

## Impersonal constructions in Jóola-Banjál

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**Abstract:** Jóola-Banjál (an Atlantic language spoken in Senegal) has several constructions, not mentioned in previous works on Jóola languages, which include no canonical subject. This paper puts forward a formal classification of these constructions and a description of their functions, emphasizing the contribution of this West African language to the general typology of impersonality. Most of the types of impersonal constructions found in Jóola-Banjál have already been identified in other languages, but there also several points on which Jóola-Banjál shows interesting particularities.

**Key-words:** impersonal constructions, Atlantic languages, Jóola.

### 1. Introduction

This paper describes the impersonal constructions of Jóola-Banjál, an Atlantic language of Casamance (Sénégal).

Impersonal constructions constitute a major topic in traditional descriptions of European languages, and some types of impersonal constructions have been widely discussed by generativists. Similar constructions have been described in languages spoken in various areas of the world and belonging to different language families, and in several recent typologically oriented publications, discussions of phenomena which typically fall under impersonal constructions are extended to languages outside Europe – see in particular Aikhenvald & al. (eds.) 2001, Bhaskararao & Subbarao (eds.) 2004, Creissels 2007, Donohue & Wichmann (eds.) 2008.

Discussions about Bantu presentational focus constructions constitute so far the main contribution of African languages to the theoretical study and the typology of impersonal constructions.<sup>1</sup> Apart from arbitrary readings of personal pronouns, grammars of West African languages rarely recognize the existence of impersonal constructions, even in languages in which they do exist. For example, no explicit mention of the existence of impersonal constructions can be found in (Hopkins 1995), which constitutes the most detailed syntactic description of another Jóola language published so far, although some of the examples used by Hopkins to illustrate other phenomena include constructions similar to those analyzed in this paper. With this paper, we would like to convince our readers that some West African languages at least have a variety of constructions the analysis of which brings an interesting contribution to the typology of impersonality.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides some general information on Jóola-Banjál. In section 3, we propose a definition concretizing the general notion of impersonal constructions within the frame of Jóola-Banjál morphosyntax. In section

4, we examine a construction of intransitive verbs devoid of any manifestation of the S argument. In section 5, we examine constructions in which the S argument of intransitive verbs does not appear in the canonical position for subjects, and no subject marker is prefixed to the verb. In section 6, we describe the impersonal use of the transitive possession verb *ebaj* ‘have’ in a construction expressing existence. Section 7 presents an impersonal construction involving the negative copula. In section 8, we analyze a construction in which a pronoun in subject position resumes a topicalized clause, but no subject marker is prefixed to the verb. Section 9 is devoted to a construction involving a frozen expletive subject marker. Section 10 presents arbitrary subject constructions in which 2nd person singular and 3rd person plural do not have their usual deictic or anaphoric interpretation. In section 11, we briefly mention the existence of verb forms devoid of a subject marker that are not involved in impersonal constructions, and are better explained as the result of isolated lexicalization processes. Section 12 summarizes the conclusions.

## 2. General information on Jóola-Banjál

Jóola-Banjál belongs to the Jóola subgroup of the Bak language group included in the Northern branch of the Atlantic language family, one of the language families that constitute the Niger-Congo phylum. Jóola-Banjál is spoken by approximately 7,000 speakers in the villages of Badiatte, Bandial, Batignère, Batignère Essil, Elubalir, Enampore, Essil, Ettama, Kameubeul, and Séléki, which constitute the territory traditionally called Mof Avvi (‘the land of the king’). The area is a peninsula bounded by the Casamance River on the north, the Kameubeul Bolong on the west, and the Ziguinchor-Oussouye road on the south and on the east.

