

# Beja Narratives: Pursuit of Participants and Analysis of Aspects

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## SOMMARIO

Questo articolo si occupa di alcune proprietà del discorso in begia (Beja) e, più in particolare, di due problemi riguardanti i racconti. In che maniera vengono usati dal narratore begia i diversi aspetti per articolare una storia e far sì che le sue diverse fasi si susseguano in maniera scorrevole? E in che maniera ne vengono da lui introdotti e caratterizzati i diversi partecipanti in maniera da distinguere con chiarezza le loro diverse identità?

Al fine di illustrare questi problemi sono stati scelti tre racconti begia, tutti e tre sufficientemente brevi da poter essere qui riportati nella loro interezza. Essi possiedono la classica “unità di tempo, luogo e azione” e, pur nel loro carattere aneddotico, forniscono esempi degli ideali begia di coraggio, magnanimità e rispetto di sé. I testi vengono presentati come partiture musicali, così da mostrare i profili separati delle categorie più rilevanti: soggetto, oggetto e aspetto verbale.

Inoltre l’articolo fornisce nuovi dati riguardo a due noti problemi linguistici: come vengono impiegati dal begia l’imperfetto afroasiatico per esprimere un perfetto narrativo, e il caso cuscitico dell’oggetto per indicare il soggetto?

Here we have a real ocean of facts - given the comparison of these manifold relations of Time and Space and Entities - [Oh that] a learned philosopher would reduce them to some simple rules and common classes!

J. G. Hamann 1760

## Participants and Aspects

A narrative - more than other types of discourse - is a rich and complex web of linguistic relations - and it may be impossible to disentangle all of its relations in all of its layers. A narrator, as he or she starts to talk, steps outside reality to build a different world. This world has its own rules, rules about how times move on, how

locations change, how participants appear and leave the stage, and how their activities relate to the rest of the world. The entire narrative hangs together as a complex web of entities and events.

As far as the identification of participants and the progression of narrative time is concerned, every language uses its grammar in its own particular ways. In these regards, SOV languages have certain rules in common, and Cushitic SOV languages even more so. But Beja - as an SOV language from a distinct Cushitic branch<sup>1</sup> - has its own ways of building narratives.

The two topics of this article<sup>2</sup> - “participants” and “aspects” - were chosen not only because they are two central concepts for the understanding of narratives structures. As far as Beja is concerned, they are of special interest, since this language uses the aspects paradigms<sup>3</sup> and the participant cases<sup>4</sup> not in the way other Afro-Asiatic languages do. Concerning the cases of participant NPs, linguists have complained as early as in the 1880s that Beja speakers do not distinguish Subject and Object cases “properly”, even though the language would have the appropriate case suffixes to do so.<sup>5</sup> Concerning the use of Aspects or Tenses, it has been noted that what looks like a good “Imperfect” in other Afro-Asiatic languages is used as the “Perfect” in Beja. This has caused a great deal of discussion,<sup>6</sup> different explanations have been offered, but none seems to have found general acceptance.

The present article investigates these two discourse properties - verbal aspects and nominal cases - in the context of narratives, and the narratives are quoted full length.

## Time, place and functions of Beja narratives

While in the Beja culture the time for songs and poems is at special festive occasions such as weddings or naming ceremonies, the time for narratives is any “leisure” time. Leisure and “leisureliness” have been identified as the Beja “ethos underlying most of their material life”.<sup>7</sup> A special, “marked” leisure period is afforded by the coffee ritual”, which “takes up to one and a quarter hours”.<sup>8</sup> Beja meal times are quick and silent, but the Beja *jabanaat*, i.e. the “time of coffee drinking”, “is the only activity that allows ... to relax and socialize at the same time.”<sup>9</sup>

This is the time when *sakanaab* or “news” are exchanged, when differences are settled,<sup>10</sup> and when stories or anecdotes are told such as those presented in this article.

<sup>1</sup> Beja, which in spite of some uncertainties usually is classified as the only “North Cushitic” language, has the word order SOV “Subject Object Verb” as all other “Cushitic” languages.

<sup>2</sup> This article is based on a paper read at the 32nd Colloquium on African Languages and Linguistics, August 26-28, Leiden 2002. We thank Abuzeinab Musa and Charlotte Wedekind who made substantial contributions to this paper.

<sup>3</sup> As from here, the term “Aspect” will be used to cover “Tense / Aspect / Mood”. Likewise, the terms “Perfect” and “Imperfect” will be used to cover “Past / Perfect(ive)” as well as “Present / Imperfect(ive)”. Hudson (1976) prefers the terms “Past, Present”, Morin (1995) “accompli, inaccompli”.

<sup>4</sup> I.e. Subject and Object case prefixes and suffixes.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance, Almkvist (1881:64, 89), Roper (1928), vs. Wedekind and Abuzaynab (2002).

<sup>6</sup> See for instance, Voigt (1988), (1999) and Zaborski (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Ausenda (1987:523).

<sup>8</sup> Ausenda (1987:539).

<sup>9</sup> Ausenda (1987:540).

<sup>10</sup> The Beja “love palavers and councils” Ausenda (1987: 289).

In the daily routine of Beja women, drinking coffee also is of major importance. In the pattern of daily activities observed by Volker-Saad and Nejat Jabir, coffee appears four times: between 5:30 and 7 a.m., between 9 and 10 a.m., at 2 p.m., and between 6 and 8 p.m.<sup>11</sup> The place for the women to have coffee together is in the women's tent or the women's rooms.

For males, the place for having coffee together, for chatting and for teaching young boys is the *shafat* or “men's house”. “Being a communication center, the *shafat* is also the locus of the education of boys ... between age seven and ten. They will hear traditional lore from older men”.<sup>12</sup> This “lore” includes narratives as well as proverbs. Beja boys are expected to shoulder heavy responsibilities at a very young age,<sup>13</sup> and they will not necessarily be excluded from serious conversations of older men. For this reason, narratives cannot easily be divided according to young vs. adult audiences or young vs. adult narrators.

## The data

Three short anecdotal narratives have been selected to exemplify the claims made in this paper.<sup>14</sup> The genre of “narratives” was chosen, because this is the richest, most inclusive of all genres. The texts are, however, short and anecdotal, because the goal was to quote the texts in full (a difficult prerequisite for any discourse study). The data are taken from a text collection which in the early 2000s had about 50.000 words. It has been enriched considerably since then.<sup>15</sup>

The 1st and 2nd narrative were both recorded in a dialogue situation where two men talked to each other. The 3rd narrative was recorded on two occasions where one man was talking, and about a dozen Beja men were listening and responding. Only one version of the 3rd narrative will be presented here; the other is published in vol. 5 of the Beja texts collated by Mahmoud Mohammed.<sup>16</sup>

The transcription<sup>17</sup> used in this article reflects the official Eritrean orthography for “Hidareb”<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Observations in the Eritrean settlement Ad Tseada (near Teseney), March 1996, as recorded by Volker-Saad and Nejat (1996:32).

<sup>12</sup> Ausenda (1987:174).

<sup>13</sup> So also Dahl et al. (1991).

<sup>14</sup> To keep things short, the alternative would have been to choose fragments from longer narratives. This however was deemed inadequate for the present purpose.

