# Information structuring in Beja (North-Cushitic)

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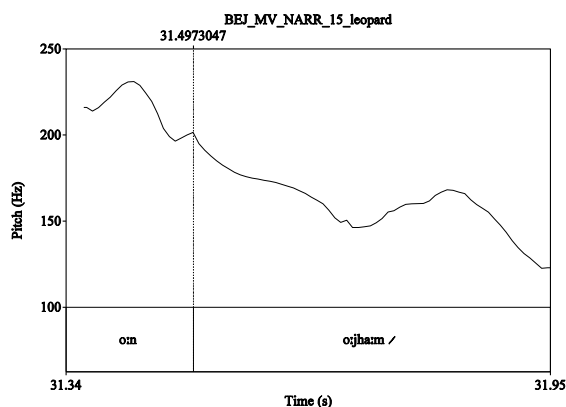
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## Abstract

Beja (North-Cushitic) displays several encoding strategies for the expression of information structuring, from prosodic marking to argumentative connetors, object pronouns, enclitic morphemes on either verbs or nouns, or clause chaing 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 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)  *o:n*　　　　*o:=jha:m*　　　　　/　*672*
PROX.SG.M.ACC　DEF.SG.M.ACC=leopard

*a:ladʒ-e:ti:t*　*dh=o:k*　　　*tikʷ-i=ho:b*　　　　　/　*318*
tease-CVB.SEQ　DIR=POSS.2SG.ACC　go_down-AOR.3SG.M=when

*ti-nʈʔi-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=Ɂi:ba:b=t=u:n*　　　　　　*da:je:b*　　*Ɂanki: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:kʷ*
　　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 Ɂa:dam>*　*han*　*bi=i-hass-ej*
　　<bani Ɂa: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:=gʷabi*　　　　　　*a-ra:ʃa~ʃid*
　　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
　　'Kharthoum, and (cities like that), was not a big city at that time.'

(8)  *tak*　*i:-fi=ejt*　　　　　/　*hi:re:r-e:*　　/
　　man　3SG.M-be_there\AOR=COORD　　walk-CVB.SMLT

　　*u:n*　　　　*u:=tak*　　　/　*kʷakʷar=t*　/
　　PROX.SG.M.NOM　DEF.SG.M.NOM=man　adder=INDF.F

　　*tambalɁa:j*　/　*sankʷi=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*　*kʷinha*　*ho:j*　*kʷinhi-ni*
　　all-POSS.1PL.NOM　one\F　cry　　ABL.3　cry-AOR.1PL

　　*e:-d-na=a:t*　　　*kass-a:*　　　*ga:t*　*kʷinha*　*ho:j*
　　3-say\IPFV.PL-COORD　all-POSS.3PL.NOM　one\F　cry　　ABL.3

　　*kʷinh-e:n=ho:b*　*a:=nda*　　　　*gʷhar-a:na=b=a:jt*
　　cry\IPFV.3PL=when　DEF.PL.M.NOM=man\PL　steal-N.AGN-INDF.M.ACC-CSL

　　*ako:*　　　　*ɖa: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 Ɂa: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.