

The role of TAM and focus markers in paratactic clause-linkage (The Wolof example)

Stéphane ROBERT

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (LLACAN)
robert@vjf.cnrs.fr

Introduction

Wolof (Niger-Congo, Atlantic group, Senegal, ± 10 M speakers):

▪ A complex verbal system :

12 inflectional paradigms (conjugations) in which aspect and tense are merged with other verbal specifications such as polarity, focus and person:

- Perfect, Presentative, Null tense (also called Narrative or Aorist), Future,
- Verb Focus, Subject Focus, Complement Focus,
- Negative, Emphatic Negative,
- Obligative, Imperative and Prohibitive.

Simple forms: perfective meaning

+ -y suffix: imperfective

(see Appendix for morphology)

▪ Tendency to express complex sentences paratactically

i.e. by juxtaposing clauses without any coordinating or subordinating morphemes (subordinating morphemes do exist, cf. Sall 2005)

→ semantic pattern of clause chaining ? (only affirmative inflections here)

→ role of the conjugations ?

→ nature of the interclausal dependency (degree of syntactic integration) ?

1. Chaining of a single conjugation

- possible for all conjugations but not frequent, except for Null tense in narratives
- two semantic values for the most common types of chaining :
 - temporal succession of events
 - cumulative or contrasting assertion

1.1. Temporal succession of events

- For Perfect (with dynamic verbs) and Null tense only
- Used in two different discourse contexts

Clause chaining with Perfect: sequencing of events in discourse

(1) *Ágg na, taw bi door na.* (Perfect, Perfect)
arrive PRF.3SG, rain the begin PRF.3SG
'He arrived, (then) it started to rain.'

≠

(2) *Mi ngi fóot, maa ngi togg.* (Presentative, Presentative)
PREST.3SG wash, PREST.1SG cook
'He is washing the laundry, I am cooking.'

(3) *Dafa àgg (rekk), taw bi ∅ door.* (VerbFocus, Null tense)
VBFOC.3SG arrive (only), rain the NULL.3SG begin
'(As soon as) he arrived, the rains started ≈ 'His arrival was enough for...'

Analysis

- Perfect indicates that a process has reached its expected end-point at the time of speech
- Clause chaining with Perfect: successive anchoring in speech-time of two resulting events, successive recording, by the speaker, of resulting events; juxtaposition of assertions.

Clause chaining with Null tense: sequencing of events in narratives

(4) *Mu àgg, taw bi ∅ door.*
NULL.3SG arrive, rain the NULL.3SG begin
'(As soon as) he arrived, the rain started.'

(5) *... Mu ñëw, ma dem.*
NULL.3SG come, NULL.1SG go
'Dès qu'il est venu, je suis parti.' [Sall, 2005: 267]
... '(As soon as) he came, I left.'

- Same temporal sequencing effect : succession of two events
- But in narratives only (≠ discourse)
- And produced differently : "situational anaphora" (Robert 1996, 2010)

Analysis

- Null tense: process is located in an unspecified situation lacking in temporal and modal specifications depends on some extra-clausal locator to specify the situation

- (6) *As soxna dafa amoon doom ju jigéen. Bi doom ji matee sëy mu maye ko. Yàlla def xale ba ëmb...*
 ‘Once upon the time there lived (**Verb focus + past**) an old woman with her daughter. When the daughter became (*Null tense*) nubile, her mother married (*Null tense*) her off. God willing (*Null tense*), the child became pregnant (*Null tense*)...’
 [T: 169]

▪ Chaining in narratives and tales:

- Null tense clause never appears first : previous temporal anchoring
- Null tense clause then refers to this previous situation (situational anaphora)
- Then, Null tense-events follow one another as an inescapable chain of events (historical narration)

1.2. Cumulative assertion

Other cases : cumulative assertion, i.e. a succession of assertions with the same pragmatic effect or argumentative strength

Perfect with stative verbs:

- (7) *Grand, rusloo nga ma, tooñ nga ma rekk.*
Grand, shame PRF.2SG me, wrong PRF.2SG me only
 ‘Grand, you shamed me, you just plain wronged me.’ [XSW]

- (8) *Sant naa leen lool. Jërë ngeen jëf. Sama xol sedd na.*
thank PRF.1SG you much. be.worth PRF.2PL deed. My heart be.cold PRF.3SG
 ‘Thank you very much. I say thank you. I am satisfied.’ [G]

