

The Structure of Wolof

Spring 2026

LIN 4930 . LIN 6571 . SSA4930

T4 (10:40-11:30) & R4-5 (10:40-12:35) . Turlington 2353

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Description This course is an introduction to the structure of Wolof, an Atlantic language of the Niger-Congo family spoken primarily in Senegal, the Gambia, and Mauritania in West Africa. Among the many linguistically interesting features of Wolof are its ATR vowel harmony system, noun classes, verbal extensions, morphologically conditioned consonant mutation, ideophones, adjectival verbs, information structure, WH-question formation, consecutive or narrative 'tense,' and extensive borrowing from French. In addition, there are many under-researched areas of Wolof grammar that provide opportunities for original research. In this class I place a premium on clear descriptive writing as a prerequisite for engaging with linguistic theory. Students will write and revise four short papers, each clearly describing a specific phenomenon. and may engage with linguistic theory if they so wish. The final paper will involve a theoretical engagement with some aspect of the structure of Wolof to be chosen by the student.

Objectives

The objectives of this course are:

- To gain an understanding of the structural features of Wolof
- To be able to analyze various aspects of Wolof grammatical structure, ranging from the representation of Wolof phonemes to clause structure
- To identify aspects of Wolof grammar that are pertinent to linguistic theory and those that require more research
- To gain experience in presenting clear oral and written arguments about language structure
- To develop a deeper understanding of the structure of human language

Readings (all available electronically, mostly on Canvas)

There is no comprehensive modern grammar of Wolof in English. The following grammatical sketch will form the backbone of our course readings, to be supplemented by articles and handouts on different aspects of Wolof grammar:

Robert, Stéphane. 2024. Wolof. In Friederike Lüpke, ed. *The Oxford Guide to the Atlantic Languages of West Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 61-96.

Class format

Our class is a community where we all learn from our discussions with each other and our efforts to articulate our thoughts in oral and written form. My aim in this class is for us to spend our class time on activities and discussion that will enable you to explore, understand, and master the material we are considering. The format of this class demands that you, the students, be active participants in the learning process by a) doing the assigned readings; b) coming to class prepared and ready to

contribute to conversations and activities on the day's topic; c) listening to your classmates, encouraging them, and sharing with them your thoughts, insights, or frustrations related to the material and topic at hand.

Grades

Grades will be based on the following work:

Class participation and presentations	30%
Short papers (4)	40%
Final project	30%

The assignment of a final letter grade will be based on the following scale:

A 94-100	B 84-87	C 74-77	D 64-70
A- 90-94	B- 80-84	C- 70-74	D- 61-64
B+ 87-90	C+ 77-80	D+ 67-70	E Below 61

A note on participation, class involvement, and classroom culture

The classroom is where we will accomplish much of our work this semester and you are expected to be a contributing member of our classroom community. This means that attendance and preparation are of paramount importance. Although you do not earn points simply by attending class, unexcused absences (more than 3 during the semester) or repeated tardiness will result in a lowered grade. You must complete all assignments and readings in a timely fashion, ie: by the beginning of the week for which readings are assigned, and come to class informed and prepared to discuss the topic of the day.

For UF's academic policies and resources please go to <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>

Schedule of topics, readings and assignments (may be modified by the instructor to suit the needs of the class)

SCHEDULE of TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS (*subject to minor change according to class needs and interests).

January 13-15: Introduction to Wolof

Readings:

- Mc Laughlin, Fiona. 2008. "Senegal: the emergence of a national lingua franca." In *Language and national identity in Africa*. Andrew Simpson, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 79-97.
- Robert, Stephane. 2024. Wolof §4.1. In Friederike Lüpke, ed. *The Oxford guide to the Atlantic languages of West Africa*. 61-96. (All subsequent references to this work in the syllabus will be abbreviated as Robert (2024)).

January 20-22: Writing Wolof

Readings:

- Lüpke, Friederike & Sokhna Bao-Diop 2014. Beneath the surface? Contemporary *ajami* writing in West Africa, exemplified through *wolofal*. In *African literacies: Ideologies, scripts, education*. K. Juffermans et al., eds. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 88-117.

Warner, Tobias. 2019. *The Tongue-tied Imagination: Decolonizing Literary Modernity in Senegal*. New York: Fordham UP. Chapter 4: Senghor's grammatology: The political imaginaries of writing African languages. 123-151.

January 27-29: Wolof phonemic inventory and syllable structure

Readings:

Robert (2024): §4.2.3, §4.2.5

Ka, Omar. 1988. Wolof syllable structure: evidence from a secret code.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED309630.pdf>

Short paper 1 due 1/31

February 3-5: Gemination and consonant mutation

Readings:

Robert (2024) §4.2.4

Bell, Arthur J. 2003. Gemination, degemination and moraic structure in Wolof.

Mc Laughlin, Fiona. 2024. Atlantic consonant mutation. In Friederike Lüpke, ed. *The Oxford guide to the Atlantic languages of West Africa*. 577-591. §25.1, §25.2, §25.2.1, §25.3, §25.4

February 10-12: ATR Harmony

Ka, Omar. 1993. *Wolof phonology and morphology*. Lanham: University Press of America (selections TBA)

Pulleyblank, Douglas. 1996. Neutral vowels in Optimality Theory: A comparison of Yoruba and Wolof. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 41(4):295-347.

Sy, Marième I. 2006. Vowel harmony in Wolof loanwords. *Studies in African Linguistics* 35:203-220.

February 17-19: Word classes

Readings:

Robert (2024) §4.3-§4.33

Mc Laughlin, Fiona. 2004. "Is there an adjective class in Wolof?" In *Adjective classes: A cross-linguistic typology*. R.M.W. Dixon and Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 242-262.

Dingemanse, Mark. TBA.

Drolc, Ursula. 2011. Le langage expressif en Wolof: les coverbes idéophoniques. In A. Diagne, S. Kessler, and C. Meyer, eds. *Communication wolof et société sénégalaise: Héritage et création*. Paris: L'Harmattan. 207-238.

Short paper 2 due 2/21

February 24-26: The Wolof noun phrase

Readings:

Robert (2024) §4.4-§4.4.34

Mc Laughlin, Fiona. 1997. "Noun classification in Wolof: When affixes are not renewed." *Studies in African Linguistics* 26(1):1-28.

Babou, Cheikh Anta, and Michele Loporcaro. 2016. "Noun classes and grammatical gender in Wolof." *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics* 37.1 (2016): 1-57.

March 3-5: Derivation and verbal extensions

Readings: Robert (2024) §4.5

March 10-12: Clause structure

Readings: Robert §4.6

Short paper 3 due 3/13

March 14-22 SPRING BREAK

March 24-26: Clause structure (cont'd.)

Readings:

Torrence, Harold. 2013. *The clause structure of Wolof: Insights into the Left Periphery* (excerpts).
Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

March 31-April 2: Information structure

Readings: Robert (2024) §4.7.

Short paper 4 due 4/4

April 7-9: Information structure and intonation: The prosody-syntax interface

Readings:

Robert, Stéphane & Annie Rialland. 2001. The intonational system of Wolof. *Linguistics* 39(5):893-939.

April 14-16 Presentations

April 21: Presentations