Lingua Aegyptia

Studia Monographica

Herausgegeben von
Frank Kammerzell, Gerald Moers und Kai Widmaier

Band 15

On Forms and Functions:
Studies in Ancient Egyptian Grammar

edited by

Eitan Grossman, Stéphane Polis,

Andréas Stauder & Jean Winand

CONTENTS

Antiphrastic Questions with *ist* and *is* in Late Egyptian[*]

Mark Collier, University of Liverpool

Abstract

Questions with *ist* and *is* are analysed as closed antiphrastic questions, in which the proposition directly under question (P) is presented by the speaker as the closed option for elimination, being contrary to the speaker's expectations, and a polar inverse inference option is invited (I) for the hearer to access the speaker's intended point of view.

1 *ist* and *is* questions as closed antiphrastic questions

Questions with *ist* and *is* in Late Egyptian[1] are dealt with quite briefly in the standard grammars and with limited attention to the meaning of the construction. Černý & Groll (1978: 556-557) cover *ist/is* questions in just over a page, noting that '*ist* is used when a strong amazement is expressed on the part of the speaker.' Junge (1996: 91) notes 'nicht selten wird so eine Tonfrage markiert, in der Zweifel mitschwingt' (the English version, Junge (2001: 87) has '*is* and *istw* frequently introduce an element of doubt into the question'). Neveu (1996: 285-290) provides the most detailed account, with a substantial listing of constructions found after *ist* and *is*, with particular focus

---

[*] This paper differs from the paper delivered at the workshop, which drew on other work currently in press, but deals with and develops the same topic of the role of alternate inferences in grammar. I am grateful to Stéphane Polis who, when I informed him (as editor) that I was writing a piece on *ist/is* questions for this volume, directed me to the sections of his recent PhD thesis (Polis 2008–9) in which he discusses *ist/is* questions from the perspective of his investigation of modality in Late Egyptian. It was very pleasing to see that, although we approach the topic from different directions, our views are distinctly compatible. As such I have reduced the first section of this paper which had originally been planned to move from current treatments in the grammars to motivating the account here. I am also grateful to Stéphane for undertaking for me a search of the *Ramsès* database, which is still in its development phase, for additional examples. My thanks too to my colleague at Liverpool, Chris Eyre for his thoughtful comments on the original draft. This paper was written during University of Liverpool research leave following completion of my term of office as head of department.

[1] This paper addresses cognitive engagement with grammatical construction at the level of viewpoint and inference, an important dimension, in my view, in our endeavour to improve our understanding of Ancient Egyptian constructions and their deployment and to improve our translations and understanding of the ancient sources which provide the direct evidence for these constructions. There is much that I cannot deal with here in what is already quite a long paper. Given the similarity, if not identical, use of the two particles *ist* and *is*, I shall not attempt to distinguish between them here. Nor do I consider whether certain combinations of *is bn* should be treated as displaying a separate grammaticalised negative question particle *is-bn*. Finally, I do not deal with the grammatical evolution of this construction and how the questioning (or possibly exclamative) force is delivered. Instead I follow the grammatical tradition since Erman (1933: 371-372) in treating this construction as a question. Notice Erman's comment (1933: 371) on *ist* and *is* 'die an und für sich keinen fragenden Sinn haben; sie mögen etwa die Frage zu dem Vorhergehenden in Beziehung setzen.'

on his case for recognising a distinct negative question particle *is-bn*. In terms of meaning he provides the brief comment (p. 285): 'Cette particule … s'emploi[e] dans le style soutenu pour poser des questions le plus souvent rhétoriques.'[2]

In his recent thesis, Polis (2008-9: 265-267) has now advanced our understanding of *ist/is* questions, albeit that his treatment is not intended to be comprehensive but is developed to serve his broader discussion of modality in Late Egyptian. Polis takes questions with *ist* and *is* to involve a 'présupposé de fausseté' in relation to the particular proposition brought under question, distancing the speaker from its content on the assertive level and thus that this particular proposition is not asserted through the question. In other words, the communicative goal is not informative exchange but to obtain a reaction from the addressee. I think his approach is essentially correct, though he concentrates more directly on the non-adherence of the speaker to the content of the question, through his modal factor of force (F⁻), than to what the question implies about the speaker's own view, which he clearly sees as being the inverse of the proposition under question. My own account here centres on the presentation of inverse alternates through the question, one closed and one invited.

A nice example of an *is* question is the following from a brief ostracon letter, O. Berlin P. 11247, which I will discuss in some detail to motivate the account here:[3]

Ex. 1   O. Berlin P. 11247, vso 5 (K*RI* III, 533,7)
         The draughtsman Pay addresses his son Pre[emheb] or Pre[hotep], asking his son not to turn away from him, while he [the father] is unwell. He then asks for some medicine for his eyes (his eyesight has failed) and comments:

is   bn   ink   p3y=k   it
is NEG 1SG your   father

"Am I not your father?"

The approach I take here is to look at *ist/is* questions in terms of the speaker's viewpoint.[4] The speaker sees something which runs contrary to, or contrasts with, the speaker's expectations/wants of, or view on, how things should be: in this case, apparently, over whether his son will or will not help him. The speaker seeks to interrogate this problem with a question, sometimes treating it as a rhetorical question, to steer away from this towards the speaker's own take on things. The goal is to entice the hearer along towards this unstated alternative view of things, ideally to make the hearer complicit in this viewpoint through engaging the hearer in the cognitive work of inference. As will be seen, the relationship between speaker expectations – or wants – and context can be varied: something can be wrong for the speaker, or display Polis's 'présupposé de fausseté', in terms of how things are (in secure knowledge contexts the proposition under question may be palpably false and counterfactual),

---

2   The common rhetorical use of *ist/is* questions has often been noted in the literature, e.g. Sweeney (2001: 106).

3   On the basis of the names, this ostracon is most likely to date to the reign of Ramesses II. The draughtsman Pay can be identified with the draughtsman Pay (i) son of Ipuy (v) of Davies (1999: 149). The name of the son can be reconstructed as either Preemheb (i) son of Pay (i), Davies (1999: 155) or Prehotep (i) son of Pay (i).

4   I shall refer to the user of the *ist/is* question as the 'speaker' as a terminological convenience even for cases where the user may not directly be speaking or being quoted, e.g. when writing. In like manner, I will refer to the person to whom the question is addressed as the 'hearer'.

how things should be or should turn out to be, or indeed in terms of how the speaker would have expected things to be from his end, even if they do not turn out to be that way.

The question itself directs attention to the problematic take on things which the speaker wishes to interrogate (whether for rhetorical or more direct purposes). In example (1) the *is* (or *is-bn*) question is a negative one (Q), with a negated proposition (P) directly under question:

Q: Am I not your father?
P: I am not your father

Clearly there is no doubt as to whether Pay is the father or not. The proposition under question (P) is wrong and contrary to Pay's expectations of how things should be taken in the current context – this is thus a CLOSED question[5] in which the proposition under question (P) is presented conventionally for closure and elimination, which I shall indicate by strikethrough:

Q: Am I not your father?
P: ~~I am not your father~~

Despite being offered for closure, the proposition under question is not irrelevant in context – here it links up to the issue as Pay sees it (and reflects something Pay would wish to steer away from). The problem in the current context, from the speaker's point of view, is that he is suffering from eye problems and is seeking to get his son to get him medicine to help him, but this is not yet forthcoming. He seems concerned that the son's immediate help is not a complete given and needs addressing (he asks his son not to turn away from him). He has expressed his view that the son ought to bring him some ingredients for eye medicine. This clearly links into the values and expectations of the father-son relationship in Ancient Egypt. The closed *is* question accesses and interrogates the comparatively well-known cultural schema of the father-son relationship, here in terms of the idealised sense of the role the son should take on. The son not helping out with the medicine would essentially be akin to him not behaving properly as a son should to his father.

Since the question directly expresses an option which the speaker is seeking to close off and eliminate, the addressee is being invited to consider things differently from the proposition directly under question – to infer an alternative. The proposition which the speaker implies is the right way to look at things (in terms of how his expectations relate to the current context) is the polar inverse proposition to the proposition under question: 'I am your father'. This alternate is thus an invited inverse inference (I) opened up by the proposition under question being closed off and so *ist/is* questions involve a form of ANTIPHRASIS in their interpretation, to be read opposite to their actual formulation. This interpretation or reading of *ist/is* questions as CLOSED ANTIPHRASTIC QUESTIONS or CLOSED POLAR INVERSION QUESTIONS can be reflected in a simple informal inference model as follows:[6]

---

5   Fiengo (2007: 64-70) has a discussion of closed questions in English which I have found useful, including his notion of the 'eliminative tactic'.

6   I present the 'inference model' through informal formulations in English for easier reading. One might deploy more factored formulations, but this would require a more sustained engagement

Q: Am I not your father?
P: ~~I am not your father~~
I: I am your father

It is the invited inference which better reflects the speaker's viewpoint and his expectations, an invitation which the addressee is expected to pick up on and to take into account and, if necessary, respond to or act upon. Thus, if successful in its enticement, the question, though starting out from something problematic and counter-to-expectation, as the speaker sees it, will end with the addressee becoming informed about, or complicit in, the viewpoint expressing the speaker's actual expectations. In example (1), if the son takes up and accepts the invited inference, then he should adapt his behaviour accordingly and get the father the medicine. As such, the father's expectations of how things should be are clearly retrievable from the circumstances and if the son accepts the invited inference, then the father will get his way and will have successfully steered his son towards helping him and away from neglecting him. Thus the father would make the son complicit, all without issuing orders or making bald statements of fact.

Such closed questions are used in a range of circumstances from questions, where the addressee is enticed to respond or react, through to rhetorical questions. Although a number of Egyptologists have noted the rhetorical nature common to examples of *ist/is* questions, this is not a necessary feature of the *ist/is* question (see particularly the discussion of ex. 41, where a response is required, a response not predetermined by the speaker, and is indeed provided by the hearer of the question).

Although I will not focus particularly on the following nuances of reading, it should be noted that the deployment of a question in which the proposition under question (P) is one the speaker wishes to distance himself from as contrary to his expectations can, in the right circumstances, allow for the reading of a critical tone, or even an ironic or sarcastic one (the speaker is dismissive to the proposition under question), or a degree of surprise, even amazement or incredulity (e.g., the speaker is surprised that this alternate needs to be raised).

Since the intended but invited inference (I) is the inverse of the proposition directly under question (P), negated *ist/is* questions invite a positive inference (as in ex. 1), whereas affirmative *ist/is* questions invite a negative inference. Example (2) provides an example of a positive *ist/is* question. Since example (1) is an example of a negative *is* question with a nominal sentence, I can utilise the example from the Qadesh inscriptions of Ramesses II that Polis uses as a lead example in his discussion (2008-9: 264 ex. 512), one which also invokes the father-son constellation, here applied to the relationship between the king and his god.

Ex. 2   Qadesh Poem, §93 (K*RI* II, 34,6-9)
         At this point in the battle of Qadesh, the Hittite king has sprung his trap. The Egyptian king is surrounded and isolated. It is a moment of crisis. Within the ideology of the drama of the inscriptions, the king is essentially alone, abandoned by his own troops (albeit that there are actually some remnant forces

---

with nuances of the interaction of negative scope with, for example, modality and presupposition-focus than I can undertake in an already lengthy paper.

actually still with him), but faced by the countless hoards of his enemy. At this point the king delivers his plea to Amun for the god to aid him. He asks 'What is it with you, my father Amun?' and then follows with an *is* question:

is	*p3*	*n*	*it*	*ḥm*	*ḥr*	*s3=f*
is	this	for	father	ignore:INF	about	son=his

"Is this for a father, to ignore his son?"

