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# Diminutives and augmentatives in Beja (North-Cushitic)

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**Abstract:** The evaluative morphology of Beja consists in four devices. Gender shift to feminine on nouns, and sound change (*r>l*) on nouns, verbs and adjectives form the diminutives. A suffix *-lo:j* on adjectives, and *-l* on Manner converbs, form the augmentatives. The analysis focuses on the evaluative, emotional and other pragmatic values associated with these morphemes, size, endearment, praise, romantic love, contempt, politeness, eloquence. When relevant, the links to the general mechanism of semantic change, LAMBDA-ABSTRACTION-SPECIFICATION proposed by Jurafsky (1996) is discussed. This paper also discusses productivity, cases where the evaluative device has scope on an adjacent noun instead of its host, the distribution of values across semantic domains and genres, and cases of lexicalization. The corpus analysis shows that the proportional frequency of pragmatic expressive connotations compared to the denotational meaning is higher for diminutives than for augmentatives. Besides, with diminutives, positive emotional values are more frequent than negative ones, while with augmentatives attested pejorative values are very rare. The analysis is set within a typological framework.

**Keywords:** Beja, evaluative morphology, diminutive, augmentative, gender, emotion

## 1 Introduction

Beja (*beḍawije=t*) is a Cushitic language of the Afroasiatic phylum mainly spoken in Eastern Sudan by some 1,100,000 speakers, and in Northern Eritrea by some 60,000 speakers (there seems to be hardly any speaker left in Southern Egypt). It is the sole member of the Northern Cushitic branch and it is grammatically and lexically quite distant from other Cushitic languages, even from Afar and Saho, the closest and neighbouring East-Cushitic languages, or Agaw, its other closest central Cushitic relative (Cohen 1988: 267).

Beja is verb-final and predominantly head-final. It possesses a very rich morphology with three nominal core cases: nominative, accusative and genitive; pronouns have dative and

ablative cases in addition. There are two genders, masculine and feminine, and two numbers, singular and plural. With nouns, nominative and accusative are marked by a vocalic ablaut on determiners, which are portmanteau morphemes, partly fusing case, number and gender.

It should be also mentioned, as it may have some impact on the use of evaluative morphology, that there exists a very strict hierarchy of speech in Beja. At the top stand poetry recited by men, followed by greetings, customary law discourse, ritualized advice and poetry sung by women, and at the very bottom all the rest, including narratives, tales and conversations which are all qualified as *harar firid* 'empty words', as opposed to *adim* 'meaningful words' (Hamid Amed 2005: 123-125).

This study is mainly based on the data the first author recorded during eight fieldwork sessions in Eastern Sudan between 2000 and 2011. It is mainly made of narratives (folktales, personal narratives), as well as some procedural texts, descriptive texts, poems, two pear stories (Chafe 1980), and one conversation, recorded from a majority of male speakers from the three dialectal varieties (south, transition zone, and, to a lesser extent, north), and some female speakers, ranging from teenagers to elderly people. Part of the data, annotated and sound-indexed, is accessible online (Vanhove 2014a). We also made use of the poems composed by several Beja poets and published by the second author (Hamid Ahmed 2005). These data are supplemented by some elicitations made with the second author, a native speaker of Beja, during his stay in Paris in 2014, and examples from Roper's (1928) grammar and lexicon.

Two very different strategies are used to form diminutives, both already recorded by Roper (1928: 6, 11). The first one makes use of the gender opposition and concerns only a few inanimate nouns: a masculine noun takes a diminutive meaning when recategorized as feminine. The second one consists in a consonantal ablaut where the alveolar trill /r/ is changed

into the alveolar lateral approximant /l/.<sup>1</sup> As summed up by Jurafsky (1996: 569), change in place or manner of articulation of a consonant as a diminutivizing device has been reported for various languages and phyla such as Santiago del Estero Quechua (de Reuse 1986), Georgian, Basque, Chukchee (Paleo-Siberian), and across western North America (Nichols 1971; Haas 1978). Contrary to these languages where several consonants are concerned, *r > l* is the sole ablaut device in Beja. This strategy concerns nouns, verbs and adjectives alike. This means that only those of these three word categories that have a trill can receive diminutive morphology. For nouns without a trill, the adjectives *dabal* or *dis* ‘small’ are used to indicate a size-related meaning.

Augmentatives were only discovered recently (Vanhove 2014b: 36). Beja speakers usually believe that they belong to the register of women, which might explain why they were not reported earlier by previous scholars who were all males. However, they are in fact also used by men. Augmentatives consist in two suffixes, which apply to adjectives or adjective-like converbs: *-lo:j* is used with adjectives, *-l* with Manner converbs.

To sum up, the occurrence of the four evaluative devices depend either on the phonemic material of the word or, more often, on the word category.

Since Sapir (1915), it has often been assumed that there exists universal patterns of sound symbolism and iconicity in the formation of diminutives and augmentatives. In particular it was reported that palatal (or postalveolar) consonants or vowels correlate with diminutives and not with augmentatives (e.g. Jespersen 1922: 402; Nichols 1971; Trigo 1991). Bauer (1996) showed, based on a genetically diverse 50-language sample, that there is no universality in this domain. On the contrary, according to his typological study, language and cultural specific patterns of sound symbolism seem to prevail. As can be noted from the above description of the Beja

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<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, this is the reverse shift of what is reported in a few North-Californian languages where *l* changes to *r* (cf. e.g. Haas 1978).

system, both diminutives and augmentatives make use of the alveolar lateral approximant. Such a fact also goes against iconicity and a straightforward correlation between sound symbolism and evaluative morphology in Beja.

From a diachronic viewpoint, it has to be noted that in Beja the origin of the diminutive morphemes is clearly unrelated to the prototypical lexical source, i.e. *child*, or to items pragmatically associated with children or to conventionalized implicatures about children as postulated by Jurafsky (1996: 562-563) for many languages. The morpheme *t* of the feminine involved in the gender shift strategy goes back to a general marker of formal opposition between words (Feghali & Cuny 1924). It gave rise to a variety of functions, among them the feminine in Semitic languages and other Afroasiatic languages. It was often perceived by Arabic grammarians as pejorative in classical Arabic, i.e. an evaluative value (Feghali & Cuny 1924: 16).<sup>2</sup> Regarding the augmentative devices, the question of their origin remains entirely open for further research. We have not been able to find any cognate forms in other Cushitic or Afroasiatic languages, nor in the contact languages, Sudanese Arabic, Tigre (both Afroasiatic), and Nubian (Nilo-Saharan). In any case, a relation with the prototypical lexical source ‘mother’, ((*n*)*di* in Beja), could not be proved (Matisoff 1992).

Each of the two main Sections of this paper presents in turn the frequency, the semantics and pragmatic values of each evaluative device. Section 2 analyses diminutives, the gender shift (§2.1.), and the sound change (§2.2.). Section 3 examines the augmentatives, starting with the suffix for adjectives (§3.1), and finishing with the suffix for Manner converbs (§3.2).

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<sup>2</sup> On the question of the origin and evolution of the feminine markers in Semitic and beyond, see Feghali & Cuny (1924) and Diakonoff (1988).

## 2 Diminutives

In the data, diminutives are infrequently used, and there is no difference in this respect between female and male speakers, neither between the three dialectal varieties. It has often been reported (Wierzbicka 1984; Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi 1994; Jurafsky 1996) that diminutives tend to occur prototypically when speaking to children. The second author does not confirm such a tendency for Beja, his native tongue. Our data suggest that the low frequency of diminutives we observed is representative of the general profile of their use in Beja.

