3. Structural Sketch: Phonology

The variety of Berta (ber0a) described here is that of Undu (U) with references to Mayu (M), Fadashi (F), 2^8 and other varieties where appropriate. The differences (at least among the first three varieties) are mainly surface phonological and lexical, and the grammatical structures seem not to be significantly different.

The systematic phonemes of Berta are as follows (at our present state of knowledge):

	Consonants								
p,			k'	?					
Ъ	đ	j	g						
ъъ	nd	υ ^g			(M): Mayu only				
	D								
f	θ s	š			(U, F): Undu and Fadashi				
	z (M)								
	st								
m	n	р (M)	ŋ (U, F)						
	1,r								
w		У		h					

There is no "plain" voiceless stop series. However, the ejectives /p', k'/ are weakly glottalized and often approach [p, k] in realization. The fricative $/\theta$ / seems to fill the position of the missing <u>t'</u> in the stop series.

Mayu /j/, /p/ correspond to Undu /g/, /q/ respectively before palatal vowels; also Mayu has /z/ corresponding to Undu /s/ or /s'/ in some cases. However, Mayu retains η in word-final $-\eta V$.

Undu $/\eta$ tends to be palatalized $[\eta^{\gamma}]$ before palatal vowels.

Geminate consonants occur.

/f/ is often realized as bilabial $[\Phi]$, and as voiced bilabial $[\beta]$ intervocalically, and sometimes approaches [w].

The voiced allophone [5] of θ occurs intervocalically.

The purported phonemes /x/ and $/\gamma/$ reported by Cerulli, and /B/ and /G/ reported by Reidhead (for both, see Tucker and Bryan 1966: 348)

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were not found. It may be that the first two were heard in the speech of Arabic-influenced informants.

Glottal stop /?/ appears to be distinctive, e.g. in $\frac{\sqrt{2}}{2}$, "meat". It serves to mark one class of derived nouns, as in $\frac{k' \acute{e} \cdot d \acute{e}}{2}$ "laughing" (< $\frac{k' \acute{e} \cdot d \acute{e}}{2}$, "laugh"), $\frac{k' \acute{e} \cdot d \acute{e}}{2}$ not being accepted by the informant. In addition, it occurs spontaneously in word-final position after <u>-V</u> as in $\frac{5 \acute{e} \cdot \acute{e}}{2} \cdot \frac{2 \acute{e} \cdot \acute{e}}{2}$ "beam". /r/ is flapped when single and trilled when long. Final long <u>r</u> tends to devoice.

Vowels

i, i:				u, u: (not in F)
[1]				[U]
e, e:				0, 0:
	[6]	[ə]	[၁]	
		a, a:		

A basic five-vowel system is found, with each vowel having terse and lax allophones as shown above by the use of square brackets for the lax varieties. Use of tense or lax varieties is conditioned by stress and/or tone, but the relationship has not yet been worked out.

Vowel-length is distinctive as shown above by the use of /V:/. As seen above under consonants, /i/ and /e/ palatalize /g/ to /j/, / η / to / η ^y/ and sometimes voice /s/ or /s'/ to /z/ in Mayu as compared to Undu. Fadashi generally has /o/ corresponding to Undu /u/.

Suprasegmentals

As mentioned above, both consonant and vowel length is distinctive. Stress is distinctive and tone may be, with at least two degrees of stress (stressed marked by ' preceding the syllable and unstressed unmarked) and two tone levels (high marked ' and low marked '). As will be seen below under Word Shape, vowel length and high tone are partially correlated with stress.

Consonant clusters seem not to occur other than long (geminate) consonants. Homorganic nasal plus stop, as in <u>mbà</u>, "this, the one which", <u>ndé</u>:, "person", <u>Ngple</u>, "tree, wood" are best thought of as units. Across syllable boundaries, Fadashi tolerates consonant sequences more than Undu and Undu in turn more than Mayu, e.g. F : <u>bùbdà</u>, "ashes", U,M: <u>bùbùdà</u>; U: <u>s'ùrof</u>, "long", M: s'ùriof.

Examples

Examples of the occurrences of most consonants will be easily found in the grammatical examples in following sections.

All vowels occur freely (except that /u/ has fallen together with /o/ in Fadashi).

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