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The contrastive particle *na / ni* in Beja (North-Cushitic)

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Abstract: Based on a corpus of semi-spontaneous data, this article is a first description and analysis of the functions of the Beja contrastive discourse particle *na / ni* within a functional, pragmatic and discourse organisation approach. It is shown that this particle is a marker of semantic opposition, denial of expectation, including adversativity, concessivity and mirativity, and possibly marginally a topic marker.

Keywords: Beja, discourse analysis, pragmatics, discourse particle, contrast, semantic opposition, adversative, concessive, mirative, topic.

1. Introduction

Contrastive particles have given rise to a very large body of research related to information structure, discourse organisation and clause linkage, within different theoretical and methodological approaches (in particular pragmatics, formal semantics, functional typology, corpus linguistics, textual and discourse analysis, and cognitive linguistics).¹ Alexandra Vydrina herself dedicated a part of her 2017 PhD thesis to a corpus-based analysis of information structure and discourse organisation, specifically on topic and focus constructions in Kakabe (Mande, Niger-Congo), including contrastive focus, contrastive assertion and contrastive topic. She further developed her approach in a descriptive and theoretically oriented article (Vydrina 2020). In both works, she showed how useful it is to study information structure within discourse organization strategies, and that instead of analysing isolated utterances, it is preferable to look at the contribution of an utterance and specificities of grammatical marking to the discourse organization as a whole. In this line, the aim of this contribution is to provide a preliminary description and corpus-based analysis of one of the contrastive discourse particles of Beja, namely *na / ni*.

As defined in Cuenca *et al.* (2019: 5) “contrast is a negative coherence relation involving the comparison of two discourse segments that express propositional contents or states of affairs presented in an antonymic relation.” It is considered as one of the basic relations expressed by discourse markers.

¹ See e.g. Lakoff (1971), Lambrecht (1996), Krifka & Musan (2012) for cognitive linguistics; Rooth (1996) for formal semantics; Hartmann & Zimmermann (2007), Lee *et al.* (2017) for pragmatics; Fraser (1998), Delahunty (2001), De Hoop & De Swart (2004), Cuenca *et al.* (2019) for discourse analysis; Malchukov (2004), Mauri (2013) for functional typology; Chafe (1976), Schwenter (2000) for discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics; Virtanen (2009), van Bergen & Hogeweg (2021) for discourse analysis and corpus linguistics; Büring (1997), Selkirk (2008), Roberts (2012), Kamali & Krifka (2020) for pragmatics and formal semantics; Umbach (2004), Gotzner & Spalek (2017) for pragmatics and discourse analysis; Bearth (1999) for pragmatics, formal semantics and typology; Meurman-Solin & Lenker (2011) for pragmatics and textual and discourse analysis; Sanders & Spooren (2010) for cognitive linguistics, textual and discourse analysis.

It is also well known that “contrast in discourse structure [is] intertwined with contrast in information structure” (Umbach 2004: 156), and numerous studies have dealt with contrastive focus and contrastive topic.

In addition, the term “contrast” is often used as a cover term for both semantic opposition and denial of expectation, i.e. the adversative function (and one of its subtypes, the concessive function) (Malchukov 2004; König 1988). For instance, as mentioned in Malchukov (2004), following Lakoff (1971: 141), the English particle *but* expresses semantic opposition in *John is short but Bill is long*, and denial of expectation in *John is short but he is good at basketball*. Moreover, “[o]nly the denial-of-expectation *but* allows a paraphrase employing a concessive conjunction (cf. *Although John is short, he is good at basketball*)” (Malchukov 2004: 180). While some languages, such as English, or Beja as we will see, use the same conjunction (*but* in English) for semantic opposition and denial of expectation, other languages, such as Russian, use different conjunctions (see e.g. Lakoff 1971; Malchukov 2004: 179-181).

At the same time, a similarity between adversativity and mirativity has long been recognized because of the unexpectedness feature that they share (see e.g. Podlesskaja 1993: 113 for Japanese; Malchukov 2004: 187-191 for Russian). As explained by Malchukov in his typology of adversative and contrastive connectives,

[i]n the adversative construction the event denoted by the second conjunct is unexpected in view of the first one (it is expected that the two events are not compatible), while in the mirative construction the event referred to in the second conjunct is unexpected as such, without any relation to the event in the first one. (Malchukov 2004: 187)

For example, the Japanese conjunction *ga* is analysed as mirative in (1):

- (1) *Yuriko wa sutto tachiagat-ta ga... kiregire ni it-ta*
Yuriko TOP immediately stand.up-PAST CONJ indistinct talk-PAST
'Juriko immediately stood up and suddenly (lit. but) started to mumble' (Podlesskaja 1993: 113, cited in Malchukov 2004: 188)

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents brief information about the language that is relevant for this article, as well as the data used. Section 3 discusses the use of *na / ni* as a marker of semantic opposition, Section 4 as an adversative particle, Section 5 as a mirative particle, and Section 6 as a possible topic marker. Section 7 concludes.