Subject focus:

- (9) *Moo xam lu tilim ci sama doom, moo xam lu wara*
SUBJFOC.3SG know REL.PR be.dirty.in my child, SUBJFOC.3SG know REL must:CONJ
bon ci sama doom, moo xam feebaram, moo koy
be.bad in my child, SUBJFOC.3SG know fever:POSS.3SG, SUBJFOC.3SG OPR:IPFV
boot ci diggu ginnaawamgi.
cary.on.the.back in middle:CONN back:POSS.3SG the
 ‘She is the one who knows what is unclean in my child, she is the one who knows what must be bad for my child, she is the one who knows if he is sick, she is the one who will carry him on her back.’ [XSW]

Verb focus (rare):

- (10) *Géej gi dafa aay, dañuy tere ku fa sang.*
see the VbFOC.3SG rage VbFOC.3PL:IPFV prohibit REL there bath
 ‘La mer est en furie, on interdit de s’y baigner.’ [Sall 2005: 269]
 ‘The sea is very rough, swimming is prohibited’

Presentative: two situations happening at the time of speech, chaining often expresses contrast

- (11) *Maa ngiy génn, yow, yaa ngiy dugg.*
PREST.1SG:IPFV exit you PREST.2SG:IPFV enter

‘I am going out (whereas) you, you are coming in.’

Analysis

Non-temporal clause chaining: repetition of the same conjugation:

Argumentative orientation of the two clauses
 convergent → strengthening effect (6-9)
 divergent → emphasizing discordance (10)

1.3. Summary

Chaining of a single conjugation:

Semantics:

Null tense
 Perfect (action verbs):

- temporal succession in narratives
 - temporal succession in discourse

Perfect (stative verbs) or any other conjugation

- cumulative assertion:
 (a) reinforcing effect (all conjugations)
 (b) contrastive effect (Presentative)

1.4. Clausal linkage :

No dependency between the 2 clauses:

simple assertive juxtaposition
 (for Null tense, cf. § 3.)

2. Focus in clause chaining

2.1. A causal meaning

▪ Causal source in protasis

Verb focus

- (12) *Dafa ko fetal, mu dee.* (Verb Focus, Null tense)
VbFOC.3SG him shoot, NULL.3SG die
 ‘He shot him (therefore) he is dead.’
- (13) *Ágg na, taw bi door na.* (Perfect, Perfect)
arrive PRF.3SG, rain the begin PRF.3SG
 ‘He arrived, (then) it started to rain.’ (purely temporal succession)
- (14) *Dafa àgg (rekk), taw bi Ø door.* (VerbFocus, Null tense)
VbFOC.3SG arrive (only), rain the NULL.3SG begin
 ‘(As soon as) he arrived, it started to rain.’ ≈ ‘His arrival was enough for...’ (causal source)

Cf. informant’s comment: “it could be used, for instance, to denote the supernatural power of a marabout whose arrival would *trigger* the rains, would cause the rain to fall.”

Subject focus

[People are talking about a man called Kebe and the crowd of people visiting him]

- (15) *Kebe moo am alal, mootax nit ñi di ko topp*
 Kebe FOC_{SUBJ}3SG have wealth that.is.wh why human the IMPF.PRED him follow
 Kebe, (it is because) he has money that the people come to him
 (lit. KEBE has money, that is why people follow him).

No examples found for Complement focus

▪ **Explanation in apodosis**

- (16) *Sama càmmiñ waxal mboog, man dama yàkkamti.*
 My brother speak:IMP therefore me VbFOC.1SG be.rushed
 ‘Come my friend, make up your mind (because) I am in a rush.’ [XCL]
- (17) *Moytul paaka bi, dafa ñaw de!*
 avoid:IMP knife the VbFOC.3SG be.sharp PTCL
 ‘Be careful with the knife (because) it is sharp!’ [SP]

2.2. Analysis

Focus: From prominence inside a clause to causation in clause chaining
 The role of presupposition and discursive linkage (Robert 2000, 2010)

Focused clause: the assertion consists in the qualitative designation of an element whose existence is presupposed (*JOHN went there* presupposes that ‘someone went there’)

