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Conditionals in Late Egyptian*

Abstract: Late Egyptian has three basic forms of conditional constructions, which can be identified by the three separate introductory markers used (*ir*, *inn*, and *hn*), as well as by other grammatical features of the P-clause. In terms of P-clauses, attested *ir*-conditionals cover forward-looking conditions, present counterfactuals, closed past conditions; attested *inn*-conditionals cover subjectively uncertain past and present conditions, and pre-emptive predictions of the future; attested *hn*-conditionals cover past counterfactuals. Certain aspects of the form and meaning of these conditionals are exemplified and discussed (with a focus on P-clauses) in terms which aim to link relevant Egyptological work to linguistic work on conditionals.

The principal aim of this paper is to join up a particular thread of Egyptological work on conditionals in Late Egyptian with relevant linguistic work on conditionals, and to present the material in a manner accessible to, and hopefully useful to, linguists. To narrow this topic down, this paper concentrates on Late Egyptian conditionals found in documentary texts, with a particular focus on conditionals from the two rich corpora of the later Tomb Robbery Papyri (TRP)¹ and the Late Ramesside Letters (LRL),² both roughly contemporary, dating from the end of the Twentieth Dynasty at the end of the New Kingdom (ca. 1080–1070 BCE).³

* My thanks to the three reviewers who provided comments on this paper.

1 The Tomb Robbery Papyri (TRP) cover a series of investigations towards the end of the Twentieth Dynasty. The group I refer to as “later”, limited to those which provide examples of conditionals, comprise: P. BM EA 10052 (year 1 of the “Renaissance”); P. Mayer A (= P. National Museums Liverpool M11162) (years 1–2 of the “Renaissance”), and P. BM EA 10403 (year 2 of the “Renaissance”). The “Renaissance” era is usually dated, on the basis of (partial) data from the Abbott dockets, as starting in regnal year 19 of Ramesses XI, the last Pharaoh of the Twentieth Dynasty. The papyri were published and translated in Peet (1920) and Peet (1930).

2 The Late Ramesside Letters (LRL) centre on the two late Twentieth Dynasty Deir el-Medina scribes Dhutmose (who also appears in the later TRP) and his son Butehamun. The Nubian group are dated to a year 10, usually considered to be of the “Renaissance” era (see Wentz 1967: 11–12), and thus stand close in time to the later TRP. The papyri were published in Černý (1939), with comprehensive translation and commentary in Wentz (1967), and with updated translations in Wentz (1990). Further documents from the group have been published by Janssen (1991, also including photographic plates of papyri transcribed in Černý 1939) and Demarée (2006).

3 Ancient Egyptian documents are typically dated by regnal years of the reigning Pharaoh (the use of an era such as the “Renaissance” era is exceptional). As such, Egyptologists usually refer to regnal year/era dates or, more generally, to collections (“dynasties”) of pharaohs (such as the

Late Egyptian⁴ has three basic conditional constructions,⁵ which can be identified by the three distinct introductory markers deployed (as well as by other grammatical features of the P-clause⁶ discussed below in the relevant section).⁷

ir-conditional

The first type of conditional is introduced by *ir*:

- (1) P. BM EA 10052, 9.3–48 (Peet 1930: pl. 31):⁹

Context: The foreigner of the land survey Paykamen has been asked the standard opening interrogation question by the vizier ‘How did you set about getting into the great places?’, where ‘places’ refers to tombs. The example is Paykamen’s opening response to this question as framed by the scribe:

“Twentieth Dynasty”, ca. 1190–1070 BCE), or broad historical phases such as the “New Kingdom” (covering the Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties, ca. 1550–1100 BCE), rather than referring directly to absolute dates, which are approximate (and are here rounded).

4 The term “Late Egyptian” should be taken here to refer narrowly to the corpus as described and not simply to the broad phase of the language labelled “Late Egyptian”.

5 I restrict my attention to the three most well-attested conditional constructions in Late Egyptian in their most typical forms. There are, of course, other constructions which can display conditional meaning in Late Egyptian, such as examples of imperative-conjunctive clauses with the standard paratactic conditional sense of “Wash my car and I will pay you five pounds”, as well as certain additional variants to the constructions discussed.

6 I use P-clause to refer to the protasis = antecedent of a conditional and Q-clause to refer to the apodosis = consequent of a conditional. In so doing I am following Declerck & Reed (2001a: 10).

7 In presenting these three initial examples, I have deliberately drawn the examples from the same Ancient Egyptian text, P. BM EA 10052, in order to avoid issues of (broad) diachrony, genre, or the like. The examples are also part of the written record of the opening responses by three different individuals to essentially the same interrogation question asked by the Vizier.

8 P. BM EA 10052 refers to the modern designation of the ancient source, here that of the Museum in which it is kept, so P. BM EA 10052 refers to “Papyrus British Museum, Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan (formerly E[gyptian] A[ntiquities]) inventory number 10052”. The stop and range notation in 9.3–4 is to be read “page 9, lines 3 to 4”.

9 Examples are presented in the following form: text reference; brief description of context; example presented utilising a standard variant of the transliteration system used in Egyptology (a system developed from a nineteenth century original, and so not strongly aligned with modern linguistic conventions); presentation of the example utilising the Leipzig Glossing Rules, including adaptations to Ancient Egyptian to be found in Di Biase-Dyson, Kammerzell, & Werning (2009); translation.

ir iw¹⁰-tw (hr) gmt=i iw ptri=i
 COND SBRD-IMPRS [PRS] find:INF=1SG SBRD see:PST=1SG
qdt ḥd qdt nbw m n3 swt iw-tw (r) irt
 qite silver qite gold from DEF:PL places FUT-IMPRS [:FUT] do:INF
n=i sb3yt nbt bʾn
 DAT=1SG punishment any terrible
 ‘If I am found to have seen a (single) qite of silver or gold from the Places,
 then any form of terrible punishment will be inflicted on me.’

inn-conditionals

The second type of conditional is introduced by *inn*:

- (2) P. BM EA 10052, 8.5 (Peet 1930: pl. 30):

Context: The servant Sekhahatyamun responds to essentially the same standard interrogation question by the vizier as in (1) above. He says he had nothing to do with the robberies from tombs at Thebes currently under investigation, and then adds the following, referring to earlier robberies at Iumitru:

inn iw-tw (r) ḥdb=i hr n3
 COND FUT-IMPRS [:FUT] kill:INF=1SG because DEF:PL
(m)ḥʿ(t) n iw-(m)-itrw mntw n wn=i im
 tomb of Iumitru 3PL DEF:PL be:REL:PST=1SG there
 ‘If I am going to be killed because of the Iumitru tombs, then (at least) they are the ones which I’ve been in.’

