



**HAL**  
open science

## Contrastive negation in Beja: the auxiliary verb rib

Martine Vanhove, Mohamed-Tahir Hamid Ahmed

► **To cite this version:**

Martine Vanhove, Mohamed-Tahir Hamid Ahmed. Contrastive negation in Beja: the auxiliary verb rib. *Afrika und Übersee*, 2002, 85, pp.81-98. halshs-00009688

**HAL Id: halshs-00009688**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00009688v1>**

Submitted on 21 Mar 2006

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## Contrastive negation in Beja: the auxiliary verb *rib*

by Mohamed-Tahir H a m i d A h m e d and Martine V a n h o v e

### 1 Introduction

In Beja, a Cushitic language spoken mainly in the Sudan, there are several negative particles depending on verbal tenses and moods. As in many languages of the world, there is also an asymmetry between the affirmative conjugations and the negative ones.<sup>1</sup> The perfect negative is not based on the affirmative simple paradigm but is a complex predicate using the so-called gerundive followed by the auxiliary verb *ak* ‘to be’, which is prefixed with the negative particle *ka-*. The negative imperfect is also not based on the affirmative. Beja uses instead the affirmative p e r f e c t paradigm, prefixed with the negative particle *ka-* already mentioned. This paradoxical situation is the result of an aspectual mutation in the language as was explained by David Cohen (1972: 58-60). As for moods, a different negative particle is used, i.e., *ba-/bi-*. Furthermore not all tenses may be negated.<sup>2</sup>

As will be shown here apart from the above mentioned negative particles, Beja also expresses a specific negative modality with an auxiliary verb *rib*, which, as a lexical verb, means ‘to refuse’. Beja is not the only language to have grammaticalized the semantic category of refusal as a negative auxiliary. It exists also for instance in Wolof (Robert 1991: 171), in Swahili (Bostoen 1999: 69) and, to a certain extent, in Maale, an Omotic language (Amha 2001: 187).<sup>3</sup> But, to the best of our knowledge, the existing descriptions give very few comments, if any at all, on the semantic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects of this type of negation.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate these three aspects for the auxiliary *rib* in Beja to which little attention has been given so far. In Section 2, we will discuss the scarce literature on the subject, which is, in addition, highly contradictory. Section 3 is a brief description of the morphosyntax of the complex predicate with *rib*, while section 4 will present an analysis of its aspectual, temporal, and modal values in our own data and of its relation to other

complex predicates and verbal paradigms. This will lead us to conclude in section 5 with some pragmatic and sociolinguistic remarks about how negative auxiliaries are introduced in language.

## 2 Overview of the literature on the negative auxiliary verb *rib*

When reviewing the scanty literature on the subject of the negative auxiliary *rib* in Beja<sup>4</sup>, we were confronted with three problems: (a) its position within the verbal system, i.e., its paradigmatic relation with two other complex predicates, namely with *?i* ‘to come’, and *aree* ‘to like, to want’, and with a grammaticalized form of the first one; (b) the different values that have been attributed to its usages by the authors, (c) the contradiction between the author’s grammatical analyses and translations in natural utterances or contexts.

Reinisch (1893) was the first scholar to mention a verbal periphrastic structure made of a verbo-nominal stem with the suffix *-at* (hereafter VN-*at*) followed by the auxiliary *rib*, meaning ‘to refuse’ as a full verb, in the Halenga variety of Beja. This complex predicate was then dealt with by Roper (1928) for Hadendowa and very briefly by Hudson (1974) for the Arteiga dialect. Because VN-*at* + *rib* was related by Reinisch to the complex predicate with *?i* ‘to come’, and because the two paradigms share a modal value, both have to be discussed.

As a matter of fact, Reinisch analysed VN-*at* + *rib* as one of the two negative forms of what he named Futurum I<sup>5</sup>, a verbal tense built on VN-*at* with the auxiliary *?i* ‘to come’. The other negative counterpart of this Futurum I is VN-*at* + *aree* ‘to like, to want’, preceded by the negative particle *ka-*. The following is the paradigm of the verb *duur* ‘to visit’ with the three auxiliaries as given by Reinisch (1893: 185):

Table 1: Verbal paradigm of the Futurum I in Reinisch<sup>6</sup>

		Positives futurum I		Negatives futurum I				
1)		<i>dūr-at</i>	<i>yí'ani</i>		<i>dūr-at</i>	<i>kārē-an,</i>	<i>dūr-at</i>	<i>a-ríb</i>
2)	m.	"	<i>etníya</i>		"	<i>kārē-ta,</i>	"	<i>tí-riba</i>
	f.	"	<i>etní</i>		"	<i>karē-tay,</i>	"	<i>tí-ribi</i>

u. s. w.

