



## Comparison of Adjectives in Coptic<sup>1</sup>

Martina George Ibrahim

Faculty of Archaeology, Ain Shams University, Egypt

[martina.george@arch.asu.edu.eg](mailto:martina.george@arch.asu.edu.eg)

**Abstract:** Coptic was able to express the second and third degrees of description: comparative and superlative, despite the fact that its adjectives only show the first degree: positive.

Comparison of adjectives has been mentioned in many Coptic grammars; however, this did not prevent the confusion in dealing with some forms and in classifying them between comparative and superlative. While there was no mention of the elative (intensification of the meaning without comparison with another).

Also, the comparison of adjectives was not mentioned under one topic, as in the vast majority of these grammars, it was under the adjectives chapter (accompanied by comparison of verbs, including adjective verbs), and in the rest of them under the prepositions used in forming comparative or superlative.

Hence, this paper comes to provide a comprehensive study of the comparison of adjectives, and reclassifying its forms under the appropriate grammatical term. It followed the analytical and comparative approaches, as the comparison is made between: ancient Egyptian, ancient Greek, and Coptic, and the extent to which Coptic is influenced by both, as well as the applied one, by selecting some examples (regarding ancient Egyptian) and the Greek, Sahidic, and Bohairic New Testament texts, to be the sample for the applied study.

**Keywords:** Ancient Egyptian- Ancient Greek- Coptic- Comparative- Superlative- Elative.

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<sup>1</sup> This study is part of MA thesis approved by the department of Archaeology, faculty of Arts, Ain Shams university, entitled: "الصفة-النعته في اللغة القبطية (دراسة لغوية من خلال النصوص الصعيدية والبحيرية)" "as-Sifah al-Na't fī al-Lwghah al-Qibtīyah (Dirāsah Lwghawīyah mn khilāl an-Nwṣūṣ aṣ-ṣā'īdīyah wa-al-Bwhairīyah)", under the supervision of Dr. Ashraf Fathy (Associate Professor of Egyptology, Ain Shams University), and Dr. Sohair Ahmed (Assistant Professor of Coptic Language, Ain Shams University).

## أساليب التفضيل (باستخدام الصفات) في القبطية

مارتينا جورج إبراهيم

كلية الآثار، جامعة عين شمس، مصر

[martina.george@arch.asu.edu.eg](mailto:martina.george@arch.asu.edu.eg)

**المُلخَص:** استطاعت القبطية التعبير عن درجتي الوصف الثانية والثالثة: التفضيل والتفضيل الأعلى، وذلك على الرغم من كون صفاتها لا تُظهر سوى الدرجة الأولى: الموجبة.

وقد دُكرت أساليب التفضيل (باستخدام الصفات) في العديد من أجروميات اللغة القبطية، إلا أن هذا لم يمنع من وجود خلط في تناول بعض هذه الأساليب وتصنيفها ما بين التفضيل والتفضيل الأعلى، في حين لم يرد أي ذكر لما يُطلق عليه: تكثيف معنى الصفة (دون وجود مفاضلة حقيقية بين الأسماء).

ولم ترد هذه الأساليب تحت موضوع واحد، فقد دُكرت في الغالبية العظمى من هذه الأجروميات تحت فصل الصفات (بمصاحبة أساليب التفضيل باستخدام الأفعال، ومن ضمنها الأفعال الوصفية)، وفي بقية تحت حروف الجر المستخدمة في صياغة هذه الأساليب.

ومن هنا تأتي هذه الورقة البحثية لتُقدّم دراسة شاملة لأساليب التفضيل (باستخدام الصفات)، وإعادة تصنيفها تحت المسمى النحوي المناسب لها، وقد اتبعت هذه الدراسة المنهجين: التحليلي والمقارن، إذ تتم المقارنة بين المصرية، واليونانية القديمة، والقبطية، ومدى تأثر الأخيرة بكلتيهما، وأيضاً المنهج التطبيقي، حيث اختار بعض الأمثلة (فيما يخص المصرية القديمة)، ونصوص العهد الجديد اليونانية والصعيدية والبحيرية؛ لتكون عينة الدراسة التطبيقية.

**الكلمات الدالة:** اللغة المصرية القديمة- اللغة اليونانية القديمة- اللغة القبطية- التفضيل- التفضيل الأعلى- تكثيف معنى الصفة.

## Introduction:

The adjective is one of the important grammatical categories<sup>1</sup> in the composition of the sentence, in addition to its main role in modifying, defining, assigning, or clarifying the noun<sup>2</sup> semantically. The description is divided into three degrees:

- **Positive degree:** that is, describing the noun without comparing with another in terms of merit of an adjective<sup>3</sup>.

As for the second and third degrees, each of them comes on the base of comparison, and they differ in the number of nouns that are compared<sup>4</sup> as follows:

- **Comparative degree** (التفضيل at-Tafḍīl<sup>5</sup>): comparing two nouns in their merit of the adjective<sup>6</sup>.
- **Superlative degree** (التفضيل الأعلى at-Tafḍīl al-A‘lá): which means the maximum comparison in merit of the adjective<sup>7</sup> between three or more nouns<sup>8</sup>.

