Network of Auxiliary Verb Constructions in Wolof: a constructional account of sentence structure

Maximilien Guérin

Network of Auxiliary Verb Constructions in Wolof:
A constructional account of sentence structure

Maximilien Guérin

Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3

maximilien.guerin@univ-paris3.fr
http://maximilien.guerin.free.fr

Introduction

In her reference monograph, Goldberg (1995) investigates one of the most central issue of grammar, i.e. the relation between verbs and sentential constructions. However, as noticed by Kuzar (2012: 1-4), while argument structure constructions play an important role in the formation of verbal sentences, they need a complementary linearization mechanism: the sentence pattern (S-pattern). In this paper, I will show how Wolof Predicative constructions provide data that question the concept of S-pattern.

1. Construction Grammar: some definitions

1.1. Construction. "C is a CONSTRUCTION iff$_{def}$ C is a form-meaning pair $<F_i, S_i>$ such that some aspect of F_i or some aspect of S_i is not strictly predictable from C's component parts or from other previously established constructions." (Goldberg 1995: 4)
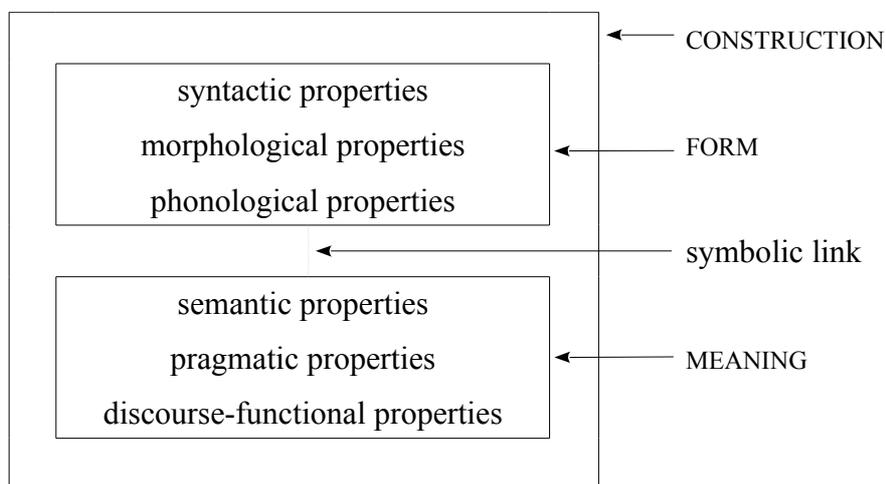
Figure 1. The symbolic structure of a construction (Croft 2001: 18)

1.2. Inheritance Links. "Constructions are specified as to which other, more abstract constructions they inherit from" (Goldberg 1995: 73), i.e. each construction is an instance of a more schematic construction (Figure 2). Moreover, "multiple inheritance paths are allowed" (*ibid.*), i.e. a construction may inherit from more than one other construction (Figure 3).
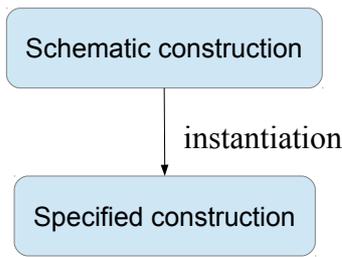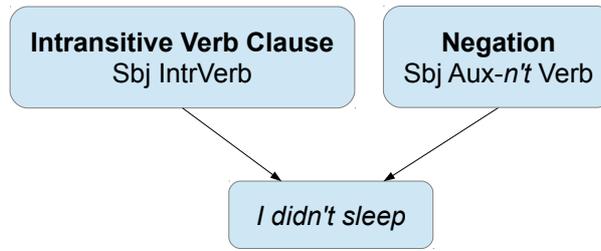
Figure 2. Instance Link

Figure 3. Multiple parents in a
construction taxonomy (Croft 2001: 26)

