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# Negative constructions in Beja

*Abstract: This chapter presents the negative constructions of Beja, a North-Cushitic (Afroasiatic) language, which are basically asymmetrical. It discusses in turn (i) standard negation in declarative main clauses with A/Cat/TAM asymmetry; (ii) the two negative types in non-declaratives, one of which does not use a negator but stem alternation and specific inflection; (iii) negation in non-main clauses (even more asymmetrical than declaratives); (iv) privatives, which include one case of clause chaining instead of a negator; (v) phasal negation; (vi) negation in stative predications; (vii) negative replies and their pragmatics. It also discusses the absence of negative transport, as well as of negative indefinites and the strategies used instead, and shows that indefinite subjects may be used (with semantic restrictions) in negative locative predications.*

## 1. The Beja language

Beja (ISO 639–1, *glottolog* beja1238), locally named *biḏawije:t*, is the sole language of the North-Cushitic branch of the Afroasiatic phylum. It is lexically and grammatically quite distant from its closest Lowland East and Central Cushitic relatives, Afar-Saho and Agaw, and is considered as peripheral within the Cushitic family. It is spoken in the northernmost part of the Cushitic-speaking area, mainly in Eastern Sudan between the Red Sea and the river Atbara by some 2,000,000 speakers, and in Northern Eritrea (approx. 60,000 speakers). It used to be spoken in Southern Egypt, but it seems speakers have now shifted to Arabic.

Beja dialectology is ill-known, but dialects do not seem much differentiated. Three main dialectal zones are identified (Morin 1995): North, Centre and South, which have further local and tribal-based subdivisions (Wedekind 2012). Dialects are differentiated on the basis of vocalic isoglosses, pronominal sets, morphological use of pitch

accent for plural formation, accommodations of Arabic borrowings and some lexical peculiarities.

Beja has had intensive contacts with Arabic (Central Semitic), and Tigre (North Ethiosemitic branch of South Semitic), probably also with Nubian (Nilo-Saharan). Today, in Sudan, where I did my fieldwork, bilingualism with Sudanese Arabic is widespread and expanding, but discredited for women who lead a cloistered life. Only a minority of the Bejas have knowledge of Tigre (mostly in Eritrea).

In Sudan, formal education is increasing among young villagers and city dwellers, but girls seldom go further than primary level. The sole language of education is classical Arabic, with a mixture of colloquial Sudanese Arabic, and more recently also with some oral explanations in Beja (Onour 2015). In addition Quranic Arabic is taught in Quranic schools to young boys and girls alike.

Beja has a rich and complex morphology, flectional and derivational, both in the nominal and verbal domains. It is partly templatic for verb inflection and derivation, noun formation, verb-noun derivation, adjective and plural formation. Beja is also partly agglutinative-fusional, with suffixes and enclitics (the majority), as well as prefixes and proclitics, which are often portmanteau morphemes, as e.g. the definite articles.

It is a marked nominative language with four nominal cases, two for the verb core arguments, nominative and accusative, and two for noun phrases, genitive and vocative. The case of core arguments is marked on determiners by vocalic ablaut (or a consonant in one marginal case); the genitive and the vocative are marked by vocalic suffixes on nouns. Pronouns have in addition dative and ablative sets, but no vocative form.

Verbs can be finite or non-finite. Finite forms are organized along a three-term aspectual system, which distinguishes, through flectional morphemes and apophony in the stem, Perfective, Imperfective and Aorist, which index also person, number and gender (only in 2 and 3 SG) of the subject. These verb forms are enriched by auxiliaries or a copula to form other TAM, Perfect among them. There are two morphological verb classes. V1 contains the majority of verbs (57%), and has prefixed paradigms for monosyllabic stems, and an infix for disyllabic stems (plural indices are suffixes). This is historically the oldest class. V2 verbs have only suffixes, and represent a common Cushitic innovation. There is in addition a rich system of semantic and

voice derivation involving ablaut, reduplication and affixal devices (pluractional, intensive, middle, passive, reciprocal, causative, and marginally double causative). The non-finite forms amount to four converbs labelled General, Sequential, Simultaneity and Manner. They are invariable, except for the Manner converb, which may vary for gender in specific syntactic environments. The converbs are used in deranked subordinate clauses and as auxiliated forms in complex predicates.

Syntactically, Beja is predominantly head-final; the canonical constituent order is (X)(S)(O)V, and dependent clause – main clause. Constituent order is not particularly rigid and may vary for pragmatic reasons.

For further details, see Vanhove (2017).

## 2. Clausal negation

### 2.1. Standard negation

In declarative verbal main clauses Beja exhibits a paradigmatic asymmetry which corresponds to Miestamo's (2005) A/Cat/TAM type. Aspect is neutralized: the five indicative tenses of declarative utterances, Imperfective, Perfective, Aorist, Perfect and Future are reduced to three in the negative polarity: the Perfective, Aorist and Perfect use the paradigm of the Perfect for the core verb and a negated auxiliary (2). In addition, there is a morphological asymmetry: the Imperfective negative stem and paradigm are based on the Perfective (1b). This is because during the course of the general evolution of the verb system, a new Imperfective paradigm was introduced, which resulted in a dramatic change in the aspectual system: the former Perfective became an Aorist while the former Imperfective became a Perfective.<sup>1</sup>

Although all three negative forms share the same proclitic negative particle *ki=* (*ka=* in 1SG because of vowel harmony), the position of the negator is different: it precedes directly the verb in the Imperfective (1), but an auxiliary in the Perfective for the other four TAM: *di* 'say' for the Future (3), *ak* 'become' for the other three

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<sup>1</sup>

A detailed discussion of this evolution is found in Cohen (1972; 1973).

paradigms (2). In the affirmative, the Perfect goes back to a complex predicate with a manner converb and a non-verbal copula. In the negative, the copula is replaced by the verb *ak* ‘become; be’ which hosts the negator. The Future affirmative is also an auxiliary construction: the core verb originates from a frozen form of the Aorist (with still a number distinction in the central dialect), followed by the verb *di* ‘say’ in the Imperfective. Compare the following examples:

(1) Imperfective

a. Affirmative

*handi wari=b ha<n>riw*  
 tree other\PL=INDF.M.ACC seek<IPFV>[3SG.M]  
 “He looks for other pieces of wood.”

b. Negative

*handi wari=b ki=hariw*  
 tree other\PL=INDF.M.ACC NEG.IPFV=seek\PFV.[3SG]  
 “He does not look for other pieces of wood.”

