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Producing a simple RRG grammar for language learners

Klaus Wedekind (SIL)

This paper summarizes which problems were encountered – and which avenues were chosen – when producing an RRG grammar for language learners and speakers of the language, in this case: Beja (Afro-Asiatic).³

Given the functional orientation and given the non-linguists as target groups, it followed that the material had to be presented in such a way that it served “happy” communication right from the outset and at every stage – while keeping linguistic terminology at a minimum.

The grammar starts off with units of high social functionality (expressions of contact, curiosity, acknowledgment or anger), many of which are non-analyzable. As a next step, some nominal building blocks had to be introduced which are basic to the RRG theory: Nouns, NPs, AdvPs. All of these had to be introduced in such a way that they are useful in normal, sensible communication. This was critical, because the first part of the grammar is limited to nominal predications.

Verbs are introduced late. The reason is that in this language, the morphology of verbs is so complex that it would impede communication if verbs were introduced at an early stage of language learning. Since the language has two very different verb classes (“prefix verbs” and “suffix verbs”),⁴ and since the language is head marking, it is fortunate that RRG allows for different verb templates which serve to clarify these morphological complications.

The final section of the grammar presents coordination, subordination and co-subordination in RRG terms. Complex sentences are illustrated in the appendix, by means of interlinearized texts. All data are available as audio files. In order to include the owners of the language as potential readers, all data are presented both in Latin and Arabic script.

³ Wedekind, K. and Ch., and Abuzeinab M., *forthc.*, Pedagogical Grammar of Beja, version A (with paradigms and conversations) submitted to the website of the “Institut fuer Afrikanistik”, University of Cologne, in January 2006. Pedagogical Grammar of Beja, version B (with texts, wie a brief dictionary, *forth.*) submitted to the “Ruediger Koeppel Verlag”, Cologne, in January 2006.

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