Bassène 2007 provides an overall presentation of the phonology, morphology and syntax of Jóola-Banjál. The transcription of Jóola-Banjál follows the conventions already used in practical orthographies of other Jóola languages, which depart from other West African orthographies in the notation of vowels: the vowel system of Jóola-Banjál is characterized by ATR harmony at word level, and the acute accent signals +ATR words (which cannot lead to any confusion, since Jóola languages, like the other Atlantic languages of this area, do not have tone). Consequently, each of the five letters *i*, *e*, *a*, *o*, and *u* has two possible values depending on the presence vs. absence of the acute accent marking the word as  $\pm$ ATR.

Jóola-Banjál morphosyntax is characterized by a system of noun classes similar to that found in other Atlantic languages, manifested by noun prefixes and obligatory agreement between the noun and several types of noun dependents, and between the subject NP and the verb. The numbering of noun classes we use in this paper, taken from Bassène 2007, must be viewed as arbitrary, although it aims at preserving consistency with previous descriptions of other Jóola languages whenever possible. The only coincidence with the system used in Bantu linguistics is that the classes typically including human nouns are labeled 1 (singular) and 2 (plural).

Jóola-Banjál has no case-marking of nouns, but the indexation of arguments by means of verbal prefixes and suffixes provides a firm basis for recognizing a syntactic function ‘subject’ grouping together the single core argument S of

intransitive verbs and the agent A of prototypical transitive verbs, contrasting with a syntactic function ‘object’ including the patient of prototypical transitive verbs.

Of particular relevance to the topic of this paper is the regularity according to which, in finite predicative constructions (i.e., predicative constructions that can give rise to independent clauses), verbs normally include an obligatory prefix representing the single core argument S of intransitive verbs and the agent A of prototypical transitive verbs. If a co-referent NP is present, this subject marker expresses either class agreement (with non-human NPs) or person-number agreement (with human NPs and personal pronouns).<sup>2</sup> In the absence of a co-referent NP, subject markers that do not belong to the 1st or 2nd person are interpreted anaphorically, triggering the identification of the argument they represent to a contextually salient referent compatible with the class or person-number value expressed by the subject marker – ex. (1) to (3).

- |     |    |  |  |    |                        |
|-----|----|--|--|----|------------------------|
| (1) | a. | <i>Atejo na-tiñ-e si-nnaŋ s-a-s-u.</i>                               |  | b. | <i>Atejo na-tey-e.</i> |
|     |    | Atéjo 3SG-eat-PF CL4-rice CL4-ANA-CL4-DEIX <sub>2</sub> <sup>3</sup> |  |    | Atéjo 3SG-run-PF       |
|     |    | ‘Atéjo ate the rice.’  |  |    | ‘Atéjo ran.’           |
| (2) | a. | <i>Na-tiñ-e si-nnaŋ s-a-s-u.</i>                                     |  | b. | <i>Na-tey-e.</i>       |
|     |    | 3SG-eat-PF CL4-rice CL4-ANA-CL4-DEIX <sub>2</sub>                    |  |    | 3SG-run-PF             |
|     |    | ‘(S)he ate the rice.’  |  |    | ‘(S)he ran.’           |
| (3) | a. | <i>*Atejo tiñ-e si-nnaŋ s-a-s-u</i>                                  |  | b. | <i>*Atejo tey-e</i>    |

In other words, the canonical verbal predication in Jóola-Banjál can be schematized as follows:<sup>4</sup>

(A/S) a/s-V (P) (X...)

A detail that greatly facilitates the recognition and analysis of impersonal constructions is that none of the subject markers of Jóola-Banjál has a zero realization or a zero allomorph.

The P argument of transitive verbs is not obligatorily indexed, but Jóola-Banjál has weak object pronouns, i.e. object pronouns that do not constitute autonomous words. They are realized as verb suffixes – ex. (4), and the ability to be represented by weak pronouns suffixed to the verb is not limited to objects – ex. (5).