The following analysis shows that both types of diminutive, the gender shift diminutive and the sound change diminutive, can encode a denotational meaning and emotional values in almost equal proportions, to which a few cases of lexicalizations have to be added. These will be discussed in turn, taking into account the semantic types of words the diminutives can be applied to.

### 2.1 Gender shift: masculine > feminine

The gender shift concerns only nouns: masculine is recategorized as feminine to express a diminutive meaning.<sup>3</sup> This type of strategy is known in a variety of linguistic phyla and families, among them Mongolian, Indo-European (e.g. Hindi) (Jurafsky 1996: 545), Papuan languages such as Savosavo, Lakuleve, Walman, the Australian languages Mawng and Yawuru (Corbett 2015: 123), and a number of languages from various language stocks in Africa: Di Garbo (2014: 146)

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<sup>3</sup> Conversely, Aikhenvald (2012: 63) notes that “[i]n a number of languages, large size (and also squat, extended shape) is a correlate of feminine gender. Small size and slender shape are a correlate of masculine gender.” She mentions one Australian language, a few Papuan languages, one Omotic language, Hamar, and Cantabrian Spanish. She further adds that “[a] change in L[inguistic]-gender may correlate with the speaker’s attitude to the referent.” For a general overview of gender-switch cross-linguistically, see Aikhenvald (2012), and, more specifically for recategorization of masculine as feminine for diminutives, Corbett (2015).

lists Berber, Chadic, Cushitic, Dizoid, Eastern Nilotic, Hadza, Khoe-Kwadi, Semitic, Sandawe, South Omotic, Ta-Ne-Omotic, which all have sex-based gender systems; she further adds that “Afro-Asiatic languages may be defined as hotbeds for Type 2 [i.e. diminutives based on gender shift] phenomena” (Di Garbo 2014: 163). Jurafsky (1996: 545) also mentions Berber for Afroasiatic, and Taine-Cheikh (1988; this volume) presents a detailed analysis for the Hassaniya variety of Arabic. In Cushitic, as far as I know, only Awngi (central Cushitic, Hetzron 1978; Darmon 2015), Dhasaanac (East-Cushitic, Sasse 1974), and Beja use the gender shift strategy to encode diminutives.

In Beja, the gender of a noun is marked on determiners, i.e. proximal and distal demonstratives, the indefinite enclitic article (M =*b*, F =*t*), and the definite proclitic article (M V=, F t(V)=). The gender of the noun triggers concord on an attributive adjective which bears the same enclitic determiners as nouns, and, when in subject position, it triggers concord on a finite verb, where it is indexed with affixes.

### 2.1.1 Frequency and semantic domains

The use of gender shift to form diminutives in Beja was already briefly mentioned in Roper (1928: 11): “The names of inanimate things that are normally masculine are regularly made feminine to indicate a diminutive, e.g. *lokei* M. stick, cudgel (normal size); F. (rather smaller than usual).” The scarcity of texts available from this period does not allow to confirm the regularity of this shift almost a century ago, but this is certainly not confirmed in contemporary Beja. Gender shift appears to be limited to a small set of masculine inanimate nouns. Only fifteen occurrences of seven nouns pertaining to three semantic domains were found in the corpus:

- Three names of body parts: *ʔambaro:j* ‘lips’, *hami/o:* ‘hair’, *su:fa* ‘tuft (of hair)’
- Three geographical terms: *g<sup>w</sup>a:b* ‘plains’, *mhi:n* ‘place’, *riba* ‘mountain’
- One name of an artefact: *ko:laj* ‘stick’.

One more geographical term and two artefact terms found in Roper (1928) are to be added to the above list:



- 'are M. (*'arīb*) hill covered with granite boulders; 'are F. (*'arīt*) dim. of above, occurs in many place-names (p. 153).<sup>4</sup>
- *ab-'ade* kid-skin, bag of kid-skin (M. large, F. small size) (p. 141).
- *šangal* knife (M. small, F. smaller still) (p. 239).

## 2.1.2 Semantics and pragmatics

### 2.1.2.1 Body parts

#### a. Denotational meaning

For the semantic domain of body parts, the denotational meaning, referring to the quantitative and size values of diminutives, is still operational for *su:fa* 'tuft (of hair)' only: traditionally, young children have their hair partly shaved, leaving a large tuft at the back of their skulls. This type of tuft has masculine determiners. A thinner tuft of hair is left at the front of their skulls, and *su:fa* has feminine determiners.

#### b. Lexicalizations

The two remaining body parts, *ʔambaro:j* 'lips' and *hami/o:* 'hair', underwent a process of lexicalization and the quantitative feature has been bleached. The gender difference actually serves to differentiate between human (F) and animal (M) lips and hair, as already noted by Roper (1928) in his lexicon. This lexicalization probably derives from the denotational meaning, i.e. the size and quantity differences between human beings' body parts and those of the prototypical domestic animals of the Beja society, camels and cows, admittedly with bigger lips and more hairy than human beings. This is a case of "conventionalization of inference" (Jurafsky 1996: 551-553), a mechanism of semantic change proposed by Grice (1975).

### 2.1.2.2 Geographical terms

#### a. Emotions

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<sup>4</sup> Roper's transcription system is kept throughout this article.

The Beja people were traditionally caravan drivers, camel or cow breeders, moving between summer and winter pastures on collective lands. Even though a mass exodus towards cities and villages has been taking place since the mid 1980-s, people keep moving from one place to another and their land and the landscapes still constitute a salient and important cultural element for the group as for individuals.

With geographical terms and toponyms, the use of the gender-shift diminutive type often conveys positive emotions denoting affection, proximity, familiarity with a particular place. Such a usage of diminutives seems to relate to the type of emotions that Ponsonnet (2014: 89-90; this volume) terms as ‘comfort and control in personal routines’ for Dalabon, an Australian language, and Fradin et al. (2003: 56) as belonging to the speakers’ ‘intimate sphere’ for French.

In example (1) below, *g<sup>w</sup>a:b* ‘plains, champaign’, a masculine noun, is used with a feminine indefinite article, not because of concord with the feminine toponym *Gabaati*, but because the narrator, while living in exile, is recalling with affection this particular place of his native land.

(1) *ti = gabati*      *e:la = t*      *g<sup>w</sup>a:b = t = i*

DEF.F=Gabaati    white.DIM=INDF.F<sup>5</sup>    champaign=INDF.F/DIM=COP.3SG

‘Gabeet is a deserted champaign.’ [BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_05\_Eritrea\_285]

In example (2), a hero is trying to escape a witch. But the witch threatens him to put all sorts of obstacles on his way. By using the feminine with the masculine noun *riba* ‘mountain’, the witch shows him that she has a closer relationship to the mountain, which will prevent him from escaping for good.

(2) *alla:j*    *ta: = riba*      *ti = bi = i-far-aj-n = e:t*

God    DEF.PL.F.NOM/DIM=mountain    DEF.F/REL=NEG.OPT=3-jump-OPT-L=REL.F

*i-sam-n = ho:k*

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<sup>5</sup> For this type of diminutives, see §2.2.

3-wait.OPT-PL=OBJ.2SG

‘God! May you find the mountains that cannot be jumped over!’

[BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_07\_orphan\_156]

Another type of positive emotion occurs with diminutives of place names. They are used as a means of praise, to show admiration and respect. This is the case for the gender shift in example (3). But native speakers infer systematically from this utterance not a praise of the place itself, but of its inhabitants. Thus, the diminutive does not have scope on its host, *mhi:n* ‘place’, but on another entity previously mentioned, *e:=nda* ‘the men’. This highlights, in an allusive way so typical of the Beja rhetorical system, the respect for their noble character, and hence the favour the king is doing to the hero. As far as we know, this particular type of shift of morphosyntactic scope of the diminutive has never been reported so far.<sup>6</sup> Such a shift may have been facilitated by the fact that gender shift cannot be applied to animate nouns, hence the extension from the city to its inhabitants.<sup>7</sup>

(3) *e:=nda*                      *en*                      *i=sur*                      *anto:j*

DEF.PL.M.ACC=man.PL    PROX.PL.M.ACC    REL.M=before    here

*barito:*    *to:=mhin*                      *dʔi-ja:=b*

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<sup>6</sup> One other type of shift of morphosyntactic scope is mentioned in a number of North American languages in which the verb carries the diminutive morpheme but has to be interpreted as applying to one of its arguments. Korean illustrates yet another type of shift where the diminutive demonstratives have scope on the noun they modify. For a detailed discussion see Bauer (1997: 554–557), where these shifts are called “transference of diminutivisation”.

<sup>7</sup> This scope shift recalls the shift towards animacy operated by augmentatives in languages of the Mediterranean area (Grandi 2002). An interaction between animacy and transitivity in the interpretation of the scope of the diminutive form of the verb in some North American languages is also reported by Bauer (1997: 555–556).

3PL.F.GEN DEF.SG.F.ACC/DIM=place do-CVB.MNR=INDF.M.ACC

*i-kti = je:b*                      *i = malik*

3SG.M-be.PFV=REL.M DEF.M=king

‘The king (gives him) the place he had given to the men who were here before (lit.

The men who were here before, their place, that he had given them, the king)

[BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_07\_orphan\_445-448]

#### b. Denotational meaning

A denotational reading is also possible with geographical terms, when no particular emotional relationship links the speaker to them. This is less frequent than an emotional reading in our data. In example (4) the narrator simply describes the smallness of a mountain in his place of exile, which he happened to have reached by chance, after having followed his runaway donkey.

(4) *bille: = t<sup>8</sup>*                      *riba = t-i*                      *ge:b*

flat.DIM=INDF.F mountain=INDF.F/DIM-GEN.SG beside

‘Next to a flattish small hill’ [BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_05\_Eritrea\_321]

### 2.1.2.3 Artefacts

#### a. Emotions

The only artefact found in our data, *ko:laj* ‘stick’, denotes either a negative judgement or a connotation of respect. Roper (1928: 211) only recorded the denotational meaning. For Beja speakers nowadays, when *ko:laj* is recategorized as feminine, it is not restricted to the denotational meaning, and can either refer to a ‘bad and small stick’ used by a shepherd (the smaller size conveying the negative judgement), bent like a boomerang, and usually carried by

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<sup>8</sup> For the analysis of *bille:t* ‘flattish’, see below, example (19).

elder people (the smaller size here is precise and concerns a particular respected usage), or a stick with this same form used by speakers in customary courts to indicate the legal power of their discourse (the form and the size of the stick are here associated to a highly positive cultural value).

b. Denotational meaning

The denotational meaning is the only one mentioned for the two artefacts found in Roper's lexicon: *ab-'ade* 'bag of kid-skin (M large, F small size)' and *šangal* 'knife (M small, F smaller still)'. They are still understood with this meaning today.

### 2.1.3 Summary

Table 1 below, organized in decreasing order of frequency, sums up the different semantic and pragmatic meanings of the gender-shift strategy for nouns, together with the number of occurrences attested in the data.

[Table 1 here]

## 2.2 The shift alveolar trill *r* > alveolar lateral approximant *l*

### 2.2.1 Frequency and semantic domains

As mentioned in the introduction, the change *r* > *l* (both phonemes in the language) concerns nouns, verbs and adjectives. It can be applied to *r* whatever its position in the word, i.e. initial, intervocalic or final, but this does not seem to be an automatic procedure. We checked all the words containing an *r* in Roper's lexicon and in the unpublished one of the first author: the second author considered the phonemic change impossible for some words, in particular for those still felt as borrowings from Sudanese Arabic. For instance, the following diminutives of Arabic origin were judged ungrammatical: *dirim* > *\*dilim* 'cattle', *adirir* > *\*adilil* 'pain', *fa:r* > *\*fa:l* 'flower', *hare* > *\*hale* 'mount', *g<sup>w</sup>hara* > *\*g<sup>w</sup>hala* 'steal'. Nevertheless, we suspect that these possible restrictions call for further research in spontaneous data. The 'true' Beja words judged

as impossible to turn into diminutives belong to the three morphosyntactic categories and do not form coherent semantic classes.

The sound change diminutive device is more frequent than the gender shift. Twenty-seven diminutive words involving the sound change  $r > l$  were found in the textual and lexical data, only four of them occurring more than once in texts: thirteen nouns, nine adjectives, and six verbs and converbs. Table 2 provides the full list of words with the sound-change diminutive morphology, organized by semantic fields and word categories.

[Table 2 here]

Note that all nouns are inanimate except one, *li:gam-ana* ‘overlooker’, which is the nickname (derived from its main personality feature) of a character in a tale.

## 2.2.2 Semantics and pragmatics

### 2.2.2.1 Body parts

#### a. Denotational meaning and quasi-lexicalizations

Beja does not differentiate between ‘hand’ and ‘arm’ lexically: both senses are expressed by *ʔaj*. Likewise, ‘leg’ and ‘foot’ are both referred to with *ragad*. Nevertheless, if speakers feel the need to refer precisely to ‘hand’ or ‘foot’, they use the sound-change diminutive forms. For ‘hand’, Beja resorts to a compounding process, similar to that of English in *forearm*, involving *ʔaj* ‘hand, arm’ and the diminutive form of the noun *su:r* ‘front’ (also a postposition and an adverb, ‘before, in front of’), which undergoes the sound change: *su:lʔaj*. Note that *\*su:rʔaj* is not attested. Unlike English, the compound noun remains polysemous, since it means both ‘hand’ and ‘forearm’. As for *lagad*, the diminutive of *ragad*, it can mean either ‘foot’ or just ‘short leg’. Even if a lexicalization process is at work, the denotational meaning of the diminutive form is still transparent and available to the speakers.

Example (5) shows a context in which *su:lʔaj* means ‘hand’, and example (6) a context in which *lagad* means ‘foot’ (no instances of ‘forearm’ or ‘small leg’ occurred in the textual data).

(5) *om i = su:lʔaj = e: habaj = t ho:j gid-a*

PROX.SG.M.ACC DEF.M=hand=POSS.PL.M.ACC poem=INDF.F ABL.3SG throw-IMP.SG.M

‘Say a poem about her hands!’ [Port-Soudan, poem]

(6) *sʔe: = t i = lagad-i dha:j hire:r-ti = ho:b*

tick = INDF.F DEF.M=leg.DIM-GEN.SG DIR walk-AOR.3SG.F=when

‘When a tick walked on his foot’ [Sinkat, tale]

*Gilma*, the diminutive form of *girma* ‘head’, can be understood metaphorically as meaning ‘corner’; in the genitive case, it functions as a postposition meaning ‘next to, near’. Contrary to the ordinary postposition *ge:b* ‘near’, *gilma-i*, in agreement with its original meaning, necessarily implies that the entity which is next to another one stands in a higher position. In (7) the porridge is on the floor, and the fox sits next to it, overlooking it.

(7) *ti = di:fo:t = jo: gilma-i ti-me:sa ~ sʔ-a = t*

DEF.F=porridge=POSS.3SG.GEN head.DIM-GEN.SG 3SG.F-REFL.PASS-sit~PLAC=COORD

‘It sits here and there next to its porridge’ [Port-Soudan, tale]

Like with the gender-shift device in §2.1.2.1, all these examples also pertain to the evolution pattern known as conventionalization of inference.