[NARR\_54\_AA\_gazelle\_15–16]<sup>2</sup>

(2) Affirmative

a. Perfective

*lawwa:w-ani*  
 prowl-PFV.1SG  
 “I prowled around him.”

b. Perfect

*lawwa:w-a:-b-i*  
 prowl-PRF-M-1SG  
 “I have prowled around him.”

c. Aorist affirmative

*lawwa:w-i*  
 prowl-AOR.1SG  
 “I used to prowl around him.”

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<sup>2</sup> Examples extracted from my online corpus (available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/scl.68.website>, and <http://cortypo.humanum.fr/Archives/cortypo.php>) are referred to by text number (54), genre (NARR), short title (gazelle), and the number of the intonation unit(s) (15-16). Elicited examples have no specific mention.

- d. Perfective/Perfect/Aorist negative  
*lawwa:w-a:-b ka=a-ki*  
 prowl-PRF-M NEG.IPFV=1SG-become\PFV<sup>3</sup>  
 “I did not prowl around him / I have not prowled around  
 him / I did not use to prowl around him.”  
 [NARR\_04\_djinn\_184]
- (3) Future
- a. Affirmative  
*jam g<sup>w</sup>?a-s-i=ho:k a-<n>di*  
 water drink-CAUS-FUT.SG=OBJ.2SG 1SG-say<IPFV>  
 “I will give you water.”
- b. Negative  
*jam g<sup>w</sup>?a-s-i=ho:k ka=a-di*  
 water drink-CAUS-FUT.SG=OBJ.2SG NEG.IPFV=1SG-say\PFV  
 “I won’t give you water.” [NARR\_39\_Bafalib\_26]

## 2.2. Negation in non-declaratives

### 2.2.1. Prohibitive

Imperatives have a dedicated negative construction, different from standard negation. The Prohibitive is formed with the negative proclitic particle *ba:=* (2SG.M, 2PL) / *bi:=* (2SG.F). Flectional morphemes are all suffixes, even for the verb class conjugated with prefixes in the indicative (V1), but they differ slightly between V1 and V2, and are similar (with one minor difference for V2 2SG.F) to those of the Imperative, as shown in Table 1.

	V1		V2	
	IMP	PROH	IMP	PROH
SG.M	-a	<i>ba:=V1-a</i>	-a	<i>ba:=V2-a</i>
SG.F	-i	<i>bi:=V1-i</i>	-i	<i>bi:=V2-ej</i>
PL	-na	<i>ba:=V1-na</i>	-a:na	<i>ba:=V2-a:na</i>

Table 1: Imperative vs Prohibitive

One further difference between Imperative and Prohibitive concerns the stem of V1 (i.e. the verbal base without flectional morphemes),

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of glossing consistency, the enclitic negator *ki=* / *ka=* is systematically glossed as NEG.IPFV, even when occurring in periphrastic tenses that do not express the Imperfective aspect.

which is similar to that of the Imperfective for monosyllabic stems, Ci:C, and partly similar to the singular stem of the Imperfective for disyllabic stems, minus the aspectual flectional infix <n>: CaCi:C (vs Ca<n>Ci:C in the Imperfective). The resulting opposition between the Imperative and Prohibitive stems is a difference in vowel length in the stem of V1 verbs: short in the Imperative, long in the Prohibitive (4).

The Prohibitive of V2 thus belongs to the most common cross-linguistic strategy described by van der Auwera et al. (2013) as using “the verbal construction of the second singular imperative and a sentential negative strategy not found in (indicative) declaratives”. On the other hand, V1 Prohibitive belongs to the second next most common strategy where “the prohibitive uses a verbal construction other than the second singular imperative and a sentential negative strategy not found in (indicative) declaratives”.

Below are examples of the Prohibitive for V1 and V2.

(4) V1 Prohibitive

*ba:=hari:d-a*

NEG.PROH=slaughter-IMP.SG.M

“Don’t slaughter it!” [NARR\_50\_fox\_hunt\_235]

(cp. Imperative *harid-a!* ‘slaughter it!’)

(5) V2 Prohibitive

*ti-bari=je:=na*

*ba:=ra:t-a*

2SG.M-have\IPFV=REL=thing NEG.PROH=ask-IMP.SG.M

“Don’t ask for what you have!” [NARR\_04\_djinn\_156]

### 2.2.2. Negative Optative

Beja has a second mood paradigm, that of the Optative (which functions as an optative with 2<sup>nd</sup> persons, a hortative with 1<sup>st</sup> persons, and a jussive with 3<sup>rd</sup> persons), which is also asymmetric in terms of polarity. The affirmative is marked with the proclitic particle *bi=*, which cliticizes to the Aorist paradigms of V1 and V2. The negative Optative is also marked with a proclitic particle *bi=* (homophonous with the affirmative one) / *ba=* (1SG)<sup>4</sup>, but it cliticizes to other paradigms and verb stems: Both V1 and V2 have prefixed personal

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<sup>4</sup> The vowel of the Optative enclitic harmonizes with the flectional morpheme of 1SG *a-*.

indices, identical to those of the indicative Perfective of V1. For V2 the invariable stem is in addition followed by specific suffixes, except 2PL and 3PL which have the same plural suffixes as the Aorist. The stems of V1 are identical to the Prohibitive stems. Thus, what distinguishes polarities in the Optative is not a negative enclitic as with other tenses, but the stem difference for V1, and the flectional affixes for V2.

