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A semantic map of the so-called "Negative Optative" in Beja

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1. INTRODUCTION

Beja *(biḍawijeː=t)*, North-Cushitic (Afroasiatic)
Spoken in Eastern Sudan + Northern Eritrea (+ Southern Egypt)
In Sudan 1,100,000 speakers; widespread bilingualism with Sudanese Arabic
Predominantly head final. Strongly SOV; SVO with enclitic object pronouns
Four nominal cases: nominative, accusative, genitive and vocative. Two more for pronouns: dative and ablative
Study based on a sound-indexed 10-hour corpus recorded in Sudanese villages and cities: Sinkat, Wagar, Port Sudan, Erkowit (partly available online at https://dx.doi.org/10.1075/scl.68.website

2. VERB SYSTEM

2 verb classes: V1 with prefixes (and stem patterns with ablaut; old paradigm), V2 with suffixes (no ablaut; new paradigm), for all indicative paradigms

Basic three-term aspectual distinction: Perfective, Imperfective and Aorist (Vanhove 2017).

+ Modal paradigms: Imperative (only suffixes for V1 and V2), Prohibitive (only suffixes, ablaut in stem for V1, + proclitic particle), Affirmative Optative/Hortative/Jussive (V1 same stem as Aorist + proclitic particle) and **Negative Optative/Hortative/Jussive** (V1 same stem as Prohibitive + different particle + **prefixes**)

+ 12 periphrastic constructions with auxiliary verbs: Perfect, Future, Desiderative (< 'say' + manner converb; intention, volition), Potential (< 'come' + V-*at*, epistemic modality: inference, quasi-certainty), Imminence, Continuative, Terminative, Benefactive, Emphasis, Light verb, Contrastive Negation, Directional

+ 4 converbs

No indigeneous modal auxiliary verb for possibility, capacity or necessity such as 'can', 'may', 'must' or 'need' (a loan verb from Arabic is spreading: *agdir / adgir* 'can' for participant-internal possibility)

3. NEGATIVE OPTATIVE

Negative Optative = Particle *ba*= (1SG) / *bi*= (other persons) **+ person prefixes (for both V1 and V2)** + V (invariable stem for V2; stem is Ciː(C) / CaCiː(C) for V1 – as Prohibitive – + suffixes of IPFV).

	SG (V1+V2)	V1mono	V2	PL (V1+V2)	V1	V2
1	*ba*=*a*-V stem		*-aj / ej*	*bi*=*n*-V stem		*-aj / ej*
2M	*bi*=*t*-V stem	*-a*	*-aja / ej*	*bi*=*t*-V stem	*-na*	*-eːna*
2F	*bi*=*t*-V stem	*-i*	*-aj / ej*			
3M	*bi*=*i*-V stem		*-aj / ej*	*bi*=*i*-V stem	*-na*	*-eːna*
3F	*bi*=*t*-V stem		*-aj / ej*			

3.1. In independent (or coordinated) clauses

Rare in the corpus. For all 3 persons SG. Only one 1PL in my data (cf. van der Auwera et al. 2003), + one 3PL found in Roper (1928). Expresses a wish, an appeal to circumstances (van der Auwera & Plungian 1998), not an order.

(1) *ti=dirʔa* *han* *ba=a-ʃaga-am-aj*
DEF.F=field also NEG.OPT=1SG-work-MID-OPT
V2.DER
'Let me not work in the field anymore!' (BEJ_MV_NARR_02_farmer_143)

(2) *harʔiː=isiːsi* *bi=t-jʔ-a=heːb=aj*
after=POSS.3SG.ABL NEG.OPT=2SG-come-OPT.M=OBJ.1SG= COORD
V2.IRG
'May you (hyena) not come to me from behind me! and…' (BEJ_MV_NARR_05_eritrea_329)

(3) *taktak* *taktak* *bi=n-ʔamiːs*
together together NEG.OPT=1PL-soak
'Let's not soak together!' (BEJ_MV_JOKE_07_LambCrocodile_56)

(4) *i=ʤammal* *t=hawaː=t=eː* *bi=i-ʃiːʃalik-na*
DEF.M=camelmen DEF.F=waterbag\PL=INDF.F=POSS.3PL NEG.OPT=3-be_few\CAUS-PL
V1.DER
'Let the camelmen not be short of waterbags!' (Roper 1928: 106)

(5) *ja* *iraːnaj* *oː-jhaːm* *ʈabʔ-a*
VOC gosh DEF.SG.M.ACC-leopard hit\INT-IMP.SG.M
ba=a-kʷinh-aj
NEG.OPT=1SG-shout-OPT
V2
'Gosh, hit the leopard, let me not shout at you!' (BEJ_MV_NARR_15_leopard_071) = I should not need to shout at you!

Negative Optative can also be used for the expression of participant-external impossibility (6).