#### b. Denotational meaning and rhetoric

In a series of hunting narratives (the favourite hobby of the speaker) and folktales about animals, the heads of the two animals involved (foxes and hedgehogs) are regularly, but not systematically, referred to in the diminutive form. Three different motivations and connotations seem at stake. In (8), the diminutive simply conveys a denotational meaning, as it refers to the fox’s head (in the second occurrence), smaller than that of the human being’s head (in the first occurrence), and thus encodes the size distinction between the human and the animal heads.

(8) *bʔafo: = b manri = je:k abdalla-j iha: ... om*

fox=INDF.M.ACC find.IPFV.3SG.M=if Abdallah-VOC VOC PROX.SG.M.ACC

*aneb girma-i = t<sup>9</sup> lhane:j gallab-a: = t = e:t = aj*

1SG.ACC head-GEN.SG=INDF.F pain be\_difficult-CVB.MNR=INDF.M=SIMIL.PL=CSL

*o:n i = gilma haj mʔ-a = he:b*

PROX.SG.M.ACC DEF.M=head.DIM COM come-IMP.SG.M=OBJ.1SG

‘If you find a fox, O Abdallah, [...] since I have a bad headache, bring me back (its) head!’ [Sinkat, tale]

In (9), the first two mentions of the hedgehog’s head are in the diminutive form, but not in the two following ones. No other type of head occurs in this context. Even if the denotational meaning is still present, Beja speakers consider this usage of the diminutive as a rhetorical way of embellishing and enhancing the discourse, as an act of eloquence, highly praised in society. As the example shows, it is not necessary to repeat the diminutive form with each occurrence of the word, once the storyline is developed.

- (9) ‘You kick the head (*i=gilma*). If you kick elsewhere than the head (*i=gilma*), the hedgehog does not die ... If you kick the leg, you break it and it turns on itself and you cannot kick it on its head (*i=girm=o*: ‘the=head=his’); it puts its head (*girm=o*: ‘head=his’) beneath itself.’ [Sinkat, procedural text]

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<sup>9</sup> The indefinite article on this occurrence of *girma* ‘head’, does not correspond to the diminutive use of the feminine determiners. Beja belongs to the rare type of double indexing genitive system, a type which indexes on the dependent noun (the possessor) both the dependent constituent and the head (the possessed) of a possessive construction, for both gender and number (Fenwick 2007: 73-74). Thus, the final =*t* of *girma-i=t* does not refer to the gender of *girma*, but to that of *lhane:j* ‘pain’, a feminine noun. If *girma* had been feminine, an additional =*t* would have occurred right after it: *girma=t-i=t*.



In some instances, unrecorded in the data, the diminutive form of ‘head’ is used with an emotional value, to praise the beauty of a head. We’ll see below in (c) that this connotation occurs with other body parts.

### c. Emotions

The sound-change type of diminutive can express emotions, mostly positive, and, more rarely, negative. The ambiguous value of diminutives between praise and satire has already been noted for other languages, such as Hassaniya Arabic (Taine-Cheikh 1988; this volume).

Positive emotions with body parts are mostly found in courteous poetry, praising a woman’s attractive features, a clear case of the use of diminutives to express romantic love (Ponsonnet, this volume). Examples (10) to (12) praise the beauty of the lips, teeth and skin of a woman, associated to their preferred colour.

(10) *i = talhaj      t = ʔambaloj      ham-a = b*

DEF.M=brown DEF-F=lips.DIM cover.PLAC-CVB.MNR=INDF.M.ACC

‘The brown colour covering the lips’ [Sinkat, poem]

(11) *et                      k<sup>w</sup>ile: = t = et                      nafs-i: = t = a = it*

PROX.PL.M.ACC tooth.DIM=INDF.F=SIMIL.PL make\_clear-ADJVZ=INDF.F=COP.3PL=CSL

‘Since the teeth are bright white’ [Sinkat, poem]

(12) *jaḡa: = it                      fu:te:ti:t                      so:t      g<sup>w</sup>ala:l*

green\_grass=SIMIL.SG grow-CVB.ANT green nicely\_dark.DIM

(The skin) is beautiful like a young autumnal sprout (Hamid Ahmed 2005: 267)

This diminutive type is also found in cattle praising poetry, where it is employed as a means of endearment and admiration, cattle being a salient and vital element of the Beja culture and society. Example (13) praises the beauty of the legs of a cherished and good milking cow which always behaves in a gentle manner with its owner.

(13) *de:fa-j i = lagad ba: = da:s-aj*

door-GEN.SG DEF.M=leg.DIM NEG.OPT=put-OPT.[3SG.M]

‘Without putting a leg in the gate’ [Wagar, poem]

The sole example of depreciative values of contempt and disapproval comes from another popular type of poetry, that of satirical verbal fencing between animals, usually describing in an allusive way defects or vices of human beings. In example (14), a frog makes fun of a mosquito in relation to its tabooed sexual orientation.

(14) *i = gumba i = ?amə:nigj-a e: = fil*

DEF.M=knee DEF.M=be\_thin-CVB.MNR DEF.PL.M.ACC=face.DIM

*i = sala:la*<sup>10</sup>

DEF.M=big\_and\_stout.DIM

‘The skinny knees, the emaciated face’ (Vanhove 2005: 500)

#### 2.2.2.2 *Geographical terms and natural elements*

These terms were not found in texts but in lexicons. The following analysis relies on the native speaker’s intuition of the second author.

##### a. Denotational meaning

Three of the five nouns of these semantic categories have a denotational meaning: *bala:m* ‘breeze’, as opposed to *bara:m* ‘wind’, *šilti* ‘small mark (on ground as guide)’ as opposed to *širti* ‘mark’, and *fal’a* ‘small obstacle on a road or path’ as opposed to *far’a* ‘obstacle’.

##### b. Lexicalization

There is one lexicalized diminutive mentioned in Roper’s (1928) lexicon: *ábāb-hākwili* ‘Venus (evening star)’. It is composed of a plural noun with the accusative indefinite enclitic

<sup>10</sup> The adjective is also in the diminutive form; for its value, see below §2.2.2.4.

article =*b*, grammatically the object of the following agent noun *hākwili*, derived from the verb *hak<sup>w</sup>il*, the diminutive form of *hak<sup>w</sup>ir* ‘tie’. So *ábāb-hākwili* indicates a thing that consistently ties up kids, literally ‘that which ties up kids’. The lexicalization process is linked to a regular activity in Beja pastoral daily life: when the star announcing the falling of night can be seen in the sky, it means that it is time for the shepherds to tie up the kids. This is done in order to prevent them to suck the goats, so that the shepherds can milk them.

### c. Emotions

The diminutive form of *riba* ‘mountain’, *liba*, is considered to have a negative emotional value. It cannot be interpreted with a denotational meaning or a positive emotional value as with the gender-change device in examples (2) and (4), but as a very pejorative and depreciative form. It is most probably rarely used (no example could be elicited), since underestimating and lowering one’s land (or even other peoples’ land, even in a satirical context), which is an integral part of the Beja identity, does not belong to the Beja culture.

#### 2.2.2.3 Derived nouns

The only two nouns of this type belong to the pragmatic domain of emotions. The nickname made of the agent noun *li:gam-ana* ‘overlooker’ in example (15), brings an endearment value, like all nicknames, be they diminutive forms or not.

(15) *li:gam-ana: = t-i*                      *li:gam-i*                      *e:n = ho:b*

look\_over.DIM-N.AGN=INDF.F-VOC    look\_over.DIM-IMP.SG.F    say.PFV.3PL=when

‘When they said: Overlooker, overlook!’ [BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_12\_witch\_090]

Conversely, the diminutive of the action noun *bilu:l* ‘spreading’ in (16) is used in a highly negative cultural context: asking directly for help goes against the ethical values of the Beja society. The diminutive reinforces the depreciative value of such a reprehensible action, and underlines the distance the speaker is keeping with this kind of behaviour.

