



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Semantic perspectives on the nude/naked body in ancient Egyptian texts

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Abstract

Starting from the assumption that bodies are relational entities, this paper dedicates itself to conceptualisations of nudity/nakedness as they manifested themselves in ancient Egyptian texts (funerary, literary, documentary, monumental, medico-magical, 'private' texts) in diachrony (c.2300–350 BCE). The focus of this work lies on a lexicological and lexicographical study of lexemes—especially the verbs *h3i*, *sh3i*, *sz3i*, and *kfi/kf3*—attested in the ancient Egyptian lexicon referring to the process of exposure/unveiling of the body or the state of nudity/nakedness. The goal of the study is to visualise culture-specific perspectives on ancient Egyptian bodies by means of a relational network (semantic conceptual field) transferred from ancient Egyptian to English as target language.

In order to introduce the resulting conceptual field and under consideration of one textual and one visual example from the Ramesside period, the semantic concept of [EXPOSURE] of the verb *kfi/kf3* is discussed. The article closes with a presentation of the conceptual field, which is composed of four superordinate semantic domains [OPENING], [COGNITION], [SEPARATION] and [EXPOSURE]. The resulting visualisation shows the range of semantic meanings of the studied verbs in comparison to each other in providing information on their semantic overlaps (partial synonymy) and distinctions.

Keywords: lexicography and lexicology, body conceptualisations, nudity/nakedness in ancient Egypt and Egyptology, conceptual field

تصورات دلالية للجسد العاري في النصوص المصرية القديمة

الملخص

انطلاقاً من الفرضية التي ترى الأجساد كيانات متصلة ومتراصة، يركز هذا البحث على استكشاف تصورات العري في النصوص المصرية القديمة، بما يشمل النصوص الجنائزية، الأدبية، الوثائقية، الأثرية، الطبية السحرية، والنصوص "الخاصة"، وذلك عبر سياق زمني يمتد من حوالي ٢٣٠٠ إلى ٣٥٠ ق.م. يتمحور هذا العمل حول دراسة معجمية وقاموسية لمجموعة من الأفعال الموثقة في المعجم المصري القديم، مثل: *h3i*, *sh3i*, *sz3i*, *kfi/kf3* التي تشير إلى عمليات الكشف أو التعري عن الجسد أو حالة العري. تهدف الدراسة إلى تقديم رؤى ثقافية محددة حول مفهوم الجسد في مصر القديمة، وذلك من خلال بناء شبكة علائقية لمجال مفاهيمي دلالي يُترجم من اللغة المصرية القديمة إلى الإنجليزية. لإبراز هذا المجال المفاهيمي، وبالنظر إلى مثال نصي وآخر بصري من فترة الرعامسة، يناقش البحث المفهوم الدلالي لفعل *kfi/kf3* فيما يتعلق بـ [الكشف]. يختتم المقال بعرض شامل للمجال المفاهيمي الناتج، الذي يتألف من أربعة مجالات دلالية عليا: [الفتح]، [الإدراك]، [الانفصال]، و [الكشف]. تُبرز التصورات الناتجة نطاق المعاني الدلالية للأفعال المدروسة، مما يتيح مقارنة دقيقة بين هذه الأفعال، مع تسليط الضوء على تداخلاتها الدلالية (الترادف الجزئي) والاختلافات بينها.

الكلمات الدالة: المعجم وعلم المفردات، تصورات الجسد، العري/التعري في مصر القديمة وعلم المصريات، المجال المفاهيمي

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1 Introduction

1.1 Theoretical background: Relational bodies

As humans, we encounter bodies empirically in our daily experience: firstly, with respect to our own bodies, by experiencing physical needs such as hunger, thirst, pain, emotions, etc.; and secondly, when we interact with others, a phenomenon which is processed by our senses. This constitutes an intrinsic, dynamic, and reciprocal creation and negotiation of our ‘body world’ by communication (HARRIS & ROBB, 2013: 7–31). These processes take place as things, entities, and bodies are put in relation to each other.

Since the so-called relational turn in sciences and the establishment of relational anthropology (STRATHERN, 2020; STRATHERN, 2018; STRATHERN, 2014), thinking-in-relations became an important paradigm (SHULTS, 2003: 18; KÜNKLER, 2017: 67–68). Thinking-in-relations instead of thinking-in-entities presupposes that relations precede relata and are, thus, neither secondary nor subsequent connections between pre-existing instances or entities. Rather, entities in their specific instantiation are primarily formed and created by relations. In this sense, relations are granted an ontological primacy which enables the overcoming of structuralist dualisms such as subject vs object, body vs mind, etc.

As scholars, we encounter bodies in the archaeological field or at the desk, e.g. when we are dealing with pictorial and textual body representations or human remains in the archaeological record or in museum collections. From the perspective of a historian or archaeologist, this encounter—an unbridgeable(?) gulf between now and then (JOHNSON, 2010: 14, fig. 2.1)—often unintentionally leads to a ‘frontal comparison’ (CANDEA, 2019) between ‘us’ and ‘them’, generating a dichotomy and thus a certain tension between ‘our’ and ‘their’ body knowledge. Although it is understood that the relations between us and them are complex—there are inclusions, attributions, superimpositions, similarities, contrasts, differences—we are at risk of seeing relations when there are none or of misjudging their quality. This touches upon the very question of ‘historical’ vs ‘diachronic’ bodies. These two terms can be tentatively disentangled in the following way: whereas the first notion emphasises the difference or the alterity between modern and past body worlds, the second can imply a dynamic evolution, continuity and a certain transhistorical validity between these two relational networks.

As has been put forward, in its use in modern English, the notion ‘relation’ often carries positive connotations, inferring relatedness, attachment, mutuality, and reciprocity (STRATHERN, 2014: 5–6; STRATHERN, 2018: 8). However, relations can also designate disruptions, oppositions, or detachments, or they can function in a linear manner by inducing, structuring, or enhancing relata (KÜNKLER, 2017: 70). Within this framework, individual bodies as well as subjectivity and individuality are understood as strictly relational entities: that is, as intersubjectivity and sociality (KÜNKLER, 2017: 69–72). Thus, bodies are not singular or independent units but rather are embedded in a relational matrix, being intertwined in an interconnected but dynamic conceptual field (KÜNKLER, 2017: 73). Depending on the perspective from which one looks at this matrix (emic vs etic), the nature and functions of the relations can be different.

In this context, it is not trivial how modern scholars use terminologies derived from their respective languages and lexica in order to describe and refer to past bodies and body parts as well as associated processes, movements, and physical conditions (see Di Biase-Dyson, this volume). As has been long recognised by scholars of translation studies, it can be particularly problematic when trying to translate lexemes and expressions from temporally remote as well as linguistically, culturally, and spatially distinct societies (e.g. ancient Egypt) into a modern target language (e.g. English or German).¹ In general, languages differ with respect to the lexicalisation of body conceptualisations and physical processes. This can be observed in textual data on the semantic and pragmatic levels of language use. But how can the semantic scope of lexemes and the concepts behind them be adequately analysed and represented in Egyptological discourse?

¹On the difficulty of representing semantic meaning in translation, see, e.g. MALMKJÆR, 2018.

1.2 Problematisation: Nudity/nakedness in ancient Egypt and Egyptology

These theoretical concerns are best illustrated by the example of the unclothed body and the underlying body conceptualisations in ancient Egypt. Originating from all regions of Egypt (and beyond), from c.4400 BCE to the end of the Pharaonic era, there is an overwhelming abundance of material culture representing the unclothed body in form of figurines, statues, graffiti and dipinti, paintings and reliefs, ‘paddle dolls’, handles of spoons or mirrors, and stamp seals, etc. Found in temples, houses, and tombs and showing all kinds of entities such as humans, kings, and deities, the representation of the unclothed human body is not only ubiquitous but also seems to have been multifunctional in Pharaonic Egypt (SEROVA, 2018).