The expectation, of course, is that ignoring his son is not the proper role of a father. Instead it is the proper role of a father to help his son:

    Q: Is this for a father, to ignore his son?
    P: ~~This is for a father, to ignore his son~~
    I: This is not for a father, to ignore his son

In context, the battle is going wrong for Ramesses II. Abandoned by his own soldiers, the king interrogates the possibility that the god too may have abandoned him. Ramesses II is using a proposition under question (P) to which he does not subscribe. Clearly he thinks that a father should not ignore his son, but should instead help him, particularly right now. The question is thus one in which the proposition directly under question (P) is presented for closure (surely this is not the right take on things). Ramesses II is attempting to steer away from the state of affairs in the proposition as questioned (P) and to its inferred alternate. This alternate inference (I) is the inverse of the proposition as put under question (I) and is aimed to entice the god to deliver his aid. Ramesses II backs this up by going on to provide a lengthy illustration of what he has done for Amun, his father. Clearly this is to serve as evidence for how he has played his role in the son/king to father/god relationship and thus merits aid in return.

The final point for initial discussion concerns the reading of inferences. The following example is one of a number in which there is a direct recorded ancient response or follow-up to an *ist/is* question and thus confirms for us directly the ancient take on such questions. This allows us to conclude that our analysis is not based on just a feature of a modern reading or interpretation.

In *The Story of Horus and Seth*, the gods Horus and Seth contest the office of kingship vacated by Osiris. A central theme of the plot exploited by Seth's opponents is whether Seth should be appointed to this office of Osiris whilst the son of Osiris, Horus, is alive and ready to serve, to which the opposing argument brought out by the supporters of Seth is whether the office of Osiris should be held by the young Horus whilst his elder relative Seth is still alive and ready to serve. This is enlivened further in the plot by the pun between the homonyms *i3wt* 'office' and *i3wt* 'cattle', which allows for the allegorical development of the dispute, as exploited in the following example.

    Ex. 3   *Horus and Seth*, 7,9 (*LES*, 46,11)
        In repeating to Pre-Horakhty how he was fooled by Isis, Seth informs Pre-Horakhty that, unknown to him, Isis had transformed herself into a beautiful woman to whom Seth is attracted. This beautiful woman told him the story of what happened when her husband died, leaving their son to look after their cattle (*i3wt*, the pun on *i3wt* 'office'). A stranger came along and threatened to take the father's cattle and to beat (and throw out) the son. Seth responds to this story with the following *is*-question:

ist i-ir.tw   *dit*   *nꜣ iꜣwt*   *n pꜣ rmṯ ḏrḏr*
ist THMZ.IMPRS give:INF the cattle to the stranger

iw   *pꜣ šri*   *n*   *pꜣ ꜥhꜣwty*   *ꜥhꜥ*
SBRD the son of the guy   stand

"Are the cattle to be given to the stranger when the guy's son is around?"[7]

In such a loaded context, we, as audience, are surely being steered towards respon-ding, 'No, the cattle are not to be given to the stranger when the guy's son is around' (the inference invited by antiphrasis). In the ancient text, this is also Seth's stance: he clearly takes the proposition under question (P) to be contrary to how things should be as he sees it (it is in that sense wrong) and is the alternate to be closed off and dismissed. In contrast, the invited inference (I) better expresses how things should be (and in that sense is the right alternate). This is shown quite explicitly in the text in that Seth then goes on to say that the stranger should be struck with a stick and thrown out and adds (*Horus and Seth*, 7,10-11) that 'your son should be put in the place of his father' (and thus be given the cattle). The inference pattern is:

Q: Are the cattle to be given to the stranger when the guy's son is around?
P: ~~The cattle are to be given to the stranger when the guy's son is around~~

Part of what makes this wrong from the speaker's perspective is made explicit in the circumstantial clause, which presents an issue which is potentially in conflict with the P proposition, at least on the level of what should be done.

I1:   The cattle are not to be given to the stranger when the guy's son is around

Given that in context the opposition is between whether the stranger or the son should get the cattle, this leads to the clear further inference:

I2   The cattle are to be given the guy's son

Seth is not the only character in the story who responds to this episode. On different occasions, both Isis and Pre-Horakhty react, both following the interpretation of *ist/is* questions offered above. Isis fooled Seth into acknowledging this role of the son in her story, of course, to raise the analogy with the contest between Horus and Seth, where Seth is contesting the office of kingship with Horus, the son of Osiris. In the initial plot-line, Isis seizes on his own account of what would be right in this context and says, 'It is your own mouth which said it; it is your own cleverness which has judged you' (*Horus and Seth*, 6,14-7.1). In the context of the *ist* question in example (3), Seth has related this story to Pre-Horakhty (who has been sympathetic to Seth's case). Re-Horakhty responds: 'Well now, you have judged yourself. What more is there for you?' (*Horus and Seth*, 7,11-12).

---

7   In the earlier version of this episode, as part of the plot-flow of the story, Seth uses a direct second tense construction without *ist*: *Horus and Seth* 6,12-13 (*LES*, 45,7-9) *i-ir.tw dit nꜣ iꜣwt n pꜣ rmṯ ḏrḏr iw pꜣ šri n pꜣ ꜥhꜣwty ꜥhꜥ*. This can be taken as either a flexion question or as an exclamative. In either case, the invitation of the polar inverse as inference is clear. *ist/is* questions are, of course, not the only constructions, even amongst constructions deployed as questions or exclamatives, which deploy invited inverse inferences to the construction as actually expressed, it's just that *ist/is* question seem specifically marked for this. For example, another question type in which the antiphrastic reading seems to be conventionally marked, at least graphically, is the use of *nn*-marked questions in *Wenamun*.

2 Examples

I will now review examples of questions with *ist* and *is* in the surviving corpus of Late Egyptian. Examples are organised by construction, but my principal focus is on demonstrating the applicability of the model proposed above across this constructional range and across the various contexts in which these examples occur.

2.1 *is* questions with the nominal sentence

Since the lead examples of this paper were of examples of *is* and *is bn* questions with the nominal sentence, I open with further examples of this type.[8] First a further example of an affirmative *is* question with nominal sentence.

> Ex. 4   P. Leiden I 365, 4-5 (K*RI* III, 232,16)
> Meryitef writes to Rudefneheh. He picks up on a point Rudefneheh has made to Mermaat previously to ask how the man (perhaps Ramesses II) is. Meryitef asks:
>
> *is p3y=k* [*b3k*]   *mr-m3ꜥt   iw   ink   p3y=k rwḏ*
> *is* your [servant] Mermaat SBRD 1SG your agent
>
> "Is Mermaat (really) your [servant] while I am your agent?"

From which the following inference pattern can be derived[9]:

> Q: Is Mermaat your [servant]
> P: ~~Mermaat is your [servant]~~
> I: Mermaat is not your [servant]

The question (Q) links to the current situation in that Meryitef is taking a stance on Rudefneheh getting Mermaat to act in this way on his behalf (perhaps rather than him doing it himself) – that this is akin to having him act as his servant and thus that Rudefneheh is behaving in a rather bossy manner, as it were. Meryitef interrogates – and challenges – this through the *is* question (Q). The proposition under question (P: 'Merymaat is your servant') is the closed alternate, positioned as being contrary to how Meryitef thinks things should be, and is presumably not factually true. As such, Mermaat should not be treated in this manner, and there may even be an element of surprise that he is being treated this way. The inverse alternate to which Meryitef wishes to steer Rudefneheh is the inference (I) that Mermaat is not Rudefneheh's servant, nor is Meryitef his agent, and so should be treated in accord with his proper relationship to Rudefneheh, which is presumably a more peer-to-peer relationship. It is unclear how seriously Meryitef is taking this, e.g., how critical, possibly even sarcastic, he is being, or whether there is an element of levity or humour. In either case, he is clearly content with having made his point and then conveys the information that 'the man' is, in fact, fine.

> Ex. 5   Turin Strike Papyrus (P. Turin 1880), rto 3,2 (*RAD*, 56,4)
> The chief of the Medjay Nebsemen conveys the vizier's account of why he has not come to sort out the rations issue which the workgang had raised. The account is rather involved. As one point within this, the Vizier is quoted as

---

8   Another example not dealt with here (because of the limited context) is O. BM EA 65942 (= O. Nash 12), 1-2 (a love song).

9   I focus in here on the immediate *is* question to simplify the discussion, although the following circumstantial clause is also within the scope of the question.

responding to the workgang making a plea that they not be deprived of their rations:[10]

is ink p3 t3ty ddy r nḥm
is 1SG the vizier place:PTCP to deprive:INF

"Am I the vizier who was appointed (just) to deprive?"

with the inference pattern:

Q: Am I the vizier who was appointed just to deprive
P: ~~I am the vizier who was appointed just to deprive~~
I: I am not the vizier who was appointed just to deprive

By using the *is* question, the vizier is clearly implying that it would, from his perspective, be wrong to consider him in a manner such as that reflected in the proposition under question. Such a possibility might be evoked by the issue over rations, which might be consonant with such a take on viziership, but it should be dismissed.

The alternate invited inference (I) reverses this: 'I am not the vizier appointed just to deprive', which, it is implied, is the correct way the vizier thinks things should be viewed in this context – the problem of providing rations at present – and thus contributes to the convoluted point the vizier is making that he has in fact been trying his best to secure rations for the workgang even in the face of a difficult supply situation. All of this is laying the ground for the workmen being given half a ration.

It is for note that all the examples available to us deploy the particle *is* and not *ist* before the nominal sentence.

2.2 *is bn* questions with the nominal sentence

Example (1) provided an example of a negative *is* question with the nominal sentence. A further example is found in *The Tale of the Two Brothers*, an example which similarly draws on family relationships:

Ex. 6   *Two Brothers*, 5,2 (*LES*, 14,6-7)
Following her failed attempt to seduce the younger brother, the wife of the elder brother displays herself in distress and lies about the younger brother to the elder brother, telling him that his younger brother had attempted to seduce her. She says she wouldn't listen to him and challenged him with the following *is* question. She says the younger brother then became afraid and assaulted her to try to prevent her from telling the elder brother:

is bn ink t3y=k mwt
is NEG 1SG your mother

ḫr p3y=k sn ꜥ3 m-di=k m sḫr n it
PTCL your elder brother with=you in manner of father

"Am I not your mother and is your elder brother (not) like a father to you?"

This straightforwardly conforms to the model proposed:[11]

---

10   The complexity of the whole passage is well known. There is also the issue of the lexical and morphological ambiguity associated with *dd* in this particular example. Discussions of the alternatives can be found, for example, in Vernus (1980: 122-123, n. c) and Frandsen (1990: 188, n. 59). The alternative rendering to the one given above would be 'Am I the vizier who would give just to deprive?' In terms of the discussion here, the inferencing would work in the same way.

Q: Am I not your mother
P: ~~I am not your mother~~
I: I am your mother

We, as the audience, know that the wife is lying, but she is clearly attempting to be convincing to her husband and her perspective is outlined here. The use of the mother-son relations are, of course, here based on the model of relations of care rather than being biologically literal: the younger brother is being brought up within the household of his elder brother and his wife and so they have father-like and mother-like roles towards the younger brother. The basic challenge to the younger brother which the wife says she made is that such roles are incompatible with the unwanted sexual advance and that reflection on that should lead the younger brother to steer away from his current course of action.

From the question as posed, the proposition explicitly under question (P) expresses how things should not be taken, i.e., that she is not in a mother-like role towards the younger brother. As the closed option, the wife essentially rejects and challenges this position and attempts to steer the younger brother towards seeing and accepting the inferred alternate (I): that she does hold a mother-like role towards the younger brother, and her husband holds a father-like role, and both should be treated accordingly.