Compare Tables 2 and 3, which provide the full paradigms of the Optative, affirmative and negative respectively.

	<b>V2</b>	<b>V1 monosyl.</b>	<b>V1 disyl.</b>
	‘eat’	‘leave’	‘arrive’
1SG	<i>bi=tam-i</i>	<i>bi=i:-dif</i>	<i>bi=i:-ktim</i>
2SG.M	<i>bi=tam-tija</i>	<i>bi=ti:-dif-a</i>	<i>bi=ti:-ktim-a</i>
2SG.F	<i>bi=tam-ti:</i>	<i>bi=ti:-dif-i</i>	<i>bi=ti:-ktim-i</i>
3SG.M	<i>bi=tam-i</i>	<i>bi=i:-dif</i>	<i>bi=i:-ktim</i>
3SG.F	<i>bi=tam-ti</i>	<i>bi=ti:-dif</i>	<i>bi=ti:-ktim</i>
1PL	<i>bi=tam-ni</i>	<i>bi=ni:-dif</i>	<i>bi=ni:-ktim</i>
2PL	<i>bi=tam-ti:n(a)</i>	<i>bi=ti:-dif-na</i>	<i>bi=ti:-ktim-na</i>
3PL	<i>bi=tam-i:n(a)</i>	<i>bi=i:-dif-na</i>	<i>bi=i:-ktim-na</i>

Table 2: Affirmative Optative paradigms

	<b>V2</b>	<b>V1 monosyl.</b>	<b>V1 disyl.</b>
	‘eat’	‘leave’	‘arrive’
1SG	<i>ba=a-tam-aj</i>	<i>ba=a-di:f</i>	<i>ba=a-kati:m</i>
2SG.M	<i>bi=t-tam-aja</i>	<i>bi=t-di:f-a</i>	<i>bi=t-kati:m</i>
2SG.F	<i>bi=t-tam-aj</i>	<i>bi=t-di:f-i</i>	<i>bi=t-kati:m</i>
3SG.M	<i>bi=i-tam-aj</i>	<i>bi=i-di:f</i>	<i>bi=i-kati:m</i>
3SG.F	<i>bi=t-tam-aj</i>	<i>bi=t-di:f</i>	<i>bi=i-kati:m</i>
1PL	<i>bi=n-tam-aj</i>	<i>bi=n-di:f</i>	<i>bi=n-kati:m</i>
2PL	<i>bi=t-tam-i:na</i>	<i>bi=t-di:f-na</i>	<i>bi=t-kati:m-na</i>
3PL	<i>bi=i-tam-i:na</i>	<i>bi=i-di:f-na</i>	<i>bi=i-kati:m-na</i>

Table 2: Negative Optative paradigms

Below are examples of the negative Optative (6-7). Note that the Optative also expresses deontic modalities with 3<sup>rd</sup> persons, such as ability (8) or obligation (9).



- (6) V2  
*ti=dirʔa han ba=a-faga-am-aj*  
 DEF.F=field also OPT=1SG-work-MID-NEG.OPT  
 “Let me not work in the field anymore!”  
 [NARR\_02\_farmer\_143]
- (7) V1  
*o:n i=kʷi:ri bi=n-hari:d*  
 PROX.SG.M.ACC DEF.M=ostrich OPT=1PL-slaughter\NEG.OPT  
 “Let’s not slaughter this ostrich!” [NARR\_38\_ostrich\_040–041]
- (8) Deontic ability (V2)  
*bani ʔa:dam han bi=i-hass-aj*  
 son Adam also OPT=3SG.M-pass-NEG.OPT  
 “A human being could not even pass!”  
 [NARR\_05\_eritrea\_178]
- (9) Deontic obligation (V2)  
*harʔi:=isi:si*  
 after=POSS.3SG.ABL  
*bi=t-jʔ-a=he:b<sup>5</sup>*  
 OPT=3SG.F-come-NEG.OPT=OBJ.1SG  
 “She must not come to me from behind it.”  
 [NARR\_05\_eritrea\_329]

### 2.2.3. Negative questions

Negative questions have the same morphological properties as standard negation or non-declarative negative Optative. They are used to force a positive answer in a polemical situation, but, like in English, need not be answered positively.

In (10) a rich and proud man is angry because a young boy did not bow in front of him. In (11) two persons are arguing about moral behaviour and rules of honour: speaker a. tries to force speaker b. to agree with him, which he does not.

- (10) Negative question with positive reply  
 a. *ane:b ki=t-kan=he:b han*  
 1SG.ACC NEG.IPFV=2SG.M-know\MID.PFV=OBJ.1SG Q.PLR  
 “Don’t you know ME?” [NARR\_31\_king\_40]

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<sup>5</sup> The final *j* of the negative Optative suffixes of V2 drops before object enclitics.

