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## Wolof: A grammatical sketch

Stéphane Robert

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### **Introduction**

Wolof (or Olof), also referred to as Walaf, Oulof, Yolof, Gelof, Guiolof or Volof in some old publications, is the main vernacular language of Senegal. According to oral tradition, it was originally spoken in the ancient Jolof Empire, covering the Cayor, Djolof, Baol, Walo, and Saloum traditional kingdoms, where it was already established as a shared language for inter-ethnic communication. It is nowadays the ‘ethnic’ or ‘identity language’ of more than 40% of the inhabitants of Senegal (Lüpke, 2013, p.14), which should amount to some 5 million speakers, belonging to all social strata. There are also approximately 226,000 speakers in Mauritania and around 18,000 in The Gambia (Leclerc, 2015). However, because of the traditional trading activity of Wolof people, with French authorities during colonisation as well as with the Sudanic empires, Wolof has also been used for a long time as a lingua franca in this region (Becher, 2001; McLaughlin, 2008b). It is nowadays an expanding vehicular language, spoken by most of the Senegalese people as ‘one language of their repertoire’ (Lüpke, 2013, p.14) all over Senegal (Fal et al., 1990, p.6), even in Casamance (a multilingual area not in the sphere of the old Wolof kingdoms area in southern Senegal) and The Gambia, where Kriol and Mandinka respectively used to prevail as a vehicular languages. Despite the existence of various sociolinguistic situations (see Dreyfus and Juillard 2004), Wolof is used in all domains, by all

ages, in particular in urban centers. Including the Wolof diaspora all over the world, the total number of speakers (with various level of proficiency) might reach 10 million.

Most of the speakers are at least bi-lingual and often multilingual, in particular the ones who do not belong to the Wolof ethnic group<sup>1</sup>. French is the official language of Senegal<sup>2</sup> (actually spoken only by ca. 10% of the population according to McLaughlin (2008b), increasing to 26% according to the last report made by OIF (2019)), but Wolof was one of the first six languages of Senegal recognised as national languages, mentioned as such in the 2001 constitution. It received an official orthography (using the Latin script) in 1971 with several corrections afterwards. However, this official orthography is seldom used by the population (as visible from alternative spellings in advertisements and public signs in the streets), since Wolof is taught very little in the education system. Its use is mainly oral (including radio and TV programs) but since the 70's, newspapers, websites and also a written literature (mostly novels) in Wolof have developed. A non-standardised literacy using the Arabic script, called Wolofal<sup>3</sup>, still survives mostly in religious (Islamic) poetry.

Dialectal variation in Wolof seems to be relatively weak. Local varieties (corresponding to the former traditional kingdoms or provinces) have their particularities (mainly phonetic, sometimes morpho-phonological or lexical), in particular the Lebu variant spoken in the Cap-Vert peninsula of Senegal and the Petite Côte, and to a certain extent the Wolof of The Gambia (see Becher (2001) for a comparison), but a systematic investigation on dialectal variation in Wolof is actually still needed. More significantly, Wolof has developed two idealised varieties (as opposite ends in a continuum of usages) corresponding, on the one hand, to a 'pure' or

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<sup>1</sup> About the ambiguity and complexity of this notion, see Lüpke and Storch (2013).

<sup>2</sup> English is the official language of The Gambia.

<sup>3</sup> For more details, see McLaughlin (in this volume).

‘deep’ Wolof associated with the traditional rural Wolof areas (Cayor in particular), and, on the other hand, to a de-ethnicised language of urban origin (Lüpke, 2013, p.17). In fact, without formal recognition, the Dakar or *urban variant*, which will be presented here<sup>4</sup>, has been gradually established as the unmarked contemporary Wolof, because of the influence of the capital and its prevalence in radio and TV broadcasts. Due to the prestige of French through centuries, even when the speakers have a low proficiency in French, this urban Wolof is characterised by an ‘interlarded codeswitching’ (Wolff, 1991, p.4) with French (for a description, see Swigart 1992a and b), often criticised by purists. As shown by McLaughlin (2008a), the development of this variant is actually much older and conventionalised than usually assumed. Moreover, because of the neighbouring of Mauritania, and because of Islam being the major religion of Senegal, many Arabic loanwords have also been integrated in the Wolof lexicon but to a lesser degree: in Thiam’s (2016) study on loan words in the Wolof lexicon, out of a total of 1968 items, 70% are from French vs. 20% from Arabic.

Wolof belongs to the northern branch of the Atlantic group and seems relatively isolated in this branch (Pozdniakov and Segerer this volume). It shares several features with other Atlantic languages but also displays some typologically remarkable properties. This short overview presents its major linguistic features of interest from a typological and areal perspective as follows: the main phonological features are presented in §1. Section 2 to 5 are dedicated to word categories and their morphology. This includes a summary of the basic typological characteristics and word classes of the language (2), followed by a presentation of the noun class system, determiners, modifiers, and pronouns (3), derivation and compounding (4), and the verbal system (5). Section 6 presents the clause and beyond, covering information

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<sup>4</sup> This sketch is based on a combination of my own data (consisting mostly of various radio programs broadcast by the ORTS during the eighties, and elicited or spontaneous utterances taken down in Dakar) and the published sources indicated in the references section.

structure (6.1), the basic clause structure (6.2), coordination and paratactic clause chaining (6.3), subordination (6.4), ending up with sentence patterns (6.5). Occasionally, diachronic comparisons will be made to enlighten some problematic aspects of contemporary Wolof.

The first known documents on Wolof date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> or possibly 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>. This language has received much attention since so that the full bibliography cannot be listed here<sup>6</sup>. However, beside several relatively short grammars (such as Diagne (1971), Fal (1999), Ngom (2003), or the introduction in Diouf (2003) for the most recent works), an extensive reference grammar of Wolof, updating Sauvageot's (1965) seminal work to the standards of modern typology, is still to be done.

## 1 Phonology and related processes

### 1.1 Orthography

When not specified by brackets, the (phonological) official orthography is used here. Graphemes and conventions that deviate from the IPA are the following: IPA *ʃ*, *ɲ* and *ʝ* are spelled *j*, *ñ* and *y* respectively; an acute accent is used for closed<sup>7</sup> vowels: IPA symbols *ɛ*, *e*, *ə*, *ɔ*, *o* are spelled respectively *e*, *é*, *ë*, *o*, *ó*. The symbol *à* indicates a maximally open vowel (see §1.3). Vowel lengthening is transcribed by the doubling of the vowel, the sole first vowel being accented when required (e.g. *óo* for IPA /o:/). In the same way, geminates are written as sequences of two identical consonants.

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<sup>5</sup> After meticulous work on the original (anonymous) manuscript published by d'Avezac (1845), de Lespinay (2000) has concluded that this lexicon certainly dates back to the early eighteenth or possibly seventeenth century.

<sup>6</sup> For documents prior to 1989, see the bibliographies in Robert (1991).

<sup>7</sup> About ATR vs. aperture distinction, see §1.3.

## 1.2 Diachronic insights

Becher (2001) has conducted a thorough comparison between contemporary Banjul (BW) and Dakar Wolof (DW) on the one hand, and ‘archaic’ Wolof (AW) as documented in 19<sup>th</sup> century grammars and texts, on the other hand. She has brought to light interesting evolutions explaining some dissymetries in the phonological system of contemporary DW. These did not take place in BW, which appears more conservative on these points, also probably influenced here by the CVCV canonical structure of Mandinka. First of all, DW has centralised then lost the final vowel of the (N)CV(N)C-**a** lexemes of AW. This vowel deletion and change of syllabic structure resulted in specific articulations of the final consonants which are transcribed as geminates in the official orthography (e.g. AW *leka*, DW *lekk* ‘to eat’) and subject to debates (§1.3). A final (N)CV(N)-**xa** gave rise to a new /q/ uvular phoneme<sup>8</sup> (e.g. AW *ñaxa*, DW *ñaq* ‘to sweat’). Furthermore, in certain contexts, back vowels and /a/ from AW have undergone centralisation<sup>9</sup> giving rise to a new /ə/ phoneme (e.g. AW *bót* DW *bët* ‘eye’, AW *mun* DW *mën* ‘can’).

## 1.3 Phonemes

Wolof has 8 short vowels and 7 long vowels (with a much lower frequency): remarkably, the central vowel /ë/ (i.e. [ə]) does not have a long counterpart (see §1.2)<sup>10</sup>, and /a:/ has an unusual open and shortened realisation before a consonant cluster (transcribed *à*) which we do not count as a phoneme as it is apparently<sup>11</sup> a conditioned realisation of [a:]. Some authors (e.g. Ka, 1994, p.7 ff.) include an ATR feature (always correlated with aperture) in this vocalic system.

<sup>8</sup> As suggested by our anonymous reviewer, the evolution of *-xa* into an uvular plosive instead of a geminate fricative is certainly due to the visible constraint against geminate fricatives in Wolof.

<sup>9</sup> According to Becher (2001: 33), nowadays this centralisation process tends to extend to the /i/.

<sup>10</sup> However, Fal (1999: 11-12) mentions the following opposition *këër* ‘limpet’ vs. *kër* ‘house’, and the integration with a final *-ëër* for the borrowings from French *-eur* ending words; she also signals an /ã/, isolated in *sãs* ‘to be extremely hot (for oil or flatiron)’ but frequent in the French loan words.

<sup>11</sup> This point is still controversial.

However, while useful to account for a kind of harmony (see §1.5), this feature has no clear phonological status in DW,<sup>12</sup> and the opposition between *reer* ‘dine’ and *rээр* ‘get lost’ can be treated in terms of aperture as well.

**Table 1: Wolof vocalic phonemes**

i		u	ii	uu
é	ë	ó	ээ	óó
e		o	ee	oo
	a		aa	
			(à)	

As for the consonants, different series contrast: a first set of simple (or weak) consonants (Table 2) contrasts with a second set of ‘strong consonants’ (Table 3) made of prenasalised consonants on the one hand, and geminates (with a restricted distribution) on the other hand. Both have a longer realisation and a stronger articulation than the simple ones (Cissé, 2006)<sup>13</sup>.

**Table 2: Wolof simple (or weak) consonants**

1.	p	t	c	k	(q)
2.	b	d	j	g	
3.	m	n	ñ	ŋ	
4.	f	r <sup>14</sup>	s	x	
5.		l	y	w	

**Table 3: Wolof strong (or long) consonants**

	<i>Geminates</i>					<i>Prenasals</i>				
1.	pp	tt	cc	kk	(q)	mp	nt	nc	nk	nq
					q					
2.	bb	dd	jj	gg		mb	nd	nj	ng	
3.	mm	nn	ññ	ŋŋ						
4.										
5.	ww	ll	yy							

All of these consonants are given as phonemes in the official orthography. However some points remain controversial concerning the prenasals and geminates in particular. Most of the

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, some speakers from the Baol area (and probably from elsewhere) seem to have a true ATR opposition at least for /uu/ and /ii/, e.g. *xuur* ‘to rust’ vs. *xoor* ‘testicle’; these two words are homophones for DW speakers who produce only +ATR /u/ and /i/.

<sup>13</sup> This opposition between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ (or fortis and lenis) consonants in Cissé (2006) is based on a previous study of various articulatory parameters. For prenasals, among other articulatory characteristics, the total length is longer than that of simple consonants but smaller than that of an N-C sequence, so they are considered as monophonematic.

<sup>14</sup> /r/ is realised as an apico-alveolar voiced thrill.

debates concern the phonological status of the various plosives (simple, geminates and prenasals) because of their restricted distribution and conditioned realisations. Some authors (e.g., Diallo, 1981, p.19) also count as a phoneme the glottal stop [ʔ] appearing systematically and solely before a word-initial vowel or at a morpheme boundary (when not replaced by an epenthetic approximant *w* or *y*, or by *h* in some dialects) but functions as the weak counterpart of /k/ in consonant alternation (§1.4). The phonemic status of the uvular plosive /q/ (see §1.2) is not a matter of debate, but this phoneme is sometime listed with the geminates with which it shares a strong articulation and also some functional features. In contrast with the other simple consonants, it never appears initially and is used as the strong degree of /x/ in the morphophonological process of consonant alternation (1.4). However, /q/ has a prenasal counterpart /nq/ while other geminates do not. Only the plosives display voicing opposition, except /q/ again. Plosives show restrictions in their distribution. The voiceless simple plosives *p*, *c*, *k* (as also *d*) are not attested in medial<sup>15</sup> and final position. Strong consonants never appear after a long vowel (except the shorten /â/), nor do they word-initially, except for the series of voiced prenasals<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, voiced plosives have specific realisations in final positions (see §1.5). These phonotactic restrictions have led some linguists to question the existence of approximant and voiceless plosive geminate phonemes (Diouf, 2003; Ngom, 2003), or, more radically, of geminates in Wolof (e.g. Samb, 1983, p.19; Becher 2001, p.37).

For a review and discussion of the controversial points about Wolof phonology, see Cissé (2006). For an analysis of the phonology and morphophonology of Wolof using the nonlinear framework, see Ka (1994).

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<sup>15</sup> A few exceptions have been found for *c* in medial position (*beeco* ‘small loincloth for women’, *loco* ‘small canoe’) which require more investigations.

<sup>16</sup> Some authors (e.g. Diallo 1981: 19ff.) do not count the voiceless prenasals as phonemes but as clusters. According to Ka (1994: 86), voiceless prenasals have lost their initial nasal segment in initial position.



## 1.4 Consonant alternation

In order to support the phonological distinction between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ consonants in Wolof, it is worth mentioning here their correlation in various morphophonological processes as remnants of the former (three) degrees of consonant alternations or mutations (see Pozdniakov and Robert, 2015, p.577 ff.). Prenasals and geminates function as the strong degree of the simple consonants in derivation processes using consonant alternation, with two different pattern depending on the consonant alternation being initial or final (see Table 4). Alternation of the stem-initial consonant is used to derive nouns from verbal stems (e.g. *fo* ‘to play’, *po* ‘play, game’). Some suffixes (such as the reversive *-i*) trigger alternation of the stem-final consonant following a different pattern (e.g. *sëf* ‘to load’, *sippi* ‘to unload’).

**Table 4: The initial and final consonant alternations**

<i>Stem-initial consonant alternation</i>			<i>Stem-final consonant alternation</i>					
<i>b-</i>	→	<i>mb-</i>	<i>-b</i>	→	<i>-bb-</i>	<i>-w</i>	→	<i>-ww-</i>
<i>d-</i>	→	<i>nd-</i>	<i>-r</i>	→	<i>-dd-</i>	<i>-y</i>	→	<i>-yy-</i>
<i>j-</i>	→	<i>nj-</i>	<i>-j</i>	→	<i>-jj-</i>	<i>-l</i>	→	<i>-ll-</i>
<i>g-</i>	→	<i>ng-</i>	<i>-g</i>	→	<i>-gg-</i>	<i>-m</i>	→	<i>-mm-</i>
<i>(t-)</i>	→	<i>(t-)</i>	<i>-t</i>	→	<i>-tt-</i>	<i>-n</i>	→	<i>-nn-</i>
<i>f-</i>	→	<i>p-</i>	<i>-f</i>	→	<i>-pp-</i>	<i>-ñ</i>	→	<i>-ññ-</i>
<i>s-</i>	→	<i>c-</i>	<i>-s</i>	→	<i>-cc-</i>	<i>-ŋ</i>	→	<i>-ŋŋ-</i>
<i>∅~(?)~y~w-</i>	→	<i>k-</i>	<i>-∅</i>	→	<i>-kk-</i>			
			<i>-x</i>	→	<i>-qq-</i>			

## 1.5 Syllabic structure and morphophonology

Among the possible syllabic structure types (see Ka, 1994, p.73), CVC is the most common structure for the numerous monosyllabic roots<sup>17</sup> and CVCV(C) for the polysyllabic ones. An epenthetic approximant (/y/ or /w/) is obligatory for stems with a long initial vowel (DW *wuute* vs. AW *uute* ~ *wuute* ‘to be different’), and frequent for short initial vowels stop (*wolof* ~ *ʔolof*). In a syllable, either the vowel or the consonant can be long, but not both. There are no

<sup>17</sup> 42% of the total lexicon follows has a CV(V)C(C) pattern, according to our personal counting in Diouf (2003).

diphthongs (*y* and *w* seem to work as approximants rather than semivowels). Consonant clusters are rare and often signal a morpheme boundary or a borrowing.

At the word level, beside stress (see §1.6), Wolof appears to use various phonetic realisations for demarcating word boundaries: (a) epenthesis and glottal stops indicate a word's (vocalic) initial boundary; (b) final vowels also undergo neutralisations in final position, such as the *a/ë* opposition at the end of polysyllabic words (Fal, 1999, p.14); (c) in word final position, the simple voiced plosives (e.g., /b/) are realised unreleased, which neutralises the voicing opposition ([-p̚]) the voiceless geminates (*pp*, *cc*, *kk*) appear with an aspirated realisation while the voiced geminates are realised with a final epenthetic schwa (see §1.2). By contrast, elision, assimilation or neutralisation processes are attested at the phrase level, such as vowel elision and coalescence (for details see Diouf, 2003, p.29 ff.; Ka, 1994, p. 103).

Lastly, Ka (1994, pp.8, 12 ff.) proposes to analyse Wolof as a language subject to progressive ATR harmony<sup>18</sup>, stating in particular that ‘although it also applies within the word, vowel harmony should be characterised in Wolof as an external sandhi rule, i.e. a rule applying above the word level to prosodic units larger than the word’ (1994, p.49). Despite some remaining problems, this analysis clearly accounts for some obvious cases of vowel assimilations at the phrase or word level, in particular for verb suffixes. For instance, with the (*-al*) benefactive suffix, one may contrast *woor-al* ‘to fast for’ with *fóot-ël* ‘to do laundry for’.

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<sup>18</sup> Vowel harmony in Wolof can be described in terms of aperture as well, and only pertains to the mid short vowels.

## 1.6 Prosody

Wolof has a prosodic system typologically unusual in several respects. As most of the Atlantic languages, it is a non-tonal language, but in addition, it has no tonal accent and no pitch accent (Rialland and Robert, 2001). Wolof has fixed dynamic stress: the main stress falls on the first syllable of lexemes unless the second syllable is long, in which case it falls on the latter: *'daanu* 'to fall', *gin'naaw* 'back', *'defaraat* 'to do again'.

Moreover, the intonational system is remarkable because of the absence of any intonational marking of focus. This situation can be explained by a morphosyntactic feature of the language, namely the expression of focus through a special set of conjugations (§ 5.2.1). The grammaticalisation of focus also converts the predicate nexus (sVO<sup>19</sup>) into an indivisible prosodic group, while preposed lexical subjects, excluded from the predicative nexus, tend to be topicalised and marked as such by a special melodic substructure. Intonational subdivisions are optional and occur at syntactic boundaries. For details, see Rialland and Robert (2001).

## 2 Basic typological characteristics and morphosyntactic categories

### 2.1 Basic typological characteristics

Wolof is a head-initial language with SVO and head-modifier basic word order (holding for most determiners as well). It also has prepositions, post-nominal relative clauses and a rich, mostly suffixing, derivational morphology. The language has no adjectives. It has two classes of ideophones. As for the nominal morphology, Wolof displays a functional noun class system, characterised, however, by various morphological simplifications, and the limitation of its syntactic scope to the noun phrase. By contrast, despite some irregularities, the Wolof verbal

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<sup>19</sup> In sVO, 's' refers to the inflectional marking of the subject in the verb phrase.

system is characterised by an inflectional morphology whereby modal specifications, grammaticalised focus and polarity distinctions have fused with personal and aspectual specifications. So nominal and verbal systems, in this language, seem to be driving into opposite directions, the former moving towards an isolating type for noun stems and the latter one to an inflectional type.

