Information structuring in Beja (North-Cushitic)

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Abstract
Beja (North-Cushitic) displays several encoding strategies for the expression of information structuring, from prosodic marking to argumentative connectors, object pronouns, enclitic morphemes on either verbs or nouns, or clause chaining types. On the basis of naturalistic data that I recorded in Sudan, this presentation will discuss the various strategies used: (i) the role of prosody (pitch contours, intonation unit boundaries and pauses) for the identification of argument topics, antitopics and afterthoughts (ex.1); (ii) the emphatic assertive particle =i=a which applies to verbs and the copula (ex.2); (iii) the contrastive particle (=)na/(=)ni which contrasts two clauses or a clause and a presupposition, and highlight an unexpected event (ex.3); (iv) the argumentative connectors geː / geːn and haːjloː (ex. 4 & 5); (v) the scalar additive focus particle han ‘also’ (ex. 6); (vi) the ‘phatic’ use (in the sense of Jacobson) of the 2SG object enclitic pronoun and the 2SG dative independent pronoun (ex. 7); (vii) the use of the 3PL perfective of the verb di ‘say’ as a marker of the end of a discursive sequence (ex. 8); (viii) tail-head linkage (ex. 9).

Remarkably Beja does not use the cleft strategy. A cultural explanation to this lack will be discussed in the light of the highly valued role of headless relative clauses as an allusive device.

Examples

(1) oːn PROX.SG.M.ACC oː=jhə:m DEF.SG.M.ACC=leopard / 672
   aːlady-tiː:t tease-CVB.SEQ dh=ok DIR=PROP.2SG.ACC tikʷ=i=hoːb go_down-AOR.3SG.M=when
   ti-nʔi=ja i-ndi 2SG-hit/IMPV-M 3SG.M-say/IFP say/IFP.3PL
   ‘After you’ve teased the leopard, when it comes down towards you, will you hit it? he says’

(2) afirej horrible tak=u=i man=COP.3SG=EMPH
   ‘He was really a horrible man.’
(3)  \[t=ʔi:bə=b=t=un \quad da:jə:b \quad ʔanki:r=ɛ:k\]
\[
\text{DEF.F-trip=INDF.F-Poss.1PL.NOM} \quad \text{good be_strong/IPFV.3SG.M}=\text{if}
\]
\[
\text{na bara:} \quad \text{han awwal}=i: \quad \text{i-ra:k}^{\omega}
\]
\[
\text{CONTR 3SG.M.NOM} \quad \text{also first=ABL.SG} \quad \text{FUT.3G-be_afraid=INT}
\]
\[
i-ndi
\]
\[
\text{3SG.M-may/IPFV}
\]
\[
\text{‘If our case (lit. our trip) was really good, first of all he would have been afraid.’}
\]

(4)  \[<\text{bani ʔa:dam}> \quad \text{han bi}=i-hass-\text{ej}\]
\[
<\text{bani ʔa:dam}> \quad \text{also NEG.OPT}=3SG.M-pass-OPT=COORD
\]
\[
\text{‘A human being cannot even pass!’}
\]

(5)  \[\text{bass ibaki:} \quad \text{dh}=e: \quad \text{jhak-i} \quad \text{ge:}
\]
\[
\text{only necessarily DIR=POS.1SG.ACC get_up-IMP.SG.F DM}
\]
\[
<\text{daral}r\text{t}> \quad \text{t}=\text{hala}gaj \quad \text{ho:k} \quad \text{a-bari}
\]
\[
<\text{must}> \quad \text{DEF.F=word\pl 2SG.DAT 1SG-have/IPFV}
\]
\[
\text{‘You must get up for me, as a matter of fact I have something to tell you.’}
\]

(6)  \[\text{ha:jlo:} \quad \text{ba}:=\text{g}=\text{abi} \quad \text{a-ra}:\text{fa}=\text{fid}
\]
\[
\text{DM NEG.PROH=pay_attention\CVB.SMLT 1SG-raise\INT=PLAC.PFV}
\]
\[
\text{‘Anyway, without paying attention, I raised it.’}
\]

(7)  \[\text{i}=\text{xartu:m}=\text{wa} \quad \text{winne:t} \quad \text{ho:k}
\]
\[
\text{DEF.M=Khartoum=COORD very 2SG.DAT}
\]
\[
\text{madi:na}=t \quad \text{bi}=t-kaj=i \quad \text{do:r}
\]
\[
\text{town=INDF.F NEG.OPT=3SG.F-becom\OPT=REL time}
\]
\[
\text{‘Khartoum, and (cities like that), was not a big city at that time.’}
\]

(8)  \[\text{tak} \quad \text{i}=\text{fi}=\text{ejt} \quad \text{// hi:re:r-e:} \quad \text{//}
\]
\[
\text{man 3SG.M-be_there\AOR=COORD walk-CVB.SMLT}
\]
\[
\text{u:n} \quad \text{u:}=\text{tak} \quad \text{// k}=\text{ak}=\text{ar}=t \quad \text{//}
\]
\[
\text{PROX.3SG.M.NOM DEF.SG.M.NOM=man adder=INDF.F}
\]
\[
\text{tambal?a:j} \quad \text{// sank}=t \quad \text{rhi-i}ni \quad \text{e:n} \quad ///
\]
\[
\text{lizard hunt\PFV.3SG.M}=\text{REL.F see}\PFV.3SG.M DM}
\]
\[
\text{‘There was a man, and while he was walking, this man, he sees an adder that was hunting a lizard.’}
\]

(9)  \[\text{kass-a:n} \quad \text{ga:t} \quad \text{k}=\text{inh-a} \quad \text{ho:j} \quad \text{k}=\text{inh-i}ni
\]
\[
\text{all-POSS.1PL.NOM one\F cry ABL.3 cry\AOR.1PL}
\]
\[
\text{e}=\text{d-na}=\text{a}:t \quad \text{kass-a:} \quad \text{ga:t} \quad \text{k}=\text{inh-a} \quad \text{ho:j}
\]
\[
\text{3-say\PFV.3PL-COORD all-POSS.3PL.NOM one\F cry ABL.3}
\]
\[
\text{k}=\text{inh-e:n}=\text{ho:b} \quad \text{a}=\text{nda} \quad \text{g}=\text{har-a-na}=\text{b}=\text{a:jt}
\]
\[
\text{cry\PFV.3PL=when DEF.PL.M.NOM=man\PL steal-N.AGN-INDF.M.ACC-CSL}
\]
\[
\text{ako:} \quad \text{da:b-e:ti}
\]
\[
\text{become\CVB.SMLT run\CVB.GNRL}
\]
\[
\text{‘All together, let’s scream one scream! they said, and when all together they scream one scream, the men, since they are burglars, set up running and…’}
\]

**Abbreviations**

(not in the Leipzig glossing rules)

/ minor prosodic boundary; // major prosodic boundary; <bani ʔa:dam>: codeswitching with Arabic ; 672: length of pause in ms ; AOR: aorist; CONTR: contrastive particle; COORD: coordination; CSL: causal particle; CVB.GNRL: general converb; CVB.SEQ: sequential converb; CVB.SMLT: simultaneity converb; DIR: directional; DM: discourse marker; EMPH: emphatic particle; INT: intensive; N.AGN: a gent noun; OPT: optative; PLAC: pluractional.