- In prototypical focus contexts: the preceding clause corresponds to the presupposition (e.g. *who went there ? or Mary went there → (no) JOHN went there.*)
 - In other cases: there is no such a simple chaining (presupposition / focused assertion) but the presupposition invoked by focus marker forces one to infer a relation with the preceding context
- the presupposition is related to the preceding clause (which serve a discursive reference point or landmark), and thus creates the interclausal relation
- relation between two(full) clauses : causative rather than adverbial (circumstantial) relation

Cf (16) ‘be careful with the knife, (as) it is sharp’

2.3. Clausal linkage : pragmatic dependency

This causal meaning of focused forms (verb or subject) in clausal linkage relies on the general mechanism of connections between the discursive landmark (preceding clause) and the internal landmark (presupposed assertion).

The interclausal dependency marked by forms indicating information hierarchy is attested in many languages such as French, Berber (Leguil 1987), Umpithamu (Verstraete 2010) or some Oceanic languages (Bril, 2010).

This corresponds to a particular type of dependency, different from embedding, subordination or syntactic dependency, i.e. ‘pragmatic dependency’ of a focused clause on its discursive landmark.

3. Null tense in clause chaining

A large array of uses from apparently independent ones to the most integrated ones :

Independent uses: narrative aorist in tales and historical narration, in proverbs, stage direction, in injunctive clauses, in interrogative clauses

As a subordinating mood :

- without a subordinating morpheme : resultative or purpose clauses, complement clauses
- with a subordinating morpheme : the Null tense is obligatory in all subordinate clauses except causal clauses, complement clauses introduced by *ne* and comparative clauses. (Robert 1991, 1996)

3.1. Independent uses: situational anaphora

Narratives : **obligatory** in tales and historical narrations

→ After a previous sentence (other conjugation) setting the reference frame (discursive landmark)
 Null tense-events follow one another as an inescapable chain of events out of this initial situation ‘Situational anaphora’ (cf supra 1.1.)

3.2. Paractactic subordinating uses (in apodosis) : consecution

Consecutive or purpose clause: depending on temporal and epistemic status of main clause’s event

- consecutive clause : the event in the main clause is accomplished

- (18) *Dafa ko fetal, [mu dee.]*
 VbFOC.3SG him shoot, NULL.3SG die
 ‘He shot him [(therefore) he is dead.]’

- purpose clause : the first event is irrealis

- (19a) *Dafa sàcc, ñu kaaf ko.*
 VbFOC.3SG steal NULL.3SG imprison him
 ‘He stole (therefore) he was put in jail.’

- (19b) *Jax ma ko, ma seet.*
 give me it, NULL.1SG look
 ‘Give it to me (so I can) have a look.’ [SP]

→ in both cases: the Null tense clause depends syntactically on the main clause, and semantically on the situation expressed by the main clause's predicate

3.3. Paratactic subordinating uses (in apodosis) : complement clauses

(20) *Dama bëggoon [ngeen àndal maak sama doom.]*
 VbFOC.1SG like:PST NULL.2PL accompany me:with my child
 'I would like you [(to) accompany my daughter for me.] (T: 169)

→ Null tense clause : complement (here object) of the main predicate

3.4. Analysis

A unifying analysis : - a common semantic definition for Null tense
 (Robert 1996, 2010) - a variable: the syntactic integration of locator in the Null tense clause

Semantics

Null tense: - process is located in an unspecified situation (*assertion is not complete*)
 - process is expected to be located via an extra-clausal locator (*situational dependency*)
 - there is a necessary and sufficient link between the Null tense clause and its locator

→ - the specification of the locator **triggers** the validation of the Null clause
 - semantic effect: **consecution** (as soon as the locator is specified the clause is validated)

A gradient of syntactic integration

The various uses of this conjugation, the more or less subordinating function and embedded status of the Null tense clause can be explained through the various *syntactic statuses* of the situational locator, as it is defined in discourse:

Situational Locator might be: absent, a different sentence, another clause, another verb

| <i>Syntactic integration:</i> | <i>Nature of the locator:</i> | <i>Nature of dependency:</i> |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| ∅ | | |
| ↓ | | |
| Max. | zero different sentence different clause different verb | assertive dependency (interrogation) situational anaphora embedding (purposive or consecutive) embedding (complement clause) |

Table 1. *Null tense-clauses and the syntactic integration of their locator* (cf Robert 2010)

4. The role of the imperfective in clause chaining:

P1 any conjugation, P2 imperfective Null tense : **concomitance ± opposition**

'P1 while P2' (22, 23)

'P1 though/and yet P2' (24)

(22) [A first spouse is talking to her husband about the bad behaviour of his second spouse]

Ñeme na ñew fekk ma lay defaral njar,
 dare PRF.3SG come find me you:IPFV prepare:BEN curdled.milk.with.water
muy indi istuwaar?
 NULL.3SG:IPFV bring quarrel

'She would dare come make trouble (while) I am making you curdled milk?' [XSW]
 (Lit. She dares come find me preparing milk for you (and) she makes trouble?)

