EPISTEMICITY AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE WOLOF VERB SYSTEM

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Aspectual or tense markers may acquire a modal value due to "subjectification" (Traugott 1995) or to "subjective use" (Wright 1994)

**English progressive**

(1) *I’m warning you* (Wright 1994)
(2) *You’re telling me you don’t love me anymore* (Wright 1995)

→ “the speaker’s own assessment of a particular situation.”

A regular mechanism in Wolof:

in synchrony, aspectual morphemes show a regular shift from temporal to modal or subjective values
OVERVIEW OF THE WOLOF VERB SYSTEM

- Wolof: Atlantic (mainly in Senegal) : ~ 10 millions speakers

- 10 primary conjugations :
  - Verb focus, Subject focus, Complement focus
  - Perfect, Presentative, Aorist
  - Negative, Emphatic negative
  - Obligative and Imperative

- An aspecto-temporal system :

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple conjugations</th>
<th>Suffixed conjugations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ø suffix</td>
<td>suffix -y ~ di</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perfective</td>
<td>imperfective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Temporal values of the **perfective** conjugations :
  - Action verbs : Past (except for Presentative)
  - Stative verbs: Present
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action verb</th>
<th>Stative verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>dem</em> “to go”</td>
<td><em>ñaaw</em> “to be ugly”</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Perfective (Ø):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>past</th>
<th>present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Subject focus)</td>
<td>moo <em>dem</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moo <em>ñaaw</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HE has gone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HE is ugly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>this is the ugly one</td>
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**Imperfective (+y):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>present</th>
<th>present</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>mooy dem</em></td>
<td>*mooy <em>ñaaw</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>HE is going</td>
<td>HE is ugly</td>
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- Difference between perfective and imperfective for **stative verbs**?
- ⇒ uses in discourse: (a) Perfect
1. PERFECT WITH DYNAMIC VERBS

- **Temporal values:**
  - “to have finished” (3)
  - resulting state of a past action (4)
  - “it has already been done now” (5) (no more need to do it)

- (3) - *Yaa ngiy lekk?*  
  PRST1sg + IMP... eat  
  Are you eating?  
  - *Déédéét, lekk naa (ba noppi)*  
  no, eat PFT1sg (until stop)  
  no, I have finished eating (my meal)

- (4) - *Jaar nga ci néégu góór*  
  pass PFT2sg in room+CONN man  
  you have gone through the men’s room = you are circumcised, i.e. you are ambitious

- (5) - *Sarax bi àgg na*  
  alms the arrive PFT3sg  
  The alms have (already) arrived = I have already given (meaning: I won’t give anymore)
2. PERFECT WITH STATIVE VERBS

- **Modal or subjective values:**
  - expected conformity (6)
  - agreement/presence of speaker (7)

- (6) *Buum bi gudd na*
  - rope the be-long PFT3sg
  - *(It’s all right)* the rope is long (enough) *(here we are! at long last!)*

- (7) [two persons watching a boubou]
  - *bubu bii, dafa rafet*
    - boubou this, VB.FOC3sg be-beautiful
    - this boubou is beautiful
  - *rafet na (de)!*
    - PFT 3sg be-beautiful (PTCL)
    - It is indeed (beautiful) ~ it is (definitely) a beautiful one
    - = agreement of the speaker
2. PERFECT WITH STATIVE VERBS

.... Modal or subjective values:  
- expected conformity (6)  
- agreement/presence of speaker (7)  
- polemic / decisive assertion (8)  
  (the discussion is closed, over)

- (8) [At the end of a discussion where the interlocutors disagree] 
  tàng na !
  be-hot PFT3sg
  (I’m telling you) it is hot

  gloss: “it is certain, there is no more discussion”,  
  “there is nothing to be added, no comment, period”.  
  → in the space of speech acts
### Dynamic verbs
(discret)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Temporal value</th>
<th>past</th>
</tr>
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### Stative verbs
(compact)