1.3. Construction Networks. "Constructions form a structured inventory of a speaker's knowledge of the convention of their language. This structured inventory is usually represented by construction grammarians in terms of a taxonomic network of constructions. Each construction constitutes a node in the taxonomic network of constructions" (Croft 2001: 25) (Figure 4). However, because of multiple inheritance paths, grammatical constructions do not form a strict taxonomic hierarchy. Thus, I use the term 'extended network' to refer to a taxonomic network and the other constructions which dominate the constructions of that taxonomic network (Figure 5).
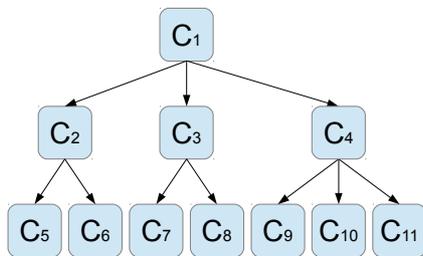
Figure 4. Taxonomic Network
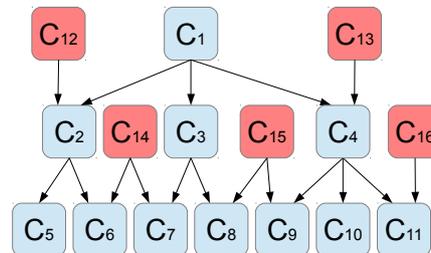
Figure 5. Extended Network

2. Linear order & Sentence patterns

Linear order is not specified in many of the more schematic constructions, even in a rigid word order language as English. For instance in ditransitive constructions, linear order is specified by other constructions (1a-d) (Croft 2001: 197).

(1)   a. Active Declarative : *I gave Becky a bottle of champagne.*
       b. Topicalization : *Becky I gave a bottle of champagne.*
       c. Information Question : *What did you give Becky?*
       d. Relative Clause : *The bottle of champagne that I gave Becky.*

To give an account of linear order, Kuzar (2012) introduces a specific kind of sentential constructions (S-pattern), which constitutes a linearized list of component slots (2).

(2) Verbal Sentence pattern in English (V S-pattern)

NP	[$_{VP}$	V	NP/PP	NP/PP	]
Sbj		Pred	Obj$_1$	Obj$_2$	
I		*gave*	*Becky*	*a bottle*	

Figure 6. Argument structure mapped onto Sentence patterns

"Every S-pattern has a default form. In its default form, all other constructional dimensions of the sentence (such as sentence mood, polarity, modality, and information structure), are unmarked." (Kuzar 2012: 15). Thus, each sentence is an instantiation of several sentential constructions such as S-pattern (Verbal, Evaluative, etc.), Clausal Mood Construction 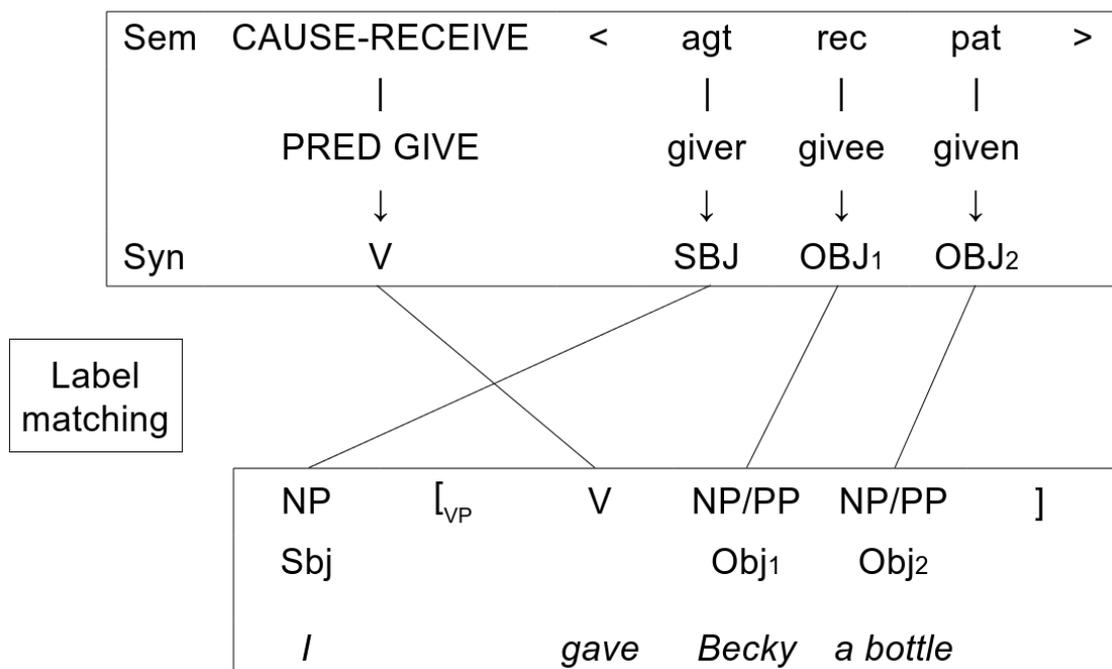(Declarative, Interrogative, etc.) or Information Structure Construction (Topic–Comment, Left-Dislocation, etc.) (3a-b).