- b. *awo: a-k<t>e:n=ho:k*  
 yes 1SG-know\IPFV<MID>=OBJ.2SG  
 “Yes, I know you.” [NARR\_31\_king\_42]
- (11) Negative question with negative reply
- a. *w=hagg=o: ho:j*  
 DEF.SG.M=right=POSS.3SG.ACC ABL.3  
*i-jaj-n=e:t to:=na*  
 3-take\IPFV-PL=REL.F DEF.SG.F.ACC=thing  
*ki=t-ti han [...]*  
 NEG.IPFV=3SG.F-become\PFV Q.PLR  
 “Should not they stand for their rights?” (lit. is it not that they take from him their rights) [CONV\_01\_rich\_SP1\_214–215]
- b. *abadan a?a:*  
 never no  
 “Never! No!” [CONV\_01\_rich\_SP2\_249–250]

## 2.3. Negation in non-main clauses

In all balanced subordinate clauses with finite verb forms, be they relative, complement or adverbial clauses, only the non-declarative construction with the negative Optative paradigms can be used, one more case of asymmetry in the polarity system. The TAM interpretation of the non-main clauses can only be deduced from the context, as shown by the examples below.

- (12) Relative clause  
*na:=t bi=t-kati:m=i mhi:n*  
 thing=INDEF.F OPT=3SG.F-arrive\NEG.OPT=REL place  
 “[The donkey stopped in] a place where nothing (can in general) arrive” [NARR\_05\_eritrea\_183]
- (13) Complement clause  
*qa:b-i bi=i-di:=je:b hi:s-an*  
 run-FUT.SG OPT=3SG.M-say\NEG.OPT=REL.M think-PFV.1SG  
 “I thought it would not be able to run.”  
 [NARR\_03\_camel\_153]
- (14) Conditional clause  
*na:=t ho:k bi=i-d?i:-n=e:k*  
 thing=INDEF.F 2SG.DAT OPT=3-do\NEG.OPT-PL=if  
 “if they don’t do anything to you [we are going to complain to God.]” [NARR\_08\_drunkard\_067]

(15) Temporal clause

*bi=i-m-tak<sup>w</sup>a:k<sup>w</sup>-n=ho:b*

OPT=3-RECP-repair\INT.NEG.OPT-PL=when

“[There was a man, and he had a wife, and they did not get along well.] As they were not getting along well...”

[NARR\_24\_chief\_010]

The negation of a deranked clause with a non-finite verb form is only possible with the Simultaneity converb, which uses the Prohibitive negator.<sup>6</sup> It takes a privative sense (see also §2.6.1).

(16) Simultaneity converb

*ba:=sina:kir-e:*

*fidin-ti*

NEG.PROH=listen-CVB.SMLT move\_away-CVB.GNRL

*ɖa:b-e:ti:t*

run-CVB.SEQ

“without paying attention, she runs away and...”

[NARR\_36\_hunchback\_443]

The other three converbs cannot be negated and the negative Optative in a balanced clause is used instead.

## 2.4. Negative lexicalizations

Among the nine semantic domains of negative lexicalizations crosslinguistically attested (Zeshan 2004; Veselinova 2013a), Beja has only one, namely cognition, represented by the cognition verb *gam* ‘ignore, not know’ (17a). It can be used for related cognitive domains, namely absence of understanding (17b) and recognition (17c), and, in a polysemous manner, also for the expression of the incapacity modality (17d).

Note that in (17a–c) *gam* could be replaced by the regular negation of *kan* ‘know’.<sup>7</sup> But Beja has no capacity modal verb (apart from the

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<sup>6</sup> The reasons for the use of the Prohibitive negator with the simultaneity converb are unclear.

<sup>7</sup> See (44b) and (47) for the negation of *kan*.

recent and infrequent loan from Arabic *agdar*) and the cognitive verb *kan* cannot be used in a modal sense of capacity in (17d).

(17) *gam* ‘ignore’

- a. *o:n* *i=mhe:l=o:*  
 PROX.SG.M.ACC DEF.M=treat\N.AC=POSS.3SG.ACC  
*e:-t-gi:m*  
 3SG.M-MID-ignore\IPFV  
 “He does not know the appropriate treatment.”  
 [NARR\_53\_pregnant\_man\_14]
- b. *w=ʔo:r-i* *bhali=e:b* *na:=t*  
 DEF.SG.M=child-GEN word=LOC.PL thing=INDF.F  
*e:-t-gi:m*  
 3SG.M-MID-ignore\IPFV  
 “He does not understand anything about the boy’s words.”  
 [NARR\_31\_king\_74–75]
- c. *i=mhaj* *ragad-a* *e:=raw*  
 DEF.M=three leg-PL DEF.PL.M.ACC=other\PL  
*a-gam*  
 1SG-ignore\MID.PFV  
 “I did not recognize the other three legs.”  
 [NARR\_27\_goat\_159]
- d. *ʔa~ʔib-ti=e:k* *wari=t*  
 PLAC~fall-N.AC=POSS.2PL.ACC other\PL=INDF.F  
*hariw-a* *na:=t* *te:-t-gi:m=e:k*  
 seek-IMP.SG.M thing=INDF.F 2SG.F-MID-ignore\IPFV=if  
 “Look for another job, if you can’t do anything else!”  
 [NARR\_04\_djinn\_162]

Note that non-utterance is not lexicalized in Beja, but in addition to several verbs of saying which are regularly negated, there is also an affirmative construction consisting of the noun *his / hus* ‘voice’ and the light verb *ak* ‘become, be’ meaning ‘not talk, shut up’.