However, especially in the English-speaking Egyptological discourse, scholars are confronted with a certain difficulty in describing these Egyptian objects by use of common terminology. This is due to a reformation of the English language in the early 18th century, in which a conceptual distinction was made between the terms ‘nudity’ and ‘nakedness’ (CLARK, 1985: 1). While ‘nakedness’ was connoted with negative aspects such as shame, deprivation, defencelessness, primitivism, and sexual desire, ‘nudity’, borrowed from Latin, was charged with opposite associations, such as purity, aesthetics, beauty, eroticism, and sensuality (CLARK, 1985; BERGER, 1972; GERNIG, 2002: 10). In that sense, neither of these two terms is neutral, as they convey certain ideas and values. When attributed to ancient Egyptian material culture, certain modern conceptualisations, and associations—predominantly, a heteronormative, voyeuristic male gaze on the female body—are at risk of being applied in the description and interpretation (SEROVA, 2025). In this context, how can the etic vs emic split be overcome and culture-inherent body conceptualisations from ancient Egypt (such as nude vs naked) be studied and best described?

2 Data selection and methodology

One possible analytical approach to ancient Egyptian conceptions of nudity/nakedness—understood here as an emic perspective—consists of the lexicographical and lexicological analysis of textual data (HARM, 2015; SCHLAEFER, 2009; for Egyptology see, e.g. BLÖBAUM et al., 2011). Such an approach means the study of selected lexical units (lexemes) used in ancient Egyptian texts to refer to the unclothed body and associated processes. This requires a primary identification of relevant lexemes in the Egyptian lexicon as well as a systematic analysis of their occurrence in different text genres and usage contexts in a diachronic perspective.

In the ancient Egyptian lexicon, seven lexemes can be identified which are used to describe the process of exposure/unveiling of the body or the state of nudity/nakedness in various contexts. The lexemes of interest are *ḥꜥi* ‘to be naked; to be apparent; to be clear’ (Wb. III 13.13–16) and its nominalised derivatives *ḥꜥyt* ‘nakedness’ (Wb. III 14.6), *ḥꜥ.w/ḥꜥ.y* ‘the naked’ (Wb. III 14.1–3), *ḥꜥ.wtj* ‘the naked’ (Wb. III 14.4–5), as well as the verbs *šꜥi* ‘to unveil; to expose; to undress; to eliminate; to liberate’ (Wb. IV 209.10–14), *szꜥi* ‘to take off (clothes); to make disappear’ (Wb. IV 273.1–4) and *kꜥi/kꜥ* ‘to unveil; to expose; to reveal; to open; to remove; to eliminate; to rob; to plunder’ (Wb. V 119.4–19; 120.2–3; 120.10–11; 121; 121.1).

These lexemes were selected according to the onomasiological principle, i.e. starting from the concept and inferring the terms used in the ancient Egyptian vocabulary. This was conducted on the basis of the publication *Großes Wörterbuch: Deutsch–Ägyptisch* by Rainer HANNIG (2000). In a second step, these terms were studied from a semasiological perspective with the aim to assess their ranges of semantic meaning (TRAUGOTT & DASHER, 2001: 25–26). This was undertaken by queries in the online database *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* (corpus version from 31 October 2014; ↗, last access: 29 July 2025) and in the *Digitalisiertes Zettelarchiv* (DZA; ↗, last access: 29 July 2025) of the *Berliner Wörterbuch* project. The resulting catalogue of attestations was expanded as far as possible with the aid of the respective secondary literature and the information provided by other repositories.

The resulting catalogue consists of 906 ‘protocol sentences’ or attestations (tokens) which were attributed to 193 textemes (types) on the basis of formal and content criteria. The term ‘texteme’ is understood here as

	OK	FIP	MK	SIP	NK	TIP	Late Period	
	Dyn. 3–8	Dyn. 9–11	Dyn. 12–13	Dyn. 13–17	Dyn. 18–20	Dyn. 21–22	Dyn. 25	Dyn. 26–30
<i>kfi/kf</i>								
<i>h³.w/.y</i>								
<i>h³i</i>								
<i>h³.wtj</i>								
<i>sz³i</i>								
<i>h³.yt</i>								
<i>sh³i</i>								

Tab. 1: Diachronic distribution and attestation of the studied lexemes

Lexemes							
Text genres	<i>kfi/kf</i>	<i>h³i</i>	<i>sh³i</i>	<i>sz³i</i>	<i>h³.yt</i>	<i>h³.w/.y</i>	<i>h³.wtj</i>
(Auto-)biography	x	x	x			x	x
Funerary: PT	x	x		x	x		x
Funerary: CT	x	x	x				
Funerary: BD	x	x				x	x
<i>Amduat</i>	x	x	x				
<i>Book of Gates</i>	x	x	x				
<i>Litany of Re</i>	x	x				x	
Hymns and prayers	x	x		x			
Ritual	x	x			x	x	
Magico-medical	x		x	x	x		
Historical-rhetorical	x						
Educational	x						
Literary	x	x	x		x		
Administrative	x	x					
Letters (private)	x	x					
Other	x	x		x			

Tab. 2: Distribution of lexemes in text genres

a textual unit which has a semantic demarcation (TOPMANN, 2002: 43; BUCHBERGER, 1993: 13, 52). In this sense, textemes—i.e. phrases and sentences—consist of both single attestations as well as parallels (e.g. BD spells).

Diachronically in the time range from c. 2300–350 BCE, the selected lexemes show different attestation phases (see Table 1) which can partly be led back to their use within specific texts and corpora (Table 2): *kfi/kf*, *h³i* and the nouns *h³.w/h³.y* are not only the most frequently attested,² but also show the widest range of usage from the Old Kingdom to the Late Period. The remaining lexemes occur depending on the transmission situation of the respective text corpus (e.g. CT, BD) either with larger interruptions (*h³.wtj*; *sz³i*) or even only selectively (*h³.yt*; *sh³i*).

In order to analyse the selected lexemes with regard to their semantics (classification, readings, meanings), grammar (morphosyntax) and context-dependent usage, all textemes were annotated according to the *Leipzig Glossing Rules* (DI BIASE-DYSON et al., 2009). Such an annotation allows more flexibility and freedom in

²The distribution of attestations (absolute/relative number) on the individual lexemes is the following: *kfi/kf* (638/69%), *h³.w/h³.y* (124/13%), *h³i* (72/8%), *sh³i* (38/4%), *sz³i* (23/3%), *h³.wtj* (19/2%), *h³.yt* (10/1%).

translation while at the same time providing detailed insights into the grammar of every lexical element of the corresponding text. Of special interest here are the verbs from this group which were used to create a semantic conceptual field consisting of corresponding semantic domains (see Section 3).

The main goal of the conducted study was to elucidate which semantic meanings the selected ancient Egyptian lexemes had within their co(n)texts. Further research questions include the following: who or what is represented as being nude/naked in the texts? In what situational contexts is nudity/nakedness mentioned in the texts? How was the unclothed body evaluated in these contexts?

2.1 Examples

To illustrate the methodology, one textual and one visual example for the concept of *kfi/kf* [EXPOSURE] shall be given which are then put in relation to each other. The first example, a texteme from the corpus, comes from the so-called *Dream Book*—a compendium of over 200 dreams with their interpretation, which was possibly used for divination and prediction of the future (SZPAKOWSKA, 2011: 509–510, 514–515; SZPAKOWSKA, 2003: 66–76).

Example 1: *Dream Book*, pLondon BM EA 10683 (pChester Beatty III), rto 9.10³ (Dynasty 19).

jr	m3	-sw	zj	m-	rsw.t
when	see:SBJV	-3SG.M	man(M)[SG]	in	dream-F
<i>When a man sees himself in a dream,</i>					
hr-	kf	ph.(w)i	=f	ds	=f
on	denude:INF	bottom-M.SG	=3SG.M	self(M)[SG]	=3SG.M
<i>exposing his own rear-end:</i>					
dw	jw	=f	r-	nmh	hr-
bad(M)[SG]	SBRD	=3SG.M	to	be_poor:INF	on
Bad!	<i>He will end up poor.</i>				

The layout of this text is organised like a table (Figure 1) with horizontal lines arranged in columns and a preceding vertically written heading *jr m3 sw zj m rsw.t* ‘When a man sees himself in a dream’ (cf. GARDINER, 1935: figs 7–7a; ISRAELIT-GROLL, 1985: 75). This is followed by individual dream descriptions, which have been interpreted as subordinate clauses (*hr* + infinitive) to the header, which is to be read before each individual line (cf. SZPAKOWSKA, 2011: 511; LEITZ, 2000: 224; ISRAELIT-GROLL, 1985: 113–114.) Each line contains one dream and can be subdivided into three parts: first, a *protasis*, i.e. the image seen, or an action performed in the dream; second, an evaluation of the dream as *nfr* ‘good’ or *dw* ‘bad’; and third, the *apodosis*, or the

³DZA 30.586.880; PUGLISI and DAKOTA (2023: 434–448, fig. 17.2); SZPAKOWSKA (2011: 511); NOEGEL and SZPAKOWSKA (2006: 196, 206, 207–208); SZPAKOWSKA (2003: 66–76, 108–109, rto 9.10); LEITZ (2000: 221–246, 243, IX, 10); GARDINER (1935: 7–23, figs 7–7a). See an image of this object in the online database of the British Museum Collection: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/31612001>, last access: July 29, 2025.

resulting consequence for the future of the person affected (SZPAKOWSKA, 2011: 511).