Thanks to the numerous verbal extensions modifying the verb valence, the language also has a quite synthetic clausal syntax: prepositions do exist but non-subject arguments very often appear as direct objects, their semantic role being specified by the verbal extensions. In the same way, although subordinating morphemes are plentiful, paratactic clause chaining is very common, the semantic and syntactic nature of the interclausal link being specified by the semantics of verb inflections. Wolof also has a very rich system of auxiliaries used to express various specifications, stressing the central role played by the verb in this language.

## 2.2 Word classes

For non-derived stems, the distinction between verbs and nouns is not morphologically. A great number of stems have both nominal and verbal uses (e.g. *liggéey* ‘to work’, *liggéey* <sup>B<sup>20</sup></sup> ‘work’, *wax* ‘to speak, tell’, *wax* *J* ‘word, speech, argument’). Wolof has no adjectives (McLaughlin, 2004): qualification is expressed by stative verbs (e.g. *ñuul* ‘to be black’) and English predicative adjectives correspond to relative clauses with quality verbs in Wolof (see §6.4.1). Among adverbs (e.g. *lool* ‘very’, *rekk* ‘only’), numerous are frozen phrases (e.g. *bu-baax* ‘well’, lit. ‘which (is-)good’; *ba-dee* ‘well and truly’, lit. ‘until-to die’), but there are also two classes of adverbial ideophones (labelled ‘coverbs’): (i) Quality-specific ideophones, used as intensifiers each for a single notion carried by a quality verb, e.g. *kukk* for *ñuul* ‘to be black’,

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<sup>20</sup> Capitals indicate the class to which a noun belongs, see §3.1.1.

*dell* for *fees* 'to be full'; (ii) Manner ideophones introduced by the quotative verb *ne~né~ni* 'to say'; the resulting verb phrase can be transitive (as *né jàkk* in (1)) or intransitive (as *né pëll* in (1)) and can express a state, a change of state, a movement or an action, together with the specific (intensive or sudden) manner with which it is performed, e.g. *ne jodd* 'to be stiff as a post', *ne tàcc* 'to get crushed', *ne pëll* 'to step out like a whirlwind', *ne tay (xaalis)* 'to burn (money)'. For details about the semantics and constructional properties of these ideophones, see Drolc (2011).

- (1) *dafa ne pëll, né ma jàkk*  
 FOCV.3SG say IDEOPH.step.out.like.whirlwind say O.1SG IDEOPH.stare.at  
 'Il est sorti en trombe et m'a regardé fixement' [Drolc 2011: 211]  
 'He went out like a whirlwind and stared at me'

Among prepositions, one deserves a special mention, the general locative preposition. First, this morpheme is formed by the combination of a *c-* prepositional morpheme with the *-i* vs. *-a* spatial deictic<sup>21</sup> (§2.3). Moreover, beside its numerous uses as an all-purpose preposition, it combines with various terms (mostly body parts) to form spatial prepositional phrases (e.g. with *gannaaw G* 'back', *ci gannaaw jàkka ji* 'behind the mosque'), and also displays remarkable uses as a partitive pronoun (see §3.3.3). The *ak ~ ag* 'with' preposition plays also an important role for coordinating noun phrases.

On adverbs, discourse markers and conjunctions, see Fal (1999, p.95–99), and for a specific study on discourse markers in Wolof, see Seck (1999). The noun determiners and modifiers are presented in §3.2, pronouns in §3.3, auxiliaries in §5.3, and the main subordinating conjunctions in §6.4.

<sup>21</sup> In AW, the locative preposition (see §2.3) combined also with the third (*-u*) deictic suffix (Becher 2001: 187). AW had only three prepositions the *cV* locative preposition, an *fV* directional one which has evolved into a locative adverb in DW (see 3.1.2), and also the still existing preposition *ag* 'with'.

### 2.3 A specificity: the role of spatial deixis

A triplet of spatial deictic suffixes plays an important role in noun modification and actually permeates almost the whole language system: it is used to form the definite article (§3.2.1), demonstratives (§3.2.2), relative and interrogative pronouns (§3.3.4 and §6.5.3), the (all-purpose) locative preposition (§2.2), a verbal inflection, the Presentative (§5.2.4), as well as temporal and conditional subordinating conjunctions (§6.4.3).

**Table 5: Deictic suffixes in Wolof**

<i>-i</i>	proximal
<i>-a</i>	distal
<i>-u</i>	not localised (or absent) in the deictic space

These three suffixes specify the localisation (in space, time or discourse) of the referential entity relative to the speaker: (*-i*) is a proximal, (*-a*) a distal, and the (*-u*) suffix is remarkable in that it is neither medial nor neutral, but indicates that the designated entity is ‘not localised’ in the space of the speaker. In AW, (*-u*) was used to indicate an indefinite localisation or to specify a referent as absent in the speech situation. In DW, it has been reanalysed as indicating a **lack** of localisation inducing a syntactic dependency, between the modified term and the one to come for providing the missing specification: at the level of noun phrase, the (*-u*) morpheme basically works as a connective relating the modified noun to the next term complementing, as illustrated in Table 6, and in the genitival construction also (see §3.2.8). For details on these spatial deictics, see Robert (2006).

**Table 6: Semantics and uses of Wolof spatial suffixes in various combinations**

	<i>Semantics</i>		
	<b>proximity</b>	<b>distance</b>	<b>absence</b>
<i>Part of speech</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-u</i>
Noun determiners	proximal definite	distal definite	indefinite relative/interrogative
Spatial preposition	proximal argument	distal argument	-
Predicate	proximal present	distal present	negation/middle <sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> My analysis of the negative and middle (*-u*) suffixes as originating from the spatial deictic suffix is more speculative and in any case diachronic, since they are not conceived as such by the speakers.

Subordinating conj.	close past	remote past	future/hypothetical
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### 3 Nouns, adnominals and pronouns<sup>23</sup>

#### 3.1 A simplified noun class system

Wolof has a functional noun class system ensuring semantic differentiation and classification (paradigmatic function) and morphosyntactic marking of referential continuity (syntagmatic function). However, the Wolof noun class system is characterised by several simplifications: the language has only ten classes (but two additional adverbial classifiers) and a simplified class pairing (one class is virtually generalised for plural); class prefixes have disappeared and there is only one set of agreement morphemes made of a sole consonant; the scope of agreement is limited to noun modifiers. Nevertheless, this reorganisation gave rise to remarkable innovations for the determiners and the pronominal system.

##### 3.1.1 Noun classes and class markers

From a morphological point of view, the class prefixes have fused with the root, and there are no suffixes. Moreover, the stem-initial consonant alternation, which used to be a regular mechanism correlated with noun class assignment, is also reduced in DW to a handful of isolated cases for number agreement (e.g. *kěf/yěf* ‘thing/things’, *baaraam/waraam* ‘finger/fingers’), and only productive in the formation of diminutives (*jigéen* ‘woman’, *njigéen* dim.) and in derivation processes (see §1.4). Thus beside these synchronically marginal cases, there is no more noun inflection, no class marker on the noun, and the belonging of a word to a class is a lexical property, visible only in the noun modifier’s agreement. Moreover, the class agreement morphemes take the form of a single set of bound consonantal<sup>24</sup> morphemes (see Table 7), combining with various morphemes in nominal dependents (see §3.2 and §3.3). The

<sup>23</sup> For more details about the noun class system and adnominals, see Pozdniakov and Robert (2015), summarised here.

<sup>24</sup> Original vowels have also disappeared and been replaced by the deictic vowels or other determiners.

resulting morphemes are autonomous and non obligatory modifiers. In proverbs, for instance, nouns can appear without article and therefore without any class marker:

- (2) *Nit, nit a-y garab-am.*  
 human.being human.being FOC-IPFV remedy-POSS.3SG  
 ‘Man is a remedy to man’ (lit. Human being, it is human being its remedy)

There are ten noun classes in Wolof, eight singular and two plural, as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: the Wolof noun classes and (agreement) class markers**

	<i>singular</i>								<i>plural</i>	
<i>Classes</i>	K	B	W	M	G	J	L	S	Ñ	Y
<i>Class markers</i> <sup>25</sup>	<b>k-</b>	<b>b-</b>	<b>w-</b>	<b>m-</b>	<b>g-</b>	<b>j-</b>	<b>l-</b>	<b>s-</b>	<b>ñ-</b>	<b>y-</b>

### 3.1.2 The defective ‘place’ and ‘manner’ classes

Two adverbial morphemes behaving like defective classes can be added to the list of classes, namely *f-* for place and *n-* for manner. Although these elements are never associated with nouns and do not function as agreement morphemes, they have the same single-consonant structure and combine with the same determiners as the noun class markers (see §3.3.2). For instance, the deictic clitic adverbs for place and manner are made on the same pattern as the definite article (§3.2.1), by the combination of the class consonant with a spatial deictic: *f-i* ‘here’, *f-a* ‘there’; *n-i* ‘in this manner’, *n-a* ‘in that manner’. As shown by Becher (2001, pp.187 and 190), the DW *fi/fa* locative adverb was used as a directional preposition in AW, which contrasted with the locative preposition *ci/ca*.

**Table 8: the Wolof defectives classes**

	<i>Place</i>	<i>Manner</i>
<i>Adverbial classes</i>	F	N
<i>Class markers</i>	<b>f-</b>	<b>n-</b>

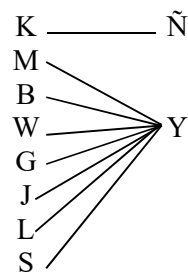
<sup>25</sup> These bound consonantal morphemes are mostly prefixed and sometimes suffixed to determiners and modifiers. In the case of the definite article they are suffixed by the spatial deictics. Their morphosyntactic status (base or affix) is therefore ambiguous. Conventionally they are cited with an hyphen as prefixes.



### 3.1.3 Classes and number, singular/plural pairings

In DW, classes are uniquely either singular or plural. They display a very simple and atypical class pairing for number: on the one hand, there is a K (singular) / Ñ̃ (plural) pairing for a single word *nit* ‘person, human being’; this remarkable gender is recycled as a generic class for pronouns referring to humans (see §3.3.2 and 3.3.4); on the other hand, there is a second pairing pertaining to almost<sup>26</sup> the whole lexicon, relating all the singular classes to a unified Y class for plural. Thus, disregarding the fact that (i) a few lexemes (which agree in another class than K for singular) also agree in Ñ̃ for plural, and (i) another term, namely *kěf* K ‘thing’ (which agrees in Y for plural, *yěf* Y), agrees in the K class for singular, Figure 1 below shows the dominant singular/plural pairings.

**Figure 1: dominant class pairings (singular/plural)**



Besides the usual singular/plural opposition, for some nominal items a collective may also contrast with the plural. This collective is formed with the J class for fruits (*màngo bi* ‘the m̀àngo’, *m̀àngo yi* ‘the mangos’, *mango ji* ‘the full set of mangos’) and a few other terms (e.g. *janq bi /yi* ‘the young girl/s’, *janq ji* ‘the group of young girls’), and the S class for some groups of persons (e.g. *Séeréer si* ‘the Seereer ethnic group’ or *sériñ si* ‘the marabouts’ group or guild’ vs. *sériñ yi* ‘the marabouts’). However, this collective derivation is not possible for all the items belonging to the same category (\**Wolof si*).

<sup>26</sup> Some few other terms for groups of people agree in the other (Ñ̃) class for plural (e.g. *gaa ñi* ‘people’, *mag ñi* ‘adults’).

### 3.1.4 Semantics and class assignment and substitution

As in other languages, class assignment in Wolof is a multidimensional semantic process by which the same class is used for multiple oppositions<sup>27</sup> which results in a complex semantic organisation. This process is complicated here by the morphological evolution of this language. As a result of the fusion of class prefixes with the root and the vanishing of consonant mutation, class assignment has been partly realigned following two main competing patterns (McLaughlin, 1997): a (classic) semantic one and a remarkable phonetic/homophonic one, by which the noun is assigned to the (C) class corresponding to its stem initial consonant (e.g. *sarax* S 'alms').

This phonetic pattern is particularly visible in the way borrowings and neologisms are integrated (e.g. *waliis* W 'luggage' from Fr. 'valise'). At the same time, there is an increasing tendency to generalise B as a kind of semantically neutral class (containing 40% of the lexicon<sup>28</sup>), as exemplified in (15) vs. (16) below. This generalisation of B class is probably based on its original semantic value as individuating countable elements, visible in its use in the following derivation process through class substitution: G for trees, B for individual fruits, J for the whole set of tree fruits (e.g. *màngo* G 'mango tree', *màngo* B 'mango fruit', *màngo* J 'the whole set of mango fruits'). The second largest class is G, which covers 21% of the lexicon, in particular tree names, wooden or long objects along with locative terms (toponyms also agree in this class, e.g. *Senegaal* G 'Senegal'). The third most frequent class is M (13%), the prototypical class for liquids also containing hollow objects along with various plant and animal

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<sup>27</sup> The semantic pattern for class assignment is not that of a simple partitioning of the lexicon into groups of elements sharing a (unique) common semantic feature but rather a dynamic grouping of elements organised in a radial manner around a 'key-word' (e.g. *saa* S 'moment' was probably integrated in the S class as a diminutive for 'a small quantity of time', the word then attracted other terms referring to time to this class for diminutives), with neighbouring relations as described by the prototype theory. These neighbouring relations design complex semantic maps for each class. These semantic networks are also complexified by the multiple functions of noun classes, used paradigmatically for categorisation but also oppositions in derivation, and syntagmatically for reference tracking, not to mention the phonetic pattern for class assignment. For an illustration, see Pozdniakov and Robert (2015).

<sup>28</sup> The percentages given here are based on Fal's et al. (1990) dictionary.

names. The W class (12%) is quite heterogeneous, containing, among others, some animals and small (often round) objects. In the J class (10 %), some important lexico-semantic groups can be found: kinship terms, small wild and often dangerous animals (or pests), diseases and related terms or, more generally, dangerous elements as well as some plants or plants products. This class is also used as a collective for sets of fruits or vegetables. Most of the Arabic borrowings are integrated in the J class.

The three remaining classes are very small but have been assigned to specific roles in DW. No specific semantic feature can be abstracted from the nouns belonging to the L class (less than 5% of the lexicon). However, this class shows two remarkable features. First, most of the nouns in L class are derived from verbs through the morphophonological process of consonant alternation. Furthermore, this small class functions as *the* generic class for inanimates in the pronominal system (see §3.3.2 and §3.3.4). This particular functioning may originate from its very low lexical frequency along with the belonging of the word *ləf* ‘thing’ to this class<sup>29</sup>. The S class (less than 3% of the lexicon) is at first quite heterogeneous. Three semantic groups can be found however: mass nouns (e.g. *saxaar S* ‘smoke’), time words (*saa S* ‘moment’, *əlläg S* ‘next day, day after’) and also small objects and diminutives, since this class is used in derivation to form diminutives for nouns belonging to other classes (e.g. *kër G* ‘house’, *kër S* ‘little house’). All the other nouns have an S as stem-initial consonant which indicates that they have been integrated in this class through the phonetic pattern. Eventually, the K class is totally marginal in the lexicon since it has a quasi single member, the word *nit* for ‘person, human being’. This situation allows this class to function as the generic class for human beings in absolute use, that is to form the human pronouns (§3.3.2 and §3.3.4). This typological peculiarity combines with another one: in Wolof, all the nouns referring to human beings (as

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<sup>29</sup> This word is thus considered as a ‘key-word’ for the L class.

well as proper names, see 3.3.1) belong to a class (e.g. J for kinship terms) different from that of the generic term *nit* ‘human being’. Nevertheless, another lexeme can agree in the K class: the *këf k-* variant of *lëfl-* ‘thing’. This term was probably integrated in this class according to the homophonic pattern.

### 3.1.5 The scope of class agreement

The scope of agreement is limited to the noun phrase. There is no class agreement on the verb for subject (see §5.2.1) or object indexation. Remarkably, there are also no class pronouns in Wolof: third person object clitics (§3.3.1) are used for nominal reference. However, the class consonant combines with various morphemes to form noun determiners and modifiers (definite or indefinite articles, demonstratives, quantifiers, possessive morphemes), which can be used pronominally except for the definite and indefinite articles, and also interrogative and relative pronouns. Agreement also appears, in a residual way, in certain forms of the genitival construction.

In Wolof, the use of spatial deictics (see Table 5) has been systematised in definite articles and the original vowels of the (\*CV-) agreement morphemes have disappeared in the combination with the deictic vowel and other agreeing morphemes. This restructuration gave rise to a remarkable system of noun determiners and modifiers.

## 3.2 Adnominals

### 3.2.1 Definite article

In Wolof, definiteness obligatorily goes with the localisation of the referent (as close vs. remote) with regard to the speaker. The definite article, always postposed to the noun, is formed by combining the consonant class marker (individualizing the entity referred to) with the proximal (-i) or distal (-a) spatial deictic, as illustrated in Table 9. This distance may be in space, time or

discourse (Robert 2006). The two defective classes for place and manner are used in the same patterns to form clitic adverbs: e.g. *fì* ‘here’, *fa* ‘there’, *ni* ‘in this manner’, *na* ‘in that manner’ (see Table 17).

**Table 9: Examples of definite (proximal and distal) articles for the ten noun classes**

Class	K	<i>nit</i>	<i>ki / ka</i>	‘the person close to / far away from the speaker’
	Ñ	<i>nit</i>	<i>ñi / ña</i>	‘the people close to / far away from the speaker’
	B	<i>xaj</i>	<i>bi / ba</i>	‘the dog close to / far away from the speaker’
	Y	<i>xaj</i>	<i>yi / ya</i>	‘the dogs close to / far away from the speaker’
	G	<i>garab</i>	<i>gi / ga</i>	‘the tree close to / far away from the speaker’
	J	<i>jinax</i>	<i>ji / ja</i>	‘the mouse close to / far away from the speaker’
	Y	<i>yàpp</i>	<i>wi / wa</i>	‘the meat close to / far away from the speaker’
	M	<i>meew</i>	<i>mi / ma</i>	‘the milk close to / far away from the speaker’
	S	<i>xorom</i>	<i>si / sa</i>	‘the salt close to / far away from the speaker’
	L	<i>lēf</i>	<i>li / la</i>	‘the thing/thingummy close to /far away from the speaker’

As noted previously, the third deictic marker (*-u*), indicating the absence of localisation in the space of the speaker, is not used to form the indefinite article (see §3.2.3) but rather a relativiser (see §3.3.4).

### 3.2.2 Demonstratives

Wolof has a rich system of demonstratives with a total of eleven paradigms (including free variants).

Some of these forms are rarely used nowadays. They can be divided in two series: one specifying the distance relative to the speaker (Table 10), the other one taking the hearer (or addressee) into account (Table 11). The latter is also used as anaphoric. Each series has basic forms with *-i* demonstrative suffix and variants with a *-le* suffix. Their components, combining in various ways, can be analysed as follows:

- the *CL*- class marker
- the distance deictic (*-i*, *-a*, *-u*)
- the demonstrative marker (*-i*), which fuses with the distance deictic (*-i+i>-ii*, *-a+i>-ee*)
- or a variant (*-le*)
- the hearer (or addressee) marker, also anaphoric (*-oo*),

**Table 10: Speaker centered demonstratives (example with *B* class)**

Proximal		Distal	
<i>CL-i-...</i>		<i>CL-a-...</i>	
+ <i>i</i>	+ <i>le</i>	+ <i>i</i>	+ <i>le</i>
<i>b-i-i</i>	<i>b-i-le</i>	* <i>b-a-i</i> > <i>bee</i>	<i>b-a-le</i>

**Table 11: Complex demonstratives (S speaker, H hearer)**

	Short forms <i>CL-oo-CL-Déict</i>	Variant + <i>i</i>	Variant + <i>le</i>	Spatial value	Anaphoric value
- <i>i</i>	-	<i>b-oo-b-i-i</i>	~ <i>b-oo-b-i-le</i>	-	close
- <i>a</i>	<i>b-oo-b-a</i>	~ <i>b-oo-b-ee</i>	~ <i>b-oo-b-a-le</i>	far from S and H but closer to H	remote
- <i>u</i>	<i>b-oo-b-u</i>	-	~ <i>b-oo-b-u-le</i>	close to H	neutral

Demonstratives are mostly postposed to the noun but may also be preposed (e.g. for *xale B* ‘child’, *xale bii* vs. *bii xale* ‘this child’). When preposed, a complex form with a repeated class marker at the end of the demonstrative is found in literary texts: *mii-m réew* ~ *réew mii* ‘this country’ for *réew M* ‘country’ (Fal, 1999, p.52). All the demonstratives can be used pronominally, e.g. about a child, *boobu* ‘this (aforementioned) one’. The two defective classes for place and manner are used in the same paradigms to form demonstrative adverbs: e.g. *fii* ‘here’, *foofu* ‘there (at the aforementioned place)’, *nii* ‘in this manner’, *noonu* ‘in this manner (anaph.)’.