<sup>15</sup> Especially the publication of books like “Baakwidhayt Alaama”, edited by Mahmud M. A., should be mentioned here.

<sup>16</sup> See “Mhamud w'alfalaj”, in Mahmud Mohammed Ahmed (ed.) (2005:18-19).

<sup>17</sup> In the Eritrean orthography, *dh* and *th* stand for retroflex *d* and *t*, and *sh* stands for the palatal fricative, while double letters stand for vowel length or consonant gemination. (Since Beja has no short mid high vowel “e”, this letter serves as “silent” *e*, to be inserted where *dh th sh* need to be distinguished from *d+h t+h s+h*. Pitch accent contrasts singulars and plurals in the nominal system. This is not written in the official Eritrean orthography, but here it is indicated by **bold** letters. For Beja, both the Latin script and the Arabic script are being used, but the latter orthography without official status.

<sup>18</sup> “Hidareb” is the name used for Beja in Eritrea. The self-name is *Bidhaawi-yeet* “Beja”, literally “Beja-Fem.Obj.”, of which the definite form is *Tu-Bdhaawi* “the Beja language”, literally “Def.F.Subj./Obj.- Beja”.

## Overview of the narratives

The 1st narrative, labelled “Two gifts”, is a short humorous story which may have been integrated into the Beja culture from a neighbouring culture (witness the use of some Arabic loans). The setting is a Beja village,<sup>19</sup> and the incident is taken from the everyday life of Beja women.<sup>20</sup>

The 2nd narrative, “Three gifts”, is about the behaviour of a Beja man who is not impressed by the authority of his sheikh - and about the sheikh who wisely manages to satisfy some outrageous demands. The story illustrates the Beja preoccupation with camels and their different functions (witness the specialized camel terminology).

The 3rd narrative, “Mhamud Oofaash” very strongly communicates the sense of resistance, pride, family honour, and courage - even in the face of death.<sup>21</sup> There probably is not a single Beja man who does not know this story and who cannot quote by heart what mother and uncle and son have been saying. This story obviously is based on an actual incident in a Beja community during the time of the British occupation.

## Classical categorization

Since these texts are concerned with the “representation of people in action” (mimesis praxis), some of the old Aristotelian categories<sup>22</sup> seem useful to contrast the different features of these three narratives:

### *Means of representation*

As far as the “means of presentation” are concerned, the three narratives largely are presented as “prose” - albeit prose of different degrees of rhetorical refinement. In addition, there are some patterns of phonological and semantic parallels which are close to a strict “poetic” meter.

The 1st narrative employs rhythmic and lexical parallels to build up a certain tension which finally is released in the last line (cf. lines 5, 6, 7, 13 in chart #1 below):

*To the one ... he gave ...*

*To the other ... he gave ...*

*The one started ... stretched up ... and said ...*

*The other started ... let down ... and said ... No!*

<sup>19</sup> In areas like Kom-Ombo (Egypt) or Teseney (Eritrea), the traditional Beja tents have been replaced by permanent compounds with solid walls, and “wall” is one of the Arabic loan words in this text.

<sup>20</sup> Reports on the everyday life of women are provided in Volker-Saad (1997), Jacobsen (1998) and Mohammed Ali and Wedekind, (2003).

<sup>21</sup> Palmisano (1991) enlarges on these aspects of Beja ethics.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle's treatise “*peri poietikes*” is a fragment which allows for a rough but useful distinction of three categories: 1st the “means” of mimesis (meter and style), 2nd the “Subjects” of the mimesis (virtuous, normal or vicious characters), and 3rd the “kinds” of mimesis which are identified by who speaks - namely, it is either the author himself who speaks (in the case of epos), or the actor (in the case of tragedies and comedies).

The 2nd narrative uses the repetition of een “thus people say” to maintain a steady short paced rhythm (Cf. lines 1, 6, 13, 15 etc. in chart #2 below). Apart from this, the text is pure prose.

The 3rd narrative contains several lines with a repetitive meter. One indication of the poetic status of these lines is that the wording is fixed: This narrative was recorded on different occasions - once in a seminar for Beja writers, and once in the traditional environment in the field - but the following lines were nearly identical both in wording and in intonation (Cf. lines 17, 18, 19, 22 in chart #3 below):

*A man: His grave is one.  
His deeds are many.  
Don't run, Mahmud our son,  
if you are our son!  
Don't run, Mahmud the brave,  
if you are our son!*

### ***Characters represented***

As far as the “status of the Subjects” is concerned, the heroes (or anti-heroes) of these three narratives are different. With a view to the old distinction between “virtuous” heroes of tragedies, “normal” characters of epic tales, and “vicious” anti-heroes of parodies or comedies, the participants of the three narratives can roughly be characterized as follows:

In the 1st narrative, the main actors behave like in a comedy.

In the 2nd narrative, they are “normal” everyday Beja characters of an epic tale.

In the 3rd narrative, Mahmud Oofash, the main character, is the hero of a Beja tragedy.

### ***Speech genres***

As far as the Aristotelian criterion “who speaks” is concerned, all three texts are “narratives” told by their authors. But the different persons in these narratives are quoted as if they were on the stage themselves: in direct speech. There is no indirect speech in Beja narratives.

The 1st and 3rd narratives largely are told by the author, with little direct speech.

The 2nd narrative - especially towards the end - consists of nothing but dialogue switched off and on by means of “he (no.1) said”, “he (no.2) said” etc.

### ***Narrative categories***

	<b>Narrative 1</b>	<b>Narrative 2</b>	<b>Narrative 3</b>
	<i>“Two presents”</i>	<i>“Three presents”</i>	<i>“Mahmud the brave”</i>
<b>Means</b>	prose	prose	prose with metric passages
<b>Subject</b>	comedy characters	everyday characters	hero
<b>Speech</b>	comical narrative	epic narrative	tragic narrative

### ***The text scores***

The texts will be presented in charts similar to musical scores (see tables #1-#3 below). The scores can be read in two different ways: To follow the actual speech chain, the chart is read line by line. To pursue a particular participant - or a particular chain of events - the chart is read column by column.

In the charts here below, the order of the main columns reflects the Cushitic word order, which is “SOV”: Subject - Object - Verb. The right-hand column with the heading “Verbs” is the backbone of the narrative. The other columns characteristically have empty cells - which means that most of the time no Subject or Object or Adverb is expressed. In other words: Most of the time, the Subjects and Objects and Adverbs - i.e. the items which Beja people talk about - are *not* expressed.<sup>23</sup>

For the sake of convenience, three textual functions are marked at the right hand of the table: [ID] “identification of participants”, [Q] “quotes”, [RS] “reasoning sequence”, and [TS] “Time Sequence”.

### **Narrative #1 “Two gifts” as told by Abuzaynab Musa, 2001**

The first narrative is an amusing anecdote about competition between neighbours. This motif is not very typical for Beja (it may have migrated into the Beja culture only recently); but this particular text has the advantages of brevity, clear structure and rhetorical quality.

### ***Translation***

First an English translation will be provided. It is a “free” translation, but it follows Beja word order as closely as possible. The numbering and the wording are the same as in table #1 below.