2.3 *ist* questions with the existential sentence

In *The Blinding of Truth by Falsehood* it is clear, from the early but badly damaged part of the story that Truth has falsely been accused by Falsehood, leading him to be blinded. The accusation involves a fantastic copper dagger with extra-ordinary components and dimensions. It is the extra-ordinary nature of this dagger which is deployed by the son of Truth as a means of getting his own back on Falsehood in an extended passage which works by analogy centred on a series of *ist* questions:

> Ex. 7   *Blinding of Truth*, 9,1-2 (*LES*, 35,2)
> The son of Truth takes an ox of very fine appearance and lodges the ox with Falsehood's herdsman. Falsehood comes later on to inspect his cattle and spots the ox and wants it. The herdsman says it is not his, but Falsehood persists by saying that an alternative ox can be given to the boy in its place. The boy returns and asks where his ox is. The herdsman offers him any replacement he wishes from the rest of the cattle. The boy then responds:
>
> *ist wn   iḥ mi ꜥꜣ   pꜣy=i iḥ ink*
> *ist* EXIS ox as large my ox   1SG
>
> "Is there any ox as large as my own?"

with the inferences:

Q: Is there any ox as large as my own?
P: ~~There is some ox as large as my own~~
I: There is no ox as large as my own

---

11   I will focus in on the clause directly following *is bn*. However, the following clause introduced by *ḥr* also falls under the scope of the question, including *bn* (cf. ex. 11 below for another example), unless it is to be taken as a contrastive point (but note the parallel in 3,9-10 where the *ḥr* clause is not contrastive).

The lad responds to the offer for him to take any of the cattle by challenging whether any are large enough to be a suitable replacement for his own: were any to be large enough (the proposition under question, P) he might acquiesce, but this is presented as an alternate which is too be rejected, because it clashes with how the boys thinks things are. The invited inference (I) is clearly that the boy is presenting himself as being of the view that no ox is as large as his own.

The lad then exploits this further, taking it from the current position where the herdsman might reasonably agree, i.e., the original ox was larger than any other in the herd, towards a more exaggerated claim to prompt a response from the herdsman. He immediately adds: 'If it were to stand on the Island of Amun, the tip of its tails would lie on the papyrus marshes, with one of its horns on the western mountain, and the other on the eastern mountain, with the Great River as its resting place, and 60 calves would be born to it daily' (*Blinding of Truth*, 9,2-5).

The herdsman responds to this in a manner akin to the boy's opening question[12]:

Ex. 8   *Blinding of Truth*, 9,5 (*LES*, 35,7)

   ist   wn   iḥ   mi ꜥꜣ   pꜣ   ḏd=k
   ist   EXIS   ox   as   large   the   say:REL=2SG.M

   "Is there (really) an ox as large as you have said?"

The invited inverse alternative stands nicely to the fore ('No, there is surely not an ox as large as you have said').

The lad then grabs the herdsman and takes him with him. He accuses Falsehood in the tribunal before the Ennead. The Ennead opens by stating to the lad that '[What you have said] is wrong. We have never seen an ox as big as you say' (*Blinding of Truth*, 10,1–2). The lad then follows up by comparing directly the original context in which Truth was accused by Falsehood and then subjected to being blinded:

Ex. 9   *Blinding of Truth*, 10,3 (*LES*, 35,12-13)

   ist   wn   ḥmt   mi ꜥꜣ   pꜣ   i-ḏd=tn
   ist   EXIS   copper (dagger)   as   large   the   say:REL=2PL

   "Is there a copper (dagger) as large as you have said, (with the mountain of El as its blade, the [wood] of Coptos as its haft, the god's tomb as the scabbard, and the herds of Kek as the belt)?"

Again the obvious intended inference is 'No, there is not'. The analogy with the lad's account of his ox is clear and thus the pronouncement of the Ennead should hold not just for the episode of the ox but for the analogous episode of the dagger as well. His trap is sprung and he declares himself to the Ennead as the son of Truth come to avenge him.

2.4 *ist/is* questions with the possession construction with *m-di*

Two examples. The affirmative one is damaged and is given here in brief.

Ex. 10   O. Cairo CG 25644, rto 5 (K*RI* IV, 330,15)

   Damaged example with limited context. However, the 'surely not' inferred sense is clear enough. The writer asks 'What sort of girl(?) do you have with you' and then follows up:

---

12   The relative form is emended in line with Gardiner (1932: 35a, 9,5, n. c).

> *ist dbḥ*   *sp sn*   *m-di=s*   *r   tr* [*nb*]
> *ist* food-requirements (repeat) with=3SG.F at [all] times
> "Does she have requirements in food at all times?"

The question as phrased allows for a nice display of hyperbole, possibly with levity, but it is the inverse alternate which expresses the actual viewpoint of the speaker.

The clearer of the examples in the corpus is a negative one:

> Ex. 11   P. Anastasi V, 11,4–5 (*LEM*, 61,12-13)
> A model letter (entitled by Gardiner 1937: 61 'Reprimand for failure to execute an order') criticising the addressee for failing to supply birds, even though the sender had expressly sent an instruction to do so:
>
> *is   bn   wn m-di=k sšw ḳnw*
> *ist* NEG POSS=you many scribes
>
> *ḥr   wn m-di=k   šmsw ḳnw   sp sn*
> PTCL POSS=you   many attendants (repeat)
> "Do you not have numerous (enough) scribes and numerous (enough) attendants?"

Clearly, the criticism is that the addressee does have sufficient resources to execute the task and so that such a lack can be eliminated as a possible reason why he did not. As such, we have the standard antiphrastic reading as the more fitting of the two possible alternates suggested by the question[13]:

> Q: Do you not have numerous (enough) scribes?
> P   ~~You do not have numerous (enough) scribes~~
> I: You do have numerous (enough) scribes

2.5 *is* questions with the *nfr iw* construction

> Ex. 12   O. DeM 554, rto 5-6 (Sauneron 1959: pl. 3)
> The unnamed sender (A) asks why the unnamed addressee (B) didn't go to the medjay Nebmehyet (C) and buy 6 beams off him. The sender had told the addressee this 10 days (an ancient Egyptian week) ago. Now the medjay (C) has told the sender (A) that he told the addressee (B) himself. But then he is reported as having added:
>
> *is nfr   iw=i   ḥr ḏd   n=f   n   ky ḏr*
> *is* good SBRD=1SG PRS say:INF to=3SG.M for someone else
> "Is it (really) proper for me to (have to) tell him for someone else?"

The text then continues: 'It is not proper what you have done'. This is probably A's comment to B, although it could also be read as a continuation of C's comment to A. Either way, it clearly picks up on the *is* question and reinforces/reiterates the implied alternative:

> Q: Is it proper for me to tell him for someone else?
> P: ~~It is proper for me to tell him for someone else~~
> I: It is not proper for me to tell him for someone else

From the speaker's (C) point of view the proposition directly under question (P) is contrary to expectation – things shouldn't be that way, i.e., C shouldn't have had to tell B on behalf of A. Rather, the invited inverse inference expresses how he sees

---

13 Again, I deal here with the immediate clause following *is*. As in ex. 6, the clause introduced by *ḥr* falls under both the question and negative scope as well.

things: It is not proper for me to tell him for someone else, and he is inviting the hearer to take this on board.

2.6 *ist/is* questions with the first present

The first example is particularly interesting, since it moves away from the reasonably close alignment of actuality and speaker expectation which previous examples have broadly shown, here profiling the speaker's own take on and concerns about a situation which is more directly in the hands of the hearer.

> Ex. 13   O. DeM 563, 2 (Sauneron 1959: pl. 8)
> The sender (B) acknowledges an earlier communication from the addressee (A) in which the current addressee (A) seems exasperated over the (slowness of?) buying of an ox and is quoted, presumably from an earlier letter, as perhaps reiterating the instruction to buy the ox, but then also asks:
>
> ist tw=i   ḥr in   iḥ dy m-di rmṯ
> *ist* PRS=1SG PRS bring:INF ox here from man
>
> "Am I (still/really) buying an ox from anyone here?"

The inference pattern is:

> Q: Am I buying an ox from anyone here?
> P: ~~I am buying an ox from anyone here~~
> I: I am not buying an ox from anyone here

The intended message in the *ist* question would seem to be that there is sufficient inactivity for the user to doubt whether he still is involved in buying an ox or not. The speaker (A) is seeking action from the hearer (B) one way or another, by taking a negative stance towards the proposition under question (P), presenting it as the closed-off alternate which seems now to be – or is presented as being – contrary to his current view of how things are going, or at least as he presents himself through the question, and needs interrogation and challenge. The invited inference (I) offers the possibility that the speaker now sees or presents himself as seeing things in terms of him effectively no longer being involved in an act of buying, which can be protracted in the Egyptian context. The current sender (the 'hearer' of the *ist* question) sees the prompt to act – the purchase may fall through unless he gets his interlocutor back on board. He tells him not to fret and then (re)asserts that he will buy an ox. In this way, the use of the *ist/is* question has helped the speaker entice the hearer to act as he wanted him to (to buy an ox).

> Ex. 14   O. DeM 10097, vso 2-3 (Grandet 2006: 293)
> A brief ostracon letter in which Qen addresses his son Pendua about an issue which has arisen concerning servants. He instructs his son to divide equally with the sculptor Merymery (another son).[14] He ends with the following *is* question:
>
> is msyt-ẖt=i   dḥr
> *is* progeny-(of)-body=my embitter:STAT
>
> "Is the progeny of my body embittered?"

This would seem to be a question about how things should be from the speaker's per-spective. The question interrogates and challenges a problematic take on the issue of

---

14   On the family, see Davies (1999: 176-178).

the division of servants and suggests, through P, the view of this the speaker would not wish to see, i.e., that bitterness should arise, or may have arisen, between his children over this issue. The speaker thus points to the way he would prefer things to be, as expressed in the invited inference (I):

Q: Is the progeny of my body embittered?
P: ~~The progeny of my body is embittered~~
I: The progeny of my body is not be embittered

2.7 *is bn* questions with the first present[15]

Ex. 15   O. Leipzig 1 (= inv. no. 1905), vso 2-3 (*HO*, pl. 33 no. 2)
There is a dispute over a cow and presumably its payment. Someone has been sent to the letter sender to demand the cow off the sender. The sender recognises that there is an issue here for him to address in terms of his own actions up to this point, which he now attempts to justify to his addressee. He asks:

is   bn   tw=i   rḫ.kw   p3   nty   t3 iḥ(t)   m-im
is   NEG   PRS=1SG   know:STAT   the   REL   the cow   there

"Don't I know where the cow is?"

Q: Don't I know where the cow is?
P: ~~I don't know where the cow us~~
I: I know where the cow is.

The speaker mobilises P to be rejected as not being the right way to look at things, perhaps even sarcastically, and clearly he implies he does know where the cow is (or he is dissembling). He then goes on to express his proper reasons for his actions: 'I didn't go to get it, but only in order to hear (first) what you had to say'.

Ex. 16   O. Qurna 633, 2-3 (*Deir el Medine Online*)
An ostracon letter which opens with a damaged context and then continues:

is   bn   tw=tn   rḫ.ti   p3   sḫr   n   p3 dmi
is   NEG   PRS=2PL   know:STAT   the   manner   of   the village

"Don't you (pl.) know the situation of the village?"