10 There are separate grammatical elements represented graphically by *iw* in Late Egyptian (although all are derived from the same original item in earlier Egyptian): *iw* as a essential component of the third future tense; *iw* as a circumstantial clause marker, which is added to the basic tense/construction form, and so, for example, can be combined with the first present to produce the circumstantial first present; *iw* as an essential component of the sequential. Each of these constructions has distinctive negation as well as other distinctive grammatical characteristics. At first sight, particularly, when preposition markers of the infinitive are omitted (as they usually are in late Twentieth Dynasty documents) the P-clause form in exx. (1) and (2) may appear to be indistinct. However, negation and other grammatical features (e.g., the form with different tenses) do show them to be distinct. I assume such distinctions here, but the examples presented in the relevant sections below provide only illustrative (rather than comprehensive) material.

hn-conditional

The third type of conditional is introduced by *hn*:

- (3) P. BM EA 10052, 4.13 (Peet 1930: pl. 27):

Context: The trumpeter Amenkhau denies involvement in the robberies. He says *bpy=i ptr ht nbt* ‘I didn’t see anything’, and then strengthens his denial with a counterfactual conditional:

hn *ptri=i*
 COND see:PST=1SG
wn *iw=i* (*r*) *dd=f*
 be:PST FUT=1SG [:FUT] say:INF=3SG.M
 ‘If had seen (anything), I would say so.’

Each type will be discussed separately in the sections to follow.

1 *ir*-conditionals

1.1 *ir*-conditionals: on form

In the P-clause *ir* introduces a circumstantial clause marked by the general Late Egyptian circumstantial/adverbial clause marker *iw*.¹¹ The majority of attested examples display *ir* + circumstantial first present, as in ex. (1) above, or as in ex. (4) here, whereas the Q-clause has standard main-clause form:

ir + circumstantial first present

- (4) P. BM EA 75019+10302, vso 4 (Demarée 2006: pl. 16):

Context: The sender of the letter is discussing certain items which the addressee has not had delivered. The sender reminds the addressee of an earlier letter in which the addressee had made a conditional promise: ‘if you write again, I will have them sent to you’. The sender now calls in that promise. The quoted conditional promise is:

¹¹ For a recent discussion of the form of *iw*-clause in P-clauses marked with *ir*, see Kruchten (1997). On circumstantial *iw*, see, for example Junge (2001: 189–195).

ir *iw=k* (*hr*) *h3b* *n*
 COND SBRD=2SG.M [PRS] send:INF again
iw=i *r* *dit* *in-tw* *n=k*
 FUT=1SG :FUT¹² cause:INF bring:SBJV-INDF DAT=2SG.M
 ‘If you write again, I will have them sent to you.’

ir-conditionals with circumstantial first present P-clauses provide the Late Egyptian equivalent of the forward-looking conditional, in which the P-clause presents a possible but as yet unrealised event as a (pre-)condition for the realisation of the Q-clause. It will be noted that the P-clause shows something of the same “tense-backstepping” feature of English, although in Late Egyptian the P-clause form is explicitly marked as a dependent (circumstantial) clause.¹³

There are attested examples with circumstantial tenses other than the first present, although examples are limited in number:

ir + circumstantial past¹⁴

(5) P. BM EA 10416, vso 11–12 (Janssen 1991: pl. 17):

Context: A woman who has been sleeping with a man who is not her husband is under threat of violence. A steward has restrained those threatening violence once, but writes to the woman, pointing out the following:

y3 *ir* *iw* *i[n]ty(=i)* *sn m p3y* *sp*
 EXLM COND SBRD restrain:PST=[1SG] 3PL in DEM:M.SG occasion
bn *iw=i* (*r*) *inty=w* *m ky*
 NEG FUT=1SG [:FUT] restrain:INF=3PL in another
 ‘Indeed, (even) if I have restrained them this time, I won’t restrain them another (time).’

¹² The Q-clause explicitly writes the distinctive third future *r*-prepositional marker of the infinitive. On the basis of such explicit writings (and also attested examples in *ir*-conditional Q-clauses of the distinctive third future negation), graphemically ambiguous *iw=f* INF Q-clauses without explicit preposition before the infinitive are usually taken to be third futures in Egyptology, although there are certain examples which suggest that the sequential form may also be found in such Q-clauses. I do not discuss this issue here and gloss *iw=f* INF Q-clauses as third futures.

¹³ Compare Declerck & Reed (2001a: 124–125) on the “Present Perspective System”.

¹⁴ Two other examples, with damaged contexts, seem to have temporal meaning (‘once you have done something’; cf. discussion of *ir* below) rather than conditional meaning. Here I restrict my comments to this particular example and accept the conditional meaning of the concessive.

îr + circumstantial third future

(6) P. BM EA 10418+10287, rto 3–5 (Janssen 1991: pl. 19):

Context: This short communiqué is probably connected to P. BM EA 10416 (see ex. (5) above). The recto contains two recorded quotes, but with no specified connection. The second is:

îr *îw* *bn* *îw=n* (*r*) *gmt=s* *r* *qnqn=s*
 COND SBRD NEG FUT=1PL[:FUT] find:INF=3SG.F to beat:INF=3SG.F
îw=n (*r*) *gm* *rt3* *t3y=s* *snt* *šrî*,
 FUT=1PL[:FUT] find:INF Ruta POSS:F.SG=3SG.F sister little
îw=n (*r*) *gm* [...] *-îs gr*, *hr=w*
 FUT=1PL[:FUT] find:INF[...]is also, say=3PL

‘If we will not find her in order to beat her, we will find Ruta, her little sister, and we will find [...]is also, so they say.’

Unfortunately, this is the only clearly attested example of the circumstantial third future in a P-clause in an *îr*-conditional, but with limited surviving context.