### 3.2.3 Indefinite article

There are three ways to mark indefiniteness in Wolof: by a zero marking ( $\emptyset$ ) on the noun for generic (see example (2)) or partitive reference, by an overt indefinite article to refer to a specific indefinite entity, and also by the use of a quantifier (see §3.2.4). The latter tends to replace the indefinite article in urban Wolof. The indefinite article has the structure *a-CL*. In AW the indefinite morpheme was made of one of the three spatial deictics (-*i*, -*a*, -*u*) but in DW, the system was reduced to the distal -*a* which has lost its spatial value in this use. By contrast with the definite article, it is preposed to the noun: thus for *fas W* ‘horse’, *aw fas* ‘a

horse’ contrasts with *fas wa* ‘the (far away) horse’. This structure is not possible for all classes: for the indefinite article, J and L singular classes are substituted by B class, and Ñ plural by Y (*ay nit* ‘some persons, people’). After morpheme ending in a vowel, the *a-* marker disappears so that the indefinite article is marked solely by the class consonant as in (3).

- (3)
- |   |            |           |           |           |             |
|---|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
|   | <i>May</i> | <i>na</i> | <i>ko</i> | -y        | <i>nag.</i> |
| < | <i>May</i> | <i>na</i> | <i>ko</i> | <i>ay</i> | <i>nag.</i> |
|   | offer      | PRF.3S    | O.3SG     | INDF:CL   | vache       |
|   |            | G         |           | y         |             |
- ‘He offered him (some) cows’<sup>30</sup>. [Diouf 2003 :135]

The indefinite article has two variants which are rarely used nowadays: a *u-CL* form (with an even more incomplete paradigm) and a short variant without class marker (singular *u* / plural *i*). For details, see Pozdniakov and Robert (2015). Noticeably, the plural indefinite article (*ay~i*) can be used as a quantifier for ‘some, a few’ (which has no proper marker in Wolof), e.g. *ay doom* ‘a few fruits’.

### 3.2.4 Quantifiers and the selective interrogative

Beside an archaic form of the genitive construction (see §3.2.8), quantifiers and the selective interrogative also show class agreement.

**CL-enn** ‘one, a particular, any, (the) same’ is mostly preposed to the modified noun (*b-enn xale* ‘a (particular) child’, *k-enn nit* ‘a (certain) person’). This noun phrase can receive various modifiers (definite articles or demonstratives), as in (4). In the plural, this marker takes on the meaning of ‘some, a few’, as in (5). This quantifier can also be used pronominally. Noticeably, it also functions as the numeral with a B class marker *benn* ‘1’ (see §3.2.7). Eventually, CL-

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<sup>30</sup> As for all examples taken from documents written in French, the translation is mine, along with the possibly related errors.

*enn* tends to replace all other forms for indefinite (see 3.2.3) in contemporary urban Wolof:

*benn xale* = *ab xale* = *ub xale* = *xale* ‘a child’.

- (4) *w-enn*      *fas*      *w-ii*  
 CLW-one      horse      CLW-DEM.PROX  
 ‘this horse’ ~ ‘this unique horse’ ~ ‘this same horse’

- (5) *y-enn*      *saa*      *s-i*  
 CLy-one      moment      CLS-PROX  
 ‘sometimes’

**CL-eneen** ‘another’ is mostly preposed to the modified noun (6). When present, the definite article is always postposed to the modified noun (7).

- (6) *c-i*      *m-eneen*      *réew*  
 LOC-PROX      CLm-QNT.ALT      country  
 ‘in another country’

- (7) *kër*      *g-eneen*      *g-i*  
 house      CLg-QNT.ALT      CLb-PROX  
 ‘the other house’ [Fal 1999: 54]

**CL-épp**, postposed to the noun has a totalizing meaning in singular ‘all (the)’ and a distributive one when proposed ‘each, every’. Thus for *guddi G* ‘night’, *guddi gépp* ‘all the night’ contrasts with *gépp guddi* ‘every night’. In the plural, this modifier always takes on a totalizing meaning (8), whatever its position. Remarkably, **CL-épp** is always postposed to the definite article when present (9).

- (8) *Xale*    *y-épp*      *dem*    *nañu*    *foy-i*.  
 child    CLy-QNT.TOT    go    PRF.3P    play-CFG  
 ‘Tous les enfants sont partis jouer’ [Diouf 2003 : 405]  
 ‘All children went playing’.

- (9) *àdduna*    *s-i*      *s-épp*  
 world    CLS-PROX    CLS-QNT.TOT  
 ‘the whole world’

Beside **CL-épp**, Wolof also has a proper distributive morpheme, **-oo** which is suffixed to the first stem of the reduplicated noun and does not undergo class agreement: e.g. for *réew M*, *réew-oo réew* ‘each country’.



**CL-an?** ‘which (one)?’. A selective interrogative is formed by combination of the class marker with the *-an* interrogative morpheme (see §3.3.4).

- (10) *B-an xaj?*  
 CLb-Q dog  
 ‘Which dog?’

### 3.2.5 Overview of the agreeing nominal determiners

Table 12 below illustrates the most common noun determiners for a *B* class word, *xaj* ‘dog’.

**Table 12: *xaj* ‘dog’ (class *b-*) with its determiners**

<i>xaj bi</i>	‘the dog (close to me)’
<i>xaj ba</i>	‘the dog (far away from me)’
<i>xaj bii</i>	‘this dog (close to me, wherever you may be)’
<i>xaj bale</i>	‘that dog (far away from me, wherever you may be)’
<i>xaj boobale</i>	‘that dog (far away from both of us, but closer to you than to me)’
<i>xaj boobu</i>	‘that dog (close to you and far away from me); the dog in question’
<i>ab xaj</i>	‘a dog’
<i>benn xaj</i>	‘a (certain) dog, one dog’
<i>beneen xaj</i>	‘another dog’
<i>bépp xaj</i>	‘any dog’
<i>ban xaj?</i>	‘which dog?’
<i>xaj bu ...</i>	‘(a/the) dog that/which ...’ (relative pronoun, see §3.3.4)
<i>xaj-ub...</i>	‘(a/the) dog of...’ (genitival construction in formal Wolof, see §3.2.8)

### 3.2.6 Possessive modifiers

There is no class agreement for the possessive modifiers, as visible in Table 13. Plural is formed with the suffixes (-*y*) and (-*i*). However, articles can be added to the possessive noun phrase, the definite article being postposed to the phrase (*sama xarit bi*), and the indefinite one preposed to the noun: *sama benn xarit* ~ *samab xarit* < *sama (a)b xarit* ‘a friend of mine, my friend’, for the 3SG possessive modifier which is formed with a suffix, as well: *ab xarit-am* ‘a friend of his, his friend’.

**Table 13: Wolof possessive modifiers (example with *xarit* ‘friend’)**

1.SG	<i>sama</i> <sup>31</sup>	<i>xarit</i>	‘my friend’	<i>sama-y</i>	<i>xarit</i>	‘my friends’
2.	<i>sa</i>	<i>xarit</i>	‘your friend’	<i>sa-y</i>	<i>xarit</i>	‘your friends’
3.		<i>xarit -am</i>	‘his friend’	<i>a-y</i>	<i>xarit -am</i>	‘his friends’
1.PL	<i>sunu</i>	<i>xarit</i>	‘our friend’	<i>sunu-y</i>	<i>xarit</i>	‘our friends’
2.	<i>seen</i>	<i>xarit</i>	‘your friend’	<i>seen-i</i>	<i>xarit</i>	‘your friends’
3.	<i>seen</i>	<i>xarit</i>	‘their friend’	<i>seen-i</i>	<i>xarit</i>	‘their friends’

Possessive pronouns are formed by combining a *CL-os* pronominal form with the possessive modifiers, e.g. for *xarit B* ‘friend’, *sama b-os* ‘mine’, plural *sama y-os* ‘mines’.

### 3.2.7 Numerals

The numeral system is based on 5, 10, 30, 100 and 1000 as primary numbers. Table 14 shows the primary numbers and some examples of compound numbers. From 6 to 9, the complementary number is juxtaposed to 5. From 10 on, the additional unit is introduced by *ak* ‘with, and’, while the number of hundreds or thousands are compound forms with the genitival linker (*-i* for plural).

**Table 14: Numerals from 1 to 10 and compound numbers**

Primary numbers			
<i>benn</i>	‘one’	<i>fukk</i>	‘ten’
<i>ñaar</i>	‘two’	<i>fanweer</i> <sup>32</sup>	‘thirty’
<i>ñett</i>	‘three’	<i>téémээр</i>	‘one hundred’
<i>ñent</i>	‘four’	<i>junni</i>	‘one thousand’
<i>juróóm</i>	‘five’		
Examples of compound numbers			
<i>juróóm benn</i>	‘six’ (lit. five one)		
<i>fukk ak benn</i>	‘twenty one’ (lit. twenty and one)		
<i>téémээр ak benn</i>	‘one hundred and one’ (lit. hundred and one)		
<i>ñaar-i junni ak juróóm ñett fukk</i>	‘two thousand eighty’ (lit. two of thousand and five three twenty)		

With the exception of ‘first’ (for which a relative clause with the verb *jëkk* ‘to be the first’ is used), ordinal numbers are obtained by suffixation of an *-eel* morpheme to the cardinal number

<sup>31</sup> Variants: (1SG) *suma* ~ *saa* (mostly in Saalum) ~ *saam* (in Waalo) and (1PL) *suñu* (outside of cities).

<sup>32</sup> The word *fanweer* for ‘thirty’ obviously originates from the compounding of *fan* ‘day’ with *weer* ‘month, moon’, and means ‘days in a month’.

(e.g. *juróom ñaar-eel* ‘seventh’). All numerals (except *benn* again) function as nouns and require a genitive marker when they modify a noun (*-u* for singular, *-i* for plural), e.g. *ñaar-eel-u xale bi* ‘the second (of) child’.

### 3.2.8 The genitival construction

This construction covers various semantic relations including part-whole relations, family relations, and possession<sup>33</sup>. The order is head-modifier. The DW genitival linker originates from the reanalysis of a former indefinite article. According to Becher (2011, p.204), in the genitival construction the indefinite article originally appeared between the possessor and the possessum, in the form of a spatial deictic vowel (*i, a, u*) suffixed with the possessum’s class marker. In AW however, the class consonant had already disappeared. DW has completed this evolution process by reducing and reanalyzing two spatial vowels as grammatical linkers, one for singular, the other one for plural. Thus, the connective morpheme is *-u*<sup>34</sup> vs. *-i* for the singular vs. plural of the head. Usually there is no class agreement marker on the connective, however in more formal Wolof, the class marker of the head noun appears on the singular form (*-u-CL*) as a remnant of the original construction (see (52) for instance). Through class agreement, the definite article can specify the head or the modifier, as shown in Table 15.

**Table 15: The genitival construction (number, agreement and definiteness)**

‘horse’ W class	linker (GEN.SG/PL)	‘king’ B class	definite article	
<i>fas</i>	<i>-u</i>	<i>buur</i>		‘(a) king’s horse’
<i>fas</i>	<i>-u</i>	<i>buur</i>	<b><i>wi</i></b>	‘the horse of the/a king’
<i>fas</i>	<i>-u</i>	<i>buur</i>	<b><i>bi</i></b>	‘the horse of the king’
<i>fas</i>	<i>-u</i>	<i>buur</i>	<b><i>yi</i></b>	‘the horse of the kings’
<i>fas</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>buur</i>	<b><i>bi</i></b>	‘the horses of the king’

<sup>33</sup> Except in compounds with *borom* ‘owner’ for which the genitival linker is absent, e.g. *borom kër* ‘owner (of the) house’.

<sup>34</sup> (*-u*) disappears after a final *w* or a final vowel. In this last case, the connective morpheme must be replaced by the class agreement marker in formal Wolof.

### 3.3 Pronouns

#### 3.3.1 Personal pronouns and proforms

While subject indexes are fused in the verbal inflection (see §5.2), Wolof has two different sets of personal pronouns, as shown in Table 16: independent pronouns (used for topic, focus and also after prepositions), and clitic object pronouns (see §6.2.3 for placement).

**Table 16: Wolof personal pronouns**

	Independent pronouns	Object clitics
1.SG	<i>man</i>	<i>ma</i>
2	<i>yow</i>	<i>la</i>
3	<i>moom</i>	<i>ko</i>
1.PL	<i>nun~ñun</i>	<i>nu~ñu</i>
2	<i>yeen</i>	<i>leen</i>
3	<i>ñoom</i>	<i>leen</i>

There are no class pronouns in Wolof and the third person object pronouns are also used as object proforms for class nouns, as exemplified in (11) with *dugub J* ‘millet’. Nevertheless, all (agreeing) determiners can be used pronominally, except the definite and indefinite articles.

- (11) *dugub j-i, b:oo ko góob-ee ci tool yi...*  
 millet CLj-PROX when.NOTLOC:NULL.2G O.3SG harvest LOC:PROX field CLY-PROX  
 ‘The millet, when you harvest it in the fields...’

Remarkably, independent personal pronouns, as well as proper names, agree in the (expected) Ñ (human) class for plural, but in the M class for singular (instead of the K class for generic reference to human beings), e. g. *moom m-oo-m-ale* ‘him (this one) over there’.

#### 3.3.2 Generic classes and defective classes in absolute use

Three noun classes have a specific pronominal functioning: they can be used as generic classes in absolute use (that is without an antecedent noun of the same class): K (SG) and Ñ (PL) for the pronominal reference to human beings as in (12) and (13), and L for reference to inanimates and for the *that*-domain, as in (14).

- (12) *K-ii, dégg nga li mu la wax.*

CLk-DEM.PROX hear PRF.2SG CLl-PROX NULL.3SG o.2SG tell  
 ‘That [girl], you heard what she said to you.’

- (13) *Jox ko ñale.*  
 give o.3SG CLñ-DEM.DIST  
 ‘Give it to these ones (= these persons over there).’

- (14) *Waaw, loolu dëgg la.*  
 yes CLl-DEM.ANAPH.NOTLOC CLb-PROX  
 ‘Yes, that is true.’

In the same way, the two defective classes for place (F) and manner (N) are used to form pronominal adverbs in combination with the various morphemes modifying the noun (3.2): e.g. *f-épp* ‘everywhere’, *n-eneen* ‘in different manner’. Table 17 gives the complete paradigms for these two defective classes. It can be paralleled with the nominal determiners shown in Table 12.

Table 17: The locative (F-class) and manner (N-class) pronominal adverbs

Locative adverbs with <i>f-</i> stem		Manner adverbs with <i>n-</i> stem	
<i>fi</i>	‘here’ (clitic)	<i>ni</i>	‘so, as’ (clitic)
<i>fa</i>	‘there’ (clitic)	<i>na</i>	‘so, as’ (clitic)
<i>fii</i>	‘here’ (demonstrative)	<i>nii</i>	‘in this manner, so’ (demonstrative)
<i>fale</i>	‘there’ (demonstrative)	<i>nale</i>	‘in that manner’ (demonstrative)
<i>foofale</i>	‘over there’	<i>noonale</i>	‘in that manner, so’
<i>foofu</i>	‘at the place we mentioned’	<i>noonu</i>	‘so, as we mentioned’
<i>fenn</i>	‘somewhere’	<i>nenn</i>	‘in a certain manner’
<i>feneen</i>	‘somewhere else’	<i>neneen</i>	‘in another manner’
<i>fépp</i>	‘everywhere’	<i>népp</i>	‘in every way’
<i>fan, fu ...?</i>	‘where?’	<i>nan, nu ...?</i>	‘how?’
<i>fu ...</i>	‘where ...’ (relative)	<i>nu ...</i>	‘how ...’ (subordinating conjunctions)

### 3.3.3 Locative-partitive adverbial pronoun

Lastly, the general locative preposition, *ci* (§2.2), also displays remarkable uses as a pronominal adverb (16) for pronominal reference to a prepositional phrase with the *ci* preposition (15); according to some uses of the *ci* preposition, this adverbial pronoun *ci* may also be interpreted as a partitive determiner (17) or pronoun (‘some of this’).

- (15) *am naa mbégte m-u mag ci sa dikk bi.*  
 have PRF.1SG satisfaction CLm-NOTLOC be.great LOC:PROX POSS.2SG coming CLb:PROX  
 ‘J’ai une grande joie pour ta venue.’ [Diouf, 2003, p.520]

‘I get a great satisfaction from your coming.’

- (16) *am na ci mbégte b-u réy*  
 have PRF.3SG LOC.PART satisfaction CLb<sup>35</sup>-NOTLOC be.big  
 ‘(S)he gets a big satisfaction from that’

- (17) *Jox ma ci xaalis bi*  
 give O.1SG LOC.PART money CLb: PROX  
 ‘Give me some of the money.’ [Perrin, 2005, p.523]

### 3.3.4 Relative and interrogative pronouns

In AW, the relativiser was identical to the definite article or to the demonstrative (Becher, 2001, p.204). In DW, due to the reorganisation of the spatial deixis (§2.3), the system has partly changed. Although the article (CL-*i/a*) may surface as a relativiser (see §6.4.1), the true relative pronoun is made by the combination of the agreement class marker (CL-) with the deictic vowel (-*u*). This third deictic, indicating a lack of localisation in the space of the speaker, works here as a connective relating the antecedent with the relative clause providing the missing specifications.

- (18) *xam na xale b-u dem Tugël*  
 know PFT.3SG child CLb-NOTLOC go France  
 ‘(S)he knows a child **who** has gone to France.’

The three generic classes K, Ñ, L, and the two defective classes F and N, are used to form relativisers (CL-*u*) in headless relative clauses, respectively for persons, things, places or manner (‘who’, singular and plural, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘how’). These relative clauses have an indefinite or generic meaning as exemplified in (19) and (100) below.

- (19) **Fu** *mu nek, dinaa ko luqat.*  
 CLF-NOTLOC NULL.3SG stay FUT.1SG IPFV dig.up  
 ‘Wherever (s)he is, I will dig him up.’

These forms are also used as interrogative pronouns. The same five classes are actually used to form two parallel sets of *wh*-question words, one by combining the class consonant with an (–

<sup>35</sup> This agreement in B class rather than in M class (as in (15)) is an example of B-class expanding.

*an*) interrogative morpheme, and a second one, actually corresponding to the generic relative pronouns, where the same noun class markers combines with (-*u*), as shown in Table 18. Each set triggers the use of a different conjugational paradigm (see §6.5.3).

**Table 18: The two sets of Wolof interrogative pronouns based on class markers**

<b>-an set</b>	<b>-u set</b>	
<i>k-an</i>	<i>k-u</i>	who? which person? (singular)
<i>ñ-an</i>	<i>ñ-u</i>	who? which people? (plural)
<i>l-an</i>	<i>l-u</i>	what? which thing?
<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)?