***1 There was a man, they say. 2 He was married to two women, they say. 3 Both were neighbours of each other.***

***4 One day, the man, 5 for the one he brought a bracelet. 6 For the other he brought earrings.***

***7 The owner of the bracelets started and 8 in order to make the other envious 9 she looked over the wall and 10 “Do you have a fan?” 11 she said. 12 (And she meant to show her bracelets.)***

***13 The other started and 14 let down her hair and 15 “No no, we don't have.” 16 she said. 17 (And she meant to show her earrings.)***

### ***Chart***

Table #1 presents the narrative line by line as it was told, but the words are divided over different columns according to their grammatical categories. All Subjects, for

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<sup>23</sup> According to Chafe, the fact that there are so few NPs per verb is part of the “one-new-idea-at-the-time” strategy in oral narratives (1992:268).

instance, are in the same column labelled “Subjects”. The participants are numbered (superscript 0, 1, 2). A hyphen stands for a “zero pronoun” (like the hyphen translated as *(he)*<sup>0</sup> in line 2, “He was married”).

Under the actual Beja words (like “Tak”) there always is a morpheme-to-morpheme translation (like “*man*”). Then follows a **free translation** which identifies the line number (like “*1 ... a man*”).

Boxes which are shaded will be discussed below. (They are of particular significance: non-zero Subjects, non-Perfect verbs).

Table #1: Chart of Narrative 1

(Adv.)	Subjects	Objects	(Adv.)	Verbs	
	Tak <i>man</i> <sup>0</sup>			ii-fi een. <i>he</i> <sup>0</sup> -was <i>they-said</i>	ID
<b>1 There was a man, they say.</b>					
	- <i>(he)</i> <sup>0</sup>	Maloot m'a <i>two women</i> <sup>1+2</sup>		d'ur-aab-u een. <i>married-PTCP-is they-said</i>	ID
<b>2 He was married to two women, they say.</b>					
	Mhalsa <i>both</i> <sup>1+2</sup>		taktak-iit <i>another-from</i>	shawawt-a. <i>neighbours-are</i> <sup>1+2</sup>	ID
<b>3 Both were neighbours of each other.</b>					
Gaal b'i, <i>one day,</i>	uu-tak, <i>the-man</i> <sup>0</sup>			- -	
<b>4 One day, the man,</b>					
tu-ngaawt-iida <i>the-one-for</i>	- <i>(he)</i> <sup>0</sup>	giweeshaab <i>bracelet</i>		ha'-iya. <i>took-came-he</i> <sup>0</sup>	TS
<b>5 for the one he brought a bracelet.</b>					
Tu-raawt-iida <i>the-other-for</i>	- <i>(he)</i> <sup>0</sup>	tilal <i>earringPL</i>		ha'-iya. <i>brought-he</i> <sup>0</sup>	TS
<b>6 For the other he brought earrings.</b>					
	Igiweeshaa- yeet ankwana <i>the-bracelets-of</i> <i>owner</i> <sup>1</sup>			yak-taa-y ti-yiha- yit <i>started-she</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>held-she</i> <sup>1</sup> -&	TS SS
<b>7 The owner of the bracelets started &amp;</b>					
	- <i>(she)</i> <sup>1</sup>	too-raaw <i>the-other</i> <sup>2</sup>		s[h]as-a tii-yid-ayt <i>incite-to she</i> <sup>1</sup> - <i>meant-for</i>	RS
<b>8 in order to make the other envious</b>					
	- <i>(she)</i> <sup>1</sup>	te-heetaatiih <i>the-wall</i>		riigam-taa-yit, <i>stretched-she</i> <sup>1</sup> -&	TS SS
<b>9 she looked over the wall &amp;</b>					

(Adv.)	Subjects	Objects	(Adv.)	Verbs	
	-	"Misra <del>r</del> afaat		ti-bar <del>i</del> i-na?"	Q
	<sup>2</sup>	fan		you <sup>2</sup> -haveIMPF-PL?	
<b>10 "Do you have a fan?"</b>					
	- (she) <sup>1</sup>			ti-di. she <sup>1</sup> -said	TS
<b>11 she said.</b>					
	- (she) <sup>1</sup>	I-giweeshaa-ye <del>e</del> h the-bracelets-herPL <sup>1</sup>		rhis-a tii-yid- <del>a</del> yt. show-to she <sup>1</sup> -meant-for	RS
<b>12 And she meant to show her bracelets.</b>					
	Tuu-raaw the-other <sup>2</sup>			yak-taa-yit, started-she <sup>2</sup> -&	TS SS
<b>13 The other started &amp;</b>					
	- (she) <sup>2</sup>	t-hamoot- <del>e</del> eh the-hair-herPL <sup>2</sup>		ti-ngil-it, she <sup>2</sup> -opened-&	TS SS
<b>14 let down her hair &amp;</b>					
"Laa laa laa No no no	- <sup>2</sup>			k-in-baru." not-we <sup>2</sup> -have.	Q
<b>15 "No no, we don't have."</b>					
	- (she) <sup>2</sup>			ti-di. she <sup>2</sup> -said	TS
<b>16 she said.</b>					
	- (she) <sup>2</sup>	I-tilal- <del>e</del> eh the-earrings-herPL <sup>2</sup>		rhis-a tii-yid- <del>a</del> yt. show-to she <sup>2</sup> -meant-for.	RS
<b>17 And she meant to show her earrings.</b>					

### Analysis

The following discourse functions have been marked in the right column: Identification (ID); Time Sequence (TS), Reasoning Sequence (RS), and Quotes. (Q). Each of them forms a separate discourse strand, each of them with rules of its own, but woven together into the coherent discourse.

### Description and Identification of Participants

A narrative world is in a happy balance when human beings are in control (i.e. the [+animate] participants are the Subjects) - and things are under control (i.e. they are the [-animate] things are Objects or Adverbials).

So then, since several items in the narrative are "things" ("inanimates" like fans or earrings), it can be expected that they function as grammatical Objects or Adverbials. This is actually the case 7 times out of 7 instances. On the other hand, the three main participants are human beings ("animates"), and it can be expected that they function as grammatical Subjects. This is actually the case 17 times out of 21 instances. Thus there are 4 exceptions (lines 2, 5, 6, 8), and this is where "animates" (the women) appear as Objects and Adverbial NPs.



In this text, each of the three participants is given one section of the narrative, and each of the participants holds the stage for about 5 steps in the narrative. According to Chafe<sup>24</sup>, this is roughly the number of statements which a good story teller will allow for the focus on one participant - because in this way the narrator can keep the audience focussed on one item without over-stretching the audience's attention span.

First the participants are introduced by means of clauses which express "identification", in lines 1, 2, and 3. These clauses introduce and identify the participants with stative aspects: "*There was a man - he was married - they were neighbours*". The Subject column brings people on stage. In this narrative, there are three participants - a man and two women. The man is introduced by means of an indefinite Subject NP, "a man" (line 1). The man then stays on the stage by means of a definite NP (line 4) and a series of "zero pronouns" (lines 2, 5, 6).