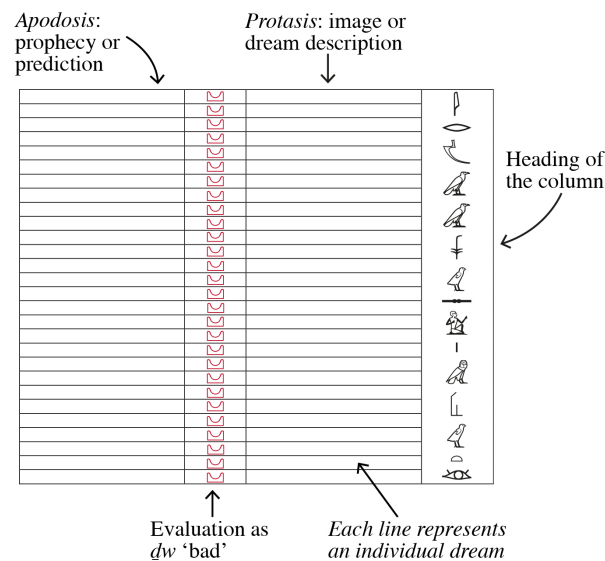


Fig. 1: Schematic illustration of the general layout of the *Dream Book* (pLondon BM EA 10683, rto col. 9).

All dream interpretations in this papyrus are decidedly aimed at a male reader (SZPAKOWSKA, 2011: 515) and situate the dreamer as the main agent or sufferer in the centre of the event. As has been already emphasised by several authors, wordplay, consonances, and visual puns play an overriding role within this text composition (NOEGEL & SZPAKOWSKA, 2006: 193–212). Stylistic devices like puns do not only serve as rhetorical or ‘literary’ tools but rather reinforce the ritual or ‘magical’ effect of the text (NOEGEL & SZPAKOWSKA, 2006: 196). Thus, most of the dreams in the *Dream Book* are allegorical; i.e. the interpretation of what is dreamed does not correspond directly to the content of the dream but is rather explained on the basis of the pun (LEITZ, 2000: 226–234).

In Example 1, a man exposes his own rear-end and sees himself unclothed in a dream. This incidence is understood as a negative omen and the person is prophesied a future of poverty. As for the question of who or what caused the nakedness of the man, which in many other texts plays a special role and can either be associated with positive or negative attributions (SEROVA, 2025), the *Dream Book* does not provide any contextual information on this point, as it is known from modern dream interpretations, for example.

Within this dream, the focus lies on the perception of one’s own body, in the sense of becoming aware of oneself and/or specific (bodily) properties of the self. The fact that the naked male body and explicitly the exposure of the buttocks is evaluated as $\dot{d}w$ ‘bad’, might indicate that showing and seeing this part of the body was perceived as unusual or inappropriate in specific situational contexts or even in everyday reality in general (SEROVA, 2025).⁴ Although the dream sphere of the dreamer is to be considered a ‘private space’ (LAZARIDIS, 2018), it seems also to be subject to specific social norms and expectations.

In this passage, several levels of wordplay can be identified: e.g. the use of *antanaclasis*, that is, two homonymous lexemes with different semantic meanings that occur in the same co-text (NOEGEL & SZPAKOWSKA, 2006: 195; cf. other examples in PUGLISI & DAKOTA, 2023: 443–444.) These are $ph.wi$ ‘buttocks’ in the *protasis* and $hr ph.wi$ ‘in the end’ in the *apodosis*, where $ph.wi$ is to be understood as an abstract noun (NOEGEL &

⁴However, it is interesting to note that in dream 4,12 on the recto of the same papyrus (GARDINER, 1935: 13 and fn. 16, pl. 6+6A), the mention of $ng:t hbs.w$ ‘ripping/tearing the clothes’ is interpreted as nfr ‘good’ since the man can thereby free himself from all evil ($wh:f m \dot{d}w.t nb.t$) (SZPAKOWSKA, 2003: 88; LEITZ, 2000: 229–230). This demonstrates all the more the importance of the situational context for evaluating the meaning of the unclothed body.



Fig. 2: Representation of Sehaqeq on oLeipzig ÄMUL 5251 (author's own image, cf. ČERNÝ & GARDINER, 1957: pl. 3).

SZPAKOWSKA, 2006: 207–208). The special feature here is that seen from the perception centre—that is, the eyes of the dreamer—there is a spatial distance to his rear end/buttocks. This spatial distance (head $\leftrightarrow$ bottom) is conceptually transferred to the temporal distance (present $\leftrightarrow$ future): at the end of a certain period of time, which is not further specified, the dreamer will be *nmh* 'impoverished; miserable; orphaned' (*Wb.* II 268.11–16) and literally sees 'his own end'. Although not explicitly mentioned, the clothing of the lower part of the body stands as a symbol for material provision and prosperity which is, e.g. very well-known from (auto-)biographical inscriptions from the Old Kingdom onwards (SEROVA, 2025). Its absence indicates impoverishment and material misery for the dreamer (SZPAKOWSKA, 2003: 108–109).

The second example, oLeipzig ÄMUL 5251, also dated to the Ramesside period (Dynasty 19), consists of a limestone ostrakon containing 11 lines of hieratic text written with ink as well as a depiction of a standing male individual (FISCHER-ELFERT, 2015: 230–248; ČERNÝ & GARDINER, 1957: pl. 3). From the context and juxtaposition of image and text, it can be deduced that the represented individual—identified as Sehaqeq, a potentially malevolent entity (LUCARELLI, 2010)—is the addressee of the text against whom the spell is to be uttered. As is known from other texts, Sehaqeq represents a night demon or a deceased revenant ('Wiedergänger') who can disturb the sleeper and cause him suffering, e.g. by invading his head through the headrest and by bringing nightmares (FISCHER-ELFERT, 2015: 240–243; FISCHER-ELFERT, 2016: 30; LUCARELLI, 2010; AZZAM, 2009). Sehaqeq is also known as a cause of different kinds of head ailments (FISCHER-ELFERT, 2015: 233).

The representation (Figure 2) shows an unclothed male figure in profile which presumably is a boy. The recipient can see the genitals of the individual and that the penis is uncircumcised. Also, on his head there are only a few loose strands of hair which is reminiscent of a sidelock of youth (cf. however FISCHER-ELFERT & HOFFMANN, 2020: 152, fn. 641, who interpret this as a sign of 'baldness'; cf. FISCHER-ELFERT, 2015: 227–228). While his left arm is stretched forward, his right arm is contorted upward so his elbow covers his eyes, and the face of the individual is not visible. This gesture has been interpreted as not wanting to be seen or not having to look at anything himself (FISCHER-ELFERT, 2016: 28; AZZAM, 2009: 107; cf. BORGHOUTS, 1971: 176). It is also reminiscent of representations of captives of the Sea Peoples and Asians in the Medinet Habu reliefs from the reign of Ramses III (THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, 1930: pl. 43–44; REDFORD, 2018: 29–31): here, on the right part of the scene, groups of bound prisoners are depicted with their elbows pointing upwards, their arms tied up with ropes and protruding unnaturally above their faces so that they partially cover their eyes. In the case of Sehaqeq however, the most peculiar element—a strange extension—can be found at the rear-end of the individual. It is the text of the spell (Example 2, see also Appendix) which adds to the understanding of this image in stating the name and affiliation of the individual as well as providing a

full description of his body and posture.