Accordingly, the comparative or superlative form consists of three main elements:

- a. the first noun (المفضَّل al-Mwfaḍḍal<sup>9</sup>).
- b. the adjective.
- c. the second noun<sup>10</sup> (المفضَّل عليه al-Mwfaḍḍal ‘layh).

<sup>1</sup> Whether as an independent grammatical category, for example, as in English: Randolph Quirk, et al., *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (New York: Longman, 1985), 67; or it is classified under another category, for example, as in Arabic (under the noun category): Ramzi M. Baalbaki, *Dictionary of Linguistic Terms: English-Arabic with Sixteen Arabic Glossaries* (Beirut: Dar El-ilm Lilmalayin, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1990), 31, 538.

As for Coptic, the author's MA thesis mentioned in the first page, showed that the adjective in Coptic has retained its being an independent and self-contained grammatical category.

<sup>2</sup> Randolph Quirk, et al., *A Comprehensive Grammar*, 402; David Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (Oxford: Black Well Publishing, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2008), 11;

محمد فاضل السامرائي، النحو العربي: أحكام ومعان: كتاب منهجي يجمع بين الأحكام النحوية ومعاني النحو بحسب موضوعات الألفية، ج ٢ (دمشق: دار ابن كثير، الطبعة الأولى، ٢٠١٤)، ٢٥٨.

<sup>3</sup> Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 387.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament, with Scripture, Subject and Greek Word Indexes* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 296.

<sup>5</sup> For the two terms التفضيل at-Tafḍīl and التفضيل الأعلى at-Tafḍīl al-A‘lá, see: Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 103, 484.

<sup>6</sup> Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 103.

<sup>7</sup> Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 484.

<sup>8</sup> Crystal, *Dictionary of Linguistics*, 465, or between two nouns, provided that the second noun is plural (something/person versus a group).

<sup>9</sup> For the two terms المفضَّل al-Mwfaḍḍal and المفضَّل عليه al-Mwfaḍḍal ‘layh, see:

محمد فاضل السامرائي، النحو العربي، ج ٢، ٢٤٥.

<sup>10</sup> It can be a pronoun (independent or demonstrative), if it has been mentioned previously within the text.

Despite the mention of comparison of adjectives in many Coptic grammars, whether written in Arabic or in foreign languages, this did not prevent confusion in dealing with some forms and in classifying them between comparative and superlative. While there was no mention of what it is called: elative (will be discussed later), and these grammars have listed it as a superlative<sup>1</sup>. This is also the case in the grammars of ancient Egyptian.

Hence, this study occurs in an attempt to provide a detailed explanation and analysis of comparison of adjectives, and to reclassify its forms under the appropriate grammatical term, relying in this on the analytical and comparative approaches. As the comparison is made between: ancient Egyptian, ancient Greek, and Coptic (Sahidic and Bohairic dialects<sup>2</sup>), with regard to the forms of comparison of adjectives, and the extent to which Coptic is influenced by both.

This is in addition to the applied approach, where these analyzes and comparisons are supported by examples (regarding ancient Egyptian) and the Greek, Sahidic, and Bohairic New Testament texts<sup>3</sup>; to reach accurate results and add comprehensiveness and authenticity to the content of this study.

The study discusses three forms: comparative, superlative and elative, as follows:

## 1. Comparative Form

**Ancient Greek** relied on changing the form of the adjective (making it variable<sup>4</sup>), not only to show gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter), number (singular or plural), and grammatical case (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, or vocative)<sup>5</sup>; And even the degree of description as well<sup>6</sup>, and to indicate the comparative degree, the

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<sup>1</sup> and called it: absolute superlative (in grammars written in Arabic: المُطْلَق/المؤكَّد (الأعلى) at- Tafḍīl (al-A'lá) al-Mwṭlaq/al-Mu'akad). For example, as in: Alexis Mallon, *Grammaire Copte: Bibliographie, Chrestomathie et Vocabulaire* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1956), 76, § 173.

Or considered it a comparative, and called it: absolute comparative (in grammars written in Arabic: general comparative: التفضيل العام at-Tafḍīl il-'ām). For example, as in:

Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Sahidic Coptic* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), 131, § 29. 3.

An example of grammars written in Arabic (that used the above terms):

أندرياس المقاري (الراهب)، قواعد اللغة القبطية، ج ١ (وادي النطرون: دير القديس أنبا مقار، الطبعة السادسة، ٢٠١٥)، ١٧٥، ١٧٦.

<sup>2</sup> Because they are the two main dialects of Coptic, and most of what has been found so far is written in them.

<sup>3</sup> The paragraphs of the texts used within the body of the study were translated according to linguistic divisions (Linguistic Translation: a translation that aims primarily to reveal the construction of the original translated text, and therefore, it may be closer to a literal translation: Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 288.), With the help of translation of publications mentioned in the footnote of each text.