2. General information on Beja and the data

Beja (ISO 639–1, glottolog beja1238), locally named *biḍawje:t*, is the sole language of the North-Cushitic branch of the Afroasiatic phylum. It is spoken by approx. 2,000,000 speakers in Eastern Sudan,² where it is unwritten, and by approx. 60,000 speakers in Northern Eritrea, where a Latin script has been developed some three decades ago for school education. It seems that there are a few speakers left in Southern Egypt.

Beja has rich and complex inflectional and derivational morphology, both in the nominal and verbal domains. It is partly templatic, i.e. consisting of consonantal roots to which various patterns are applied, for verb inflection and derivation, noun formation, verb-noun derivation,

² The country where I did my fieldwork.

adjective and plural formation. Beja is also partly agglutinative-fusional, with suffixes and enclitics (the majority), as well as prefixes and proclitics, some of which are portmanteau morphemes, such as the definite article.

Syntactically, Beja is predominantly head-final; the canonical constituent order is (X)(S)(O)V, and dependent clause – matrix clause. Within a clause, constituent order is not particularly rigid and may vary for pragmatic reasons, but in complex sentences, the clause order is more rigid. There are two main types of complex sentences: deranked subordination with sequential, simultaneity, general and manner converbs, and balanced subordination³ with finite verb forms and conjunctions, which either go back to relative clauses headed by a still transparent temporal or spatial noun (temporal clauses) or to enclitic conjunctions (temporal, conditional, concessive and reason clauses). Symmetric clausal relations are expressed via parataxis or coordination. The latter strategy uses either enclitics on finite verbs (=t / =it / =ajt / =a:t ‘and’), or independent particles. The most common ones are: *are:* ‘then’, *la:kin* ‘but’ (an Arabic loan), *nu:n* ‘except, but, simply’, *tara* ‘or’ (for details see Vanhove 2017).

The particle *na*, with a free variant *ni*, has a different morphosyntactic and pragmatic status than the two above-mentioned strategies. It relates two states of affairs, be they syntactically expressed independently or dependently. It is mostly used as an enclitic particle (very rarely as a proclitic), and less so as an independent particle. When enclitic, it always occurs in the final position of a prosodic word, after all other clitics (temporal, conditional and coordinating conjunctions, the comparative marker), and it can attach to almost any of the main parts of speech, in whatever function or position in the clause: finite verbs, converbs, nouns, pronouns, adverbs. It can combine with other discourse particles, as in (2) below.

- (2) *i=tak=i:=ka* *ʔaɖami=ka=b* *aka-je:*
 DEF.M=man=ABL.SG=CMPR young=CMPR=INDF.M.ACC become-CVB.SMLT
- i=nafs=i* *rh-i* / *ʔakr-a:=ka=na* *han*
 DEF.M=soul=POSS.1SG.NOM see-AOR.1SG . be_strong-CVB.MNR=CMPR=CONTR also
- dh=i* *a-tʔi=ajt* / *ʔa:ladʒ-ani* *i-ni* //
 DIR=POSS.1SG.ACC 1SG-resemble/PFV=CSL . tease-IPFV.1SG 3SG.M-say/PFV .
- ‘I could see myself as younger than the man, **but** because I **also** felt that I was the strongest, I’ll tease it (the leopard), he thought.’ (BEJ_MV_NARR_15_leopard_047-050)

The present study is exclusively based on a 10 hour-length corpus of narrative, poetic, and procedural texts, interviews, and an 8.45 min-long dialogue that I recorded in Sudan at Sinkat, Wagar, Erkowit, and Port-Sudan between 2001 and 2011.⁴ It was not possible to elicit and test data for the purpose of this article at that time, nor since then. It should also be noted that a strong hierarchy of discourse genres and restrictive rules of politeness mean that Beja speakers are reluctant to be recorded in ordinary conversations for fear of disrespecting the researcher, hence the scarcity of this genre in the corpus. It may have had an impact on the low rate of occurrences of the contrastive particle in my data: only 30 examples were found, eleven with =*ni*, fourteen with =*na*, four with *na* and one with *na=*. Nine occurrences were found in the

³ The terminology “deranked subordination” and “balanced subordination” was introduced by Cristofaro (2003) to refer to subordinated clauses with non-finite verb forms, and those with finite verb forms, respectively.

