1 Preview

- This presentation surveys and describes different strategies for forming wh-questions in Sereer-Saloum.
- In main clauses, the language allows both **wh-in-situ** and **wh-fronting** to a focus position.
- In long distance wh-questions, where the wh-word originates in an embedded clause, only the wh-fronting construction is possible. These cases are interesting, as there’s an wide range of forms the embedded clause can take with regards to focus marking and resumption.
- There is also a wh-copying strategy, where two distinct copies of a wh-word show up in a long-distance question. If I have time, I’ll show what I know about this construction after preliminary elicitation.

2 Background: Sereer

- Sereer1 (also Serer or Seereer) is a language of the Senegambian branch of the Niger-Congo languages spoken by 1.2 million people in Senegal and 30,000 in The Gambia. It is the principal language of the Sereer people.
- This presentation describes the **Saloum** dialect.
  - Other documentation exists, but it is mostly for the Siin dialect, which is the prestige dialect. Siin seems to differ significantly from Saloum, but is still completely mutually intelligible.
  - Existing documentation is mostly descriptive and is limited to phonology/phonetics (McLaughlin 1994, 2000) and morphology (McLaughlin 1994, Renaudier 2012)
  - The syntax of Sereer is significantly undокументed and does not appear in the theoretical literature.
- All data in this talk were collected during the 2012-2013 Sereer Field Methods class in the Berkeley Linguistics Department and in elicitation with our consultant Malick Loum during September 2013, unless otherwise noted.

3 Background: Relevant Morphosyntax

- The basic word order in Sereer is SVO in transitive clauses, as shown in (1)2:

  (1) *Jegaan a ga’-a otew oxe*
    - *Jegaan 3SG.AGR see-DV woman DET*
    - ‘Jegaan saw/sees the woman.’
    - BASIC TRANSITIVE CLAUSE

- Verbs are marked for tense, aspect, finiteness, negation, and subject agreement.
  - Most verbal morphology is suffixal, though there are some TAM auxiliaries (not relevant here).

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1 I would like to thank my Sereer consultant Malick Loum in sharing his language with me and the 2012-2013 Field Methods class. Thanks also to feedback during the process of eliciting this data from Peter Jenks, Line Mikkelsen, Christine Sheil, Jack Merrill, Jevon Heath, and Kelsey Neely. All Mistakes are my own!
Finite verbs not preceded by an auxiliary take a default vowel suffix -a, labeled here ‘DV’.

Agreement is marked by a mixed paradigm of proclitic morphemes and suffixes (see Appendix 1).

- Verbs have distinct a **focus form** used to indicate focus on a constituent. Focused subjects remain preverbal (2a); focused objects are fronted (2b).

(2) a. Jegaan (*a) ga’-[u] otew oxe
   Jegaan see-FOC woman DET
   ‘JEGAAN saw/sees the woman.’

   b. otew oxe Jegaan a ga’-[u]
      woman DET Jegaan 3SG.AGR see-FOC
   ‘Jegaan saw/sees THE WOMAN.’

- The focus form of the verb involves:
  - Replacement of the default vowel -a with the focus suffix -u.
  - Loss of subject agreement if a subject is focused, as in (2a).

- Adjuncts may also be focused, in which case they are fronted and the verb takes the same form as it would in an object focus clause, as shown in (3):

(3) faak Jegaan a ga’-[u] otew oxe
    yesterday DET Jegaan 3SG.AGR see-FOC woman DET
    ‘Jegaan saw the woman YESTERDAY.’

- Finally, finite embedded clauses do not have any morphological peculiarities. They are preceded by a complementizer (y)ee, as shown in (4):

(4) Ami a xalaat-a [ yee Jegaan a ga’-a otew oxe ]
    Ami 3SG.AGR think-DV COMP Jegaan 3SG.AGR see-DV woman DET
    ‘Ami thinks that Jegaan saw/sees the woman.’

EMBEDDED FINITE CLAUSE
4 Background: Wh-expressions

- The inventory of documented wh-expressions is shown in Table 1, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wh-expression</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>an</td>
<td>‘who’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xar</td>
<td>‘what’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mban</td>
<td>‘when’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tam, mam</td>
<td>‘where’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nam</td>
<td>‘how’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yaam xar</td>
<td>‘why’ (lit. ‘because of what’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xar taxu</td>
<td>‘why’ (lit. ‘what caused’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP + CL-um</td>
<td>‘which NP’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP + CL-podnum</td>
<td>‘how many/much NP’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Sereer Wh-Expressions

- Wh-words are not marked for class or number, with the exception of CL-um ‘which’ and CL-podnum ‘how many/much’ which take the place of a determiner and agree with their NP.