- |     |  |  |   |                           |
|-----|--|--|---|---------------------------|
| (4) | <i>Ni-tiñ-e gu-mango g-a-g-u.</i>                                  |  | → | <i>Ni-tiñ-e-go.</i>       |
|     | 1SG-eat-PF CL8-mango CL8-ANA-CL8-DEIX <sub>2</sub>                 |  |   | 1SG-eat-PF-CL8            |
|     | ‘I have eaten the mangos’  |  |   | ‘I have eaten them’       |
| (5) | <i>Ni-jug-e su-joba s-a-s-u ni bi-it.</i>                          |  | → | <i>Ni-juk-so-bo.</i>      |
|     | 1SG-see-PF CL4-dog CL4-ANA-CL4-DEIX <sub>2</sub> in CL5-rice.field |  |   | 1SG-eat-PF-CL4-CL5        |
|     | ‘I have seen the dogs in the rice fields.’                         |  |   | ‘I have seen them there.’ |

In addition to vowel harmony, the clearest evidence that weak object pronouns are affixes comes from the fact that, in the inflected form of the verb expressing verb focalization, characterized by the reduplication of the stem, they are inserted between the stem and its copy, as in *ni-tif-fo-tiñ* ‘I ate it (the mango).’

On the limitations to the possible combinations of weak pronouns suffixed to the same verb, see Bassène 2007: 92-3.

### **3. The notion of impersonal construction in Jóola-Banjál**

As discussed in Creissels 2007 and in the introduction of Siewierska (ed.) 2008, the notion of impersonality underlying traditional analyses of European languages is broad and disparate; it does not characterize a well-defined and homogeneous type of construction, but rather a family of constructions that in some way or other lack a canonical subject. The delimitation of impersonal constructions depends on the notion one has of what is (or should be) a canonical subject, and the extension of the notion of impersonal construction to other languages is therefore particularly problematic in the case of languages for which the notion of subject itself is controversial.

However, in a language like Jóola-Banjál, the agreement prefixes of verbs provide clear evidence of the relevance of a syntactic function ‘subject’ subsuming the single core argument of intransitive verbs and the agent of transitive verbs, and the obvious manifestation of a ‘canonical subject’ is the obligatory subject marker triggering an anaphoric interpretation in the absence of a co-referent NP. The subject marker constitutes in Jóola-Banjál the clearest manifestation of a canonical subject. Consequently, in this language, impersonal constructions in the sense of constructions that lack the usual manifestations of a canonical subject can be delimited as follows: in Jóola-Banjál, an impersonal construction is a finite predicative construction in the sense of a construction underlying independent assertive clauses, which however differs from the prototypical predicative construction described in section 2 in that the morphological slot normally occupied by a subject marker is left empty, or is occupied by a morpheme that does not show the canonical behavior of a subject marker with respect to agreement and/or reference.

### **4. Intransitive verbs in a construction including no manifestation of the S argument**

A first type of impersonal construction involves intransitive verbs in a construction including no manifestation of the S argument obligatorily expressed in the canonical construction of the same verbs. Semantically, this construction expresses predication about a situation which is not elaborated by selecting an element that would be treated as the S argument of a predication. As illustrated by ex. (6c) & (7c), this construction concerns verbs describing states, and is in particular used to describe meteorological states.<sup>5</sup>

- (6) a. *Fu-toŋ f-a-f-u fu-mo-moc.*  
 CL7-room CL7-ANA-CL7-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL7-be.dark-be.dark  
 ‘The room is dark.’
- b. *Fu-mo-moc.*  
 CL7-be.dark-be.dark  
 ‘It is dark (the room, or other salient class 7 referent).’
- c. *Mo-moc.*  
 be.dark-be.dark  
 ‘It is dark (speaking of the atmospheric conditions).’
- (7) a. *M-al m-a-m-u mu-jébi-jébi.*  
 CL10-water CL10-ANA-CL10-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL10-be.cold-be.cold  
 ‘The water is cold.’
- b. *Mu-jébi-jébi.*  
 CL10-be.cold-be.cold  
 ‘It is cold (the water, or other salient class 10 referent).’
- c. *Jama jébi-e.*  
 today be.cold-PF  
 ‘It is cold today.’