⁴ The data are partly available online at <https://corporan.huma-num.fr/Archives/corpus.php>. They are segmented into intonation units and fully annotated. In the transcriptions, / represents a minor prosodic break, // a major prosodic break.

- (6) *o:=da:r* *o:n* *ga:l* *be:nto:j* *ni-dʔi* / *o:=da:r*
 DEF.SG.M.ACC=circle PROX.SG.M.ACC one there 1PL-do\AOR . DEF.SG.M.ACC=circle
- o:=ra:w* / *unto:j* *ni-dʔi* / *o:=mhi:n*
 DEF.SG.M.ACC=other . here 1PL-do\AOR . DEF.SG.M.ACC=place
- wi=n-ha=e:b* / *tu:=do:b* / *o:=da:r*
 REL.SG.M=1PL-be_there\IPFV=REL.SG.M . DEF.SG.F.NOM=bride. DEF.SG.M.ACC=circle
- o:na:j* *da:-ti=ni* / *to:=do:b* *i:-gʷʔad* /
 PROX.SG.M.GEN be_there-AOR.3SG.F=CONTR . DEF.SG.F.ACC=bride 3SG.M-watch\AOR .
- dha:j* / *əəə* / *ho:j* *da:j-e:n* / *e:=nda* /
 DIR . er . 3DAT/ABL be_there-IPFV.3PL . DEF.PL.M.ACC=man\PL .
- ‘We used to make this one circle there, we used to make the other circle here, the bride stays in this circle, in the place where we are, **on the other hand**, the men stay, er, to look after the bride.’
 (BEJ_MV_NARR_55_tanduuy_028-045)

In the following example the contrastive particle cliticizes to the last element of a relative clause, the finite verb with the clitic relative marker =*e:b*. The speaker contrasts, in adjacent clauses, two alternative solutions to a problem: calling the police, or agreeing beforehand on a written contract.

- (7) *huku:ma=t* *ti:-fi=e:k* / *ti-s-ʔibik* *ti-ndi* // *ombaro:* /
 police=INDF.F 3SG.F-be_there\AOR=if . 3SG.F-CAUS-take\AOR 3SG.F-say\IPFV . 3SG.M.ACC .
- ittifa:g* *kitb-a=b* *i:-kti:-n=e:b=na* /
 agreement write-CVB.MNR=INDF.M.ACC 3-become\AOR-PL=REL.SG.M=CONTR .
- ane:b=wa* *bawo:k=wa* / *hi:da=b* *ni-sʔa*
 1SG.ACC=COORD 2SG.M.ACC=COORD . together=INDF.M.ACC 1PL-sit\MID.PFV
- ‘If there were a policeman, he would stop him. **But**, for an agreement that they would have written, me and you, we would have sat together. (BEJ_MV_CONV_01_rich_SP2_265- 271)

In example (8), the speaker compares the gloomy present state of a summer resort with its bustling activity in ancient times. Note that the two contrasted SoA are not adjacent: they are separated by 23 intonation units (from both speakers of the interview). The contrastive particle is enclitic to a temporal adverb.

- (8) *tʔa* *o:n* *wha:l* *o:na:j* *ki=ha:j* /
 now DEM.SG.M.ACC DEF.SG.M=situation PROX.SG.M.GEN NEG.IPFV=be_there\PFV[3SG.M] .
- (...) *masjaf* *bho:b=na* / *fagar* *fanha* *faga:m-i* /
 summer_resort formerly=CONTR . clever work work-AOR.3SG.M.
- ‘Now, it is not in this condition anymore. (A long description of the former activities of the summer resort follows). **But**, formerly, the summer resort used to work well.’ (BEJ_MV_INT_01_hotel_SP2_049-071)

Example (9) illustrates a case where the broader linguistic context, in which it is amply discussed that an unscrupulous rich man refused to pay poor people who worked for him, knowing that he did not risk to be prosecuted, serves as the first linguistic segment to which the apodosis of the conditional sentence is compared. The contrastive particle occurs as a free-standing particle, in its own intonation unit, after a pause of 686 ms.⁵

⁵ To answer a question of one of the reviewers, there was no hesitation in the speaker’s utterance, according to my consultant.