- Both expressions meaning ‘why’ are syntactically complex.
  - *yaam xar* involves a preposition yaam ‘because’ + xar.
  - *xar taxu* consists of a verb tax ‘cause’ with xar ‘what’ serving as a focused subject.

5 Main Clause Questions

- Sereer employs two methods for forming wh-questions in main clauses.
  - **Wh-in-situ**, in which the wh-expression appears clause internally.
  - **Wh-fronting**, in which the wh-expression appears clause initially in a focus position, accompanied by focus morphology on the verb.

- Both strategies are available for subjects, objects, and adjuncts. However, certain wh-expressions display resistance to wh-in-situ constructions.

5.1 Wh-in-situ

- In wh-in-situ, the wh-expressions may appear in the position that an equivalent non-wh-argument or adjunct would appear. The verb in these constructions appears in a normal, non-focus finite form.

- Examples of wh-in-situ is given below for subjects in (5), objects in (6), and temporal and locative adjuncts in (7):

  (5) \( [an] \) a war-a acek ale
        who 3SG kill-DV chicken DET
      ‘Who killed the chicken?’

      SUBJECT WH-IN-SITU
Manner questions formed with nam ‘how’ seem to resist wh-in-situ:

(8) ??Baabu a war-a acek ale [nam]
    Baabu 3SG kill-DV chicken DET how
    ‘How did Baabu kill the chicken?’                   ‘HOW’ WH-IN-SITU

The question in (8) was deemed quite strange by my consultant. Reordering of the postverbal constituents does not alleviate this.

When the verb is in a non-focus form, the interrogative yaam xar ‘why’ may appear in either clause initial position (9a) or post-verbally (9b).

(9) a. [yaam xar] Baabu a war-a acek ale
    why Baabu 3SG kill-DV chicken DET
    ‘Why did Baabu kill the chicken?’                         INITIAL-‘WHY’ WH-IN-SITU

b. Baabu a war-a acek ale [yaam xar]
    Baabu 3SG kill-DV chicken DET why
    ‘Why did Baabu kill the chicken?’                          FINAL-‘WHY’ WH-IN-SITU

I analyze the sentences in (9) as instances of wh-in-situ because of the lack of focus morphology on the verb (see below).

The (8) examples are significant, as it has been shown in the literature that ‘why’ is often disallowed in clause internal or wh-in-situ cross-linguistically (Kandybowicz and Torrence, 2011). Sereer seems to permit both in-situ ‘why’ and fronted/focused ‘why’ (see below).

5.2 Wh-fronting

Alongside the wh-in-situ construction just discussed, wh-expressions may appear in a clause initial focus position. This is available for all wh-expressions but xar taxu ‘why’.

That the interrogative is in a focus position is confirmed by the fact that the verb has the focus suffix -u.

Examples of wh-in-situ is given below for subjects in (10), objects in (11), and adjuncts in (12):

(10) [an] (*a) war-u acek ale
    who kill-FOC chicken DET
    ‘Who killed the chicken?’                                  SUBJECT WH-FRONTING
The form in (12) is what my consultant prefers for questions with nam ‘how’.

Questions that involve wh-fronting are morphosyntactically identical to non-wh-question focus clauses. Note the ungrammaticality of subject agreement marking with questioned subject in (10).

‘Why’ questions with yaam xar can also appear with focus morphology, as in (13a). However, the interrogative cannot appear postverbally here, (13b):

(13) a. \[yaam xar\] Baabu a war-[u] acek ale \\
    \[why\] Baabu 3SG kill-FOC chicken DET \\
    ‘Why did Baabu kill the chicken?’  \\
    INITIAL-’WHY’ + FOCUS

b. *Baabu a war-[u] acek ale \[yaam xar\] \\
    Baabu 3SG kill-FOC chicken DET \[why\] \\
    ‘Why did Baabu kill the chicken?’  \\
    FINAL-’WHY’ + FOCUS

I take this to indicate that the example in (13a) involves wh-fronting while the examples in (9) above involve wh-in-situ.

I have not identified any major semantic difference between the wh-in-itu construction and the wh-fronting construction. My consultant has said that both may be used as normal question.

I welcome suggestions or references as to tests or questions that might help me suss out any differences between the two constructions!

