



# EPISTEMICITY AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE WOLOF VERB SYSTEM

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# SUBJECTIVE USES OF ASPECTUAL MARKERS



- Aspectual or tense markers may acquire a modal value due to "subjectification" (Traugott 1995) or to "subjective use" (Wright 1994)

English progressive

- (1) *I'm warning you* (Wright 1994)
- (2) *You're telling me you don't love me anymore* (Wright 1995)

→ “ the **speaker's own assessment** of a particular situation.”

- A regular mechanism in Wolof:

in synchrony, aspectual morphemes show a regular shift from temporal to modal or subjective values

# OVERVIEW OF THE WOLOF VERB SYSTEM



- Wolof: Atlantic (mainly in Senegal) : ~ 10 millions speakers
- 10 primary conjugations :
  - Verb focus, Subject focus, Complement focus
  - Perfect, Presentative, Aorist
  - Negative, Emphatic negative
  - Obligative and Imperative
- An aspecto-temporal system :

Simple conjugations	Suffixed conjugations
∅ suffix perfective	suffix -y ~ di imperfective

- Temporal values of the **perfective** conjugations :
  - Action verbs : Past (except for Presentative)
  - Stative verbs: Present



**Action verb**

*dem* “to go”

**Stative verb**

*ñaaw* “to be ugly”

**Perfective (Ø) :**

**past**

**present**

(Subject focus)

*moo dem*  
HE has gone

*moo ñaaw*  
HE **is** ugly  
this is the ugly one

**Imperfective (+y) :**

**present**

*mooy dem*  
HE is going

**present !**

*mooy ñaaw*  
HE **is** ugly

- Difference between perfective and imperfective for **stative verbs** ?
- ⇒ uses in discourse : (a) Perfect

# 1. PERFECT WITH DYNAMIC VERBS

- **Temporal values :**
  - “to have finished” (3)
  - resulting state of a past action (4)
  - “it has already been done now” (5)  
(no more need to do it)
- (3) - *Yaa ngiy lekk ?*                      - *Déédéét, lekk naa (ba noppi)*  
PRST1sg + IMP... eat                      no, eat PFT1sg (until stop)  
Are you eating ?                      no, I have finished eating (my meal)
- (4) *Jaar nga ci néégu góór*  
pass PFT2sg in room+CONN man  
you have gone through the men’s room = you are circumcised,  
i.e. you are ambitious
- (5) *Sarax bi àgg na*  
alms the arrive PFT3sg  
The alms have (already) arrived = I have already given  
(meaning: I won’t give anymore)

## 2. PERFECT WITH STATIVE VERBS



- **Modal or subjective values:**
  - expected conformity (6)
  - agreement/presence of speaker (7)
  
- (6) *Buum bi gudd na*  
rope the be-long PFT3sg  
**(It's all right) the rope is long (enough) (here we are ! at long last !)**
  
- (7) [two persons watching a boubou]
  - *bubu bii, dafa rafet*  
boubou this, VB.FOC3sg be-beautiful  
this boubou is beautiful
  
  - *rafet na (de) !*  
PFT 3sg be-beautiful (PTCL)  
**It is indeed (beautiful) ~ it is (definitely) a beautiful one**  
**= agreement of the speaker**

## 2. PERFECT WITH STATIVE VERBS



.... Modal or subjective values:

- expected conformity (6)
- agreement/presence of speaker (7)
- **polemic / decisive assertion** (8)  
(the discussion is closed, over)

- (8) [At the end of a discussion where the interlocutors disagree]

*tàng na !*

be-hot PFT3sg

**(I'm telling you) it is hot**

gloss : **“it is certain, there is no more discussion”,**  
**“there is nothing to be added, no comment, period”.**

→ in the space of speech acts



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**Dynamic verbs**

(discret)

past

**Stative verbs**

(compact)

present

- *Temporal value*

- *Uses*

**Temporal uses**

- to have finished
- resulting state
- it has already been done

**Subjective uses**

- expected conformity
- agreement/presence of S<sub>0</sub>
- polemic/decisive assertion

- *Argumentative and intersubjective values* for stative verbs:

- relief
- approval
- controversial





- A common semantic structure (image-schema) :
  - “the process (already known to be ongoing) has henceforth reached its expected end-point or term so that there is nothing to add, no more variation: a stable resulting state has been reached”
  
- ... applied to different “domains” (Aktionsarten) :
  - Dynamic verbs unfold in time, have a temporal term (“discret”)
  - Stative verbs have no temporal phases (“compact”)
  
- ... producing various semantic effects :
  - with dynamic verbs : elimination of the **temporal** variation / instability
  - with stative verbs : **elimination of the epistemic variation** :  
(no more doubt concerning assertion)



### 3. THE IMPERFECTIVE VS. PERFECTIVE SUFFIX

Simple conjugations	Suffixed conjugations
∅ suffix perfective	-y ~ di suffix imperfective

#### Temporal values with **dynamic** verbs :

Perfective : Past (except for Presentative (cf ex.12))

Imperfective:

- **action in progress** or uncompleted action (9)
- **habitual** (10)
- **likely future** (probable) (11)

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### ▪ Action in progress

- (9a) *Dafa dem* « He left (that is why...) » (perfective)
- (9b) *Dafay dem* (imperfective)
- VB.FOC3sg +IMP go  
He is leaving (that is why...)