The affirmative mood named ‘Jussiv und Cohortativ’<sup>7</sup> by Reinisch must also be added to these paradigms, because he considers, rightly, that part of the conjugation is phonetically a short form of his Futurum I with *ʔi*<sup>8</sup>, and also because Roper (1928), who agrees with the etymological hypothesis, assigns a common semantic value (of ‘Potential’ not of Future or Cohortative, see below) to both the complex predicate with *ʔi* and Reinisch’s Jussiv. Although Reinisch is wrong to integrate all the forms in one paradigm (3rd persons in fact belong to another paradigm, that of Injunctive, see Roper’s ‘Optative’ 1928: 51), it is worth giving his paradigm for the sake of comparison. Reinisch considers that the conjugational paradigm of the so-called Jussiv-Cohortativ is a mixed one, the 3rd persons being based on another stem. We will see below that Roper and Hudson present other paradigms, analyses and labels. Here is the paradigm as given by Reinisch (1893: 154) for the verb *dir* ‘to kill’:

Table 2: Verbal paradigm of the Jussiv-Cohortativ in Reinisch

1)		<i>der-at-éni</i>
2)	m.	<i>dír-at-a</i>
	f.	<i>dír-at-i</i>
3)	m.	<i>ba-'e-dár</i>
	f.	<i>ba-te-dár</i>
1)		<i>dír-at-ēnēy</i>
2)		<i>der-át-na</i>
3)		<i>ba-'e-dár-na</i>

As far as *rib* is concerned, Reinisch (1893: 151, § 251) adds a vague pragmatic comment about the value of the negative Futurum which he considers as “stronger”<sup>9</sup> than the one with the auxiliary *aree* ‘to like, to want’ preceded by the negative particle *ka-*.

One of the problems of Reinisch’s analysis of VN-*at* + *rib* as a negative Future tense is that he translates it by a Past tense in German in the sole example provided by the texts he published, which is a tale of the oral tradition in the Hadendowa variety, not the Halenga<sup>10</sup> :

- (1) *Wu háḍḍa éya, ē-š’á gāl edír, mēháy-t yína e-šá’ wu-ānkúána iháro, wō-háḍḍa ímire, derát iríb, mderáyna wō-haḍ, ú-raû edír ō-ták.*

Der löwe kam und tötete eine kuh, der eigentümer suchte sie drei tage, da traf er den löwen, konnte in aber nicht töten; denn als er daran war, denselben zu töten, da tötete in selbst ein anderer löwe. (Hadendowa Text n. 8, p. 63, sentence 2).

(“The lion came and killed a cow, the owner looked for it for three days, (and) then he met the lion, but he failed to kill it, because when he was about to kill it, another lion killed him.”)

Apart from the problem of the semantic values of the tense referred to above, there is obviously some discrepancy between the grammatical analysis and the translation made by Reinisch for *rib*. If, a priori, a dialectal difference between the Halenga and the Hadendowa varieties cannot be discarded, the fact that the same discrepancy is found in Roper (see below) for the Hadendowa dialect itself, rules it out. Furthermore it raises the question why Reinisch has overlooked this contradiction which he does not comment upon. There are two possible explanations which do not exclude each other. One is that Reinisch was somehow misled by the use of the same rather rare verbo-nominal stem VN-*at* with both *?i* and *rib*. The other is that the material and analyses presented in Reinisch’s work are not entirely reliable due to the fact that he lost part of his manuscript as he himself explains in the preface (p. 2, § 2).

Roper (1928: 82f.) also dealt with the auxiliary *rib* in a paragraph dedicated to the four auxiliary verbs that can be constructed with the VN-*at* stem which he named Participle or Verbal Noun.