Although particularly common with reference to meteorological states, this use of intransitive verbs describing states is more generally possible whenever the speaker has in mind a relatively vague referent for which the context does not readily provide a designation. For example, an impersonal formulation would not be acceptable in the answer to a question formulated as in ex. (8), because a referent previously named as *fal fafu* ‘the river’ is understood, whereas the impersonal formulation is normal in ex. (9), because the referent is only vaguely identified as ‘the place we are going to’. As indicated below, we have observed an interesting parallelism with French, which uses the subject clitic *ça* encoding vagueness of reference much in the same conditions as the subjectless construction of Jóola-Banjál, contrasting with the subject clitics *il/elle* obligatorily used in contexts that would trigger the presence of a subject marker in Jóola-Banjál.<sup>6</sup>

- (8) – *F-al f-a-f-u fu-ráli-ráli?*  
 CL7-river CL7-ANA-CL7-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL7-be.far-be.far  
 ‘Is the river far?’ (French *Il est loin, le fleuve?*)
- *Xani fu-ráli-ut.* / \**Xani, ráli-ut.*  
 no CL7-be.far-NEG  
 ‘No, it is not far.’ (French *Non, il n’est pas loin (le fleuve).*)

- (9) – *B-o nu-ja-ale-me ráli-ráli?*  
 CL5-REL 1PL-go-1PL-SBD be.far-be.far  
 ‘The place we are going to, is it far?’ (French *C’est loin, là où on va?*)
- *Xani, ráli-ut.*  
 no be.far-NEG  
 ‘No, it is not far.’ (French *Non, ce n’est pas loin. / \*Non, il n’est pas loin*)

## 5. Intransitive verbs in constructions in which the S argument shows object properties

### 5.1 The impersonal construction of *ɛɲaɲɲo* ‘remain’

*ɛɲaɲɲo* ‘remain’ is an intransitive verb occurring in canonical intransitive predication – ex. (10), but also in a construction in which no subject marker is prefixed. In this construction, the absence of the subject marker correlates with the postverbal position of the NP representing the S argument, which consequently occupies the position normally occupied by the objects of transitive verbs – ex. (11).

- (10) *Si-rálam s-a-s-u si-ɲaɲɲo-e.*  
 CL4-money CL4-ANA-CL4-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL4-remain-PF  
 ‘The money remained.’

- (11) *ɲaɲɲo-e si-rálam.*  
 remain-PF CL4-money  
 ‘There remained some money.’

As reflected in the translation, this construction belongs to a type of construction attested in many languages in which the canonical constituent order in transitive predication is AVP, and S in the canonical construction of intransitive verbs is morphosyntactically aligned with A. In such languages, a more or less important subclass of intransitive verbs may have an alternative construction encoding a ‘presentational’ (or ‘thetic’, ‘sentence-focus’) organization of predication, in which the S argument is represented by an NP in postverbal position (i.e., in the canonical position of objects). Depending on language-specific rules, in such constructions, the S argument of intransitive verbs may lose other subject properties (in particular, the control of verb agreement) and acquire object properties, as discussed among others in Lambrecht 2000 and Creissels 2007.

As illustrated by ex. (11), contrary to what is observed in languages that have ‘locative inversion’ constructions, in Jóola-Banjál, the special treatment of the S argument of *ɛɲaɲɲo* in this construction is not bound to the presence of a fronted locative expression.

In some languages (for example, Tswana), such a construction is possible for any intransitive verb without any particular restriction. In other languages (for example, French), it is common for some intransitive verbs only, but it has been shown that it

does not really involve a division of intransitive verbs into two subclasses, since various factors (in particular, the presence of a locative adjunct in frame function) may improve its acceptability for verbs that at first sight do not accept it. Jóola-Banjál illustrates the borderline case of a language in which this type of construction is possible with a very restricted set of intransitive verbs only: according to our observations, *ɛɲaño* ‘remain’ is the only verb of Jóola-Banjál that can be found in this construction.