### ▪ Habitual

- (10a) *Saaku ceeb la jox* « What he brought is a bag of rice »
- (10b) *Saaku ceeb lay jox weer wu.nekk*  
bag+CONN rice COMP.FOC3sg +IMP give month every  
What he brings every month is a bag of rice

### ▪ Likely future (probable)

- (11a) *Dafa dee* « He died (that is why...) »
- (11b) *Bu ko jamee, dafay dee*  
if (AOR3sg) him sting-ANTER, VB.FOC3sg +IMP die  
If it stings him, he will certainly die

## Perfective vs. Imperfective with stative verbs :

Simple conjugations	Suffixed conjugations
∅ suffix perfective	<b>-y ~ di suffix</b> imperfective



Stative verbs : Present

- **Habitual**
- **Likely future (probable)**
- **Present with modal nuances**



- **SKIP THIS SLIDE**

- **Habitual**

(15) *Saaku ceeb mooy war weer wu.nekk*

bag+CONN rice SUBJ.FOC3sg +IMP must month every

What we need is a bag of rice **every month**

- **Likely future (probable)**

(16) *Boo ci daggee lu.bari, bii mooy ëpp*

if in cut-ANTER much, this SUBJ.FOC3sg +IMP be-in excess

if you cut off to much of it, this one **will** be too big

## IMPERFECTIVE WITH STATIVE VERBS (2) : MODAL PRESENT



Comparison :

*Perfective*

Present

*Imperfective*

- Habitual
- Likely future (probable)
- **Present with modal nuances :**
  - likely but not certain (15)
  - almost but not really (16)

### ▪ It is likely but not certain

(15a) *Picc bii moo mel ni ndobin*

(Perfective suffix  $\emptyset$ )

bird this SUBJ.FOC ( $\emptyset$  =PERF) resemble like big\_calao

This bird looks (**definitely / for sure**) like a big calao

(15b) *Picc bii mooy mel ni ndobin*

(Imperfective suffix -y)

bird this SUBJ.FOC+IMP resemble like big\_calao

This bird **tends** to look like a big calao

(to my mind, **questionable**)

## IMPERFECTIVE WITH STATIVE VERBS (2) : MODAL PRESENT



- **It is almost (p) but not really**

(16a) *Moo tolloog garab gi* (Perfective suffix (∅))  
SUBJ.FOC3sg to-reach tree the  
He is as high as the tree ~ He has reached the tree

(16b) *Mooy tolloog garab gi* (Imperfective suffix -y)  
SUBJ.FOC3sg+ IMP to-reach tree the  
He is **almost** as high as the tree ~ He has **almost** reached the tree

- **Modal nuances :**

- “likely but not certain” : **epistemic modality (uncertainty)**
- “almost but not really” : **appreciative modality (uncompleteness)**





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**Dynamic verbs**

**Stative verbs**

■ *Uses :*

Temporal :

- habitual

- likely future (probable)

- action in progress, **uncompleted**

- habitual

- likely future

- **modal present :**

Epistemic value :

• likely but not certain

Appreciative value :

• almost but not really

■ **Temporal value** Uncompleted (present)

(present)

■ **Modal value**

Probable but not certain



- A common semantic structure (image-schema) :
  - “ The process is on its way, oriented toward its term  
but the endterm has not yet been reached (aspectual instability)”
- ... applied to different “domains” (Aktionsarten) :
  - Dynamic verbs unfold in time, have a temporal term (“discret”)
  - Stative verbs have no temporal phases (“compact”)
- ... producing various semantic effects :
  - with dynamic verbs: temporal instability
  - with stative verbs: epistemic variation or instability :  
doubt concerning the validation, the assertion

# PERFECT AND IMPERFECTIVE : SUMMARY



	<b>IMPERFECTIVE</b>	<b>PERFECT</b>
<b>Aspectual phases :</b>	variation/instability of p	stabilization of p
<b>Dynamic verbs</b> (temporal space)	uncompleted process	completed in time (resulting state)
<b>Stative verbs</b> (assertive space) (validation of p)	- probable but not certain - almost but not totally P	definitely certain/true really P



- So with the stative verbs, the aspectual morphemes convey **an attitude on the part of the speaker** :
  - **certainty** vs uncertainty (epistemic value)
  - or - **completeness** vs incompleteness of the process (appreciative value)

cf « ideational subjectivity » De Smet and Verstraete (2006),  
after Halliday and Hasan (1976)
  
- Subjective values are also associated with regular **argumentative effects** :  
(the discussion is over / I disagree / I agree / I am relieved...)
  - cf « interpersonal subjectivity » De Smet and Verstraete (2006)
  - can be described in terms of **positioning of the interlocutors** / process
  - with aspectual phases corresponding to different positions (correlation)

## CONCLUSION (1) : A REGULAR MECHANISM IN WOLOF



- In their uses in synchrony, the different aspectual morphemes in Wolof present a regular **shift from temporal to modal or subjective values**
- **conditioned** by the specific properties of Aktionsarten :

Stative verbs (compact) :

**Aspectual phasing is transferred to the domain of assertion =**  
a space with different zones corresponding to aspectual phases  
(certain vs. uncertain; really vs. almost)

- The modal values: two different types of subjectivity
  - ideational subjectivity : epistemic values
  - interpersonal subjectivity : argumentative values

## CONCLUSION (2) : A RECURRENT MECHANISM ACROSS LANGUAGES



- **Subjectification** here : not due to grammaticalization but to conditioning
- **Homology between temporal space and space of the speech acts**
- **Correlation : aspectual phases / positions of speaker and addressee**

→ used to express engagement in discourse

- General mechanism across languages, to investigate

(1) English progressive (Wright 1994, 1995)

a. *I'm warning you*

b. *You're telling me you don't love me anymore*

→ “the speaker’s own **assessment** of a particular situation.”

(2) Perfective Tok Pisin (Mühlhäuser 1985)

*tupela i pren pinis (= finish)*

The two are **real** friends

(3) Perfective Engenni (Gur group), (Thomas 1978)

*“he flat finish” = “it is **really** flat”*

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