5.3 Summary

The differences between the wh-in-situ and wh-fronting are summarized in Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Form</th>
<th>Position of WH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WH-IN-SITU</td>
<td>V-a (NON-FOCUS) Clause Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WH-FRONTING</td>
<td>V-u (FOCUS) Left Edge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Main Clause Wh-Questions
6 Multi-clause Questions

- Things get more interesting when we look at wh-questions involving clausal embedding.
  - A wh-expression may not appear in-situ in an embedded clause.
  - Instead, it must front to the clause initial position of the matrix clause for the entire multi-clausal construction to be interpreted as a question.

- When such long distance wh-fronting occurs, there is a resumptive pronoun at the left edge of embedded clause and the embedded verb in the embedded clause usually appears in the focus form. There is variation in both the form of the verb and the presence of the pronoun.

- A wh-copying strategy, in which a copy of a wh-word appears at the edge of the matrix clause and the embedded clause, also appears to be possible based on preliminary findings.

6.1 No Embedded Wh-in-situ

- Wh-words may not appear in-situ in an embedded clause. This is true of subjects (14), objects (15), and at least temporal adjuncts (16).

(14) * layaa / yee an a fal-a naak le
  say.2SG.AGR.FIN COMP who 3SG kick-DV cow DET

Intended: ‘Who did you say kicked the cow?’

(15) * layaa / yee Mataar a fal-a xar
  say.2SG.AGR.FIN COMP Mataar 3SG kick-DV what

Intended: ‘What did you say that Mataar kicked?’

While I have not yet been able to test this type of construction with all wh-expressions, it seems that my consultant rules out any wh-in-situ in the lower clause for multi-clause questions.

This is not to be unexpected, as not all languages that allow main clause wh-in-situ allow embedded wh-in-situ.

6.2 Long Distance Wh-fronting

- Fronting of an argument wh-expression from an embedded clause (usually) involves the following:
  - The wh-expression occurs at the left edge of the matrix clause.
  - The matrix verb appears in the focus form.
  - The left edge of the embedded clause is occupied by a resumptive pronoun ten 3SG. This follows the complementizer (y)ee if it is present.
  - The embedded verb appears in the focus form. If the wh-argument is a subject, there is no agreement in the embedded clause.

- This is shown for a subject in (17) for an object in (18):
The pronoun ten is a resumptive pronoun, as it is coreferential with the fronted interrogative.

The pattern presented in (15)-(16) is the ‘core’ pattern. This is the one that my consultant produces most often. However, it turns out that one can vary the form of the embedded clause. This variation involves:

- Presence of a complementizer.
- Presence of a resumptive.
- Presence of focus morphology on the verb.

For the sake of space, I won’t provide an example of all the possible variants here. Instead, I summarize the judgements given for each variant for both subject and objects in Table 3 on the next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>COMP?</th>
<th>ten?</th>
<th>Verb form?</th>
<th>Schema</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>(a) V-u</td>
<td>[ yee ten ... V-u]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(a) V-u</td>
<td>[ yee Ø ... V-u]</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>(a) V-u</td>
<td>[ ten ... V-u]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(a) V-u</td>
<td>[ Ø ... V-u]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>a V-a</td>
<td>[ yee ten ... V-a]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>a V-a</td>
<td>[ yee Ø ... V-a]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>a V-a</td>
<td>[ ten ... V-a]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>a V-a</td>
<td>[ Ø ... V-a]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Embedded Clause Types in Long Distance Wh-fronting

The only ungrammatical pattern is #2 for subjects. This is when there is an overt complementizer followed by no resumptive pronoun and the verb is in the focus form. This is shown in (19):

(19) * [an] Jegaan [a xalat-[u] [ yee [ten] (*a) jaw-[u] maalo fe
who Jegaan 3SG.AGR think-foc COMP 3SG cook-FOC rice DET

‘Who does Jegaan think cooked the rice?’

Strikingly, all other (hypothetically) possible patterns in Table 3 were judged grammatical by my speaker. So, there seems to be something pretty special about that cell with the ‘*’.
• While more work needs to be done to firm up this intuition, the effect in (19) seems reminiscent of what has been
called the ‘Comp-trace’ effect (Pesetsky and Torrego, 2001), which rules out examples like (20), where an overt
complementizer is followed by a subject gap/trace:

(20) Who do you think (*that) t saw Erin?

• Supposing that the resumptive pronoun ten is the overt phonological realization of a trace left by the movement
of the wh-word, the ungrammaticality of (19) would arise because there is a non-overt subject trace preceded by
an overt complementizer.

• I have yet to systematically check the above variation for long-distance wh-fronting from a doubly embedded
clause, but preliminary results suggest that there variation is at least possible in the intermediate clause:

  what Baabu 3SG.AGR think-FOC COMP Yande 3SG.AGR know-DV COMP 3SG
Jegaan a jaw-[u]?
Jegaan 3SG.AGR cook-FOC

‘What does Baabu think that Yande knows that Jegaan cooked?’