- (9) *badhi ho:j da:j-e:ti:t / t=ʔi:ba:b=t=u:n da:je:b*
 witness\PL 3DAT/ABL be_there-CVB.SEQ . DEF.F=travel=INDF.F=POSS.1PL.NOM good
ʔanki:r=e:k / 686 na / baru: han / ʔawwal=i: /
 be_strong\IPFV.[3SG.M]=if . CONTR . 3SG.M.NOM also . first=ABL.SG .
i-ra:k^v i-ndi //
 FUT.SG-be_afraid\INT 3SG.M-say\IPFV .
 ‘... If there were witnesses for that, and our case became really strong, **on the other hand**, he too, from the beginning, would have been frightened.’ (BEJ_MV_CONV_01_rich_SP2_265-280)

In (10), one of the contrastive segments is left implicit. It is deductible from the common ground shared by the speakers, namely that there are people who believe in the last judgement and others who do not. The connective of nominal coordination =*wa* ‘and’ has an associative value here, as it is used on only one noun.⁶ The contrastive particle is enclitic to the connective.

- (10) *ti=gija:ma=wa=na / w=ʔi:ma:n i-bari-n da i-kati-n=e:k //*
 DEF.F=doomsday=COORD=CONTR . DEF.SG.M=faith 3-have\IPFV-PL man\PL 3-become\IPFV-PL=if .
lʔa:-n-e:=d e:-ʔif-n=e:b hi:s-ani //
 after-life-L-GEN.PL=DIR 3-let\IPFV-PL=REL.SG.M think-IPFV.1SG .
 ‘If they are men who have faith on doomsday and (all that goes with it) (**as opposed to those who don’t**), I think they should leave it for the after-life.’ (BEJ_MV_CONV_01_rich_SP2_256-260)

4. Adversative

The contrastive particle can also mark adversativity between two states of affairs, that is a contrast that involves counter-expectation, including presupposition and unexpectedness. It is often of the concessive subtype. There are eleven examples of this sort in the data. The contrastive marker occurs three times as a clitic to a main verb, four times as a clitic to a conditional conjunction attached to a finite verb, twice as a clitic to a manner converb used in predicative function, once to a discourse particle, and once as a free-standing particle.

Example (11) is extracted from the same dialogue as example (9). In his question (11a), Speaker 1 proposes that the poor men should force the rich man to pay them for their work, but Speaker 2 (11b) is against it and prefers another solution, which goes against Speaker 1’s expectation, expressed in (11a). In Speaker 2’s answer, the contrastive particle occurs on a finite verb.

- (11) a. *am-de:r-a:j-ti:t / ta:w-ti:t w=hagg=o:*
 RECP-kill\INT.IPFV-RECP.IPFV-CVB.SEQ . wring\INT-CVB.SEQ DEF.SG.M=right=POSS.3SG.ACC
ho:j i-jaj-n=e:t to:=na / ki=t-ti han
 3DAT/ABL 3-take\IPFV-PL=REL.F DEF.SG.F.ACC=thing . NEG.IPFV=3SG.F-become\PFV Q.PLR
are: ʔo:r // na:=t tak ba:=mka:r //
 then child . thing=INDF.F man NEG.PROH=advise\CVB.SMLT.MID.NEG .
 ‘After having quarrelled with him, should not they take their rights by force, then, man? Without asking for advice from any one.’ (BEJ_MV_CONV_01_RICH_SP1_213-216)
- b. *abadan / aʔa / ʔakr-a=ka tak e:-fi=ajt /*
 never . no . be_strong-CVB.MNR=CMPR man 3SG.M-be_there\IPFV=CSL .
be:na:j=d i:-ʔif=na // alla:ji-i=d i:-ʔif bass //
 DIST.SG.M.GEN=DIR 1SG-let\AOR=CONTR . God-GEN=DIR 1SG-let\AOR only .
 ‘Never! No! Because there is a Man stronger than him, I’d leave it for that One **instead**, I’d only leave it for God.’ (BEJ_MV_CONV_01_rich_SP2_248-253)

⁶ Plain coordination is marked on each coordinated noun.