<sup>4</sup> For this term, see: Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 523.

<sup>5</sup> Cecelia A. E. Luschnig, *An Introduction to Ancient Greek: A Literary Approach* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2007), 28, 48.

<sup>6</sup> صموئيل كامل عبد السيد، وموريس تاوضروس، اللغة اليونانية للعهد الجديد (القاهرة: مؤسسة القديس أنطونيوس، ١٩٨٢)، ١٦٥، ١٦٦.

inflectional suffix<sup>1</sup>  $\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma^2$  was added to the stem<sup>3</sup> of the adjective, as shown in the following table:

Adjective		
Positive Degree	Comparative Degree	
	Form	Meaning
ἅγιος <sup>5</sup>	ἁγιώτερος <sup>4</sup>	more holy, more sacred
πιστός <sup>7</sup>	πιστότερος <sup>6</sup>	more faithful/more honest
σοφός <sup>9</sup>	σοφώτερος <sup>8</sup>	Wiser

Table 1: Examples of Comparative Adjectives

Since this suffix ends in  $\omicron\varsigma$ , the adjective is inflected in the comparative degree according to the first declension<sup>10</sup>, even if it belongs morphologically to another declension in the positive degree.

<sup>1</sup> What is meant is an addition (at the end of the word) used in the inflection of words. It is distinguished from the derivational one in that it does not usually change the function (type) of the word it is included in. See the terms inflexional affix, and suffix, in: Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 246, 483.

<sup>2</sup> William W. Goodwin, *A Greek Grammar* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1900), 74, § 350. Except for some adjectives to which the suffix is added instead:  $\omega\upsilon\upsilon$  (masculine and feminine) and  $\tau\omega\upsilon$  (neuter): Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, 75, § 357-358. Accordingly, it is inflected according to the second declension. See:

صموئيل كامل عبد السيد وموريس تاوضروس، اللغة اليونانية، ١٦٢، ١٦٣.

Adjectives, in ancient Greek, are divided, in terms of inflection, into three main declensions according to the inflectional suffix added to them: Luschnig, *Ancient Greek*, 48, 121-122.

<sup>3</sup> What is meant is the form of the word that accepts an addition (Affix): Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 472. Some rules are taken into account to control the form of the stem used in forming the comparative and superlative degrees of the adjective. See: Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, 75, § 351-355;

صموئيل كامل عبد السيد وموريس تاوضروس، اللغة اليونانية، ١٦٥، ١٦٦.

However, there are some irregular adjectives whose stem is completely different (whether in comparative or superlative) from the stem used in the positive degree, as in (for example, see: Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, 76, § 361.): The adjective  $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$  (in the positive degree):  $\acute{\alpha}\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omega\upsilon$  (which is one of the stems used for this adjective in the comparative degree: *LSJ*, 4 b., and the ending  $\omega\upsilon$  mentioned in the previous footnote appears here) “more righteous”.

صموئيل كامل عبد السيد وموريس تاوضروس، اللغة اليونانية، ١٦٦؛

*LSJ*, 9 b.

<sup>5</sup> *LSJ*, 9 b.

<sup>6</sup> *LSJ*, 1408 b.

<sup>7</sup> *LSJ*, 1408 b.

<sup>8</sup> Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, 74, § 350; *LSJ*, 1622 b.

<sup>9</sup> *LSJ*, 1622 b.

<sup>10</sup> صموئيل كامل عبد السيد وموريس تاوضروس، اللغة اليونانية، ١٦٥.

For more detail on the inflection of the adjectives that belong to the first declension, see: Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, 63, § 299.

For example, the comparative adjective of μέλας<sup>1</sup> is μελάντερος<sup>2</sup> “blacker”, which is inflected according to the first declension, despite its belonging to the third declension in the positive degree<sup>3</sup>.

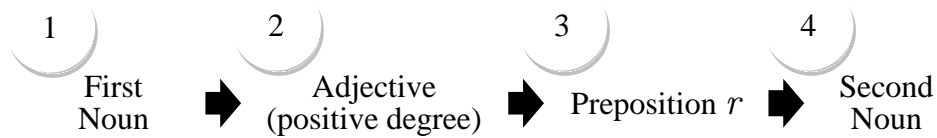
Therefore, the endings in the case of the singular subject (nominative) are<sup>4</sup>:

τερος	τερα	τερον
masculine	feminine	neuter

Thus, the comparative adjective<sup>5</sup> in ancient Greek agrees in gender, number, and grammatical case with the first noun, as for the second noun<sup>6</sup>, it comes<sup>7</sup> (a or b):

- a. Immediately after them, provided that it is in the genitive case.
- b. Preceded by the article ἡ<sup>8</sup>, or by either of the two prepositions: παρά<sup>9</sup>, or ὑπέρ<sup>10</sup>, and all of them indicate Comparison.

