

Adjectives in an adjective-deficient language: Wolof

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The existence of languages that lack adjectives and use verbs as their property-predicates (PPrs) is commonly accepted (Wetzer 1996, Stassen 1997). Wolof is generally assumed to be such a language (A). We argue, on the basis of the semantic properties of certain relative clauses, that Wolof PPrs do embed a real (attributive) adjective (B). The apparent categorial deficiency is actually a case of spellout deficiency: in Wolof, little *a* must spell out together with the head Pred, creating an intransitive verb of sorts (C).

A. Evidence for the verbal nature of Wolof PPrs include their ability to predicate without a copula (*di* in (1), which **must** be used with nominal predicates), their combinability with verbal inflection (2); and the impossibility to combine them directly with nouns in a *attributive construction* (3) (Baker 2003).

- (1) Faatu moo-**di** *rey / sama jàngalekat. (2) Xaj bi da ñuul-**oon** / dem-**oon**.
 Faatu 3sg.Foc-Cop big / my teacher dog Cl-Def FocV black-Pst / leave-Pst
 (3) *xar réy (lit. sheep big) / *réy xar (lit. big sheep)

B. As other adjective-deficient languages (Bhat 1994, Baker 2003), Wolof uses relative constructions with an attributive interpretation.

- (4) xaj b-u ñuul b-i
 dog C:Cl-Indef. black D:Cl-Def.Prox. 'the black dog'

Constructions like (4) are relative clauses (Torrence 2005): *bu* is a complementizer agreeing in class (*b-*) with the head *xaj* 'dog' and *bi* is a (definite) determiner also agreeing in class. Relatives usually exhibit definiteness agreement between C and D (compare the *-i...-i* pattern in (5) to *-u...-i* in (4)).

- (5) garab g-i ma gis (g-i) (Torrence 2005: 194)
 tree C:Cl-Def 1Sg see D:Cl-Def 'the tree that I saw'

The mismatched relative (MisR) in (4) is restricted to PPrs (McLaughlin 2004, Torrence 2005) (compare (4) with (6)).

- (6) *garab g-u ma xool g-i (Torrence 2005: 195)
 tree C:Cl-Indef 1Sg look_at D:Cl-Def 'the tree that I looked at'

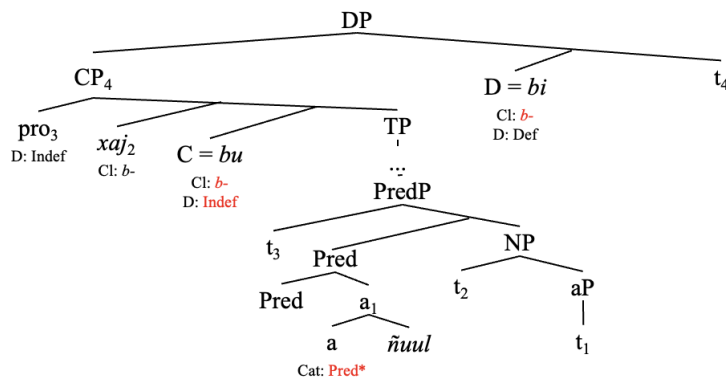
We argue that MisRs embed an attributive adjective. PPrs licence a non-intersective reading only in MisRs (7a), and not in matrix clauses (7b). Non-intersective readings are properties of *attributive* adjectives, not of predicates (Siegel 1980).

- (7) a. Jàngalekat b-u baax b-i (MisR)
 teacher C:Cl-Indef good D:Cl-Def.Prox
 'good as a teacher' / 'good as a person'
 b. Jàngalekat b-i dafa baax.
 teacher D:Cl-Def.Prox 3Sg.VFoc good
 'good as a person' / *'good as a teacher'

We will also explore an additional new piece of evidence: MisRs do not require a contrastive interpretation of the PPr, unlike other constructions. This is restricted to attributive adjectives cross-linguistically, we will argue (cf., *the black dog* vs. *the dog that is black*).

Following Baker (2003), we propose that the PPr verb in the MisR originates as an attributive adjective adjoined to the head noun.

- (8) *xaj bu ñuul bi*
 ‘the black dog’ (lit. the one thing that is a black dog)



The lexical item *ñuul* ‘black’, together with little *a*, forms an aP that is first merged as an adjunct to the head noun *xaj* ‘dog’, forming an NP attributive construction, accounting for the abovementioned semantic effects. This construction is the complement of PredP, articulating the predicative relation (Bowers

1993, Roy 2013). The subject of Pred is a null *pro* endowed with a Definiteness feature but devoid of any Class features. The noun *xaj* moves to Spec-CP and values the unvalued Class feature of C. The Definiteness value of C is valued by *pro*. The whole CP, which originates as a complement to D (Kayne 1994), moves to Spec-DP, where it values the Class feature of D, itself endowed with an inherent Definite feature. The different valuation of C and D accounts for the mismatch. Little *a* in Wolof comes with an uninterpretable Pred feature forcing it to be c-commanded by Pred; in addition, the two heads must spell out together. This accounts for the fact that all PPrs in the language are predicative, i.e., verb-like.

C. Crosslinguistic variation in the availability of adjectives and the expression of PPrs has a morphosyntactic basis. Some languages do not require adjectives to be in the domain of Pred, which may spell out together with TAM as a copula (French, English), the adjective spelling out independently. Other languages require the adjective to be in the domain of Pred and to be spelled out with it (Wolof, Choctaw). Finally, other languages require the adjective to be in the domain of Pred, but not to be spelled out with it (Slave: Baker 2003). These languages show copulas but not non-predicative adjectives. The fourth logical possibility (languages in which adjectives are not forced to be in the domain of Pred, and yet are necessarily spelled-out together with Pred) can independently be ruled out on standard locality grounds.

Selected references: Baker, M. 2003. *Lexical categories*. CUP. Kihm, A. 1999. ‘A study of what morphology may do to syntax: Focus in Wolof’. <https://doi.org/10.1075/la.24.09kih>. Roy, I. 2013. *Nonverbal predication*. OUP. Torrence, H. 2013. *The clause structure of Wolof*. JB.