Interestingly, this situation is not unique to Jóola-Banjál among West African languages: in Wolof too, ‘remain’ seems to be the only verb attested in a presentational construction of this type (Sylvie Nouguier, p.c.), and the same is observed in Manding. The case of Manding is all the more interesting because Manding and Jóola are typologically very different, and belong to language families (Mande and Atlantic, respectively) that have only a very remote genetic relationship, if any. This could perhaps be interpreted as evidence that ‘remain’ has semantic properties resulting in a particular predisposition to be used in a presentational construction.

## 5.2. *The impersonal construction of intransitive verbs with a clausal argument*

We have seen in section 4 that intransitive verbs describing states, like ‘be dark’, ‘be cold’ or ‘be far’ have an impersonal construction devoid of any manifestation of their single core argument, found in particular (but not exclusively) in meteorological constructions. This section deals with intransitive verbs describing states and combinable with a single argument of clausal nature, such as *eári* ‘be good’ or *essuneni* ‘be shameful’. When their core argument is of clausal nature, either finite, as in (12b), or non-finite, as in (13b) and (14b), such verbs have an impersonal construction in which no subject marker is prefixed to the verb, and the clausal argument occurs in postverbal construction, i.e., in the position typical for objects in transitive predication. Note that, in (14), the *w-* added to the stem in the impersonal construction is not a subject marker, but an epenthetic consonant the presence of which results from a morphophonological rule. If it were a subject marker, it would not be repeated between the stem and its copy.

- (12) a. *Áine*        *au-m-u*                *na-suneni-e.*  
 (CL1)man    (CL1)DEM-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub>    3SG-be.shameful-PF  
 ‘This man[’s attitude] is shameful.’
- b. *Suneni-e*    *na-jow*    *gu-ñen*        *gu-rakkel.*  
 shameful-PF 3SG-go    CL8-hand    CL8-empty  
 ‘It is shameful for him to go with empty hands.’
- (13) a. *Bu-nuk*        *b-au-b-u*                *bu-ssu-ssum.*  
 CL5-palm.wine CL5-DEM-CL5-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL5-be.sweet-be.sweet  
 ‘This palm wine is sweet.’

b. *Su-ssum e-rem bu-nuk ni bujom.*  
 be.sweet-be.sweet CL3-drink CL5-palm.wine in morning  
 ‘It is pleasant to drink palm wine in the morning.’

(14) a. *Fu-mangu f-a-f-u fu-ári-ári.*  
 CL7-mango CL7-ANA-CL7-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL7-be.good-be.good  
 ‘The mango is good.’

c. *Wári-wári e-baj a-ññil áine.*  
 be.good-be.good CL3-have CL1-child (CL1)man  
 ‘It is good to have a son.’

The same construction is possible with passives. Jóola-Banjál has a passive suffix *-i*, canonically used in an agentless passive construction in which the P argument of a transitive verb is encoded as the subject of an intransitive predication, whereas the A argument cannot be expressed. With transitive verbs that accept a second argument of clausal nature, such as *effas* ‘know’ in (15a), the canonical passive construction illustrated by (15b) is not possible with clausal arguments. Clausal arguments can nevertheless occur in the impersonal passive construction illustrated by ex. (15c), in which they are treated like clausal constituents that constitute the sole core argument of intransitive verbs in examples (12b), (13b) and (14b).

(15) a. *U-añ-a-a-w gu-fas-e*  
 CL6-cultivate-AGNR-ANA-CL6<sup>7</sup> 3PL-know-PF  
*bi-it b-a-b-u tu bu-om.*  
 CL5-rice.field CL5-ANA-CL5-DEIX<sub>2</sub> where CL5-be.found  
 ‘The farmers know where the rice field is.’

b. *Áine au-m-u na-fas-i bánoban.*  
 (CL1)man (CL1)DEM-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub> 3SG-know-PASS everywhere  
 ‘This man is known everywhere.’

c. *Fas-i gáabuok áine au-m-u na-ssái-ssái.*  
 know-PASS that (CL1)man (CL1)DEM-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub> 3SG-be.a.sorcerer-be.a.sorcerer  
 ‘It is known that this man is a sorcerer.’