(3) a. (i) *They could easily find this book in the library.*
            V S-pattern, Declarative, Topic–Comment
      (ii) *Could they easily find this book in the library?*
            V S-pattern, Interrogative, Topic–Comment
      (iii) *This book – they could easily find it in the library.*
            V S-pattern, Declarative, Left-Dislocation
      (iv) *This book – could they easily find it in the library?*
            V S-pattern, Interrogative, Left-Dislocation
    b. (i) *It leaves me cold to see them dance together.*
            EV S-pattern, Declarative, Thetic
      (ii) *Does it leave me cold to see them dance together?*
            EV S-pattern, Interrogative, Thetic
      (iii) *What leaves me cold is to see them dance together.*
            EV sentence, Declarative, wh-cleft

3. Sentence Structure in Wolof

3.1. Wolof Language. Wolof is a Niger-Congo language (belonging to the Atlantic family) mainly spoken in Senegal.

3.2. Verbal Predication. In Wolof, verbal predication is based on a small number of constructions, the so-called "predicative constructions" (4a-h). These constructions are comparable to conjugations in that they express information about aspect (4a), tense (4b), mood (4c-d), or information structure (4e-h) (Dialo 1981; Church 1981; Robert 1991):

(4)   a. <u>Perfect</u>

      (i)   *liggéey   na-a*
           work   PM-1SG
           'I worked / have worked.'

      (ii) *Omar lekk na   ceeb*
           Omar   eat   PM   rice
           'Omar ate / has eaten rice.'

   b. <u>Future</u>

      (i)   *dina-a   liggéey*
           PM-1SG   work
           'I will work.'

      (ii) *Omar   dina lekk ceeb*
           Omar   PM   eat   rice
           'Omar will eat rice.'

   c. <u>Optative</u>

      (i)   *na-a   liggéey*
           PM-1SG   work
           'May I work.'

      (ii) *na   Omar   lekk ceeb*
           PM   Omar   eat   rice
           'May Omar eat rice.'

   d. <u>Imperative</u>

      (i)   *liggéey-al !*
           work-IMP.2SG
           'Work!'

      (ii) *lekk-al   ceeb !*
           eat-IMP.2SG   rice
            'Eat rice!'

   e. <u>Subject focus</u>

      (i)   *ma-a   liggéey*
           1SG-PM   work
           'It is me who has worked.'

      (ii) *Omar   a   lekk ceeb*
           Omar   PM   eat   rice
           'It is Omar who has eaten rice.'

   f. <u>Presentative</u>[1]

      (i)   *ma-a ngi liggéey*
           1SG-PM   work
           'This is me who has worked.'

      (ii) *Omar   a ngi   lekk ceeb*
           Omar   PM   eat   rice
           'This is Omar who has eaten rice.'

   g. <u>Complement focus</u>

      (i)   *fii   la-a   liggéey*
           here   PM-1SG work
           'It is here that I have worked.'