Where the Subject remains the same during an entire chain of events, the suffix -t "SS" (Same Subject)<sup>25</sup> will be attached to the Perfect form of the verb - as in lines 7, 9, 13, 14. However, where a chain of events is completed - as in lines 5, 6, 11, 15 - this suffix cannot be attached. Where a new participant takes over, this is indicated by shaded boxes in the "Subject" column. It should be noted that Subject participants usually remain "on stage" longer than Object participants. This has also been observed for other Afro-Asiatic languages, and it seems to be a universal strategy of good orature.<sup>26</sup>

NPs in the "Objects" column are not unambiguously marked with Object case markers - even though Beja does in fact have full sets of contrastive case affixes.<sup>27</sup> For instance, the article prefix in the last line i- "*the PL*" is ambiguous: It could indicate an Object NP or a Subject NP.<sup>28</sup> But Appendix I shows how and why these affixes are systematically neutralized under certain conditions. (The Beja discourse regularities - like those exemplified in this article - do take care of these apparent ambiguities. )

These are ambiguities only in isolated phrases - not in a well-formed discourse.

Beja is a language which obligatorily leaves out pronouns (a so-called "pro-drop" language like Italian).<sup>29</sup> To identify the "zero pronouns", superscript numbers have been used as follows: The man is (he)<sup>0</sup>, the first woman is (she)<sup>1</sup>, and the second woman is (she)<sup>2</sup>. In fact, it is not rare but very common that the Subject participants are kept on stage by means of zero pronouns (e.g. lines 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17). To illustrate how many zero pronouns and how few NPs serve as Subjects in this narrative, the "Subjects" column of the narrative is displayed alone as a list (below). The "zero pronouns" are written as "-" hyphens.

<sup>24</sup> See above: Chafe (1992:268) identifies this strategy as "*one-new-idea-at-a-time*".

<sup>25</sup> After consonants, this morpheme has the shape -it. After the vowel "i" it has the shape -t. After other vowels it has the shape -yit.

<sup>26</sup> Gasser (1983:118) notices a "higher continuity / persistence for SUBJECTS and DATIVE ... OBJECTS than for ACCUSATIVE OBJECTS". This he observed in the discourse strategy of another Afro-Asiatic SOV language.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. there are article prefixes uu-/aa- for Subject Masc. SG./PL. articles as against oo-/ee- for Object Masc. SG./PL. articles. Likewise, the possessive suffixes -uu/-aa for Subject Masc. SG./PL. as against -oo/-ee for Object Masc. SG./PL.

<sup>28</sup> The i- could be a reduced form of either ee- "*the PL OBJ*" or aa- "*the PL SUBJ*", and with nouns of more than one syllable, this reduction is a regular phonological process.

<sup>29</sup> The forms and functions of Beja pronouns are discussed in Wedekind (2003).

## List of Subjects, Narrative #1

	-	-
“Subjects” column	(he) <sup>0</sup>	(she) <sup>1</sup>
	<b>6 he</b>	<b>12 she</b>
Tak	Igiweeshaa-yeet ankwana	Tuu-raaw
man <sup>0</sup>	the-bracelets-of owner <sup>1</sup>	the-other <sup>2</sup>
<b>1 A man</b>	<b>7 The owner of the bracelets</b>	<b>13 The other</b>
-	-	-
(he) <sup>0</sup>	(she) <sup>1</sup>	(she) <sup>2</sup>
<b>2 he</b>	<b>8 she</b>	<b>14 she</b>
Mhalta	-	-
both <sup>1+2</sup>	(she) <sup>1</sup>	<sup>2</sup>
<b>3 Both</b>	<b>9 she</b>	<b>15 she</b>
uu-tak,	-	-
the-man <sup>0</sup>	<sup>2</sup>	(she) <sup>2</sup>
<b>4 The man</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16 she</b>
-	-	-
(he) <sup>0</sup>	(she) <sup>1</sup>	(she) <sup>2</sup>
<b>5 he</b>	<b>11 she</b>	<b>17 she</b>

## Time Sequence

The clauses which express that different events follow each other in time are marked as “Time Sequence” (“TS”) – see lines 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, and 16. Only verbs of the “Perfect” paradigm are used to express this. A full “Perfect” paradigm - contrasted with the “Imperfect” paradigm - has been provided in Appendix II.

## Reasoning Sequence

The narrative has three “reasoning” clauses, all of them marked with the suffix -ayt “for, in order to”. These clauses relate to other clauses not by way of “Time Sequence” but in a “reasoning sequence” (RS), see lines 12, 17.

## Quotes

This narrative has only two “direct speech” passages. (marked as Q “Quote”, lines 10, 15). They form a dialog in the Imperfect / Present form: “Do you have a fan?” - “No we don't have”. Note that in the direct speech the Imperfect is being used rather than the Perfect of the “Time Line”.

## Narrative #2 “Three gifts” as told by Abdallaah Adaroob, 2001

This narrative was told in a very fast tempo and with a rigorous rhythm, accentuated by the repetitions of *idi een*.

### Translation

In the following somewhat “literal” translation, an attempt is made to stay close to the Beja original word order. The interlinear text of table #2 has the same words and the same line numbers.

*1 There was a man, they say.*

*2 He came to the leader and (so) 3 he started out to the leader and (said) 4 “I will puzzle him with something.” 5 he said and (thus) 6 he is going to him, they say. 7 He started to him and 8 went to him and 9 they let (his camel) kneel and 10 they welcomed him well, at that time (he said)*

*11 “I here, since I am in need of three things 12 I have come to you.” 13 he said, they say. 14 I am in need of them from you. 15 he said, they say. 16 “My children, since they are hungry, 17 a milking animal, to milk for them 18 I want from you.” 19 he said, they say. 20 “For shouldering and loading also 21 I want something from you. 22 And adding another thing I have come.” 23 he said, they say. 24 “Well, needing a gift from you 25 I have come.” 26 he said, they say.*

*27 Since he (the leader) had a milking camel 28 “Bring the milking animal” 29 he said, they say.*

*30 “This is a milking camel and 31 milk it for your children and give them! 32 he said, they say. 33 “Also, it is a docile animal, 34 load it!” 35 he said 36 “Also, consider it a gift and take it!” 37 he said, they say.*

### Chart

Table #2 presents the entire narrative, but with the words of different categories placed in different columns. Under the actual Beja words (like “*Tak*”) there always is a morpheme-to-morpheme translation (like “*man'*”). Then follows a **free translation** which identifies the line number (like “*1 ... a man*”).

In the “Verbs” column, those verbs have been shaded which do not use the “Perfect” form. (As has been said above, the “Perfect” aspect is the unmarked, typical verb form for the “Time Sequence” or “Time Line”.)

In the “Subject” column, those NPs have been shaded which introduce a new participant (lines 1, 27).