1.2 Comments on *îr*

îr is not just used in marking conditionals (and as such differs from *inn* and *hn*, which are limited to conditional usage). *îr* is also regularly used to introduce a left-dislocated topic/setting as the immediate context or ground for a following clause.¹⁵

¹⁵ Compare the discussion in Haiman (1978). Since I am concentrating here on using the three introductory lexemes *îr*, *inn*, and *hn* to help distinguish the three Late Egyptian conditional forms, I do not discuss here whether *îr*, *îr* + circumstantial *îw*, or just circumstantial *îw* is key to the conditional meaning of what I refer to as the *îr*-conditional. In the glosses, I gloss *îr* in conditionals as “COND” for convenience and for immediate comparison with *inn* and *hn*, allowing me to gloss circumstantial *îw* separately, whereas I gloss other uses of *îr* with ‘as-for’ or ‘when’.

ir + nominal phrase

- (7) P. BM EA 10052, 4.24 (Peet 1930: pl. 28):
- ¹⁶

Context: The slave Degay is interrogated for a second day, as part of extensive testimony he gives concerning his owner, a key thief Bukhaaf. He opens with the following, and then lists a series of names:

ir *p3* *m3ˁt* *nty iw=i* (*r*) *dd=f*
 as-for DEF:M.SG truth REL FUT=1SG [:FUT] say:INF=3SG.M
bn dd(=i) *rmṯ* *nb iptr=i* *i-r-m*
 NEG say:SBJV=[1SG] person every see:REL:PST=1SG with
bw-ḥ3ˁ=f
 Bukhaaf
 ‘As for the truth which I’m going to tell, I may not be able to name every-
 one who I saw with Bukhaaf.’

ir + prepositional phrase¹⁷

- (8) P. BM EA 10054, 2.4 (Peet 1930: pl. 6):

Context: The fisherman Panakhtemope confesses to having ferried thieves across the river to the west bank at Thebes (where the tombs are) a number of times. He relates the first episode and then moves on to the second, starting as follows (‘they’ refers to the thieves):

ḥr ir *n rwh3* *n hrw 2*
 Then as_for in evening of day 2
iw=w (*ḥr*) *iṯ*
 CORD=3PL [:CORD] come:INF
 ‘Then (as for) in the evening of the second day, they came.’

ir is also used to mark two other forms of subordinate clauses, both with temporal meaning:

¹⁶ Usually, the *ir*-marked nominal expression is resumed pronominally in the following clause; however, as this example shows, this does not have to be the case. As such, *ir*-marking is akin to the pairing “As for Paris, most visitors consider it a wonderful city” and “As for Paris, the Eiffel tower is a must-see tourist attraction”.

¹⁷ No example of this construction happens to appear in P. BM EA 10052. P. BM EA 10054 is another papyrus from the TRP, usually dated a generation or so earlier.

ir + *m-dr sdm=f*

- (9) P. BM EA 10052, 10.18 (Peet 1930: pl. 31):

Context: The slave Paynekhu describes how he came to be owned by the accused thieves, a husband and wife. Paynekhu first recounts:

ir m-dr hfy pzy-nhsy hrdw
 as-for when destroy:PST Paynehsy Hardai
iw ms-nhsy bw-th3-imn (hr) int(=i)
 CORD young-Nubian Butehamun [:CORD] take:INF=1SG
 ‘When Paynehsy destroyed Hardai, the young Nubian Butehamun took me.’

(*hr*) *ir* + first present/past tense

The other principal construction with *ir* in Late Egyptian is a temporal correlative construction in which *ir*, or more commonly *hr ir*, is followed by the form known as the “first present” (here with past time reference) or, more rarely, the past tense (with pluperfect time reference) in a temporal clause (‘when’) to a following clause in which the tense-form is restricted to the sequential. The first present and past tense in the (*hr*) *ir* clause do not take the circumstantial marker *iw* and appear in the same form as in independent main clauses:

- (10) P. BM EA 10052, 10.19–20 (Peet 1930: pl. 31):

Context: Following on from ex. (9) above, the slave Paynekhu recounts that he was bought from Butehamun by the foreigner Pentasekhnu, after which (the ‘him’ in the following example refers to Pentasekhnu):

hr ir tw-tw (hr) hdb=f
 Then when PRS¹⁸-IMPRS [:PRS] kill:INF=3SG
iw k3ry k3r (hr) int=i (r) swnt(t)=i
 CORD gardener Kar [:CORD] take:INF=1SG [at] price=1SG
 ‘Then, when he was killed, the gardener Kar bought me at my price.’

18 The Late Egyptian first present (in its basic form) with pronoun subject shows (for first and second person pronouns singular and plural, and also the impersonal suffix *-tw*) a pronoun form with a pronominal prefixed base *tw=*. Circumstantial *iw* and past *wn* with the first present take the pronoun subject directly as a suffix pronoun and do not co-occur with the pronominal prefix base.

1.3 *îr*-conditionals: on meaning

Conditionals are a key means of coping with uncertainties, with things not fully settled. As a backdrop to this paper, I adopt here a subjective probability approach to the understanding of conditionals, a major thread in recent philosophical work on conditionals. As such, in conditionals the Q-clause is not entertained independently but conditionally on the supposition of P as ‘Q given P’.¹⁹ Languages, of course, tend to mark the P-clause based on features of how it is being entertained. In Late Egyptian it seems that P-clause marking reflects the relationship of the P-clause epistemically to the actuality, and temporally to the present, of the use-context,²⁰ and it is here that I shall mostly concentrate my attention.

By meaning, as already noted, the *îr*-conditional provides the typical form of forward-looking situational conditional. That is, the P-clause provides a condition which requires the outcome of future events to be fulfilled (as such the condition covers events which are both subjectively uncertain to the user and addressee of the conditional and objectively uncertain in terms of the temporality of events in the world). The Q-clause is to be realised or activated on realisation of the P-clause, and thus again awaits the unfolding of events. As such, the P-clause provides the hypothetical contextual ground in (or mental space/possible world from) which the further realisation of the Q-clause situation is projected. Consider again ex. (1):

(11)=(1) P. BM EA 10052, 9.3–4:

Context: The foreigner of the land survey Paykamen has been asked the standard opening interrogation question by the vizier ‘How did you set about getting into the great places?’, where ‘places’ is used to refer

¹⁹ In terms of probability logic, the conditional probability of (Q given P) is equal to the ratio of the probability of (P&Q) and the probability of P (the Ratio formula $\pi(Q|P) = p(P\&Q)/p(P)$, for $p(P) > 0$, where, following Bennett 2003: 51, “ π ” refers to conditional probability and “ p ” to unconditional probability). For discussion of probabilistic approaches to conditionals (particularly in terms of degrees of belief), and of the Ramsey Test, see Edgington (1995: 259–270, 2003, 2005), and the general account in Bennett (2003: 28–33, 45–59). This draws on the standard Bayesian account of conditional probability, and allows for connection to work in Cognitive Psychology; see, for example, Oaksford & Chater (2007: chapter 5). Just one thing to note in the current context: the probabilistic approach makes active use only of the assumption of the stated P (which can have positive or negative polarity, of course), and does not make active use of the unstated not-P (the “bet”, as it were, is cancelled or void if the stated P is false). This seems to me to link up nicely to the exploitation of a (defeasible) conversational implicature approach to the use of negated P in reading conditional perfection into conditionals (see below).