      (ii) *ceeb   la   Omar   lekk*
           rice   PM   Omar   eat
           'It is rice that Omar has eaten.'

   h. <u>Verb focus</u>

      (i)   *da-ma   liggéey*
           PM-1SG   work
           'I do work.'

      (ii) *Omar   dafa lekk ceeb*
           Omar   PM   eat   rice
           'Omar does eat rice.'

These nine predicative constructions are in complementary distribution and form the basis of Wolof

---

1   Following the latest writing conventions, I write the presentative marker in two words: *a ngi*. Besides, the last vowel *-i* is a proximal deictic morpheme expressing a location close to the speaker. Two other morphemes may appear in this position: *-a* (distal) or *-oog(u)* (anaphoric) (Robert 2006: 164-165).

verbal predication, i.e. the speaker must choose one predicative construction to make a complete finite clause and the instantiation of a predicative construction matches a complete single clause.

With the exception of the imperative construction which is marked by an affix on the lexical verb (4d), Wolof predicative constructions display a mono-clausal split predicate structure involving a lexical verb and an auxiliary-like word, the predicative marker (PM). The PM carries the subject affix and the most part of TAM and information structure informations, and the lexical verb almost exclusively contributes lexical semantic content to the predication.

3.3. Linear Order. In Wolof, S-patterns, TAM constructions and information structure constructions cannot be separated. Indeed, predicative constructions carry information dealing with tense, aspect, information structure or mood, and determine the linear order of all the sentential components (5-9).

(5) a. Perfect: S V *na*-s o O
     b. Future: S *dina*-s o V O
     c. Optative: *na*-s o S V O
     d. Imperative: V-*al*-s o O
     e. Subject Focus: S/s-*a* o V O
     f. Presentative: S/s-*angi* o V O
     g. Compl. Focus: O/o *la*-s/S V
     h. Verb Focus: S *da(fa)*-s o V O

(6) | **S** | **PM** | **-s** | **o** | **V** | **O** | **(Future)** |
     |---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
     | a. *Aali* | *dina* | | | *naan* | *ndox* | |
     | Ali | FUT | | | drink | water | 'Ali will drink water.' |
     | b. | *dina* | *-a* | *ko* | *naan* | | |
     | | FUT | 1SG | 3SG | drink | | 'I will drink it.' |

(7) | **S** | **V** | **PM** | **-s** | **o** | **O** | **(Perfect)** |
     |---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
     | a. *Aali* | *naan* | *na* | | | *ndox* | |
     | Ali | drink | PRF | | | water | 'Ali has drunk water.' |
     | b. | *naan* | *na* | *-a* | *ko* | | |
     | | drink | PRF | 1SG | 3SG | | 'I have drink it.' |

(8) | **O/o** | **PM** | **-s** | **S** | **V** | **(Complement focus)** |
     |---|---|---|---|---|---|
     | a. *ndox* | *la* | | *Aali* | *naan* | |
     | water | CFOC | | Ali | drink | 'It is water that Ali has drunk.' |
     | b. *lii* | *la* | *-a* | | *naan* | |
     | this | CFOC | 1SG | | drink | 'It is this that I have drunk.' |

(9) | **PM** | **-s** | **o** | **S** | **V** | **O** | **(Optative)** |
     |---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
     | a. *na* | | | *Aali* | *naan* | *ndox* | |
     | OPT | | | Ali | drink | water | 'May Ali drink water.' |
     | b. *na* | *-a* | *ko* | | *naan* | | |
     | OPT | 1SG | 3SG | | drink | | 'May I drink it.' |

3.4. Default form in Wolof. Just like Kuzar's S-patterns, every Wolof predicative construction has a default form, in which all the other dimensions are unmarked. By default, predicative constructions have a present perfective affirmative value (10a). To express imperfective aspect, the auxiliary verb *di* or its clitic form *-y* must be added to a predicative construction (10d). Negative polarity is

generally encoded by the verb suffix *-ul* (10b), and past tense is usually encoded by the verb suffix *-(w)oon* (10c).