Table #2: Chart of Narrative 2

(Adv.)	Subjects	Objects	(Adv.)	Verbs	ID
	<i>Tak</i> <i>man'</i>			<i>ii-fi</i> <i>een.</i> <i>he-was</i> <i>they-said</i>	

*1 There was a man, they say.*

(Adv.)	Subjects	Objects	(Adv.)	Verbs	
	-		Suurkinaa- yihoo-da <i>leader<sup>2</sup>-his-to</i>	ee- <b>yaa</b> -yit, <i>he<sup>1</sup>-came-&amp;</i>	TS SS
<b>2 He came to the leader and</b>					
	-		suurkinaa- yihoo-da <i>leader<sup>2</sup>-his-to</i>	yak-iy <b>aa</b> -yit, <i>started-he<sup>1</sup>-&amp;</i>	TS SS
<b>3 he started out to the leader and</b>					
	-	Oon-baroooh naa-t <i>that-him<sup>2</sup> thing-OBJ</i>		i-suugim <b>a</b> -ndi <i>FUT-puzzle I-will</i>	Q
<b>4 "I will puzzle him with something."</b>					
	-			di-yii-t, <i>said-he<sup>1</sup>-&amp;</i>	TS SS
<b>5 he said &amp;</b>					
	-		daay <i>toHim<sup>2</sup></i>	yak-iini een. <i>starts-he<sup>1</sup> IMPF they-said</i>	
<b>6 he is going to him, they say.</b>					
	-		Daay <i>toHim<sup>2</sup></i>	yak-iy <b>aa</b> -yit, <i>started-he<sup>1</sup>-&amp;</i>	TS SS
<b>7 He started to him &amp;</b>					
	-			<b>i</b> -ba-yit, <i>he<sup>1</sup>-wentTo-&amp;</i>	TS SS
<b>8 went to him &amp;</b>					
	-	-		i-si-ganif-n-iit, <i>they-let-kneel-they-&amp;</i>	TS SS
<b>9 they let (his camel) kneel &amp;</b>					
	-	-	daayii-b <i>well</i>	dabaaysalaam-lyaan- <b>eet</b> tu-midda <i>greeted-they-WH the-time</i>	TS
<b>10 they welcomed him well, at that time (he said)</b>					
	Un-'ani <i>thisSUBJ-I</i>		mhayt naat- eeh <i>three things-of</i>	haraw-aay <i>want-PTCP</i>	Q
<b>11 "I here, since I am in need of three things</b>					
			de-hook <i>to-you<sup>2</sup></i>	yak-aab-u. <i>start-PTCP-am</i>	
<b>12 I have come to you."</b>					

Beja Narratives: Pursuit of Participants and Analysis of Aspects

	-			i-di	een.	TS
	(he) <sup>l</sup>			he <sup>l</sup> -said	they-said	
<b>13 he said, they say.</b>						
	-		De-hook	tiilaleey-aab-u.		Q
			to-your <sup>2</sup>	needy-PTCP-am		
<b>14 I am in need of them from you.</b>						
	-			i-di	een.	TS
	(he) <sup>l</sup>			he <sup>l</sup> -said	they-said	
<b>15 he said, they say.</b>						
	Ar-i			diw-aab-aayt,		Q
	children-mine			hunger-PTCP-for		
<b>16 “My children, since they are hungry,</b>						
	-	dangee-t	daay	anayi-yeet		
		milkAnimal-OBJ	forThem	milking-of		
<b>17 a milking animal, to milk for them</b>						
	-		hook	a-harriiw.		
			fromYou	I-want		
<b>18 I want from you.”</b>						
	-			i-di	een.	TS
	(he) <sup>l</sup>			he <sup>l</sup> -said	they-said	
<b>19 he said, they say.</b>						
	-		Sinkaa-	a-ranbi-yeeh		Q
			yidaayi-wwa	I-load-PTCP		
<b>20 “For shouldering and loading also</b>						
	naa-t-iidaayi-	-	hook	a-harriiw.		
	wwa		fromYou	I-want		
<b>21 I want something from you.</b>						
	-		Wee-naat-	haraw-aay y'-aab-u		
			iida	want-PTCP come-PTCP-am		
<b>22 And adding another thing I have come.”</b>						
	-			i-di	een.	TS
	(he) <sup>l</sup>			he <sup>l</sup> -said	they-said	
<b>23 he said, they say.</b>						
	-	Miyaay, aree,	hook	hariw-eeh		Q
		gift, well,	fromYou	want-ing		
<b>24 “Well, needing a gift from you</b>						
	-			y'-aab-u.		
				come-PTCP-am		
<b>25 I have come.”</b>						

(Adv.)	Subjects	Objects	(Adv.)	Verbs	
	- (he) <sup>1</sup>			i-di een. he <sup>1</sup> -said they-said	TS
<b>26 he said, they say.</b>					
	U-Suurkina The-leader <sup>2</sup>	mirbee-t milkingCamel-F		ii-briy-aayt, he <sup>2</sup> PERF-have-since	RS
<b>27 Since he (the leader) had a milking camel</b>					
		Te-humaa-t the-milkingAnimal-F		haa m'aa-na! take come-Pl.IMPV	Q
<b>28 “Bring the milking animal”</b>					
	- (he) <sup>2</sup>			i-di een. he <sup>2</sup> -said they-said	TS
<b>29 he said, they say.</b>					
	Uun-batuuh this-sheSUBJ			humaa-tuwi, milkingAnimal-Shels	Q
<b>30 “This is a milking camel &amp;</b>					
	-	y-'ar-eek the-children-yours		nii-ya hi-ya! milk-SgIMPV give-SgIMPV	
<b>31 milk it for your children and give them!</b>					
	- (he) <sup>2</sup>			i-di een. he <sup>2</sup> -said they-said	TS
<b>32 he said, they say.</b>					
“Mal-yaab second-ly	-			laamaa-tuwi, docile-Shels	Q
<b>33 “Also, it is a docile animal,</b>					
	-			ribiy-a!” load-SgIMPV	
<b>34 load it!”</b>					
	- (he) <sup>2</sup>			i-di een. he <sup>2</sup> -said they-said	TS
<b>35 he said</b>					
Mal-yaab second-ly	-	miyaay gift		kwaas-aa-t ah-a!” create-IMPV-& take-IMPV	Q
<b>36 “Also, consider it a gift and take it!”</b>					
	- (he) <sup>2</sup>			i-di een. he <sup>2</sup> -said they-said	TS
<b>37 he said, they say.</b>					

### Analysis - additional notes

#### Identification of Participants

The main participant (he)<sup>1</sup> is introduced first, in a full stative clause “There was a man” (line 1).

The other participant (*he*)<sup>2</sup> is not introduced with the same pomp and circumstance. He only appears in Adverbial phrases or Object suffixes (lines 2, 3, 7 etc.), and finally steps into the narrative as a definite NP in line 27: “The leader”.

As in narrative #1 above, one and the same participant will remain the “same Subject” over a whole series of connected clauses, this is signalled with the suffix -t “Same Subject” (SS). In line 10 however, the reference switches from “they” to “he”, and this calls for a different suffix.<sup>30</sup>

As far as the inanimate participants of this story are concerned (i.e., the various gifts), they are introduced as Object NPs - as they should be. There are three of them, and the point of the story is, of course, that the three requests receive three responses - but all three of them are wrapped into one Object NP in the final quote (line 36), and there the story ends.

#### Time Sequence TS

Except for line 5, all of the verbs in the “Time Line” use the “Perfect” form. For some reason, the verb in line 5 steps outside this sequence, and the “Imperfect” form is used, rather than the Perfect. (The function of this change of aspects seems to be that the narrator stands still to visualize how the main participant now is on his way to the leader.)