As for **ancient Egyptian**, the form of the adjective did not show any degree of description<sup>11</sup> other than the positive<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, it resorted to the semantic context to indicate the comparison, using the adjective<sup>13</sup> in its positive degree, provided that the second noun is preceded by the preposition *r*, to indicate comparison<sup>14</sup> (here it means “more than”<sup>15</sup>), and accordingly, its comparative form is as follows:



<sup>1</sup> *LSJ*, 1095 b.

<sup>2</sup> *LSJ*, 1095 b, 1096 a; Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, 74, § 350.

<sup>3</sup> See: Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, 68, § 324.

<sup>4</sup> صموئيل كامل عبد السيد وموريس تاوضروس، اللغة اليونانية، ١٦٥.

<sup>5</sup> It can come before or after the first noun, as in the adjective phrase, in the positive degree.

<sup>6</sup> It can be a pronoun (independent or demonstrative), if it has been mentioned previously within the text.

<sup>7</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond Basics*, 299.

<sup>8</sup> “than”: *LSJ*, 761 a, b.

<sup>9</sup> Here it means “compared to”, and the second noun comes after it in the accusative case: *LSJ*, 1302 a, 1303 a.

<sup>10</sup> Here it means “than”, and the second noun comes after it in the accusative case: *LSJ*, 1857 b, 1858 a.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being An Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1976), 47, § 50.

<sup>12</sup> Its inflection (when it was variable) was limited only to gender and number (which agree with the first noun, and there is no inflection in ancient Egyptian for the grammatical case).

<sup>13</sup> James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2010), 65.

<sup>14</sup> Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 47, § 50.

<sup>15</sup> *Wb* 2, 387, 18.

**Coptic** followed the example of ancient Egyptian, as it preserved the presence of the preposition, to give the meaning of comparison. Due to the fact that the adjective also does not show any degree of description<sup>1</sup> other than the positive, it used<sup>2</sup> the same preposition ε (S and B)<sup>3</sup>, but if the next was a suffix pronoun<sup>4</sup>, the pronominal form ερο (S and B)<sup>5</sup> was used.

Bohairic often used the preposition εροτε<sup>6</sup>, to give the same meaning<sup>7</sup> as “more than”<sup>8</sup>, and the pronominal form for it: εροτερο<sup>9</sup>, if the next was a suffix pronoun. As for Sahidic, it used the preposition παρα<sup>10</sup> (used in Greek), and added a pronominal form<sup>11</sup> to it, which is παραρο<sup>12</sup>.

Also in the Coptic comparative form, the adjective - if it is variable - agrees with the first noun in gender and number. This is clear from the following texts<sup>13</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> John M. Plumley, *An Introductory Coptic Grammar: Sahidic Dialect* (London: Home and Van Thal, 1948), 47, § 114.

<sup>2</sup> Johanna Brankaer, *Coptic: A Learning Grammar (Sahidic)*, Subsidia et Instrumenta Linguarum Orientis 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 20, § 32; Mallon, *Grammaire Copte*, 75, § 171.

<sup>3</sup> *CD*, 50 a, 51 b.; and its ancient Egyptian origin is *r*: *CED*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> If it is a demonstrative pronoun, the basic form of the preposition is used (not the pronominal form), for example, as in (John 5:20), with the pronoun και: *CNTS* 3, 70, 72; *CNTN* 2, 382.

<sup>5</sup> *CD*, 50 a.

<sup>6</sup> Mallon, *Grammaire Copte*, 75, § 171.

<sup>7</sup> *CD*, 51 b.

<sup>8</sup> معوض داود عبد النور، قاموس اللغة القبطية للهجتين البحرية والصعيدية: قبطي-عربي (الإسكندرية: نشر شخصي، الطبعة الثانية، ٢٠٠٠)، ٤٩.

<sup>9</sup> معوض داود عبد النور، قاموس القبطية، ٤٩؛

It is formed by adding the pronominal form ερο (of the preposition ε) to the base form εροτε: Mallon, *Grammaire Copte*, 75, § 171.

This is due to the occurrence of a type of contraction, which is here: deleting a letter as a result of its repetition in writing, perhaps to ease pronunciation.

For the term contraction, see:

بيتر سمير دانيال، قواعد اللغة القبطية: اللهجة الصعيدية، ج١ (القاهرة: مدرسة الإسكندرية للدراسات المسيحية، الطبعة الأولى، ٢٠١٨)، ٣٦.

<sup>10</sup> Brankaer, *Coptic (Sahidic)*, 20, § 32.

<sup>11</sup> It is not found in Greek.

<sup>12</sup> Brankaer, *Coptic (Sahidic)*, 20, § 32, and this form is not found in the New Testament texts.

<sup>13</sup> The three adjectives, used in the comparative pattern in these texts are compound adjectives (representing two types of adjectives using relative morphemes). See:

مارتينا جورج إبراهيم، "الأصل اللغوي لبنية الصفات المركبة بمورفيمات الصلة في القبطية"، مجلة مركز الدراسات البردية والنقوش، العدد ٣٨ (٢٠٢١): ١١١-١٢٤.