²⁰ I use use-context generally to cover person-to-person linguistic interaction both in speech and in letter exchanges (where the user and recipient are, of course, divorced in space and time).

to tombs. The example is Paykamen's opening response to this question as framed by the scribe:

ir iw-tw (hr) gmt=i iw ptri=i
 COND SBRD-IMPRS [PRS] find:INF=1SG SBRD see:PST=1SG
qdt ḥd qdt nbw m n3 swt iw-tw
 qite silver qite gold from DEF:PL places FUT-IMPRS
(r) irt n=i sbzyt nbt bīn
 [:FUT] do:INF DAT=1SG punishment any terrible

'If I am found to have seen a (single) qite of silver or gold from the Places, then any form of terrible punishment will (surely) be inflicted on me.'

In the use-context, the status of Paykamen being found to have seen the silver and gold is objectively (and thus also subjectively) uncertain and awaits the unfolding of events to be realised or not. It is thus dependent on the temporality of occurrence (the event of the P-clause actually happening or not), as can be seen by taking the conditional out of context and artificially strengthening the meaning towards certainty through 'when' as in 'when I am found to have seen silver and gold from the places, any form of punishment will be inflicted on me'. The majority of attested examples of *ir*-conditionals in the corpus under study are forward-looking conditionals of this type.

There are also examples in which the P-clause is an imagined alternative state of affairs (present counterfactual) as a (counterfactual mental space/possible world) immediate context within which to couch the Q-clause.²¹

²¹ As in Iatridou (2000), the term "present counterfactual" refers to the P-clause being a counterfactual to, or in conflict with, the current state of affairs (although potentially still realisable), rather than to features of tense-marking. Of course, the usual caveats on the term "counterfactual" apply.

- (12) P. Paris Bibl. Nat. 198, II (LRL no. 46), vso 6–7 (Černý 1939: 68.9–10):

Context: The letter writer shows, as he has done regularly through his letter, his disgruntlement with the intended recipient:

îr *îw=k* *m* *ṯ3ty*
 COND SBRD=2SG.M as vizier
bn *îw=î* (*r*) *h3y* *r* *n3y=k* *skty*
 NEG FUT=1SG [:FUT] descend:INF into POSS:PL=2SG.M boat
 ‘(Even) If you were the vizier, I wouldn’t get into your boats.’

Although Late Egyptian has no specific marker for counterfactual or epistemic distancing in constructions of this type (it does not use past-tense marking, for example), the imaginary nature of certain *îr*-conditionals, particularly those with P-clauses with non-verbal constructions (that is, with no equivalent of the verb ‘to be’ in the Late Egyptian pattern), and thus referring to non-dynamic situations, is clear enough by sense. I will return to the concessive reading of this conditional below.

Example 5 above, with *îr îw* + past *sḏm=f* in the P-clause presents an example of the conditional assertion of a Q-clause based on a P-clause in which the situation in the P-clause is accepted as having occurred (and again has concessive sense):

- (13)=(5) P. BM EA 10416, vs. 11–12 (Janssen 1991: pl. 17):

Context: A woman who has been sleeping with a man who is not her husband is under threat of violence. A steward has restrained those threatening violence once, but writes to the woman, pointing out the following:

y3 *îr* *îw* *î[n]ty(=i)* *sn* *m* *p3y*
 EXLM COND SBRD restrain:PST=[1SG] 3PL in DEM:M.SG
sp *bn* *îw=î* (*r*) *înty=w* *m* *ky*
 occasion NEG FUT=1SG [:FUT] restrain:INF=3PL in another
 ‘Indeed, (even) if I have restrained them this time, I won’t restrain them another (time).’

Across these usages, the P-clauses of *îr*-conditionals seem to be distanced, or excluded or projected away, from the ‘now’ of the use-context, whether temporally and/or epistemically, and in the P-clause there is alignment between subjective epistemic evaluation (the perspective of an individual’s knowledge in terms of evidence available) and the objective state of affairs, at least as

that is accepted or is thought to be knowable (in contrast with *inn*-conditional P-clauses, which directly relate to the ‘now’ of the use-context, and for which a distinction between subjective knowledge and the objective state of affairs is significant; see below). So, the forward-looking P-clause with circumstantial first present awaits the outcome of future events and is objectively unknowable or unverifiable ‘now’ (and is, of course, therefore subjectively unknowable as well); P-clauses with circumstantial non-verbal predications present imaginary or present counterfactual P-clauses, a P-clause which is distanced epistemically from actuality and accepted as a counterfact; the P-clause with a circumstantial past provides a closed condition – an accepted past occurrence.

1.4 From conditional perfection to concessive readings of *ir*-conditionals

As already noted, some of the examples above readily allow a concessive meaning (and can be translated as ‘even if’), although there is no specific marker for concessive conditionals in Late Egyptian. This can be addressed by looking at meaning-construction in context for Late Egyptian *ir*-conditionals, which, as might be expected, show a range of pragmatic effects from, on the one hand, a tendency to the exclusive reading of the P-clause as a condition for the realisation of the Q-clause (conditional perfection) through, on the other hand, to examples in which the P-clause is read as an inclusive, limiting condition for the realisation of the Q-clause, particularly in the context of constructed pragmatic scales.

1.4.1 Conditional perfection

Forward-looking conditionals are those which most readily lend themselves to “conditional perfection”: the tendency to perfect a conditional into an “if and only if” conditional.²² The P. BM EA 10052 9.3–4 example of an *ir*-conditional readily lends itself to a conditional perfection reading:

²² The discussion here draws on Horn (2000), who treats conditional perfection in terms of conversational implicature (R-based pragmatic strengthening).

(14)=(1) P. BM EA 10052, 9.3–4 (Peet 1930: pl. 31):

Context: The foreigner of the land survey Paykamen has been asked the standard opening interrogation question by the vizier ‘How did you set about getting into the great places?’, where ‘places’ refers to tombs. The example is Paykamen’s opening response to this question as framed by the scribe:

ir iw-tw (hr) gmt=i iw
 COND SBRD-IMPRS [PRS] find:INF=1SG SBRD
ptri=i qdt ḥd qdt nbw m n3 swt
 see:PST=1SG qite silver qite gold from DEF:PL places
iw-tw (r) irt n=i sb3yt nbt bīn
 FUT-IMPRS [:FUT] do:INF DAT=1SG punishment any terrible
 ‘If I am found to have seen a (single) qite of silver or gold from the Places, then any form of terrible punishment will be inflicted on me.’