#### Reasoning Sequence RS

In this narrative, there are only two clauses (lines 16 and 27) which relate to other clauses by way of reasoning (RS). Both of them use the suffix -aayt “since, because”.

#### Quotes Q

The Quotes (Q) or direct speech passages employ a larger variety of aspects than the “Time Line” or “Time Sequence” does. While the “Time Sequence” prefers the “Perfect” aspect, the “Quotes” have many different aspects, such as FUT future, PTCP participles, IMPF Imperfect, and IMPV imperative.

### Narrative #3 “Mahmud the Brave” as told by Bashiir Mohammed, 2001

#### *Translation*

This “free” translation again stays close to the Beja word order. Table #3 below has the same free translation (underneath the interlinear translation) and it uses the same line numbers.

*1 Once, Mahmud the Brave had killed a soldier.*

*2 Now the law officers stood up (and said),<sup>3</sup> “We will let you free, 4 if you jump over the fire in front of all the people.”*

---

<sup>30</sup> Because of the speaker's high speed, the transcription is not entirely clear at this point.

5 They gathered the people, and 6 they made a fire. 7 They tied a rope around his legs (and said):

8 “From this fire, if you run and get out, 9 we will let you free.”

10 The people were gathered around (him), 11 they put a rope around his feet (and said). 12 “Stepping behind (gidehiisay) the fire like a camel, 13 if you get out, we free you.”

14 The mother was standing (there), and 15 took out a dagger and 16 set it on her breast (she said),

17 “For a man his grave is (only) one, 18 (but) his deeds are many. 19 (So) don't run! Mahmud, our son, 20 if you are our son.” 21 so the mother said, 22 “Don't run! Mahmud the Brave, 23 if you are our son.”

24 The uncle (said) “Run, run! 25 Here behind the fire come out!” 26 His death he didn't want.

28 The women (were) watching in a great row. 29 they are standing,

30 “My uncle told (me) to run; 31 “(but even about) walking I wonder.” 32 In the middle of the fire he stood (stayed).

### Chart

The chart is organized in the same way as those of the other narratives. (See the remarks above.)

Table #3: Chart of Narrative 3

(Adv.)	Subjects	Objects	(Adv.)	Verbs	
Gaal door,  one time	Mhamud Uu-fash Mahmud the-brave	kajart-aa-yiib soldier-OBJ		i-dir. he-killed	TS
<b>1 Once, Mahmud the Brave had killed a soldier.</b>					
Oon-d'aab the-now	t-hukwuuma the-officers			yak-taa-yit, stood-they-and	TS SS
<b>2 Now the law officers stood up (and said),</b>					
	Hinin we			nii-fdig-hook nee-yad, we-free-you we-FUT,	Q
<b>3 “We will let you free,</b>					
uu-dehay dabaay the-people before		too-n'i the-fire		ti-ttaliil-eek. you-jump-if	Q
<b>4 if you jump over the fire in front of all the people.”</b>					
	- (the officers)	Oo-dehay the-people		i-shawawiin-iit, they-gathered-and	TS SS
<b>5 They gathered the people, and</b>					



(Adv.)	Subjects	Objects	(Adv.)	Verbs	
	- (officers)	N'ee-t fire-OBJ		i-dirig-na. the-kindled-they	TS
<b>6 they made a fire.</b>					
I-ragad-aa-yiib the-leg-PL-at	- (officers)	geet rope	hooy at	i-d'in-iit the-put-and	TS SS
<b>7 They tied a rope around his legs (and said):</b>					
		Toot-too-n'i this-the-fire		thak-ee stepp-ing	Q
<b>8 “From this fire, if you run</b>					
			gideh-ii- say back-of-from	ti-tfar'i-yeek, you-jump-if	Q
<b>and get out,</b>					
				ni-fdig-hook nee-yad, we-free-you we-FUT	Q
<b>9 we will let you free.”</b>					
	Uu-dehay The-people		daayi at	amararri-ya-ba gathered-PL-ID	ID
<b>10 The people were gathered around (him)</b>					
	- (people/officers)	tadh-oob rope-OBJ	hooy at	i-d'in-iit, they-put-and	TS SS
<b>11 they put a rope around his feet (and said)</b>					
				Thak-ee stepp-ing	Q
<b>12 “Stepping</b>					
oo-kaam-iit the-camel-like			toot-tuu- n'ee-t-i gideh-ii- say this-the-fire-of back-of-from	ti-tfar'i-yeek, you-exit-if	Q
<b>12 (Steppint) behind the fire like a camel, if you get out</b>					
				ni-fadig-hook nee- yad. we-free-you we-FUT	Q
<b>13 we free you.”</b>					

(Adv.)	Subjects	Objects	(Adv.)	Verbs	
	Tuu-ndi <i>the-mother</i>			ti-ngidiya-yit, <i>she-stand-ing</i>	RS TS
<b>14 The mother was standing (there), and</b>					
	- <i>(mother)</i>	hinjar <i>dagger</i>		ti-fir'-iit, <i>she-exit-and</i>	TS SS
<b>15 took out a dagger and</b>					
	- <i>(mother)</i>		i-ngwii- hoo-da <i>the-breast-her- at</i>	daas-taa-yit, <i>put-she-and</i>	TS SS
<b>16 set it on her breast (she said),</b>					
Oo-tak <i>the-man</i>	uu-miimaash- uuh <i>the-grave-his</i>			gaal-u. <i>one-ID</i>	Q
<b>17 "For a man his grave is (only) one,</b>					
	I-faal-a <i>the-deed-PL</i>			gwid-aa-ba. <i>many-PL-ID</i>	Q
<b>18 (but) his deeds are many.</b>					
				Baa-dhaabaa! <i>not-run-don't</i>	Q
<b>19 (So) don't run!</b>					
	Mhamud oor- uun! <i>Mahmud son- ours</i>	Hinin oor-oon <i>we son-ours</i>		ti-kati-yeek. <i>you-are-if</i>	Q
<b>Mahmud, our son, 20 if you are our son."</b>					
	tuu-ndi <i>the-mother</i>			ti-di. <i>she-said</i>	TS
<b>21 so the mother said.</b>					
				Baa-dhaab-aa! <i>not-run-don't</i>	Q
<b>22 "Don't run!</b>					
	Mhamud Oo- fash! <i>Mahmud the- brave</i>	Hinin oor-oon <i>we son-ours</i>		ti-kati-yeek. <i>you-are-if</i>	Q
<b>Mahmud the Brave, 23 if you are our son."</b>					