His approach is different from Reinisch’s in that he does not draw up a paradigmatic relation between the complex predicate with *rib* ‘to refuse’ and the one with *?i* ‘to come’, the

latter being rightly labelled Potential not Future. He only correlates the negative VN-*at* + *ka-aree* ‘not to want’ to the Potential in *?i* (see p. 82, § 265). As for the paradigm of the grammaticalized form of VN-*at* + *?i*, which he considers semantically equivalent to the auxiliated construction, Roper’s version is different from Reinisch’s for 3rd persons and 1st pl.: they are not amalgamated and are identical with the respective forms of the complex predicate with *?i*. It could be claimed that these forms only belong to the latter paradigm, the grammaticalized one being defective and expressing a more neutral form of potentiality than the contrastive potential expressed by *?i* ‘to come’. Here is the paradigm of Roper’s two ‘Potentials’ for the verb *tam* ‘to eat’. It should be noted that the 1st person sg. of the synthetic form is the verbo-nominal stem itself (with a zero morpheme):

Table 3: Paradigm of the Potentials in Roper (p. 82)

Potential I (§ 264)	Potential II (§ 263)
<i>tamát</i>	<i>tamát éni</i>
<i>tamáta</i>	<i>tamát étnia</i>
<i>tamáti</i>	<i>tamát étni</i>
<i>tamát eīni</i>	<i>tamát éīni</i>
<i>tamát étni</i>	<i>tamát étni</i>
<i>tamát énei</i> (or <i>tamaténa</i> )	<i>tamát énei</i> (or <i>tamat ena</i> )
<i>tamátna</i>	<i>tamát étena</i>
<i>tamát een</i>	<i>tamát éen</i>

As for the value of the negative complex predicate with *rib*, Roper’s sole comment is that “The English equivalent wavers between past and future” (p. 83, § 267).

Roper’s description of VN-*at* + *rib* is contradictory for several reasons. Firstly, because he sometimes translates VN-*at* + *rib* with the lexical meaning ‘to refuse’. This may be because he does not give a word for word translation, but the problem is that, today, *rib* only keeps its lexical meaning (at least with the third persons) when used with another verbo-nominal form, the nomen actionis (see below § 3)<sup>11</sup>. Secondly, because all his translations by the Future tense in the examples are given out of context in the grammatical part and are not

accepted by one of us (M-T. H. A.) who is a native speaker of the Hadendowa variety of Beja. In (2), those examples with a Future would have been more appropriately translated by a Preterite:

- (2) *werát aríb* I refused to do (it) = I will not do it; *tegizáza idelāwó šūmat tiríb* the bottle refused to go in its hole = (I tried to put it in and) it won't go in, cf. *šūmát kárea* = obviously it won't go though I haven't tried; *áne šūmát aríb* I will not go in (sc. as the others have); *irabéyi isandúki kissú šūmát iríb* all my effects will not go in my box; *nāt anfaradāt teríb* nothing replied = there was no reply; *on irhát aríb* I did not see this one (sc. I saw the others). (p. 83)

And thirdly, because in the texts of the oral tradition Roper published, all the examples in context (3a, b, c below) were translated by a Past tense, i.e., an English Preterite, showing a discrepancy between examples made up for a grammar book and spontaneous utterances:

- (3a) *tengáḡ. dūlát teríb* ... ‘(“O my girl, go in front.”) She stood still and did not approach’ (p. 120, § 118).
- (3b) *tamiánebka ikíkāw nāt óyaf šūmát teríb*. ‘Whenever the crow tried to eat [acc.], nothing would enter his mouth.’ (p. 124, § 135).
- (3c) *ibenūt johāw igāwīd éān. jóha sinūt iríb*. ‘(“Go to Joha, since no one else can settle this matter.”) They went and came to the house of Joha. Joha was not there.’ (p. 132, § 157).

What is the reason for such a discrepancy? Has Roper also been influenced by the common verbo-nominal stem used with both *rib* and *?i*? Has the value of *rib* really changed over time? It is doubtful because both Reinisch and Roper translated the spontaneous utterances by a past tense.

Hudson (1974: 117) was the last to mention, very briefly, in the Arteiga dialect, the structure VN-*at* + *rib*, but he neither comments upon its temporal or modal value nor on its

paradigmatic relation with other tenses. He simply gives an example which he translates by a Preterite and a modal verb:

(4) *ṣaa-ʻt tam-át ?i-riḅ* ‘He failed to eat meat’

He also mentions the complex predicate VN-*at* + *?i* ‘to come’, again with no comment about its value, and the morphologized form discussed above, which he does not relate to the previous one, but labels as ‘Future’. He is correct in giving a defective conjugation (no 3rd persons, no 1st person plural). Below is the so-called Future conjugation for the verb *tam* ‘to eat’:

Table 4: Paradigm of the Future in Hudson (p. 134)

1	<i>tam-át</i>
2m	<i>tam-át-a</i>
2f	<i>tam-át-i</i>
2p	<i>tam-át-na</i>

In addition, Hudson specifies that 2nd persons are only used in interrogative utterances, while the 1st person singular is used in the answers, a statement which meets our own observations. Nevertheless, Hudson (1974: 128) was conscious that his labels were dubious and he stated:

“One of the main outstanding problems in the study of Beja is to identify more precisely the meanings of these and other inflectional categories of the verb, so the translations given should be taken only as rough guides to meaning (as should the names given to the categories).”