(16) *w = ʔaji = i*                      *dha:ʃ bilu:l*

DEF.SG.M=hand=POSS.1SG.ACC DIR spread.N.AC.DIM

‘The fact of holding out my hand to him’ (= asking for help)

[BEJ\_MV\_CONV\_19\_rich\_SP2\_041]

The non-diminutive form *biru:r*, in *baqamti biru:r* ‘the spreading of a mat’, a metaphorical expression of hospitality, actually expresses a highly positive value.

#### 2.2.2.4 Adjectives

##### a. Denotational meaning

The prototypical denotational meaning associated with diminutives is found with adjectives denoting physical properties as in (17) and (18).

(17) *be:n*                      *i = hande*    *i = laga:ga*

PROX.PL.M.ACC DEF.M=tree DEF.M=tall\_and\_stout.DIM

‘These long and thin trees’ [Sinkat, tale]

(18) *ag<sup>w</sup>al-a*                      *ti:-ngidi*

bend.PASS.DIM-CVB.MNR 3SG.F-stop.AOR

‘It (the goat) was standing slightly bent’ [BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_09\_goat\_070]

Jurafsky (1996: 549) noted, regarding the semantic extensions of diminutives of gradable adjectives, that “approximatives, or ‘semantic hedges’, are words or constructions which are commonly assumed to draw distinctions of degree of category membership, or to mark that some sort of criterion for category membership is weak or lacking.” According to Jurafsky, such a connotation is based on the metaphor MARGINAL IS SMALL, and is developed through a “LAMBDA-ABSTRACTION-SPECIFICATION” mechanism, i.e. the creation of second order predicates, quantifying over predicates, which he summarizes (p. 559) in the following formula ‘small(*x*)’ is lambda abstracted to ‘lambda(*y*) (smaller than the prototypical exemplar *x* on the scale *y*)’. Like all types of secondary predicates, approximation adds its own particular constraint on its scale

in that it “applies only to gradable verbal, adjectival, and adverbial concepts” (Jurafsky 1996: 559).

This type of connotation within the denotational meaning is also found in Beja. In (19), the use of the adjective *bille*:=*t* ‘flattish’, denoting a physical property, instead of *birre*:=*t* ‘flat’ makes it explicit that the mountain is not really flat but somewhat uneven.

(19) *bille*:=*t*                      *riba*=*t-i*                      *ge*:*b*

flat.DIM=INDF.F    mountain=INDF.F/DIM-GEN.SG    beside

‘Next to a flattish small hill’ [BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_05\_Eritrea\_321]

With adjectives of colours, the denotational meaning may not necessarily refer to the colour itself but to the noun it determines. Such a shift of scope can be compared with a similar use of the gender change device in example (3). It bears more resemblances with the Korean type of shift of the diminutive value from a demonstrative modifier to the modified noun (see footnote 6), since the colour adjective is also a modifier. In (20), *?adalo*: does not have an approximation meaning of ‘pink’, ‘light red’ or ‘reddish’ when used as an attribute of a noun which cannot have a diminutive morphology; instead it refers to the size of *na* ‘thing’ (a feminine noun) itself.<sup>11</sup>

(20) *en*                      *j*=*?ar*=*eb*                      *w*=*?or*

---

<sup>11</sup> One of the anonymous reviewers suggests that these shifts in scope could be interpreted as some sort of diminutive agreement phenomenon, whereby the diminutive property word indexes the size of the referent of the noun. A similar interpretation is actually discussed by Bauer (1997: 557) for two North American languages, Passamaquoddy and Dakota. She rejects it on the ground that the relationship between a noun and its agreement pattern is not strict. The same argument could apply in Beja: the noun *na* is feminine, and does not necessarily trigger the diminutive form with */*. Would this interpretation be correct for Beja, it would imply including contextual and world-knowledge factors in the gender system, unpredictable from the morphosyntax and the lexicon themselves.

PROX.PL.M.ACC DEF.M=child.PL=LOC.PL DEF.SG.M=child

*u = dis = ka                      ?adalo: na       manri*

DEF.SG.M.NOM=small=CMPR red.DIM thing find.IPFV.[3SG.M]

‘The youngest of those children finds a small red thing’

[BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_02\_farmer\_028-034]

#### b. Emotions and rhetoric

The diminutive of adjectives can also bring endearment and praising values. In (21) the diminutive form *galab* ‘cut’ is used by the chief of the foxes as a rhetorical device and a trick, in order to convince its fox comrades to cut their tails and ears so as to cheat the hunters who want to kill them, and thus save their lives. By using the diminutive form of *garab* ‘cut’, the chief conveys the idea that ‘being cut’ is beautiful.

(21) *galab                      ?angwi:l = t ba: = akaj                      na       so:d?a:l-a = t*

cut.ADJ.DIM ear=INDF.F NEG.PROH=be.CVB.SMLT thing blue\_pearl-PL=INDF.F

*hoj       bi = t-ha = jet                      i = ni:wa       kat?-a*

ABL.3SG NEG.OPT=3SG.F-be\_there=REL.F DEF.M=tail cut.REFL-CVB.MNR

*bi = i-ka = jet = ka                      ne:-dar       ne:-jad*

NEG.OPT=3SG.M-be=REL.F=DISTR 1PL-kill.IPFV 1PL-say.IPFV

*de:-ja = b = a                      kass = t = a:kna*

say-CVB.MNR=INDF.M.ACC=COP.3PL all=INDF.F=POSS.3PL.NOM

*i = ni:wa = e:kna                      kat?-a:na*

DEF.M=tail=POSS.3PL.ACC cut.REFL-IMP.PL

‘We are going to kill all the foxes that do not have cut ears, that do not wear blue pearls and that do not have cut tails, they have said, so all of you, cut your tails!’

[Sinkat, tale]

#### 2.2.2.5 Verbs

##### a. Denotational meaning

Diminutive forms of verbs of movement can be associated to a denotational meaning. Such is the case with *bilʔik* ‘flutter about’, typically said of butterflies, as opposed to *birʔik* ‘fly’ used for birds.

##### b. Pragmatics and politeness

Jurafsky (1996: 557–558) observes that the pragmatic use of diminutives to soften the illocutionary force of an utterance and express something politely is very common crosslinguistically. It is reported for instance in Tzeltal (Brown and Levinson 1978), Cantonese (Jurafsky 1988), Greek (Sifianou 1992), Awtuw (Feldman 1986), Japanese (Matsumoto 1985), Mexican Spanish. For Jurafsky, this connotation also falls under LAMBDA-ABSTRACTING. In particular under one of the two main universal tendencies of semantic change whereby “first order predicates give rise to second order predicates”, namely “meanings shift from the external or textual domains to the metalinguistic or speech-act domains [...] (‘weaken the illocutionary force of p(x)’)” (Jurafsky 1996: 560) as far as diminutives are concerned.

Although this pragmatic value seems rare in Beja contrary to Greek (Sifianou 1992) for instance, the diminutive applied to an imperative verb form has an attenuating force, minimizing the imposition on the hearer. It undertones an order and makes it sound more polite, as in (22).