(Adv.)	Subjects	Objects	(Adv.)	Verbs	
	U-duura: the-uncle				
<b>24 The uncle (said)</b>					
				Dhaab-aa! dhaab-aa! run-do! run-do!	Q
<b>“Run, run!</b>					
		Too-n'i the-fire	har'-ii-say back-of-from	fir'-a! exit-do!	Q
<b>25 Here behind the fire come out!”</b>					
	- (uncle)			i-di. he-said	TS
<b>25 (he said)</b>					
	- (uncle)	tu-yatt-oo the-death-his		kii-hariw. not-wants	TS
<b>26 His death he didn't want.</b>					
	Tee-rhaay ti-faggaad-i the-view the- row			i-shak-eet they-lined-WH	TS
<b>28 The women (were) watching in a great row</b>					
	- (they)			i-ngad-iin. they-stand-they	TS
<b>29 they are standing,</b>					
	(duur-u) (uncle-mine)			Hadiid-iini, says-he	Q
<b>30 “He (my uncle) tells me</b>					
	duur-u uncle-mine	ee-dhab. the-running			Q
<b>30 “My uncle( tells me) about running;</b>					
		U-sak-han the-going-even		gallabaa-yoo-yu. consider-mine-ID	Q
<b>31 “(but even about) walking I wonder.”</b>					

(Adv.)	Subjects	Objects	(Adv.)	Verbs	
	-		tu-n'eet-i	i-ngad.	TS
			f'iib		
	(Mahmud)		the-fire-of inside	he-stood	
<b>32 In the middle of the fire he stood (stayed).</b>					

### Analysis

Participants and aspects of this 3rd narrative display the regularities noted in the previous narratives. A quick glance at table #3 will confirm this, namely:

As far as the participants of this narrative are concerned (Mahmud, the mother etc.), each of them is introduced with a Subject NP (see the shaded passages in the “Subjects” column, lines 1, 2, 10, 14, 24). Subsequently they are identified by zero pronouns (lines 5, 6, 7 etc.).

As far as the aspects are concerned, it will be seen that in the “Quotes” or “direct speech passages”, verbs are in non-Perfect aspects (see the frames marked as “Q” in lines 3, 4, 8, 9 etc., where non-perfect verbs are shaded). In the “Time Sequence” however, verbs are in the Perfect aspect (see the passages outside the frames, marked as “TS”, lines 2, 5, 6 etc.).

### More on participants

Participants in Beja discourse could be distinguished by “Object” vs. “Subject” case markers - but often they are not. Beja speakers appear to ignore this distinction. Thus, in publications about Beja, there have been complaints about the “carelessness” in case marking. The complaint goes as follows: Beja has case markers like uu- “Subj. Masc.” vs. oo- “Obj. Masc.”; so why are these affixes not used consistently? Appendix I illustrates why.

There is a second reason why case can be disregarded: Beja is a head marking language, i.e. the participants are marked on the verb by means of affixes, like in Italian. (Incidentally, the Beja Object affixes however are zero for all 3rd persons.)

Consequently, there also is no need for using independent pronouns to identify the participants. Pronouns are only used for (contrastive) emphasis, as in the following example.

#### Participant pronouns

i-di	“he said”	lit. “he.PERF-said
baruuh i-di	“HE, he said”	lit. “he.SUBJ he.PERF-said.”

### ***Strategies of keeping track - a summary***

Beja texts have various ways of keeping track of participants. Some of these have already been mentioned above, others will be listed here below, to summarize the strategies:

- Whether a clause has the “Same Subject” or a “Different Subject” than the preceding clause is signalled by verb suffixes. (For an SOV language this is common.) In the present text collection, the suffix “-ṭ”<sup>32</sup> signals “Same Subject”.<sup>32</sup>
- The distinction of two genders (Masc. / Fem.) and two numbers (sg. / PL.) helps to disambiguate the references.
- “Case” also takes care of references - except where the case markers are neutralized.
- Typically, whenever a participant is elevated to a topical role, there will be heavy nominal marking (like indefinite NPs, Names, or full pronouns). Once a topical participant is established, however, the marking approaches zero morphology (unstressed pronoun, verb affix, or zero verb affixation). The uninterrupted presence of a participant needs no morphological marking at all.
- The first occurrence of animate participants - provided they are not the 1st or 2nd person - demands an indefinite referential Noun Phrase, usually in the Subject.
- A new participant can be introduced by means of a NP with an Object case suffix - and in many Cushitic languages this functions as a neutral “citation” suffix. Then, after the participant has been introduced, the NP can be re-interpreted as the Subject of whatever follows.
- The second occurrence may be a Definite Noun Phrase also in the Subject case.
- All subsequent occurrences need no markers at all.
- Very seldom a participant is referred to by an independent pronoun. Verb agreement or zero anaphora are much more common.

What has been said above can be summarized in form of a hierarchy of reference marking,<sup>33</sup> as follows:

Indefinite referential NP > Definite NP Subj. > Indep. pron. > Verb agreement > Zero

### **More on Aspects**

#### ***A verb which lost its aspect: the evidential marker***

The verb *een* “*they said*” closes many paragraphs in each of the narratives above. Morin had suggested that its function is to build rhythm.<sup>34</sup> But to understand its actual

<sup>32</sup> In Highland East Cushitic, a suffix of a very similar form, -ṭṭ'i “SS” is used for the same purpose (Wedekind 1990: 666). Beja speakers have claimed that to disregard the suffix -ṭ “Same Subject” (SS) is a sign of poor command of the language. In Reinisch's old text collection of 1893, this “SS” suffix is missing in several instances. Reinisch does not identify the function of the -ṭ “SS” suffix, but he does actually state that a number of texts in his collection are of inferior quality.

<sup>33</sup> Gasser (1983:138) identifies a “hierarchy of topic-continuity devices” in another Afro-Asiatic SOV language.

<sup>34</sup> Morin, (1995: 53) “fonctionnant comme support de rythme, sous la forme accompli”.

function in Beja discourse, it should first be noted that this verb always appears in the same “Perfect” form as other verbs of the “Time Sequence” (TS).

Thus it would appear that “they said” is part of the narrative “Time Line”. But this is not the case, since *een* does not count as a full verb. Strictly speaking, this form refers to participants who are outside the chain of events - even outside the narrative - because the reference is to “*them*”, i.e. “the people” or the “tradition bearers” from whom the narrative was received. (To interpret this verb as an “impersonal passive” would not be legitimate, since Beja does have a passive morphology.<sup>35</sup>)

Actually, the original meaning of this verb “to say” is bleached out.<sup>36</sup> The verb now is on its way to a suffix of “evidentiality”,<sup>37</sup> and the new evidential function of this form is something like the following: “*What was said is tradition - I did not make this up myself but people say so.*”

There are several facts which support this interpretation:

- In the case of *een* “they said”, no change of Subject is indicated. Normally, however, a change of Subject should be made explicit by means of some morphological signal.
- In paragraph final function of *een* as “evidential”, the verb is always found in exactly the same form: the same person, the same number (PL.), the same aspect, the same mood, the same lexical form the same phonological shape - in spite of the fact that Beja would have a lot of choices.
- There are now two verb forms which basically express the meaning “they said”, namely *een* and *idiin*. (These two verb forms have been highlighted in the paradigms of Appendix II.) But today, if one really wants to communicate “they said”, then the 2nd form *idiin* is used - not the bleached-out “evidential” *een*.
- The form *een* - unlike full verbs - carries no stress.

### ***Aspects in verb pairs***

There are other verbs which have been reduced to grammatical markers because of their special functions in Beja discourse.

