

# Information structuring in Beja (North-Cushitic)

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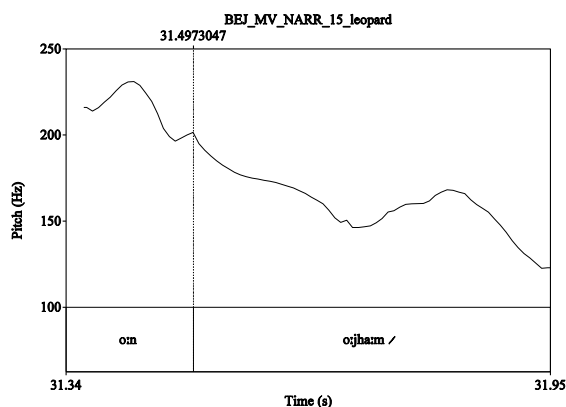
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## Abstract

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  $ge:$  /  $ge:n$  and  $ha:jlo:$  (ex. 4 & 5); (v) the scalar additive focus particle  $han$  ‘also’ (ex. 6); (vi) the “phatic” use (in the sense of Jakobson) 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)  $o:n$                      $o:=jha:m$                     / 672  
PROX.SG.M.ACC    DEF.SG.M.ACC=leopard
- $a:lady-e:ti:t$      $dh=o:k$                      $tik^w-i=ho:b$                     / 318  
tease-CVB.SEQ    DIR=POSS.2SG.ACC    go\_down-AOR.3SG.M=when
- $ti-nf?i-ja$              $i-ndi$                      $e:n$                     //  
2SG-hit\IPFV-M    3SG.M-say\IPFV    say\PFV.3PL  
‘After you’ve teased the leopard, when it comes down towards you, will you hit it? he says’



- (2)  $afirej$              $tak=u=i$   
horrible    man=COP.3SG=EMPH  
‘He was really a horrible man.’

- (3) *t=ʔi:ba:b=t=u:n*                      *da:je:b*    *ʔanki:r=e:k*  
 DEF.F=trip=INDF.F=POSS.1PL.NOM      good              be\_strong\IPFV.[3SG.M]=if  
*na baru: han awwal=i: i-ra:k<sup>w</sup>*  
 CONTR 3SG.M.NOM also first=ABL.SG FUT.SG-be\_afraid\INT  
*i-ndi*  
 3SG.M-say\IPFV  
 ‘If our case (lit. our trip) was really good, first of all he would have been afraid.’
- (4) <*bani ʔa:dam*> *han bi=i-hass-ej*  
 <bani ʔa:dam> also NEG.OPT=3SG.M-pass-OPT=COORD  
 ‘A human being cannot even pass!’
- (5) *bass ibaki: dh=e: jhak-i ge:*  
 only necessarily DIR=POSS.1SG.ACC get\_up-IMP.SG.F DM  
 <*daru:ri*> *t=hala:gaj ho:k a-bari*  
 <must> DEF.F=word\PL 2SG.DAT 1SG-have\IPFV  
 ‘You must get up for me, as a matter of fact I have something to tell you.’
- (6) *ha:jlo: ba:=g<sup>w</sup>abi a-ra:ʃa~fid*  
 DM NEG.PROH=pay\_attention\CVB.SMLT 1SG-raise\INT~PLAC.PFV  
 ‘Anyway, without paying attention, I raised it.’
- (7) *i=xartu:m=wa winne:t ho:k*  
 DEF.M=Khartoum=COORD very 2SG.DAT  
*madi:na=t bi=t-ka:j=i do:r*  
 town=INDF.F NEG.OPT=3SG.F-becom\OPT=REL time  
 ‘Khartoum, and (cities like that), was not a big city at that time.’
- (8) *tak i:-ʃi=ejt / hi:re:r-e: /*  
 man 3SG.M-be\_there\AOR=COORD walk-CVB.SMLT  
*u:n u:=tak / k<sup>w</sup>ak<sup>w</sup>ar=t /*  
 PROX.SG.M.NOM DEF.SG.M.NOM=man adder=INDF.F  
*tambalʔa:j / sank<sup>wi</sup>=t rhi-i:ni e:n //*  
 lizard hunt\IPFV.[3SG.M]=REL.F see-IPFV.3SG.M DM  
 ‘There was a man, and while he was walking, this man, he sees an adder that was hunting a lizard.’
- (9) *kass-a:n ga:t k<sup>w</sup>inha ho:j k<sup>w</sup>inhi-ni*  
 all-POSS.1PL.NOM one\F cry ABL.3 cry-AOR.1PL  
*e:-d-na=a:t kass-a: ga:t k<sup>w</sup>inha ho:j*  
 3-say\IPFV.PL-COORD all-POSS.3PL.NOM one\F cry ABL.3  
*k<sup>w</sup>inh-e:n=ho:b a:=nda g<sup>w</sup>har-a:na=b=a:jt*  
 cry\IPFV.3PL=when DEF.PL.M.NOM=man\PL steal-N.AGN-INDF.M.ACC-CSL  
*ako: ʔa:b-e:ti*  
 become\CVB.SMLT run-CVB.GNRL  
 ‘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.