Example 2: Protection spell, oLeipzig ÄMUL 5251⁵ (Dynasty 19) (see Appendix)

- (1^{rto}) *j:nd hr=k Sh:qq pri m- [p.t jr.tj=f]*
Hail to you, Saturated-Devourer⁶ (Sehaqeq), who came from [the sky], [whose eyes]
- (2^{rto}) *m-db.t⁷ f[ns]f m- r.t=f wnm=f m-t' hr.i [jm=f hpš=f]*
are in his head, whose [tongue] is in his arse so that he can only eat bread [with it] from below.
- (3^{rto}) *jmn.i m- dš hr- jr.t=f wp.t(j) n: sb: w (hr-) dg: nh=f m- d[bn.w]*
[His] right [forearm] crosses over his field of vision, which is (thus) divided. The stars (deities) see that he lives on d[roppings].
- (4^{rto}) *[nb]-št: w m- p.t rs.i(t) snd n=f*
[Oh, Lord] of Secrets in the Southern Sky, whom
- (5^{rto}) *[jm.i hr.t-ntr] Ndr-sh-mj-mm⁸*
[the inhabitant of the necropolis] fears! The-one-who-picks-excrements-like-grains (Nedjersekh-mimem)
- (6^{rto}) *[rn n- mw.t=k] [Dw]-bš.t⁹ rn n-*
[is the name of your mother], [Mount]-vomit (Djubesht) is the name of
- (7^{rto}) *[jt=k] [jr jy=k r- mn] ms n- mn*
[your father]!¹⁰ [If you should come after NN] born by NN,
- (8^{rto}) *[jw=j r-pri k: h: t=k .w] k w: i. w*
[then I will go (against)]¹¹ your 'corpse-k'? so that] your [arms are] far away

⁵oLeipzig ÄMUL 5251, DZA 29.408.650; (FISCHER-ELFERT, 2016: 27–30, fig. 16–17; FISCHER-ELFERT, 2015: 230–248; ČERNÝ & GARDINER, 1957: pl. 3) is one of at least six parallel attestations of this protective spell: the other sources are pLondon BM 10731 (EDWARDS, 1968), oGardiner 300 (ČERNÝ & GARDINER, 1957: 24, pl. 91.1), pHeidelberg Hier. 3a+b (FISCHER-ELFERT, 2015: 220–252), pLondon UC 31969 and pAthens 1826 (x+7,11–x+8,4) (FISCHER-ELFERT & HOFFMANN, 2020: 150–155). In the presented (glossed) translation of the spell, textual reconstructions were made by use of the synoptic text version published in KITCHEN (1982: 181–184); cf. also the translation of pLondon BM 10731 in KITCHEN (2003: 133).

⁶On the basis of oLeipzig ÄMUL 5251, the name of the demon is tentatively interpreted as a combination of the following Egyptian lexemes: 1) *sh:* 'to confound; to defraud' (Wb. IV 207.2–5), which is attested once in the sense of 'saturation' (Wb. IV 206.9), and 2) *qq* 'eat' (Wb. V 71.10) as a participle. This would suggest an Egyptian origin of the name which has however been strongly debated in Egyptological discourse: see the detailed etymological discussion in FISCHER-ELFERT and HOFFMANN (2020: 153–154) and FISCHER-ELFERT (2015: 227, 243–246) with references to HOCH (1994: 266–267, fn. 377) and EDWARDS (1968: 158); cf. also QUACK (1996: 511, n° 377) who relates the name of the demon to the Egyptian verb *hk* 'to break open(?)' with reference to VON DEINES and WESTENDORF, 1962: 573–574

⁷*db.t* 'box' (Wb. V 434.10) or *tb.t* 'box' (Wb. V 261.6) can be understood as a pejorative expression for the 'head' of the protagonist.

⁸The personal name in this text version seems to be composed of the elements *ndri* 'to hold fast; to seize' (Wb. II 382.21) as participle without gender congruency (*.t*), *shw* 'filth' (Wb. IV 211.12) as the object of the verb followed by *mj* 'like' and the noun *mmj* 'grains' (Wb. II 58.7).

⁹This personal name might be a construction by use of two lexemes: 1) *dw* as 'bad, evil' (Wb. V 545.9–546.20) or 'mountain' (Wb. V 541.7–545.1 in the sense of a 'rock; pile' and 2) *bš.i* 'to spit out; to spew' (Wb. I 477.14–478.4) to be understood either as a resultative form with the ending *.tw/tj* or as the noun *bš.t* (based on the infinitive form) to be translated as 'vomit' or 'puke'. Since pLondon BM EA 10731, vso 3 shows the sign O39 as classifier after *dw*, a reading as 'pile of barf' or 'mount-vomit' seems possible. As has been kindly pointed out by Christian Casey and Andreas Winkler in a private discussion, the group writing of the name and the addition

of the classifier group T14-A1  in the version oLeipzig ÄMUL 5251 are noteworthy as indicators of a foreign origin of the name-holder. In that sense, it might be an intentional 'foreignization' of an Egyptian noun compound in the sense of a dysphemism; (cf. comment by FISCHER-ELFERT & HOFFMANN, 2020: 152, fn. 636).

¹⁰Such an interpretation of the personal names of the parents of Sehaqeq rules out the option of a foreign etymology and would strongly contradict the prevailing opinion that these designations have a Nubian or Meroitic origin: see FISCHER-ELFERT (2015: 248) and ZIBELIUS-CHEN (2011: 207–208); cf. also EDWARDS (1968: 159–160), in favour of a Syrian or Anatolian origin of the names. The readings proposed here are only possible on the basis of the text version in oLeipzig ÄMUL 5251, since the other parallels provide different variants of these names (cf. FISCHER-ELFERT, 2015: 248).

¹¹As in *pri-* 'to be brave; to be violent' Wb. I 527.6; the version pLondon BM 10731 is used here, but the visible signs do not provide any attestation of the sign D36 for '': for a zoomable image of the object see <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/ob->

- (1^{VSO}) *[r=k nn h:]y=sn hr=j jnk ˙.wj=sn h:-k=r dd-mdw*
 from you. They [cannot affect] me, not me after all! Their hands are placed around the ‘shrine’!
 Recitation
- (2^{VSO}) *hr- mh˙.w n- wd.w jr.w m- ˙h: [...]*
 over flax fibers of raffia shaped into an arrow [...],
- (3^{VSO}) *[...] r-p; rmt j:rd n=f t˙ hr.i [...]*
 [...] against someone to whom bread is given from below [...].

What can be learned from this object is that Sehaseq is an anthropomorphic being who has all kinds of functional body parts (with associated abilities), but because of his posture—effectively captured both in the image and the spell (Figure 2, cf. line 3, rto)—he is limited in his visual perception and, thus, his actions.¹² Sehaseq is able to see neither himself nor his rear-end, but the viewer of the ostrakon can(!). Also, the extension at his rear-end, which has occasionally been interpreted as a tail (BRUNNER-TRAUT, 1956: 57), is referred to in the text as a *ns* ‘tongue’: this corporeal feature inflicts the reversal of the direction of food intake as part of the banishment or punishment of this potentially malevolent being. Thus, the spatial displacement of the tongue out of his field of vision reinforces a functional restriction and inversion of his eating behaviour (for further discussion of the ‘reversed corporeality’ of this demon, see CONTE, 2025; see also FISCHER-ELFERT & HOFFMANN, 2020: 151, fn. 633 and 154). This reversal is expressed by the motif of living on faeces, which is already known from other spells dedicated to the execration of and defence against hostile entities (CT 698: see FRANDSEN, 2000: 18; FISCHER-ELFERT, 2015: 231, fn. 101).

As is known from numerous magico-medical texts (e.g. pTurin CGT 54050, vso 6,8–9; ROCCATI, 2011: 34, 172), the unmasking or exposure (*kfi/kfi*) of pathogens which are often personified as *hft* ‘enemy’, *mw.t* ‘dead’, *ḏy* ‘adversary’ or as specific disease demons, as is the case in Example 2, is one of the measures taken by the healer or priest in order to fight against the disease. By identifying and revealing the name of hostile entities in the patient’s body, the healer is able to destroy or render them harmless. In the case of pTurin CGT 54050, these entities are commanded to come out (*pri*) of the body or to reveal themselves through typical symptoms, e.g. in the form of bodily fluids, so that the healer can see (*mꜣ*) the cause and take more targeted action against the illness of the person affected.