Moreover, the class markers are used to form the selective interrogative by affixing the *-an* or more rarely the *-u* suffix to the class marker of the noun referred to, e.g. *b-an xale?* ‘which child?’. This selective interrogative can be used as an adjective or as a pronoun.

## 4 Derivation and compounding

For a comprehensive overview of derivation and compounding in Wolof, see Ka (1981). For a detailed study of verbal suffixes inducing a change in argument structure, see Nouguié Voisin (2002) from which most of my analyses have been taken.

### 4.1 Compounding

The order is head-modifier. Compound terms can be nominal, verbal or adverbial, e.g. *gaynde-gééj G* ‘shark’ (lit. ‘lion (of) sea’), *neex-deret* ‘be good-natured’ (lit. ‘be agreeable (regarding) blood’), *xef-ag-xippi* ‘in the twinkling of an eye, immediately’ (lit. ‘blink and open eyes’). Various grammatical morphemes may be inserted between the two components, such as the proximal definite article of the first term (*ndey-ji-réew J* ‘lebu dignitary’, lit. ‘mother<sub>1</sub> CL<sub>1</sub>i-country CL<sub>1</sub>’). Some compounds are made of complete verb phrases (*nax-sa-goro* ‘baggy pants’, lit. ‘deceive your father-in-law’).

## 4.2 Derivation

### 4.2.1 Nominal derivation

Prefixes are rare in Wolof and mostly used to form nouns, e.g. *waa-* ‘people of’ as in *waa-kër* ‘household’ derived from *kër* ‘house’. The most common derivational processes are reduplication (e.g. *Jolof-Jolof* ‘inhabitants of the Jolof province’, *xam-xam* ‘knowledge’ from *xam* ‘to know’) and mainly suffixation (e.g. *bey-kat B* ‘farmer’, from the verb *bey* ‘to farm’ and *-kat* agentive suffix). Derived nouns are mostly deverbal: Ka (1981) lists fifteen deverbal suffixes. For nominal derivation, Wolof also makes use of two other processes, typical for Atlantic languages: stem-initial consonant alternation as presented in §1.4 (e.g. *sàcc* ‘to steal’, *càcc G* ‘thief’), and class change (e.g. *xale B* ‘child’ vs. *xale S* ‘little child’, *mag J* ‘older brother/sister’ vs. *mag G* ‘old age’). These various derivational processes may combine (e.g. *pas-pas* ‘node’ from *fas* ‘to knot’) but nominal suffixes cannot combine. Nominal suffixes can, however, combine with single or multiple verbal extensions to which they are postposed: *daw* ‘to run’, *daw-al* ‘to race, to drive’, *daw-al-kat B* ‘driver’.

### 4.2.2 Verbal derivation

Wolof has a rich system of verbal suffixes (up to 40, depending on the authors). Some of them also involve reduplication for expressing iterativity or pluractionality with various semantic effects (e.g. *tàpp-tàppal* ‘tap gently and repeatedly’, from *tàpp* ‘to strike on’), or stem-final consonant alternation (§1.4), as the reversive *-i* and the completing-causative *-ali* suffixes do (e.g. *. ubb-i* ‘to open’ from *ub* ‘to close’, *sàpp-ali* ‘to increase or restore the taste’ from *saf* ‘to be tasty’), sometimes also including alternation of the stem vowel, as in *fecc-i* ‘to untie’ from *fas* ‘to tie’ (see Ka, 1994, p.95 ff.).



The verbal suffixes have various meanings (e.g. itive and venitive, corrective, discontinuative, provisional, simulative, privative, benefactive, causative, etc...). A subcategory of them plays a very important role in the syntax of Wolof because these suffixes code valency and semantic roles. They may reduce verbal valence (e.g., reciprocal, antipassive, middle) or more frequently increase it (e.g. causative, assistive, sociative, applicative, possessive...) or merely change the semantic roles of the arguments. Let us mention here the most remarkable points. Wolof lacks a true passive. This language has a typologically rare possessive suffix: this (*-le*) suffix changes the subject of an intransitive verb expressing a quality (as *baax* ‘to be good’ in (20)(a) into a possessed object having the quality expressed by the verb, the subject of the derived form being the possessor as in (20)(b):

- (20) (a) *Tééré yi baax nañu*  
 book CLY:PROX be.good PFT.3PL  
 (b) ‘The books are (definitely) good’  
*Baax-le na ay tééré<sup>36</sup>*  
 be.good-POSS PFT.3SG INDF:CLY book  
 ‘He has good books’ (lit. he is good-having books) [Church, 1981, p.276]

Wolof also has two different applicative suffixes licensing objects with semantic roles of obliques: one (*-al*) adds a human argument to intransitive, transitive or ditransitive clauses with a semantic role of recipient (‘do to someone’), beneficiary (‘do for someone’), or comitative (‘do with someone’) as in (21). The second applicative suffix (*-e*) adds a (prototypically) non-human object with a semantic role of instrument, manner, or (spatial or temporal) location as in (22). The locative complement may express the origin (as in (52) below), the location or the path but not the goal of a movement.

- (21) *Sama rakk laa génn-al*  
 POSS.1SG youngest FOCCOMP.1SG go.out-APPL1  
 C’est avec ma soeur que je suis sorti [Nouguier Voisin, 2002, p.225]  
 ‘It is with my (younger) sister that I went out’

- (22) *Podoor la jàng-e Tukulóor*

<sup>36</sup> On *baaxle*, Diouf (2003, p.58) indicates that the object should be omitted (as redundant with *-le*); this might be an ongoing evolution in DW since Church’s description is based on Cayor Wolof.

Podoor    FOCCOMP.3SG    learn-APPL2    Pulaar  
 Il a appris le poular à Podor                    [Nouguier Voisin: 228, from Fal, 1999]  
 ‘It is in Podor that he has learnt Pulaar’

Wolof has three distinct reciprocal suffixes (not including a sociative suffix): one (-*e*), which can be characterised as ‘symmetrical reciprocal’, is used for naturally reciprocal events and indicates that an action is performed simultaneously and conversely by at least two different participants on one another (e.g. *gis* ‘to see’, *gis-e* ‘to see each other, to meet’). The (-*ante*) ‘alternating reciprocal suffix’ is not restricted to naturally reciprocal events and does not necessarily refer to simultaneous and converse actions. Lastly, the (-*oo*) reciprocal derivation is often synonym to the alternate reciprocal (-*ante*) but implies a more intimate interaction resulting in a qualitatively different situation, such as *dégg* ‘to hear’, *déggante* (alternate reciprocal) ‘to receive news one from another’ vs. *déggoo* ‘to get along one with each other, to live together in good terms’.

Wolof also distinguishes at least five types of suffixal causatives (not including a no more productive -*e* causative suffix). The suffix -*ali* is used as a completing-causative. Causative verbs derived by means of the -*al* and -*loo* suffixes occur both in typical causative constructions, with the causee in the syntactic role of object: -*al* only applies to intransitive verbs (mostly quality verbs) and expresses a ‘direct causation’ by which an agentive subject (causer) causes a transformation process affecting the new object (causee), as in *weex* ‘to be white’ > *weex-al* ‘to whiten something, or *fees* ‘be full’ > *fees-al* ‘fill’; by contrast, (-*loo*) is not limited to intransitive verbs, and semantically implies indirect causation in which the subject (causer/controller) does not participate in the accomplishment of the action: the causee, in object position, is the real agent of the process as in *jooy* ‘cry’ > *jooy-loo* ‘make cry’, or in (23) > (24); (-*le*) is used for ‘assistive causation’ (e.g. *lekk* ‘to eat’, *lekk-le* ‘to help someone eating’), whereas (-*lu*) is used (exclusively with transitive verbs) when the causee/agent is omitted, as exemplified in (25). Examples and analysis are taken from Creissels and Voisin (2008).

- (23) *Ñaw naa roob*  
 sew PFT.1SG dress  
 ‘I sewed a dress’
- (24) *Ñaw-loo naa ko roob*  
 sew-CAUS5 PFT.1SG O.3SG dress  
 ‘I had him/her sew a dress’
- (25) *Ñaw-lu naa roob*  
 sew-CAUS4 PFT.1SG dress  
 ‘I had a dress sewed’

Verbal suffixes can combine according to specific ordering rules of and compatibility (see Ka, 1981, p. 8 ff.), with a limit a three suffixes. About the reflexive construction, see §3.3.1 and Robert 2020.

#### 4.2.3 Impersonal suffix

Lastly, Wolof has a specific suffix used for impersonal constructions, indicating an unspecified human subject. The expression of the subject argument is blocked by the presence of this (*-ees*) morpheme which appears on the first possible component to which personal marking can be attached, with a very atypical morphosyntax: it can be suffixed to the verb stem as in (26), but also to the relativisers as in (27), or to the complement focus morpheme. For details, see Creissels et al. (2015), from which the following examples are taken.

- (26) *Xam-ees na ko.*  
 know-IMPS PFT.3SG O.3SG  
 ‘One knows that.’
- (27) *n-ees ko-y jëfandikoo*  
 CLn-IMPS O.3SG-IPFV use  
 ‘How is it used?’(lit. which.manner-one uses it)

## 5 Verbs and verb phrases

### 5.1 Bare stems, infinitives and complex predicates

In contrast to other Atlantic languages, Wolof has no infinitive derived with noun class markers. There are two nonfinite verb forms in Wolof, comparable to the bare and the *to* infinitives of

English according to Voisin (2006): the bare stem used for verb phrases in nominal function (subject or object), as in (28), and a marked form in complex predicates in which the bare stem is introduced as a second predicate by an enclitic (=a) morpheme attached<sup>37</sup> to the last preceding component of the verb phrase<sup>38</sup>, in a [VP1=*a* VP2] structure as in (29). When V1 is a movement verb, =*a* is not required (e.g. *dem liggéey* ‘to go working’). This =*a* verbal linker has a perfective meaning and disappears in presence of the *di* imperfective copula in the same function<sup>39</sup>, as in (30). See also §5.3 on auxiliaries.

- (28) [*Sàcc ndënd*                    *yomb na, waaye* ...  
 steal drum                    be.easy PFT.3SG but  
 ‘It is easy to steal a drum, but...’ (lit. stealing a drum is easy) [Voisin, 2006]

- (29) *Moo bëgg=a dem.*  
 FOCUS.3SG want-LINK leave  
 ‘He is the one who wants to leave’.

- (30) (a) *Fale laa ko jot =a gis.*  
 CLF-DIST FOC.COMP.1SG O.3SG reach -LINK see  
 ‘It is over there that I could see him’.  
*Fale laa ko jot di gis*  
 (b) CLF-DIST FOC.COMP.1SG O.3SG reach IPFVCOP see  
 ‘C’est là-bas que j’ai pu le voir habituellement’. [Church, 1981, p.38]  
 ‘It is over there that I *habitually* could see him’.

## 5.2 The verbal system

The Wolof verbal system has a complex morphology and a partly irregular morphosyntax because of its fused character and uncompleted evolution (see §5.2.3). It is characterised by an inflectional morphology whereby modal specifications, and, more remarkably, grammaticalised focus and polarity distinctions have fused with personal and aspectual specifications. Although the original components of these inflections are still largely visible (see Table 20), a synthetic viewing of the verbal paradigms as conjugations or inflectional paradigms is the most coherent

<sup>37</sup> See 6.2.3 on ‘special clitics’.

<sup>38</sup> The last component of the VP1 may be the verb stem, the verb extensional suffix, the verb inflection or an object clitic.

<sup>39</sup> According to Church (1981, p.39), the *-a / di* alternation is reduced to  $\emptyset / di$  in some Wolof variants.

way<sup>40</sup> to present this system in synchrony. Aspect in this language has two levels of organisation: (1) the basic verbal system is organised into primary paradigms (§5.2.1) sharing a common perfective (i.e. completive) value with the utterance moment as reference time (except for the Null tense); (2) these primary paradigms enter into secondary oppositions by means of aspectual, temporal and negative additional markers (§5.2.2), thus imperfective and past reference are derived from the bare (perfective) conjugations, mostly by suffixation.

For more details on the Wolof verbal system, see Robert (1991), for a synthetic account of aspect and tense in Wolof, see Robert (2016a), for a diachronic account, see Becher (2001).

### 5.2.1 The primary conjugations

The Wolof verb constituent has two components: an invariant lexical stem (unless derived) and an inflectional marker conveying the verb's grammatical specifications: the subject indices (or bound person forms) are fused with the other verbal specifications. The inflectional marker is (mostly) preposed, postposed or suffixed to the lexical stem. These inflectional markers function as predicative markers and are obligatory<sup>41</sup> even when there is a lexical subject: in a well-formed sentence, every clause has to contain one (and only one) of them. Moreover, there is no class agreement on the verb (see §3.1.5), the 3rd person holding for all nominal subjects as illustrated in (31) (a) and (b).

- |      |     |                       |           |             |             |
|------|-----|-----------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| (31) | (a) | <i>jigéen</i>         | <i>ji</i> | <i>dafa</i> | <i>xiif</i> |
|      |     | woman                 | CLj-PROX  | FOCV.3SG    | be.hungry   |
|      |     | 'The woman is hungry' |           |             |             |
|      | (b) | <i>xaj</i>            | <i>bi</i> | <i>dafa</i> | <i>xiif</i> |
|      |     | dog                   | CLb-PROX  | FOCV.3SG    | be.hungry   |
|      |     | 'The dog is hungry'   |           |             |             |

<sup>40</sup> While interesting for reconstruction, an analysis breaking down systematically the different inflectional components into separate morphemes leads to many inconsistencies (e.g. about personal markers, compare them in Table 19) or impasses: for instance, splitting up the *la* morpheme for Complement focus into *l-a*, in order to recover the *-a* copula, leads Torrence (2013: 67) to an absurd glossing of *l-* as an expletive element.

<sup>41</sup> On exceptions, see §5.2.3.

The verbal system is thus organised into twelve primary<sup>42</sup> paradigms or conjugations. Their uses and semantic values are presented in 5.2.4. In the affirmative indicative mood, there are three non-focusing conjugations (Perfect<sup>43</sup>, Presentative, and Null tense) and three focusing conjugations (traditionally called ‘emphatic’): Verb focus, Subject focus, and Complement focus. There is also a compound conjugation (Future). Among the primary paradigms, Wolof also has two negative (indicative) conjugations (beside a negative suffix, see §5.2.2, and 6.5.2 on negation), and three injunctive conjugations including a negative one (Imperative, Obligative and Prohibitive). With *lekk* ‘eat’ and *loolu* ‘that’ (anaphoric demonstrative), we find the conjugations presented in Table 19 for the standard DW.

**Table 19: The twelve primary conjugations in Wolof**

	PERFECT	PRESENTATIVE	VERB FOCUS	SUBJECT FOCUS	COMPLEMENT FOCUS
1 SG	<i>lekk naa</i>	<i>maa ngi lekk</i>	<i>dama lekk</i>	<i>maa lekk</i>	<i>loolu laa lekk</i>
2	<i>lekk nga</i>	<i>yaa ngi lekk</i>	<i>danga lekk</i>	<i>yaa lekk</i>	<i>loolu nga lekk</i>
3	<i>lekk na</i>	<i>mu ngi lekk</i>	<i>da(fa) lekk</i>	<i>moo lekk</i>	<i>loolu la lekk</i>
1 PL	<i>lekk nanu</i> <sup>44</sup>	<i>nu ngi lekk</i>	<i>danu lekk</i>	<i>noo lekk</i>	<i>loolu lanu lekk</i>
2	<i>lekk ngeen</i>	<i>yeena ngi lekk</i>	<i>dangeen lekk</i>	<i>yeena lekk</i>	<i>loolu ngeen lekk</i>
3	<i>lekk nañu</i>	<i>ñu ngi lekk</i>	<i>dañu lekk</i>	<i>ñoo lekk</i>	<i>loolu lañu lekk</i>
	NULL TENSE	FUTURE	OBLIGATIVE	NEGATIVE	EMPHATIC NEGATIVE
1 SG	<i>ma lekk</i>	<i>di-naa lekk</i>	<i>naa lekk</i>	<i>lekk-uma</i>	<i>duma lekk</i>
2	<i>nga</i> <sup>45</sup> <i>lekk</i>	<i>di-nga lekk</i>	<i>nanga lekk</i>	<i>lekk-uloo</i>	<i>doo lekk</i>
3	<i>mu ~ ∅ lekk</i>	<i>di-na lekk</i>	<i>na lekk</i>	<i>lekk-ul</i>	<i>du lekk</i>
1 PL	<i>nu lekk</i>	<i>di-nanu lekk</i>	<i>nanu lekk</i>	<i>lekk-unu</i>	<i>dunu lekk</i>
2	<i>ngeen lekk</i>	<i>di-ngeen lekk</i>	<i>nangeen lekk</i>	<i>lekk-uleen</i>	<i>dungeen lekk</i>
3	<i>ñu ~ ∅ lekk</i>	<i>di-nañu lekk</i>	<i>nañu lekk</i>	<i>lekk-uñu</i>	<i>duñu lekk</i>
	IMPERATIVE	PROHIBITIVE			
2 SG	<i>lekk-al</i>	<i>bul lekk</i> <sup>46</sup>			
2 PL	<i>lekk-leen</i>	<i>buleen lekk</i>			

<sup>42</sup> I have labeled these forms ‘primary’ because they do not result from the combination of otherwise existing morphemes.

<sup>43</sup> Concerning the conjugations, in order to avoid confusion, capitalised names are used here for language-specific morphological categories (e.g. Perfect, Verb focus, Future,) but lower case for semantic concepts or functions (e.g. verb focus, perfect, future) which may be expressed in multiple ways across languages.

<sup>44</sup> In Dakar, the first person plural is often identical to the third person plural, i.e. it is pronounced with a palatal nasal instead of a dental one (e.g. *lekk nañu* ‘we have eaten’ instead of *lekk nanu*, or *ñu ngi lekk* ‘we are eating’ instead of *nu ngi lekk*).

<sup>45</sup> In temporal, conditional and relative clauses where the Null tense 2SG marker fuses with the final –u of the subordinating morphem, an –oo fused form appears, probably originating from an archaic –a variant for 2SG (see Pozdniakov and Segerer 2004: 154). This archaic variant is still attested in the Lebu dialect of Bargny and also though rarely, in the Wolof of Cayor (Jean-Léopold Diouf, pc).

<sup>46</sup> For this paradigm, the Null tense inflection (postposed to the *bu* morpheme) replaces the Imperative one for the 1st and 3rd persons (e.g. 1pl *bu ñu lekk*).

The Presentative is a discontinuous form (e.g. *maa ngi lekk* ‘I am eating (here)’) made with a *ng\_* morpheme suffixed with the proximal (-i) or distal (-a) deictic. Noticeably, the Future can be reconstructed as a compound conjugation since it is made up of the Perfect inflection suffixed to the *di* predicative variant of the imperfective marker (§5.2.2). However, from a functional point of view this paradigm can be considered a primary conjugation in so far as, like the other conjugations, it can receive the imperfective and past suffixes (§5.2.2).

Throughout these paradigms, the series of predicative morphemes presented in Table 20 can be identified. Synchronically however these morphemes have merged with the person markers while undergoing various restructuring, so that it is impossible to isolate, across these paradigms, regular series of person markers along with regular verb morphemes. This is why it is more fitting to use the term ‘conjugations’ for this system, even though there can be some non-inflectional variants accompanying the lexical subject. On the origin of these morphemes and irregularities in the system, see §5.2.3.