(18) Non utterance

- u=ja:s-i=d* *hus* *ak-a*  
 DEF.SG.M.ACC=dog-GEN=DIR voice become-IMP.SG.M  
*i-jad-na*  
 3-say\IPFV-PL  
 “They tell the dog: Shut up!” [NARR\_18\_Adam\_devil\_221]

## 2.5. Other clausal negation constructions

### 2.5.1. Privatives

Absence can be marked by three types of clausal construction, depending on the category of the scope: if the scope is a noun or a pronoun, it can be followed by the negative simultaneity converb of *ak* ‘become’ (19)<sup>8</sup>; if the scope is a covert 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun and the main predicate is a motion verb, absence is marked by clause chaining with the general converb of *ʔif* ‘let’ (20); if the scope is a predicate the negative simultaneity converb form of the verb is used (21) (see also ex. 16, §2.3).

- (19) Scope over noun with negative simultaneity converb of *ak*  
*i=nawa=wwa*                      *ti=mi.tat=wa*  
DEF.M=sinew=COORD    DEF.F=bone\PL=COORD  
*ba:=ka:j*  
NEG.PROH=become\CVB.SMLT  
“without the sinews and the bones”  
[NARR\_41\_Emirab\_leopard\_085]
- (20) Scope over covert pronoun with motion verb  
*ʔif-ti*                      *gi:g-i:ni*  
let-CVB.GNRL    leave-IPFV.3SG.M  
“He leaves without (them).” [NARR\_18\_Adam\_devil\_289]
- (21) Scope over predicate  
*ʔala:l=i:b*                      *simha-ti*                      *da<nn>ʔi*  
duststorm=LOC.SG get\_riid\_off-CVB.GNRL do<IPFV>.[3SG.M]  
*ba:=g<sup>w</sup>ab-e:*  
NEG.PROH=overturn-CVB.SMLT  
“It makes a whirl of dust without overturning.”  
[NARR\_51\_camel\_stallion\_116–117]

### 2.5.2. Phasal negation

Three adverbial phrases may be used to express phasal negation together with a negative predicate. None of them is obligatory, and they are indeed quite rare in naturalistic data.

As in affirmative utterances, the additive focus particle *han* ‘also’ can be used for this purpose (22). In addition two other adverbs, *w=ʔagija* ‘anew’ (23) and *fa:wi* ‘again’ (24) may be used in the negative polarity (not *mhasi* ‘again’, possibly limited to the affirmative polarity, but further research is needed). Only *fa:wi* can be postposed

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<sup>8</sup>

For the use of a dedicated postposition, see §3.4.

to the verb. Note that *w=ʔagija* behaves morphologically as a noun and hosts the definite article.

- (22) Phasal negation with *han*  
*ti=dirʔa han ba=a-faga-am-aj*  
 DEF.F=field also OPT=1SG-work-MID-NEG.OPT  
 “Let me not work in the field anymore!”  
 [NARR\_02\_farmer\_143]
- (23) Phasal negation with *w=ʔagija*  
*tʔa w=ʔagija i:-bqan*  
 now DEF.SG.M=anew FUT.SG-forget\INT  
*ka=a-di*  
 NEG.IPFV=1SG-say\PFV  
 “Now, I won’t forget him anymore!”  
 [NARR\_13\_grave\_080]
- (24) Phasal negation with *fa:wi*  
*ani=wa baru:k=wa*  
 1SG.NOM=COORD 2SG.M.NOM=COORD  
*ki=n-am-da~dʔar fa:wi*  
 NEG.IPFV=1PL-RECP-PLAC~marry\PFV again  
 “Me and you, we are not husband and wife anymore.”  
 [NARR\_23\_lezard\_075–076]

Another type of phasal negation is ‘not yet’, but Beja has no special ‘not yet’ tense. Such a meaning is very rarely overtly expressed in naturalistic data. Below is one example with the negative Imperfective followed by the adverb *nu:n* ‘only’.

- (25) ‘Not yet’  
*e:ra-m-a:-b winne:t*  
 white-MID-PRF-M plenty  
*ki=i-ki nu:n*  
 NEG.IPFV=3SG.M-become\PFV only  
 “It is not broad day light yet.” (lit. it is not very white  
 only) [NARR\_05\_eritrea\_387]

### 3. Non-clausal negation

#### 3.1. Negation in stative predications

Stative predications have no dedicated negative constructions, and there are no special negators, which are the same as those in standard and non-declarative negations.

### 3.1.1. Possessive predication

Possessive predication is expressed with a ‘have’ verb, *biri*, which is defective and shows traces of the previous aspectual system: it has no Perfective, and the Aorist (historically the former Perfective) is used instead. Consequently, the Imperfective negative is built on the Imperfective paradigm and stem (instead of the Perfective for regular verbs), as shown in (26) below.

(26) Negative possession

*ahamad i=ragad-a ki=i-bari*  
 Ahmed DEF.M=LEG-PL NEG.IPFV=3SG.M-have\IPFV  
 “Ahmed had no legs.” [NARR\_05\_eritrea\_022]

### 3.1.2. Equational, proper inclusion and attribution clauses

In the affirmative, equational, proper inclusion and attribution clauses are all expressed with a non-verbal copula, enclitic to their host, which varies for person, gender and number (with some conflation), but not for TAM. In the negative polarity, the copula is replaced by *ak*, an irregular verb meaning ‘be/become’. Note that there is no overtly marked difference between permanent and temporary property assignment.