The three authors’ descriptions and analyses can be summed up in the following table:

Table 5: Summary of the values of *riḅ* and *?i*



<i>Values</i>	<i>Reinisch</i>	<i>Roper</i>	<i>Hudson</i>
VN- <i>at</i> + <i>rib</i> in grammar	Neg. of Future VN- <i>at</i> + <i>?i</i>	Neg. “Wavers between past and future”	not indicated
Transl.	Past tense neg.	Past tense neg.	Past tense + modal verb
<i>rib</i> = <i>ka-aree</i>	yes	no	not indicated
VN- <i>at</i> + <i>?i</i> morph. form	Futurum I Jussiv-Cohortativ	Potential Potential	not indicated Future

### 3 Syntactic and paradigmatic constraints of *rib*

Before studying the value of *rib* as a negative auxiliary, it is necessary to give an overview of the morphonology, the syntactic and paradigmatic distribution, and the constraints of the uses of VN-*at* + *rib*.

(a) The VN suffix *-at* changes to *-t* with verbs ending with the vowel *-i*, and to *-eet* before pronominal suffixes (see also Roper 1928: 83f.).

(b) The word order of the negative periphrasis is always main verb + auxiliary verb *rib*.

(c) The main verb is the invariable verbo-nominal stem with the suffix *-at*.

(d) As already clearly stated by Roper (1928: 83), the auxiliary *rib* can be only conjugated in the Perfect form. It is incompatible with other aspects and moods (Imperfect, Imperative, Optative, Past Durative).

(e) The stem of the verbal complement of *rib* is different when *rib* keeps its lexical meaning of ‘to refuse’. The *nomen actionis* or *masdar* is then used. In Beja, *masdar* patterns vary according to the syllabic structure of the verb and the class to which it belongs; see examples (5)-(7):

(5) *hoy ti-nšinha iribna*  
of ART.F.SG-take care.NA they refused  
They refused to take care of him.

(6) *aan aa-šʔa amseenook ikay-hoob i-siisam-ti*  
DEM.M.PL ART.M.PL-COW this day it is-when ART.M.SG-graze-NA  
*iribna*  
they refused  
One day, these cows refused to be sent grazing.

- (7) *oo-ng<sup>w</sup>i*            *kaɖ-ti*            *riɓaa-b(-i)*            *tiidi*  
 ART.M.SG-breast    suck-NA.M    refusing-M-(PRED)    she said  
 He refuses to suck my breast, she said.

Consequently, it is clear that, contrary to what could have been deducted by some of Roper's translations, there is no syntactic or semantic ambiguity between the two values of *rib*, that of a lexical verb, and that of a negative auxiliary verb.

This statement seems only true for third persons, not for first and second ones. In the latter cases the periphrasis in VN-*at* + *rib* may have both meanings of refusal or of negation, depending on the context. Example (8) is one of such examples elicited with M-T. H. A.:

- (8) *ti-ɖabanaat-oo*                            *g<sup>w</sup>?-át*            *arib-eet*            or / *tirib-eet*  
 ART.F.SG-coffee-POS3M.SG    drink-VN    I refused-REL            / you refused-REL  
*ti-naat-ii-dhá*                            *yhása*  
 ART.F.SG-thing-GEN-for    he got angry  
 He got angry because I/you did not drink his coffee or I/you refused to drink his coffee.

In our data, the six utterances with 1st or 2nd persons all have a value of contrast and can often be translated by 'not anymore, no more', thus showing that the contrastive value is quite productive in the language:

- (9) *yiinaat*    *asni*            *naat*    *rh-at*            *areb*  
 days    I waited    thing    see-VN    I refused  
 I waited for days and could not see anything.
- (10) *ee-g<sup>w</sup>iba*            *tam-at*    *tiribi*                            *deey-aa-heeb*  
 ART.M.PL-rats    eat-VN    you refused.F    say-GER-1SG  
 They told me: you don't eat rats anymore.

Thus, semantically, the structure VN-*at* + *rib* is only fully grammaticalized as a negative auxiliary with the third persons, although it seems that 1st and 2nd persons are about to be fully grammaticalized also. This is not surprising because, as we'll see below in section 4, VN-*at* + *rib* is almost exclusively used in narratives, where third persons are predominant.