(22) *li:gam-ana:* = *t-i*                      *li:gam-i*                      *en* = *ho:b*

look\_over.DIM-N.AGN=INDEF-F-VOC    look\_over.DIM-IMP.SG.F    say.PFV.3PL=when

‘When they said: Overlooker, overlook!’ [BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_12\_witch\_090]

##### c. Emotions

The diminutive form of verbs, like with nouns and adjectives, may be used to express emotions. A positive or a negative interpretation may be linked to the semantics of the verb, as *dawlis* ‘make beautiful’ in (22) and *hila:le:l* ‘wander’ suggest. But as they are the sole examples

in the data, further research is needed to confirm this hypothesis. In (23), the diminutive can only be interpreted as emphasizing and praising the beauty of the shoes.

(23) *jisis-ti:t*      *dawli-s-e:ti:t*      *om*      *o: = ɕo:z*

rub-CVB.ANT beautiful.DIM-CAUS-CVB.ANT PROX.SG.M.ACC DEF.SG.M.ACC=pair

*bak*    *da-s-ena*

thus    do-caus-IPFV.3PL

‘After they have rubbed them and made them nicely beautiful, they put the pair  
(of shoes) down like that.’ [BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_17\_shoemaker\_212]

On the contrary, *hila:le:l* (which does not occur in our textual corpus) can only mean ‘to wander in an abnormal way, to roam with evil intentions’.

### 2.2.3 Summary

Table 3 sums up, in order of frequency, the different semantic and pragmatic meanings for each word category, together with the number of words concerned. Note that the same word may be used with several meanings, hence a greater number than in Table 2.

[Table 3 here]

## 3 Augmentatives

We follow the broad definition of *augmentative* adopted throughout this volume as mentioned in the introduction (Ponsonnet & Vuillermet, this volume). As Bauer remarks

The term *evaluative morphology* [...] seems also to allow for a wider reading than simply markers of size and positive or negative emotional affect, including such things as intensification and politeness or modesty, which in some languages use the same affixes as diminutives and/or augmentatives. Thus, although diminutives



and augmentatives may provide the core of evaluative morphology, its borders are rather imprecise. (Bauer 1997: 538)

The Beja suffixes are thus classified as augmentative constructions rather than plain intensifiers. There are two main criteria that differentiate augmentatives and intensifiers language internally. First, the former may also have a negative emotional value, even if rare, which the intensifier adverb *winne:t* 'plenty, very' does not have. Second, the intensifier can be used with all kinds of word categories and with scope both on a word or a clause. This property is not shared by the augmentative suffixes which only have scope on their host. All this is actually in line with the crosslinguistic behaviour of augmentatives, which, unlike diminutives, are only used on noun, adjective and verb bases as shown by Bauer's sample of 120 languages (Bauer 1997: 539) (see the next paragraph for the full hierarchy).

In Beja, augmentatives can only be applied to property adjectives and to Manner converbs, usually in attributive position. This goes contrary to the implicational hierarchy of base types for diminutivisation and augmentativisation suggested by Bauer (1997: 540) whereby "for a word-class to be used as the base in evaluative morphology in a particular language, word-classes from each step above that must also be so used in that language." The hierarchy, where nouns are at the top reads as follows: Noun > Adjective, Verb > Adverb, Numeral, Pronoun, Interjection > Determiner. Together with Khmer, mentioned by Bauer, Beja constitutes an exception to the hierarchy.

Augmentatives are as infrequent as diminutives in the data (37 words in both cases), but unlike diminutives, most of the non-elicited material occur several times in the textual data. Still, considering the low number of tokens, this frequency difference may be due to mere chance. They seem to be more productive than diminutives, as they can also apply to borrowings from Sudanese Arabic.

The suffix *-lo:j* of adjectives may sometimes combine with the sound-change diminutive form.

### 3.1 Adjectives and the suffix *-lo:j*

Twenty-four adjectives with an augmentative suffix occur in the data. A variant *-ro:j* after *dawri* ‘nice’, probably due to consonantal harmony, is supposedly used only by female speakers. While this holds true for the corpus, it would need to be checked on more data.

Morphologically, the suffix *-lo:j* stands in the closest position to the adjective, the number suffix comes after it, and enclitics come last (gender, copula, etc.).

The suffix applies to a wide range of semantic domains which cover part of Dixon’s (1977, 2004) semantic types of property concepts consistently found in adjective classes cross-linguistically: dimension, value, physical property, human propensity, speed, quantification and position. Table 4 provides the list of adjectives with an augmentative suffix which occurred in the data.

[Table 4 here]

#### 3.1.1 Denotational meaning

The vast majority of these augmentatives have a simple denotational meaning of intensification, i.e. having a property to the highest degree. Below are a few examples.

(24) *adha-lo:j darab o: = mhin i:-fi = it*

narrow-AUG path DEF.SG.M.ACC=place 3SG.M-be-there.AOR=CSL

‘As there was a very narrow path at this place’ [Sinkat, description]

(25) *ko:ba = t = wa lul gʷimad-lo:j = wa ... haj jʔ-ɛti:t*

container=INDF.F=COORD rope long-AUG=COORD COM come-CVB.ANT

‘After he has brought a container and a very long rope...’

*sagi-lo:j mhin ɛ:-stʔe ...*

far-AUG place 3SG.M-sit.REFL.IPFV

‘he sits in a very distant place’

*ige:si halák marʔa-loj jh-eti:t ...*

immediately cloth large-AUG take-CVB.ANT

‘Immediately after he has taken a very large cloth’

*w = ʔaj = o: tabak-loj mhinani fum-s-eti:t ...*

DEF.SG.M=hand=POSS.3SG.M.ACC tight-AUG place enter-CAUS-CVB.ANT

‘after he has introduced his hand in a very tight place’ [Wagar, procedural text]

(26) *om w = ʔor umbaru: i = waʃi-ló:j i = nafiri-ló:j*

PROX.SG.M.ACC DEF.SG.M=child 3SG.M.NOM DEF.M=dirty-AUG DEF.M=ugly-AUG

‘This very dirty and very ugly lad’ [Sinkat, tale]

(27) *ti = bʔaʃi bʔin-loj-a jas lame:d = t = u = it*

DEF.F=fox coward-AUG-PL dog.PL accustomed=INDF.F=COP.3SG=CSL

‘Since the fox was accustomed to the very coward dogs’ [Sinkat, procedural text]

Below is one of the examples where the augmentative suffix is added to a sound-change type of diminutive. *dawri* ‘nice’ is the only adjective with which this occurred several times, precisely four times with different speakers, in the data. In this case, the diminutive brings the emotional value of affection, of endearment, while the augmentative suffix brings the denotational meaning of intensification.

(28) *dawli-loj-a = t aka-je: i-sem-n = ho:b*

beautiful.DIM-AUG-PL=INDF.F be-CVB.SMLT 3-wait.PFV-PL=when

‘When he finds them (the shoes) very nicely done’ (lit. when they waited being very nicely done) [BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_17\_shoemaker\_102]

### 3.1.2 Emotional meaning

An emotional meaning may surface with augmentatives, but this is quite rare, and only concerns adjectives in attributive position to a noun. In the only two examples of the data, they

have a pejorative value. Example (29) is taken from the same satirical verbal fencing between animals as example (14) with the diminutive, where a frog makes fun of a mosquito in relation to its tabooed sexual orientation. This time, it is the mosquito that makes fun of the fatty frog and shows its contempt by using the augmentative suffix. It cannot be interpreted as endearment.

(29) *ti = le:w-a*      *ti = nʔik<sup>w</sup>-lo:j-a*

DEF.F=flank-PL    DEF.F=soft-AUG-PL

‘Fatty love handles’ (lit. very slack flanks’) (Vanhove 2005: 500)

In a more ordinary context, i.e. non-poetic, to get a pejorative value with the augmentative suffix, the adjective has to precede the noun and cannot bear the definite article, as in the following elicited example.