Mārtīna Gūrg Ibrāhīm, "al-Aṣl al-Lwghawī li-Binyat aṣ-ṣifāt al-Mwrakkabah bi-Mūrf īmat aṣ-ṣilah fī al-Qibtīyah", *Majalit Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Bardīyah wa-al-Nwkūsh, al-‘dad* 38 (2021): 111-124: [https://bcps.journals.ekb.eg/article\\_203681\\_42b5a8043cdbd6aad255873e69d1f1e3.pdf](https://bcps.journals.ekb.eg/article_203681_42b5a8043cdbd6aad255873e69d1f1e3.pdf)

For more detail on its inflection, see the author's MA thesis, mentioned in the first page of this paper.

The adjective ενααϩ (S and B) in the comparative pattern mentioned in:

(John 15: 20)

S<sup>1</sup>: ἀριπμεεγε ἡπιϩαχε ενταλχοοϩ νητῆ χε ἡμῆ ρῆραλ ενααϩ  
 επεϩχοειϩ εϩχε αγπωτ ἡσωι σεναπωτ ἡσατηγῆ εϩχε αγραρεϩ  
 επαϩαχε σεναραρεϩ οη επωτῆ

B<sup>2</sup>: ἀριφμεγι ἡπιααχι εταιααχι ἡμοϩ νωτεν χε ἡμον οϩβωκ ενααϩ  
 επεϩϩεϩ ιαχε αγσοαχι ἡσωι ἡωτεν ρωτεν εγεσοαχι ἡσωτεν ιαχε  
 αγραρεϩ επαααχι εγεαρεϩ εϩωτεν ρωτεν

Translation: Remember the word that I said to you: There is not servant greater than his master/lord. If they persecuted me, (B: you too) they will persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep also yours<sup>3</sup> (B: yours also).

Analysis: In this comparative pattern, the adjective ενααϩ agrees with the first noun ρῆραλ<sup>4</sup>/βωκ<sup>5</sup> in gender (masculine) and number (singular), because it ends with the suffix pronoun ϩ (refers to a singular masculine noun).

The adjective εθνααϩ (B) in the comparative pattern mentioned in:

(Revelation 2: 19)

Text<sup>6</sup>: †σωοϩν ἡνεκρβηοϩι nem τεκαγαπη nem πεκναρ† nem πεκωμεωι  
 nem τεκρϩπομονη nem νεκρβηοϩι ἡβαεϩ εθνααϩ ενιρϩα†

Translation: I know your works, and your love, and your faith, and your service, and your patience, and that your last works are greater than your first.

Analysis: Although the adjective εθνααϩ comes here as a second adjective of the first noun ρβηοϩι (βαεϩ as its main adjective, and both of them come after the noun), it is the one used in the comparative pattern. These two adjectives agree with the noun, where the plural form of the adjective βαε<sup>7</sup> and the plural suffix pronoun ϩ in the second adjective are used, this is because the noun is the plural form of ρωβ<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> CNTS 3, 252.

<sup>2</sup> CNTN 2, 520.

<sup>3</sup> Where the pronominal form of the possessive pronoun (singular masculine: CD, 260 b.) πω (S)/φω (B) is used with the first person pronoun (plural):

بيتر سمير دانيال، اللهجة الصعيدية، ج ١، ١٥٠، ١٥١؛ أندرياس المقاري (الراهب)، اللغة القبطية، ج ١، ٤٥، ٤٦.

This is to avoid repeating ϩαχε/ααχι (the noun mentioned previously in the If clause).

<sup>4</sup> CD, 665 a.

<sup>5</sup> CD, 30 a.

<sup>6</sup> CNTN 4, 458.

<sup>7</sup> CD, 635 a, b.

<sup>8</sup> CD, 653 a.



The adjective εφταιηϋ (S)/ εφταιηοϋτ (B) in the comparative pattern mentioned in:  
(Luke 14: 8)

S<sup>1</sup>: ροταν ερωαν ογα ταρμεκ ἡπῖρνοχκ ἡτπε μηποτε ηῖτερῃ ογα  
εφταιηϋ εροκ

B<sup>2</sup>: ροταν αρεωαν ογαί θαρμεκ ερανροπ ἡπερρωτεβ επιωορη  
ἡμαῖρωτεβ μηποδ αγθαρημ κεογαί εφταιηοϋτ εροτεροκ

Translation: Whenever someone invites you (B: to weddings), do not look away (B: do not recline in the first place), lest he has invited someone more honorable than you (B: lest another one, more honorable than you, was invited).

Analysis: In this comparative pattern, the adjective εφταιηϋ/εφταιηοϋτ agrees with the first noun ογα/ογαί<sup>3</sup> in gender (masculine) and number (singular), because it has the suffix pronoun ϣ (refers to a singular masculine noun).

