



Interrogation in Wolof : two strategies and a puzzle for *wh*-question words

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- Wolof : Niger-Congo (Atlantic), Senegal
- SVO language
- Noun class system
- Noun class agreement markers (10) : C-

<i>Noun classes</i>										<i>Adverbial classes</i>	
k-	b-	w-	m-	g-	j-	l-	s-	ñ-	y-	f-	n-
<u><i>singular</i></u>								<i>plural</i>		<u><i>space</i></u>	<u><i>manner</i></u>

- Class markers used for noun modifiers
definite article, demonstratives, quantifiers, relative pronouns

(1) *nit* *k-ii* ‘this personne (close)’
person CLk-DEM.PROX

(2) *xaj* *b-ii* ‘this dog (close)’
dog CLb-DEM.PROX

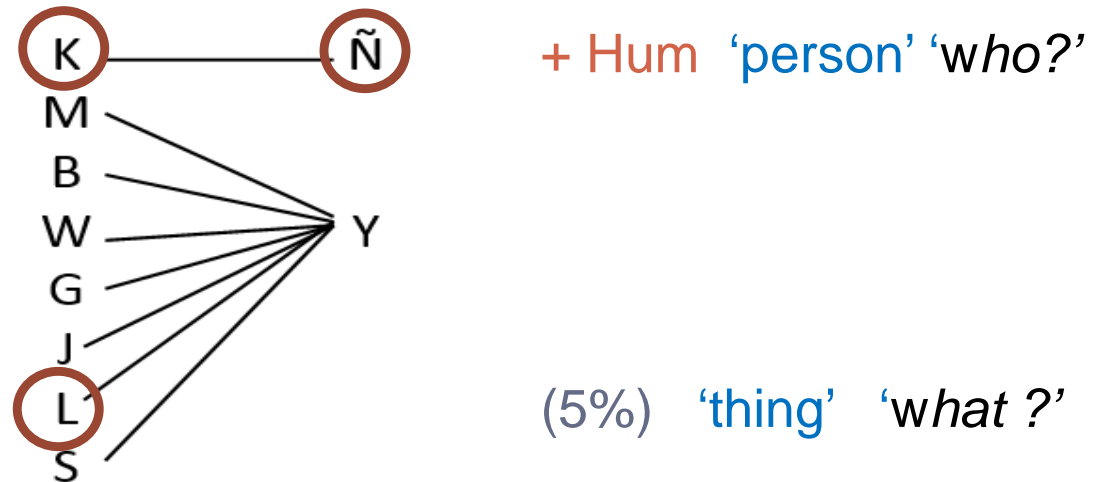
(3) *f-ii* ‘here’
CLf-DEM.PROX

- ... and *wh*-question words

- Pattern :

CL-interrogative morpheme (-an)

- Nouns classes :



- Wh-question words :

<i>k-an</i>	'who?' (sg)
<i>ñ-an</i>	'who? which people?' (pl)
<i>l-an</i>	'what?'
<i>f-an</i>	'where?'
<i>n-an</i>	'how?'
<i>CL-an</i>	'which (one)?'

- Two parallel sets : *CL+an* and *CL+u*

<i>-an</i> set (+ Focus)	<i>-u</i> set (+ Null Tense)	
<i>k-an</i>	<i>k-u</i>	who?
<i>ñ-an</i>	<i>ñ-u</i>	who? (pl)
<i>l-an</i>	<i>l-u</i>	what?
<i>f-an</i>	<i>f-u</i>	where?
<i>n-an</i>	<i>n-u</i>	how?
<i>cl-an</i>	<i>cl-u</i>	which (one)?

- Free variation: same uses
- Why these two sets of *wh*-question words ?

(4) *Kan moo qën ci yow?*
 CLK:INT SUBJFOC3SG surpass LOC EMPHPR2SG
 ‘Who does best by you?’ (lit. WHO is it who does best by you?)

Ah waay yaa qën ci man!
 ah PTCL SUBJFOC2SG surpass LOC EMPHPR1SG
 Oh, it’s YOU who do best by me! [XSW]

(5) *Kan lay xool?*
 CLK:INT COMPFOC3SG:IPFV watch
 Who [is it that] he is looking at?