(23) *Maa ngi toog ci sama biir néeg di dégg yépp,*
 PREST.1SG be.sitting at my inside room IPFV hear all
ngay wax.

NULL.2SG:IPFV talk
 'I am sitting in my room hearing everything (while) you are speaking.' [XSW]

(24) *Paaka bi mu ngi ñaw be, nga koy foye!*
 knife the PREST.3SG be.sharp so NULL.2SG OPR:IPFV play:INS
 'The knife is so sharp (and yet) you are playing with it!'

Simultaneity : role of imperfective on the dependency expressed by the Null tense.

Opposition : when the argumentative orientation of the two clauses is divergent (cf 2.2.)

Conclusion

Paratactic clause chaining in Wolof :

- A large array of regular interclausal meanings produced by the TAM and focus markers
- Different types of dependency, depending on the semantic integration (Cristofaro 2003) of the events of the complex sentence

Semantic interclausal meanings

Conjugations involved in clause chaining

Semantic interclausal meanings

Chaining of the same conjugation:

... Null tense
 dynamic verbs with Perfect
 other cases

- temporal succession in narratives
 - temporal succession in discourse
 - cumulative assertion:
 (a) reinforcing effect (all conjugations)
 (b) contrastive effect (Presentative)

Focusing conjugations

Null tense in second position

Imperfective combined with Null tense

- causation (causal source, explanation)
 - consecution
 - concomitance ± opposition

Different types of dependency

| Nature of dependency | Conjugations involved in clause chaining |
|----------------------------------|---|
| - Simple assertive juxtaposition | chaining of the same conjugation (except. Null tense) |
| - Pragmatic dependency | chaining with Subject or Verb focus conjugation |
| - Situational dependency | Null tense in a different sentence |
| - Embedding | Null tense clause integrated in P1 |

References

- Cristofaro S. 2003. *Subordination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Leguil A. 1987. *Structures prédictives en berbère*, Travaux présentés pour le Doctorat d'état, INALCO-Université de Paris 3.
- Robert S. 1991. *Une approche énonciative du système verbal: le cas du wolof* [Sciences du langage]. Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- Robert S. 1996. Aspect zéro et dépendance situationnelle: l'exemple du wolof. In Claude Müller (éd), *Dépendance et intégration syntaxique (subordination, coordination, connexion)*: 153-161. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Robert 2000. Le verbe wolof ou la grammaticalisation du focus. In *Topicalisation et Focalisation dans les Langues Africaines*, Bernard Caron, (ed), 229-267. Leuven: Peeters
- Robert S. 2010. Clause chaining and conjugations in Wolof: a typology of parataxis and its semantics. In I.Brill (ed), *Clause hierarchy and clause linking: syntax and pragmatics*. Amsterdam Philadelphia: John Benjamins: 469-498.
- Sall, A. O. 2005. *La subordination en wolof : description syntaxique*. PhD dissertation, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar.
- Verstraete, J.C. 2010. Focus, mood and clause linkage in Umpithamu (Cape York Peninsula, Australia). In I.Brill (ed), *Clause hierarchy and clause linking: syntax and pragmatics*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins: 451-468.

Corpus references

- G: *Gancax gi*, a TV play from the radio program *Jamonoy Tey*, broadcast by the ORTS (Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision du Sénégal) on July 8, 1984.
- H: *Feebar yi ak garab yi*. Debate on traditional healers in the radio program Horizon, broadcast by the ORTS (Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision du Sénégal) on November 21, 1985.
- T: The anthology of traditional Wolof tales and mythological narratives edited by Kesteloot & Mbodj (see bibliography).
- XCL: The play *Xët cig lëndëm*, the manuscript of which was provided in 1985 by the Daniel Sorano Theater Company in Dakar.
- XSW: *Xam sa waru gaar*, a play from an educational TV program, by the ORTS (Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision du Sénégal) in 1986.

