Introduction
A large part of the works developed within the Construction Grammar framework are devoted to specific constructions. Much fewer publication deal with complete networks of constructions or with the whole “construction circuit” (ie. the network of all construction networks of a language). Nevertheless, Construction Grammar framework allows for holistic analyses of constructions networks, as it highlights both the internal organization of these networks and the links between the different constructions. The aim of this paper is to propose a Construction Grammar analysis of the whole verbal constructions network of Wolof (Atlantic, Niger-Congo language spoken in Senegal).

Toward a constructional analysis
I consider that Wolof predicative constructions cannot be analyzed as a simple list of independent constructions. Some groupings are necessary to explain the formal similarities and differences that exist between these constructions. Besides, some apparent idiosyncrasies in Wolof conjugation can be explained in the light of diachronic elements. The framework provided by Construction Grammars allows a unified analysis of synchronic observations and diachronic phenomena. Indeed, within the scope of a constructional approach, we may consider that Wolof predicative constructions form a construction network. Idiosyncrasies observed in syntax can be analyzed as marks of grammaticalization processes having lead to a restructuring of the network. I thus propose to bring some constructions together into specific networks.

Wolof verbal system

a holistic construction grammar approach

The Wolof conjugation is based on a limited number of constructions called “predicative constructions” (Guérin, 2016), which combine different kinds of grammatical categories: focus (1-4), perfect (5), future (6) or mood (7-9).

In addition to the expression of these distinctions, each predicative construction is perfective, non-past and non-negative by default. To express imperfective, past or negation, it is necessary to add an auxiliary (or its clitic form) (11) or a verbal affix to the construction (11).

Taking all of this into consideration, Wolof verbal paradigms can be represented as a construction table where each line corresponds to a predicative construction.

The advantage of this analysis is to take into account all possibilities allowed by Wolof conjugation. Nevertheless it can obscure some facts, as it cannot explain (i) differences about word order, (ii) formal similarities between some constructions or (iii) paradigmatic oppositions between some constructions.

Network of Auxiliary Verb Constructions

Network of predicative constructions

Network of Negative Constructions

Network of Extraction Constructions

Polygrammaticalization of the former Verb Focus Construction

Network of Non-Finite Constructions

Conclusion
I propose a schematic representation of the whole network of Wolof verbal constructions. Solid black arrows are inheritance links, dotted black arrows are diachronic links and dotted boxes are former constructions. All dotted elements no longer exist in contemporary Wolof. Red arrows are new inheritance links, due to a reanalysis of the constructions in synchrony.

I consider that all predicative constructions constitute a taxonomic network, that is to say they all inherit, directly or indirectly, features from one single schematic construction that I call “Predicative Constructions”.

References

