

This informal report summarizes briefly much of what we've learned about Wolof morphosyntax in the past several weeks. Some very interesting (and very different from English) patterns have emerged, but there's a lot more yet to be explored. The data in this squib includes items collected since the beginning of the semester. I've used the Munro-Gale *Ay Baati Wolof* dictionary to confirm (and correct) many of my Wolof transcriptions and to revise many previous IPA transcriptions, since some of the morphosyntactic characteristics of Wolof began emerging even in the earliest class sessions. The report starts with discussion of noun phrases, with discussion of various aspects of morphosyntax that have emerged along the way.

### Noun Phrase

The noun phrase can be a proper name, common noun, or pronoun. Among the elicitations we've heard both French and Arabic borrowings among the nouns (days of the week, for example, from Arabic). We've also seen a fair amount of compounding:

"finger"	baaraam	"toe"	baaraam u tànk
"nail"	we		
"leg, foot"	tànk	"fingernail"	we u tànk

Mamuur's literal translation for "baaraam u tànk" is "fingers of the foot." (I notice now that there's what seems to be a particle **-u** as a connector of some sort between the two nouns. Compounding can be fairly involved, and in 3) below, also seems to involve verbs.

	Gloss	Wolof	Literal Translation
1.	"forebears"	maamaati maamaati maam <sup>1</sup>	"great-grandparents' great grandparents' grandparents"
2.	"homosexual"	góor-jigéen	"man-woman"
3.	"lesbian"	jigéen juy wut jigéen	"woman who looks for women"

In example 1, we might be seeing something akin to reduplication, but further research is needed. (Also, I just noticed that this formation also has a vowel, **-i**, as some sort of 'connector' between the morphemes (words) that make up the word. I'm not sure how this fits in with the other connectors we've observed to date, but I make a note for future reference. Perhaps it's a phonological rule when combining word-level morphemes? Further investigation needed.)

We've observed that Wolof does not mark nouns directly for number, gender, or case, but uses a system of morphemes whose initial consonants vary, depending on the class of the noun involved. However, gender doesn't seem to play a role at all in what we've observed so far.

Evidence for noun classes and consonants was first noted as elicitation moved from single, non-definite nouns (njombar, xale, góor, for example) to definite and plural elicitation, as can be seen in these examples:

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<sup>1</sup> I'm not certain, but I *think* Mamuur may have come up with this on the fly, which leads me to suspect that this approach is common in the language, that speakers freely use the morpho-syntax to devise new words to convey meaning as needed.

“child”	xale	“the child”	xale bi	“the children”	xale yi
“woman”	jigéen	“the woman”	jigéen ji	“the women”	jigéen yi
“man”	góor	“the man”	góor gi	“the men”	góor yi
“rabbit”	njombor	“the rabbit”	njombor bi	“the rabbits”	njombor Ci

So far we’ve seen examples of these classes:

b-	njombar, xale, laax... <sup>2</sup>
g-	góor...
j-	jigéen, juma...
l-	ndaa...
s-	suuf...
w-	waan, weñ...
y-	marks plural form for many nouns (xale yi, jigéen yi...)

There’s evidently another consonantal marker, - ñ, for certain classes of plural nouns (Munro), but I’m not sure we’ve seen this yet in our data, so I only mention in passing as something that needs further research.

We learned that it’s the *consonants* that vary, not the morpheme as such, and once this was pointed out to us, it became much easier to recognize these varying consonant-morphemes within the data. For example, we see the pattern in noun phrases that pattern as relative clauses (called as such because the NP that modifies the initial NP in clause is connected to the head NP via a ‘relativizer’ construct).