Note that, with infinitives,<sup>8</sup> the impersonal construction of intransitive verbs combined with clausal arguments is not the only possibility. The canonical predicative construction illustrated by examples (16) and (17) is also possible, with the infinitive phrases *e-jow gu-ñen gu-rakkel* and *e-baj a-ññil áine* in subject role. This can be viewed as evidence that the infinitive phrases of Jóola-Banjál have an intermediate status between fully canonical NPs and clausal constituents unable to occupy the most typical nominal positions in the matrix clause.

- (16) *E-jow gu-ñen gu-rakkel e-suneni-e.*  
 CL3-go CL8-hand CL8-empty CL3-shameful-PF  
 lit. ‘To go with empty hands is shameful.’
- (17) *E-baj a-ññil áine e-ári-ári.*  
 CL3-have CL1-child (CL1)man CL3-be.good-be.good  
 lit. ‘To have a son is good.’

## 6. Impersonal use of *ebaj* ‘have’ in existential predication

The transitive verb *ebaj* ‘have’ has a canonical construction in which it assigns the role of possessor to the subject NP, and the role of possessee to the object NP, as in ex. (18) & (19).

- (18) *Ni-baj-e ji-iba (ni e-poc-om).*  
 1SG-have-PF CL11-knife in CL3-bag-1SG  
 ‘I have a knife (in my bag).’

- (19) *Atejo na-baj-e gu-ññil futox.*  
 Atéjo 3SG-have-PF CL2-child five  
 ‘Atéjo has five children.’

The same verb expresses an existential meaning in a impersonal construction characterized by the absence of any manifestation of a subject, but in which an object NP is present in the same way as in the canonical construction of the same verb – ex. (20) to (23).

- (20) *Baj-e ji-iba ni e-poc y-a-y-u.*  
 have-PF CL11-knife in CL3-bag CL3-ANA-CL3-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘There is a knife (in the bag).’
- (21) *Ni-ju-jux búok bab-baj bu-gan naki gu-kkúet.*  
 1SG-see-see that have-have CL2-person HAB 3PL-steal  
 ‘I saw that there were people stealing.’
- (22) *Filay pan baj bu-kut Mof Avví.*  
 this.year IPF have CL5-initiation Mof Avvi  
 ‘This year there will be initiation in the Mof Avvi.’
- (23) *Baj-ut si-ñaru ni ga-llak g-a-g-u.*  
 have-NEG CL4-monkey in CL9-field CL9-ANA-CL9-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘There are no monkeys in the field.’

This impersonal use of ‘have’ is in particular a common strategy for introducing new participants in the discourse – ex. (24).

- (24) *Baj-en-e aïne a-cce ga-ja-ol Kajaka.*  
 have-PST-PF (CL1)man CL1-other CL9-name-3SG Kajaka  
 ‘There was another man called Kajaka.’

The use of ‘have’ verbs in impersonal constructions with an existential meaning is cross-linguistically common – Creissels 1979: 494-504, Creissels 2007. In some languages (Greek, Wolof), the form used with an existential meaning is simply marked as 3rd person singular, and is therefore ambiguous between an existential reading in which the 3rd person mark is not referential, and a possessive reading in which the same mark receives an anaphoric interpretation. Other languages (French) avoid the ambiguity by adding a non-referential locative element to the form of ‘have’ conveying an existential meaning. In Jóola-Banjál, the absence of the otherwise obligatory subject marker unambiguously distinguishes the existential reading of *ebaj* from the possessive reading.