In the case of oLeipzig ÄMUL 5251, the above-described depiction and description of the body of Sehaseq has the effect that the demon is subject to the will of the recipient or user of the ostrakon (cf. THEIS, 2014: 398). This is also strengthened by reference to the names of the parents and thus the genealogical origin of this demon (see lines 5–7, rto), which—if read as Egyptian expressions—can be interpreted as the dysphemic designations *Nḏr-sh-mj-mm* ‘The-one-who-picks-excrements-like-grains’ (Nedjersekhmimem) and *Dw-bš.t* ‘Mount-vomit’ (Djubesht), taking up the motif of ‘reversed corporeality’ by including negatively connotated bodily excretions. The unclothed body in combination with the passive, defensive and contorted posture, as well as the inability to see contributes to the innocuousness of this demon (cf. RITNER, 1990: 30). In this sense, both the image and the text of the ostrakon guarantee that Sehaseq not only loses his powers and thus cannot affect the body of the patient or the user of the spell but is also subject to the perception of the viewer.

When putting both examples (Examples 1 and 2) in relation to each other, the role of *mꜣ* ‘to see’ in the context of nudity/nakedness becomes evident. However, far from Eurocentric ideas of voyeurism, in this case *mꜣ* describes the processes of cognitive apprehension (understanding), visualisation, and perception of hidden contents that are otherwise not visible or perceptible (see also below, Section 3). In Examples 1 and 2, bodies

ject/Y_EA10731 (last access: 29 July 2025).

¹²However, cf. the parallel text oGardiner 300, rto 3–4 (KITCHEN, 1982: 182; FISCHER-ELFERT, 2015: 233) where the body of Sehaseq is described as mutilated and constrained in several ways, being incapable to move or speak; see also FISCHER-ELFERT (2015: 241–242) comparing the information on the arm postures in the parallel documents.

are understood as objects with inherent qualities on their inside and outside. In this sense, the verb *kfi/kfi* in association with nudity/nakedness semantically refers to processes that take place either from the inside to the outside of an entity or on the surface of a carrier. In the first case, the underlying principle is that of the body as a [CONTAINER], while in the second, the body functions as a [SURFACE] (cf. NYORD, 2009: esp. 10–14 on image schemata). In Example 1, the focus is on the experience and perception of one's own body—the dreamer is seeing his nakedness and is becoming aware of his corporeality, whereas in Example 2, the pictorial and textual representation of the naked body eternally captures specific characteristics of the protagonist (Sehaqeq), shown semi-bald, contorted, and limited in his physical abilities,¹³ who is thus made subject to the will of the recipient. According to the principle of [CONTAINMENT], *kfi/kfi* can express the activation of qualities and potential powers inherent within individual body parts that have positive or negative effects on the whole body of the individual. However, both examples rather seem to highlight a negative and vulnerable view on the unclothed body, i.e. the naked rear-end or abdomen (cf. NYORD, 2009: 300–302). At least based on these contexts, the exposure of this body part seemed to have been perceived as something potentially unnatural, unusual, or inappropriate.

These two examples were used to demonstrate some aspects of the semantic domain [EXPOSURE] of the verb *kfi/kfi*. To elucidate the semantic range of the context-dependant meanings and usage of this and other verbs associated with nudity/nakedness, the studied lexemes (see Section 2) shall be modelled within a conceptual field, a relational network visualising semantic interrelations between these lexical units (see Section 3).

3 Results: Nudity/nakedness and the modelling of semantic relations

Lexemes can be assigned to certain classes ('lexical' or 'conceptual fields') on the basis of their semantic relationship (synonymy, antonymy, hyper- and hyponymy, etc.), which not only structure the individual and collective understanding of a language on a psychological-cognitive level but are also reproduced in active and passive acts of communication. Such a conceptual field, as represented here, is inspired by semantic map research (GEORGAKOPOULOS & POLIS, 2022) and consists of a set of meaning-related or partially synonymous lexemes that stand in certain paradigmatic, lexical relations to each other. The sum and variety of the semantic meanings of the lexemes as well as their overlaps can be represented schematically. In this sense, a conceptual field, as an abstracting way of representing information and knowledge, can be used to describe and analyse linguistic complexity by establishing a network of entities and relations.

In relational thinking (STRATHERN, 2020; STRATHERN, 2018; STRATHERN, 2014; KÜNKLER, 2017), a differentiation between relations-between and relations-within entities can be drawn. In the first case, already-identifiable phenomena are brought into (external) relations with one another, while in the second, phenomena are understood as internally constituted by relations (STRATHERN, 2018: 4; STRATHERN, 2020: 7–8)—although these are seemingly two irreconcilable perspectives, both types of relations are at play when language in general and especially semantics and lexis are concerned. As has been argued by several scholars (e.g. STRATHERN, 2018: 4; KÜNKLER, 2017: 67–68), the establishment of a specific relation between entities by thinking of one entity 'with respect to' another can change their 'conception' or 'identity' (cf. 'merographic connections' in STRATHERN, 1992). This assigns an ontological quality to relations that have an effect on the terms or entities they are referring to or are associated with. On the other side, as for the relations-within, any change within one entity (e.g. semantic change in meaning of one word) can affect the meaning of other entities to which it is related.

Against this theoretical backdrop, when applied to research questions in linguistics and lexicography, a conscious engagement with models of thinking-in-relations becomes inevitable, as relations are relevant on at least two different levels (see Figure 3). First, it concerns the relation between the sign (lexeme) and the

¹³e.g. the reversal of food intake constitutes an internal process which normally cannot be perceived from the outside.

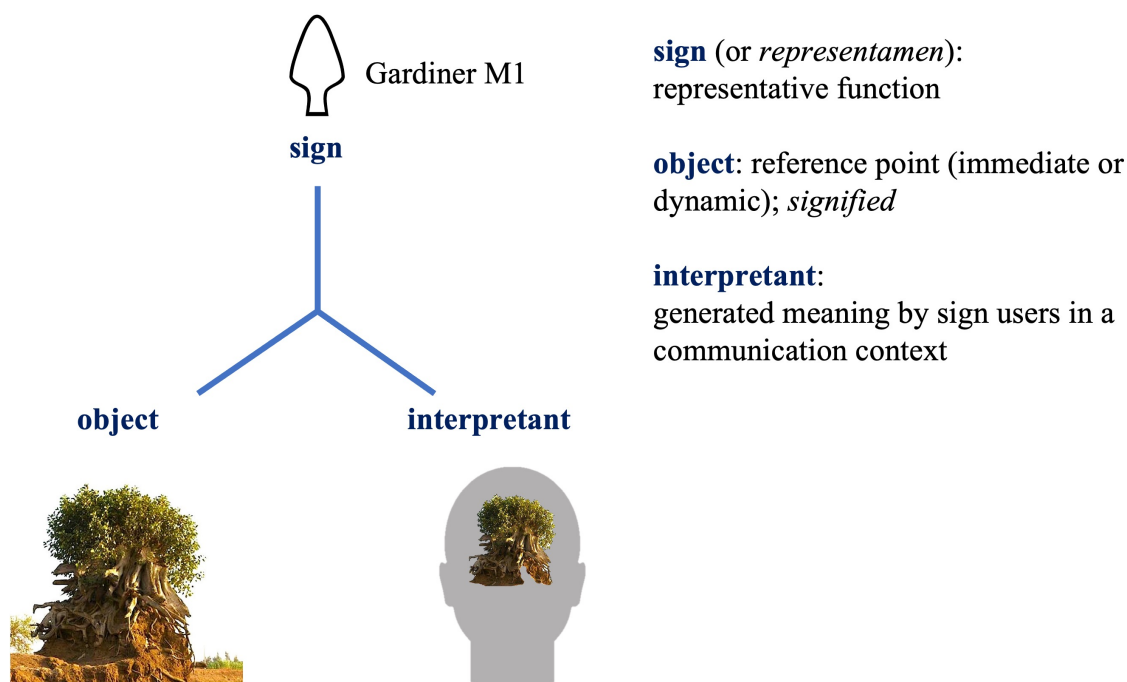


Fig. 3: Triadic model of a semiotic sign according to C.S. Peirce (Nöth 2000: 136–141).

interpretant (attributed meaning): the differentiation between relations-between and relations-within implies that not only the semantic scope of a lexeme as an entity is dynamic and organised by specific internal relations (e.g. rules of inflection), but also that its relations to other homonymous or synonymous lexemes within the conceptual field are subject to change according to their use context (i.e. chronolect, regiolect, sociolect, idiolect, register). Second, when going beyond the interrelation between the sign and its meaning (semantics), the semiotic relation between the sign (lexeme) and the object to which the sign refers to in reality comes into the foreground (see Figure 3).¹⁴ In this sense, all three semiotic components and their respective relations are subject to change and have the potential to affect each other, forming a complex network of interrelatedness (cf. KÜNKLER, 2017: 69–76). Although the conceptual field presented here especially concerns the first complex of relations, it is not untouched or unaffected by the second one.