<table>
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<th>Temporal uses</th>
<th>Subjective uses</th>
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<td>- to have finished</td>
<td>- expected conformity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- resulting state</td>
<td>- agreement/presence of $S_0$</td>
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<tr>
<td>- it has already been done</td>
<td>- polemic/decisive assertion</td>
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- **Argumentative and intersubjective values** for stative verbs:
  - relief
  - approval
  - controversial
A common semantic structure (image-schema) :
“the process (already known to be ongoing) has henceforth reached its expected end-point or term so that there is nothing to add, no more variation: a stable resulting state has been reached”

... applied to different “domains” (Aktionsarten) :
- Dynamic verbs unfold in time, have a temporal term (“discret”)
- Stative verbs have no temporal phases (“compact”)

... producing various semantic effects :
- with dynamic verbs : elimination of the **temporal** variation / instability
- with stative verbs : elimination of the **epistemic** variation :
  (no more doubt concerning assertion)
**Argumentative effects with stative verbs:**

*Time (aspectual phases)*

- \( T_x \)
- \( T_0 \)

*Space of the predicate: (topology)*

- \( p' \)
- \( p \)

*Positions of interlocuteurs / p*

*Space of the speech acts: (validation of p)*

- \( S'_0 \) addressee
- \( S_0 \) speaker

**Argumentative values:**

*Argumentative (engagement)*

- relief: \( S_0 / S_0 \) cf (6)
- approval: \( S'_0 = S_0 \) cf (7)
- controversial assertion: \( S'_0 \neq S_0 \) cf (8)
3. THE IMPERFECTIVE VS. PERFECTIVE SUFFIX

Temporal values with dynamic verbs:

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Perfective: Past (except for Presentative (cf ex.12)

Imperfective:
- action in progress or uncompleted action (9)
- habitual (10)
- likely future (probable) (11)
IMPERFECTIVE with DYNAMIC VERBS

SKIP THIS SLIDE

- **Action in progress**
  
  (9a) *Dafa dem* « He left (that is why...) » *(perfective)*
  
  (9b) *Dafay dem* *(imperfective)*
  
  - VB.FOC3sg +IMP go
  
  He is leaving (that is why...)

- **Habitual**
  
  (10a) *Saaku ceeb la jox* « What he brought is a bag of rice »
  
  (10b) *Saaku ceeb lay jox weer wu.nekk* (bag+CONN rice COMP.FOC3sg +IMP give month every)
  
  What he brings every month is a bag of rice

- **Likely future (probable)**
  
  (11a) *Dafa dee* « He died (that is why...) »
  
  (11b) *Bu ko jamee, dafay dee*
  
  if (AOR3sg) him sting-ANTER,VB.FOC3sg +IMP die
  
  If it stings him, he will certainly die
Perfective vs. Imperfective with stative verbs:

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Stative verbs:
- Present
- Habitual
- Likely future (probable)
- Present with modal nuances
Habitual

(15) *Saaku ceeb mooy war weer wu.nekk*

bag+CONN rice  SUBJ.FOC3sg +IMP must  month every

What we need is a bag of rice **every month**

Likely future (probable)

(16) *Boo ci daggee lu.bari, bii mooy ëpp*

if in cut-ANTER much, this SUBJ.FOC3sg +IMP be-in excess

if you cut off to much of it, this one **will** be too big
Comparison:  

**Perfective**

| Present |

**Imperfective**

- Habitual
- Likely future (probable)
- Present with modal nuances:
  - likely but not certain (15)
  - almost but not really (16)

- It is likely but not certain

15a) *Picc bii moo mel ni ndobin*  
(Perfective suffix ∅)

bird this SUBJ.FOC (∅ =PERF) resemble like big_calao  
This bird looks *(definitely / for sure)* like a big calao

15b) *Picc bii mooy mel ni ndobin*  
(Imperfective suffix -y)

bird this SUBJ.FOC+IMP resemble like big_calao  
This bird *tends* to look like a big calao  
(to my mind, *questionable*)
IMPERFECTIVE WITH STATIVE VERBS (2) : MODAL PRESENT