This is similar to the last example, but has even less in the way of context. Again one presumes that it is the invited inference (I) which would better meet expectations of how things are or should be:

Q: Don't you know the situation of the village
P: ~~You don't know the situation of the village~~
I: You do (or should) know the situation of the village

Ex. 17   P. Anastasi V, 26,4-5 (*LEM*, 71,7-8)
In a model letter, May, the deputy of the Tjeku, is writing to Anhernakht, the chief of Medjay, and Yey, the chief of troops. May has received a complaint about how the chief (of Medjay Anhernakht) dealt with an instruction to produce a number of people, including his refusal to read out the names from the roll. May reminds him, 'Didn't I say to you: Check the roll yourself immediately and take it?' (= ex. 35), and that Anhernakht had responded:

---

15   There is a damaged example of an affirmative *ist/is* question using *rḫ* in the stative in P. DeM 22, rto 5. In Černý & Koenig (1986: pl. 5) this is read *ist iw=i rḫ.k r-ḏd* [...], but from the photograph (pl. 5a) the reading *ist tw=i rḫ.k r-ḏd* […] seems preferable. Unfortunately the example is too damaged, as is the context, to elucidate properly what is going on.

is bn   tw=i   rḫ.k   nꜣ ḥy   n mḏꜣy   ḥnˁ
is NEG PRS=1SG know:STAT the inspectors of medjay and

nꜣy=sn sḫnt ḳnw
their many duties

"Don't I know the inspectors of the medjay and their many duties?"[16]

May continues immediately 'You really do know them', before going on to direct Anhernakht to read out the names as on the roll. Thus May answers Anhernakht's question directly, reflecting the inverse inference (I) invited by Anhernakht:

Q: Don't I know the inspectors of the medjay and their many duties?
P: ~~I don't know the inspectors of the medjay and their many duties~~
I: I do know the inspectors of the medjay and their many duties

2.8 *ist/is* questions with *bw ir=f sḏm* and *bw sḏm=f/sḏm.n=f*

Polis (2008-9: 312) shows that in *ist/is* questions *bw ir=f sḏm* is the modal correlate of *bn sḏm=f* (see below section 2.11), with *bw ir=f sḏm* showing possibility modality under negation and *bn sḏm=f* showing necessity or obligation modality under negation. Since modality is treated at length by Polis (in work still to be fully published), I do not engage directly with this aspect of the constructions here, but concentrate rather on speaker viewpoint. *ist/is bw ir=f sḏm* questions are interesting, since the comparatively large number of examples display the spectrum of speaker viewpoint from a viewpoint of secure knowledge of the matter under interrogation as the speaker sees it to less certain viewpoints of the speaker in relation to what may or may not be the state of affairs but about which the speaker has expectations of what the state of affairs should be or should have been. First an example with reasonably secure speaker knowledge:

Ex. 18   P. Anastasi V, 11,5 and 11;6 (*LEM*, 61,13-14 and 61,14-15)
          A model letter (entitled by Gardiner 'Reprimand for failure to execute an order') criticising the addressee for failing to supply birds, even though the sender had expressly sent an instruction to do so (the first question was dealt with above as ex. 11):
          is bn wn m-di=k sšw ḳnw ḥr wn m-di=k šmsw ḳnw sp sn

          is bw   ir<=i>   {ḥr} ḏd imi ḥmnt n ꜣpdw n pꜣy šmsw
          is NEG AUX<=1SG> say:INF 'Give a number of birds to this attendant'

          tw=k ḥr šmt irt iḫ pꜣy rmṯ

          is bw   ir=k   {ḥr} ḏd n=f   mn
          is NEG AUX=2SG.M say:INF to=3SG.M 'There is none,'

          mtw=f šmt n=f
          "Do you not have numerous scribes and numerous attendants?
          Could <I> not have said, 'Give a number of birds to this attendant'?
          (Yet) you went to do what to this man?
          Could you not have said to him, 'There is none,'
          and off he went?"

---

16 Translation closely following Caminos (1954: 270). The word *ḥy* translated by Caminos as 'inspector' is unclear in meaning.

From the context we seem to have an example of pronoun confusion in the first *is* question (*ir=k* written for *ir=i*),[17] which, once corrected, yields:

Q: Could I not have said, 'Give a number of birds to this attendant'?
P: ~~I could not have said, 'Give a number of birds to this attendant'~~
I: I could have said, 'Give a number of birds to this attendant'

Of course, the speaker knows what he did or did not say. The possibility that he did not issue the instruction is palpably false from his perspective and closed off (P). The addressee's failure to act might be commensurate with not having received instruction, but this is not so. Clearly the speaker is inviting the inference that he did in fact issue this instruction and is enticing the addressee to consider things from this perspective, and thus see the critical stance. In essence: I did say this and you should not have acted as you did.

The second *is* question with negative aorist in this example interrogates how the hearer treated the attendant sent to collect the birds:

Q: Could you not have said to him, 'There is none,' and off he went?
P: ~~You could not have said to him, 'There is none,' and off he went~~
I: You could have said to him, 'There is none,' and off he went

Clearly, the situation is being presented that the hearer did tell the attendant that there were no birds available and so he went off empty-handed. The proposition under question (P) is thus wrong in terms of what the speaker knows, and is presented for elimination. The invited inverse inference is the correct view of what happened, as the speaker sees it. This example centres on the speaker's knowledge of what happened rather than on his expectations of what should have happened.

An example from the Qadesh inscriptions of Ramesses II in brief:

Ex. 19   Qadesh Poem, §§258-9 (K*RI* II, 79,11-80,6)
Ramesses II chides his army for their conduct in the battle:
is bw   ir=i   nfr   n   wꜥ im=tn
is NEG AUX=1SG good to one among=2PL
p3y=tn ḫ3ꜥ=i wꜥ.kw m-ẖnw p3 ḥrw
"Could I have not done good to (even) one of you such that you should abandon me all alone amidst the battle?"

The clear inference being, of course, that the king has done good. The critical tone and lack of suitable basis for the army's conduct is clear:[18]

Q: Could I have not done good to one of you such that you should abandon me all alone amidst the battle?
P: ~~I could not have done good to one of you such that you should abandon me all alone amidst the battle~~
I: I could have done good to one of you such that you should not abandon me all alone amidst the battle

On to examples in which the speaker interrogates the hearer's viewpoint with regard to what the hearer is to do, attempting to entice the hearer towards alignment with the speaker's view, particularly his wants regarding the outcome:

---

17   As noted by Gardiner (1937: 61a, n. 13a) and accepted by Caminos (1954: 239) without comment.
18   Interestingly, for proper sense the *p3y=tn ḫ3ꜥ=i* clause needs polar reversal for the invited inference.

Ex. 20 P. Anastasi V, 14,3-4 (*LEM*, 63,10-11)

In an additional point raised, the sender says he knows the woman Takaret and is seeking to get cattle back from her. He comments on the addressee being someone who has had involvement in the case (= ex. 37 'Is it not you who went in front of the scribes of the vizier to her house?). He reiterates knowing Takaret and says that has already been to her house and asserts that he is in the right. He then asks:

is	*bw*	*ir=t̠*	*iy*	*i-r-m=s*	*shn=n*		*m-bꜣḥ*	*t̠ꜣty*
is	NEG	AUX=2SG.F	come:INF	with=3SG.F	contend.SBJV=1PL		before	vizier

"Can you not come with her so that we can contend before the vizier?"[19]

The speaker would seem to want his hearer to come, and is attempting to entice or persuade the addressee to that view, albeit that this is down to the hearer's decision:

Q: Can you not come with her so that we can contend before the vizier?
P: ~~You cannot come with her so that we can contend before the vizier~~
I: You can come with her so that we can contend before the vizier

Ex. 21 *Two Brothers*, 8,2 (*LES*, 17,7-9)

The younger brother has made the dramatic gesture of cutting off his penis and throwing it into the water. He asks his elder brother the following:

ist	*ir*	*sḫꜣy=k*		*wꜥ*	*n*	*bin*
ist	COND	recall:SBJV:2SG.M		one	of	bad

ist	*bw*	*ir=k*		*wꜥ*	*n*	*nfr*
ist	NEG	AUX=2SG.M		one	of	good

m r-pw wꜥ nkt iw iry=i sw n=k

"If you can recall something bad,
can you not recall something good or something I have done for you."

Q: If you can recall something bad, can you not recall something good?
P: ~~If you can recall something bad, you cannot recall something good~~
I: If you can recall something bad, you can (surely) recall something good

The proposition under question (P) is consonant with the stance the elder brother has been displaying towards the younger brother. But such a state of affairs is clearly not how the younger brother wishes things to be; by contrast the invited inference (I) expresses the younger brother's desire.

Ex. 22 *Wenamun*, 2,54-55 (*LES*, 72,11-12)

Tjekerbaal has provided the timber but reminds Wenamun of his precarious position and refers to the fate of envoys from 'Khaemwese'. Wenamun notes that both Khaemwese and his envoys were just men, but that Wenamun is the envoy of Amen-Re King of the Gods. Wenamun suggests that Tjekerbaal should commemorate this through erecting a stela with an account of how he provided the timber for the god. So when future envoys come from Egypt, they would read his name and he would receive water in the west (i.e., in the afterlife). Wenamun's suggestion comes in the form of an *ist* question:

ist	*bw*	*ir=k*	*rš*
ist	NEG	AUX=2SG.M	rejoice:INF

mtw=k dit [*ir*]*y.tw n=k wꜥ wd̠y*

"Can't you rejoice and have a stela made for you?"

---

19 Caminos (1954: 242) translates: 'Did you not come with her that we might content in the presence of the vizier?'

The suggestion can be inferred in the standard way:

- Q: Can't you rejoice and have a stela made for you?
- P: ~~You can't rejoice and have a stela made for you~~
- I: You can rejoice and have a stela made for you

Tjekerbaal sees food for thought in this, i.e. from the invited inference, and responds, 'This is a great testimony of words which you have said to me.'

> Ex. 23 P. Anastasi V, 15,7-16.1 (*LEM*, 64,10-11) (= P. Sallier I, 6,2, which uses *bw sḫ3.n=k*)
>
> The model letter opens with the sender informing his addressee that he has been told that his addressee has abandoned scribal training and instead has gone to working in the field. This is an opportunity for the sender to point out the downside of the farmer's life as compared to the scribe's. This opens:
>
> *ist bw sḫ3=k   ḳi   n ꜥḥwtyw   ḥft-ḥr   spḫr šmw*
> *ist* NEG recall=2SG.M state of cultivators in-face-of registration
>   of harvest
>
> "Can you not recall the state of cultivators faced with the registration of the harvest?"

The inference is that surely the addressee can: the addressee's being able to do so would agree with the speaker's expectations of or desire for what should be the case:

- Q: Can you not recall the state of cultivators faced with the registration of the harvest?
- P: ~~You cannot recall the state of cultivators faced with the registration of the harvest~~
- I: You can recall the state of cultivators faced with the registration of the harvest

> Ex. 24 P. Anastasi V, 13,2-3 (*LEM*, 62,16-63,1)
>
> This model letter (entitled by Gardiner 'Letter about a bull, with a message to a lady') is positioned as response. The letter opens with 'I have taken note of the message you made out for me about a bull' and then carries on:
>
> *is bw   rḫ=k   t3 st w3ḥ   i-ir   p3y=k šri p3 iḥ*
> *is* NEG know=2SG.M the place of putting do:REL your son the bull
>
> *is bn iṯ=f sw di=f sw (n) t3y-sry(t) wsḫt-nmtt*
> "Can you (really) not know where your son put the bull?
> Ought he not to take it and give it to the standard-bearer Weskhetnemtet?"