(6) *<bani ʔaːdam>* *han* *bi=i-hass-ej=t*
<bani ʔaːdam> also NEG.OPT=3SG.M-pass-OPT=COORD
V2
'A human being could not even pass (in such a narrow canyon)!' (BEJ_MV_NARR_05_eritrea_178) (lit. Let not a human being pass!)

3.2. In subordinate clauses

Main usage in corpus. The only way to negate a verb in relative, complement, conditional, concessive clauses.

With periphrastic paradigms (Perfect, Future and Desiderative) the form of main verb is preserved, and the auxiliaries are in the Negative Optative.

In conditional, concessive/temporal clauses, just plain negation. No modal value is perceived by native speakers.

(7) *naː=t* *hoːk* *bi=i-dʔiː-n=eːk*
thing=INDF.F 2SG.DAT NEG.OPT=3-do\OPT-PL=if
V1.IRG
'If they don't do anything to you' (BEJ_MV_NARR_08_drunkard_067)

(8) *oːn* *ani* *his=iː*
PROX.SG.M.ACC 1SG.NOM voice=POSS.3SG.ABL
diːr-a=b *ba=a-kaːj=eːk*
kill-CVB.MNR=INDF.M.ACC NEG.OPT=1SG-become\OPT=if
PRF V1.IRG (AUX.PRF)
'Me, if I had not killed it with my voice' (BEJ_MV_NARR_40_camel_hyena_116-117)

(9) *i=taːkʷ-ana* *rh-a=b* *bi=n-kaːj=eːt* *mʔari*
DEF.M=cook\INT-N.AGN see-CVB.MNR=INDF.M.ACC NEG.OPT=1PL-become\OPT=REL.F food
V2 V1.IRG
'Even if we have not seen the cook, or a meal' (BEJ_MV_NARR_57_Ababda_199)

(10) *i=rizg=oːk* *iː-hariw* *bi=t-diː-n=eːk*
DEF.M=job=POSS.2SG.ACC FUT.SG-seek NEG.OPT=2-say\OPT-PL=if
V1.IRG
'If you don't look for your livelihood' (BEJ_MV_NARR_18_Adam_devil_030)

(11) *ʃagaː-m-a* *ba=a-diː=jeːk*
work-MID-CVB.MNR NEG.OPT=1SG-say\PFV=if
V1.IRG(AUX.DES)
'If I don't want to work' (BEJ_MV_CONV_01_RICH_SP2_138)

(12) *naː=t* *i-niːw=hoːb=wa* *bi=i-hiːw=hoːb=wa*
thing=INDF.F 3SG.M-give\IPFV=when=COORD NEG.OPT=3SG.M-give\OPT=when=COORD
V1.IRG
'Whether he gives them or does not give them something' (BEJ_MV_CONV_01_RICH_SP1_176)

But in relative (11 12!!-14) and complement (15-19) clauses, Negative Optative expresses either participant-internal or external modalities of impossibility or, rarely, unnecessity (deontic) (18).

(13) *naː=t* *bi=t-katiːm=i* *mhiːn*
thing=INDF.F NEG.OPT=3SG.F-arrive\OPT=REL place
V1
'A place were nothing can arrive' (BEJ_MV_NARR_05_eritrea_183)

(14) *alif=iː* *ba=a-mra-aj* *na*
thousand=ABL.SG NEG.OPT=1SG-find\MID-OPT thing
V2.DER
tiːdijaː=t=iːb *ti-kati=jeːk*
DEF.F=lower_world=INDF.F=LOC.SG 3SG.F-become\IPFV=if
'A thing that I cannot find for one thousand (dirham), since it is in the lower world'
(BEJ_MV_NARR_14_sijadok_303-305)

(15) *ittifaːgijaːj=t* *bi=t-ha=eːb* *oː=mhiːn*
convention=INDF.F NEG.OPT=3SG.F-be_there=REL.M DEF.SG.M.ACC=place
V1.IRG
'To the point where there is no possible agreement' (BEJ_MV_CONV_01_RICH_SP2_288)

(16) *allaːj* *taː=riba* *ti=bi=i-far-aj-n=eːt* *i-saːn-n=hoːk*
God DEF.PL.F.NOM=mountain REL.F=NEG.OPT=3-jump-OPT-L=REL.F 3-wait\AOR-PL=OBJ.2SG
V2
'God! may you find the mountains that cannot be jumped over, (BEJ_MV_NARR_25_ORPHAN_153)

(17) *hoːj* *ti-mir-n=eː=na* *ti-kati=jeːb*
ABL.3 2-find\PFV-PL=REL=thing 2SG-become\IPFV=REL.M
bi=t-kaː=jeːb *i-ndi=jaːt*
NEG.OPT=2SG-become=REL.M 3SG.M-say\IPFV=COORD
V1.IRG
'He wonders wether you can get something out of it or not, and'
(BEJ_MV_NARR_18_Adam_devil_043-044)