(f) Although there is no accurate equivalent of the value of VN-*at* + *rib* with the affirmative, the complex predicate best commutes with the affirmative perfect conjugation, but never with the complex predicate VN-*at* + *?i* 'to come'.

#### 4 *rib*, a modal auxiliary of negative contrast

Considering the differences between the three authors' analyses and the contradictions between these analyses and their translations, we thought it best to look mainly at spontaneous utterances in context.

The corpus we studied consists of tales and dialogues M. V. recorded in the Sudan during four field works in 2000-2003. It covers the three major dialectal zones, that is South (Wagar), North (Erkowit, Port-Soudan) and the transition zone (Sinkat). The data were complemented by examples taken from the corpus of tales and historical accounts published by the Sudanese scholar Adarob Ohaj (1981), and a joint work of elicitation with M-T. H. A. who is a native speaker of the southern variety of Beja (Hadendowa). It should be mentioned that we did not note any dialectal or sociolinguistic variations to date (no differences due to sex, age or education variables), with regards to VN-*at* + *rib*.

Our first observation was that the negative auxiliary is only found in narrative contexts, the events and feelings described being always connected somehow to the past in relation to their non-achievement. Thus, the negative complex predicate with *rib* can be considered, aspectually and temporally, as a narrative tense and more precisely as a perfect negative. It also explains why we mainly found examples with third persons.

Our second observation was that the use of the auxiliary *rib* always conveys and underlines the idea of a contrast between an expected event and its non-fulfilment. This expected event can be either deduced textually or culturally from the previous context, and would have been a logical consequence of an activity, a state, or a natural phenomenon, previously mentioned. The preconstructed positive consequence is thus thwarted and ruled out by what really happened, or did not happen, hence the strong link of VN-*at* + *rib* with narrative contexts. Furthermore, contrary to Reinisch's statement, it cannot substitute for VN-*at* + *ka-aree*, nor can it substitute for the ordinary perfect negative with the particle *ka-* which would sound very odd in context. Thus VN-*at* + *rib* is contextually compulsory, otherwise the notion of counter-expectation is lost.

Following are some examples, preceded when necessary by short glosses in order to illustrate the value of contrast in narrative contexts. The utterance in (11) is taken from a historical account of the Mahdist revolt in the Sudan, which describes a battle between

Mahdists and anti-Mahdists, during which the latter unexpectedly overcame the former. The Mahdists being on the winning side at that time, it was expected that they would have used their guns as usual. But the attack came as a surprise for them and they had no time to reach for their weapons. The contrast lies between a background knowledge, i.e., fighting with guns, and the fact that the Mahdists could not use guns under this particular circumstance:

- (11) *i-mindik<sup>w</sup>a*      *gees-s-at*<sup>12</sup>      *iribni-it*      *šuumyaani*  
 ART.M.PL-guns    throw.INT-CAUS-VN    they refused-COOR    they went in  
*id<sup>?</sup>uuni-it*      *b<sup>?</sup>ađđaa-w-wa*      *finaat-wa*      *iki*  
 they did-COOR    swords-IDF-COOR    spears-COOR    he became  
 They made no use of the guns. They went in. (The battle) was fought with swords and spears. (Adarob Ohaj 1981: 21, l. 6)

In (12) *rib* underlines the fact that one would expect a woman who has been married a long time to have a lot of children. On the contrary, she has none:

- (12) *tak*    *fađigtamun*    *hawlá*    *takat*    *dir<sup>?</sup>aab*      *ikte-yeet*      *door-han*  
 man    forty                    year    woman    being married    he was-REL    long time-even  
*firi-it*                    *tirib*  
 give birth-VN    she refused  
 After a man had been married for 40 years, (still) his wife never gave birth.

In the following example, the use of *rib* implies that people have tried unsuccessfully to untie the cow's leg:

- (13) *yhaak<sup>w</sup>irn-iit*    *ont<sup>?</sup>a*    *areek*    *aa-lil*                    *lhasyaan-iit*      *hoy*    *fir<sup>?</sup>-at*  
 they tied-COOR    now    then    ART.N.M.PL-ropes    they hurt-COOR    of    go out-VN  
*iribni-it*  
 they refused-COOR  
 They tied them, but then, the ropes hurt [the cow], and they could not be taken off.