(30) *nʔak<sup>w</sup>-lo:j-a-t*      *bilik<sup>w</sup>*

soft-AUG-PL=INDEF date

‘Dates very unpleasantly soft’

In the same way, *lʔa-lo:j* ‘very cold’, the second adjective with a pejorative meaning, can be understood as cold in a very unpleasant way when it comes before the noun it characterizes.

### 3.1.3 Summary

To sum up, the denotational meaning is largely prevalent with the augmentative suffix *-lo:j* and concerns 22 of the 24 adjectives. A negative emotional value was only recorded for two adjectives denoting physical properties in the context of a satire or when preceding the head noun.

## 3.2 Manner converbs and the suffix-*l*

The thirteen Manner converbs, out of which six were elicited, are mainly derived from stative verbs, or from an intransitive verb for one of them. Most of them inherently denote positive or negative properties. The full list of tokens in the data is provided in Table 5.

[Table 5 here]

### 3.2.1 Denotational meaning

As with adjectives, the meaning is most often denotational, sometimes accompanied by a phonetic lengthening of the suffix of the Manner converb itself, as in (31), to reinforce the denotational meaning.

- (31) *akir-a:l-l=t*                                      *?aba = t = u*

be\_strong-CVB.MNR-AUG=INDF.F    wadi=INDF.F=COP.3SG

‘It was a very powerful wadi’ [BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_05\_Eritrea\_169]

- (32) *ont?a    gwid-a-l-a*                                      *kam    faɖig    ?aj = b*                                      *ak-ertit*

now    be\_numerous-CVB.MNR-AUG-PL    camel.PL    four    five=INDF.M.ACC    be-CVB.ANT

‘After there has been a whole lot of camels, four, five...’ [Erkowitz, life story]

- (33) *ʃingir-a-l*                                      *tak = u = it*

be\_ugly-CVB.MNR-AUG    man=COP.3SG=CSL

‘Since the man was really ugly’ [Sinkat, tale]

- (34) *oon*                                      *w = hi:wa*                                      *i = goj-a-l = wa*

PROX.SG.M.ACC    DEF.SG.M=young\_camel    DEF.SG.M=be\_weak-CVB.MNR-AUG=COORD

*to: = kam*                                      *ti = goj-a-l = wa*

DEF.SG.F=camel    DEF.SG.F= be\_weak-CVB.MNR-AUG=COORD

*a:n*                                      *a: = jam*                                      *ha:j    gi:g-en*

PROX.PL.F.NOM DEF.PL.F.NOM=water COM leave.IPFV-3PL

‘This water takes away the very weak young camel and the very weak she-camel.’

[Sinkat, tale]

### 3.2.2 Lexicalization

In the northern variety of Beja spoken at Erkowit, the converb *goj-a-l* ‘being weak’ has undergone a metathesis and has lexicalized in a frozen form *go:laj* where the converb and augmentative morphology are no longer transparent. It has become the ordinary way of saying ‘weak’.

(35) *go:laj-a=b*                      *argin-a=b=wa*

weak-PL=INDF.M.ACC lamb-PL=INDF.M.ACC=COORD

‘weak lambs and...’ [Erkowit, life story]

### 3.2.3 Habituality

In one instance, the augmentative takes a habitual value, when used with the copula, which regularly serves to form the Perfect aspect when added to the Manner converb.<sup>12</sup> We are not aware of any report of an extension of augmentative suffixes to a habitual meaning, but it is well known that it is one of the possible values of reduplication, a morphological device often used for evaluative morphology cross-linguistically (see e.g. Jurafsky 1996: 570). This parallel makes the Beja aspectual connotation not so surprising, even if it occurs only once in the data.

(36) *miskin-a=b*                      *dig<sup>w</sup>i-a-l=a=ji*                      *gaw*

poor-PL=INDF.M.ACC walk\_bare\_foot-CVB.MNR-AUG=COP.3PL=REL house

*ki-i-ke*

NEG.IPFV-3SG.M-be.PFV

<sup>12</sup> Example (34) cannot be interpreted as a Perfect, since in relative clauses, the Perfect cannot occur with the copula, but with a ‘be’ verb (Vanhove 2014b).

‘It is not a house for poor people who walk bare-footed’ [Sinkat, tale]

### 3.2.4 Emotions

Not a single instance of an emotional value has been noted in the textual data. This might be linked to the particular shades of meanings, already positive or negative, of the properties denoted by the stative and intransitive verbs to which the augmentative suffix is applied.

### 3.2.5 Summary

The augmentative suffix *-l* which applies to the Manner converb is mainly confined to the expression of denotational meanings. Two highly marginal values were also noted: an aspectual value of habituality for one converb and one case of lexicalization due to metathesis in one dialectal variety. No instance of an emotional value is attested in the data for this morpheme.

## 4 Conclusion

From a typological viewpoint, the analysis of the repartition of the diminutive morphology according to word classes (see tables 1 and 3) corresponds to a well-documented tendency in the languages of the world by which nouns, followed by adjectives and verbs, are the most prone to undergo diminutive marking, and exhibit the most fine-grained range of meanings and uses (Bauer 1997: 540). On the contrary, Beja augmentative morphology is exceptional (along with that of Korean, see §3) with respect to the implicational hierarchy since nouns cannot form the base to which augmentatives are applied, while adjectives and adjective-like items can.

The study of Beja evaluative morphology has shown that, even though the denotational meaning is predominant when adding both semantic types, there is a clear asymmetry between the two in their respective proportions of emotional connotations. Diminutives denote emotional values, mostly positive ones, almost as often as they express a denotational meaning, while only one of the augmentative suffixes may scarcely denote emotional values, and always negative ones in two particular contexts: satires or when pre-posed to a noun, a less common

word order for adjectival phrases in Beja. This goes in line with Creissels's (1999: 55) finding about the lower rate of semantic extensions of augmentatives in African languages.

In her preliminary typology, Ponsonnet (this volume) proposes a classification of emotions expressed with diminutives and augmentatives. Beja fits in nicely, although, as expected, not all types of emotions occur in the data, namely compassion for positive emotions and fear for negative ones. Whether this is due to the size limits of the data or to the general profile of the language regarding the possible connotations of diminutives is open for further research. Table 6 recapitulates the emotional values associated with evaluative morphology in Beja, together with the denotational meaning and the other extensions of the four evaluative devices.

[Table 6 here]

As Ponsonnet (this volume) mentions, the evaluative morphology of Beja denotes some cross-linguistically rare emotional values, those of romantic love (with a serious connotation) and comfort. It is striking that the first of these emotional connotations occurs mainly in courteous poems recited by men, a genre which belongs to the top of the hierarchy of speech in Beja. The few examples of the comforting connotation in the Beja data relate to somewhat different settings than those reported by Ponsonnet (2013) for Dalabon or by Fradin et al. (2003) for French, since the element of "control in personal routines" is lacking. This does not mean that it should be ruled out for Beja when more data becomes available.

Unlike other languages, the pragmatic extension towards politeness seems to be restricted to the specific category of imperative verb forms, in order to undertone an order.

The attestation of the other pragmatic extension to a context of eloquence relies on the native speakers' judgement, and is not independent of the emotional connotation of praise. Such a judgement is not surprising in a society which possesses a hierarchy of speech types as mentioned in the introduction, and whose ethical values give a high status to beautiful and convincing discourse.



The aspectual value of habituality with the augmentative *-l* (which comes hand in hand with intensification) is by no means grammaticalized or on the verge of being grammaticalized (cp. Grandi 2009 for Italian, and Sőrés, this volume, for Hungarian). The sole example hints either at a possible contextual coloration, a relation with the semantics of the verb or with the syntactic frame in which it is embedded. From this point of view, it is interesting to note that the augmentative is in a paradigmatic relation with another verb form involving the Manner converb and which has been grammaticalized as a Perfect aspect.

