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# Complex predicates in Wolof (Atlantic): a first overview

Stéphane Robert

[stephane.robert@cnr.fr](mailto:stephane.robert@cnr.fr)

## Wolof and its typological characteristics

- Niger-Congo (Atlantic branch) – Senegal (~10 M speakers)
- **SVO(X)** (except for focused clauses and clitic pronouns)
- **Accusative alignment but no case distinction**
  - Syntactic functions : marked by constituent order ( $\pm$  der.)
- **A simplified Noun class system :**
  - no marking on N: agreement of the N modifiers  
(important for infinitive)
- **A complex verbal system**
  - 12 primary inflectional paradigms

NB. No morphological converbs or participles...  
No serial verb construction  
No light verb construction

## Twelve primary inflections

- Focus	Presentative, Zero-tense, Perfect, Future
+ Focus	Verb Focus, Subject Focus, Complement Focus
+ Negation	Negative, Emphatic Negative, Prohibitive
+ Jussive	Obligative, Imperative (and Prohibitive)

Inflections :

- Aspect and tense merged with other verbal specifications (focus, polarity, modality and person)

An aspect-temporal system:

- unmarked perfective, using the speech moment as tense locus
- Imperfective and past reference: derived by suffixation

(-y)

(-oon)

- Verbal constituent: two components

**V** lexical stem + inflectional marker  
(invariant ± der.) **preposed**, postposed, or suffixed to V

- *moo daanu*                                  *daanu na*  
FOCS.3SG fall                                  fall    PFT.3SG  
's/he is the one who fell down'      's/he has fallen down'
- *lekk-uma*    'I have not eaten'  
eat-NEG.1SG

- Inflections: **predicative** markers

Every clause has to contain **one and only one** of them

→ A criteria for identifying VCP

- The clearest case
- VCP identified by
  - A construction with an **=a** marker ('verbal linker' LINK)
  - Morphosyntactic properties: clitics' raising

The construction:

inflected **V1** ...=**a** uninflected **V2** (OX)

- **=a** : a 'special (en)clitic marker': no other use; cf. Zwicky 1977
    - Introduces V2 and must precede it
    - but is incorporated to the last constituent of first V phrase  
(lexical stem ± TAM markers ± clitics)
- Stray Adjunction
- What type of construction is it in the typology of VCP ?

## EXAMPLES

- a. *Dama bëgg=a jubbanti tank-u siis bi.*  
FOC.V.1SG love=LINK straighten leg-GEN chair the.CLb  
'I want to straighten the leg of the chair.'

V Ø N

- a'. *Dama bëgg lem*  
FOC.V.1SG love honey  
'I love honey'

V.....=a precedes V2

- b. *Jaadu-wul-oon=a def*  
*be.legal-NEG.3SG-PST=LINK do*  
'it was not legal to do'

Here : interveining are TAM but clitic pronoms also possible....


# CLITICS' PLACEMENT

(Voisin 2006)

- **V2** selects the objects arguments of the VP
- But, when clitic : **raising** to V1 domain

a. *Bëgg naa ko ko:o xam:al.*  
want PRF:S1SG **O.3SG O.3SG:LINK** know:CAUS

cf. *ko*



'I want to let him know this.'

The two *ko* are the two object arguments of the ditransitive *xamal*

Raising: only for clitics, cf ditransitive *jox*

b. *Nanga xaar [...], nga soog ko:o jox caabi woto bi.*  
OBL.2SG wait ZERO.2SG just.do **O.3SG:LINK** give key car the.CLb  
Wait [until he has digested his drunkenness] to hand him the car keys.

## TYPES OF **V1** IN THIS CONSTRUCTION

- Different types (cover term : ‘operator verbs’)
- Some can be considered as ‘**auxiliaries**’:

TAM values or modalities of realization of **V2** (‘nuclear’ V)

	in lexical use	in VCP construction
<i>faral</i>	–	be used to do ≠ IPFV TAM suff.
<i>sog</i>	–	have just done; then do
<i>xaw</i>	–	have almost done,
<i>bëgg</i>	love	want, be about to do
<i>mës</i>	taste	have experienced doing
<i>naaje</i>	–	do late in the morning
< <i>naaj</i>	be late (morning)	
<i>gaaw</i>	be fast	be fast in doing
etc...		