Using English as a metalanguage, the conditional perfection reading emerges as follows:

- (15) ‘If I can be found to have seen a (single) qite of silver or gold from the Places, then any form of terrible punishment will be inflicted on me.’
 ‘If I cannot be found to have seen a (single) qite of silver or gold from the Places, then any form of terrible punishment will not be inflicted on me.’
 ‘If and only if I can be found to have seen a (single) qite of silver or gold from the Places, then any form of terrible punishment will be inflicted on me.’

This seems admirably suited to the context of Paykamen’s defiant response. In inviting the possibility that if he is found guilty then punishment will surely befall him, he is opening the unstated conditional perfection inference that if it turns out that he is not found to have seen the silver and gold from the tombs, he should not be punished and thus the exclusivity of the relationship between guilt and punishment that punishment should befall him if and only if he is found to have seen the silver and gold from the tombs.

In terms of sufficient and necessary conditions, standard forward-looking *ir*-conditionals thus include clear examples which allow, in context, an implicature strengthening the P-clause from being a sufficient condition to be capable of

being entertained (at least in practical terms) as a necessary and sufficient, and thus exclusive, condition.

1.4.2 Concessive Conditionals

(16)=(12) P. Paris Bibl. Nat. 198, II (LRL no. 46), vso 6–7 (Černý 1939: 68.9–10):

Context: The letter writer shows, as he has done regularly through his letter, his disgruntlement with the intended recipient:

ír *iw=k* *m* *t3ty*
 COND SBRD=2SG.M as vizier
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 NEG FUT=1SG [:FUT] descend:INF into POSS:PL=2SG.M boat
 '(Even) If you were the vizier, I wouldn't get into your boats.'

The P. Paris Bib. Nat. 198 II, vso 6–7 example does not allow conditional perfection:²³ '*if and only if you were vizier, I would not get into your boats' seems a quite wrong pragmatic strengthening of this example. That is, the P-clause does not lend itself to being read as an exclusive condition. In addition, the Q-clause, rather than being realised as a consequence of the realisation of the P-clause, holds independently of the P-clause: the imagery of 'I will not get into your boats' holds also as a comment on the addressee right now and not just in the imaginary situation of the addressee being vizier. So, the counterfactual P-clause provides just one context for the realisation of the Q-clause, a context which also includes the actual state of affairs. There is also a scalar effect through which the P-clause provides a limiting condition on the Q-clause. That is, the user of the conditional is implying that he wouldn't get into the recipient's boat (as an idiom for agreeing with his point of view) as things stand, and that would remain the case right up to and including if the recipient had the powerful status of vizier.

Although there is no formal expression of concessivity in the P-clause, nevertheless the scalar reading can be readily constructed. The recipient does not in fact hold the position of vizier and so a counterpart relationship is being projected for the addressee, linking his actual standing with the hypothetical

²³ A widely recognised feature of concessive conditionals, cf. König (1986: 235–239) for a discussion covering territory similar to the discussion here.

positing of him being vizier. This counterpart relationship is scaled or ranked pragmatically into a partially ordered set²⁴ ranging from the addressee as he is to what Ekkehard König termed a “pseudo-superlative” as a limiting term in the scale,²⁵ here the powerful position of vizier (presumably also covering a host of unstated intermediary positions in between?). As such, the Q-clause is interpreted not just in the case of the P-clause as formally expressed, but in relation to the constructed scalar range and so the Q-clause is applicable not just in the hypothetical circumstance of the addressee being vizier, but to the addressee as he currently is right up the scale to him being vizier. The P-clause thus meets the criterion noted by Haspelmath & König (1998: 565) for scalar concessive conditionals that such concessive conditionals relate not a single P-clause, but a set of P-clauses, to a Q-clause, here a set established by implicature.

2 *inn*-conditionals

The second type of conditional is the *inn*-conditional. Here example 2 is repeated:

(17)=(2) P. BM EA 10052, 8.5 (Peet 1930: pl. 30):

Context: The servant Sekhahatyamun responds to essentially the same standard interrogation question by the vizier as in (1) above. He says he had nothing to do with the robberies from tombs at Thebes currently under investigation, and then adds the following, referring to earlier robberies at Iumitru:

inn iw-tw (r) hdb=i hr n3 (m)h'(t) n
 COND FUT-IMPRS [:FUT] kill:INF=1SG because DEF:PL tomb of
iw-(m)-itrw mntw n3 wn=i im
 Iumitru 3PL DEF:PL be:REL:PST=1SG there
 ‘If I am going to be killed because of the Iumitru tombs, then (at least) they are the ones which I’ve been in.’

²⁴ I refer to pragmatic scales in the sense of Fauconnier (1975), and Posets as in Hirschberg (1991). For scalar approaches to concessive conditionals, see, for example, König (1986), Kay (1990/1997) (on ‘even’), Haspelmath & König (1998), Declerck & Reed (2001b: 217–230), and Iten (2005: 217–233).

²⁵ König (1986: 236).

2.1 *inn*-conditionals: on form

The P-clause is formed by the introductory marker *inn*²⁶ followed by a clause which has the same form and meaning (including time reference) as the equivalent independent main clause without *inn*; the Q-clause has standard main-clause form. Examples are provided here for past, present, and future:²⁷

inn + past tense (here the specific negation of the past)

- (18) P. BM EA 10100 (LRL no. 30), rto 14–15 (Černý 1939: 50.16–51.2):

Context: The sender is discussing 5 serving-women he has allocated to the workmen, commenting that they are for the service of all the work-gang (with the exception, apparently, of Heramunpenaf). However, the sender is unsure whether the serving-women have actually arrived and so provides guidance for this eventuality:

hr inn bwpw=tn šsp=w
 CORD COND NEG:PST=2PL receive:INF=3PL
iw=tn (r) šm r p3 nty hr-r-t
 FUT=2PL [:FUT] go:INF to DEF:M.SG REL Hereret
im mtw=tn šsp=w n=s
 there CORD.MOD=2PL receive:INF=3PL from=3SG.F
 ‘But if you haven’t received them, you should go to Hereret [lit. to where Hereret is] and get them from her.’