The lack of a richer context makes it hard to be detailed:

- Q: Can you (really) not know where your son put the bull?
- P: ~~You cannot know where your son put the bull~~
- I: You can know where your son put the bull

This is again a rather nice example because it seems to be about how things should be or things should go, from the speaker's perspective, in a context in which it would be the hearer who would know better how things actually are. From the speaker's perspective, the hearer should know where her son put the bull and act accordingly. If she doesn't, then this is something that needs sorting out.

A similar example from the Qadesh inscriptions of Ramesses II:

Ex. 25   Qadesh Poem, §262 (K*RI* II, 80,13-16)

A little further on in Ramesses II's chiding of his army he asks

is   bw   rḫ=tn   r-ḏd   m ib=tn   ink pȝy=tn sbty n biȝ n pt
is   NEG   know=2PL   that   in hearts=2PL   I your rampart of iron

"Can you not know that, in your hearts, I [the king] am your rampart of iron?"

Again the clear inference is that the king expects that they should know this:

Q: Can you not know that, in your hearts, I am your rampart of iron?
P: ~~You cannot know that, in your hearts, I am your rampart of iron~~
I: You can know that, in your hearts, I am your rampart of iron

The following examples display insecure speaker knowledge over the state of affairs interrogated, particularly when contrasted to the hearer's knowledge, and seem to reflect more the speaker's expectations of what the state of affairs should be or should have been from his perspective, which may differ from the actual state of affairs:

Ex. 26   P. BM 10375, rto 23-24 (*LRL*, 46,4-6)

In his letter to the general Piankh, the scribe Butehamun is responding to an issue about the delivery of cloth for bandages for the expedition south. He asks the following *is* question, and then tells how, when they finally reached Thebes, his father Dhutmose was aghast to find that Piankh had already set off south. Dhutmose was instructed to go south along with the clothes, in order to deliver them to his lord:

ist   bw   ir   sš ḏḥwty-ms n pr ḥr   {r-}ḏd   n=k   smy
ist   NEG   AUX   scribe Dhutmose of necropolis   say:INF   to=2SG.M   report

m pȝ wḫȝ i-ir=n ꜥkȝ iw=n tm gm ȝs

"Could the scribe of the necropolis Dhutmose not report to you about the search we made for the transport-ship but we couldn't find one right away?"

The *is* question seems to centre on Butehamun's expectations of what should happen or should have happened, given that his father has travelled south to join the general. He might have expected his father to report on what happened, but perhaps he has not had the opportunity or the general has not yet asked him for report, and thus the general seems unaware of what has happened at Butehamun's end. In his question, then, the proposition under question (P) is presented for elimination in the sense that it does not meet his expectations; it is the invited inference (I) which reflects what he would have expected:

Q: Could the scribe of the necropolis Dhutmose not report to you?
P: ~~The scribe of the necropolis Dhutmose could not report to you~~
I: The scribe of the necropolis Dhutmose could report to you

Having established his surprise that this is not reflected in the general's letter, Butehamun then uses this as a license to give his own report on what happened.

Ex. 27   P. Bologna 1094, 9,10-10,1 and 10.2 (*LEM*, 9,7-8 and 9,9-10)

A model letter from a lady. The letter content opens with the remark that the addressee had previously written asking why the sender (the lady) had cast out a (presumably divorced) man. She gives her response:

ist   bw   ir=k   pȝ   i-ḏd=f
ist   NEG   do=2SG.M   the   say:REL=3SG.M

bn ink s-ḥmt
ist iw=i r wn pȝ ḏd=k
ir pȝ dit i-ir=k iwt=f r-šȝꜥ minȝ iw=k im m-di=f

> | *ist* | *bw* | *ir=k* | | *it̠ʒ=f* | | *r* | *tʒ ḵnbt* |
> |--------|-------|---------|--------|-----------|----------|------|------------|
> | *ist* | NEG | AUX=2SG.M | | take:INF=3.SG.M | | to | the tribunal |
>
>   *mtw=k dit rwi.[t]w pʒy=f ꜥnḫ*
>   "Could you not do what he said? Am I not a woman?
>   Shall I disregard what you said?
>   As for your getting him to come here when you were there with him,
>   could you not take him to the tribunal and have his oath annulled?"

The second *ist* question with the negative aorist seems to be the clearer of the two in terms of context. Rather like the Butehamun example (ex. 26), we seem here to have a situation in which the speaker thinks that her expectations over what should have happened have not been met – something may have prevented the addressee from carrying out the task. Thus in terms of these prior expectations, we have:

>   Q: Could you not take him to the tribunal and have his oath annulled?
>   P: ~~You could not take him to the tribunal and have his oath annulled~~
>   I: You could take him to the tribunal and have his oath annulled

The context for the first *ist* question with negative aorist is limited, but the inference again seems to be that the woman had an expectation that her addressee would do this, which would be the I inference, but may have prevented in some way from carrying it out. However, without a context which informs us more specifically what this actually refers to, I hesitate to treat this example further.

2.9 *ist* questions with the third future *iw=f r sd̠m*

>   Ex. 28 P. Bologna 1094, 10,1 (*LEM*, 9,8)
>   For context see ex. 27 above:
>
> | *ist* | *iw=i* | | *r* | *wn* | | *pʒ* | *d̠d=k* |
> |--------|---------|-------|------|-------|-----------|-------|---------|
> | *ist* | FUT=1SG | | FUT | disregard:INF | | the | say:REL=2SG.M |
>
>   "Shall I (just) disregard what you said?"

The *ist* question with third future, if it works in the manner suggested here, would seem to be enticing the viewpoint 'no I shall not disregard what you said'; she intends to carry on with the matter:

>   Q: Shall I disregard what you said?
>   P: ~~I shall disregard what you said~~
>   I: I shall not disregard what you said

>   Ex. 29 P. Chester Beatty I, 17,6 (Fox 1985: 402,12-403,1)
>   As part of a love song, the lover has been standing at the door of his love's house, but she ignored him. He asks the following about this situation:
>
> | *ist* | *iw=i* | *gr* | | *n=s* |
> |--------|---------|-------|-------|--------|
> | *ist* | FUT=1SG | silent:INF | | to=2SG.F |
>
>   "Shall I stay silent to her?"

Again the intended implication seems to be the inverse inference that he should not.

2.10   *ist/is* questions with *sd̠m=f*[20]

There are two interesting examples with *ist sd̠m=f* + sequential. The first is:

Ex. 30   P. Cairo 58057, 7 (K*RI* I, 238,12-13):

The addressee is quoted as giving an argument why he shouldn't be taken to the tribunal over the return of a donkey when he was apprehended by the current sender and one of his colleagues. His argument is: 'Don't take me to tribunal. I do have the donkey' and then he asks:

is di=k   iwt.tw   r   it̠ꜣ=f
is cause:PST=2SG.M come.SBJV.IMPRS to take:INF=3SG.M

iw=i ḥr tm dit=f
"Did you send someone to take it and I didn't give it?"

As usual, the speaker is presenting – whether truthfully or not – the proposition under question as closed, here being in conflict with what actually happened, but if things had been that way then taking him to task in the tribunal would seem justified. Instead, the invited inference is that his interlocutor did not send someone expressly for the donkey, albeit that the speaker had been told to return the donkey, and perhaps that if he had, then the donkey would have been returned at that point:

Q: Did you send someone to take it and I didn't give it
P: ~~You sent someone to take it and I didn't give it~~
I: You did not sent someone to take it and (so) I didn't give it

Clearly, the speaker is attempting to entice the hearer towards this viewpoint and so not to take the speaker to task in the tribunal. Interestingly the sequential clause requires its polarity to be retained under inference.

The following example is not quite as clear:

Ex. 31   O. Ashm 177, 4-5 (K*RI* VII, 305,8)

This brief ostracon communication opens with a response: 'As for the matters of the illness which you have been writing to me about, what have I done to you?' The writer then asks:[21]

ir nꜣ pḥrt i-d̠d=tn

is hꜣb=tn   n=i   ḥr=sn
is send:PST=2PL to=1SG about=3PL

iw=i ḥr tm dit=w n=t
"As for the medicines you mentioned, did you write to me about them and I didn't give them to you?"

There is limited context here, but it seems clear that the speaker is responding to some form of complaint from his hearer and challenging the complaint. It seems clear that the question is being used antiphrastically with the proposition under question being presented as the closed alternate:

Q: did you write to me and I didn't give them to you?
P: ~~You did write to me and/but I didn't give them to you~~

However, what the intended inference is perhaps depends on the scope of polar inversion. It is perhaps most straightforward to see the inversion affecting the *sd̠m=f* form directly after *ist*, as in the P. Cairo 58057 example above, giving:

I: You didn't write to me about them and (so) I didn't give them to you

Perhaps less likely would be for polar inversion to affect the sequential form only:

---

21 Polis (2008-9: 437, ex. 1058) treats *is* as marking indirect discourse here recording what the addressee had said previously, but again with *is* indicating a 'présupposé de fausseté'.

I: You did write to me about them and I did give them to you

but in any case inversion seems not to be invited across both clauses:

I: ?You didn't write to me about them and I did give them to you

P. DeM 4 would seem to provide an example of a subjunctive *sḏm=f* after *ist*:

Ex. 32   P. DeM 4, rto 6-7 (Černý & Posener 1978: pl. 19)
         The sender asks what offence he has committed against his addressee and points
         out (through a flexion question) that he is his old eating companion. He then
         asks:
         ist iwt   t3 wnwt   i-ir=k   ḫ3ˤ   [sn?]=k
         ist come.SBJV the hour AUX:REL=2SG.M abandon.INF brother=your
         "Should the hour come when you would abandon your [?brother]?"

The proposition under question seems to be contrary to the expectations which the
speaker has of how things should go. Rather, he does not want a complete breakdown
of relations as reflected in the invited inference:

Q: Should the hour come when you would abandon your [brother]?
P: ~~The hour should come when you would abandon your [brother]~~
I: The hour should not come when you would abandon your [brother]

2.11   *is* questions with *bn sḏm=f*[22]

In his recent treatment of modality in Late Egyptian, Polis demonstrates that *bn sḏm=f*
concerns the modality of necessity and obligation, which I follow here.

Ex. 33   P. Anastasi IV, 11,3-4 (*LEM*, 46,13-15)
         A reprimand in a model royal decree over various actions, including taking Tjekten
         away from their proper duties and for not preparing properly for Pharaoh's travel.
         The Tjekten issue is then followed up with the following *is* question before the
         addressee is instructed to put the Tjekten back to their normal duties:
         is bn   dy.tw=k   r   t3 st   n   ktḫ n m-r pr ḥḏ
         is NEG put:SBJV.IMPRS=2SG.M to the position of other treasury overseers
         wn=w ḥr sn ḥr ṯ-k-tn n wḥ3t r tf=f t3y[=f] niw
         "Should you not be put in the position of other treasury overseers who meddled
         with an oasis Tjekten to take him off his patrol/hunt?"

The threat or negative position in this seems to be that the speaker thinks that on the
basis of his actions so far the addressee should, in fact, be treated in this manner, but,
through his follow-up instructions, offers him the chance to redeem himself:

Q: Should you not be put in the position of other treasury overseers?
P: ~~You should not be put in the position of other treasury overseers~~
I: You should be put in the position of other treasury overseers

Ex. 34   P. Anastasi V, 13,3 (*LEM*, 63,1-2)
         For context see ex. 34 above:
         is bw rḫ=k t3 st w3ḥ i-ir p3y=k šri p3 iḥ
         is bn   it=f   sw
         is NEG take:SBJV=3SG.M 3SG.M
         di=f sw (n) t3y-sry(t) wsḫt-nmtt
         "Don't you know where your son put the bull?
         Ought he not to take it and give it to the standard-bearer Weskhetnemtet?"