In the present study and conceptual field (Figure 4), the semantic meanings of the verbs *kfi/kfī*, *ḥꜣi*, *shꜣi* and *szꜣi* (on the methodology see Section 2) were identified by analysis of their usage co(n)texts and then transferred into the English target language. The resulting visualisation shows the range of semantic meanings of the verbs in comparison to each other by providing information on their overlaps or points of contact but also their distinctions (see Figure 4). Basically, three different entities are interrelated here: semantic domains, attested translations of the investigated lexemes and the lexemes themselves, building a complex semantic network and thus representing a selected section of the Egyptian lexicon.

In the case of this study, the ‘common lexical field value’—a prerequisite of any lexical or conceptual field (COSERIU, 1973: 49)—is the body-related area (‘body field’), i.e. physical nudity/nakedness as a state (passive, intransitive) and exposure or unveiling as a process (active, transitive). However, not all four verbs have this core meaning (or body relatedness) since some of them have their foci in other semantic areas (see Figure 4). The ‘nodes’ in the scheme are the readings of the lexemes inferred on the basis of glossing and analysis of the co-texts. In Figure 4, the topological distance or proximity between the nodes does not result from a

¹⁴While semantics focusses on the study of meanings of words and the connections/relations between these meanings, semiotics takes all kinds of signs into account and looks at all three components sign, object, and interpretant (for further reading see NÖTH, 2000: 158ff. and ECO, 2002).

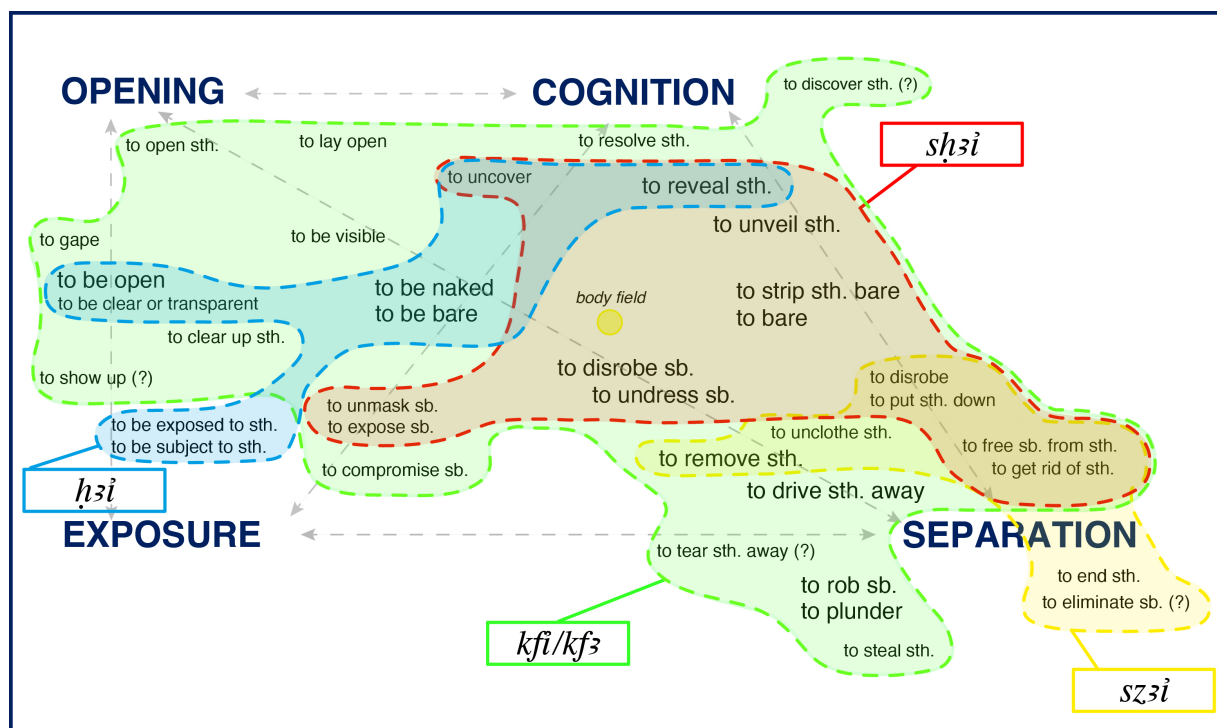


Fig. 4: Conceptual field associated with nudity/nakedness structured by the four semantic domains [OPENING], [COGNITION], [SEPARATION] and [EXPOSURE]; indication of semantic areas of the verbs *kfi/kf3*, *h3i*, *sh3i* and *sz3i* within this space.

quantitative computational approach but from a qualitative analysis. Thus, the visualisation of this part of the ancient Egyptian lexicon, as well as the position of the single nodes, represent tentative approximations. Coloured lines indicate the boundaries of the respective lexemes in the semantic space.

As the analysis has shown, the examined lexemes and their English equivalents move on specific axes, whose poles are composed of the superordinate semantic domains [OPENING], [COGNITION], [SEPARATION] and [EXPOSURE]. A semantic domain is an abstract unit in which readings/meanings of the lexemes are clustered, thus sharing commonalities in their semantic use.

The 'body field' is dominated by the verbs *kfi/kf3*, *sh3i* and *h3i*. These lexemes are used both to describe the state of being nude/naked and to express the action of undressing or unveiling. In the studied texts, not only human or human-like beings and their body parts were addressed but references to animals were also made. Here, the body parts which are often described as being undressed or nude/naked include the head (*dp*) and the face (*hr*), but also, for example, the teeth (*jbh.w*), the extremities (*ꜥ*, *qꜥh*, *rmn*; *ms.t*, *mn.tj*) and parts of the abdomen (*ph.tj*, *k3.t*), as well as internal body parts, such as the heart (*jb*). The evaluation and contextual meaning of nudity/nakedness can have positive or negative connotations depending on the body part and the conceptualisations associated with it. The spectrum of meanings ranges from activity, dynamism, vitality, power, revelation, and initiation to poverty, helplessness, deprivation, liminality, and weakness (see in more detail [SEROVA](#), 2025).