²⁶ There have been differing proposals for the etymology of *inn*, but the most likely proposal (see, e.g., Depuydt 1991) is that it comes from the earlier Egyptian combination *ir wnn* (examples still to be found in Late Egyptian), one of the attested uses of which is to mark epistemic conditional usage. If so, the epistemic usage has grammaticalized out by Late Egyptian, as so often cross-linguistically.

²⁷ Further examples, across a wider range of tenses and constructions, are provided in Collier (2006).

inn + first present

- (19) O. Berlin P 12630, vso 1–2 (Deir el-Medine on-line):
- ²⁸

Context: A letter of complaint over non-payment by the recipient for a coffin and bed which the sender has previously provided. After resuming the history the debt briefly, the sender ends:

inn tw=t hr dît p3 ih
 COND PRS=2SG.F PRS give:INF DEF.M.SG OX
imî in-tw=f
 CAUSE:IMP bring:SBJV-IMPRS=3SG.M
hr inn mn ih imî in-tw
 CORD COND NEG.EXIS OX CAUSE:IMP bring.SBJV-IMPRS
p3 hctî hn^c p3 wt
 DEF.M.SG bed and DEF.M.SG coffin

‘If you can provide the ox, have it sent; but if there is no ox, have the bed and coffin returned.’

inn + third future (see also ex. (17)=(2) above)

- (20) P. Mayer B (= P. National Museums Liverpool M11186), 4–5 (Peet 1920: pl. P. Mayer B):
- ²⁹

Context: The thief Pais is attempting to coerce his way into a share of a robbery undertaken by other thieves. He does so by using a conditional threat to inform on the thieves to (the people of) the governor of the west (of Thebes) and the inspectors (the transliteration of this lengthy phrase is omitted and replaced with NN).

ir n3 hd igm=k
 as-for DEF:PL silver find:REL:PST=2SG.M
inn bn iw=k (r) dît n=i im=w
 COND NEG FUT=2SG.M [:FUT] give:INF DAT=1SG from=3PL

²⁸ The ostracon is usually dated to the mid-Twentieth Dynasty (reigns of Ramesses III–Ramesses IV), so around about 70–80 years before TPR and LRL; see the Deir el-Medina Database web-site.

²⁹ P. Mayer B is a single page fragment. It concerns the robbery from the tomb of the mid-Twentieth Dynasty pharaoh Ramesses VI, and so cannot be too far in time from the other TPR.

iw=i (r) *šm* r *dd=f* n NN
 FUT=1SG [:FUT] go:INF to tell:INF=3SG.M DAT NN

‘As for the monies which you have found, if you are not going to give me (anything) from them, then I will go to tell it to NN.’

2.2 *inn*-conditionals: on meaning

The *inn*-conditional deals with conditional current subjective knowledge about P-clause situations which themselves may be in the past, present, or future – the P-clause is presented as being subjectively uncertain (usually uncertain to the user, whether in fact or as a rhetorical ploy), and the Q-clause (an assertion, an instruction, a question) is put on supposition of this subjectively uncertain P-clause.³⁰ For P-clauses with past or present tense, whether or not the P-clause accurately characterises the situation referred to in the P-clause is, in objective terms, open to confirmation (fact-checking):³¹ the formulation in the P-clause is either a true or false characterisation of matters as they stand, and the relevant evidence is, in principle, potentially available (already or through checking) to someone (usually the addressee to whom the conditional is put).³² Future-oriented P-clauses primarily concern current predictions of the course of events and, based on the prediction, can allow for the pre-emption of the future outcome of those events by realisation of the Q-clause ahead of, or separate from, the outcome of those events.³³ Such conditionals can be glossed with ‘if it is true/the case that’ and the epistemic meaning of the P-clause of the *inn*-conditional can often be

30 See Haegeman (2003: 319–320) for a sample listing of authors who have distinguished two sorts of “if-clauses” along what seem to be similar lines as the distinction between *ir*- and *inn*-conditionals here, although there seem to be issues at the level of detail (see, for example, Edgington (2003: 394–396) for critical comments on deploying causality as a means of distinguishing a class of conditionals), and on whether terminologies and analyses apply to P-clauses or connections between P- and Q-clauses (such as Sweetser 1990’s influential distinction between “content”, “epistemic”, and “speech-act” conditionals). My usage has a lineage within Egyptology which stretches back to work by the linguist and Coptologist Wolf-Peter Funk (cf. Funk 1985; and also Depuydt 1999, who grounds his work in that of Boole), albeit that my account differs in detail.

31 Egyptologists have often noted that the P-clause in such a conditional overlaps in its properties with yes/no questions; see, for example, Junge (2001: 266). Compare Declerck & Reed (2001a: 91–92).

32 Cf. particularly Funk (1985: 375–376) and Kaufmann (2005: 186).

33 Cf. Nieuwint (1986); Dancygier (1998: 116–120); Dancygier & Sweetser (2005: 87–89).

brought out by taking the conditional out of context and artificially strengthening towards certainty through using ‘since’ or ‘because’. Thus example (17)=(2) can be strengthened to (in this example this also happens to work in context):

- (21) ‘Since I am going to be killed because of the Iumitru tombs, then (at least) they are the ones I’ve been in.’

Ordinarily in *inn*-conditionals, there is presumed to be a distinction, or asymmetry, in the subjective knowledge of the user and addressee of the conditional. Most commonly, users position themselves as being currently uncertain about the P-clause, and then follow through with a Q-clause based on supposition of the P-clause; the user seems ordinarily to expect the addressee to have a clearer body of knowledge about the P-clause situation and thus to be able to activate the Q-clause or not on the basis of this knowledge (e.g., to accept or reject an assertion, to carry out an instruction, to answer a question). Of course, as in English, users can adopt this stance as a rhetorical ploy, e.g., as a means to guide the addressee towards a particular conclusion. See ex. 22 below.

inn-conditionals can have P-clauses which can be read counterfactually, or epistemically distanced (higher degree of hypotheticality), as something which is offered up as being possible but which, in the following example, can be ruled out, although there is no explicit marking of unlikelihood or counterfactuality:

- (22) P. BM EA 10375 (LRL no. 28), vso 1 (Černý 1939: 46.16–47.1):

Context: The scribe Butehamun is stressing to the general Payankh, his lord, that the workgang are carrying out all the tasks of the lord as diligently as they can even in the face of problems. He reinforces this with the following conditional claiming that they would inform the general were they not (and Payankh can see for himself that they are not informing the lord of this in their letter – just the opposite).

inn bn i-ir=n b3k n=k
 COND NEG THMZ=1PL work:INF DAT=2SG.M
m ib h3ty=n
 with heart-force heart=1PL
iw=n (r) h3b r dit m
 FUT=1PL[:FUT] send:INF to CAUSE:INF know:SBJV

p3y=n *nb*
 POSS:M.SG=1PL lord
 ‘If we were not working for your heart and soul, we would write to let our lord know.’

