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On the Distribution of Complementizers in Wolof

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requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Linguistics

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, William Torrence and Dorothy Cawthorne Torrence, and my sister, Sonjia Michelle Torrence.

For your unspoken gifts.

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List of Abbreviations

C	complementizer
cl	class
gen	genitive marker
i/a Rel	relative clause with <i>i/a</i> as complementizer
neg	negative
Neut	neutral (<i>na</i>) clause
NSC	non-subject cleft
Oneg	optative negative
Opt	optative
P	preposition
pl	plural
prog	progressive
rel	relative marker
SC	subject cleft
sg	singular
str	strong pronoun
Subj	subjunctive
uRel	relative clause with <i>u</i> as complementizer
VC	verb cleft
xpl	expletive

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation concerns the distribution of complementizers in Wolof, a West Atlantic language. I present a description and analysis of three complementizers, *i/a/u* which occur in several constructions, as D^0 and C^0 -like elements. Once the morphology is decomposed, I show that these complementizers have rather uniform behavior across construction types. The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to Wolof and the necessary background for later chapters. Chapter 2 analyzes the “*u*-construction”, a *wh*-question construction. I argue that Wolof has a set of silent *wh*-words whose presence is detectable by the agreement that they trigger on the complementizer. In addition, I argue that in the *u*-construction the putative *wh*-words are complementizers. Chapter 3 argues for a promotion analysis of relative clauses in Wolof,

which display three complementizers, *u/i/a*. Chapter 4 focuses on cleft constructions. It is argued that the *-a-* that appears in clefts is not a complementizer, but a raising predicate similar to English *be*. I further argue that clefting of a subject involves extraction from a TP while clefting of a non-subject involves extraction from a full CP structure. This yields an account for basic subject/non-subject asymmetries in cleft constructions in Wolof.