- but most cannot be considered as grammaticalized auxiliaries



- The full list of possible V1 still to be established (preliminary works)
- Verb types in V1 and their semantic values still to be sorted
- Two subcases of VCP have been identified

(1) V1 : **quality verb** and VCP has **no object** (even V2 is transitive)

<i>nda</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>diis</i>	<i>naa</i>	<i>yenu</i>
canary	the.CLI	be.heavy	PFT.3SG:LINK	carry.on.head
'The jar is <b>heavy to carry</b> '				

S is **not** the agent of V2

(2) V1 : **stative or dynamic** V1 and the VCP can have an object

a. 

<i>àttan-uma</i>	<i>koo</i>	<i>def</i>
be.able-NEG.3SG	O.3SG:LINK	do
I am not able to do it'		

b. 

<i>noppi naa</i>	<i>liggééy</i>
stop	PFT.3SG:LINK work'
'He has stopped working'	

S is the agent of V2 (S animate)

## A FEW OTHER CASES

- **Vx=a Vx** (same verb): intensive meaning

*Dafa réy-oon=a réy* 'He was **really** fat'  
FOC.V.3SG be.fat-PST=LINK be.fat

- Another construction : **V1 ak=a V2** (V1 **with**-LINK V2)  
*ak* : comitative **prep.** !

*Dañu ko jàpp, mu:y tëb ak=a dal*  
FOC.V.3SG him catch, ZERO.3SG:IPFV **jump with=LINK land**  
'they caught him, he was struggling ~ stomping' (lit. jump with land)

*tëb ak a dal* 'jump with land' = to struggle

*dem ak a dikk* 'go with come' = move back and forth

*yéeg ak a wàcc* 'raise with descend' = 'to yo-yo' → A single event

**ak=a** ~ **ak di** (free variants !)

- General alternation between **=a**, **di** and  $\emptyset$  : **not so clear !**
  - **=a** is the marker of VCP but it is not always present
- (1) 'alternates' with **di** : **imperfective copula** ~ **-y suffix** (! check)
- both are in complementary distribution
    - Aspectual contrast
      - a. *Dafa bëgg=**a** séy ak moom* V2: single action  
'She wants to marry him'
      - b. *Dafa bëgg **di** ànd ak tégkat yi* V2: iterative, pluriactional,  
'He likes to (lit. accompany with) be around musicians.'
    - Free variant
      - c. *Ci suba si laa-**y** gën-a faral=**a**/**di** xaw-a sonn*
- 4 Verbs** *gën*: be more, *faral*: be used to do, *xaw*: do almost, *sonn*: be tired  
'It is especially in the morning that I am (episodically) a little **tired**'
- di** pluriactional vs. **=a** aspectually neutral (punctual or pluriact.)

=a vs. di vs. Ø ?

(2) Second case : no marker between V1 and V2

- **V1 Ø V2** : rarely but when ?

Difficult question, **blurred by variation** :

- (rarely) **dialectal variation** (e.g in Saint-Louis, Church 1981)
- (mostly) new trend of omitting =a in **urban Wolof** (vehicular)  
incorrect for elders; never happens in the villages  
(rural Wolof: =a is even inserted between FOC.V and V)

But some clear cases where **=a is prohibited**:

- After **'come'** and **'go'** (only motion verbs)
  - a. *ñoo ñów Ø sanc foofa*  
'they're the one who **came to settle** there '
  - b. *maa ngiy dem Ø béy-i*  
'I'm **going/leaving to farm**'

**Why ?** Because V2 is the **goal/endpoint** of the motion verb ?

But then...

- Why there is no =a after *jàng* 'learn' ?

A pending question...