**Table 20: Basic morphemes of verbal system in DW**

PERFECT	(V) <i>na</i> (postposed)	OBLIGATIVE	<i>na</i> (V) (fronted)
NULL TENSE	∅	IMPERATIVE	-(a)l
PRESENTATIVE	<i>ng + i/a</i> (prox./dist.)		
FUTURE	Imperfective + Perfect		
VERB FOCUS	<i>da</i>	PROHIBITIVE	<i>bu</i>
SUBJECT FOCUS	-a	NEGATIVE	-ul
COMPLEMENT FOCUS	<i>la</i>	EMPH. NEGATIVE	<i>du</i>

### 5.2.2 TAMP suffixes and aspectual system

The perfective aspect is the unmarked value of the system and is analysed in Robert (2016a) as an aspectual by-product of the primary paradigm’s core meaning. It is induced by three different configurations depending on each primary marker’s semantics (§5.2.4): resulting state for the Perfect, temporal presupposition entailed by focusing conjugations, and minimal structuring and a comprehensive view of the process for the Null tense and Presentative. Except for Null

tense, which by definition lacks temporal anchoring (§5.2.4), bare conjugations have a completive value, that is a perfective value with the speech moment as reference time (what some authors label a ‘factative’ value), resulting in different temporal values depending on verb types: dynamic verbs refer to a previously completed, thus past event, while stative verbs refer to a present state, except for the Presentative which, by definition, refers to a current process with all verb types. These primary conjugations can all receive imperfective<sup>47</sup>, past or negative extensions, as presented in Table 21.

**Table 21: The Wolof verb system and its secondary TAMP markers**

<i>Primary verb forms</i>	<i>Secondary markers</i>
zero suffix (perfective)	suffix <i>-y ~ di</i> (imperfective)
zero suffix (present)	suffix <i>-(w)oon</i> (past anterior), suffix <i>-(w)aa(n)</i> (remote past)
zero suffix (affirmative) <sup>48</sup>	suffix <i>-ul</i> (negative)

The imperfective suffix takes on a durative value with Null tense but its aspectual meaning combines with the temporal anchoring of other conjugations to indicate (i) an action in progress at the time of speech for durative dynamic verbs, (ii) a modal present for stative verbs, or, for all verb types (iii) a proximal future as in (32) or (iv) an habitual as in (127) below. The imperfective suffix (*-y*) has a functional competitor *di*, an unbound form which sometimes functions as a predicative morpheme (i.e. as an imperfective copula), and is the basis for the formation of the Future (see Table 19). The (*-ul*) negative suffix and its complementary distribution with negation conjugations are presented in §6.5.2. Two extra affixes combining with negative conjugations deserve to be mentioned here: *-at-* for ‘not anymore’, and *-ag-* for ‘not yet’ as exemplified in (32), with an epenthetic glide.

- (32) *Yow      dee-wag-oo,              dang-a-y              door.*  
 PRO.2SG die-not.yet-NEG.2SG FOCV.2SG-IPFV              begin  
 ‘You, you are not dead yet, you are just beginning.’

<sup>47</sup> With one exception: Perfect cannot combine with the imperfective suffix (*-y*) but combines with the predicative variant (*di*) to form the Future.

<sup>48</sup> Except for negative conjugations.



The *-(w)oon* past suffix is used to refer to a (perfective) past event whose consequences were valid *at* a previous specific moment (compare (33) and (23)). This suffix indicates that the predicated event precedes another event. It is therefore a relative tense. As in many other languages, this past suffix may also denote irrealis as in (34) and (49), and even counter-factual events in subordinate clauses (see §6.4.3). Considering their placement and movement inside the predicative nexus (see examples (72) and (73)), the past suffix and the imperfective suffix actually behave rather like ‘special clitics’ (see §6.2.3) than like ordinary suffixes.

- (33) *Ñaw-oon naa robb.*  
 sew-PST PFT.1SG dress  
 ‘I had sewed a dress’ [at that time]
- (34) *Yow, war-oon nga dee, yow.*  
 you must-PST PFT.2SG die you  
 ‘You, you should have died, you’.

The *-(w)aa(n)* suffix refers to an indeterminate remote past (this suffix is incompatible with a definite moment). This makes it compatible with an habitual meaning (35). While the perfective form (*-aan*) is relatively rare in DW where it only appears in subordinate clauses (35), its imperfective variant (*d-aan*) is well attested.

- (35) *Fu mu dem-aa, ñépp ∅ dàq ko.*  
 CLF:NOTLOC NULL.3SG go-PST.REM CLñ:QNT.TOT NULL.3 chase O.3SG  
 ‘Wherever he went, everyone chased him away.’. [Diouf 2001]

The TAMP suffixes can combine with each other (if need be, past and negative suffixes combine with the *di* variant of the imperfective as in (54)), and are subject to rare combinatory restriction, for structural (e.g. no negative suffix when an equivalent negative conjugation exists) or semantic reasons (e.g. no past suffix on Imperative, no imperfective suffix on Perfect). For a complete chart, see Diouf (2003, pp.36–39).

### 5.2.3 Variants and irregularities in a diachronic perspective

The conjugation system shows some morphosyntactic irregularities pointing to an as yet incomplete evolution to an inflectional system. While in the third person most of the inflectional

forms are retained in presence of a lexical subject, in the manner of true conjugations, the Subject focus, the Presentative, and (more importantly) the Null tense have non-inflectional variants.

For focusing a noun in subject function, the full inflectional form of Subject focus third person may be replaced by the =*a* focus copula. This bound morpheme attaches<sup>49</sup> to the preceding noun phrase (fusing with a vowel when appropriate), as in (36). In the same way, in presence of a lexical subject, the full form of Presentative (e.g. 3SG: NP *mu ngi...*) can alternate with a non-inflected form using this (=a) copula (NP=*a ngi...*).

- (36) *Sàmba moo dem*  
 Samba FOCS.3SG leave  
 ~ *Sàmba =a dem*  
 Samba FOC leave  
 ‘It is Samba who left’

For the **Null tense**, the variant is remarkable since it is a zero marking for both third singular (*mu*) and plural (*ñu*). Moreover, the alternation between the full variant and the zero variant is more constrained and plays an important role in the syntax, pointing to an original pronominal functioning for this inflection: the full variant is required when no other element in the clause takes on the syntactic function of subject, while the zero variant may appear when another element assumes this role, e.g. *Sàmba dem* ‘Samba left’ vs. *mu dem* ‘he left’ (see also (35)). In independent clauses, the full variant may be maintained when the lexical subject (or a demonstrative pronoun) is topicalised (e.g. *Sàmba, mu dem*). In dependent clauses, the alternation between the two variants is strictly constrained by co-reference and syntactic functions. In relative clauses (see §6.4.1) and in related *wh*-questions (§6.5.3) using Null tense, a zero variant of the Null tense will indicate that the relative/interrogative pronoun is in subject function whereas a full variant will be required when the same (fronted) relative/interrogative

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<sup>49</sup> See 6.2.3 on ‘special clitics’.

pronoun is in object (or non-subject) function. This is illustrated by (100) vs. (101) for relative pronoun, or (133) vs. (134) for interrogative pronouns. In the same way, in final clauses, the subject is omitted and the Null tense form has a zero variant (for all persons this time) when it is co-referential with that of the main clause (see §6.4.3).

Based on Becher's (2001) findings, from AW (i.e. 19<sup>th</sup> century Wolof) to DW (contemporary Dakar Wolof), the verbal system underwent significant restructurings and various grammaticalisation processes. This **evolution of the verbal system** explains the mentioned variants as well as numerous morphological or morphosyntactic irregularities in the system. For a complete diachronic account of the Wolof verbal system from AW to DW, see Becher (2001, pp. 88–187, 202–204). The main points are the followings: AW verbal system was based on the **Null tense**, appropriately labelled *Neutralis* by Becher, which was the unique inflectional form used in verbal clauses. This *Neutralis* was made of bare personal indices or pronouns, with a zero morpheme conveying a perfective value. Wolof has then developed a **focus system** with copulas in cleft sentences with the *Neutralis*: *la* for object focus, *na* for (perfective) aspect focus (with a terminative value explaining the semantics of what I have labeled as Perfect in DW), and *a* for Subject focus, combining not with the *Neutralis* but with the autonomous personal pronouns, hence the inflectional differences in DW's paradigm; the Verb focus marker *da(f)* emerged from the grammaticalisation of the verb *def* 'to do' as an auxiliary (followed as such by the =*a* linker, see 5.1), as crosslinguistically well attested pattern for verb focus, before the merging with personal indices blurred its lexical source. Presentative was originally an independent category (already formed with the *ng\_* morpheme suffixed with the spatial vowels) before developing as a subcategory of Subject focus (as visible in part of its inflectional morphemes and in the copulative variant mentioned above), the Subject focus markers (namely the original independent pronouns and the =*a* copula) becoming obligatory.

In all cases, the personal indices (independent pronouns or Neutralis indices) have merged with the focus morphemes in DW, and some inflections were partially realigned by morphological analogy, creating irregularities in the system. In the new DW system, the former Neutralis acquired different uses (see §5.2.4). However, the copulative (or verbal) origin of these inflectional morphemes is still visible in their uses in non-verbal clauses in DW (see §6.2.4), in non-agreeing forms of the Complement focus (see (38) and footnote 52), as well as in the variants mentioned above.

Moreover, AW had two more **moods** that have been lost as such in DW: a conditional (*kon ~ koon*) and an optative (*-onté*). According to Becher's reconstruction, the DW Obligative originates from the reanalysis of a verbal construction (well attested in AW) with an auxiliary verb *ela ~ yal(a)* 'to be necessary' at the perfective Aspect Focus form (i.e. with the *na* Perfect morpheme in DW). The verbal head was then lost and the *na* morpheme became the headed inflected marker. Hence the homophony of Perfect and Obligative in DW which however have a distinct morphosyntax (i.e. postposed vs. preposed to the verb stem).

As for the aspectual system, the perfective was already unmarked in AW. The **imperfective** aspect was originally marked by an *a* copula which has been lost in DW<sup>50</sup>; the *di* copula, originally used for *non-verbal* predicates (with a disappeared *do* competitor), has first grammaticalised as a variant for the former imperfective *a*, and then developed an *-y* suffixal variant, which tends to replace *di* in DW. The copulative origin of *di* explains its morphosyntactic specificities with regard with *-y* (see Robert 2016a), and probably also the imperfective form required for most inflections in non-verbal clauses (see §6.2.4).

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<sup>50</sup> However Church (1981: 107) mentions *-a* as a variant of *-y* for different verbal inflections in Lebu and in the Wolof spoken in Saint-Louis as well as in Saloum.

Concerning the temporal morphemes, for the **future**, AW combined an *-i* verbal extension (originating from the still existing itive or centrifugal derivational suffix *-i*) with the imperfective copula *di*. This future has been lost in DW and replaced in this function by the Future conjugation which originates from the AW imperfective aspectual focus formed with the *di* variant (DW *di-naa dem* ‘I will go’ vs. AW ‘I am going’)<sup>51</sup>. For the **past**, AW used an *oon* morpheme (preserved in DW), originating from an adverb meaning ‘in other times’, with a greater syntactic freedom than in DW. For **negation**, AW used the sole suffix *-ul* combining with all predicative forms. The fusion of the personal and aspectual markers in DW has blurred the system and produced a complicated chart combining two negative inflections and affirmative inflections with a negative suffix (see §6.5.2).

#### 5.2.4 On the semantics of the verbal system

This section gives a brief outline of the semantics of the conjugations. On injunctive conjugations, see §6.5.1; on the negative inflections and negation system, see §6.5.2.

The three focusing conjugations are used according to the syntactic function of the focused constituent (subject, verb, or complement, i.e., any other constituent). Their canonical (and defining) uses as focusing conjugations are presented in §6.1.1. A few other characteristics deserve to be mentioned here. First, the **Complement focus** has a complex structure: this paradigm consists of inflectional markers (e.g. 1SG *laa*) encoding both the focusing of the preposed (fronted) complement, and the subject indices and aspectual component (perfective when not suffixed by *-y*) of the following predicate as in (37). When not topicalised, the lexical subject appears between the Complement focus marker and the predicate: in this case, the

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<sup>51</sup> Hence the dissymmetry for the Perfect in DW, see footnote 47.

Complement focus does not agree with the subject and always appears in the third singular (bare) form<sup>52</sup>, as in (38).

(37) *Tey jii laa la gën-a fonk.*  
 today CLj:DEM.PROX FOCOMP.1SG O.2SG be.more-LINK be.thoughtful.of  
 ‘It is today that I respect you most.’

(38) *Tool yi la beykat yi bey.*  
 field CLY:PROX FOCOMP.3SG farmer CLY:PROX farm  
 ‘It is the fields that the farmers cultivate.’

**Subject focus** has three main uses in discourse, subject identification being only the prototypical one<sup>53</sup>:

- Identification or qualitative designation of the subject, i.e. subject focusing (see (55) below)
- Definition or explanation of the current situation (39)
- Exclamation with an intensification of the verb (40)

This remarkable intensive meaning conveyed by Subject focus is only possible for verbs expressing a measurable quality (essentially scalar stative verbs).

(39) *Kebe moo am alal, moo tax nit ñi di ko topp.*  
 Kebe FOC3.3SG have wealth FOC3.3SG cause human CLñ-PROX IPFVCOP O.3SG follow  
 ‘Kebe, (it is because) he has money that the people come to him.’  
 (lit. KEBE has money, that is why people follow him).

(40) *Kii, moo ñàkk fayda!*  
 CLK-DEM.PROX FOC3.3SG lack resolution  
 ‘How spineless is this person!’ (lit. this one, HE lacks resolution)

In the same way, **Verb focus** has four main uses in discourse. Remarkably, the last two uses are conditioned by the verb type and are actually the most common ones:

- contrastive focus on the lexical content of the verb: possible with all verb types but marginal

<sup>52</sup> These examples of plural subjects with a third singular form (i.e. non-agreeing) of the Complement focus are remnants of the copulative origin of this form, see 5.2.3.

<sup>53</sup> For a detailed account of these various uses according to discourse chaining, see Robert (1991) or (2010b).

- focus on the truth value (or assessment) of the predicate (see §6.1.1)
- explanation: most common value for dynamic verbs as in (41) or (43)
- simple predication or mere statement<sup>54</sup>: most common value for the stative verbs expressing a quality or property as in (42) below or (31) above ; not possible for dynamic verbs

- (41) *Dañu dem.* (dynamic verb)  
 FOCV.3PL go  
 ‘Actually, they left’ ~ ‘it is because they left’ (confirmation or explanation)
- (42) *Dafa liw.* (stative quality verb)  
 FOCV.3SG feel.cold  
 ‘It is cold’. (unmarked statement)

The three focusing inflections can be used in non-verbal clauses but two of them require the imperfective suffix for this, see 6.2.4.

The **Perfect** has resultative meaning: it indicates that a process (already known to be ongoing) has henceforth reached its expected end-point or term so that a stable resulting state has been obtained at the time of speech. This point is clearly illustrated by the following contrast: in order to inform the interlocutor that a woman has given birth, for instance as an explanation of why she looks tired, the Verb focus conjugation (43) is used rather than the Perfect. In fact, the Perfect can only be used in order to announce that the expected event has now happened (44). If this Perfect sentence were used without such a background, the interlocutor would certainly say that he did not even know that she was pregnant.

- (43) *Dafa wasin.*  
 FOCV.3SG give.birth  
 ‘She gave birth (that’s why she’s tired).’
- (44) *Wasin na.*  
 give.birth PRF.3SG

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<sup>54</sup> This remarkable use can be explained by the specificity of the Wolof verbal system lacking of a simple present. For a detailed explanation of this point, see Robert (2010b); for a full account of the various uses of Verb focus, see Robert (1991, pp. 69-116).

‘(There) she has given birth.’

Depending on context and clause chaining, emphasis can be placed on different components of this definition. But here again, the verb type produces a remarkable conditioning resulting in different meanings. With dynamic (or action) verbs that take place over time and have a temporal term, this conjugation indicates that temporal variation or instability is now eliminated, hence the past interpretation of the process. It provides the classical attributes of perfect conjugations such as ‘to have finished doing *p*’ or ‘to have already done *p*’. Depending on the context, emphasis can also be placed on the resulting state as in (45).

- (45) *Yow*      *Yalla*      *tàccu*      *na*      *la!*  
                   God          applaud      PRF.3SG      O.2SG  
 ‘You, God has applauded you’, a formulaic expression meaning ‘you are lucky’

With stative verbs, due to their aspectual properties (they have no temporal phases and no unfolding over time), the elimination of variation or instability at the time of speech corresponds to the elimination of the **epistemic** variation surrounding the predicate, with a present reading. The Perfect indicates here that there is no (more) doubt concerning the assertion with several possible contextual meanings: expected conformity (46), agreement of the speaker, polemic or decisive assertion (for more details see Robert, 1991, pp. 52–67; Robert, 2016a).

- (46) [a person who was looking for a rope of a certain length]  
*Buum*      *bi*                      *gudd*              *na.*  
 rope      CLb:PROX      be.long              PRF.3SG  
 ‘(All is well) the rope is long (enough)’ [gloss: we’ve found it at long last!]

The **Presentative** reports the current state of affairs by situating the predicative relationship in the speaker's space-time. More specifically, this conjugation indicates that the process is happening now, at the moment of the speech act, in a place close (*vs.* remote) to the speaker’s space, as indicated by the spatial suffix, (*-i*) for proximal (57) and (*-a*) for distal (47). By definition, both dynamic and stative verbs have an (on going) present reading (compare (57)



and (62)). Stative verbs rarely seem to be used in independent clauses with the Presentative, but are common with this conjugation in paratactic structures (see Robert 2010a).

- (47) *Mu ng-a dëkk ca dëkk ba.*  
 PRST.3SG PRST-DIST live LOC:DIST town CLb:DIST  
 ‘(At present) he is living in the town far away’.

The **Null tense** (elsewhere referred to as Narrative, Minimal or Aorist) holds a special place in the system, defined by its being the only non-tensed conjugation. With this conjugation, the process is anchored (or located) in an unspecified situation: the event is not located in time, nor is the speaker committed to it. Therefore lacking in temporal and modal specifications, the sentence is not a complete assertion and the clause *depends* on some extra-clausal element (or locator) to specify in which situation this event is located and true. This is what I have dubbed ‘situational dependency’ and ‘situational anaphora’ (for details, see Robert, 1991; 2010a). The nature of the situational locator and its integration in the Null tense clause is the variable determining the various degrees of dependency displayed by the Null tense clauses, which range from assertive to syntactic dependency, and extend from discourse coherence to embedding. This analysis accounts for the various uses of the Null tense: on the one hand, this conjugation is common in proverbs (48) and obligatory for narration in tales, in which it actually occurs after an initial time-setting verbal form extended with the past suffix; on the other hand, it is used in *wh*-questions (see §6.5.3), in echo-questions, in injunctions (§6.5.1), and can be considered as *the* subordinating mood since it is obligatory with most of the subordinating conjunctions (see §6.4, and the *ba*-subordinate clause in (52) below), and is also the only conjugation allowing the construction of subordinating clauses (namely complement, as in (49), or final clauses) without subordinating morphemes.

- (48) *Ku ∅ muñ, ∅ muuñ.*  
 CLK:NOTLOC NULL.3SG be.patient NULL.3SG smile  
 ‘The one who is patient will smile.’ (Patience is rewarded) [proverb]

- (49) *Dama bëggoon ngeen àndal ma-ak sama doom.*  
 FOCV.1SG like:PST NULL.2PL accompany O.1SG-with POSS.1SG child  
 ‘I would like you (to) accompany my daughter for me.’

Lastly, being formed with the Perfect, the **Future** inflection expresses a future of certainty indicating that an event will necessarily take place at some future moment, distinct from the time of speech (50). This epistemic component is especially visible in the fact that it is difficult to use this conjugation if an element of uncertainty is introduced, as in (51). By contrast, the future expressed by the imperfective suffix corresponds to a probable and proximal future in continuity with the time of speech, it is therefore possible in (51) (b). Future is a future of prediction. It implies that once a condition is fulfilled, the event will necessarily take place.