In (14), although the hotel had a lot of rooms, it was not enough to accommodate everybody:

- (14) *dooba*    *y<sup>?</sup>iin*      *akó*      *aan*      *i-dooba*      *i-gawa*      *aan*  
 brides    they came    being    DEM.M.PL    ART.M.PL-brides    ART.M.PL-houses    DEM.M.PL  
*lak<sup>w</sup>anda*    *u-mhe-et*                    *tirib*      *tinaayt*    *bee<sup>?</sup>een*    *mhak<sup>w</sup>al-ook*  
 hotel      REL-be enough-VN    she refused    so      there      uphill-POS2M.SG  
*hadiid*    *ittabna*

until they filled

Brides used to come, (so many) brides that the rooms of the hotel were not enough (to accommodate them). [The hotel] was full up to the top of the hill over there.

In (15), *rib* underlines the unfulfilled promise:

- (15) *i-balad*                    *harʔi*   *iḡeraat-kina*   *eeaan-iit*                    *ti-lak<sup>w</sup>anda*  
ART.M.SG-country    after    renting-owners    they came-COOR    ART.F.SG-hotel  
*aḡḡarnaay*   *eeni-it-ka*                    *aḡar-at*   *iribna*                    *gad-i*   *dʔi-it*  
we rent                    they say-COOR-each    rent-VN    they refused    stop-F    do-VN

*iribna*

they refused

After the owners came here, and although each time they would say: ‘we’ll rent the hotel’, they did not rent it nor leave it.

Due to the presence of many tourists, a man expected to go on selling eggs and chickens for the rest of his life, but the closing down of the summer resort thwarted his hopes:

- (16) *ti-lak<sup>w</sup>anda*    *thak<sup>w</sup>ir-eet*                    *ti-madda*                    *k<sup>w</sup>hiiye-w-wa*    *kiley-wa*  
ART.F.SG-hotel    it closed-COOR    ART.F.SG-time    eggs-IDF-COOR    chickens-COOR

*daay-at*   *irib*

do-VN    he refused

When the hotel closed down, he no longer sold eggs and chickens.

- (17) *giigaa*   *giiga*    *giiga*    *tini*                    *sinaakir-at*   *irib*  
go away   go away   go away   she said   listen-VN    he refused  
Go away, go away, go away! she said. (But) he did not obey. (Port-Soudan) [An order is expected to be obeyed].

- (18) *ani*   *baaskiitan-hoob*   *tuu-yin*                    *djib-at*   *tirib*  
I    I fasted-when    ART.N.F.SG-sun    set-VN    she refused

When I fasted, the sun did not set!

In (19), after camels had spent the night in a particular place, grass never grew again as it used to, without any natural reason:

- (19) *šawti*                    *siyaam*   *yakat*                    *irib*  
soon after   grass    come up-VN    he refused  
Soon after, the grass did not come up.

In (20), the first speaker is astonished by the fact that during the hunt the leopard did not try to attack the second speaker, the hunter, a quite unexpected behaviour from such a dangerous animal:

- (20) *-yʔ-eet-ook*     *irib ?*     *-yʔ-eet-ii*     *irib*  
 come-VN-2M.SG    he refused    come-VN-1.SG    he refused  
 – It did not come towards you?! – It did not come towards me.

In (21), teachers have a problem with parents refusing to send their children to school:

- (21) *y-ʔar*                    *ti-madrasa*        *agiriy-at*     *iribn-eek*        *kak*     *niwari?*  
 ART.M.PL-children    ART.F.SG-school    study-VN    they refused-if    how    we do  
 If the children don't go to school, what shall we do?

Therefore, in addition to its function in negative narrative, *rib* expresses a qualitative modality of negative contrast. Negation being, by definition, an assertive modality implying the necessary preconstruction of a positive assertion, it can be said that *rib* explicitly unveils or reveals this relationship between the positive and negative polarity. *Rib* is not a synonym of a specific negative form. It has both a narrative and a contrastive function. It seems that the three linguists referred to above (§ 2) had some kind of intuition of this modal value of contrast: the glosses given by Roper after his translations of the examples in (2), such as ‘(I tried to put it in and) it won't go in’, ‘I will not go in (sc. as the others have)’, and Reinisch's and Hudson's translations by ‘konnte in aber nicht’, and ‘failed to’ in (1) and (4) are somehow in line with this notion.

From a semantic and syntactic point of view it is also remarkable that the subject of the negative complex predicate can be either human or non-human, animate or inanimate, as in (12), (13), (18) and (19), and that all semantic types of verbs, be they active, stative or passive, may have *rib* as an auxiliary. This is an indication that the auxiliary is fully integrated into the morphosyntax of the language for third persons (and also well on the way of being so for 1st and 2nd persons).