In the semantic domain [OPENING], the lexemes *kfi/kf3* and *h3i* are predominant. *h3i* as a stative verb often stands for the result of the described action, which consists of 'standing/lying open' or 'being clear/transparent'. Such a use of *h3i* was attested marginally with abstract nouns such as *hrw* 'day' (e.g. pLondon BM EA 10477, 9–10) or *mw* 'water' (e.g. S1C, Cairo CG 28118 with CT VI, 207e–g [586]). In both cases, *h3i* 'to be naked' in its use as 'to be clear' refers to the revelation, perception and thus cognitive understanding of

inherent and normally not visible elements. For example, in the context of *Coffin Texts*, ‘naked water’ as an expression means transparency and thereby the visibility or perceptibility of the beings (such as potentially dangerous animals) located in the water. In this sense, *kfi/kfj* and *hʿi* can be used to create references to the perceptibility and visibility of things (see [COGNITION]). This means that the opening, i.e. disclosure and revelation of things and objects, can be linked to their visibility and cognitive perception. *kfi/kfj* in the domain [OPENING] is mainly used actively with readings such as ‘to make sth. clear’, ‘to open sth.’ or simply ‘to gape’. The reading ‘to clear sth. up’ (cf. [SEPARATION]), especially in relation to *p.t* ‘sky’ is already attested in the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom¹⁵ and expands later to *šn(.yt)* ‘storm clouds’,¹⁶ attested from the New Kingdom onwards. The reading of *kfi/kfj* ‘to open sth.’ was first observed in the Second Intermediate Period within the medical manuscript pEdwin Smith (pNew York AoM 217), especially in the sense of ‘to gape’ in relation to wounds and injuries. In the meaning of ‘to open’, *kfi/kfj* was later used twice within one and the same text document in Dynasty 19, namely the *Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days*.¹⁷

The area [COGNITION] is covered by the verbs *kfi/kfj*, *shʿi* and *hʿi*. The main matter in this semantic domain is the ‘revealing’ of secrets or other things not otherwise externally perceptible, which are brought outside and thus made visible or accessible (e.g. internal processes, qualities, or characteristics). The term [COGNITION] describes the concept of learning, cognitive understanding and recognition which is evoked by the process of unveiling or uncovering. For example, in some texts, the physical exposure of certain body parts (e.g. the head or face) relates to the ability to see and be seen, thus perception and information processing. Such a usage context is attested with the verb *kfi/kfj*, which, in addition to the reading ‘to clarify (a matter)’, holds the meanings ‘to find out sth. unknown/hidden’, ‘to discover’ or ‘to suddenly notice sth./sb.’.

In the semantic domain [SEPARATION], the verbs *kfi/kfj*, *szʿi*, and marginally *shʿi* are attested. These lexemes overlap, especially in their readings such as ‘to free sb. from sth.’, ‘to discard sth.’, and ‘to remove sth.’. The verb *szʿi* additionally shows a use as ‘to settle (a dispute); to end’ with respect to objects like *jzft* ‘falsehood’ and *hnn.w* ‘turmoil’ (e.g. PT 229, §229a–c, Wenis). In turn, *kfi/kfj* can also be used to express actions like ‘to plunder; to rob; to steal sth.’ (e.g. *Sinuhe*, pBerlin ÄM 3022 + pAmherst, fragm. M–Q, 145–146) and ‘to rob sb.’ in the sense of violent appropriation of the property of others. Also, in numerous documents, *kfi/kfj* shows the reading ‘to remove; to drive away sth.’, which the verb partly shares with *szʿi*.

The last semantic domain is [EXPOSURE] where the lexemes *kfi/kfj*, *hʿi* and *shʿi* are situated. While in *hʿi* the physical aspect still plays a role, in the sense of a body ‘being exposed to a natural element’ (e.g. *Opening of the Mouth Ritual*, scene 1, KV 17), the other two verbs focus on psychological exposure, i.e. ‘losing face’ or compromising and unmasking individuals or evil beings. As ‘to unmask; to expose sb.’, *shʿi* is clearly attested with this reading in the New Kingdom, especially in Dynasty 20 (tTurin CGT 58004, 1–2). This also holds true for *kfi/kfj* with the reading ‘to expose; to compromise sb.’.

4 Discussion

The above-presented conceptual field of nudity/nakedness based on four verbs (Section 3, Figure 4) brings detailed insights into the organisation of a small part of the ancient Egyptian lexicon by showing semantic overlaps between the lexemes and associated areas (‘semantic domains’) where these lexemes are partially synonymous. Although the number of studied lexemes (four in total) is low and their attestations (906 in total) are statistically irrelevant as they represent only a marginal and limited part of the lexicon, the insights gained can be considered as epistemologically exemplary and methodologically innovative for lexicographic

¹⁵For one of the earliest attestations of the expression *kfi/kfj p.t*, see, e.g. the (auto-)biographical inscription by Htj II. (*Siut* IV, l. 10–11; FIP): DZA 30.587.030; EDEL (1984: 67–187, esp. 185).

¹⁶See e.g. the so-called *Israel-Stela* (Cairo CG 34025, l. 2–3; Dynasty 19): DZA 30.587.210; KITCHEN (1982: 12–19, l. 10).

¹⁷See pCairo JE 86637, *rto* 20, 3–4 and 26, 10–11; LEITZ (1994: 285–286, esp. 285 with fn. a, 104 with fn. e); LEITZ (1994: pl. 26, l. 10–11 and pl. 74, l. 3–4).

and lexicological research within Egyptology.¹⁸

The potential of the modelling of the lexicon as a multidimensional or multifactorial network highlights the role and complexity of relations between the studied entities (lexemes) and thus shifts the focus from meticulous and evitable lexicographical or lexical examinations of single terms to a more holistic understanding of lexis and language use in context. Furthermore, this network is expandable by the inclusion and addition of other neighbouring semantic domains which are associated with other linguistic concepts and areas of the lexicon; therefore, it can provide an alternative perspective on the organisation of related lexemes. The resulting network can also be used for mapping antonymous relations between lexemes, as the semantic domains allow both the attribution of antonyms and synonyms (cf. [SEROVA](#), 2025).

However, some limiting aspects of this approach should also be noted. First, the conceptual field presented here (Figure 4) was not created by means of a quantitative approach as it is often done in modern linguistics (e.g. multi-dimensional approaches, [BIBER](#), 1992: 331; concerning semantic maps see e.g. [GEORGAKOPOULOS](#) and [POLIS](#), 2022 and [CROFT](#), 2022). Such approaches in Egyptology would not only require a specific expertise in statistics and Digital Humanities, but also full access to digital corpora with deeply annotated texts from different genres and time periods. However, these are still in the process of development and growth for Egyptological research.¹⁹ Also, as a dead language, ancient Egyptian cannot be accessed and analysed in the same way as modern languages since the historical linguistic reality is almost completely lost ([JENSET & MCGILLIVRAY](#), 2017: 37–38). Whether and to what extent such methodologies can be applied to ancient Egyptian texts still awaits a critical evaluation.

As a second limitation, the visualisation (Figure 4) does not illustrate diachronic change of the lexemes, as it shows all attested meanings and readings of the verbs simultaneously. This is not unproblematic because the continuity vs alterity of semantic meanings and related body conceptualisations cannot be represented by means of this model (cf. Section 1.1).²⁰ The strength of the conceptual field, which is expandable by inclusion of further semantic domains, lies in showing the possible context-dependent semantic uses of the studied lexemes in their full range.

The third aspect relates to the general translation issue: there is an inherent bias within the methodological approach of semantic mapping when used in an interlingual context (e.g. [HASPELMATH](#), 2003: 217), that is the translation of lexemes and associated sememes from one language to another—the core task of interlingual lexicography ([HARTMANN](#), 2007; [MALMKJÆR](#), 2018). The issue of translation equivalence is even more problematic when dealing with a dead language such as ancient Egyptian (for further reading see [IMHAUSEN](#) and [POMMERENING](#), 2016: 1–5; [POMMERENING](#), 2016: 176–177, 184–187, esp. 187; [HOFFMANN](#), 2016: 337–339, 341–342).

Nevertheless, the conceptual field presented here provides valuable insights into an area of the ancient Egyptian lexicon, as the visualised relations between lexemes and their meanings are not detached from

¹⁸In current Egyptological research, there are several comparable studies on lexical and conceptual fields, in the form of ongoing or completed doctoral theses (e.g. [JENKINS](#), 2022 on ‘sadness’; [KÖHLER](#), 2016 on ‘rage’; [EICKE](#), 2015 on ‘fear’; [STEINBACH](#), 2015 on verbs of perception; B. Böhm on verbs of stealing and appropriation). These works indicate a stronger interest in the modelling of ancient Egyptian vocabulary and its cognitive-semantic comprehension by means of theories and modern methodologies from linguistics, philology, and lexical studies; for an evaluation and theoretical discussion of the possibilities of lexical field research in Egyptology, see, e.g. [BUTT](#) (2011: 49–59); [HAFEMANN](#) (2011: 103); [KÖHLER](#) (2011: esp. 128).