- (50) *Dina doy*  
 FUT.3SG suffice  
 ‘This will be enough.’ [gloss: it is certain]
- (51) (a) ? *Dinaa dem Dakaar bu ma amee pas.*  
 FUT.1SG leave Dakar when:NOTLOC O.3SG have:ANTER fare  
 ‘I will go to Dakar if I have a ticket.’
- (b) *Dama-y dem Dakaar bu ma amee pas.*  
 FOCV.1SG-IPFV leave Dakar when:NOTLOC O.3SG have:ANTER fare  
 ‘(it is that) I will go’ ~ ‘I am going to Dakar if I have a ticket.’

### 5.2.5 A compound form: the Occasional

A last compound form deserves to be mentioned since its meaning is not so obviously deducible from the meaning of its components. The Future may take the imperfective suffix (-y) in which case it no longer has a future meaning but rather indicates that an event happens sporadically or occasionally, from a temporal perspective (52). From a subjective perspective, it indicates uncertainty, improbability.

- (52) *Dina-y liggéey bant ba nga yaakaar*  
 FUT.1SG-IPFV work wood until NULL.2SG believe  
*ni biti-m réw la jóg-é.*  
 COMP exterior:CLM country FOCOMP.3SG rise-APPL2  
 ‘At times he works the wood so well that it looks like it’s imported.’

### 5.3 Auxiliaries

Beside the quotative verb used to introduce ideophones (see §2.2), Wolof also has a very rich system of auxiliaries adding to the originality of Wolof and stressing the central role played by the verb in this language. The auxiliaries are often without equivalents in English, and must therefore be translated with adverbs, even though they are indeed verbs. They may add various temporal, aspectual or modal specifications to the dependent verb, which is introduced by the (-a) linker or the *di* imperfective copula (see §5.1). For example, *dal di*, ‘do immediately’; *doog~soog~sog* ‘do for the first time, then do, do before to’; *door, tàmbali, sog, dal* ‘begin’; *faf* ‘end up by doing, resign oneself to doing’; *faral* ‘do often’; *géj* ‘not have done for a long time’; *guddee* ‘do late in the day’; *naaje* ‘do late in the morning’; *mas* ‘already have experienced’; *namm* ‘intend to’; *tàmm* ‘be used to doing’; *xal* ‘end up by doing, do in the end’; *xas* ‘do irreversibly’; *xaw* ‘almost do, be a little’; or *nar* ‘be on the point of, have the intention of doing’. They are also numerous modal auxiliaries (e.g. *bëgg* ‘want’, *war* ‘must’, *mën* ‘can’).

For a more complete list, see Church (1981, pp. 50–65). Church distinguishes between auxiliary verbs with no lexical uses (e.g. *sog, xaw*), verbs with lexical uses but mostly used as auxiliaries (e.g. *bëgg* ‘like’ vs. ‘want’), and lexical verbs with occasional uses as auxiliaries (e.g. *diis* ‘be heavy (to...)', *doy* ‘be enough’ vs. ‘be useful to...’). He indicates that 40% of the stative verbs and only 7% of dynamic verbs in his list can be used as auxiliaries. For a syntactic analysis of the various auxiliaries, see Voisin (2006).

## 6 The clause and beyond

### 6.1 Information structure

Due to the grammaticalisation of focus marking in the verbal system (§5.2.1), a choice about information structure must be made in Wolof for every clause, in order to select the appropriate

verbal inflection. The focusing conjugations are obligatory whenever a constituent (whatever its syntactic function) is the ‘rheme’ (i.e. the informative part of the utterance or commentary) in the information structure of the sentence. These prototypical (and defining) focusing uses are presented in the next section (for other uses and meanings see §5.2.4). The four non-focusing conjugations indicate that the rheme is *not* a syntactic constituent as such (on the semantics of these conjugations, see §5.2.4). With the Perfect, the informational content consists of the terminative component of the process, which can be considered as an aspect or ‘auxiliary’ focus. With the Future emphasis is laid on the modal (certainty) and temporal (delay) components of the predicate, however this conjugation does not involve any presupposition and thus any focus<sup>55</sup>. In the same way, with the Presentative and the Null tense, the clause does not contain any presupposition nor any sub-structuration concerning the informational content: the whole clause is rhematic. Thus the Presentative can be used forthetic (present) clauses, while the Null tense, lacking temporal anchoring and commitment, has a special assertive status (‘situational dependency’). About the negative forms (including negative focus), see §6.5.2, and for injunctive forms, see §6.5.1.

### 6.1.1 Focus

It is worth noting that, since the former copulas have fused with the personal markers to form inflectional focusing paradigms, one cannot consider focused clauses in DW as cleft sentences<sup>56</sup> *stricto sensu*, as sometimes claimed: focused clauses in contemporary Wolof are made of one and only one predicative marker, the focusing conjugation, and are not bi-clausal. All focused constituents appear clause initially and are followed by the focusing conjugation. A focused verb (or predicate) remains *in situ*.

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<sup>55</sup> For a definition of focus, see e.g. Robert (2010b).

<sup>56</sup> Robert (2010b) alternatively proposes the concept of ‘split assertion’.

The three focusing conjugations are used according to the syntactic function of the focused constituent (subject, verb, or ‘complement’, i.e., any other constituent). Their uses go beyond the case of contrastive, exclusive or replacing focus; for instance, they are also used in *wh*-questions (see §6.5.3), and are obligatory in the replies to such questions as in (53), and are actually extremely frequent in discourse.

- (53) - *N-a(n) nga tudd?*  
 CLn-Q FOCOMP.2SG be.named  
 ‘What is your name?’ (lit. HOW are you named?)  
 - *Kumba laa tudd.*  
 Kumba FOCOMP.1SG be.named  
 ‘My name is Kumba.’ (lit. I am named KUMBA)

The Complement focus is used for focusing any complement, be it a direct object with patient semantic role as in (39) or oblique role specified by applicative suffixes as in (21) or (22), or in a genitival construction (as in (67) below), or a temporal complement as in (37), a prepositional phrase or even temporal clause as (54). On the morphosyntax of the Complement focus, see §5.2.4. Note that with these mono-clausal forms, the focused complement is fronted and not followed by a resumptive pronoun.

- (54) [*Bi ma d-oon bey sama tool-u baay*] *laa gis gaynde.*  
 when:PROX NULL.1SG IPFVCOP-PST farm POSS.1SG field- father FOCOMP.1SG see lion  
 GEN.SG  
 ‘It was [when I was farming my father’s field] that I saw the lion.’ [Church, 1981, p.130]

The subject-focusing form is required for the prototypical subject identification as in (36) or (55). When present, the nominal or pronominal focused subject is fronted and indexed in the inflection, as visible in (39) or (96).

- (55) *Moo-y dagg sa xol.*  
 FOC.S.3SG.IPFV cut POSS.2SG heart  
 ‘That is what breaks your heart.’

Since verb focus is grammaticalised in the verbal inflection, the same Verb focus paradigm is used for all kinds of focus on the lexical content of the verb, be it contrastive, polar, parallel, selective, exclusive, replacing (56) or completive verb focus as in (57). Its uses also include focus on the assessment or truth-value of the predicate as in (41) above, and extend to the whole predicate (i.e. including verb and complements) as in (58).

(56) *Wax-uma la sax rekk lekk, dama ko wann*  
 tell-NEG.1SG 0.2SG even only eat FOCV.1SG 0.3SG gobble  
 ‘I have not just eaten it, I have devoured it’  
 (lit. I do not just say only ‘eat’, in fact I ‘devoured’ it)

(57) – *Loo def ak mburu mi ?*  
 CL:NOTLOC.NULL.2SG do with bread CLM:PROX  
 ‘What did you do with the bread?’  
 – *Dama ko lekk.*  
 FOCV.1SG 0.3SG eat  
 ‘Actually, I ate it.’

(58) – *Loo bëgg ?*  
 CL:NOTLOC.NULL.2SG want  
 ‘What do you want?’  
 – *Dama la soxla, seriñ.*  
 FOCV.1SG 0.2SG need master  
 ‘It happens that I need you, master.’

As it is the case in many languages, verb focus also often conveys an intensive value (‘really’), visible in contrast to the Perfect conjugation in (59), and also an explanatory value in particular (but not exclusively) with dynamic verbs as in (60).

(59) *Bëgg naa dem ≠ Dama beg=a dem*  
 want PRF.1SG leave FOCV.1SG want-LINK leave  
 ‘I want to leave’ ‘I firmly intend to leave’

(60) – *Néeg bii mu ngi sedd !*  
 room CLb:DEM.PROX PRST.3SG PRST:PROX be.cold  
 ‘This room is cold!’  
 – *Paa bi dafa dindi palanteer bi*  
 daddy CLb:PROX FOCV.3SG remove shutter CLb:PROX  
 ‘(It is because) Daddy has removed the shutter’

On focus and negation, see §6.5.2.

### 6.1.2 Topic

Arguments or adjuncts can be topicalised by fronting and a melodic marking using a pause and a specific melodic contour for substructuration (Rialland and Robert, 2001). Due to the morphosyntax of focused clauses, this marked topicalisation is obligatory in two cases: for a fronted lexical subject used in a clause containing the Complement focus (61), and for a lexical object moved into initial position without being focused. In the second case, when a topicalised object is moved from postverbal, as in (62)a, to initial position, as in (62)b, there will always be both a pause and an anaphoric pronominal object.

- (61) \**Péer mburu mi la lekk*  
*Péer | mburu mi la lekk.*  
 Peter (PAUSE) bread CLM:PROX FOCOMP.3SG eat  
 'As for Peter, it was bread he ate.' [pause: prosodically marked topicalisation]

- (62) a *Lekk na mburu mi.*  
 eat PRF.3SG bread CLM:PROX  
 'He ate the bread.'
- b *Mburu mi, | lekk na ko.*  
 bread CLM:PROX (PAUSE) eat PRF.3SG O.3SG  
 'That bread, he ate it.' [initial object: obligatory pause]

Finally, let us point out that in Wolof, apparently there can be no cataphoric pronominal reference to a following topicalised term (antitopic).

For a generative account of focus and topic, simple or complex clauses' structures (including relative and interrogative clauses, and some other issues), see Torrence (2013).

## 6.2 The structure of the simple clause

### 6.2.1 Word order and basic clause structure

For the canonical verbal predication, Wolof has a relatively rigid SVOX constituent order as illustrated in (63), except when the clause contains a focused complement (see §6.1.1). 'V' refers here to the verbal constituent made of two components, the lexical stem and the

inflectional part. This inflectional part has a variable positioning, as visible in Table 19 and schematised in Table 22 below. Inside this verbal nucleus, only TAMP morphemes (see §5.2.2) and clitics (see *infra* §6.2.3) can be inserted.

(63)	(S)	(V)	(O)	(X)
	<i>Paa bi</i>	<i>dafa dindi</i>	<i>palanteer bi</i>	<i>ci sama néeg.</i>
	daddy CLb:PRO X	FOCV.3SG remove	window CLb:PROX	LOC:PRO POSS.1SG room X
	‘Daddy did removed the window in my room.’			
	~ ‘(it is because) daddy has removed the window in my room’			

Wolof is a language with accusative alignment but no case distinction: the distinction between subjects and objects is marked by constituent order, by indexation or by focusing conjugations (6.1.1). The verbal inflections (or conjugations) function as predicative markers and are obligatory<sup>57</sup> even when there is a lexical subject. The subject is thus always indexed in the verbal inflection (without class agreement). As in some other Atlantic languages, the object is not indexed in the verb but may be represented by a clitic when pronominalised. On clitics’ position, see §6.2.3.

Wolof has intransitive (64), transitive (63) and ditransitive (65) clauses using the same set of verbal inflections.

(64)	<i>Paa bi</i>	<i>dafa</i>	<i>sonn.</i>				
	daddy CLb:PROX	FOCV.3SG	be.tired				
	‘Daddy is tired.’						
(65)	<i>Paa bi</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>ngi</i>	<i>laaj</i>	<i>Adji</i>	<i>caabi</i>	<i>bi.</i>
	daddy CLb:PROX	PRES.3SG	PRES:PROX	ask	Adji	key	CLb:PROX
	‘Daddy is asking Adji for the key.’ (lit. is asking Adji the key)						

For details on verb types (including ‘avalent’ verbs with impersonal uses) and argument structure, see Nougier Voisin (2002, pp. 76–88). It is worth mentioning that, although the

<sup>57</sup> About non-inflectional variants, see §5.2.3, about exceptional nominal clauses without predicative markers, see §6.2.4.



middle suffix displays decausative uses, Wolof lacks a true passive construction (Nouguier Voisin, 2002, p.120). About the reflexive construction, see §3.3.1 and Robert 2020 for details.

### 6.2.2 Non subject complements

There is no formal distinction between direct and ‘indirect’ objects. Thanks to the numerous verbal extensions modifying the verb valence, this language has a very synthetic syntax: prepositions do exist (see (63) and §2.2) but most of the time, non-subject arguments appear as direct objects, their semantic role being specified by the verb’s meaning, their position, and the verbal extensions (see §4.2.2). With nominal objects, the preferred order is patient (or theme) after the recipient/beneficiary<sup>58</sup>, as in (66)(a), but the reverse order is possible, as in (66)(b), in particular with non derived ditransitive verbs. However, a clitised object (whatever its semantic role) always comes first (see next §6.2.3) because it belongs to the verbal nexus.

- (66) (a) *Abdu may na Momar xaaalis.*  
 Abdu offer PFT.3SG Momar money  
 (b) *Abdu may na xaaalis Momar*  
 Abdu offer PFT.3SG money Momar.  
 ‘Abdu has given Momar money.’

Moreover, Fal (1999, pp. 110–111) indicates the possibility for some verbs, including intransitive quality verbs, to have an internal object, as in (67).

- (67) *Dox-in-u ramatu la-y dox*  
 walk-MNR-GEN sparrow FOCCOMP.3SG-IPFV walk  
 ‘He is walking like a sparrow’ (lit. it is a sparrow’s walk that he is walking) [Fal, 1999, p.111]

On prepositional phrases, see Fal (1999, pp.111 ff.).

<sup>58</sup> Probably because the beneficiary is human.

### 6.2.3 Clitic placement

There is one single set of object clitics (see Table 16), which show no class agreement. Clitics are integrated into the verbal nexus. Due to the split of the verb phrase into two components and the variable positioning of the inflectional part, the position of subject indices and object clitics vary across conjugations, following a general principle: object clitics (spelled here ‘o’) always come after subject indices (spelled here ‘s’), as described in Table 22 (adapted from Nouguié Voisin, 2002: 50).

**Table 22: Clitic’s position in the verb phrase (‘s’ for subject indexed in the inflection, ‘o’ for object clitic, V for verb stem)**

<b>so</b> <b>V</b>	Verb focus (68), Subject focus, Complement focus, Emphatic Negative, Presentative, Obligative, Future, Null tense in most subordinate clauses (112)
<b>Vs</b> <b>o</b>	Perfect (69), Imperative, Negative
<b>sV</b> <b>o</b>	Null tense in independent clauses (70), injunctions, and in some subordinate clauses <sup>59</sup>

(68) *Dafa ko lekk.*  
FOCV.3SG o.3SG eat  
‘He did eat it.’ ~ ‘(It is because) he ate it.’

(69) *Lekk na ko.*  
eat PRF.3SG o.3SG  
‘He has eaten it.’

(70) [in a narrative]  
... *Mu lekk ko, ...*  
NULL.3SG eat o.3SG  
‘... He ate it, ...’

The short forms of locative and manner deictic adverbs, *fi/fa* and *ni/na* (see Table 17), as well as the locative-partitive adverbial pronoun *ci* (see §3.3.3), follow the same placement rules as object clitics, as visible in (71) compared to (68), or in (16) compared to (69).

(71) *Dafa fa lekk.*  
FOCV.3SG CLf:DIST eat  
‘He did eat there.’ ~ ‘(It is because) he ate there.’

<sup>59</sup> For details on clitic objects with the Null tense or ‘Minimal’, see Church (1981, pp.83–91) and Robert (1991, p.230).

Noticeably, as part of the verbal nexus, all these clitics attract the TAM suffixes, i.e. the imperfective (-y) and temporal (-oon) ones, as illustrated in (72) and (73).

- (72) *Dafa-y*      *lekk*      *mburu*      *mi*      >      *Dafa*      *ko-y*      *lekk.*  
 FOCV.3SG-IPFV    eat            bread      CLm:PROX      FOCV.3SG    O.3SG-IPFV    eat  
 ‘(It is because) he is going to eat the bread’      >      ... ‘he is going to eat it’
- (73) *Gis-uma-woon*      *Moodu*      >      *Gis-uma*      *ko-woon*  
 see-NEG.1SG-PST      Moodu                      see-NEG.1SG      O.3SG-PST  
 ‘I had not seen Moodu.’      >      ‘I had not seen him’

These Wolof TAM markers deserve a special mention. Voisin (2006) categorises them, along with the (=a) focus particle (see 5.2.3) and the (=a) the verbal linker for complex predicates (see §5.1), as ‘**special clitics**’, following Anderson and Zwicky’s (2003) definition: these phonologically dependent morphemes are necessarily incorporated into an adjacent word through ‘Stray Adjunction’, which results in a clitic’s attaching to a word with which it has no (or even a counter-intuitive) syntactic affiliation. In Wolof, the enclitic behavior of the TAM suffixes may result in their attachment to a clitic object pronoun whereas their semantic scope is on the verb inflection, as it is the case in (72) and (73). See also the remarkable placement of the verbal linker and the object clitic in (30)(a).

When there is a **double object**, the cliticised one always appears first, before the nominal one (74). When both objects are clitics, ‘dative’ (i.e recipient or beneficiary) generally comes first (75) but the placement is also constrained by person hierarchy, which generates ambiguities: first person comes first and third person last (1>2>3), as illustrated in (76), and singular (77) tends to appear before plural (for details see Church, 1981, pp.80–95).

- (74) *Jàngal*      *na*      *ma*      *Wolof.*  
 learn-CAUS1    PRF.3SG    O.2SG      Wolof  
 ‘S/he has taught me Wolof.’
- (75) *Jàngal*      *na*      *ma*      *ko.*      [beneficiary > object]  
 learn-CAUS1    PRF.3SG    O.2SG    O.3SG  
 ‘S/he has taught it (to) me.’

- (76) *Jox na ma la.* [first > second person]  
 give PRF.3SG O.1SG O.2SG  
 ‘He has given me (to) you’ or ‘He has given you (to) me’
- (77) *Jox na la nu.* [singular > plural]  
 give PRF.3SG O.2SG O.1PL  
 He has given you (to) us’ or ‘He has given us (to) you’

#### 6.2.4 Nonverbal clauses

As predicative markers, most verbal inflections are also used in various types of non-verbal predicates, in accordance with their meaning in verbal clauses. Noticeably, Perfect is not used anymore in non-verbal predicates<sup>60</sup>. There are five types of very common non-verbal predications in DW, using different inflections<sup>61</sup>. Some of them require the imperfective suffix for these non-verbal uses. For more details, see Robert (1991, pp.159–164).

Presentative is commonly used for presentative or locative predications (78), Complement focus (in the perfective bare form) for ascriptive predications indicating that an entity N1 is defined or characterised as being a N2 (79).

- (78) *Ñu nga fa.*  
 PRES.3PL PRES:DIST CLF:DIST  
 ‘They are overthere.’
- (79) *Man, nit (rekk) laa.*  
 PRO.1SG human.being only FOCOMP.1SG  
 ‘Me, I am (only) a human being’ (i.e. I am not a superman, I am not a dog)

This ascriptive predication must be distinguished from the identificational predication formed with the imperfective Subject focus. The latter is used either with an intensive value indicating that, among a set of other possibilities, an entity (N1) is identified as being a/the real N2 (80),

<sup>60</sup> As it was in AW according to Kobès (1869, p.273).