APPENDIX

The eleven primary conjugations in Wolof

lekk 'eat' and loolu 'that' (anaphoric demonstrative)

| | PERFECT | PRESENTATIVE | VERB FOCUS | SUBJECT FOCUS | COMPLEMENT FOCUS |
|------|------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1 sg | lekk naa | maa ngi lekk | dama lekk | maa lekk | loolu laa lekk |
| 2 | lekk nga | yaa ngi lekk | dang lekk | yaa lekk | loolu nga lekk |
| 3 | lekk na | mu ngi lekk | da(fa) lekk | moo lekk | loolu la lekk |
| 1 pl | lekk nanu | nu ngi lekk | danu lekk | noo lekk | loolu lanu lekk |
| 2 | lekk ngeen | yeena ngi lekk | dangeen lekk | yeena lekk | loolu ngeenlekk |
| 3 | lekk nañu | ñu ngi lekk | dañu lekk | ñoo lekk | loolu lañu lekk |
| | NULL TENSE | FUTURE | OBLIGATIVE | NEGATIVE | EMPHATIC NEGATIVE |
| 1 sg | ma lekk | di-naa dem | naa lekk | lekk-uma | duma lekk |
| 2 | nga lekk | di-nga dem | nanga lekk | lekk-uloo | doo lekk |
| 3 | mu ~Ø lekk | di-na dem | na lekk | lekk-ul | du lekk |
| 1 pl | nu lekk | di-nanu dem | nanu lekk | lekk-unu | dunu lekk |
| 2 | ngeen lekk | di-ngeen dem | nangeen lekk | lekk-uleen | dungeen lekk |
| 3 | ñu ~Ø lekk | di-nañu dem | nañu lekk | lekk-uñu | duñu lekk |
| | IMPERATIVE | PROHIBITIVE | | | |
| 2 sg | lekk-al | bul lekk ¹ | | | |
| 2 pl | lekk-leen | buleen lekk | | | |

Primary (non derived) conjugations have a *present perfective meaning* (unmarked form).

| Simple verb forms | Suffixed verb forms |
|---------------------------|--|
| zero suffix (perfective) | suffix -y ~ di (imperfective) |
| zero suffix (present) | suffix -oon (past anterior); suffix -aa(n) (remote past) |
| zero suffix (affirmative) | suffix -ul (negative) |

Abbreviations

ANTER: anterior suffix -ee ; CL: classifier (class consonant in noun modifiers); COM: comitative suffix; COMPFOC: Complement-focusing conjugation; COMP: complementizer (introducing complement clauses); CONN: connective suffix (-u SG, -i PL); CONJ: conjunctive verb suffix -a ; DEF: definite determiner (class consonant suffixed with proximal or distal deictic); DEM: demonstrative; DIST: distal spatial suffix (-a); EMPHNEG: Emphatic negative conjugation; FOC: subject-focus particle or suffix (-a); IMP: imperative; IMPFV: imperfective suffix (-y); full variant: di~d-: imperfective copula; IMPFVCOP: imperfective copula (di~d-); IMPFVNEG: imperfective negative marker (dul); ITER: iterative suffix; LOC: : localizer : locative preposition (ci proximal, ca distal) or partitive pronoun; NEG: negative suffix (-ul); NEG.(3SG) : Negative perfective conjugation (3SG); NOTLOC: spatial suffix (-u) indicating absence of localization; NULL: Null tense conjugation ; OPR: object pronoun; P: proposition or clause; PST: past suffix (-w)oon); PERF: perfective; PRF: Perfect conjugation; POSS3SG: 3sg possessive suffix (-am); PRES: Presentative conjugation (discontinuous morpheme); PROH(2SG): Prohibitive conjugation; PROX: proximal spatial suffix (-i); REL: relative pronoun (cl marker C+i for the definite, +u for the indefinite); REM PST: remote past suffix (-w)aan); SUBJFOC: Subject-focusing conjugation; VbFOC: Verb-focusing conjugation; ven: ventive verbal suffix;

¹ For this paradigm, the Null tense inflection (postposed to the bu morpheme) replaces the Imperative one for the 1st and 3rd persons (i.e 1sg bu ma lekk).