¹⁹The updated and revised version of the database *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* ([TLA](#), corpus version 19, web-app-version 2.2.1.1, 6 March 2023, last access: 29 July 2025) was first launched in autumn 2022. It offers all texts from the old *TLA* ([TLA](#), corpus version 16, 31 October 2014, last access: 29 July 2025)—with the exception of the Edfu texts—plus all texts that were edited and finished between 2015 and 2022. However, not all query functions are implemented yet in the web app versions 2.0.x. More functionalities will be implemented and added during the next years. In addition, there are plans to publish the raw corpus data in format. As for the database *Ramses Online* for Late Egyptian texts, currently accessible in its beta version ([RO](#), last access: 29 July 2025), it continues to grow, as existent texts are currently revised in terms of quality and more textual material and attestations are about to be included into the corpus. I would like to express my gratitude to Daniel A. Werning for providing this information.

²⁰For a detailed description of the diachronic change of the semantic meanings of the studied lexemes, see [SEROVA](#) (2025).

the objects they refer to in the lived reality and the empirical experiences with bodies and corporealities (cf. Figure 3, see Section 3). As for ancient Egyptian body conceptualisations, the semantic domains of the lexemes identified by a close reading of the texts provide a deeper understanding of the emic conceptualisation of (un)dressing events and of the body itself—whether royal, divine, human, animal, abstract or precise, animate or inanimate. Furthermore, such an approach to texts referring to the unclothed body and beyond opens new perspectives to the interpretation of the manifold pictorial representations of the body and its material culture surviving from ancient Egypt (cf. Examples 1 and 2 in Section 2.3).

5 Conclusion

This contribution has dealt with conceptualisations of ancient Egyptian bodies as relational entities in a dynamic conceptual field. Exemplified on the basis of nudity/nakedness, bodies as a research subject were approached by means of an examination of ancient Egyptian written texts with a focus on semantics and meaning making. The use of language—that is, naming and designating entities (e.g. people, things, places) and putting them in relation to each other as subjects or objects in specific settings—is understood here as a means of referring and expressing inter- and intra-subjective body conditions and activities or processes. Such an instantiation of a relation between relata by language use, e.g. by applying specific terminologies, contributes to the social negotiation and construction of bodies. Thus, when dealing with an extinct culture as an archaeologist or a scholar of ancient studies, there is a natural tension when describing the other body by means of vocabulary derived from modern languages such as English or German. This is because these come with their own cultural and zeitgeist connotations that run the risk of being transferred onto the ancient material.

In this paper, these issues concerning concepts of nudity/nakedness in ancient Egypt have been discussed by means of two case studies. By studying selected lexemes (*ḥꜥ*, *šꜥꜥ*, *szꜥ*, and *kꜥ*/*kꜥ*) which are diachronically attested in a wide range of ancient Egyptian texts (Table 2), linguistic references to the unclothed body and related processes were collected and contextualised within a lexical conceptual field (Figure 4). The resulting conceptual field is a relational visualisation of a marginal part of ancient Egyptian vocabulary, represented by translation of linguistic expressions into a modern target language.

For illustrative purposes, one textual (Example 1) and one visual example (Example 2, Figure 2) from the Ramesside period were presented in order to evaluate possible perspectives on the nude/naked body and the concept of [EXPOSURE].

The result of this study was an innovative mapping of semantic values of four selected ancient Egyptian verbs moving within a large lexical relational network, structured by four semantic domains, namely [OPENING], [COGNITION], [SEPARATION], and [EXPOSURE]. The semantic analysis has shown that the studied verbs used to express the state of nudity/nakedness or undressing/unveiling events move on specific axes between these domains and occupy their distinct semantic space (Figure 4). Also, it became evident that the contextual use and meaning of the four verbs is highly dependent on the text type, the co-text, the situational context of the action, and the body part involved.

In this sense, a relational network (bodies in their specific socio-cultural, temporal, spatial, contextual settings) associated with emic attributions and expressed by specific linguistic means (vocabulary) was described by means of a semantic conceptual field using etic terminologies. The approach proposed here allows cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparisons to deepen the understanding of ancient Egyptian bodies as historical and diachronic entities.

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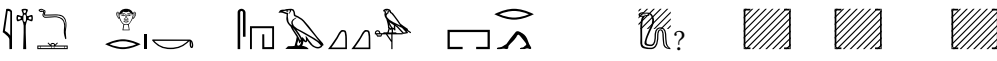
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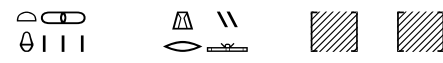
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A Appendix

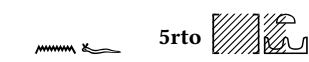
1rto 
j:nd **hr:k** **Sh:qq** **pri** **m-** **[p.t]** **[jr.tj]** **[ʃf]**
 hail:IMP face(M)[SG] PN come:RES[-3SG.M] from= sky-F eye-DU.F =3SG.M
Hail to you, Saturated-Devourer (Sehaqeq), who came from [the sky], [whose eyes]

2rto 
m- **db.t** **ʃf** **[ns]** **ʃf** **m-** **ʀ.t** **ʃf**
 in= head-F =3SG.M tongue(M)[SG] =3SG.M in= arse-F =3SG.M
are in his head, whose [tongue] is in his arse,


wnm **ʃf** **m-** **tʰ.w** **hr.i** **[jm]** **[ʃf]**
 eat:PFV =3SG.M from= bread-COLL under:ADVZ with =3SG.M
so that he can only eat bread [with it] from below.


[hpš] **ʃf** **jmn.i** **m-** **d:i** **hr-** **jr.t** **ʃf** **wp.t(j)**
 forearm(M)[SG] =3SG.M right:M.SG in= cross:INF over= eye-F =3SG.M divide:RES
[His] right [forearm] crosses over his field of vision, which is (thus) divided.


n: **sb:~w** **(hr-)** **dg:** **ʀnh** **ʃf** **m-** **d[bn.w]**
 ART:PL star-M.PL on= see:INF live:INF =3SG.M from= round_excrement-M.PL
The stars (deities) see that he lives on d[roppings].

4rto 
[nb]-št:~w **m-** **p.t** **rs.ı(t)** **snd** **n:f** **[jm.ı-hr.t-ntr]**
 lord=of=secrets-COLL in= sky-F south(F) fear:REL(M) of=3SG.M in:ADJ.Z.M.SG=necropolis-F
[Oh, Lord] of Secrets in the Southern Sky, whom [the inhabitant of the necropolis] fears!

Ndr-sh-mj-mm **6rto** **[rn]** **[n-]** **[mw.t]** **[ʃk]**
 PN name(M)[SG] of= mother-F =2SG.M
The-one-who-picks-excrements-like-grains (Nedjersekhmimem) [is the name of your mother],

[Dw]-bš.t **rn** **n-** **[jt]** **[ʃk]**
 PN name(M)[SG] of= father-(M)[SG] =2SG.M
Mount-barf (Djubesht) is the name of [your father]!










[jr] **[jy]** **[≠k]** **[r-]** **[mn]** **ms** **n-** **mn**
 COND come:SBJV =2SG.M against= so-and-so born:RES by- so-and-so
[If you should come after NN] born by NN,








[jw] **[sj]** **[r-]** **[pri]** **[k-h:t]** **[≠k]**
 SBRD =1SG to= come_out:INF Ka(M)[SG]=corpse-F =2SG.M
[then I will go (against) your 'corpse-k']?







[.wj] **≠k** **w:i.w** **[r≠k]**
 arm-DU.M =2SG.M be_far_away:RES[-3PL] from=2SG.M
[so that] your [arms are] far away [from you].













[nn] **[h:]y** **≠sn** **hr≠j** **jnk** **.wj** **≠sn** **h:-** **kr**
 NEG fall:SBJV =3PL on=1SG 1SG arm-DU.M =3PL around= shrine(M)[SG]
They [cannot affect] me, not me after all! Their hands are placed around the 'shrine'!
















dd-mdw **hr-** **mḥ.w** **n-** **wḏ.w** **jr.w** **m-** **ḥ:**
 recitation(M)[SG] over= flax-M.PL of= plant_bast-M.PL form:RES-3PL as= arrow(M)[SG]
Recitation over flax fibers of raffia shaped into an arrow [...],
















[...] **r-** **p:** **rmt** **j:rd** **n≠f** **t'.w** **hr.i** **[...]**
 [...] against= ART:M.SG man(M)[SG] give:PTCP(M:SG) to=3SG.M bread-COLL under:ADVZ [...]
against someone to whom bread is given from below [...].