In the story from which example (12) is extracted, a married woman was kidnapped by another man, by whom she had children. The legitimate husband managed to find her, and after he had asked her about her current condition, her answer shows that she inferred that he wanted her back without her children, the socially acceptable behaviour. The contrastive particle, enclitic to the conditional conjunction, underlines her denial of her husband's expectation, and could be schematized as “if *p* then normally not *q*”, and paraphrased as “if one has illegitimate children, one should not keep them”.

- (12) *o:nane:b* / *ha:j* *gi:g-i=he:b* *ti-ndi=e:k=na* /
 PROX.SG.M.ACC 1SG.ACC . COM leave-FUT.SG=OBJ.1SG 2SG.F-say\IPFV=if=CONTR .
j=ʔar=e:=wwa / *ane:b=wa* *ni:-t-ram=ho:k* /
 DEF.M=child\PL=POSS.1PL.ACC=COORD . 1SG.ACC=COORD FUT.PL-MID-accompany=OBJ.2SG .
ni-jad / *j=ʔar=i* *i:-ʔif* *ka=a-di* /
 1PL-say\IPFV . DEF.M=child\PL=POSS.1SG.ACC FUT.SG-let NEG.IPFV=1SG-say\PFV .
 ‘As for me, if you want to take me away, my children and I, we will accompany you **against all odds**. I won't leave my children.’ (BEJ_MV_NARR_51_camel_stallion_303-309)

In example (13), as in the two preceding examples, the contrastive particle has a general adversative meaning. In the preceding context of this example, the speaker mentions that there is no well in his village, then provides a long list of the wells and reservoirs found in the surroundings. The speaker ends his discourse by a statement about the absence of thirst. It is first introduced by the discourse particle *ibaki*: ‘anyway’, confirming that the numerous water spots prevent from being thirsty. It is immediately followed by the enclitic contrastive particle, which does not go back to the preceding list of wells, but contrasts with the mention of the absence of a well 22 intonation units before, an absence which could have led the population and cattle to lack water in an arid environment. In the desert, the absence of a well normally presupposes thirst for living beings.

- (13) *i=k^{wa}:k^{wi}* *sad* *are: e:-fi* / *su:r tʔawa:j* *ni:-di* / *ibaki:=na* /
 DEF.M=Sinkat reservoir then 3.SG.M-be_there. before T'away 1PL-say\AOR . anyway=CONTR .
mangar ho:j *ki=ha:j* /
 thirst 3DAT/ABL NEG.IPFV= be_there\PFV.[3SG.M] .
 ‘There is also Sinkat reservoir. Before, we used to call it T'away. Anyway, **well (i.e. contrary to what one would suspect)**, there is no thirst here.’ (BEJ_MV_INT_02_Erkowit_SP2_84-88)

Example (2) above, repeated below as (14), illustrates the case where the particle is enclitic to a converb used in predicative function (here after the comparative clitic =*ka*), marking the contrast between the first SoA, i.e. being the youngest, with the second SoA, i.e. being the strongest. These two SoA, as is the rule for adversative relations, are not expected to be compatible. The presupposition is that normally younger persons are not stronger than older ones. It clearly entails a concessive relation, which could be paraphrased as “although I was the youngest, I was the strongest”.

- (14) *i=tak=i:=ka* *ʔaɖami=ka=b* *aka-je:*
 DEF.M=man=ABL.SG=CMPR young=CMPR=INDF.M.ACC become-CVB.SMLT
- i=nafs=i* *rh-i* / *ʔakr-a:=ka=na* *han*
 DEF.M=soul=POSS.1SG.NOM see-AOR.1SG . be_strong-CVB.MNR=CMPR=CONTR also
- dh=i* *a-tʔi=ajt* / *ʔa:ladʒ-ani* *i-ni* //
 DIR=POSS.1SG.ACC 1SG-resemble\PFV=CSL . tease-IPFV.1SG 3SG.M-say\PFV .
- ‘I could see myself as younger than the man, **however**, because I also felt that I was the strongest, I’ll tease it (the leopard), he thought.’ (BEJ_MV_NARR_15_leopard_047-050)

In (15), the predicative manner converb marked with =*ni* is included in a conditional clause (without an apodosis, a frequent rhetorical strategy), expressing a concessive relation, “although your friends are happy, you are sad”. Happiness of others is not supposed to be compatible with one’s own sadness.