<sup>61</sup> An ellipsis of the verb *doon* ‘to be, to exist’ would not make sense here.

or to identify an element with another (X is Y), as in (81). In this case, there must be a strict identity between X and Y, that is why the Subject focus is required in (81), *Tugël* being the Wolof word for designating France (X=Y), but is not possible in (82) where the Complement focus is required to characterise ‘*Tugël* and *France*’ (X) as being one and the same thing (X=1). These two non-verbal predications also contrast with the explanatory predication formed with the imperfective Verb focus, indicating that an entity has the quality of being a X (=N) as an explanation of a situation (83).

- (80) *Kii, moo-y suma xarit !*  
 CLK:DEM.PROX FOC.S.3SG-IPFV POSS.1SG friend  
 ‘S/he is my (real close) friend’.
- (81) - ‘*Tugël mooy lan?*  
*Tugël FOC.S.3SG-IPFV CLL:Q*  
 ‘What is ‘*Tugël*?’  
 - *Tugël mooy France*  
*Tugël FOC.S.3SG-IPFV France*  
 ‘*Tugël*, that is *France*.’
- (82) *Tugël ak France benn la.*  
*Tugël with France one FOC.COMP.3SG*  
 ‘*Tugël* and *France*, that is the same thing’ (lit. *Tugël* and *France* is one)
- (83) *Damay naar rekk, mootax mu suufeel ma.*  
 FOC.V.1SG Moore only IPFV NULL.3SG underneath:VBLZ:CAUS1 O.1SG  
 ‘(It is only because) I am a Moore, that is why he looks down on me.’

Lastly, the Emphatic Negative inflection is used to form negative equational predications (84), indicating that an entity (N1) is not a (N2).

- (84) *Man, duma sa xarit.*  
 PRO.1SG NEG.EMPH.1SG POSS.2SG friend  
 ‘(Me), I am not your friend.’

In addition, the Null Tense in the imperfective form can also be used in non-verbal clauses but in more restricted contexts. According to the general dependent value of the Null tense, this form is not used in independent assertive clauses (compare (85) with (80)). It may appear in

chained clauses in narratives (86), in dependent clauses (87) or in modally marked answers in dialogues.

- (85) \* *Kii mu-y suma xarit*  
 CLK:DEM.PROX NULL.3SG-IPFV POSS.1SG friend
- (86) *Ndax yóñent Yàlla, Nohun, amoon na doom. Mu-y Kanhan.*  
 because messenger Allah Nohum have:PST PRF.3SG descendant NULL.3SG-IPFV Kanhan  
 ‘For, Allah’s messenger, Nohun, had a son. It was Kanhan.’
- (87) *Su-ma dugg-ee ci bitik, gis dara, mu-y*  
 if-NULL.1SG enter-ANT LOC:PROX shop see thing NULL.3SG-IPFV  
*lu ma neex, dama ko-y jénd.*  
 CL:NOTLOC O.1SG be.agreeable FOCV.1SG O.1SG-IPFV buy  
 ‘If I head into a store, see something I like, I do buy it.’ (lit. see a thing, **it-is** what pleases me)

Finally, a specific pattern of non-verbal clauses, without predicative markers this time, has been reported by Fal (2011). It consists of a binary structure with two noun phrases (88) or bare infinitives (89) separated by pause (symbolised here by ‘:’). According to Fal, these equative sentences without predicative markers are used in persuasive speech with a gnomic value. Most of them are well known proverbs (see also (48) and (100) below) but the pattern is still productive.

- (88) *mbër : doole*  
 wrestler strenght  
 ‘lutteur: force’ (c’est la force qui fait le lutteur) [Fal, 2011, p.203]  
 ‘wrestler : force’ i.e. ‘the strength makes the wrestler’
- (89) *yàkkamti : yàqule*  
 be.in.hurry suffer.harm  
 ‘être pressé: subir un revers’ (trop de précipitation nuit) [Fal, 2011, p.203]  
 ‘be in a hurry: receive a setback’ i.e. ‘too much hurry can be a challenge’

## 6.3 Coordination and paratactic clause chaining

### 6.3.1 Coordination

Verbal coordination is distinct from nominal coordination. The conjunction *te* is used for coordinating verbs or clauses (90), whereas the comitative/instrumental preposition (*ak*) is used

for nouns, nominal phrases and pronouns (91). Depending on the semantics of the two coordinated predicates, *te* can take on an oppositive (‘yet’) value.

(90) *Kimmil te delloo ma sama sigaret*  
 take.puff COORD.V return:CAUS2:[IMP.SG] O.1SG POSS.1SG cigarette  
 ‘Take a puff and give me back my cigarette’

(91) *man ak yow*  
 PRO.1SG with PRO.2SG  
 ‘you and me’ (lit. me with you)

Disjunction is marked by *wal(l)a*, as exemplified in (92).

(92) *Noppi-l wala nga génn!*  
 be.quite-IMP.SG or NULL.2S go.out  
 G  
 ‘Tais-toi ou tu sors !’ [Diouf, 2003, p.362]  
 ‘Shut up otherwise you go out!’

*Wànte* ‘but’, *kon* ‘so, therefore’, *ndax(te)* ‘for, because’ behave more like discourse markers (at the beginning of an utterance) than like coordinative conjunctions.

### 6.3.2 Paratactic clause chaining

Paratactic clause chaining is very common in Wolof. All conjugations can combine in chained clauses; the only prohibited chain is a first Null tense clause followed by any other conjugation than Null tense. Due to the nature of the different conjugations, clause chaining in this language yields different types of interclausal dependency, defining a gradient of syntactic integration: from simple assertive juxtaposition to more integrated syntactic dependency (with the embedded Null tense clauses at the endpoint of the gradient), through ‘situational dependency’ and ‘pragmatic dependency’. Furthermore, the various combinations of conjugations produce different but regular interclausal meanings, such as temporal succession, cumulative assertion (with reinforcing or contrastive effects), causality, opposition or consecution. For details, see Robert (2010a).

## 6.4 Subordination

Only the crucial points and most common forms will be mentioned here. For a comprehensive study of subordination in Wolof, see Sall (2005).

A first important point must be made: Null tense appears as the prototypical subordinating mood. This form is the only conjugation used to mark clause subordination *without* any subordinating morpheme (for complement and consecutive clauses); it is also *obligatory* with most subordinating conjunctions, with two exceptions: the complement and the causal subordinated clauses.

### 6.4.1 Relatives clauses and qualifying phrases

Relative clauses occur post-nominally. Their canonical structure is ‘(antecedent) relativiser + embedded clause’. As for most subordinating clauses, the Null tense inflection (in the perfective or imperfective form) is required in the relative clause. Several points are remarkable about relative clauses in Wolof. The first one is the interaction between the relative pronoun (see §3.3.4) and the definiteness (or referentiality) of the modified noun. According to Nougier Voisin (2001, 27), the relativiser (which she calls a ‘connective’) is formed with *-i* (proximal) and *-a* (distal deictic) when the noun phrase is referential, as in (93) and (94), and *-u* when it is non-referential, as in (95) and (96).

(93) *Kër gi Ablaye jënd*  
house CLg:PROX Ablaye buy  
‘The house (nearby) that Ablaye bought’

(94) *Kër ga Ablaye jënd*  
house CLg:DIST Ablaye buy  
‘The house (distant) that Ablaye bought’

(95) *Am-uma benn xaalis bu ma la-y jox fi*  
have-NEG.1SG CLb:one money CLb.NOTLOC NULL.1SG O.2SG-IPFV give CLf:DEM.PROX  
‘I do not have any money to give you here. (lit. that I give you here)’



- (96) *Xale bu-y toppatoo waajur-am, moo-y gudd fan rekk.*  
 child CLb.NOTLOC-IPFV take.care parents-POSS.2SG FOCs.3SG-IPFV be.long life.span only  
 ‘A child who takes care of his parents will have a long life.’ (lit. he is the one who...)

The *CL-u* form is actually the only specific (and true) relative pronoun. According to Sall’s analyses (2005, p.160 ff.), in the definite relative clauses, the surfacing form is actually the article, not the relative pronoun which disappears to ‘avoid syntactic redundancy’ between the (postnominal) definite article and a following relativiser. One good argument for this analysis is the existence of relative clauses headed by demonstrative pronouns that cannot function as relative pronouns, as *googa* in the following example:

- (97) *Góor googa daan léeb dafa màggat léegi.*  
 man CLg.DEM.ANAPH COP.IPFV:PSTREM tell.tales FOCV.3SG be.old now  
 ‘That man who used to tell tales is old now.’ [Sall, 2005]

However, and that is the second remarkable point, this pattern holds true for dynamic verbs only. With stative (i.e. mostly quality) verbs, the relativiser is most often formed with the *-u* morpheme (i.e. the proper relative pronoun) and definiteness is expressed according to the usual pattern, that is with the definite article postposed to the relative clause as to any noun phrase (98). Thus quality verbs are more tightly integrated into the noun phrase pattern than dynamic verbs. This is in accordance with their distinct role in event structure: by nature, dynamic verbs predicate a distinct event from that of the main clause.

- (98) *dama bëgg [ piis bu xonq ] bi*  
 FOCV.1SG want piece.of.cloth CLb.NOTLOC be.red CLb.PROX  
 ‘I want the piece of cloth that is red.’

These relative clauses with quality verbs echoes a parallel structure in which *CL-u* introduces not a verb but a noun (N2) qualifying a preceding noun (N1), as in (99)<sup>62</sup>. However, in this type of noun phrases, N2 is restricted to two lexemes specifying human beings or animals, namely *jigéen* ‘woman (female)’ and *góor* ‘man (male)’.

- (99) *fas*      *wu*      *jigéen*  
 horse    CLW.NOTLOC    female  
 ‘a mare’  
 [*fas*      *wu*      *jigéen*]    *wi*  
 horse    CLW.NOTLOC    female    CLW.PROX  
 ‘the mare’

So the two types of definite relative clauses (depending on the verb type) might also be due to the reanalysis of the *-u* deictic (see §2.3), leading to an evolution of the relativisation system from a gapping type (attested in the definite relative clauses with dynamic verbs) to a relative-pronoun type, using a new relative pronoun *CL-u* (in all other cases), with a retention of the original indefinite value of the *-u* morphem.

Generic classes and defective classes (see §3.3.2) can be used for **headless relative clauses** as in (100) and (101).

- (100) *Ku*                       $\emptyset$       *bëgg*      *lem,*      *ñeme*      *yamb.*  
 CLK.NOTLOC    [NULL.3SG]    want      honey      dare      bees  
 ‘He who wants honey must not fear bees.’ (lit. is brave [when faced with] bees) [proverb]

- (101) *Xam-uma*      *fu*              *mu*              *dëkk.*  
 know-NEG.3SG    CLF.NOTLOC    NULL.3SG    live  
 ‘I do not know where he lives.’

A third remarkable point pertains to the marking of the relative pronoun’s **syntactic function**.

As for interrogative pronouns, the position (i.e. clause-initial) and the form of the relative

<sup>62</sup> Considering the parallel structures, some authors group the nominal and the verbal qualifying constructions under the same label, as ‘adjectival construction’ (Nouguier Voisin 2001, pp.25-26) or ‘attributive relatives’ (‘relatives épithétiques’, Sall 2005, pp.168-171), to be distinguished from relative clauses.

pronoun remain identical whatever its semantic or syntactic role. Thus, in Wolof, the relative pronoun does not encode the role of the head noun in the relative clause. However, this syntactic role is indirectly indicated by the form of the Null Tense personal markers, according to the general rule for Null tense's (pronominal) functioning (see §5.2.3): the zero variant appears<sup>63</sup> when the relative pronoun is the subject of the relative clause, as in (100) or in previous examples, whereas the full variant is required to specify the subject of the clause when the relative pronoun is an object (95) or an adverbial relativiser (101).

Most of the constituents are accessible to the relativisation but according to different strategies (see Nougier Voisin (2002: 26 ff.), from which the next examples are taken). Beside subjects and objects, obliques can be relativised as long as they can be promoted to object role by the applicative suffixes (§4.2.2), as in (102). Possessor can also be relativised, the possessive suffix (on the possessed noun) functioning then as a resumptive pronoun, as in (103).

(102) *Bés bi mu tabax-e-woon kër-am*  
 day CLb.PROX NULL.3S<sup>1</sup> build-APPL2-PST house-POSS.3SG  
 'The day **when** he built his house'

(103) *Xale bi yaay-am dee*  
 child CLb.PROX mother-POSS.3SG die  
 'The child **whom** mother died'

Lastly, **complex relative clauses**, called 'inserted clauses' by Fal (1999: 125-6), are commonly used for circumventing syntactic constraints. A formulaic expression ('which you know that...') is used as pivot to convert the relative structure into a completive clause (see next section), as illustrated in the following example where this structure is required for introducing a Subject focus in the dependent clause:

(104) *waaye ñun ñ-i nga xam ne ñoo la yor, ...*

<sup>63</sup> The zero variant appears only when there is no ambiguity about the semantic role of the relativiser and that of its antecedent.

but PRO.1PL CLñ-PROX NULL.2SG know COMP FOC.1PL O.2SG look.after  
 ‘but we, who are the one who have looked after you,...’  
 (lit. we [which you know that] WE have looked after you ...)

#### 6.4.2 Complement clauses

Complement clauses can be introduced by the complementiser *ne~né~ni* (a grammaticalised form of the quotative verb *ne*) or constructed directly in a paratactic structure without complementiser. In the former case, there is no restriction on the verb inflection in the subordinate clause, Null tense excepted, but the complement clause can only appear in object function (105). In the latter case (direct construction), only Null tense can be used, and the complement clause can appear in object (106) or subject (107) function. Note the irrealis meaning of the Null tense clause in (106), compared that of Perfect in (105).

(105) *Yaakaar naa ne tane nga*  
 hope PRF.1SG COMP be.better PRF.2SG  
 ‘I hope that you have recovered.’

(106) *Yaakaar naa nga tane*  
 hope PRF.1SG NULL.2SG be.better  
 ‘I hope you will recover.’

(107) *Mu takk jabar dem-aale-wul ci xel mi*  
 NULL.3SG tie wife go-SIM-NEG.3SG LOC:PROX mind CLM:PROX  
 ‘taking a wife never occurred to his mind.’

#### 6.4.3 Adverbial clauses

For **temporal and conditional clauses**, Wolof has an interesting system based on two conjoint mechanisms combining with the *b-* or *s-* subordinating morphemes (see Perrin 2005, 2012): (i) the use of one of the three spatial deictics (see §2.3) to indicate the subordinate clause’s temporal localisation; (ii) the use of two competing verbal suffixes which specify the relations between the main and the subordinate clauses (antecedence vs. concomitance). Null tense conjugation is used in all cases.

When suffixed to the subordinating morpheme *b-*, the three spatial markers (proximal, distal and not localised) introduce, respectively, a subordinate clause situated in the recent past presented as close to the speech time, using *bi* (108); a subordinate clause situated in the remote past, far removed from the speech time with *ba*; and with *bu* (variant *su*) a non-past (or irrealis) subordinate clause corresponding to a habitual, future or hypothetical event (110). The anteriority vs. simultaneity of the subordinate clause vis-à-vis the main clause is marked by morphemes suffixed to the verb of the subordinate clause, indicating either anteriority (*-ee* suffixed to the verb stem) or simultaneity (imperfective suffix *-y* suffixed to the Null tense inflection), as illustrated in (108) and (109).

- (108) *Bi*            *mu*            *wasin-ee*,  
 when:PROX    NULL.3SG    give.birth-ANTER  
*fekoon*        *na*            *mu*            *am*            *ñaari*            *doom*.  
 happen:PAST    PRF.3SG    NULL.3SG    have        two:GEN.PL    child  
 ‘When she gave birth (recently), she (already) had two children.’

- (109) *Bi*            *mu-y*            *dem*,    *xaritam*            *agsi*  
 when:PROX    NULL.3SG-IPFV    go        friend:POSS3SG    arrive:VEN  
 ‘Just when he left (recent event), his friend arrived.’

- (110) *Bu (~su)*    *ma*            *gis-ee*        *ndobin*,    *dinaa*    *ko*        *fital*.  
 when:NOTLOC    NULL.1SG    see-ANTER    bird.SP    FUT1SG    O.3SG    shoot  
 ‘When/if I see a calao (bird), I will shoot it.’

Two other verb suffixes can be used instead of *-ee* and *-y*, namely the temporal suffixes *-aan* and *-oon* (see 5.2.2): *-aan* for habitual past events referring to an unspecified past time, as in (111), *-oon* for counterfactuals (compare (110) above with (112) below).

- (111) *Bu*            *ñów-aan*,        *xale*    *yépp*            *dañu-y*    *bég*.  
 When:NOTLOC    come-PST.REM    chid    CLY:QNT.TO1    FOCV.3PL    be.happy  
 ‘Whenever he came, all the children were pleased.’

- (112) *Ndobin*,    *dinaa*    *ko*        *fital*,    *su*            *ma*            *ko*        *gis-oon*.  
 bird.SP    FUT.1SG    O.3SG    shoot,    when:NOTLOC    NULL.1SG    O.3SG    see-ANTER  
 ‘A calao (bird), I would shoot it, if I saw one.’

Remarkably, the two most common subordinating morphemes used for **causal clauses** can also be used for **final clauses**. Moreover, *ndax* and *ngir* also have prepositional uses (‘because of’).

In subordinating uses, their semantic interpretation is conditioned by the conjugation used in the dependent clause: in causal clauses (113), all but Null tense can be used, whereas, conversely, final clauses require Null tense (114). In both cases the subordinate clause comes second, after the main clause. This functioning echoes the (very common) paratactic constructions in which Null tense can be used in apodosis for a final clause, and a Verb focus for a causal clause (with free order), as shown in Robert (2010a). As noted by Sall (2005: 219), in final clauses, the subject is omitted (thus Null tense form has a zero variant) when it is co-referential with that of the main clause, as in (115).

(113) *Dafa-y jooy ndax dafa mer.*  
 FOCV.3SG-IPFV cry because FOCV.3SG be.angry  
 ‘s/he is crying because she is angry.’ [Sall 2005: 272]

(114) *Dinaa ko neex-al ndax mu ñëw.*  
 FUT.1SG O.3SG be.agreeable:APPL1 because NULL.3SG come  
 ‘I will please him/her so that she comes.’ [Sall 2005: 278]

(115) *Mu daj-eek ñépp ngir déglu seen-i tawat.*  
 NULL.3SG encounter-CAUS2:with CLN:QNT.TOI because listen POSS.3PL:GEN.PI complaint  
 ‘He met everyone in order to to their complaints.’ [Sall 2005: 219]

The same semantic conditioning by the verb’s conjugation holds for two other conjunctions (*ndegam* and *ndem*), which take on a conditional (i.e. ‘provided that’) or concessive (‘unless’) meaning with a Null tense (Sall 2005: 280), and that of a causal ‘since’ with other conjugations (as *gannaaw* also does). Actually, although not so frequent, *ndaxte* (as well as *paskë*, a borrowing from French *parce que*) is the only univocally causal conjunction.

## 6.5 Sentence patterns

On declarative sentences, see §6.2 above; on impersonal clauses, see §4.2.3 and references at the end of §6.2.1.