• In (21), the wh-word originates in the object position of the a lowest clause, and fronts to the left edge of the
matrix clause. Focus morphology appears on the embedded verb and matrix verb. However, the middle clause
does not have focus morphology or a resumptive pronoun. This middle clause is equivalent to the form in row
#6 in Table 3.

7 Wh-copying?

• Disclaimer: Everything in this section is highly tentative and may be completely wrong.

• Finally, it seems that there may be another way of forming long distance wh-question in Sereer. The method is
shown for a subject in (22), an object in (23), and a temporal adjunct in (24):

(22) [anj] lay-o / yee (anj) (*a) jaw-u maalo
  who say-2SG.AGR.FOC COMP who cook-FOC rice

‘Who did you say cooked rice?’

(23) [xarj] lay-o / yee [xarj] Jegaan a jaw-u maalo
  what say-2SG.AGR.FOC COMP what Jegaan 3sg.agr cook-FOC

‘What did you say Jegaan cooked?’

(24) [mbanj] lay-o / yee [mbanj] Jegaan a jaw-u maalo
  when say-2SG.AGR.FOC COMP when Jegaan 3sg.agr cook-FOC rice

‘When did you say Jegaan cooked rice?’

• Above, two distinct wh-words appear in the long distance question: one at the left edge of the matrix clause and
one at the left edge of the embedded clause. Both verbs appear in the focus form.
In the literature, this strategy is known as ‘wh-copying’. It has been documented in a wide variety of languages, including German, Passamaquoddy (Bruening, 2006) and Hungarian (Den Dikken 2009).

I haven’t been able to test this construction thoroughly yet, though I know it’s not available for wh-determiners:

(25) * acek [apodnum] lay-o / yee (acek) [apodnum] otew oxe
    chicken.PL how.many say-2SG.AGR.FOC COMP chicken.PL how.many woman DET
    a war-u?
    3SG.AGR kill-FOC

Intended: ‘How many did you say Jegaan cooked?’

A lot more work needs to be done to figure out if this a robust pattern in Sereer.

8 Summary and Conclusions

Sereer has two ways of forming wh-questions in main clauses:

- **Wh-in-situ**, where the wh-word appears in the position where an equivalent non-interrogative constituent would appear.
- **Wh-fronting**, where the wh-word appears in a clause initial focus position and the verb is marked for focus.

When the wh-expression originates in an embedded clause, wh-in-situ is impossible; the interrogative must front to the left edge of the matrix clause.

Normally, the verbs both clauses in such a construction have focus marking. In addition, a resumptive pronoun occurs at the left edge of the embedded clause.

There is a good deal of freedom as to the form of the embedded clause, as shown in Table 3 above. This variation is (possibly) quite significant:

- There is a good deal of work showing that when there is morphology that tracks the extraction of an element out of a clause, that the same morphology occurs on all the intermediate clauses along the path of extraction (McCloskey, 2002; Chung, 1994).
- This is not true for Sereer, at least in some cases, as the forms in Table 3 and the ability for the two embedded clauses in (21) to have different forms show.
- More work needs to be done to narrow down exactly what’s going on in these ‘mixed’ extraction cases.

Also interesting is the location of the resumptive pronoun when it appears:

- The location itself of the resumptive pronouns in long distance wh-fronting is interesting. Normally, resumptive pronouns occur in the position where their coreferant is interpreted (McCloskey, 2002).
- In Sereer, however, they uniformly appear at the left edge of the embedded clause, regardless of the form of the verb or the type of constituent extracted.
- Again, I need to do more work to figure out exactly how these resumptives behave.

Finally, a broader point: These patterns are completely undisussed in the literature on Sereer. Thus, they add to both our understanding of the language as a whole and add novel data for theoretical musings.
References


9 Appendix: Subject Agreement Paradigms (some of them)

Verbs in Sereer are inflected for person and number of their subjects. The basic, perfective finite clause subject paradigm is shown in Table 4. The focus equivalent for this paradigm is shown in Table 5. In these tables ‘V_M’ indicates that the initial segment of the verb undergoes consonant mutation where possible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>V-aam</td>
<td>i-V_M^2a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>V-naa</td>
<td>nu-V_M-a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>a V-a</td>
<td>a V_M-a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Finite Perfective Subject Agreement, non-Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>V-um</td>
<td>i-V_M^2u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>V-o</td>
<td>nu-V_M-u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>a V-u</td>
<td>a V_M-u</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Finite Perfective Subject Agreement, Focus