

4. Grammar

4.1 Major Word Classes

Beginning with this section, a phonemic transcription will be used. Tones will not be marked except for specific instances where they are known, and known to be relevant. See also note 43.

Pronouns occur in two major forms: independent or self-standing, and possessive suffixes. Slight variants of the independent pronouns serve as object markers and a second set as verb-suffixed pronouns in the perfect aspect.

<u>Independent</u>	<u>Possessives</u>	<u>Object</u> <u>Markers</u>	<u>Verb Perfect</u> <u>Suffix</u>
1 sg. ali	ʃul- i:ŋk'o	k'ol-gi	θiŋ-ali
2 sg. ŋgo	-ʔa	-iŋgo	-aŋo
3 sg. ŋine	-k'eDe	-nine	-ane
1 pl. haθa:ŋ	-iŋk'a	-haθaŋ	-aŋa
2 pl. haθu	-iŋgama	-haθu	-ahaθu
3 pl. mere:	-mere	-mere:	-amere

The possessives are shown with ʃuli, "house", object markers with k'ol, "bit", and perfect suffixes with θiŋ, "have eaten". The 1st singular object marker is -ji in Mayu.

Unlike many Nilo-Saharan languages, Berta does not have special exclusive, inclusive, or dual forms of pronouns.

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Reflexive and reciprocal pronouns are formed by use of the marker (?i, "self", e.g. i?ink'o, "myself", mere p'ilu-?i, "they fight each other" (p'il-, "fight, quarrel").

Interrogatives include ndolo, "who?" (F: mbolo),³⁰ nde, "which (one)?" , na:no, "what?".

The numeration system is based on five, as is so common among Nilo-Saharan languages:

mu:ŋk'u "one" (M: Duk'unu), mo:lan, "two" (F: mo'holan, M: holononin), mu:θe, "three" (F: mo:θe), 'manamu, "four" (F: mannamu), ma'ku:su, "five", mak'e:ra "six", θab-o:-lan, "seven", θab-o:-re, θab-o:-θe "eight", θab-a:-namu, "nine", ma-θu:ma, "ten".

As can be seen, 7, 8, and 9 are made up of "hand" (θaba) plus 2, 3, 4 respectively. Multiples of ten make use of k'is'iriyo "twenty". Mayu uses Arabic numerals for all numerals above "two".

Relational concepts involving time and space are shown mainly by a few prepositions and the use of particles, many clearly recognizable as nouns, in the role of postpositions or the postposed parts of parapositions.

The commonest preposition is θa--θe-, "at, to, in, by, for, with" etc., e.g. θa-ŋk'a, "in our house, neighborhood" (lit. in- ours). Also occurring are ša--še-, "because of, like", iθigi-, "near", mašer-, "without". A few Arabic prepositions are used, e.g. min-, "from", badal- "in place of, instead of". Postposed particles which seem to occur without accompanying prepositions are: -šor, "up", -bulu, "low, down", -i, "for" (e.g. ngo-i, "for you").

Some examples of parapositions follow: θa-šul-gundi, (at-house-back, "behind the house"), θa-šul-ndu (at-house-mouth, "in front of the house"), θa-fir-in, (at-water-buttock, "under the water"), θe-ŋe:ra-yu, (at-forest-belly, "through the forest").

Adjectives, nouns, and verbs will be discussed under the headings of basic grammatical categories and syntax.

6. Syntax

The usual sentence order is SVO, as seen in many examples above.

In constructions involving several modifiers, the relative particle mba "which is, that is, having", is used to avoid excessive piling up of modifiers following the head, e.g. ma:bi s'us'urni-le-gu

mu:θe mba p'i:ši "these three fine tall people", (lit. people tall-def. -pl. three having goodness).

Relative clauses follow their nouns and are not morphologically marked. Examples: ma:ba do-i < ma:ba ado-i, "the man who came or comes" (lit. man came); amo:do maba do?i?-i, "I saw the man who came", (lit. I-saw man came - self).

Comparison is by syntactic rather than morphological means, as is common in Ethiopian languages. The adjective gor, "big", is used predicatively with no preposition, e.g. murθa Daη(i) gor gali, "the horse is bigger than the dog" (lit. horse big exceed dog), murθa bun-i gor gali, "the horse runs faster than the dog", (lit. horse run exceed dog). The superlative is formed in the same way, using k'illin, "all", e.g. (θe Dana) midigin gor gin k'illin, "the elephant is biggest of all", (lit. (in bigness) elephant exceed thing all). As can be seen, the prepositional phrase θe Dana may optionally be adjoined at the beginning of the sentence).

For examples of the possessive construction, see above under noun case.

The main negative particle is wala (< Ar. walla).³⁹ This is used with all the verb tenses outlined above, e.g. walal θin-i (< wala ali θin-i), "I do not eat", negative of the habitual, as well as non-verbally, e.g. wala p'iši ("not good"), wala:li (< wala-ali) "not I", wala do:k'ole, "not now", wala biri, "not fast". However, the verb bik'a, "leave off" (Amh. ተቀ), is used to form the negative imperative,⁴⁰ e.g. bik'a θinno, "don't eat!", bik'a θin haθu, "don't eat!" (pl.).

Interrogation makes use of question-words, including n'da, "who?" (lit. person), m'ba, "who?", (lit. the one who), nam, "what?" awune "when?" waine, "where?" ša, "how?", kammu, "how much, many?" (Ar. loan), na:ya, "why". Examples: m'ba ma-dine or n'da madine, "who knows?" (lit. who is-knows), n'de;; mbe-θi, "which is that?" (lit. which the one-that).

The sentence-final interrogative particle -(y)a serves generally when other question words are not present. Examples: ngo θin-a, "you eat", ngo -θin-ia, "do you eat?"; gaDi, "true" (also "good, straight") gaDi-a, "is it true?". Intonation and tone need to be studied in connection with the use of this particle.

The passive is formed syntactically much as in English, by use of the copula ma. Examples: gine k'ula handun, "he broke the door", handun- (ma)- k'u:la nin θa:ba, "the door was broken (by) his hand"; ?u?um ma-θinθin, "meat was eaten".

Ideas of equality, attribution, or existence are expressed in at least three ways:⁴¹

- zero, e.g. fir p'iši, "water is good";⁴²
- use of the copula ma, e.g. fir-ma gin p'uDi, "water is liquid" (lit. water-is thing flows);
- use of the copula sia, "to be in a place", e.g. ma:ba si(?)i θa-θonor-u, "the man is on the road; there is a man on the road".

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