Coptic (Afro-Asiatic) is the last stage of the Ancient Egyptian language. The grammar of Coptic is still poorly described. Of the two main literary varieties of Coptic, viz. Sahidic and Bohairic, only Sahidic has a reference grammar that meets contemporary linguistic standards (Reintges 2004). This contribution is devoted to the other variety, Bohairic. It is based on my original research of a single corpus of narrative texts, Hyvernat (1886/1977) and is a part of my larger research project on Bohairic linguistics. The verb ti ‘give’ in Bohairic Coptic is highly polysemous, which becomes apparent from the different translational equivalents of the particular occurrences of this verb, for instance ‘give’, ‘donate’, ‘deliver’, ‘entrust’ and even ‘put’. These differences in meaning obviously involve departures from the prototypical semantic characteristics of a ditransitive situation. The verb ti can for example denote a transfer which does not result in the possession on the part of the recipient, a non-purposeful transfer or a transfer to an inanimate or non-individuated recipient. The relative position on the animacy scale of all three participants concerned (the agent, theme and recipient/goal) and their relative ‘topic worthiness’ can also play a role. Formally some of these differences are reflected in the marking of the third participant by means of different prepositions: the dedicated ‘dative’ preposition n-, the allative e-, other prepositions or prepositional compounds (semi-fixed constructions), as in the following example:

phē eta-f-erpe-ki-ti nōten n-tai eksousia
DEM.SG.M REL-3SG.M-also-give DAT.2PL ACC-DEF.SG.F power
nthof eth-na-ol-s nten=thēnou
he REL-FUT-withdraw-3SG.F from=2PL
nte-f-tēi-s e-ke-ouai
CONJ-3SG.M-give-SG.F ALL-other-one
’(Christ, the true God) who also has given this power to you (…), it is him who will withdraw it from you (…) and give it to another one’ (AM, 211).

Besides, the verb ti can be a basis of light verb constructions with nouns designating a speech act. In this way a distinct class of performative and persuasive verbs is obtained whose valency is different from that of the originally three-place predicate ti:

ti n-t-apophasis n-… vs. ti-apophasis e-…
give ACC-WDEF.F-verdict DAT-… sentence ALL-…
‘to pronounce the verdict on… (litt. for …)’ vs. ‘to sentence ... (litt. to ...)’

In this paper the various uses of ti will be systematically presented and discussed from a functional-typological and cognitive perspective, in line with for instance Malchukov Haspelmath & Comrie (eds., 2010); Van Lier (fc); Newman (ed., 1998); Dabrowska (1997). The aim of the paper is twofold: first, to arrive at a better understanding of an important subset of Coptic language facts, still largely unexplored, secondly, to situate these facts within a broader range of typologically comparable phenomena.

References