---

22 I do not treat here the damaged example with limited context in O. DeM 919, rto 2.

The second *is* question deals with what the speaker thinks the lady's son should do in this context:

Q: Ought he not to take it and give it to the standard-bearer Weskhetnemtet?
P: ~~He ought not to take it and give it to the standard-bearer Weskhetnemtet~~
I: He ought to take it and give it to the standard-bearer Weskhetnemtet

In the final two examples, there is perhaps a question, which I do not address here, as to whether the construction is *is bn sḏm=f* or *is-bn sḏm=f*:

Ex. 35   P. Anastasi V, 26,3-4 (*LEM*, 71,6-7)
In a model letter, May, the deputy of the Tjeku, is writing to Anhernakht, the chief of Medjay, and Yey, the chief of troops. May has received a complaint about how the chief (of Medjay Anhernakht) dealt with an instruction to produce a number of people, including his refusal to read out the names from the roll. May reminds him:

is   bn   ḏd(=i)   n=tn
is   NEG   say:SBJV=1SG   to=2PL

ḥsf n=tn pꜣ imy-rn=f ḥr-rꜥ mtw=tn iṯꜣ=f
"Did I not have to say to you, 'Check the namelist yourselves immediately and take it?'"

Clearly, this deals with the fact that the speaker did say this, though this clashes with the hearer's actual actions, which is the problem under address:

Q: Did I not have to say to you, 'Check the namelist yourselves immediately …'?
P: ~~I did not have to say to you, 'Check the namelist yourselves immediately …'~~
I: I did have to say to you, 'Check the namelist yourselves immediately …'

Ex. 36   Qadesh Poem, §98 (K*RI* II, 36,1-4)
As part of his plea to the god Amen, Ramesses II notes how he has served the god well. He opens with an *is* question

is   bn   iry=i   n=k   mnw ꜥšꜣ wrw
is   NEG   make:SBJV=1SG   to=2SG.M   numerous great monuments

"Ought I not to have made numerous great monuments for you?"

The king then follows with a considerable list of how he did in fact do this, starting in §100 with 'I built my temple of millions of years for you'. He is asking the god whether he has performed his role as king properly enough to merit the god's aid in his current crisis. In doing so, he is, of course, closing off the negative take on this and enticing the god towards the positive, and so his view can be constructed as follows:

Q: Ought I not to have made numerous great monuments for you?
P: ~~I ought not to have made numerous great monuments for you~~
I: I ought to have made numerous great monuments for you

2.12   *is bn* with the participial statement

Ex. 37   P. Anastasi V, 14,2 (*LEM*, 63,8-9)
In an additional point raised the sender says he knows the woman Takaret and is seeking to get cattle back from her. He comments on the addressee being someone who has had involvement in the case by asking the following *is* question:

is   bn   ntt   i-šm   r-ḫꜣt   nꜣ sšw ṯꜣty   r   pꜣy=s pr
is   NEG   2SG.F go:PTCP ahead   the scribes of vizier to her house

"Was it not you who went leading the scribes of the vizier to her house?"

Clearly, the addressee is expected to agree to this as true:

Q: Was it not you who went leading the scribes of the vizier to her house?
P: ~~It was not you who went leading the scribes of the vizier to her house~~
I: It was you who went leading the scribes of the vizier to her house

Ex. 38   O. DeM 357, a3 (Černý 1951: pl. 5)

A damaged short ostracon letter. Meryre writes to Neferrenpet. The initial content is damaged and involves an individual Piay and some form of delivery. The sender then asks an *is* question:

is bn   ntf   in   sw   n=k   r-ḥry
is NEG 3SG.M bring:PTCP 3SG.M to=2SG.M up

m ꜣtw [....] in sw n=k

"Was it not he who brought it up to you? Or was it the inspector [.....] who brought it to you?"

Under the assumption that the damaged section does not take us out of the second clause, and the repetition of 'who brought it to you' supports this, we have contrastive alternates presented of who it was who might have brought 'it', one marked with *is bn* and one not. Interpretation here is delicate. Assuming that both alternates fall under the question but just the first under *bn*, then we would have the following interpretative scheme:

Q: Was it not he who brought it up to you? Or was it the inspector [.....] who brought it to you?
P: ~~It was not he who brought it up to you. It was the inspector [.....] who brought it to you?~~
I: It was he who brought it up to you. It was not the inspector [.....] who brought it to you

Perhaps the nuance to be taken would then be that from the sender's point of view, the way things should be is that 'he' brought it to you and not the inspector, and so the sender would be more surprised if that were not the case, but that he recognises the possibility that it could be the other way round. However, there is so little to go on that we have clearly entered the realm of speculation at this point.

2.13   *ist* questions with the second tense construction[23]

An example of an *ist* question with second tense was used as example (3), one of a number of similar *ist* questions deployed through the *Tale of Horus and Seth*, exemplifying the running plot line of the manner in which various deities react to the proposal that either Seth or Horus should be assigned the kingship of Osiris. I now look at other examples of this type. In the following, because of the contextual availability of the contrast between Horus and Seth as candidates for the kingship, I will cut short the presentation of the invited inference in that manner.

Ex. 39   *Horus and Seth*, 1,11-12 (*LES*, 38,6-7)

Horus and Seth opens with Horus seeking appointment to the office of his father Osiris by the Lord of All. Initially, it goes well for Horus, with a number of deities, including Thoth, supporting his case. However, the Lord of All is

---

23   There is a discussion of second tenses in *ist/is* questions in Cassonnet (2000: 47-51). Cassonnet notes there that affirmative second tenses are found only with the particle *ist* and then suggests a distinction between *is-bn* and *ist bn* for negative examples.

reluctant, indeed furious, at this. Seth then intervenes and asks to be able to contest with Horus for the office. Thoth, a supporter of the claim of Horus, then asks 'Should we not discover the unjust one?' and then adds the following *ist* question, which, in various ways, is repeated a number of times throughout the story, whether applied to Seth, as here, or to Horus ('his' in 'his son' in the following refers to Osiris):

ist i-ir(.tw)   *dit*   *t3 i3wt   n wsir   n sth*
ist THMZ(.IMPRS) Give:INF the office of Osiris to Seth

iw s3[=f] *ḥr ꜥḥꜥ*
"Should the office of Osiris be given to Seth when his son Horus is still around?"

As a consistent supporter of Horus, Thoth's point of view is clearly that it should not, i.e. the inverse of the explicit proposition under question, just as we would expect from the model proposed above:

Q: Should the office be given to Seth, when Horus is still around?
P: ~~The office should be given to Seth, when Horus is still around~~
I: The office should not be given to Seth (but to Horus), when Horus is still around

Once again we have an issue concerning how things should not and should be from the speaker's perspective. Thoth points to and interrogates a problem with giving the office to Seth: that Horus, the son of Osiris, is available to take the office himself, expressed explicitly in the circumstantial clause. This problematic alternate is that directly under question (P) and is, of course, presented for closure and rejection. The invited inverse inference is thus that the office should be given to the alternate candidate, Horus. That this rather obvious interpretation-in-context is indeed the correct one is suggested by the fact that the Pre-Horakhty immediately reacts to this with extreme anger: 'Then Pre-Horakhty got very angry indeed – Pre had set his heart on giving the office to Seth, great of virility, son of Nut' (*Horus and Seth*, 1,12-2.1).

The opposite question is put by Banebdjed a little later in the story:

Ex. 40   *Horus and Seth*, 4,7-8 (*LES*, 42,2-3):
         Seth has just asserted his case for receiving the office of Osiris, i.e., he is the only god who can kill the enemy of Re in the daily journey of the sun-bark, which has swayed the Ennead. Onuris and Thoth contest this, raising once again the issue of the 'bodily son' being available.[24] Banebdjed responds:

         ist i-ir.tw   *dit*   *t3 i3wt   n p3 ꜥdd*
         ist THMZ.IMPRS give:INF the office to the lad

         iw stẖ p3y=f sn ꜥ3 ꜥḥꜥ
         "Is the office to be given to the lad when Seth, his elder relative, is still around?"

The example works as with the previous one, but supporting Seth rather than Horus.

See example (3) above for the nice example where Isis fools Seth to undermine his own case by using the cattle analogy.

Ex. 41   *Horus and Seth*, 12,10-11 (*LES*, 54,3-4)
         Seth is unaware that he has ingested semen from Horus (which Isis had smeared onto lettuce that Seth then had eaten). In the tribunal Thoth lays his hand on the shoulder of Seth and asks the semen to come out. The semen responds, 'Where shall I come out' (thus identifying itself as present inside Seth). Thoth asks it to come of Seth's ear, but the semen does not think this suiting:

---

24 They do so by using the second tense construction: *i-ir.tw dit i3wt n sn n mwt iw s3 n ẖt ꜥḥꜥ*.

> *ist i-ir=i   pry   r-bl m   msḏr=f*
> *ist* THMZ=1SG leave:INF out from ear=his
>
> *iw ink mw nṯry*
> "Am I to come out of his ear, given that I am divine fluid?"

Thoth responds by saying, 'Come out from the crown of his head', and so the semen emerges as a solar disk from on top of the head of Seth (*Horus and Seth*, 12,11-12).

It is not an issue here of whether or not the semen can or should come out of Seth's body, it is more precisely a question of where it should emerge. The proposition under question (P) suggests a problem with coming out of his ear: the semen is divine fluid and it seems that the ear is being suggested to be not suitably fitting as a place to emerge and is being presented as the closed-off alternate. The invited inference (I) is, of course, that another more suitable location should be suggested for the semen to emerge:

Q: Am I to come out of his ear, given that I am divine fluid?
P: ~~I am to come out of his ear, given that I am divine fluid~~
I: I am not to come out of his ear (but from somewhere else), given that I am divine fluid

Thoth, in his response, directly addresses the invited inference (I) and suggests the crown of Seth's head. The semen then does come out of the top of Seth's head. It is of note, therefore, that this is not a rhetorical question in the strict sense, albeit that it is a closed question with an invited inference.[25]

Ex. 42   *Wenamun*, 2,79 (*LES*, 75,8-9)
Wenamun has been forced by the wind to the land of Alasiya. The people come out, intending to kill him. Wenamun makes it through to where the female ruler is. He asks whether there is an interpreter who understands Egyptian. Wenamun tells his interpreter to say to the princess that he has heard as far away as Thebes that even though injustice is committed everywhere, justice is done in the land of Alasiya. He then asks:

> *ist i-ir.tw   iry   grg   rꜥ nb   dy*
> *ist* THMZ.IMPRS do:INF injustice every day here
>
> "Is injustice done daily even here (now)?"

Once again, it is a matter of how things should be, as seen from the user's perspective (Wenamun), here contrasting with relevant features of the actual situation: he thinks he should have a fair hearing and not simply be killed, as the context suggests he might be. The proposition under question (P) is intended to undermine the inappropriateness of him just being killed, by pointing out that this reflects injustice, something which he says he has been told is the opposite of what happens in Alasiya. As the P component this proposition is presented as closed off and for rejection. The invited inference (I) is, of course, that injustice should not be done here, and, from

---

25 Sweeney (1991: 323) provides a useful characterisation of rhetorical questions as either unanswerable, unanswered (including A showing that he is not interested in B's answer), or predetermined. Ex. 41 does not fully conform to any of these: it is answerable and indeed is answered (and the semen does take up Thoth's answer) and the answer, although directed by the closure and invitation offered by the *ist* question, is not properly predetermined, particularly in Sweeney's sense of 'a preferred answer which A wants to elicit from B. B's response is already fixed by A.' Thoth (B) offers his own answer.