What we do know for certain is thunits, perhaps better identified as “relative phrases” are formed by using a **-Cu** morpheme that conveys the meaning ‘who is a, or has the attributes of’ the NP that follows. For example:

	Gloss	Wolof	Literal Translation
3.	“boy”	xale bu góor	“child [ who is a, or has the attributes of a...] man”
4.	“girl”	xale bu jigéen	“child [ “ ” ] woman”
5.	“older brother” <sup>3</sup>	mag bu góor	“man [+ attributes of] old age”

The bracketed cluster [who is a,...] in the table can be considered a “relativizer,” and phrases such as “xale bu góor” might be thought of more succinctly as “**child who is male**,” or “male child.” Since the “bu” agrees with the “xale” in terms of its noun classifier, xale would be the head of the NP (further analysis still be done). Actually, I think this is dependent marking, since the only morphological distinction in changing a singular to a plural in these relative clauses occurs in the relativizer’s initial consonant.

“grandson”	sèt <b>bu</b> góor
“grandsons”	sèt <b>yu</b> góor
“beautiful woman”	jigéen <b>ju</b> rafet
“beautiful women”	jigéen <b>yu</b> rafet

<sup>2</sup> I believe Mamuur mentioned that new borrowed words are typically assigned to the **b-** class, but this needs to be validated. It suggests that **b-** is a default noun class.

<sup>3</sup> Also used for any older adult male relative (per M. Saar)

## Verbs

One of the first verb forms we observed is the imperative, created by adding a suffix in the pattern -Vl to the base verb, where V is typically a low- to mid-low central vowel (a, è, Senegalese transcription) followed by the alveolar lateral approximant. This may vary depending on how the base verb concludes, (to be further explored). When applied to a group, the conjugation marker 'leen' is used, but the base verb remains the same as in these examples:

Elicitation verb form (“infinitive”)		Imperative		“you” [V]	“you all” [V]
“to cook”	togg	“Cook dinner.”	toggal	Toggal reer.	Toggal leen reer.
“to come close”	jegesi	“Come close.	jegesil	Jegesil.	Jegesi leen.
“put to the depth <sup>4</sup> ”	diigal	“Make it go to the bottom.	diigalal	Diigalal ko.	Diigalal leen ko.

We’ve learned that Wolof doesn’t have an “adjective” construct, as a modifier of NPs. Rather, Wolof uses **stative verbs** to assign attributes to referents in the clause as in these examples:

(6) Rafet na. “She is pretty.”  
BE.pretty 3sg

(7) Piis bi xotteku na. “The cloth is torn.”  
cloth DET BE.torn 3sg

These examples also reveal one of the basic clause patterns we’ve observed, in which an Intransitive verb has a ‘subject’ that is a Patient (although in 6, it might be better to describe as simply Undergoer). This needs more thought.) Intransitivity is not limited to stative verbs, as this example shows:

(8) Lekk naa. “I ate.”  
“to eat” 1sg.

The intransitive clause contrasts with another key pattern we’ve seen in which a transitive verb has both an agent and a patient (using these terms to stay away from “subject” and “object” for the time being). In 9, the verb is transitive (Munro), while in 7, it’s not.

(9) Daam xotti na piis bi. “Daam tore the cloth.”  
Daam “to tear” 3sg cloth DET

As these examples also demonstrate, Wolof supports syntax patterns with Verb-initial as well as NP initial, but we note that the determiners (‘bi’) follow the noun. In 10, we see another pattern in which the sentence focus is brought to bear on what would normally be the object (Theme) of the transitive

(10) Ceeb laa lekk. “[It was] rice [that] I ate.”  
rice 1sg. “to eat”

Some of the differences in these examples, such as 1sg *laa* in (8) compared to 1sg *naa* in (10) provide evidence of Wolof conjugations. My analysis in this area is not complete, but what can be seen thus far is

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<sup>4</sup> “to submerge in water” (Munro)

that Wolof has several conjugations that are used depending on a variety of factors, including most aspectual features rather than tense. Apparently, the conjugations of Wolof depend on the type of construction (clause) in which they are used, with differences including such things as ‘non-subject focus’ (Munro). For this squib, however, I’m only going to discuss the paradigms that I’ve been able to tease out from our data.