- (15) *i=raw=a:k* *wanas-e:n=e:k* / *afirh-a=b=ni*
 DEF.M=friend/PL=POSS.2PL.NOM chat-IPFV.3PL=if . rejoice-CVB.MNR=INDF.M.ACC=CONTR
- i-kati-n=e:k* / *baru:k* *gadab-a:=b* *ti-kati=e:k*
 3-become\IPFV-PL=if . 2SG.M.NOM be_sad-CVB.MNR=INDF.M.ACC 2SG.M-become\IPFV=if
- ‘**Even though** your friends are chatting, are happy, (why) are you sad?’ (lit. if your friends chat, if they are happy, you, if you are sad?) (BEJ_MV_NARR_13_grave_035-038)

5. Mirative

As described by Malchukov,

In the adversative construction the event denoted by the second conjunct is unexpected in view of the first one (it is expected that the two events are not compatible), while in the mirative construction the event referred to in the second conjunct is unexpected as such, without any relation to the event in the first one. (Malchukov 2004: 187)

Seven examples of this sort, involving an element of surprise and unexpectedness, were found in the Beja data: four with the contrastive particle clitic to a verb, two clitic to a noun, and one clitic to a conditional conjunction.

Example (16) occurs in the same context as example (12), and directly precedes it. The woman begins her answer about her current condition by reminding her husband of the unexpected visit of the stranger who took the opportunity to kidnap her, while the husband was looking after his camels. The two contrastive particles are clitic to finite verbs.

- (16) *ja: ira:ni* *u:n* *ani* / *ge:* *o:=tak* / *be:taj*
 ADRF gosh PROX.SG.M.NOM 1SG.NOM . DM DEF.SG.M.ACC=man . that_one
- rhi-ta=ni* / *w=ha:j* *gi:g-ja:=ni* / *firaj* *ho:j*
 see-PFV.2SG.M=CONTR . REL.SG.M=COM leave-PFV.3SG.M=CONTR . offspring\PL 3DAT/ABL
- a-mri* /
 1SG-find\PFV .
- ‘Gosh, as for me, the man you saw that day **unexpectedly**, who left with me **unexpectedly**, I got children from him.’ (BEJ_MV_NARR_51_camel_stallion_295-301)

(17) is another example with the contrastive particle clitic to a finite verb. Here the statement comes completely out of the blue, and the mirative meaning comes from the shared knowledge that a human being is not supposed to have donkey legs.

- (17) *ira:ni baru:k wanas-naj di:-ti:t // ira:ni baru:k*
 gosh 2SG.M.NOM chat-IPFV.1PL say-CVB.SEQ . gosh 2SG.M.NOM
o:n i=g^winib=i:b / tak me:k-i ragad-a=i /
 PROX.SG.M.ACC DEF.M=Gwinib=LOC.SG . man donkey-GEN leg-PL=COP.3SG .
i=ragad-a-i i-kati=ni / e:-fi
 DEF.M=leg-PL-GEN 3SG.M-become\IPFV=CONTR . 3SG.M-be_there\IPFV
 ‘Gosh, we want to chat with you. Gosh, you, at Gwinib, **lo and behold**, there is a man with donkey legs, he is made of legs!’ (BEJ_MV_NARR_34_donkeyman_53-58)

An out-of-the-blue mirative meaning is also the case in example (18), where the contrastive particle this time is clitic to a noun. Note that the particle also occurs in a conditional clause as in example (15), but here it has a reason meaning and a matrix clause preceding it. The unexpectedness of the SoA comes from the shared knowledge that a fisherman is supposed to catch fish, not donkey corpses or pieces of jar.

- (18) *ja:bi // i=baxit ho:j salla:m-a:=he:b i-ndi e:n //*
 god! . DEF.M=destiny 3DAT/ABL give-IMP.SG.M=OBJ.1SG 3SG.M-say\IPFV say\PFV.3PL .
me:k-i=t misu:s=ni a-fanr?i=e:k / diwa:n-i firka:k a-fanr?i=e:k //
 donkey-GEN=INDF.F die\N.AC=CONTR 1SG-go_out\IPFV=if . jar-GEN piece 1SG-go_out\IPFV=if .
 ‘He says, they said: God! protect me against the misfortune of today! since sometimes, **lo and behold**, I fish out the corpse of a donkey, and sometimes I fish out a piece of jar!’
 (BEJ_MV_NARR_02_farmer_186-193)

In (19), also with the contrastive particle on a noun, the unexpectedness comes from the fact that a man, even if very thirsty, is not supposed to drink a whole jerrycan of water, let alone go and get a second one.