- It is almost (p) but not really

(16a) *Moo tolloog garab gi*  
.Substring.FOC3sg to-reach tree the  
He is as high as the tree ~ He has reached the tree

(16b) *Mooy tolloog garab gi*  
.Substring.FOC3sg+ IMP to-reach tree the  
He is almost as high as the tree ~ He has almost reached the tree

- Modal nuances :
  
  - “likely but not certain” : epistemic modality (uncertainty)  
  - “almost but not really” : appreciative modality (uncompleteness)
### Dynamic verbs vs. Stative verbs

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<th><strong>Uses</strong></th>
<th><strong>Temporal</strong></th>
<th><strong>Modal value</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic verbs</td>
<td>- habitual</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- likely future (probable)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- action in progress, <strong>uncompleted</strong></td>
<td>- modal present:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stative verbs</td>
<td>- habitual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- likely future</td>
<td></td>
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**Epistemic value:**
- likely but not certain

**Appreciative value:**
- almost but not really

**Temporal value:**
- Uncompleted (present)

**Modal value:**
- Probable but not certain
A common semantic structure (image-schema):

“The process is on its way, oriented toward its term but the endterm has not yet been reached (aspectual instability)”

... applied to different “domains” (Aktionsarten):

- Dynamic verbs unfold in time, have a temporal term (“discret”)
- Stative verbs have no temporal phases (“compact”)

... producing various semantic effects:

- with dynamic verbs: temporal instability
- with stative verbs: epistemic variation or instability: doubt concerning the validation, the assertion
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspectual phases</th>
<th>IMPERFECTIVE</th>
<th>PERFECT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dynamic verbs (temporal space)</td>
<td>uncompleted process</td>
<td>completed in time (resulting state)</td>
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<table>
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<th>Stative verbs (assertive space) (validation of p)</th>
<th>IMPERFECTIVE</th>
<th>PERFECT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- probable but not certain</td>
<td>- almost but not totally P</td>
<td>- definitely certain/true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- almost but not totally P</td>
<td></td>
<td>- really P</td>
</tr>
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So with the stative verbs, the aspectual morphemes convey an attitude on the part of the speaker:

- **certainty** vs uncertainty (espistemic value)
- **completeness** vs uncompleteness of the process (appreciative value)

cf « ideational subjectivity » De Smet and Verstraete (2006), after Halliday and Hasan (1976)

Subjective values are also associated with regular argumentative effects: (the discussion is over / I disagree / I agree / I am relieved…)

cf « interpersonal subjectivity » De Smet and Verstraete (2006)

- can be described in terms of **positioning of the interlocutors** / process
- with aspectual phases corresponding to different positions (correlation)
In their uses in synchrony, the different aspectual morphemes in Wolof present a regular shift from temporal to modal or subjective values conditioned by the specific properties of Aktionsarten:

Stative verbs (compact):

Aspectual phasing is transferred to the domain of assertion = a space with different zones corresponding to aspectual phases (certain vs. uncertain; really vs. almost)

The modal values: two different types of subjectivity

→ ideational subjectivity : epistemic values
→ interpersonal subjectivity : argumentative values
CONCLUSION (2) : A RECURRENT MECHANISM ACROSS LANGUAGES

- **Subjectification** here: not due to grammaticalization but to conditioning
- **Homology between temporal space and space of the speech acts**
- **Correlation**: aspectual phases / positions of speaker and addressee

  → used to express engagement in discourse

- General mechanism across languages, to investigate

(1) English progressive (Wright 1994, 1995)

  a. *I’m warning you*
  b. *You’re telling me you don’t love me anymore*

  → “the speaker’s own **assessment** of a particular situation.”

(2) Perfective Tok Pisin (Mühlhäuser 1985)

  *tupela i pren pinis (= finish)*
  The two are **real** friends

(3) Perfective Engenni (Gur group), (Thomas 1978)

  “*he flat finish*” = “it is **really** flat”