It was rice that I ate.	Ceeb laa lekk
It was rice that you (sg) ate.	Ceeb nga (ngë) lekk
It was rice that s/he/it ate.	Ceeb lë lekk
It was rice that we ate.	Ceeb lanu lekk.
It was rice that we ate.	Ceeb lañu lekk.
It was rice that you (pl) ate.	Ceeb ngeen lekk.
It was rice that they ate.	Ceeb lañu lekk.

From the above, we obtain the following conjugation:

1sg	laa	1pl	lanu
2sg	nga	2pl	ngeen
3sg	la	3pl	lañu

Yet to be determined is how to label this particular paradigm. Another paradigm that emerge is this one that denotes that the action of the verb is “in the process” of happening (based on Mamuur’s elicitations and discussion), I’ll just call it the “progressive conjugation” for the time being:

1sg	màngi	1pl	nungi ~ nuñgi
2sg	yàngi	2pl	yeen(en <sup>5</sup> )gi?
3sg	mungi	3pl	nuñgi

This paradigm was extracted from the following series of elicitations:

“I am cooking dinner.”	Mangi togg reer.
“You are cooking dinner.”	Yangi togg reer.
“S/he is cooking dinner.”	Mungi togg reer.
“We are cooking dinner.”	Nungi/Ñungi togg reer.
“You (all) are cooking dinner.”	Yeenengi togg reer.
“They are cooking dinner.”	Ñungi togg reer.

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<sup>5</sup> I’ve listened to the recording again and again, and can’t tell if I’m really hearing a vowel sound in between the 2.PL form example sentence “Clean the floor.”

A parallel series (to the previous one) demonstrating ostensibly the “past tense” confirms that the verb “togg” remains unaltered (as does ‘reer’), but here we see another conjugational paradigm:

“I cooked dinner.”	Togg naa reer.
“You cooked dinner.”	Togg nga reer.
“S/he cooked dinner.”	Togg na reer.
“We cooked dinner.”	Togg nanu reer.
“You (all) cooked dinner.”	Togg ngeen reer.
“They cooked dinner.”	Togg ñanu reer.

As we’ve observed in all full-sentence elicitations, the base verb form remains unchanged, uninflected for tense, aspect, or mood. The form used in clauses is the same form elicited during elicitations early in the semester in response to the English infinitive verb prompts, e.g. “to cook,” “to wash,” and so on.

From the examples above, we can also note that Wolof doesn’t seem to distinguish between “simple past” and “simple present,” and that the primary distinctions are based on aspect—completed, or still going on—rather than tense (Moore, Munro).

### Clause Structure

As mentioned elsewhere, we’ve seen several different clause types, including intransitive and transitive patterns. We’ve also seen di-transitive patterns requiring an Agent, Patient, and various other roles, such as Recipient or Benefactor such as this example:

Tegal nañu la téere bi ci (kaw) taabal bi.      “They have put the book on the table for you.”

I’ve not completed my analysis here at all, but it’s been identified in our data that there’s “no way to remove the agent argument” from the example above (Moore) and make a note to further analyze that series of sentences and look for other examples in the data that demonstrate di-transitivity.

### Negation

We’ve observed several different negation patterns, some of which seem to focus on the NP, some of which negate the Verb. This area needs further clarification, but some preliminary findings suggest that to negate the NP (as in “not rice, but X that I ate”), the morpheme ‘du’ precedes the referent, as in:

<u>du</u> wolof	not wolof (that he studies)
<u>du</u> ma sàcc	“I am <u>not</u> a thief.”

However, I note that “sàcc” in “du ma sàcc” is a stative verb (I believe, based on the other examples around this verb in the elicitations, but I’d need to confirm) so I need to think about how that might factor into the analysis, if at all.

We’ve observed what seem to be a couple of different ways of negation a verb, but further work in this area is also needed to better identify patterns (again, is there a difference in stative verbs vs other types of verbs?). At first glance, it seems that negation of the verb involves a suffix, -ul (but that’s likely another -Vl pattern? For example:

“to be tall”	Njool.
‘She is not tall.’	Njoolul.