- (19) *dʒaraka:ni=t ah-i:t i:-t-gadhi // ti=dʒaraka:ni=na /*
 jerrycan=INDF.F take-CVB.SEQ 3SG.M-MID-go_down\IPFV . DEF.F=jerrycan=CONTR .
to:n fa:jis-e.ti:t / we:na=t=i:b i-manri /
 PROX.SG.F.ACC finish-CVB.SEQ . other_thing=INDF.F=LOC.SG 3SG-find\IPFV .
 ‘He takes a jerrycan and gets down. **Lo and behold**, after he finishes the jerrycan, he gets another one!’
 (BEJ_MV_NARR_42_hunter_bread_028-035)

In the preceding context of example (20), people show their surprise when they see two men asleep in the mosque, instead of the man and woman they were expecting to discover. They ask them why they are there. A misunderstanding follows, as in the context of Islamic rules of hospitality, it is normal for travellers and homeless people to sleep in a mosque. In their answer with the contrastive particle in a reason clause, marked with the conditional clitic, the answer underlines the unexpectedness of the question.

- (20) *alla:j-i gaw i-kati=e:k=ni / hinin ho:j bʔa:-na:=e:k /*
 God-GEN house 3SG.M-become\IPFV=if=CONTR . 1PL.NOM 3DAT/ABL lie_down-PFV.1PL=if⁷.
 ‘**Lo and behold**, since it is God’s house, if we slept in it (it was our right)!’
 (BEJ_MV_NARR_84_MountainSon_371-373)

6. Contrast and/or topic?

There are three instances for which the exact function of the particle is ambiguous. In each of them, the noun to which the particle is attached is a repetition of the same noun in the preceding

⁷ Like in example (15), the apodosis is left unexpressed.

segment. On one hand, the contrast between two linguistic segments seems to be still at stake, but on the other hand, the repetition of the noun may indicate that the particle is grammaticalizing towards a marker of the topic of the second segment.

In example (21), extracted from a procedural text from an adult who was explaining the rules of a children’s game, there is a thematic break between the first segment and the second. In the first segment, the speaker describes the course of the game when it is the turn of the first group of players to chase the “bride”. He goes on with the description of the turn of the second group when they have won the first round. The example could thus be interpreted as either marking the topic of the second segment, or a semantic opposition between the two segments.

- (21) *to:=do:b* / *o:=da:r* / *fu:m-ti=e:b* / *o:=da:r*
 DEF.SG.F.ACC=bride . DEF.SG.M.ACC=circle go_in-AOR.3SG.F=REL.SG.M . DEF.SG.M.ACC=circle
ba:=fu:m-s-e: / *ni-dir=e:k* / *u:=do:r* / *hinib*
 NEG.PROH=go_in-CAUS-CVB.SMLT 1PL-kill\PFV=if . DEF.SG.M.NOM=time POSS.1PL.ACC
i-kati=a:t / *hinin* / *are:* / *do:b=t* / *ni-dʔi* / *hinin* / *are:* /
 3SG.M-become\IPFV=COORD . 1PL.NOM then . bride=INDF.F 1PL-do\AOR . 1PL.NOM then .
i=do:r=o:n=na / *are:* / *hawa:-naj* / (...) *ti=do:b=t=u:n*
 DEF.M=time=POSS.1PL.ACC=CONTR . then . play-IPFV.1PL . DEF.F=bride=INDF.F=POSS.1PL.NOM
o:=da:r / *fu:m-ti=e:k* / *hinin* / *girb-a=b* / *ni-kati* /
 DEF.SG.M.ACC=circle go_in-AOR.3SG.F=if . 1PL.NOM win-CVB.MNR=INDF.M.ACC 1PL-become\IPFV.
 ‘The bride who has entered the circle, if we have killed her without us being made enter the circle, it becomes our turn, and we then choose (another) bride. We, then, **as for** our turn, then we play and (...) if our bride enters the circle, we are the winners.’ (BEJ_MV_NARR_55_tanduuy_084-102)

In example (22), the second clause with the particle is simply a rephrasing of the first clause, and no thematic break is involved. =na seems to behave as a mere marker of topic continuity. However, another possible interpretation is that =na could underline the contrast between the fact that the fairies have worked, but that the shoemaker has not rewarded them yet as expected, i.e. an adversative meaning, which was unmarked in the first formulation of the question.