Wenamun's point of view, that means not killing him. Clearly, he is seeking to influence the princess and get her to see it his way and thus to be made complicit in the resolution of the question:

Q: Is injustice done daily, (even) here
P: ~~Injustice is done daily, (even) here~~
I: Injustice is done daily, but not here

Ex. 43   *Apophis and Seqenenre*, rto 2,7-8 (*LES*, 87,16-88,2)
The Hyksos king Apophis and his advisors have cooked up a plan to inflame his rival king Seqenenre by making the rather absurd demand that hippos be taken out of a lagoon in Thebes on the pretext that the noise prevents sleep in the northern capital. The messenger travels south and relates this message to Seqenenre, who is somewhat aghast at the suggestion. The example is damaged but the standard restoration below is taken from other sections mentioning this issue:

ist i-ir   p3y=k nb ꜥ.w.s. {ḥr} sḏm   m[dt]
ist THMZ   your lord l.p.h. understand:INF matters

ḥr [t3 ḥnw dby nty m p3] w[b]n n nwt rsy m p[3y]
"Does your lord (really) understand ma[tters] concerning [the lagoon of hippopotamuses which is t]he east of the Southern City in th[is way]?"

Another example of how things should be as seen from the speaker's perspective. Seqenenre can hardly believe his ears and thus closes off and presents for rejection the apparent account (P) of how things are, i.e., that Apophis really understands things this way, implying that this is surely not the case, and thus there should be some other reason:

Q: Does your lord understand matters concerning the lagoon of hippos in this way?
P: ~~Your lord understands matters concerning the lagoon of hippos in this way~~
I: Your lord (surely) does not understand matters concerning the lagoon of hippos in this way

The following example famously displays direct negation of the verbal action with *tm*, but it is the element in focus, i.e., the reason for not coming, cast in relief against that negative action which is at the centre of the second tense construction and is the relationship inversed under inference:[26]

Ex. 44   Turin Strike Papyrus (P. Turin 1880), rto 2,20 (*RAD*, 56,1-2)
The entry for regnal year 29 (of Ramesses III) IV *Peret* 28 opens with a note that the vizier To had sailed north taking gods from the southern region to the forthcoming *sed* festival of the king. The chief medjay is sent to the workmen at Deir el-Medina to pass on the vizier's message to the workmen about the rations they were expecting to get. The vizier's message is quoted as opening with an *ist* question:

ist i-ir=i   tm   iy   n=tn   n   nkt
ist THMZ=1SG NEG come:INF to=2PL for small-thing

"Did I not come to you just for a trivial reason (lit. 'a small thing')?"

In his rather convoluted and rhetorically dense manner the vizier implies that he has good reasons for not coming, and indeed the start of the entry tells us he was travelling north to the *sed*-festival of the king. The proposition under question (P) expresses

---

26   The most detailed discussion is in Vernus (1980: 121-124).

what would be an inappropriate or unfitting reason for him not to have come to the community of workmen and, of course, closes off this alternate and presents it for elimination. The invited inverse inference (I) suggests there is a more robust reason behind this, but without the Vizier having to condescend to explain himself further:

Q: Did I not come to you for a trivial reason?
P: ~~I did not come to you for a trivial reason~~
I: I did not come to you but not for a trivial reason

2.14   *ist/is bn* questions with the second tense construction

ist/is bn questions with the second tense invite inference to the inverse, which will, of course, thus be an affirmative statement, reversing the negation.

Ex. 45   *Horus and Seth*, 8,5-6 (*LES*, 47,14-15)
Pre-Horakhty, previously a firm supporter of Seth's claim to kingship (the office of Osiris) has now changed his position and has stated, along with Atum, in a message to the Ennead that the white crown is to be put on the head of Horus and he is to be appointed to the position of his father Osiris (*Horus & Seth*, 8.4-5). Unsurprisingly, this infuriates Seth. The Ennead respond to Seth's anger by first questioning why he has got angry and then ask:

ist bn   i-ir.tw   m p3w dd
ist NEG do:THMZ.IMPRS as this say:REL

tm nb t3wy iwnw ḥnᶜ p3-rᶜ-ḥr-3ḫty
"Shouldn't it been done just as Atum lord of the two lands, the Heliopolitan, and Pre-Horakhty said?"

Q: Should it not be done as Atum and Pre-Horakhty said?
P: ~~It should not be done as Atum and Pre-Horakhty said~~
I: It should be done as Atum and Pre-Horakhty said

The Ennead are questioning Seth's angry response to Pre-Horakhty and Atum's message. The proposition under question (P) clearly expresses how the Ennead think things should not be: that 'it should not be done as Atum and Pre-Horakhty have said', thus undercutting Seth's grounds for complaint and his angry response. By contrast, the invited inference (I) shows how the Ennead thinks should be: the decision of Atum and Pre-Horakhty should be followed and Seth's anger would be less justified.

Ex. 46   P. Anastasi IX, rto 5 and 7 (K*RI* III, 505,12-14)
The sender is replying to issues previously raised by his addressee. One of these concerns the supply of cattle. The addressee seems to have been critical of the speaker's abilities. The sender responds:

ḥr ir p3y=k h3b n=i r-dd bw ir=k ḥry

is bn   i-ir=i   in   n3 iḥw   3bd 2   r   n3
is NEG THMZ=1SG bring.INF the cattle months 2 to this

iw bw ir=k ḥn=w
"Now, as for your writing to me to say, 'You are not perceptive(?) (enough)', did I not fetch the cattle 2 months ago, before you (even) demanded them?"

The speaker is clearly attempting to entice the hearer into accepting that the speaker did indeed do this:

Q: did I not fetch the cattle 2 months ago, before you (even) demanded them?
P: ~~I did not fetch the cattle 2 months ago, before you (even) demanded them~~
I: I did fetch the cattle 2 months ago, before you (even) demanded them

The proposition under question (P) clearly clashes with the speaker's point of view – it is not how things should be taken to be, from his perspective – but relates to the hearer's initial viewpoint in that, if it had been correct, it might have conformed more with the addressee's critical perspective, which, of course, is what the speaker is responding to and attempting to entice the addressee away from. The invited inference (I) makes the point that the sender wishes the addressee to retrieve and to evaluate against his initial criticism.

This is another instance where the sender responds to his own antiphrastic question, showing us clearly what his own take on the question is. He immediately follows on in ll. 5–6 'When the threshing of the barley was finished, I sent a message to summon their herdsman saying, "Come and take them away," before you had (even) written to me.'

Finally, two examples from the Qadesh Poem:

Ex. 47   Qadesh Poem, §95 (K*RI* II, 35,1-6)
          As part of Ramesses II's plea to the god Amun he points out that he has followed Amun by asking the closed question:

          is   bn   šm.n=i   ꜥḥꜥ.n=i   ḥr   r=k
          is   NEG   go:THMZ=1SG   stand:THMZ=1SG   upon   word=your

          "Do I not go and stop at your word?"

Q: Do I not I go and stop at your word?
P: ~~I do not go and stop at your word~~
I: I do go and stop at your word

Ex. 48   Qadesh Poem, §§255-6 (K*RI* II, 79,1-4)
          Ramesses II chides his army. He asks then the closed question:

          is   bn   ir.n   rmṯ   sꜥꜣ=f   m   nwt=f
          is   NEG   THMZ   man   advance:INF=3SG.M   in   town=his

          iw=f iw ir=f ḳnw m-bꜣḥ nb=f
          "Does a man not advance himself in his town when he returns having shown bravery before his lord?"

Q: Does a man not advance himself in his town, when he returns having shown bravery before his lord?
P: ~~A man does not advances himself in his town, when he returns having shown bravery before his lord~~
I: A man does advances himself in his town, when he returns having shown bravery before his lord

2.15   *ist/is* questions with construction with *m-ḏr sḏm=f*

Correlative constructions offer an interesting set of cases. Here the question particle *ist/is* is positioned in front of the entire correlative complex consisting of the two linked clauses. For a positive example, see ex. 53 below. Here two negative examples are considered. First:

Ex. 49   *Two Brothers*, 7,5-6 (*LES*, 16,12-13)
          Following his wife's false account of the episode between her and the younger brother, the elder brother has chased his younger brother attempting to kill him.

Now divided by water filled with crocodiles brought about by Pre, the younger brother attempts to put his side of things to his brother. As part of this he asks:

is bn   n-ḏr   hꜣb=k   r   in   n=n   prt
is NEG when send=3SG.M to bring:INF for=1PL seed

iw   tꜣy=k ḥmt ḥr ḏd   n=i
CORD your wife on say.INF to=1SG

"Was it not when you sent me to fetch seed for us that your wife said to me, ('Come, let's spend an hour sleeping together.')"

The younger brother clearly thinks the inverse of the stated proposition under question (P). To keep the temporal clause within the question and the negation, I will use a longer informal propositional format:

Q: Is it not the case that when you sent me to fetch seed for us your wife said to me, 'Come, let's spend an hour sleeping together'?
P: ~~It is not the case that when you sent me to fetch seed for us that your wife said to me, 'Come, let's spend an hour sleeping together'~~
A: It is the case that when you sent me to fetch seed for us your wife said to me, 'Come, let's spend an hour sleeping together'

Once again the invited antiphrastic inference expresses how the younger brother thinks things should be understood.

The scope of *bn* is over the entire correlative clause complex. In constructing the invited inference this *bn* can be simply removed, as it were. This has the consequence that this leaves the sequential clause, which contains the younger brother's key assertion here, already in the form the younger brother would wish it.

It seems that this was not the only position that the negation could be placed. In the following example it occurs before the second clause, which is a *bn sḏm=f* construction, with *ist* positioned before both clauses:

Ex. 50   *Horus and Seth*, 15,7-8 (*LES*, 58,8-11)
From the netherworld, Osiris has sent two letters to the Ennead criticising the failure to award kingship to his son Horus. In the second, he comments on his role in the cosmic order of things:

ist m-ḏr ir   ptḥ ꜥꜣ rsy inb=f nb ꜥnḫ tꜣwy   tꜣ pt
ist when make Ptah great south of wall=his lord of Ankh-tawy the sky

ist bn   ḏd=f   n nꜣ sbꜣ   nty m-ḫnw=s
ist NEG say:SBJV=3SG.M to the stars REL in=3SG.F

i-ir=tn ḥtp Ἰmntt r tnw grḥ m pꜣ nty nsw wsir im
"When Ptah, the Great, South of his Wall, Lord of Ankh-tawy, created the sky, did he not have to say to the stars which are in it [the sky], 'You shall set in the west every night in the place where Osiris is'?"

Clearly Osiris is of the view that the inverse inference (I) of the proposition under question (P) is the correct point of view:

Q: When Ptah created the sky, did he not have to say to the stars, 'You shall set in the west every night in the place where Osiris is'?
P: ~~When Ptah created the sky, he did not have to say to the stars, 'You shall set in the west every night in the place where Osiris is.'~~
I: When Ptah created the sky, he did have to say to the stars, 'You shall set in the west every night in the place where Osiris is.'

2.16   *ist* questions with conditionals

Conditionals also provide examples of a clausal complex after *ist/is*. There are not many examples to work with and I will restrict my comments to the matter at hand.

Ex. 51   *Two Brothers*, 8,2 (*LES*, 17,7-9)
> For context and glossing, see ex. 21 above:
> *ist ir sḫȝy=k wˁ n bin*
> *ist bw ir=k sḫȝy wˁ n nfr m r-pw wˁ nkt iw iry=i sw n=k*
> "If you can recall something bad,
> can you not recall something good or something I have done for you?"