This is an example of an *inn*-conditional deployed by the user to try to steer the addressee towards a particular view: the content of the P-clause is not subjectively uncertain to the user, but is subjectively uncertain to the addressee. Butehamun obviously has a clear stance on whether the workmen are working heart and soul for their general (whether a truthful stance or not). He presents a conditional in which the general can reason out (by *modus tollens* reasoning) an answer to this for himself (or at least reason out Butehamun’s version of the answer) based on the conditional as presented.

3 *hn*-conditionals

Finally, the third type of conditional is the *hn*-conditional:

(23)=(3) P. BM EA 10052, 4.13 (Peet 1930: pl. 27):

Context: The trumpeter Amenkhau denies involvement in the robberies. He says *bpy=i ptr ht nbt* ‘I didn’t see anything’, and then strengthens his denial with a counterfactual conditional:

hn *ptri=i*
 COND see:PST=1SG
wn *iw=i* (*r*) *dd=f*
 be:PST FUT=1SG [:FUT] say:INF=3SG.M
 ‘If had seen (anything), I would say so.’

This example expresses past counterfactual conditional meaning. The term “counterfactual” has, of course, come under criticism, even for patterns of this sort,³⁴ and examples exist from well-studied languages, such as English, in which the relevant P-clause tense-marking pattern need not have strictly counterfactual meaning. However, counterfactual meaning is typical, even if this is pragmatic and not essential, and, for Late Egyptian, the range of attested examples

³⁴ For example, Comrie (1986: 89–91).

do display past counterfactual meaning, whereas the type of example which might show whether this pattern necessarily expresses counterfactuality or not is lacking from the available dataset.

3.1 *hn*-conditionals: on form

The P-clause is formed by the marker *hn* followed by the ordinary past tense (the past *sḏm=f* form as in ex. (23) above). Examples can also be found in which the past tense carries a further past tense marker (thus providing a “pluperfect” tense-form). For example, the counterfactual strengthening of denial found in ex. (23) occurs a number of times across the written versions of the testimonies in the later TPR, including the following variant from P. BM EA 10403:

(24) P. BM EA 10403, 3.29 (Peet 1930: pl. 37):

Context: The townswoman Shedehtakhte denies seeing anything to do with the thefts during the time she worked in the house of the accused thief Tetisheru. She says *hpy=i ptr* ‘I didn’t see (anything)’ and then strengthens this with the following counterfactual conditional:

<i>hn</i>	<i>wn</i>	<i>ptr=i</i>	
COND	AUX:PST	see:PST=1SG	
<i>wn</i>	<i>iw=i</i>	(<i>r</i>)	<i>ḏd=f</i>
be:PST	FUT=1SG	[:FUT]	say:INF=3SG.M

‘If I had seen, I would say so.’

Returning to the general form of the *hn*-conditional, the Q-clause (here a counterfactual Q-clause) also shows distinctive marking, being composed of the third future (*iw=f r sḏm*, which has the specific negation *bn iw=f r sḏm*) preceded by the past marker *wn*. The past marker *wn* appears in all surviving examples of counterfactual Q-clauses with the third future and so appears not to be optional (so *wn iw=f r sḏm*, with the specific negation *wn bn iw=f r sḏm*); see also ex. 26 below. In fact, the *wn* + third future construction can be used outside of conditionals to express a counterfactual state of affairs:³⁵

³⁵ For forms marked both for “potentiality” and “past” as the most common forms for single-clause counterfactual constructions, see Van Linden & Verstraete (2008: esp. 1870–1872).

- (25) P. Turin 2021, rto 3.4 (Allam 1973a: 117):
- ³⁶

Context: The priest Amenkhau states that he is providing for his second wife Anksunedjem, and also that he is providing for his children from a previous marriage. In particular, they are not omitted from anything which he brought in with their mother. He then adds the following, after which he notes that he is precluded by the word of Pharaoh from doing this:

iw wn iw=i (r) dit n=w m p3
 SBRD be:PST FUT=1SG [:FUT] give:INF DAT=3PL from DEF:M.SG
in=i i-r-m nḥ-n-nwt ink-sw-ndm
 bring:REL:PST=1SG with townswoman Anksunedjem
 ‘I would give them from what I have brought in with the townswoman Anksunedjem.’

3.2 *hn*-conditionals: on meaning

As already noted, the *hn*-conditional covers the core ground of past counterfactual conditionals – the positing of an alternate P-clause past state of affairs from that which did obtain as a condition for the realisation of the Q-clause. In attested examples in documentary texts, the counterfactual P-clause differs only in limited particulars from actuality,³⁷ and the *hn*-conditional is deployed for its contribution to the current discourse, which is usually centred on actuality, thus with interplay between counterfactuality and (f)actuality. For example:

³⁶ P. Turin 2021, with additional fragments P. Geneva D409, dates to the late Twentieth Dynasty (and mentions certain individuals, such as the Deir el-Medina scribe Dhutmose, known from both the later TPR and the LRL). For transcription and photographs, see Allam (1973a: 112–119); for German translation, see Allam (1973b: 320–327).

³⁷ The limited or constrained alteration to actuality in order to construct the counterfactual space reflects something of the (admittedly more stringent) conditions on closest possible world discussed at length and in detail in the philosophical literature, a discussion going back to Lewis (1973). See Bennett (2003: chapters 10–16) and Edgington (2008) for recent discussions.

- (26) Wenamun (P. Pushkin Museum 120), 2.29–30 (Gardiner 1932: 69.15–16):
- ³⁸

Context: The ruler of Byblos Tjekerbaal has pointed out to the Egyptian representative Wenamun that previous Egyptian rulers used to pay for the timber provided from the Lebanon for the sacred bark of Amun. Wenamun counters by asserting that everything belongs to the god Amun. He then takes up the point about earlier rulers. ‘As for your saying that previous rulers used to have silver and gold sent, if they had had life and health, they would not have had these things sent. They did send these things — but only instead of life and health — to your ancestors. But Amen-Re King of the Gods, he is the master of life and health’.

hn *wn-(m)-dī=w* *ḥnh snb,*
 COND PST-POSS³⁹=3PL life health
wn *bn* *īw=w* (*r*) *dīt* *īn-tw*
 be:PST NEG FUT=3PL [:FUT] cause:INF bring:SBJV-IMPRS
n3 *3ht*
 DEF:PL things
 ‘If they had had life and health, they would not have had these things
 [= gold and silver] sent.’