Some have become aspect markers, others now serve as Adverbials, and still others as negation verbs. Each of these verbs is still used as a full verb - but its place in the discourse context decides whether it should be regarded as a full verb with the full lexical impact - or as a grammatical marker.

For example, the full lexical meaning of *yak-* is “to stand up”, and of *aha-* “to take”. However, in narratives these verbs very frequently have their special function, such as in Narrative #1 line 7, which is quoted in the following example:

<sup>35</sup> The passive verb also is common, in phrases like *X ittiyoodi* “he is called X”. But this verb form only serves to express naming. With reference to *een* “they said”, it should be noted that in Beja communication, oral information has to be absolutely reliable. The reason seems to be that in matters such as rainfalls or grazing areas, the reliability of oral news (*sakanaab*) can be a matter of life and death. It is therefore also essential to be clear about one's sources of information. In Beja orature, the reference to oral “authors” is more explicit in songs and sayings than it is in narratives. Beja handles this less strictly than Somali would.

<sup>36</sup> Heine et al. (1991:40) speak of “bleaching” as a form of grammaticalization, where lexical forms are reduced to grammatical signals.

<sup>37</sup> VanValin and LaPolla (1997) provide the background for a theory of evidentials.

yak-iyaa y i-yihaa-yit ...	“He started to ...”	lit. “He stood up and he-took-and ...”
yak-iyaa y ti-yihaa-yit ...	“She started to ...”	lit. “She stood up and she-took-and ...”

In this context the verbs “to stand up to take” are reduced to an inchoative marker “to start to”: They serve to indicate the beginning of a new action or a new sequence of activities.

### *Aspects in narrative functions*

The two tables below are summaries across the entire text collection,<sup>38</sup> contrasting the use of the different aspects in two different kinds of passages:

On the one hand, the “Perfect” aspect is more frequent in the narrative “Time Sequence” than elsewhere - actually, between 1.3 and 3 times as frequent.

On the other hand, the other aspects - especially the “Imperfect” - are more frequent in the narrative “Quotes” and “Identification clauses” than in the “Time Sequence” - actually, between 2 and 20 times as frequent.

Aspects in the “Time Sequence”	Examples		Ratio <sup>39</sup>	Total
Perfect	idi	“he said”	3 times	2340
Perfect Verb Pair	yakiyaayt tiyihaayit,	“she started and”	3 times	200
Perfect Ptcp. as Attribute	d'uraab-u	“(he who) married”	1.3 times	170
Others				< 100
Aspects in “Quotes” etc.	Examples		Ratio	Total
Imperf.	hadidiini	“he says”	3 times	369
Noun + Copula	humaatuwi	“it / she is a milk-camel”	2 times	266
Imperf Neg.	kinbaru	“we don't have”	2 times	250
Imperative	dhaaba!	“run! SG”	20 times	246
Others				< 100

Thus the use of aspects in narrative “Time Sequences” is different from the use of aspects in “Quotes” and other sections of a narrative:

On the one hand there is the Time Sequence of the “Narrative backbone” (the Time Sequence “TS), where the “real” world of the narrative happens - and on the other hand there are the “Quotes”, where participants talk about all kinds of worlds, both real and fancy.

<sup>38</sup> The basis for this statistics is a text collection of 2001 with about 4400 clauses. About one fourth of them are “direct speech” clauses. It should be noted that the numbers are rounded, that there are some uncertainties, and the list is not exhaustive.

<sup>39</sup> The “Ratio” shows the occurrence of this form in “Quotes” as compared to the occurrence in “Time Sequences etc.”.

## Concluding remarks

In Beja narratives, the verbs which provide the narrative “Time Sequence”, communicating a “narrative Past”, are those which use the prefix conjugation of the Afro-Asiatic “Imperfect”. There is no doubt that this Beja paradigm - even though it looks like an Imperfect - fulfills the narrative functions which in other Afro-Asiatic languages is taken care of by the Perfect / Past paradigm.

Furthermore, in today's narratives the apparent “disregard” for case affixes is, on the one hand, the result of systematic phonological neutralization and, on the other hand, a topicalization strategy. The resulting ambiguities - especially with participants in the role of “topic” or “Subject” - are more than resolved by the fact that Beja is a head-marking language with concurrent discourse strategies such as the use of “same Subject” affixes (SS), gender affixes and nominal identification of participants - employing a hierarchy of nominal forms from full NPs to pronouns to verb affixation to zero marking.



## Appendix I: Participants

In the following examples with *tak* “man”, Subject and Object can be distinguished unambiguously, and this is true for all monosyllabic nouns:

### Unambiguous case marking

uu-tak rhi-ya	“The man saw it”	lit. “Subj.the-man saw-he (something)”
oo-tak rhi-ya	“He saw the man”	lit. “Obj.the-man saw-he”

The dilemma comes with instances such as the following example with *takat* “woman”, where *tuu-* “Subj. Fem.” and *too-* “Obj. Fem.” are collapsed into short *tu-*.

### Ambiguous case marking

tu-takat rhi-ta	“The woman saw it”	lit. “Subj.the-woman saw-she (something)”
tu-takat rhi-ta	“She saw the woman”	lit. “Obj.the-woman saw-she”

So the alleged “carelessness” in case distinctions is, in fact, the systematic application of phonological rules.

## Appendix II: Aspects

Today's Beja “Perfect” paradigm is today's Afro-Asiatic “Imperfect” paradigm. This has been pointed out repeatedly.<sup>40</sup> The paradigms below illustrate the prefixes of the Beja “Perfect” paradigm, and the verb *ni-/di-* “to say” is used as an example. Beja “to say” is a strong verb, also called a “prefix” verb. It has two alternative forms which are used in different dialect areas.

It is obvious that this paradigm has the prefix pattern of Afro-Asiatic “Imperfect” verbs like in today's Arabic, Hebrew or Tigrigna.

### Prefix paradigm “to say” (so-called strong verb)

Perfect	(alternative form)		Imperfect
I said	a-ni	a-di	I say
you M	ti-niy-a	ti-diy-a	...
you F	ti-niy-i	ti-diy-i	...
he	i-ni	i-di	
she	ti-ni	ti-di	
we	n-ee-n	ni-di	
you P	t-ee-na	ti-dii-na	
they	ee-n	i-dii-n	

<sup>40</sup> Already with Almkvist (1881) and later with Reinisch (1893).

A comparison of “strong” and “weak” Beja verb paradigms can be useful. It shows that Beja weak verbs (like “to arise” below) uses the “Perfect” paradigm of Beja “to say” (above) as suffixes of its “Imperfect” paradigm.

Suffix paradigm “to stand up” (so-called weak verb)

Perfect		Imperfect	
I arose / stood ...	<b>yak</b> -an	I arise / stand ...	<b>yak</b> -ani
you M	<b>yak</b> -taa		<b>yak</b> -tiniya
you F	<b>yak</b> -taayi		<b>yak</b> -tiniyi
he	<b>yak</b> -iya		<b>yak</b> -iini
she	<b>yak</b> -ta		<b>yak</b> -tini
we	<b>yak</b> -na		<b>yak</b> -nay
you P	<b>yak</b> -taana		<b>yak</b> -teena
they	<b>yak</b> -aan		<b>yak</b> -een

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