This example has already been discussed (ex. 21). The inference pattern is:

Q: If you can recall something bad, can you not recall something good?
P: ~~If you can recall something bad, you cannot recall something good~~
I: If you can recall something bad, you can (surely) recall something good

Ex. 52   Moscow Bowl 3917b, 5 (Gardiner & Sethe 1928: pl. 9)
> The following is raised as another matter at the end of a letter, taken by Gardiner and Sethe to be a letter to the dead:
>
> *is bn   ir ḳn=k   n=i   pȝy=k ḥn nfr*
> *is* NEG if stop=2SG.M to=1SG your good attitude
>
> *iw=i   r irt   gr   ink*
> FUT=1SG FUT do:INF also 1SG
>
> "Is it not the case that if you stop your good attitude towards me, I will act myself also?"

Q: Is it not the case that if you stop your good attitude towards me, I will act myself also?
P: ~~It is not the case that if you stop your good attitude towards me, I will act myself also~~
I: It is the case that if you stop your good attitude towards me, I will act myself also

The point seems to be the reciprocal relationship between sender and addressee: if the addressee stops behaving well towards the sender, the sender will reciprocate in like manner. This threatened action on the part of the sender (dependent on what the addressee does first) clearly emerges in the invited inference (I).

As with the temporal construction examples, examples with conditionals exemplify both initial negation with *bn* after the question marker and (the appropriate) negation in the main clause (the apodosis).

2.17   The *ist/is* question against itself: irony/sarcasm?

ist/is questions clearly lend themselves to a certain attitude of dissembling, since the proposition under question is expected to be (or it is hoped that it will be) dismissed and an inference drawn on the correct proposition to be understood, the polar inverse of the proposition as stated. But what if the speaker wishes to be ironic in his use of the *ist/is* question itself? This would erect a different viewpoint in which the *ist/is* question, its proposition under question, and its invited inference would be viewed from an alternative viewpoint and be intended ironically or even sarcastically. This would thus be a reversal of a reversal, as it were, but with the intention that this be seen and processed, and not simply a cancellation under reversal. Such a use would be

risky, since it would require a hearer to recognise something amiss with the actual use of the *ist/is* question and to construct a higher viewpoint in which this can be assessed.

Of course, establishing such ironic usage for a dead ancient language such as Ancient Egyptian is a considerable task. However, I think the following example, from O. DeM 10061, lends itself to analysis in this manner:

> Ex. 53   O. DeM 10061, 12-13 (Grandet 2006: 251)
> The writer is responding to his addressee having written to him saying that they would not bring him fuel supplies. He says:
>
> *is ir   m-di wn=i   dy   r-ꜥḳꜣy=k*
> *is* as-for when AUX=1SG there like=2SG.M
>
> *iw=i   ḥr in   n=k*
> CORD=1SG on bring:INF to=2SG
>
> *iw bn tw=i ḥr dit gb=k m nkt*
> "Is it the case that, when I was there exactly like you, I supplied you, without letting you lack in anything?"

It would seem from the letter that the answer to this should be a resounding 'yes', thus allowing the contrast with the behaviour of the hearers, but the direct inference pattern on the *is* question would yield the opposite answer 'no'. This seems, at first sight, to run counter to the discussion above. However, the intended reading seems to be 'you might infer "no, I didn't," which would then at least legitimise your actions to a degree, but of course I actually did, and this is the contrast I intend', with an extra layer of contrastive viewpoint. Now it has to be admitted that there is always a possibility of an omission from the original text, even of such an important item in terms of sense as a negation; scribal errors do occur. Papyrus Ashmolean 1945.97 (Naunakht I), 4.8, for example, provides us with a clear instance of this. However, I would prefer to attempt to deal with this example as we have it and not to impose such an emendation unless unavoidable. Treated as an ironically used *is* question, the speaker would be erecting an extra, alternate viewpoint stance within which the ordinary interpretation of the *is* question can be reversed and its use seen for what it is – sarcasm. That is, the speaker's negative attitude is not just to be taken to the proposition under question, but to the entire *is* question (along with its inferences):[27]

> Viewpoint 1 (the ordinary way in which such a question would be taken):
> Q: When I was there exactly like you are now,
>   did I supply you without letting you lack in anything?
> P: ~~When I was there exactly like you are now,~~
>   ~~I supplied you without letting you lack in anything~~
> I: When I was there exactly like you are now,
>   I did not supply you, letting you lack in everything

The move to the extra, higher viewpoint would be urged by the obvious untruth of the standard reasoning with *is* questions which the speaker expects the hearers to recognise, but to see the relationship with their own actions. This extra viewpoint would be as follows, with a reversal of the standard inferencing:

---

27 I am influenced here by the treatment of irony in Tobin and Israel (2012).

Viewpoint 2 (the ironic, and more processing-intensive, way it is to be taken):

Q: When I was there exactly like you are now,
       did I supply you without letting you lack in anything?
P: When I was there exactly like you are now,
       I supplied you without letting you lack in anything
I: ~~When I was there exactly like you are now~~
       ~~I did not supply you, letting you lack in everything~~

Of course, this is a more risky strategy requiring more cognitive processing on the part of the addressees.

I am particularly struck that Pierre Grandet, who published the *editio princeps* for this ostracon, felt moved to include an extra negation in his translation in order to capture the flavour: 'lorsque je me suis trouvé là, dans la même condition que toi, ne t'(en) ai-je pas apporté, ne permettant pas que tu manques de rien?' (Grandet 2006: 65). In the analysis here, this extra negation is, as it were, provided by the inversion taken in the higher viewpoint, the ironic stance, and thus pragmatically, and is not expressed morpho-syntactically. However, as already noted, one cannot completely discount the possibility of a scribal omission of negation.

2.18   *is* question with contradictory alternates

The following example differs from the previous examples in supplying disjunctive contradictory alternates both expressly within an *is* question:

Ex. 54   O. DeM 552, vso 3-5 (Sauneron 1959: pl. 2)
       On the verso of this ostracon the sender reacts to his addressee's previous statement that the garment had been stolen: 'as for you saying, "It has been stolen"':

is   sw   ḥr   rn=i
is 3SG.M upon   name=my

is {sw} bn   sw   ḥr   rn=i
is   NEG 3SG.M upon name=my

       "Was it under my name?
       Or was it not under my name?"

The precise sense is tricky to nail down in such a limited context (the recto describes the price of the garment, a kilt or wrap-around piece of cloth). One reading, for example, might be 'Is it or is it not under my responsibility,'[28] from which one disjunct might be accepted. However, one might question a reading which does not directly recognise the use of *is* before each question. Given the limited context the following is clearly speculative, but I do wonder whether the speaker is taking a negative attitude to both alternates, since these are the two alternatives expressed and provide contradictory propositions under question. If this is so, then he would seem to be dismissing both alternatives, perhaps along the lines of 'I don't care whether it's under my name or not' or 'it doesn't matter whether or not it was under my name'. This would similar to the last example in reflecting more the speaker's negative attitude to the entire viewpoint evoked in the *is* question, the question (Q) and all its

---

28   So Neveu (1996: 286, n. 3).

inferences to be dismissed. He positions himself in viewpoint 2 in which the whole issue of being under his name is dismissed as not mattering here.

Viewpoint 1:
Q1: Was it under my name?
P1: ~~It was under my name~~
I1: It was not under my name

Q2: Was it not under name?
P2: ~~It was not under my name~~
I2: It was under my name

Viewpoint 2:
It doesn't matter/I don't care: the point is it was stolen.

3 End

The inference model proposed here for *ist/is* questions is one in which the proposition under question is (P) contrary to the speaker's viewpoint and is presented as the closed alternate for elimination, whilst its inverse (I) properly reflects the speaker's viewpoint. This inverse is a proposition which the hearer is invited to infer and thus be enticed towards the speaker's point of view.

Bibliography

Caminos, Ricardo A. 1954. *Late Egyptian Miscellanies*, Brown Egyptological Studies I, London.

Cassonnet, Patricia. 2000. *Études de néo-égyptien. Les temps seconds i-sḏm.f et i-iri.f sḏm. Entre syntaxe et sémantique*, Études et Mémoires d'Égyptologie 1, Paris.

Černý, Jaroslav. 1951. *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el-Médineh*. V, *Nos 340 à 456*, Documents de Fouilles de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire 7, Cairo.

Černý, Jaroslav & Sarah I. Groll. 1978. *A Late Egyptian Grammar*, 2nd ed., Studia Pohl Series Maior 4, Rome.

Černý & Posener 1978 = Černý, Jaroslav. 1986. *Papyrus hiératiques de Deir el-Médineh*. I, *Nos I-XVII*, Documents de Fouilles de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire 8, Cairo. Posthumous catalogue completed and edited by Georges Posener.

Černý & Koenig 1986 = Černý, Jaroslav. 1986. *Papyrus hiératiques de Deir el-Médineh*. II, *Nos XVIII-XXXIV*, Documents de Fouilles de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire 22, Cairo. Posthumous catalogue completed and edited by Yvan Koenig.

Davies, Benedict G. 1999. *Who's Who at Deir el-Medina. A Prosopographic Study of the Royal Workmen's Community*, Egyptologische Uitgaven 13, Leiden.

Erman, Adolf. 1933. Neuägyptische Grammatik, 2nd ed., Leipzig.

Deir el Medineh Online: http://dem-online.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/index.php.

Fiengo, Robert. 2007. *Asking Questions. Using Meaningful Structures to Imply Ignorance*, Oxford.

Fox, Michael V. 1985. *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, Madison.

Frandsen, Paul J. 1990. Editing Reality. The Turin Strike Papyrus, in Sarah Israelit-Groll (ed.), *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim*, Jerusalem, 166-199.

Gardiner, Alan H. & Kurt Sethe. 1928. *Egyptian Letters to the Dead, Mainly from the Old and Middle Kingdoms*, London.

Grandet, Pierre. 2006. *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deîr el-Médînéh*. X, *Nos 10001-10123*, Documents de Fouilles de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire 46, Cairo.

HO = Černý, Jaroslav & Alan H. Gardiner. 1957. *Hieratic Ostraca*, Oxford.

Junge, Friedrich. 1996. *Einführung in die Grammatik des Neuägyptischen*, Wiesbaden. English version: Junge, Friedrich. 2001. *Late Egyptian Grammar: An Introduction*, Oxford.

K*RI* = Kitchen, Kenneth A. 1975–1990. *Ramesside Inscriptions. Historical and Biographical*, 8 vols, Oxford.

LEM = Gardiner, Alan H. 1937. *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca VII, Brussels.

LES = Gardiner, Alan H. 1932. *Late-Egyptian Stories*, Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca I, Brussels.

LRL = Černý, Jaroslav. 1939. *Late Ramesside Letters*, Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca IX, Brussels.

Neveu, François. 1996. *La langue des Ramsès. Grammaire du néo-égyptien*, Paris.

Polis, Stéphane. 2008-9. *Étude de la modalité en néo-égyptien*. PhD thesis, University of Liège.

RAD = Gardiner, Alan H. 1948. *Ramesside Administrative Documents*, Oxford.

Sauneron, Serge. 1959. *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques non littéraires de Deir el-Médineh*. [VI] *Nos 550-623*, Documents de Fouilles de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire 13, Cairo.

Sweeney, Deborah. 1991. What's a Rhetorical Question?, in: *Lingua Aegyptia* 1, 315-331.

————. 2001. *Correspondence and Dialogue. Pragmatic Factors in Late Ramesside Letter-Writing*, Ägypten und Altes Testament 49, Wiesbaden.

Tobin, Vera & Michael Israel. 2012. Irony as a Viewpoint Phenomenon, in: Barbara Dancygier & Eve Sweetser (eds.), *Viewpoint in Language. A Multimodal Perspective*, Cambridge, 25-46.