(10) a. <u>Default form</u>
  da-ngeen *liggéey*
  PM-2PL   work
  'You have worked.'

 b. <u>Negative</u>
  da-ngeen *liggéey -ul*
  PM-2PL   work -NEG
  'You have not worked.'

 c. <u>Past</u>
  da-ngeen *liggéey -oon*
  PM-2PL   work -PST
  'You had worked.'

 d. <u>Imperfective</u>
  da-ngeen *di* *liggéey*
  PM-2PL   IPFV work
  'You are working.'

e. <u>Negative Past</u>
 da-ngeen *liggéey -ul-oon*
 PM-2PL   work -NEG-PST
 'You had not worked.'

f. <u>Imperfective Negative</u>
 da-ngeen *d-ul*   *liggéey*
 PM-2PL   IPFV-NEG work
 'You are not working.'

g. <u>Imperfective Past</u>
 da-ngeen *d-oon*   *liggéey*
 PM-2PL   IPFV-PST work
 'You were working.'

h. <u>Imperfective Negative Past</u>
 da-ngeen *d-ul-oon*   *liggéey*
 PM-2PL   IPFV-NEG-PST work
 'You were not working.'

3.5. Sentence formation in Wolof. Sentence formation in Wolof is based on the interaction of sentential constructions belonging to two major networks: the Network of argument structure constructions and the Network of predicative constructions (Figure 7). Some minor sentential constructions can mark the other dimensions: Negative, Past, Imperfective.
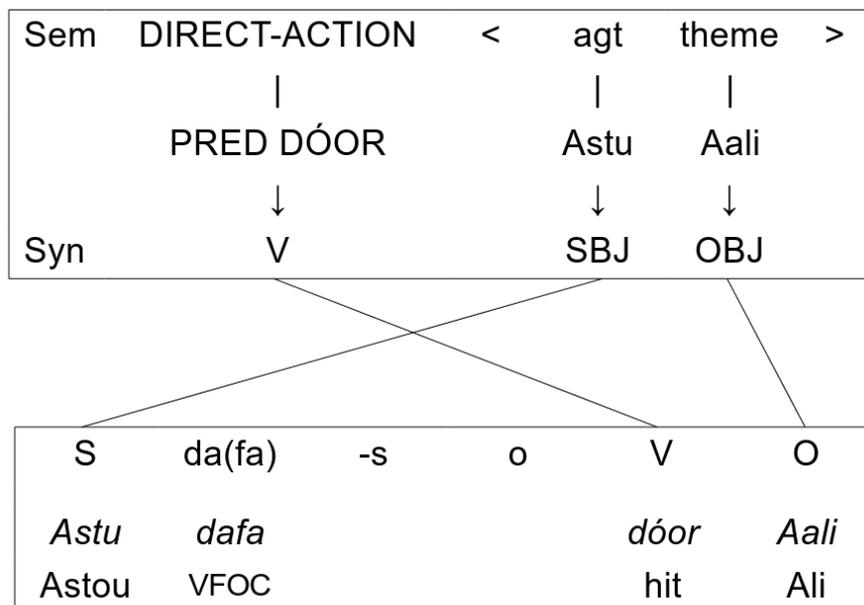