So, it is clear from our data that VN-*at* + *rib* is not the negative equivalent of the affirmative Potential in VN-*at* + *ʔi* nor of the grammaticalized form Hudson labelled as a Future and that it cannot be considered simply as a negative Future tense. The numerous (over a hundred) examples in our spontaneous data leave no doubt that it belongs to the category of modality and that it is a contrastive narrative negative tense. Accordingly, even if Reinisch

was wrong in his analyses (probably misled by the fact that both auxiliaries ruled the same verbo-nominal stem), as was Roper when he stated that *rib* “wavers between past and future”, it does not mean that the two structures with VN-*at* + *auxiliary* do not share any semantic properties at all; indeed, they do have one: the modality of contrast. As already stated above, in addition to its Potential value, the auxiliary *?i* ‘to come’ in the complex predicate always conveys the idea that an event or an action is, will be or could be realised contrary to the speaker’s expectation or fear. In the following poem (Hamid Ahmed 2000: 389), the poet fears the disappearance of the praised ethical value of loyalty, contrasting the effective existence of loyalty to the fear of its end:

- (22) *uu-bri yaamee daruur ka-ryhan.* Although rain goes on falling, I don’t see  
green grass any longer.  
*aa-d?ár haayee hamaayeet* Although marriage still exists, I don’t see  
‘hamaayeet’.<sup>13</sup>  
*tuu-slif haayee dagee naawii,* Although debt still exists, because of lack of  
refunding ...  
*k<sup>w</sup>iq-át een ?amaanaat* I fear the disappearance of loyalty.  
disappear-VN they come loyalty.F.PL

Hence, there is some kind of parallelism between VN-*at* + *rib* and VN-*at* + *?i*, but not the one Reinisch thought of.

From a semantic point of view, it is also interesting to note that the morphologized formation of the VN-*at* + *?i* structure lost the modal value of contrast, and is a mere Potential, expressing the possibility that an event or an action takes place as a consequence from another explicit or implicit event or action (hence, probably, Hudson’s interpretation as a Future tense). We have here one more instance of the semantic bleaching that occurs in the process of grammaticalization and morphologization (e.g. Hopper and Traugott 1993).

## 5 Conclusion

Beja contrastive negation can be compared to a similar development which took place in two other languages which one of us studied, Maltese and Yemeni Arabic (Vanhove 1994; 1996). In both languages, the negative particle which was restricted to nominal utterances can now be used with verbs to express a contrast, a contrastive focus, a strong opposition or a refutation of a previous statement. Beja uses a different strategy but the aim, although more

restricted as far as semantic values are concerned, is quite similar. This necessity to underline an unexpected negative event seems to be the pragmatic driving force for the introduction of new negative markers in languages.

Nevertheless, it may not be the only motivation; social rules of politeness may also motivate the use of this construction. In the Beja society for instance, expressing directly a positive statement with an affirmative utterance is often considered rude. The allusive style characterising the Beja speech outside the nuclear family (Hamid Ahmed 2000) and oral traditions makes use of many techniques among which negation is an important one. Using negated statements instead of affirmative ones enhances their positive content. So if a speaker wants to make clear that something is denied, other devices have to be introduced and among them, probably the use of *rib*. So far it is only a hypothesis for this auxiliary, but well worth investigating in the future.

To exemplify the euphemistic and prestigious use of negative statements, the numerous traditional nicknames for men and women may be mentioned. In the Beja Bedouin society these are in fact negated relative clauses, underlying a corresponding positive meaning. For example, *bii-šaamni* means ‘he who is not supported by speech’, i.e., someone who does not need anyone to plead for him, someone independent and eloquent, two traditional prestigious ethical values, and *ti-baa-šáriik* ‘she who does not become greedy’ underlines frugality, also a highly praised virtue.

The euphemistic overuse of negative utterances due to social reasons and taboos may also lead to their linguistic weakening, hence the necessity to introduce new and more expressive structures.

## References

- Adarob Ohaj, Muhammad, 1981: *Min Turaath al-Beja al-Sha‘bi*. Khartoum: Institute of African Studies.
- Almkvist, Herman, 1881-5: *Die Bischari-Sprache Tuu-Beḍaawie* in Nordost-Afrika. Upsala: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Amha, Azeb, 2001: *The Maale Language*. Leiden: Research School CNWS, Universiteit Leiden.