(18) *i-kteːni* *bi=i-rh-aj=eːt* *toː=na*
3SG.M-know\MID.IPFV NEG.OPT=3SG.M-see-OPT=REL.F DEF.SG.F.ACC=thing
V2
'It (porcupine) realizes that he (Adam) does not (cannot) see it (because it is dark)'
(BEJ_MV_NARR_18_Adam_devil_057)

(19) *eː-bi=jeːt* *toː=na* *bi=t-kaːj=eːb* *hiːs-ani*
1SG-go\INT.IPFV=REL.F DEF.SG.F.ACC=thing NEG.OPT=3SG.F-become\OPT=REL.M think-IPFV.1SG
V1.IRG
'I think that I should not go' (lit. I think that it is not that I go) (BEJ_MV_CONV_01_RICH_SP2_141)

(20) *i-maːr* *ba=a-di=jeːb* *hiːs-an*
FUT.SG-find\INT NEG.OPT=1SG-say=REL.M think-PFV.1SG
V1.IRG

'I thought I would not find it' (BEJ_MV_NARR_27_GOAT_049)

4. DIACHRONIC EXPLANATION

4.1. Indicative

Renewal of the aspectual system from a two-term system to a three-term system with introduction of a new Imperfective paradigm and inversion of aspectual values (cf. Reinisch 1893-94; Cohen 1972, 1973; Zaborski 1975).

Beja today	*Reconstructed forms and semantic values*
Imperfective	*Light verb 'say' (> new paradigm) (V1 pre- or infixed; V2 suffixed)
Perfective	*Imperfective
Aorist	*Perfective

Tableau 1. Diachrony of indicative paradigms

Assymetrical Negative Indicative paradigms:

- Negative Imperfective < Perfective + *ka*= (1SG)/*ki*=
- No Negative Aorist (= Negative Imperfective)
- Negative Perfective = manner converb + 'be' + *ka*= (1SG)/*ki*= (same as Negative Perfect)

4.2. Negative Optative

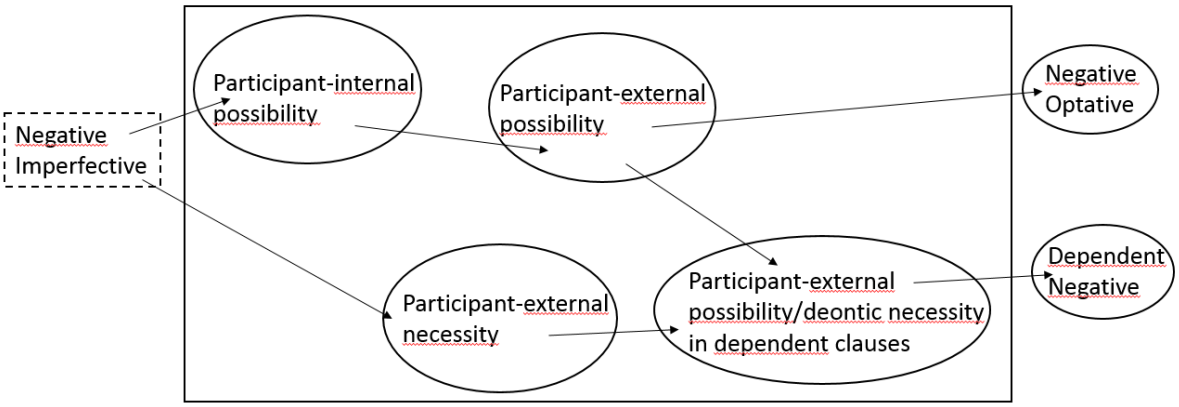
- The only paradigm with prefixed personal morphemes for both verb classes (same as Imperfective V1)
- Prefixed paradigms are the oldest ones in Cushitic
- ⇨ Negative Optative may be a trace of a former (asymmetrical) Negative Imperfective paradigm (?)

Auwera and Plungian's (1998:107) modality's semantic map shows that optative may develop from participant-external possibility (demodalization), not the other way round. Still traces of the latter meaning in independent clauses (ex. 4 & 5).

But what about its use in dependent clauses (no optative value, only impossibility, unnecessity)?

Diachronic development of verb systems throughout Afroasiatic (Cohen 1984) – also elsewhere – is that old paradigms gradually become restricted to modal meanings and to dependent clauses.

4.3. Diachronic semantic map



Conform to van der Auwera and Plungian (1998).

One extra source of modality: Negative Imperfective.

No dialectal variation.

BUT *ba=/bi=* also particle of Affirmative Optative, but Vstem is that of Aorist (which can still be used with an Optative value, cf. ex. 15)

For Negative Optative Vstem is that Prohibitive, as well as suffixed gender and number morphemes (for V1, plural only for V2) (but not person morphemes which are those of the V1 Indicative)

⇨ historically, *ba=/bi=* is an Optative particle, not a negative particle

5. ABBREVIATIONS

LGR List of Standard Abbreviations + AOR aorist; COORD coordination; DER derivation; DES desiderative; INT intensive; IRG irregular; MID middle voice; MNR manner; N.AGN agent noun; OPT optative.

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