The few cases of lexicalization, which relate to semantic change via conventionalization of inference, can be attributed to two different paths of semantic extension, either via the denotational meaning, or via the pragmatic value of politeness.

### *Sources*

The examples that come from Vanhove's (2004a) online corpus are signalled in the following way: BEJ\_MV\_NARR, followed by a digit referring to the number of the text, a short title, and a second number which refers to the number of the prosodic unit, e.g. [BEJ\_MV\_NARR\_17\_shoemaker\_212]. BEJ is the ISO code for Beja, MV are Vanhove's initials, and NARR or CONV refer to the broad genre classification, narrative and conversation respectively. Texts with a number above 18, are not yet accessible on line, but will soon be.

Vanhove's unpublished corpus is referred to by the place of recording and the genre to which the data belong, e.g. [Sinkat, tale].

Examples extracted from the authors' publications are referred to by surname, date of publication and page, e.g. (Hamid Ahmed 2005: 267).

Examples based on elicited material do not have an explicit mention of the source.

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### *Abbreviations*

ADJVZ adjectivizer; ANT anteriority; AOR aorist; Ar. Arabic; AUG augmentative; CMPR comparative; COORD coordination; CSL causal; DIM diminutive; DIR directional; L linker; MNR manner; N.AC action noun; N.AGN agent noun; OPT optative; PLAC pluractional; SIMIL similitive; SMLT simultaneity.

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**Table 1: Semantic and pragmatic meanings of gender-shift diminutives**

<i>Meanings</i>	<i>Semantic type of noun</i>
Denotational	Body parts (1); geographical terms (1); artefacts (2)
Positive emotion	Geographical terms (3), Artefacts (1)
Lexicalization	Body parts (2)
Negative emotion	Artefacts (1)

Table 2: *r > l* diminutives

NOUNS	BODY PARTS	<i>ʔambalo:j</i> ‘lip’; R <i>fil</i> ‘face’; <b><i>gilma</i></b> ‘head’; <i>k<sup>w</sup>ile</i> ‘tooth’; <i>lagad</i> ‘leg’; † <i>tsu:l-ʔaj</i> ‘hand’, lit. front-arm
	LANDSCAPE AND NATURAL ELEMENTS	R† <i>ábāb-hākwili</i> ‘Venus (evening star)’, lit. that which tie; ✧ <i>bala:m</i> ‘wind’; R <i>fal’a</i> ‘obstacle’; ✧ <i>liba</i> ‘mountain’; R <i>šilti</i> ‘notch’
	DERIVED NOUNS	<i>bilu:l</i> ‘spreading’; <b><i>li:gam-ana</i></b> ‘overlooker’
	VALUE	( <i>dawli</i> ‘nice’)
	COLOUR	<i>adali/o:</i> ‘red’; <i>e:la</i> ‘white’; <i>g<sup>w</sup>ala:l</i> ‘nicely dark, striped, coloured’
ADJECTIVES	PHYSICAL PROPERTY	<i>bille</i> ‘flat’; <b><i>galab</i></b> ‘cut’; <i>laga:ga</i> ‘tall and thin’; <i>sala:la</i> ‘emaciated’
	MOVEMENT	✧ <i>bilʔik</i> ‘fly’; ✧ <i>hila:le:l</i> ‘prowl’
	PERCEPTION	<b><i>li:gam</i></b> ‘look from above’
VERBS	PROPERTY CONVERBS	<i>ag<sup>w</sup>al-a</i> ‘bent’; <i>bilil-a</i> ‘spread’; <i>dawli-s-e:ti:t</i> ‘having turned nice’

NB: ✧ = elicited words; † = (quasi-)lexicalized diminutives; R = Roper’s data; **bold** = more than one occurrence. (*dawli*) only occurred together with the augmentative *-lo:j*.



**Table 3: Semantic and pragmatic meanings of *r* > / diminutives**

<i>Meanings</i>	<i>Semantic type of noun</i>	<i>Semantic type of adjective</i>	<i>Semantic type of verb or mood</i>
Denotational	Body part (2); natural element (2)	Physical property (3); colour (3)	Movement (2)
Positive emotion, rhetoric	Body part (5); agent noun (1)	Physical property (1)	Property (3)
Negative emotion	Body part (1); natural element (1); action noun (1)		Movement (1)
Lexicalization	Body part (2); natural element (1)		
Politeness			Imperative (1)

**Table 4: List of adjectives with an augmentative suffix**

DIMENSION	<i>adha-lo:j</i> ‘very narrow’ (< Ar.); <i>g<sup>w</sup>imad-lo:j</i> ‘very long’; <i>kiḍa-lo:j</i> ‘very thick’; <i>marʔa-lo:j</i> ‘very broad’; <i>tabak-lo:j</i> ‘very tight’
VALUE	<i>ato:rbi-lo:j</i> ‘very ugly’; <i>bʔin-lo:j</i> ‘very fearful’; <i>da:ji-lo:j</i> ‘very good’; <i>dawli-lo:j</i> ‘very nice’; <i>dawri-lo:j</i> / <i>dawri-ro:j</i> ‘very nice’; <i>gabili-lo:j</i> ‘very beautiful’; <i>nafiri-lo:j</i> ‘very ugly’
PHYSICAL	<i>lʔa-lo:j</i> ‘very cold’; <i>nʔikw-lo:j</i> ‘very soft’; <i>fo:f-lo:j</i> ‘very light’; <i>nhas-lo:j</i> ‘very
PROPERTY	clean’; <i>ʃik<sup>w</sup>a:n-lo:j</i> ‘very fragrant’; <i>wa:fi-lo:j</i> ‘very dirty’ (< Ar.)
HUMAN	<i>fagar-lo:j</i> ‘very smart’ (< Ar.); <i>misikin-lo:j</i> ‘very poor, obedient’ (< Ar.)
PROPENSITY	
SPEED	✧ <i>dile:l-lo:j</i> ‘very slow’
QUANTIFICATION	<i>ʃalik-lo:j</i> ‘very little’
POSITION	<i>dawil-lo:j</i> ‘very close’; <i>sagi-lo:j</i> ‘very far’

NB: ✧ = elicited data

**Table 5: List of Manner converbs with an augmentative suffix**

<i>akir-a-l</i>	very strong’	<i>go:j-a-l</i>	‘very weak’
✧ <i>am’arriw-a-l</i>	‘very tidy’	<i>g<sup>w</sup>id-a-l</i>	‘very numerous’
✧ <i>andʒim-a-l</i>	‘very skilled’	<i>halbo:b-a-l</i>	‘very floppy’
<i>dig<sup>w</sup>i-a-l</i>	‘bare-footed’	✧ <i>hamr-a-l</i>	‘very sour, bitter’
✧ <i>dajjar-a-l</i>	‘very tired’	<i>ʃingir-a-l</i>	‘very ugly’
<i>damj-a-l</i>	‘very stinky’	✧ <i>winn-a-l</i>	‘very angry’
✧ <i>e:f-a-l</i>	‘very skinny’		

NB: ✧ = elicited data

**Table 6: The meanings and connotations of evaluative morphology**

Meanings and connotations		Diminutives		Augmentatives	
		F	<i>r &gt; l</i>	<i>-lo:j</i>	<i>-l</i>
Denotation		+	+	+	+
Negative emotions	Contempt, negative judgement	+	+	+	
Positive emotions	Respect	+			
	Comfort	+			
	Praise, endearment		+		
	Romantic love		+		
Pragmatics	Politeness		+		
	Eloquence		+		
Aspect	Habitual				+
Lexicalization		+	+		(+)