

Self-propelled WALK verbs in Beja (Cushitic)

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Keywords: Beja, Motion, Lexicon, Cognition, Sociolinguistics

Beja, the sole Cushitic language of the Northern branch (Afroasiatic), is mostly a verb-framed language, according to Talmy's (1985, 2009, 2016) typology of motion events (see e.g. Slobin 2006, and Nikitina 2013 for discussion), but it exhibits rich lexical encoding of manners of motion, as well as time, cause, and goal. Leaving aside the typological classification of motion events, this presentation will focus on how the semantic domain of the self-propelled motion of WALKING is carved up. Based on all the tokens extracted from naturalistic data (10 hours of narratives, jokes, and interviews, partly accessible online, Vanhove 2020) I collected in Sudan between 2001 and 2011 from a variety of speakers, and from a bilingual dictionary (Vanhove & Hamid Ahmed in prep.), this presentation will discuss cognitive, communicative, sociological, cultural, and environmental issues related to self-propelled WALK verbs.

Beja counts no less than 34 self-propelled WALK verbs that can be subcategorized into four **lexical** categories, based on morphological and semantic criteria:

1. Base verbs denoting different manners of walking belonging to a dedicated morphological pattern, Ca:C(C)e:C (e.g. *fa:rʔe:k* 'to walk swiftly with great steps, legs and arms apart'; *ma:ke:k* 'to walk heavily legs apart')
2. Base verbs denoting different manners of walking of various morpho-phonological types (e.g. *arfak* 'to walk trembling'; *tas* 'to walk very quickly with very small steps'; *ti:lo:g* 'to walk with very long steps')
3. Pluractional verbs related to six semantic classes of base verbs: BEND verbs, verbs of DIRECTIONAL MOTION, MEASURE verbs, CHANGE-OF-CONFIGURATION verbs, and verbs of FLOWING and ROLLING (some of which also belong to the Ca:C(C)e:C pattern or are derived from type (2)) (e.g. *ɖʒigʷir* 'to bend' > *ɖʒigʷir~ɖʒigʷir* 'to walk bent forward dashing as if in order to catch s.th., s.o.'; *hanig* 'to bend' > *ha:ne:g* 'to walk bent to the side'; *gid* 'to throw' > *ga~ge:d-am* 'to walk heavily swinging the body and/or the arms')
4. Colexifications with verbs of FLOWING and PANTING (e.g. *har* '1. to pant (without a strong sound), 2. to walk swiftly like a panting tired dog'; *fankʷa:kʷ* '1. to flow quietly, 2. to walk slowly').

In addition to the two superordinate WALK verbs, *hi:re:r* 'to walk' and *libas* 'to walk at night', three salient manner features are co-expressed in self-propelled WALK verbs: (a) movements of the body, arms, and legs, (b) speed and rhythm, and (c) length of steps, which can combine within one lexical item. In addition, a few verbs also include (d) the aim of locomotion or (e) its direction.

I show that both base verbs and metaphorically induced derived verbs are all motivated by socio-cultural and environmental factors, i.e., social rules of public and private behavior, the importance of camel breeding and caravan trade in the society, and the arid climate. I will also address the communicative role of humorous interactions in the use of the non-basic WALK verbs, which are otherwise rarely used, a scarcity in line with the typological profile of motion events in Beja (Slobin 2006). To conclude, I will discuss possible avenues for further typological and cognitive research in MOTION lexicons.

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