## 2. Superlative Form

**Ancient Greek** showed the superlative degree by adding the inflectional suffix τατοϋ<sup>4</sup>, to the stem of the adjective<sup>5</sup>, so the superlative adjectives belong morphologically to the first declension as well<sup>6</sup>, even if their belonging in the positive degree is to other declensions (such as the adjective μέλαδ: μελάντατοϋ<sup>7</sup> “blackest”).

Therefore, the endings in the singular nominative case are<sup>8</sup>:

τατοϋ	τατη	τατον
masculine	feminine	neuter

<sup>1</sup> *CNTS* 2, 280.

<sup>2</sup> *CNTN* 2, 200.

<sup>3</sup> *CD*, 469 a, b. It is a number used here as a noun.

<sup>4</sup> As for the adjectives to which των is suffixed in the comparative degree, the inflectional suffix ιστοϋ is added to them (for the masculine, ιστη for the feminine, ιστον for the neuter) in the superlative degree:

صموئيل كامل عبد السيد وموريس تاوضروس، اللغة اليونانية، ١٦٥، ١٦٦.

<sup>5</sup> Taking into account the irregular adjective, such as the adjective αγαθοϋ: ἄριστοϋ (which is one of the stems used for this adjective in the superlative degree: *LSJ*, 4 b., and the ending ιστοϋ mentioned in the previous footnote appears here) “most righteous”.

<sup>6</sup> صموئيل كامل عبد السيد وموريس تاوضروس، اللغة اليونانية، ١٦٥.

<sup>7</sup> *LSJ*, 1095 b, 1096 a.


<sup>8</sup> صموئيل كامل عبد السيد وموريس تاوضروس، اللغة اليونانية، ١٦٥.

Examples of these adjectives include<sup>1</sup>:

Adjective		
Positive Degree	Superlative Degree	
	Form	Meaning
ἅγιος	ἁγιώτατος <sup>2</sup>	most holy, most sacred
πιστός	πιστότατος <sup>3</sup>	most faithful/most honest
σοφός	σοφώτατος <sup>4</sup>	wisest

Table 2: Examples of Superlative Adjectives

As with the comparative adjectives, the superlative adjectives in ancient Greek also agree with the first noun in gender, number, and grammatical case.

As for ancient Egyptian, it used<sup>5</sup>  "imy" "which is in"<sup>6</sup> to form a superlative, as it comes after the adjective<sup>7</sup> in its positive degree, provided that the second noun is plural<sup>8</sup>. It also used the preposition *r* as was the case in the comparative form, however,


<sup>1</sup> In the superlative form, the adjective (accompanied by the definite article) can come from its stem or using another stem used as a predicate or a noun (in the latter: if the first noun has been mentioned previously within the text), while the second noun appears in the plural genitive case; Whether it is a noun or a pronoun (independent or demonstrative). As in the adjective ἐλάχιστος (smallest/least: a form of the adjective μικρός in the superlative degree, as it can occur from its stem or using another stem: *LSJ*, 1133 a, b.) in the superlative pattern mentioned in (1 Corinthians 15:9): Ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων "For I'm the least of the apostles" (used here as a predicate): *GNT*, 602.

<sup>2</sup> صموئيل كامل عبد السيد وموريس تاوضروس، اللغة اليونانية، ١٦٦.

<sup>3</sup> *LSJ*, 1408 b.

<sup>4</sup> Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, 74, § 350; *LSJ*, 1622 b.

<sup>5</sup> Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 65.

<sup>6</sup> It is a nisbe adjective (*Wb* 1, 72, 16.) of the preposition  *m* "in" (*Wb* 2, 1, 2.).

Nisbe adjective (equivalent English term: relative adjective: Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 425.): what is meant is an adjective derived from the stem of a noun or a preposition, by adding the derivational suffix *\y* to this stem, and the scholars of ancient Egyptian language used this Arabic term, because there is a similarity in this type of adjectives between the two languages, See: Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 61, § 79.

It is formed in Arabic by adding the stressed (ي) *ī* to the end of the noun, to indicate the relation:

عبد الله بن يوسف الجديع، المنهاج المختصر في علمي النحو والصرف (البيد: الجديع للبحوث والاستشارات، الطبعة الثالثة، ٢٠٠٧)، ١٦٩.

Derivational suffix: an addition (at the end of the word) used in the derivation of words. It usually changes the function (type) of the word it is included in (the example here: from preposition to adjective). See the term derivational affix, in: Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 143.

<sup>7</sup> Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 65, and the adjective here can be used as a predicate or a noun.

<sup>8</sup> Whether the noun has the inflectional suffix *w* (| | |, |, or |) for plural (Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 39), or accompanied by *nb* (primary adjective "every": Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 61; *Wb* 2, 234, 3) (here to indicate the plural not to designate each person/thing separately, and this is shown through the semantic context), in addition to the possibility of being a pronoun (suffix or demonstrative).

the second noun in this case is what differentiates between the two form, as it must be plural if it is a superlative.