### 6.5.1 Commands

Affirmative commands (or injunctions) can be formed by means of three different conjugations, depending on *how* and *when* the order is to be carried out (see Robert 1991, pp. 235–256). The Imperative is possible only for 2nd person and is used as an order directed to the addressee(s) for an immediate execution<sup>64</sup>, that is why this form is not compatible with a temporal subordinate clause coming first and thus introducing an intervening event between the order and the time of speech<sup>65</sup> (e.g. ‘when you arrived, give us a call’). By contrast, the Obligative (which is possible for all persons) expresses an order expressed at the time of speech and directed to the addressee to *have* the process realised by the syntactic subject of the sentence, at a later unspecified moment, as in (116): that is why it is compatible with temporal clauses but not with topical conditional clauses (i.e. coming first) which would make the command hypothetical. Depending on the context, the clause appears as a command, a suggestion or a simple wish. So, in (117) the Imperative is possible only when the person has already started eating or is about to start (immediate execution), whereas, the Obligative is an invitation for the person to fill up once he *will* have started eating (delayed order).

(116) *Na liggéey bu baax !*  
 OBLIG.3SG work well  
 ‘(let) him work well !’

(117) (a) *Lekk-al ba suur !*  
 eat-IMP.SG until be.full  
 (b) *Nanga lekk ba suur !*  
 OBLIG.2SG eat until be.full  
 ‘Eat your fill.’

The Null tense is also used for injunctions but in other specific contexts. As a dependent mode, Null tense requires an extra-clausal locator, that is why Null tense is not correct in (118) where Imperative is rather used. In injunctive uses, Null tense is found *after* a previous injunction

<sup>64</sup> The imperfective Imperative (formed with the *di* variant of imperfective) expresses a request to go immediately into a habit (e.g. *di-l naan!* ‘get into the habit of drinking’, addressed to someone who does not drink enough).

<sup>65</sup> The reverse order is possible (‘give us a call when you arrived’).

using the Imperative, after a conditional clause (119) or in relation to an obstacle in the situation of speech, which then functions as a locator (120). This injunctive use of Null tense is to be related to its use in paratactic final clauses.

- (118) [out of the blue]  
*Toog-al !*  
 sit-IMP.SG  
 \* *Nga toog*  
 NULL.2SG sit  
 ‘Sit down!’

- (119) *Su ñu bañee, yow, nga def ko!*  
 if NULL.3PL refuse-ANTER PRO.2SG NULL.2SG do O.3SG  
 ‘If they refuse to do it, you, just do it (yourself)!’

- (120) [On a bus] This needs not be said if the exit is clear  
*Ma wàcc fi!*  
 NULL.1SG get.off here  
 ‘(Let me through so) I can get off here!’

The Prohibitive is used as a negative counterpart of both Imperative and Obligative.

- (121) *Bul wàcc fi!*  
 PROH.2SG get.off here  
 ‘Do not get off here!’

### 6.5.2 Negation

Due to the diachronic changes and the grammaticalisation of the focus in the verbal inflections, Wolof has a complex system for negation, including three negative conjugations, a negative suffix, a negative copula, all formed with the same negative morpheme *-u(l)*, and also two suppletive auxiliaries (*bañ* ‘to refuse’ or *ñakk* ‘to lack’). All these forms, presented in Table 23, are in complementary distribution: their choice depends on the scope of negation. For a general overview of the negation in Wolof, see Robert (1990) or Robert (1991, pp.283–302).



Table 23. Overview of the negative morphemes in Wolof

<b>Negative morphemes combining with affirmative conjugations</b> (i.e. combining with Null tense and focusing conjugations)		
<i>Form</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>-ul</i>	Suffixed to the verbal lexeme	negative perfective
<i>dul</i>	Preposed to the verbal lexeme	negative imperfective

<b>Negative copula</b>		
<i>du</i>	Preposed to non-verbal predicate	negate the predication

<b>Negative conjugations</b> (cf. Table 19)		
<i>Label</i>	<i>Affirmative counterpart</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Negative	- Presentative - Perfect	Negation of the present happening or completion of a process
Negative Emphatic	- Imperfective Verb focus - Future	Negation of the process in general, of the habitual and of the future
Negative Emphatic + <i>y</i>	- Imperfective conjugations	Negation of frequency
Prohibitive	- Imperative and Obligative	Negative command

The negative suffix (as well as its unbound imperfective variant) combines with the Null tense and the three focus conjugations, and does not scope on the conjugations' meaning but only on the predicate, which turns negative as visible in (122) and (123).

- (122) (a) *Yaa tóx.*  
FOCS.2SG smoke  
'YOU smoked' ~ 'It is you who smoked.'
- (b) *Yaa tóx-ul*  
FOCS.2SG smoke-NEG  
'It is you who did not smoke.' ~ 'you are the one who did not smoke'
- (123) *Mu lekk-ul, moo gën.*  
NULL.3SG eat-NEG FOCS.3SG be.more  
'It is better that he did not eat.' (lit. (that) he did not eat, that is what is better)

The negative suffix cannot be used with a nonfinite verb, that is with a verb in nominal function. In this case, one of the two suppletive auxiliaries (*bañ* 'to refuse' or *ñakk* 'to lack') will be recruited, as in (124). More generally, these auxiliaries are used when the negative suffix is considered as incorrect, as it appears to some speakers with the Null tense or the Presentative in some of their uses.

- (124) \* *gudd-ul*, *amul njari bu nuy yóotu*  
*ñ*  
(lit. not being tall has no utility)

*ñakk=a gudd, am-ul njariñ bu muy yóotu*  
 lack-LINK be.long have-NEG.3SG utility when: NOTLOC NULL.1PL:IPFV extend.arm  
 ‘it is a disadvantage not to be tall, when one tries to reach something high’  
 (lit. lacking to be tall, has no utility)

By contrast, the two negative conjugations are used to negate the semantic component of the other affirmative conjugations, in an asymmetrical system where there is no one-to-one correspondence between negative and affirmative conjugations (see Table 23). For instance, in (125) the Negative serves to negate the Perfect (negating that the endpoint of the process has been reached) as well as the Presentative (negating that the process is ongoing); in (126), the Emphatic Negative negates the future or the general happening of a process, corresponding respectively to the Future and the imperfective Verb Focus. Its imperfective variant, as in (127), has the specific meaning of negating the frequency of the process (‘never do’ or ‘do sometimes, but rarely’) which corresponds to negating the imperfective variant of the Future (called here the Occasional).

(125) *Tóx-uloo*  
 smoke-NEG.2SG  
 ‘You have not smoked’ ~ ‘you are not smoking’

(126) *Doo tóx*  
 NEGEMPH.2SG smoke  
 ‘You do not smoke’ ~ ‘you are not a smoker’ ~ ‘you will not smoke’

(127) *Dooy tóx*  
 NEGEMPH.2SG-IPFV smoke  
 ‘You do not usually smoke’ ~ ‘you sometimes (but rarely) smoke’

### 6.5.3 Interrogation

There are two ways to form a **polar question**: with or without the *ndax* fronted question word<sup>66</sup>. In both cases, there are no structural constraints but the clause has a specific intonational contour, distinct from that of declarative sentences, i.e. it is marked by a high plateau (with a large pitch range) at the beginning of the clause before the voice falls gradually back to floor

<sup>66</sup> The interrogative *ndax* is actually the same morpheme as the causal *ndax*.

level for unmarked questions, and by a rise on the last syllable for *ndax* questions, as for all interrogations with a question word (see Rialland and Robert 2001).

- (128) *Ndax* Péer ak Sàmba ñëw nañu démb?  
 Q.PLR Peter with Samba come PRF.3PL yesterday  
 ~ Ø Péer ak Sàmba ñëw nañu démb?  
 Peter with Samba come PRF.3PL yesterday  
 ‘Did Peter and Samba come yesterday?’

Several particles can be used for leading questions, such as *mbaa* if a positive answer is expected (129), and *xanaa* expressing doubt (‘by any chance...?’) and an expected negative answer as in (130).

- (129) *Mbaa dégg na wolof?*  
 otherwise hear PRF.3SG Wolof  
 ‘Does he understand Wolof? I hope so.’

- (130) *Yow xanaa danga ma-y napp yow?*  
 PRO.2SG rather FOCV.2SG O.1SG-IPFV fish PRO.2SG  
 ‘You, are you by any chance trying to trick me, you?’  
 ~ ‘You would not be trying to trick me now, would you?’

For **content questions**, Wolof uses interrogative proforms without additional particles or case marking. For ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘which (one)’, ‘where’ and ‘how’, they are two sets of interrogative pronouns, composed of the same class markers with either the *-u* or the *-an* formative (see 3.3.4). Each set triggers the use of a different conjugational paradigm: originating from a reinterpretation of free indefinite relative clauses, the interrogative clauses with the *-u* set requires the Null tense, whereas the *-an* set (as focused forms), requires a focusing conjugation. These interrogative pronouns do not in themselves indicate their syntactic functions. Neither – due to the general fronting rule for question words – is the syntactic function of interrogative pronouns marked by their position. This role is taken on by the verb inflection, the Subject (131) vs. Complement focus (132) inflection for the *-an* series, and the full (133) vs. zero variant (134) of the Null tense (see §5.2.3) for the *-u* series, as in relative clauses. The locative (*fan* and *fu*) and manner (*nan* ~ *naka* and *nu*) interrogatives follow the non-subject patterns.

- (131) *K-an moo gën ci yow?* [‘who’ subject]  
 CLK-Q FOC3.SG be.more LOC:PRO PRO.2SG  
 ‘Who does best by you?’ (lit. who is it who does best by you?)
- (132) *K-an la-y xool?* [‘who’ object]  
 CLK-Q FOC3.SG-IPFV watch  
 ‘Who is he looking at?’ (lit. who is it that he is looking at?)
- (133) *K-u mu xool?* [‘who’ object]  
 CLK-NOTLOC NULL.3SG watch  
 ‘Who did he look at?’
- (134) *Ku ∅ jël saabu bi?* [‘who’ subject]  
 CLK-NOTLOC [NULL take soap CLb:PROX  
 ‘Who took the soap?’

Other content question words follow various syntactic patterns, depending on their morphosyntactic nature (periphrasis, interrogative proforms or locative copula), as listed in Table 24.

**Table 24 : Other content question words**

Question word	Construction	Meaning
<i>lu tax ~ lan moo tax</i>	(+ direct complement clause)	‘why?’ (lit. ‘what caused [it that]...?’)
<i>lu te(r)e ~ tee</i>	(+ direct complement clause)	‘why not?’ (lit. ‘what prevents [that]...?’)
<i>kañ(a)</i>	(+ Complement focus conj.)	‘when?’
<i>ñaata</i>	(+ Complement focus conj.)	‘how many?’
<i>naka</i>	(+ Complement focus conj.)	‘how (is)?’
<i>ana</i>	(interrogative copula)	‘where is?’

For more details on the syntax and origin of the *wh*-questions words in Wolof, see Robert 2016b. For a generative approach, see Torrence 2013.

## Conclusion

Wolof shares several morphosyntactic features with other Atlantic languages (in particular those from the Northern branch excluding Mel languages), such as a noun class system, (remnants of) consonant alternation, a rich set of demonstratives based on spatial deixis, a large inventory of derivational (mostly verbal) suffixes and auxiliaries, a remarkable verbal morphology integrating focus and negation, and an SVO and head-modifier basic word order. This language also has no adjectives but many ideophones. Nevertheless, Wolof departs from

other Atlantic languages in several respects. This language has undergone significant changes leading to simplifications or reductions but also to innovative restructurings, both producing some typologically rare features. Some aspects of this evolution are shared by other Atlantic languages but pushed here to remarkable extents without destroying the functionality of the system.

First, the loss of final vowels in many lexemes has led to a change in the canonical syllabic structure (CVCV•CVC) and resulted in specific articulations of the final consonants. But the most peculiar features of Wolof certainly pertain to the evolution of its noun class system<sup>67</sup>. Noun class prefixes have fused with the root and totally disappeared so that the belonging of a word to a class is visible only in nominal agreement, which makes it a typologically rare type of noun class language. Consonant alternation being also limited to a few derivational processes in DW, the Wolof nominal system is drifting to an isolating type for the stems, while keeping an operative agreement system for the nominal dependents. Due to these morphological changes, class assignment has been partly realigned following two main competing patterns, a semantic one and a phonetic (homophonic) one. The scope of class agreement is limited to the noun determiners and modifiers, with a single set of agreement morphemes made of a sole consonant. There are no (more) class pronouns and the third person has been extended to class nouns for subject indexing and object clitics. Class pairing has been also remarkably simplified (one class is virtually generalised for plural), and there is an increasing tendency to generalise the B class as a kind of semantically neutral class, whereas three other classes have a very low lexical frequency, the K class even having a quasi single member.

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<sup>67</sup> See Pozdniakov (2015) for a comparison with proto-Atlantic.

However, this reorganisation of the noun class system gave rise to remarkable innovations for the determiners and the pronominal system. First, these three very small classes have been recycled in the specific role of *generic classes* for the reference to human beings (singular and plural) and to inanimates, that is for pronouns in absolute uses (demonstratives, headless relative and interrogative pronouns). This typological peculiarity combines with another one: in Wolof, all nouns referring to human beings belong to a class different from that of the generic term for human being. Furthermore, Wolof has integrated the two defective classes for place and manner adverbs in this pronominal system and thus acquired a nicely coherent and economical system for proforms. Second, the original vowels of agreement morphemes have been replaced by spatial deictics, giving rise not only to a rich system of demonstratives (combining spatial and discourse deictics) but also to a remarkable and complex correlation between *definiteness* and *spatial deixis*, for the definite article as well as for the relative pronoun. In Wolof, definiteness obligatory goes with the localisation of the referent in the deictic space and the specification of the distance (in space, time or discourse) of the referent with regard to the speaker. Such a use of spatial deictics is found in some other Atlantic languages (e.g. Sereer, Palor or Fula) but in different systems. Here a third remarkable innovation of Wolof comes into play. AW had a triplet of distance deictics made of a proximal, a distal, and a third term for an unspecified localisation, used for indefinite location ('somewhere') or for indicating that the referent is *not localised*, i.e. absent, in the situation of speech. This system is already typologically rare, since ternary systems for spatial deixis usually have an additional medial or neutral term. But in DW, this 'absence' in the situation of speech has been reanalysed as a *lack* of determination, producing non-referentiality and indefiniteness on the semantic part and also, crucially, syntactic dependency: this third deictic works as a *connective* relating the modified noun to the next term complementing its 'suspended' specification. In DW, the genitival linker can be analysed as an extension of this connective use

of the third deictic. But more significantly, the emergence of this suspensive value of the third deictic led to a remarkably economical system for noun determination and pronominalisation: combined with the proximal or distal deictic, the consonantal class marker produces a (distancial) definite article, and an indefinite relative or interrogative pronoun with this third deictic. Another remarkable outcome of this reanalysis is the existence of a double set of interrogative pronouns based on two different communicational strategies, one on indefiniteness with suspensive (or headless relative) pronouns, the other one on focusing constructions with strong pronouns. This double strategy for content question words is not typologically unknown (see French, *qui?* vs. *qui est-ce qui?*) but not attested, at least to my knowledge, in other Atlantic languages. Furthermore, the use of these three spatial deictics, with their specific values, has been strikingly systematised in Wolof, across various linguistic categories, for noun determination and pronominal reference but also for predication and subordination, so that reference to deictic space permeates almost the entire system of the language.

As for the verbal system, Wolof has developed some typical features of Atlantic languages to some extents that single it out, too. For instance, following the general trend for the verbal system in this language, the grammaticalisation of focus and negation in the verbal system has been pushed to their fusion into *inflectional* paradigms. This radical grammaticalisation might explain another typological singularity of Wolof, namely the absence of intonational marking of focus. However, this evolution toward an inflectional system remains incomplete, generating morphosyntactic variants or irregularities. Moreover, among its large inventory of derivational suffixes, Wolof display some rare suffixes (e.g. a possessive verb suffix, a specific causative for omitted causee, a suffix for a provisionally performed action), and a prolific system of verb suffixes coding valence change (e.g. five causatives including an

assistive one, three reciprocals, two applicatives) which contributes to the specific syntactic profile of this language.

The last particular feature of Wolof that should be mentioned here for its explanatory and programmatic value pertains to language variation. As we said, dialectal variation seems to be weak in Wolof and can be more adequately described by distinguishing between two urban vs. deep (mostly rural) varieties as two idealised standards. The ‘rural’ Wolof is precious for linguistic investigation because it is more conservative, whereas urban Wolof is undergoing relatively rapid changes due to language contact and modern way of life. Part of the changes described here are clearly due to the use of Wolof as a vehicular language in a context of language contact and code mixing (mostly with French). Although Wolof is quite well documented compared to most of Atlantic languages, both deep Wolof (and its dialectal variation) and code mixing in urban Wolof clearly need to be more systematically investigated to enlighten the changes at work in contemporary Wolof, and also to explain the morphosyntactic irregularities or complexities in DW, only a part of which have been mentioned here. Thus, this grammatical sketch is only a route point before a complete reference grammar of Wolof can be made, synthetising all the existing documentation and, most of all, integrating language use, language variation and code mixing thanks to a large scale corpus study.

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### Abbreviations used (based on the Leipzig Glossing Rules)

:	in glosses, indicates a segmentable morpheme when the text is not segmented
—	indicates a stem that never appears without suffixes
1, 2, 3	first, second, third person
AW	archaic Wolof as attested in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century documents
ADV.PART	partitive adverb ( <i>ci</i> )
ANAPH	anaphoric
ANTER	anterior suffix
AUX	auxiliary
APPL1	applicative verb suffix for the role of recipient, beneficiary or companion
APPL2	applicative verb suffix for the role of instrument, manner or location
CAUS1	causative verb suffix for direct causation ( <i>-al</i> )
CAUS2	alternate causative verb suffix for direct causation ( <i>-e</i> )
CAUS3	causative verb suffix for sociative-assistive causation ( <i>-le</i> )
CAUS4	causative verb suffix for omitted causee ( <i>-lu</i> )
CAUS5	causative verb suffix for indirect causation ( <i>-loo</i> )
CFG	centrifugal verb suffix
CLX	class marker of class x, visible in agreement
COMP	complementiser
COORD.V	verbal coordinator
DW	urban variety of Wolof as illustrated in the Dakar contemporary Wolof
DEM	demonstrative
DIST	distal spatial suffix
FOC	subject-focus copula
FOCCOMP	Complement-focusing conjugation
FOCS	Subject-focusing conjugation
FOCV	Verb-focusing conjugation
FR	French (borrowing or code-switching)
FUT	Future conjugation
GEN(.SG)	genitival suffix ( <i>-u</i> SG, <i>-i</i> pl)
IDEOPH	ideophone
IMP	imperative
IMPS	impersonal suffix
INDF	indefinite article
IPFV	imperfective suffix
IPFVCOP	imperfective copula ( <i>di</i> ~ <i>d-</i> )
LINK	verbal linker
LOC	locative preposition ( <i>ci</i> proximal, <i>ca</i> distal)
LOC.PART	locative/partitive pronoun ( <i>ci</i> )
MNR	deverbative nominal suffix for manner
NEG	negative suffix
NEG(.3SG)	Negative perfective conjugation (3SG)
NEGEMPH	Emphatic negative conjugation
NOTLOC	spatial suffix ( <i>-u</i> ) indicating absence of localisation
NULL	Null tense conjugation
O(.3SG)	object pronoun
OBLIG	Obligative conjugation
PST.REM	remote past suffix
PL	plural (for personal morphemes)
POSS	possessive verb suffix

POSS(.1SG)	(1SG) possessive determiner
PRF	Perfect conjugation
PROH(.2SG)	Prohibitive conjugation
PRO	Independent personal pronoun
PROX	proximal spatial suffix (-i)
PRST	Presentative conjugation (discontinuous morpheme)
PST	past suffix
Q	question marker (-an) in interrogative pronouns
Q.PLR	question particule for polar questions
QNT.ALT	alterity quantifier
QNT.TOT	totalizing quantifier
REV	reversive verb suffix
SG	singular
SIM	verb suffix for simultaneous action
SP	species
VEN	venitive verbal suffix
VBLZ	verbalizing noun suffix (-e)