Here Wenamun points out that previous rulers of Egypt had to pay because they were not the determiners of life and health, as part of his point that he, Wenamun, is a representative of the god Amun, not of a temporal ruler, and the god is the determiner of life and health. In the conditional, a counterpart for the previous rulers is projected into a counterfactual space and assigned the (counterfactual) property of the ability to determine life and health, and then the consequence of this altered state of affairs is explored based on this supposi-

³⁸ The *Report of Wenamun* (a modern title) is a literary text (or at the very least an embellished literary version of a report), and probably dates a good few decades or more later than other material dealt with in this paper. However, it has long been recognised in Egyptology that the form of its language finds close parallel in late Twentieth Dynasty documentary Late Egyptian. For publication of hieroglyphic transcription, see Gardiner (1932); for photographs of the original hieratic, see the end plates to Schipper (2005); for recent English translation, see Wente in Simpson (2003: 116–124); for arguments for a dating to the mid-Twenty-first Dynasty to early Twenty-second Dynasty, see Winand (2011).

³⁹ The possession construction in this example is comprised of the auxiliary *wn* followed by a prepositional phrase meaning etymologically ‘in the hand of’. See Černý & Groll (1975/1993: 395) for brief discussion of time indication with the possession construction.

tion – that they would not have had to pay. Wenamun then returns to actuality within which space he asserts that Amun is the master of life and health (and thus has counterpart properties to the counterfactual P-clause). He thus implies (on the basis of a scalar ranking with Amun ranking above temporal rulers) that the stated consequence in the counterfactual should hold for Amun in “factual” space (without explicitly having to state that this is so):⁴⁰

Factual	Counterfactual	Factual
Previous rulers	Previous rulers	The god Amun
- control life and health	+ control life and health	+ control life and health
+ Pay for timber	- Pay for timber	(- Pay for timber)

4 Conclusion

The three different conditional patterns in Late Egyptian have distinctive forms and meanings, in which P-clause marking is key. In the *ir*-conditional, the P-clause is distanced from the actuality of the use-context and subjective, and objective (un)certainly are not distinguished: forward-looking P-clauses await the outcome of the future course of events; present time-reference P-clauses are accepted as counterfactual; past P-clauses are accepted as closed conditions. In the *im*-conditional, the P-clause is presented as subjectively uncertain in the use-context, although a past or present P-clause could, in principle, objectively be resolved as to whether it is right or wrong, should relevant evidence be available (e.g., to the addressee); a future P-clause is predictive, allowing for the possibility of the pre-emption of the predicted or intended event. In the *hm*-conditional, the P-clause is again excluded from the actuality of the use-context, both temporally and epistemically, as a past counterfactual.

Direct comparison can be made across all three types of Late Egyptian conditional in the case where the P-clause for each displays the standard past-tense form (the past *sdm=f*). In this case, each type displays a clear distinction of meaning (albeit that the surviving sample set for *ir iw sdm=f* with conditional meaning is rather small):

⁴⁰ This seems amenable to a treatment along the lines of Fauconnier (1997: chapters 4–5).

ir-conditional with past *sḏm=f* in the P-clause

(27)=(5) P. BM EA 10416, vso 11–12 (Janssen 1991: pl. 17):

Context: A woman who has been sleeping with a man who is not her husband is under threat of violence. A steward has restrained those threatening violence once, but writes to the woman, pointing out the following:

y3	ir	iw	i[n]ty(=i)	sn	m	p3y	sp
EXLM	COND	SBRD	restrain:PST=[1SG] 3PL	in	DEM:M.SG	occasion	
bn	iw=i	(r)	inty=w	m	ky		
NEG	FUT=1SG	[:FUT]	restrain:INF=3PL	in	another		

‘Indeed, (even) if I have restrained them this time, I won’t restrain them another (time).’

In this *ir*-conditional, the past event in the P-clause is treated as closed, as something which is accepted/treated simply as having happened.

inn-conditional with past *sḏm=f* in the P-clause

(28) P. Mayer A (= P. National Museums Liverpool M11162), 2.15 (Peet 1920: pl. Mayer A page 2):

Context: The priest Nesamun is being interrogated in place of his father Paybaki. He admits his father was involved in the thefts but says that he doesn’t know any of the details. He does, however, know of 3 men who were also involved. He names them and then says:

inn	nw-tw		nbw
COND	obtain:PST-IMPRS		gold
mntw	n3	nty	rḥ
3PL	DEF:PL	REL[PRS:3PL]	KNOW.RES[-3PL] ⁴¹

‘But if gold (really) was obtained, then they are the ones who know.’

In this *inn*-conditional, the user positions himself as being subjectively uncertain as to whether or not gold actually was obtained from the robbery, but this

⁴¹ The verb, *rḥ* ‘know’ is in the stative (or resultative) form, the principal alternative form of the verb in the first present (alongside *hr* + infinitive).

could, in principle, be determined through relevant evidence, and he names three accomplices of his father who can confirm this. As such, the user distances himself nicely from the thefts.

hn-conditional with past *sdm=f* in the P-clause

(29) = (3) P. BM EA 10052, 4.13 (Peet 1930: pl. 27):

Context: The trumpeter Amenkhau denies involvement in the robberies. He says *bpy=i ptr ht nbt* ‘I didn’t see anything’, and then strengthens his denial with a counterfactual conditional:

hn *ptri=i*
 COND see:PST=1SG
wn *iw=i* (*r*) *dd=f*
 be:PST FUT=1SG [:FUT] say:INF=3SG.M
 ‘If had seen (anything), I would say so.’

In this *hn*-conditional, the past event in the P-clause is treated as a counterfactual, that is, as an event contrary to what is asserted actually to have taken place. The counterfactual meaning and counterfactual marking also extends to the counterfactual Q-clause.

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Deir el-Medina Database: <<http://www.leidenuniv.nl/nino/dmd/dmd.html>>. For bibliography and comments on Deir el-Medina texts (but does not include the tomb robbery papyri).

Deir el-Medine on-line: <<http://obelix.arf.fak12.uni-muenchen.de/cgi-bin/mmcgi2mmhob/mho-1/hobmain/>>. Includes on-line publication of Late Egyptian texts in the Berlin Museum.