The case did not differ much in **Coptic**, where the preposition εβολ ογτε<sup>1</sup> (S and B) “among”<sup>2</sup> was used, as well as ε<sup>3</sup> (used in the comparative form), with the adjective<sup>4</sup> in the positive degree, to form a superlative, provided that the second noun is plural (noun or pronoun) or accompanied by nīm (S)/nībēn (B)<sup>5</sup>.

It is worth noting that the **ancient Egyptian**, **ancient Greek**, and **Coptic** used the genitive phrase to semantically express the superlative, by converting (syntactically) the adjective in the positive degree (used as epithet) into a noun, and then using it twice in the genitive phrase:

- a. singular as a first noun (indicating possession).
- b. plural as a second noun (indicating possessor).

For example:

- **Ancient Egyptian:** the direct genitive phrase wr wrw, or the indirect one (using the genitival linker n) wr n wrw<sup>6</sup>, where the adjective wr<sup>7</sup> was used in the singular form as a noun of possession, and in

<sup>1</sup> For example, as in (1 Corinthians 15:9) (B): CNTN 3, 208., and it was not used in the Sahidic New Testament texts.

<sup>2</sup> CD, 494 b.

<sup>3</sup> B: as in (Ephesians 3: 8): CNTN 3, 352; S: for example, (1 Corinthians 13:13): CNTS 4, 282, as for the Bohairic equivalent of the latter, the preposition ɣēn “in” (CD, 683 a.) appeared in the text: CNTN 3, 196; where Bohairic used it to indicate the superlative as well:

أندرياس المقاري (الراهب)، اللغة القبطية، ج ١، ١٧٦.

<sup>4</sup> Which often comes as a predicate or a noun (and also with a definite article), and it is worth noting that Coptic also borrowed some Greek superlative adjectives, such as the adjective ελαχιστος mentioned in: for example, (1 Corinthians 15:9) (S): CNTS 4, 298.

In which the superlative form came in the same way as it was in Greek: ἀνοκ γαρ πε πελαχιστος ἡἡἀποστολος “For I’m the least of the apostles”, where the same Greek superlative adjective (defined) was used as a predicate, and the second noun came after it, preceded by ἡ (a genitival linker) to link them instead of inflecting this noun in the genitive case in Greek. While the Bohairic equivalent of this text replaced the Greek superlative adjective with the adjective κογχι (CD, 92 b.) in the positive degree, then the preposition εβολ ογτε after it, and lastly the second noun.

<sup>5</sup> CD, 225 b.; and its ancient Egyptian origin is nb: CED, 108.

The use of adjective nb in Demotic was closer to determiners (Janet H. Johnson, *Thus Wrote onchsheshonqy: An Introductory Grammar of Demotic*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 45 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2000), 46, § 59), a role that was also approved by Coptic.

Determiners are articles that are associated with a noun, and their function is to express connotations, such as number, demonstratives, and possession. The most commonly used in general are the definite and indefinite articles, and then the demonstrative and possessive adjectives: Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 145.

<sup>6</sup> Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 78, § 97.

<sup>7</sup> Wb 1, 327, 8.

the plural form as a noun of possessor, to semantically express the superlative “literal meaning: the great of greats, semantically: the greatest of greats”.

- **Ancient Greek:** the genitive phrase ἅγια ἁγίων mentioned in (Hebrew 9:3)<sup>1</sup>, by using the adjective ἅγιος in the positive degree twice<sup>2</sup>: in the singular feminine<sup>3</sup> nominative case as a noun of possession, and in the plural genitive case as a noun of possessors, to semantically indicate the superlative “literal meaning: holy of holies, semantically: most holy of holies”.
- **Coptic:** the genitive phrase ⲛⲉⲙⲟⲩⲁⲃ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲙⲟⲩⲁⲃ (B), which is the Bohairic equivalent<sup>4</sup> of the previous Greek text (Hebrew 9:3) where the adjective ⲙⲟⲩⲁⲃ<sup>5</sup> was used:
  - ⇒ first: as a noun of possession (accompanied by the demonstrative pronoun ⲛⲛ for the singular feminine “that”<sup>6</sup>).
  - ⇒ second: as a noun of possessor (accompanied by the demonstrative pronoun ⲛⲛ for the plural “those”<sup>7</sup>).

### 3. Elative Form

Elative is a term used to describe an intensification of the meaning of an adjective<sup>8</sup> (with the translation “very”<sup>9</sup> before the adjective in its positive form<sup>10</sup>), without there being any comparisons, and far from the comparative or superlative forms<sup>11</sup>.

Since in **ancient Greek**, if the adjective is used in its positive form, there will be no ability to understand whether this adjective is with an intensification of its meaning or not, it used the comparative and superlative adjectives<sup>12</sup> to express the elative.

<sup>1</sup> GNT, 756.

