# Variations of the quotative in Wolof

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Wolof has a quotative verb which can take take either the form *ni*, *nee* or *ne*, all of which are listed as variants of each other in Diouf (2003). Strikingly, *ni* is formally identical to the word for 'how', *ni*, formed with the manner noun class *nV*, and both *ni* and *ne* are also complementizers. These relations are illustrated Figure 1.

Robert (1996) and Munro and Gaye (1997) have observed that the quotative verbs are more restricted than lexical speech verbs, such as *wax* 'say'. This is illustrated with elicited data in (1), where a consultant was asked to correct the sentence in A. We see that while the original sentence contained a quotative verb *nee*, the consultant changed it to *wax* when they needed to use the negative suffix *-ul*.

(1) A: Mousa nee na Omar dafa dem.
M. QUOT PFV.3SG O. VFOC.3SG go
'Moussa said that Omar left.'

B: Mousa wax-ul ni Omar moo dem, waaye Hamine la wax
M. say-NEG.3SG COMP O. SFOC.3SG go but H. CFOC.3SG say
ni moo dem.
COMP SFOC.3SG go
'Moussa didn't say that Omar left, but that Hamine left.'

However, it is not entirely clear what the meaning differences are between the three forms of the quotatives *nee*, *ne* and *ni* are, as speakers appear to use them interchangeably in elicitation.

This paper attempts to find out what the differences in **usage** between these forms are. Data are gathered from the Wolof UD Treebank (Dione, 2019). When it comes to the quotatives, I have found that the form *ni* is the most rare one to be used in that way, followed by *nee*, and that the form *ne* is the most frequent. When it comes to complementizers, again *ne* is the more frequent form. The use of *ni* as a complementizer seems to be more restricted to some fixed constructions such as *nga xam ni* 'which' (lit: 'you know that').

Finally, note that the 19th-century grammar by Boilat (1858) only lists the form *ni* as a synonym to *wax*. Thus, it could be the case that *ni* is the oldest form and is now being 'taken over' by the newer form *ne*.

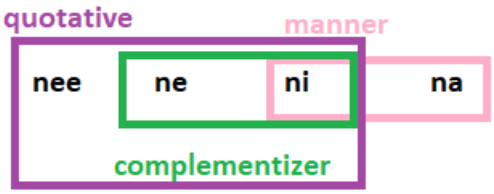


Figure 1: Quotative-Complementizer-Manner space in Wolof.

## References


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