- Fronting (SVO language)
- Focusing verbal inflexion (constraints on focus marking)
- Syntactic function marked by verb inflexion

- Cl-*an* question words : independent pronouns

(6) *Ndax* *lan ?*
 because CLI:INT.SUFF
 For what reason? (lit. because of what?)

- Referential path :

A focusing strategy for content question words

Common in African languages (Creissels et al. 2008)

- Common properties : fronted, used for S or O functions
- Different morpheme and verbal inflexion
- The *-u* morpheme :
 - spatial deictics
 - i* : proximal
 - a* : distal
 - u* : **unsituated** (Robert 2006)

CL+i/a definite article : *xaj bi* 'the dog' (close to me)

xaj ba 'the dog' (far away)

* *xaj bu*

CL+u: **relativizer** *xaj bu...* **'the dog that/which...'**

interrogative *bu xaj ?* **'which dog ?'**

- The Null tense inflexion
 - a subordinate mood
 - obligatory in most subordinate clauses
 - relative, temporal, conditional, purpose clauses...
 - and interrogative (*-u*) clauses (Robert 1990)

- *-u* questions: formally identical to indefinite relative clauses
 - same pronoun (*CL-u*)
 - same verb form
 - same structure

.../...

- Indefinite relatives

(7) Mënuma gis nit **ku** \emptyset feebale nii
 can:NEG1SG see person CLk:NOTLOC [NULL3SG] be.weak so
 ‘I can’t abide a person who is so weak.’

(8) **Ku** \emptyset bëgg lem, \emptyset ñeme yamb.
 CLk:NOTLOC [NULL3SG] want honey [NULL3SG] be.brave bees
 ‘[He] who wants honey must not fear bees.’

- Interrogative clauses (-u)

(9) **Ku** \emptyset jël saabu bi ?
 CLk:NOTLOC [NULL3SG] take soap CLb:DEM.PROX
 ‘Who took the soap?’

(10) **Ku** mu xool ?
 CLk:NOTLOC NULL3SG watch
 ‘Who did he look at?’

- (-u) question words : - no syntactic autonomy
(≠ -an) - clitic pronouns, clause initial
- like relative pronouns
 - ❖ grammaticalization of relative clauses
 - cf. same form, same functions
 - cf. fronting without focus marking
 - ❖ insubordination (Evans 2007)
 - ❖ ‘suspensive pronouns’ (Van den Eynde & Mertens 2003)

- Referential path : **indefiniteness** (cf.-u)

- Origin of the (-*u*) question words : relative pronouns
- Origin of the (-*an*) question words ?

An atypical predicative question word : *ana* 'be where ?

(11) *Ana* *xale* *yi ?*
be.where child CLy:PROX

- Where are the children?

- How are the children doing? (in greetings)

A unique pattern : < *ana* + subject ? >, * *ana* + VP

- *ana* : an interrogative locative copula

- Hyp. *ana* < **an-a*

**an*+focusing copula

(12) Momar *moo* dem

Momar SUBJFOC3SG leave

~ Momar *-a* dem

Momar FOC leave

MOMAR left ~ It was Momar who left

(13) *Kan* *moo* *lekk* *mburu* *mi* ?

CLk:INT SUBJFOC3SG eat bread CLm:PROX

~ *Kan* *-a* *lekk* *mburu* *mi* ?

CLk:INT FOC eat bread CLm:PROX

Who ate the bread? (lit. who was it who ate the bread?)

ana ‘where is ?’ < *an-a

-a : focusing copula

an- < a locative question word (‘where?’) ?

- Grammaticalization path for Bantu C and D :

lack of distinction

(it) is where ? > (it) is which one ? > which one ? > who, what ?

(Idiatov 2009)

- Wolof : same path, resulting in a fuller recycling : **CL+an**
- -*an* set : - the dedicated interrogative proforms in Wolof
 - originating form a locative question word

- *Wh*-question words in Wolof : use of noun class markers
- Two sets :
 - u* set < grammaticalization of relative pronouns
 - an* the only dedicated interrogative marker
< locative question word *'where?'
- Two strategies for constituent question words :
 - (1) focusing constructions with strong pronouns (*-an* set)
common in African languages (Creissels et al. 2008)
 - (2) indefiniteness with unspecified spatial deictic (*-u* set)
interrogative, relative pronouns, and indefiniteness
(Haspelmath 1997) (Bhat, 2004, Karcevski 1969)

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