<sup>2</sup> This is the only place in the New Testament texts, in which the adjective is used twice in this form (the genitive phrase) to indicate the superlative: Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond Basics*, 298.

<sup>3</sup> Since it refers to a feminine noun: σκηνή “tabernacle”: *LSJ*, 1608 a.

<sup>4</sup> CNTN 3, 510.

<sup>5</sup> It is a compound adjective (using relative morpheme).

<sup>6</sup> أندرياس المقاري (الراهب)، اللغة القبطية، ج ١، ٣٩؛

CD, 260 b.

<sup>7</sup> أندرياس المقاري (الراهب)، اللغة القبطية، ج ١، ٣٩؛

CD, 260 b.

<sup>8</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond Basics*, 296.

<sup>9</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond Basics*, 296; Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 167.

<sup>10</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond Basics*, 296.


<sup>11</sup> Baalbaki, *Linguistic Terms*, 167.

<sup>12</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond Basics*, 296, and this adjective also agrees with its substantive in gender, number, and grammatical case.

Provided that there are two main factors that determine its use as an elative form from comparative or superlative forms:

- a. absence of comparison with another (regardless of the number).
- b. the semantic context (in meaning: it does not make an explicit comparison<sup>1</sup>).

For example, the adjective phrase κράτιστε θεόφιλε “oh very dear Theophilus”, mentioned in (Luke 1:3)<sup>2</sup>, where the superlative adjective κράτιστε<sup>3</sup> (of κρατύς<sup>4</sup>) was used to express the elative. This is clear from the absence of both: the second noun (or what replaces it), and the explicit comparison (in terms of meaning)<sup>5</sup>.

As for **ancient Egyptian**, it used the adjective in the positive form, but it added the adverb  wrt<sup>6</sup> after the adjective to give the meaning of “very<sup>7</sup>”. This is what **Coptic** preserved, which used the two adverbs “very”: εματε, ἄματε (S)/εμαϱω, ἄμαϱω (B)<sup>8</sup>, and ἄξογο (S and B)<sup>9</sup>, to intensify the meaning of the adjective (forming the elative).

## Conclusion:

This study sought to analyze the comparison of adjectives in Coptic and reclassify its forms under the appropriate grammatical term on three axes: comparative, superlative, and elative forms, comparing them to ancient Egyptian and ancient Greek, and supporting all of this with texts. It reached the following results:

<sup>1</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond Basics*, 296.

<sup>2</sup> *GNT*, 193.

<sup>3</sup> κράτιστος in the masculine nominative case.

It agrees with its substantive θεόφιλε, in gender (masculine), number (singular), and grammatical case (vocative).

<sup>4</sup> *LSJ*, 991, b.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that Coptic has used this phrase and preserved the same Greek inflection (even the grammatical case) and its intensification of meaning (the elative) without any change. It is clear in both the Sahidic and Bohairic equivalents: κρατιστε θεοφιλε: *CNTS* 2, 2; *CNTN* 2, 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Wb* 1, 331, 1; and also  wr: *Wb* 1, 330, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 78, § 97.

This reference mentioned it within the superlative form, but the study here has included it within the elative; due to its meaning and the absence of comparison between nouns.

<sup>8</sup> *CD*, 190 a., for example, as in (Matthew 2:10) with the adjective νοσ (S)/ἡϱϱⲧ (B) “great” (*CD*, 250 a.): *CNTS* 1, 10; *CNTN* 1, 8.

<sup>9</sup> *CD*, 735 a, 736 a.

However, if the preposition ε (*CD*, 735 b.) comes after it, the form changes to the comparative or superlative (according to the number indicated by the second noun), and it is translated “very more than”.

1. Coptic was able to express the other two degrees of description: comparative and superlative, despite the fact that its adjectives only show the positive degree (because they are not variable in terms of degree).
2. In doing so, Coptic followed the same example as ancient Egyptian; it relied on the semantic context, with the help of some elements, most notably the use of some prepositions, and also the meaning of some forms, such as the genitive phrase.
3. This did not prevent Coptic from:
  - a. borrowing some Greek superlative adjectives.
  - b. using the Greek preposition *παρά* (in the Sahidic dialect) among the prepositions used.
  - c. Retaining, in a few cases, the same superlative or relative pattern used in the Greek text.

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### Abbreviations:

- B Bohairic
- CD Crum, W. E. *A Coptic Dictionary*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1939.
- CED Černy, J. *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
- CNTN Horner, G. *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect Otherwise Called Memphitic and Bohairic*, 4 vols. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1898-1905.
- CNTS Horner, G. *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect Otherwise Called Sahidic and Thebaic*, 7 vols. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1911-1924.
- GNT Aland, Kurt, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger and Allen Wikgren. *The Greek New Testament*. Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1993.
- LSJ Liddle, Henry G., Robert Scott and Henry S. Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 9<sup>th</sup> edition, 1996.
- S Sahidic
- Wb Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache*, 7 vols. (Berlin: Academy Publisher, 1971).

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