- (22) *ira:naj* / *e:t* / *ti=dʒa:nta:ji* / *a:n* / *hinin* / *kak* /
 gosh PROX.PL.F.ACC . DEF.F=jinni PROX.PL.M.NOM 1PL.NOM . how .
ira:naj / *o:n* / *i=dʒaza=jo:* / *ni-kʷe:s* / *e:-d-na* //
 gosh . PROX.SG.M.ACC DEF.M=wage=POSS.3SG.ACC . 1PL-reimburse\IPFV 3-say\IPFV-PL .
o:n / *i=dʒaza=jo:=na* / *kak* / *sak-i:ni*
 PROX.SG.M.ACC DEF.M=wage=POSS.3SG.ACC=CONTR . how do-IPFV.3SG.M
 ‘They say: Gosh, how can we pay their wages to these fairies? **As for** the wages, what shall we do?’
 (BEJ_MV_NARR_17_shoemaker_233-244)

7. Conclusion

The above description has shown that the Beja contrastive particle *na* / *ni* is polysemous and multifunctional, fitting in the broad characterization of the concept of contrast, which groups together mere semantic opposition between two states of affairs, adversativity (and its concessivity subtype), and mirativity.

Morphosyntactically, what is striking is the great freedom of position of this particle within any type of clause. However, further research is needed to explain such syntactic diversity.

The scope of the contrastive particle is not limited to the adjacent word, and from the point of view of discourse organisation it can contrast two adjacent states of affairs, or jump over long stretches of discourse to compare two states of affairs, as in examples (8) and (13).

In a few instances, when it is enclitic to a noun, the particle may be undergoing a process of grammaticalization towards a topic marker, which needs to be checked on more data.

Even if not a coordinating element *per se*, it is striking that *na / ni* mirrors neatly the right-hand part of the semantic map of coordinating connectives proposed by Malchukov (2004: 178), and reproduced below. The non-relevant semantic functions for Beja are surrounded with dashed lines.

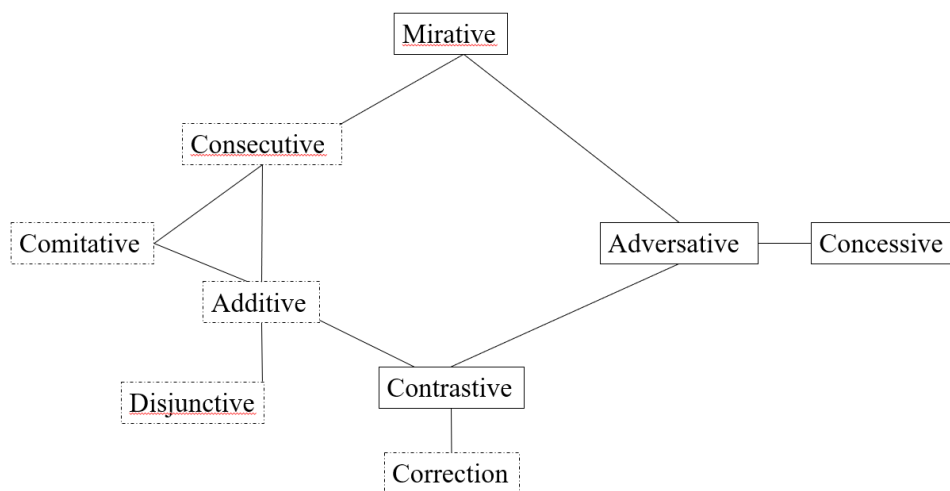


Figure 1: A semantic map for coordinating connectives (adapted from Malchukov 2004: 178)

To conclude, I want to insist on the fact that this is a preliminary description and analysis based on a limited set of data, which would need to be complemented by more data and tests.

Abbreviations

ABL ablative; ACC accusative; ADRF address form; AOR aorist; CAUS causative; CMPR comparative; COM comitative; CONTR contrastive ; COORD coordination; COP copula; CSL causal; CVB converb; DAT dative; DEF definite ; DIR directional; DIST distal; DM discourse marker; EMPH emphasis; F feminine; FUT future; GEN genitive; IMP imperative ; INDF indefinite; INT intensive; IPFV imperfective; L linker; LOC locative; M masculine; MID middle; MNR manner; N.AC action noun; NEG negative; NOM nominative; OBJ object; PFV perfective; PL plural; POSS possessive; PROH prohibitive; PROX proximal; Q.PLR polar question; RECP reciprocal; REL relator; SEQ sequential; SG singular; SMLT simultaneity.

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