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

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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 C is a form-meaning pair <F₁, S₁> such that some aspect of F₁ or some aspect of S₁ 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)](image)

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).
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).

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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NP</th>
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<th>V</th>
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<th>NP/PP</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sbj</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pred</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>a bottle</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“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. Perfect
   (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. Future
   (i)  dina-a liggéey
        PM-1SG work
   ‘I will work.’
   (ii) Omar dina lekk ceeb
        Omar PM eat rice
   ‘Omar will eat rice.’

c. Optative
   (i)  na-a liggéey
        PM-1SG work
   ‘May I work.’
   (ii) na Omar lekk ceeb
        PM Omar eat rice
   ‘May Omar eat rice.’

d. Imperative
   (i)  liggéey-al!
        work-IMP.2SG
   ‘Work!’
   (ii) lekk-al ceeb!
        eat-IMP.2SG rice
   ‘Eat rice!’

e. Subject focus
   (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. Presentative
   (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. Complement focus
   (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. Verb focus
   (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.

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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: \( S \ V \ na-s \ o \ O \)  
   Ali \ dina \ drink \ water \ ‘Ali has drunk water.’

b. Future: \( S \ dina-s \ o \ V \ O \)  
   ‘I will drink it.’

c. Optative: \( na-s \ o \ S \ V \ O \)  
   ‘May Ali drink water.’

d. Imperative: \( V-al-s \ o \ O \)  
   ‘May I drink it.’

e. Subject Focus: \( S/s-a \ o \ V \ O \)  
   ‘It is water that Ali has drunk.’

f. Presentative: \( S/s-angi \ o \ V \ O \)  
   ‘It is this that I have drunk.’

g. Compl. Focus: \( O/o \ la-s/S \ V \)  
   ‘It is this that I have drunk.’

h. Verb Focus: \( S \ da(fa)-s \ o \ V \ O \)  
   ‘May I drink it.’

(6) a. Perfect: \( S \ V \ na-s \ o \ O \)  
   ‘Ali has drunk water.’

b. Future: \( S \ dina-s \ o \ V \ O \)  
   ‘I will drink it.’

c. Optative: \( na-s \ o \ S \ V \ O \)  
   ‘May Ali drink water.’

d. Imperative: \( V-al-s \ o \ O \)  
   ‘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. Default form
da-ngéen liggéey
PM-2PL work
‘You have worked.’

b. Negative
da-ngéen liggéey -ul
PM-2PL work -NEG
‘You have not worked.’

c. Past
da-ngéen liggéey -oon
PM-2PL work -PST
‘You had worked.’

d. Imperfective
da-ngéen di liggéey
PM-2PL IPFV work
‘You are working.’

e. Negative Past
da-ngéen liggéey -ul-oon
PM-2PL work -NEG-PST
‘You had not worked.’

f. Imperfective Negative
da-ngéen d-ul liggéey
PM-2PL IPFV-NEG work
‘You are not working.’

g. Imperfective Past
da-ngéen d-oon liggéey
PM-2PL IPFV-PST work
‘You were working.’

h. Imperfective Negative Past
da-ngéen 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’)

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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agt</td>
<td>Agent</td>
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<td>Aux</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
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References