- Bostoën, Koen, 1999: Katanga Swahili: the particular history of a language reflected in her structure; in: *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 57: 47-77.
- Cohen, David, 1972: La mutation aspectivo-temporelle dans quelques langues couchitiques et le système verbal chamito-sémitique; in: Thomas, J. M. C. et Bernot, L. (éds.), *Langues et Techniques, Nature et Société*. Paris: Klincksieck, 57-63.
- Culioli, Antoine, 1990: *Pour une linguistique de l'énonciation. Opérations et représentations. Tome 1. Gap: Ophrys.*
- Givón, Talmy, 1979: *On understanding grammar*. New York, San Francisco, London: Academic.
- Hamid Ahmed, Mohamed-Tahir, 2000: "Paroles d'hommes honorables". *Essai d'anthropologie poétique des Bedja du Soudan*. Bordeaux: Thèse de doctorat de l'Université.
- Heine, Bernd, Ulrike Claudi and Friederike Hünemeyer, 1991: *Grammaticalization. A Conceptual Framework*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Hopper, Paul J. and Elizabeth Closs Traugott, 1993: *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge University.
- Hudson, Richard A., 1974: A Structural Sketch of Beja; in: *African Languages Studies* 15: 111-142.
- Linguistique Africaine*, 1990, vol. 4.
- Morin, Didier, 1995: "Des paroles douces comme la soie". *Introduction aux contes dans l'aire couchitique (bedja, afar, saho, somali)*. Paris: Peeters.
- Reinisch, Leo, 1893: *Die Beḍaue-Sprache in Nordost-Afrika*. Wien: *Sitzungsberichte der Kais. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Band CXXVIII*.
- Robert, Stéphane, 1991: *Approche énonciative du système verbal. Le cas du wolof*. Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- Roper, E.M., 1928: *Tu Beḍawie. An Elementary Handbook for the Use of Sudan Government Officials*. Hertford: Stephen Austin.
- Vanhove, Martine, 1994: Sur le fonctionnement de la négation en maltais. *Matériaux Arabes et Sudarabiques. MAS - GELLAS, Nouvelle Série* 6: 141-167.
- Vanhove, Martine, 1996: The negation *maašii* in a Yaafi'i dialect (Yemen); in: Eid, M. and D. Parkinson (eds.), *Perspectives on Arabic Linguistics IX. Papers from the Ninth Annual Symposium on Arabic Linguistics*. Georgetown University, 10-12 mars 1995,

Washington. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 195-206.

### Abbreviations

ART	article	M	masculine
CAUS	causative	N	nominative
COOR	co-ordinator	NA	nomen actionis
DEM	demonstrative	PL	plural
F	feminine	POS	possessive
GEN	genitive	PRED	predicative
GER	gerund	REL	relative morpheme
IDF	indefinite	SG	singular
INT	intensive	VN	verbo-nominal form

---

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. the special issue of *Linguistique Africaine* 4, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> For details see Roper (1928: 39-52, 56-67).

<sup>3</sup> Heine et al. (1991: 118), following Givón (1979: 222), mention a cross-linguistic grammaticalization of verbs meaning ‘to refuse’ into negative morphemes but without giving specific examples.

<sup>4</sup> Not all the specialists of Beja mentioned the negative construction with *rib* ‘to refuse’. There is nothing about it in Almkvist (1881-5) and Morin (1995).

<sup>5</sup> Reinisch’s labels and analysis are debatable, see discussion below.

<sup>6</sup> Authors’ transcriptions have been respected.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Reinisch (1893: 154, § 257): “Die formation dieses modus ist keine einheitliche durch alle drei personen, sondern entspricht in der ersten und zweiten beider zalen dem verkürzten futurum I (...) und in der dritten person dem plusquamperfect ... “.

<sup>8</sup> But its negative counterpart is different to that of VN-*at* + *?i* (see Reinisch 1893: 154).

<sup>9</sup> “Statt der oben aufgeführten construction [with *ka-aree*], welche eigentlich bedeutet: ich will (werde) nicht töten, lösen u. s. w. wird ein stärkerer grad der verneinung für das gleiche tempus damit ausgedrückt, dass an dieselbe nominalform *der-át*, *fidg-at* u. s. w. das affirmative perfect des grundstammes vom starken verb *rib* verschwören, verwünschen, verweigern, angefügt wird” (underlining by the authors).

---

<sup>10</sup> He lost most of his material on Halenga in a cab in Vienna (Reinisch 1893: 2).

<sup>11</sup> It is not impossible that Beja underwent an evolution in this matter in the last 80 years or so, if one considers that ‘to refuse’ is a possible meaning of the 1st and 2nd persons with the VN-*at* stem (see below § 3).

<sup>12</sup> = *geed-s-at*.

<sup>13</sup> The *hamaayeeet* designates the relationship with the family in law and the social duties and obligations attached to it.