(27) Equational

a. Affirmative

*t=hiku:ma ?araw=e:=ja*  
 DEF.F=power friend\PL=POSS.1PL.ACC=COP.3PL  
 “The policemen are my friends.”  
 [NARR\_08\_drunkard\_064]

b. Negative

*w=?ara:w=o: ba:=a-kaj=e:t*  
 DEF.SG.M=friend=POSS.3SG.ACC OPT=1SG-become\  
 NEG.OPT=REL.F  
*to:=na ti-kan=he:b*  
 DEF.SG.F.ACC=thing 3SG.F-know\MID.PFV=OBJ.1SG  
 “She knew that I was not her boyfriend.”  
 [NARR\_01\_shelter\_133–137]

(28) Proper inclusion

a. Affirmative

*t=ʔano:=t=a*

DEF.F=sheep=INDF.F=COP.3PL

“They are ewes.” [NARR\_02\_farmer\_119]

b. Negative

*tak ka=a-ki*

man NEG.IPFV=1SG-become\PFV

“I am not a man.” [NARR\_25\_orphan\_263]

(29) Attribution

a. Affirmative

*u:=tak*

*ama:g=i*

DEF.SG.M.NOM=man bad=COP.3SG

“The man is bad.” [CONV\_01\_rich\_sp2\_049]

b. Negative

*fawa:j ka=a-ki*

free NEG.IPFV=1SG-become\PFV

“I am not free.” [NARR\_18\_Adam\_devil\_285]

### 3.1.3. Existential and locative predications

Existential and locative predications are expressed with three locative verbs *faj*, *haj* and *da*: ‘be there’. They are marked for TAM with some restrictions: *haj* has no Perfective, Imperative and 1SG Imperfective; *faj* has no Perfective. These predications have only two functions: existential and locative. None can be used as a privative, or as a short answer.

Existential and locative negative predications belong to the second most frequent type of Veselinova (2013b), i.e. there is no special existential negator. But *faj* cannot be negated; the two other locative verbs are used instead, as shown in (30–31). Moreover, the use of *da*: is restricted to abstract notions in existential and locative constructions (32).

(30) *haj* existential negation

*mʔari=t han o:=do:r be:b*

food=INDF.F also DEF.SG.M.ACC=time DIST.SG.M.ACC

*ki=t-ha:j=it*

NEG.IPFV=3SG.F-be\_there\PFV=CSL

“since there is no food at that time either”

[NARR\_46\_tirik\_062]



- (31) *da*: existential negation  
*ittifa:g bi=i-da:-aj=e:t*  
 agreement OPT=3SG.M-be\_there-NEG.OPT=REL.F  
*to:=na:=t=i*  
 DEF.SG.F.ACC=thing=INDF.F=COP.3SG  
 “There should not be an agreement.” (lit. the thing is that there is no agreement) [CONV\_01\_rich\_sp1\_192]
- (32) *da*: locative negation  
*mi-rk<sup>w</sup>aj ho: ka=da-ja nu:n*  
 N.AC-fear 1SG.DAT NEG.IPFV=be\_there-PFV.3SG.M only  
*i=gin<sup>?</sup>=i:b*  
 DEF.M=heart=LOC.SG  
 “Nevertheless I am not afraid in my heart.” (lit. fear is not to my heart = I am courageous) [NARR\_05\_eritrea\_220]

Note that in (32) the abstract subject of the locative predication is indefinite, unlike subjects in more prototypical and concrete locative predications as in the affirmative example (33) with *haj*.

- (33) *haj* locative affirmative  
*w=hata:j=ih i dha:j*  
 DEF.SG.M=horse=POSS.3.SG.GEN DIR  
*ha:j-e:*  
 be\_there-CVB.SMLT  
 “While he was on his horse...”  
 [NARR\_18\_hunchback\_454]

### 3.2. Negative replies

Beja has several ways to form negative replies. A frequent one in everyday interactions is a dental click for ‘no’. It can be used in replies to negative and affirmative questions, and rarely in reaction to affirmative or negative statements. Its affirmative counterpart is a lateral click.

We already saw in (11b) the negative reply *aʔa*: ‘no’, reinforced by the adverbial *abadan* ‘never’, an Arabic loan. It is used in polemical situations when each speaker sticks to his/her own arguments, and corresponds to *awo*: ‘yes’ used as an affirmative reply, also in polemical situations, as in (10b) above. But *awo*: is more often used in other discourse situations, as a sign of agreement to a statement, be it by the speaker himself about his own statement (34) or by his

interlocutor (35). The pragmatic uses of these affirmative and negative replies differ.

(34) Self approval

*u=:re:w*                      *ki=i-ki*                                      *ako:*  
 DEF.SG.M.NOM    NEG.IPFV=3SG.M-become\PFV    DM  
*tu:=na*                                      *dab~dab-ja:n*                      *awo:*  
 DEF.SG.F.NOM=thing    run~PLAC-3PL.PFV    yes  
 “As it was not cattle, they ran away, they did.”  
 [NARR\_67\_WitchCow\_270–271]

(35) Agreement with interlocutor

- a.        *bar-ije:*    *i=bhali*                      *ni-msaw*  
 3-GEN.PL    DEF.M=words    1PL-hear\IPFV  
 “We are going to hear his words.”  
 [INT\_04\_marriage\_SP1\_030]
- b.        *awo:*  
 yes  
 “Yes.” [INT\_04\_Marriage\_SP2\_001]

The most common construction to express negative replies to affirmative and negative polar questions is to use the full paradigm of the negative Imperfective of *ak* ‘be, become’, which functions in this case as a dummy verb.

(36) Negative reply with *ak* to an affirmative polar question

- a.        *ti=j?a*        *na:=t*                      *ho:j*    *t-?if-a*                      *kwi:kʷaj*  
 DEF.F=milk    thing=INDF.F    ABL.3    2-let\PFV-SG.M    crow  
 “Did you leave some milk from it, Crow?”  
 [NARR\_16\_Prophet\_Fox\_332–333]
- b.        *ka=a-ki*  
 NEG.IPFV=1SG-become\PFV  
 “No.” [NARR\_16\_Prophet\_Fox\_334]

As (36) shows, the negation with *ak* in reply to a positive polar question disagrees with its contents. But in replies to negative polar questions, it agrees with the negative polarity of the question and means also ‘no’, as in (37) below. The negation with *ak* does not function as a polarity-reversing particle, *awo:* ‘yes’ is used instead (cp. 10b).