Figure 7. Argument structure construction mapped onto AVC (*Astu dóor na Aali* 'Astou has hit Ali')
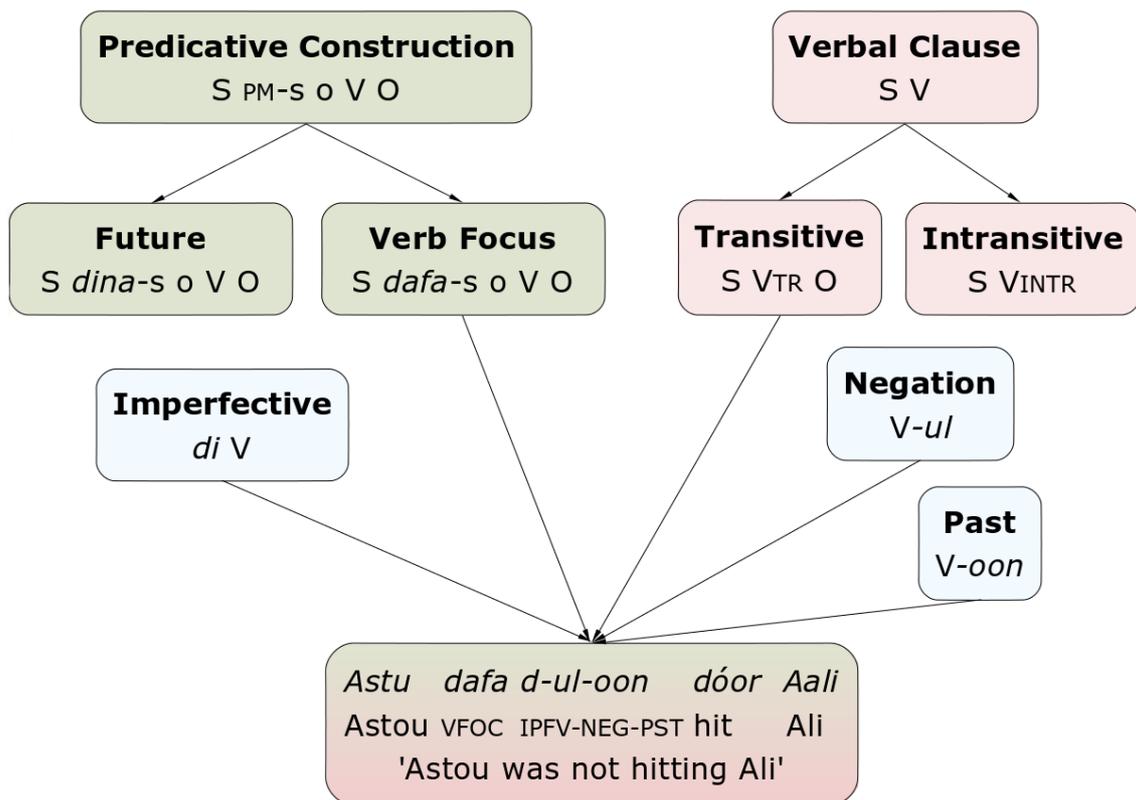
Figure 8. Interaction of sentential constructions

Conclusion

It is not necessary to postulate a specific schematic construction to explain linearization in Wolof. Predicative constructions encode most constructional dimensions of the sentence, including linear order. Indeed sentence formation in Wolof is based on the interaction of sentential constructions belonging to two major networks: the Network of argument structure constructions and the Network of predicative constructions. Some minor sentential constructions can mark the other dimensions (polarity, imperfective aspect and past tense).

Abbreviations

agt	Agent	NP	Noun Phrase	rec	Recipient
Aux	Auxiliary	Obj	Object	Sbj	Subject
C	Construction	pat	Patient	Sem	Semantic
CFOC	Complement focus	PM	Predicative marker	Syn	Syntax
FUT	Future	PP	Prepositional Phrase	V	Verb
IMP	Imperative	Pred	Predicate	VFOC	Verb focus
Intr	Intransitive	PRF	Perfect	VP	Verb Phrase
NEG	Negative	PST	Past		

References

Church, Eric. 1981. *Le système verbal du wolof*. Dakar: Université de Dakar.

Croft, William. 2001. *Radical Construction Grammar: Syntactic Theory in Typological Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dialo, Amadou. 1981. *Structures verbales du wolof contemporain*. Dakar: Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Dakar.

Goldberg, Adele. 1995. *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Kuzar, Ron. 2001. *Sentence Patterns in English and Hebrew*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Robert, Stéphane. 1991. *Approche énonciative du système verbal : Le cas du Wolof*. Paris: CNRS.

Robert, Stéphane. 2006. Deictic space in Wolof: Discourse, syntax and the importance of absence. In Maya Hickmann & Stéphane Robert (eds.), *Space in languages: linguistic systems and cognitive categories*, 155–174. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.