In some of the data, it's hard to discern the difference between the imperative form and the negative form, so this is an area for clarification:

toggul 'not cooking'	"S/he is not cooking dinner."	Toggul reer.
toggal 'cook' (imp)	"You (all) cook dinner."	Toggaleen reer.

On the other hand, the context and the "leen" likely simplifies the distinction. However, I'm making a note of this here because I'd like to further examine the difference in the negation of a verb vs. the imperative of the same verb—or is the negative considered a different verb in its own right, rather than a derivation?

### Conjunctions

Wolof has a simple particle to join clauses or phrases (need to check this still). It seems to vary between the voiced/voiceless velar plosive [ag/ak], and I still need to check whether there's a distinction between the two based on the surrounding consonantal sounds. This may be an example of a phonological rule-based variation—but would need to be explored further. Just making a note of it for now.

ag/ak	"and"
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We do have several seemingly complex clauses in our data, but I haven't fully explored that data for coordination, subordination, and other patterns so for now, I just make a note of this alternating conjunction, for future reference.

### Deictics

We've seen many examples of a deictic system that makes fine distinctions based on proximity, visibility, ability to touch, and other factors. I only mention this in passing at this point because I've not completed my analysis and so this table is barely a starting point.

			"here"	"this"	"that"	
<b>Proximal</b>		here	fi	-ii	bi	
<b>Distal</b>	out of reach but visible	there	fèlé		bèlé	
	not visible	there	foofu		boobu	

This area is very rich it seems, with distinctions drawn (from what I believe Mamuur mentioned) in some cases based on the speaker's perspective, in other cases, the listener's perspective. This would be an interesting area for further research, and unfortunately, I've given it very short shrift here. I look forward to now focusing on a single aspect of the Wolof for the term paper. Putting this squib together has been a great help in starting to really coalesce our information—I just know there's so much more to do.

### List of Standard Abbreviations<sup>6</sup>

- 1 First person (I, me, we, us, etc.)
- 2 Second person (you, y'all, etc.)
- 3 Third person (he, him, she, her, they, them, it, etc.)
- ACC Accusative case
- ACT Actor
- ART Article
- ASP Aspect
- BEN Benefactive
- CL Classifier

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<sup>6</sup> From Payne (2006). I've left many items in this list that haven't been used in this squib, for possible future reference in further research and developing the term paper.

CONJ	Conjunction
DAT	Dative
DEF	Definite
DEP	Dependent
DIR	Directional
DIST	Distal deixis
DTRNS	Ditransitive
FOC	Focus
FUT	Future tense
GEN	Genitive case
I, INTRNS	Intransitive
IMP	Imperative mode
IMPERF	Imperfective aspect
LOC	Locative
MAN	Manner
NEG	Negative
NF	Non-future
NOM	Nominative
OBJ	Object
PASS	Passive voice
PAST, PT	Past tense
PAT	Patient
PERF	Perfective aspect
PL	Plural (several things)
PN	Pronoun
POS	Possessed
PR	Present tense
PROG	Progressive aspect
PROX	Proximal deixis
SG	Singular (1 thing)
STAT	Stative
SUBJ	Subject
TOP	Topic
TRNS	Transitive
CONJ	Conjunction
N	Noun
NP	Noun Phrase
PP	Prepositional or Postpositional Phrase
V	Verb
VP	Verb Phrase
A	Most AGENT-like argument of a multi-argument clause
D	Dative or indirect object of a multi-argument clause
O	“Other,” less AGENT-like argument of a multi-argument clause
OBL	Oblique clausal element (non-argument)
S	Single argument of a one-argument clause

## References

- MUNRO, PAMELA; GAYE, DIEYNABA. (1997) *Ay Baati Wolof. A Wolof Dictionary*. Revised Edition, 1997. UCLA Occasional Papers in Linguistics.19
- PAYNE, THOMAS. (2006) *Exploring Language Structure: A Student's Guide*. New York: Cambridge University Press