(37) Negative reply with *ak* to a negative polar question

- a. *Ahmed nʔir-a:-b ki=i-ki han*  
Ahmed cure-PFV-M NEG.IPFV=3SG.M-become\PFV Q.PLR  
'Has not Ahmed healed?'
- b. *ki=i-ki*  
NEG.IPFV=3SG.M-become\PFV  
'No, he has not.'

### 3.3. Negative indefinites

Beja does not have a category of indefinite pronouns. For human entities one may use the numeral *ga:l* 'one', and its plural form *ga:li* 'ones', in an affirmative utterance. But *ga:l* cannot be used in negative utterances, and the generic noun *na:* 'thing' or *tak* 'man' are used instead, together with a negative predicate.

(38) Animate indefinite

- a. Affirmative  
*ga:l dha:j jʔ-i*  
one DIR come-AOR.3SG.M  
'Someone was coming towards him.'  
[NARR\_11\_coffee\_03]
- b. Negative  
*tak ba=a-sak<sup>w</sup>hi:*  
man OPT=1SG-follow\NEG.OPT  
'Let me not be followed by anyone!'  
[NARR\_55\_tanduuy\_114]
- c. Negative  
*w=ha:f=i:b han na:=t*  
DEF.SG.M=land=LOC.SG also thing=INDF.F  
*ki=i-ke:-n*  
NEG.IPFV=3-become\PFV-PL  
[The people in this country flew away from her] "There is even no one in the country." (lit. they are not a thing)  
[NARR\_33\_teeth\_31–32]

Note that the use of *ga:l* or *tak* is not obligatory, and a finite verb form can simply be used instead, without an independent subject pronoun as in (39) which is the very beginning of an anecdote.

(39) No overt indefinite

*tam-i:ni*

eat-IPFV.3SG.M

“Someone is eating.” [NARR\_07\_cold\_01]

For indefinite inanimates the generic noun *na:* ‘thing’ is used for the expression of ‘something’ in affirmative utterances and ‘nothing’ with a negative predicate. In accordance with morphological rules of indefiniteness marking, the generic noun bears no indefinite article in subject position (40a–b) – except in relative clauses, see (13) – but does in object position (41a–b).

(40) Inanimate subject

a. Affirmative

*ti-fik*

*na: ti:-fi*

3SG.F-hunt\PFV thing 3SG.F-be\_there\AOR

“There was something that hunted it.”<sup>9</sup>

[NARR\_05\_eritrea\_261]

b. Negative

*na: dha:j ka=?e:ta*

thing DIR NEG.IPFV=come\PFV.3SG.F

“Nothing came to it.” [NARR\_16\_Prophet\_Fox\_071]

(41) Inanimate object

a. Affirmative

*na:=t*

*he:=ho:n*

thing=INDF.F give\IMP.[SG.M]=OBJ.1PL

“Give us something!” [NARR\_50\_fox\_hunt\_171]

b. Negative

*na:=t*

*ho:k*

*bi=i-d?i:-n=e:k*

thing=INDF.F 2SG.DAT OPT=3-do\NEG.OPT-PL=if

“if they don’t do anything to you”

[NARR\_08\_drunkard\_067]

Apart from the Arabic loan *abadan* ‘never’ used as a strong refutation or disapproval to a statement (see 11b above), Beja uses the standard negation or non-declarative negation to express an event that does not

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<sup>9</sup>

Only human beings are considered as animate.

occur at any moment. As for ‘nowhere’, one simply uses the noun ‘*mhi:n* ‘place’ in its indefinite form in a negative utterance.

### 3.4. Privative

Absence is expressed by four syntactic constructions. Three of them are cases of clausal negation and have been treated in §2.5.1. The fourth construction is marked with the postposition *anu* ‘without’ and has scope over a noun or a pronoun.

- (42) Scope on (pro)noun with postposition *anu*  
*kibir anu a:di tak i-ka*  
 pride without normal man 3SG.M-become\PFV  
 “He became a normal man without pride.”  
 [NARR\_31\_king\_94]

## 4. Other aspects of negation

### 4.1. Reinforcing negation

Ordinary clausal negations are often used rhetorically as understatements. This is associated with highly positive values, in compliance with Beja social rules of politeness and honour, in order to soften statements and their social or psychological impact (44a–b).

- (43) Negation used as understatement
- a. *winne:t ho:j ḍib-a-b*  
 plenty ABL.3 fall-PRF-M  
*ki=i-ki*  
 NEG.IPFV=3SG.M-become\PFV  
 “He is furious against him.” (lit. he has not fallen a lot from him) [NARR\_38\_ostrich\_143–144]
- b. *dijar-an=e:k ka=a-kan*  
 be\_tired-PFV.1SG=if NEG.IPFV=1SG-know\MID.PFV  
 “I am really exhausted.” (lit. I don’t know if I am tired)  
 [NARR\_18\_Adam\_devil\_165]

To make clear that a statement is truly negative, and contrasts with an expected event or state, speakers use a complex predicate, only grammaticalized in the Perfective. It is built with a verbo-nominal form of the core verb with the suffix *-at / -it* and the auxiliary verb *rib* ‘refuse’. Apart from the TAM restriction, two features distinguish the

complex predicate from a clause chain including *rib* with its original meaning: in clause chaining the verb preceding *rib* is its general converb form (45b) or its action noun (45a), and the subject is obligatorily animate; in the complex predicate, in addition to the form of the core verb, the subject of *rib* can be inanimate (46) (for details, see Hamid Ahmed and Vanhove (2004)).