*Dafa jàng ∅ daw:al awyoŋ / awyoŋ bi*  
FOC.V.3SG learn run:CAUS plane plane the.CLb  
'He learned to fly a plane / the plane'

Consultant : 'here *dawal* is not a verb, it is a noun'

cf. many stems are bivalent in Wolof : V/N (*añ* 'lunch')

However : it is not an ordinary 'noun' because of its complement

N-**u** N genitival connector ≠ *dawal ∅ awyoŋ*

→ *dawal* is a nominal form of the verb: an infinitive

Voisin 2006: Wolof has two infinitive forms

the bare infinitive (lexical verb stem) and the =a infinitive

// Engl. bare infinitive vs. **to** infinitive

# THE INFINITIVE(S) IN WOLOF

The two are used in different constructions (Voisin 2006, Guérin 2016)

- **Bare infinitive**, unlike the =a infinitive

**clitic objects** always come after the verb (no raising)

*Dinaa la telefone ngir [wóor:al ko]*

FUT.1SG O.2SG phone for [be.sure:CAUS O.3SG]

‘I will phone you to (PREP) [confirm it]’

- Qualifying the **VCP =a** construction as **an infinitive construction ?**  
Not very satisfying considering this ‘special clitic’ and its Stray adjunction.

# CONCLUSION

Several constructions have been identified

- V1-V2 construction with its 'enigmatic' linker

The canonical construction VCP

**A few** subtypes identified

- V1 : TAM auxiliary
- The 'tautological' or 'stuttering' construction  
(Vx-linker Vx) with intensive value
- The 'hard to digest' construction with non-agentive S
- V1 **with** linker V2
  - i.e the 'yo-yo' construction: VCP= a single composite event
- V1 **imperfective copula** V2: aret an aspectually marked variant of the neutral linker
- The **zero linker** or bare (infinitive) construction...

On which so many things are still to investigate

Last word

*Bëgga dem taxula mëna dem. Mëna dem ay taxa dem* (Prov.)

il ne suffit pas de vouloir partir, il faut pouvoir le faire !



- Continuity between VCP and complement clause constructions  
*tax*: ‘to cause’

(Nouguier Voisin 2002, 192 sqq)

- Periphrastic causative (regular complement clause)

a. *Nit kii, yaa ko tax-a jóg.*

human this.CLk FOC.S.2SG O.3SG cause-LINK get.up

‘This man, it is for you that he came.’

Lit. ‘it is you who caused him to come’

- VCP causative

b. *Tax nga [mu jooy].*

cause PFT.2SG [ZERO.2SG cry]

‘You made him cry.’ Lit. ‘you caused he cried’

No semantic differences (< semantics of *tax* (auxil.) ?

## ARGUMENT CONTROL

- **V2** selects the properties of the VCP arguments
  - Subject : no restriction on the selection of S
    - a. *Saxaar angi bëgg-a deqi.*  
train PRES(3SG) want-LINK start  
'The train is about to start.'
  - Object: no restriction on the selection of S
    - b. *Nanga xaar [...], nga soog koo jox caabi woto bi.*  
OBL.2SG wait ZERO.2SG just.do O.3SG:LINK give key car the.CLb  
Wait [until he has digested his drunkenness] to hand him the car keys.
- But arguments are syntactically controlled by **V1**: **pronoun raising**  
cf. *ko* in b.

b. *Dama*      *xaw=a*      *sonn*  
FOC.V.1SG almost.do=LINK be.tired  
'I am a little bit tired'

## The 12 primary conjugations for *lekk* 'eat'



	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>dang 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 ~ NP-a lekk</i>	<i>loolu la lekk</i>
1 pl	<i>lekk nanu</i>	<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 ngeenlekk</i>
3	<i>lekk nañu</i>	<i>ñu ngi lekk</i>	<i>dañu lekk</i>	<i>ñoo lekk</i>	<i>loolu lañu lekk</i>
	ZERO-TENSE a.k.a NARRATIVE	(FUTURE) cf. PERFECT	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 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 <sup>3</sup>			
2 sg	<i>lekk-al</i>	<i>bul lekk</i>			
2 pl	<i>lekk-leen</i>	<i>buleen lekk</i>			