BEJA PRONOUNS AND GLIDES:
DIALECTS IN SEARCH OF OPTIMA

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1. Studies of Beja pronouns

This brief study focuses on puzzles posed by glides in Beja (Bidha-awyeet) pronouns—a word class which—starting with Almkvist and down to today—has attracted the interest of various linguists, including especially Werner Vycichl.

Beja has a comparatively rich set of “possessive pronouns”, and over the last 120 years, they have been documented extensively and repeatedly—in spite of their low textual frequencies. The full sets of these pronouns were recorded (1) 1881 by Almkvist, pp. 102–104 for the Bisharin dialect, (2) 1893 by Reinisch pp. 101–102 for the Gash-Barka dialect, and (3) 1928 by Roper p. 28 for the Port Sudan dialect. Later, Vycichl (1953), Hudson (1976), Bechhaus-Gerst (1985) and Zaborski (1989) have commented on various other features of this word class—features which however are not in focus in this brief note.

Table I (below) presents the basic set of pronouns in the two forms which for Beja have been called the “subject” and “object” cases—a distinction accepted for Cushitic languages.1

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1 The self-name for this language is “Bidhaawiyëet”, an indefinite fem. noun in its “citation” form. The definite form would be “Tuu-Bdhaawiyee”. Note that (1) the acute accent indicates pitch-accent—which is contrastive but not used in the orthography; (2) the “i” functions as a “schwa mobile”; (3) the double vowels are long vowels, and (4) the “dh” stands for a retroflex d. The spelling “Bidhaawiyëet” reflects the official Eritrean orthography.

2 But starting with Almkvist (1881:64, 89), linguists have wondered why Beja speakers are nonchalant about using case “correctly”. Our text studies—which use Valin’s “RRG” approach—have convinced us that textual functions rather than “case” must be considered here.
Table I  Basic pronouns


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Object” (citation form)</th>
<th>“Subject”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 1</td>
<td>ánée(b)</td>
<td>ánii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 2 masc.</td>
<td>baróok</td>
<td>barúuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 2 fem.</td>
<td>batóok</td>
<td>batúuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 3 masc.</td>
<td>baróo(h)</td>
<td>barúu(h)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 3 fem.</td>
<td>batóo(h)</td>
<td>batúu(h)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 1</td>
<td>hinéen, hinín</td>
<td>hinín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 2 masc.</td>
<td>baréeekna</td>
<td>baráakna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 2 fem.</td>
<td>batéeekna</td>
<td>batáakna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 3 masc.</td>
<td>barée(h)</td>
<td>baráa(h)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 3 fem.</td>
<td>batée(h)</td>
<td>batáa(h)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Double vowels stand for long vowels, accent aigu stands for pitch-accent.

Table II (below) presents the pronouns in one-word-clauses which could be glossed as follows:

*Sg.M.:  “he is mine, he is yours” etc.*

*Pl.M.:  “they (masc.) are mine, they are yours” etc.*

*Sg.F.:  “she is mine, yours” etc.*

*Pl.F.:  “they (fem.) are mine, they are yours” etc.*

The data in the column “Asmara 2001” of Table II (below) are based on text studies with speakers from Eritrea and Port Sudan.

Table II  Possessive pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessor</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Almkvist 1881</th>
<th>Reinisch 1893</th>
<th>Roper 1928</th>
<th>Asmara 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>aniibu</td>
<td>aniibu</td>
<td>aniibi</td>
<td>aniibu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 2 masc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>barióoku*</td>
<td>baryóoku</td>
<td>barióki</td>
<td>bariyóoku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 2 fem.</td>
<td></td>
<td>batíóoku</td>
<td>batyóoku</td>
<td>batíóki</td>
<td>batüyóoku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 3 masc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>barióohu</td>
<td>baryóooru</td>
<td>bariíhiyi</td>
<td>bariyooohu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 3 fem.</td>
<td></td>
<td>batíóohu</td>
<td>bateyóooru</td>
<td>bateíhiyi</td>
<td>bateyooohu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>heneebu</td>
<td>hnineebi</td>
<td>hineebi</td>
<td>hineebu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 2 masc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>baréeoknáayu</td>
<td>bareeyóoknáayu</td>
<td>bäreéóki</td>
<td>bareeyóoknáayu**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 2 fem.</td>
<td></td>
<td>batéeoknáayu</td>
<td>bateeyóoknáayu</td>
<td>bateéóki</td>
<td>bateeyóoknáayu**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 3 masc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>baréeooohíñáayu</td>
<td>bareeyóóóñáayu</td>
<td>bäreéhiyi</td>
<td>bareéchoonáayu**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 3 fem.</td>
<td></td>
<td>batéeooohíñáayu</td>
<td>bateeyóóóñáayu</td>
<td>bateéhiyi</td>
<td>batéechoonáayu**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>aniíba</td>
<td>aniíba</td>
<td>aniíba</td>
<td>aniíba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 2 masc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>bariééeka</td>
<td>baryééeka</td>
<td>bariééeka</td>
<td>bariyééeka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 2 fem.</td>
<td></td>
<td>batíééeka</td>
<td>batíyééeka</td>
<td>batíééeka</td>
<td>batíyééeka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>