(44) *rib* in clause chaining

- a. *e:=jam* *ti=sito:b-o:j*  
 DEF.PL.M.ACC=water DEF.F=convey-N.AC  
*i-n-ri:b=ho:b*  
 3SG.M-IPFV-refuse=when  
 “when he refuses to bring water” [NARR\_48\_milk\_044]
- b. *dʔir-ti* *i-rib-na*  
 marry-CVB.GNRL 3-refuse\PFV-PL  
 “They refused to marry (me).” [NARR\_36\_hunchback\_520]

(45) *rib* as contrastive negation

*t=ʔaba=t=i* *dh=e:*  
 DEF.F=wadi=INDF.F=POSS.1SG.NOM DIR=POSS.1SG.ACC  
*tʔi-it* *ti-rib*  
 resemble-VN 3SG.F-refuse\PFV  
 “To me, my wadi did not look like it.”  
 [NARR\_05\_eritrea\_309]

## 4.2. Negative transport

Negative transport does not occur in Beja. In complement clauses, whatever the semantic category of the predicate of the main clause, negation has only scope over its host. This means that if the main predicate is negated, the complement clause in the affirmative has an affirmative interpretation (47), and that negative complement clauses are always marked with a negator (48–49).

(46) Scope over main predicate

*t=ho:j=t=e:b* *na:jlo:=b*  
 DEF.F=belly=INDF.F=LOC.PL plastic=INDF.M.ACC  
*hi:s-i=e:k* *ka=a-kan*  
 think-AOR.1SG=if NEG.IPFV=1SG-know\MID.PFV  
 “I don’t know if I had thought of a plastic bag in its belly.”  
 [NARR\_27\_goat\_176]

- (47) Scope over complement clause  
*ho:j da:-jan=i da:j*  
 ABL.3 be\_there\_PFV.1SG=REL be\_there\N.AC  
*ka=a-kan*  
 NEG.IPFV=1SG-know\MID.PFV  
 “I don’t know how I did it.” [NARR\_03\_camel\_221]
- (48) Scope over complement clause  
*ɖa:b-i bi=i-di:=je:b*  
 run-FUT.SG OPT=3SG.M-say\NEG.OPT=REL.M  
*hi:s-an*  
 think-PFV.1SG  
 “I thought it would not be able to run.”  
 [NARR\_03\_camel\_153]

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the negative system of Beja clearly distinguishes constructions in declarative and non-declarative constructions, and within declaratives and non-declaratives: it has a reduced asymmetrical TAM system and uses different negators. TAM is even more reduced and asymmetrical in non-main clauses, where only the negative Optative or the negative Simultaneity converb can be used, whereas all affirmative declarative verb forms and converbs are possible in balanced and deranked clauses respectively.

Remarkable is the fact that, unlike other tenses, the negative Optative does not use an enclitic negator, but has recourse instead to stem alternation and specific inflectional morphemes.

On the other hand Beja has no distinct polarity system for stative predication. It makes no difference between permanent and temporary property assignment, and existential and locative predications cannot be used as privatives, nor as short answers. It should be noted however that an indefinite subject is possible in locative constructions (but only when referring to abstract notions), in contradiction with Veselinova (2013b) cross-linguistic survey.

In addition to the basic negative system, Beja has grammaticalized an auxiliated construction to reinforce negation, but only in the Perfective aspect, which is where TAM reduction occurs in ordinary negation. It is possible that social reasons are behind this restriction, since the Perfective aspect is less committing for speakers, and since it is considered as impolite to state loud and clear one’s opinion.

Privatives are marked with four constructions, three clausal ones, even when the scope of negation is a noun, and one non-clausal, with a dedicated postposition and scope on (pro)nouns. One of the clausal constructions, that with motion verbs, resorts to clause chaining with a converb denoting abandonment (‘let’), and not to a negator.

Phasal negation is rarely overtly expressed and is usually left to contextual interpretation. Nevertheless three adverbs denoting addition or repetition (‘also’, ‘anew’, ‘again’) can be added to negative utterances. One of these adverbials (‘only’) may, but rarely, be used for the expression of ‘not yet’, but again, it is rarely overtly expressed.

Beja has no indefinite pronouns, but may use either the numeral *ga:l* ‘one’, the generic noun *na:* ‘thing’, the noun referring to a male *tak* ‘man’, in both affirmative and negative utterances.

The language has only a negative lexicalization in the domain of cognition (polysemous with modality) competing with an affirmative verb, and does not show negative transport.

Finally, negative replies use different strategies, from a simple dental click, to an adverb meaning ‘no’, or a dummy negative verb. Their use largely depends on pragmatics.

A diachronic note to conclude: Beja shows no trace of the Jespersen’s Meillet’s Cycle, nor of the Negative Existential Cycle as described by Croft (1991) and Veselinova (2014).

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## Abbreviations

ABL ablative; ACC accusative; AOR Aorist; CAUS causative; COORD coordination; COP copula; CSL causal; CVB.GNRL general converb;



CVB.SEQ sequential converb; CVB.SMLT simultaneity converb; DAT dative; DEF definite; DIR directional; DIST distal; DM discourse marker; F feminine; FUT Future; GEN genitive; IMP imperative; INDF indefinite; INT intensive; IPFV Imperfective; LOC locative; M masculine; MID middle; N.AC action noun; NEG negation; NOM nominative; OBJ object; OPT Optative; PFV Perfective; PL plural; PLAC pluractional; POSS possessive; PRF Perfect; PROH Prohibitive; PROX proximal; Q.PLR polar question; RECP reciprocal; REL relator; SG singular; TAM tense, aspect, mood; VN verbo-nominal.

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