## 7. Impersonal use of the negative identification copula

Jóola-Banjál has verbless predicative constructions expressing identification and localization. In the positive, identification can be expressed by mere juxtaposition of constituents, as in (25), whereas localization is expressed by means of a copula agreeing with the subject, as in (26). The structure of this copula is *u-CL-e/u/ua*. The first formative is a constant element *u-* glossed COP. The second formative is a class agreement marker, and the third formative *-e/u/ua* is a deictic element found also as a formative of demonstrative pronouns and determiners (see note 3 above).

- (25) *Atejo a-añ-a.*  
 Atéjo CL1-cultivate-AGNR  
 ‘Atéjo is a farmer.’

- (26) *Si-ñaru u-s-ua ni ga-llak g-a-g-u.*  
 CL4-monkey COP-CL4-DEIX<sub>3</sub> in CL9-field CL9-ANA-CL9-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘Some monkeys are in the field.’

Clauses in which the identification, categorization, or localization of an entity is negated make use of the negative copula *-let*, prefixed with a subject marker, as in (27) & (28).

- (27) *Atejo a-let a-añ-a.*  
 Atéjo 3SG-COP.NEG CL1-cultivate-AGNR  
 ‘Atéjo is not a farmer.’

- (28) *Si-ñaru s-a-s-u si-let ni ga-llak g-a-g-u.*  
 CL4-monkey CL4-ANA-CL4-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL4-COP.NEG in CL9-field CL9-ANA-CL9-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘The monkeys are not in the field.’

The preceding examples are not impersonal. However, in clauses expressing negative identification, the negative copula also has an alternative construction in which no subject marker is prefixed to it, and no NP designating the entity in question is present, as in ex. (29) & (30).

(29) *Let ínje.*  
 COP.NEG 1SG  
 ‘It’s not me.’

(30) *Let Atejo.*  
 COP.NEG Atéjo  
 ‘It’s not Atéjo.’

This impersonal use of the negative copula combines with the focalization construction to express negative focalization of a constituent in verbal predication, as in ex. (31c), (32c) and (33c). In addition to intonation, focalization is marked, either by the use of different subject markers (if the focalized constituent is the subject), or by fronting the focalized constituent (in the other cases).

(31) a. *Atejo na-ttep-e y-aŋ y-a-y-u.*  
 Atéjo 3SG-build-PF CL3-house CL3-ANA-CL3-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘Atéjo has built the house.’

b. *Atejo a-ttep-e y-aŋ y-a-y-u.*  
 Atéjo 3SG.FOC-build-PF CL3-house CL3-ANA-CL3-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘It is Atéjo that has built the house.’

c. *Let Atejo a-ttep-e y-aŋ y-a-y-u.*  
 COP.NEG Atéjo 3SG.FOC-build-PF CL3-house CL3-ANA-CL3-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘It is not Atéjo that has built the house.’

(32) a. *Ni-jug-ol Dakkar.*  
 1SG-see-3SG Dakar  
 ‘I saw him/her Dakar.’

b. *Dakkar ni-jug-ol.*  
 Dakar 1SG-see-3SG  
 ‘It is in Dakar that I saw him/her.’

c. *Let Dakkar ni-jug-ol.*  
 COP.NEG Dakar 1SG-see-3SG  
 ‘It is not in Dakar that I saw him.’

- (33) a. *A-ññil a-k-u u-m-e fatia bu-ra b-a-b-u.*  
 CL1-child ANA-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub> COP-CL1-DEIX<sub>1</sub> on CL5-bed CL5-ANA-CL5-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘The child is on the bed.’
- b. *Fatia bu-ra b-a-b-u a-ññil a-k-u a-am.*  
 on CL5-bed CL5-ANA-CL5-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL1-child ANA-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub> 3SG-COP.FOC  
 ‘It is on the bed that the child is.’
- c. *Let fatia bu-ra b-a-b-u a-ññil a-k-u a-am.*  
 COP.NEG on CL5-bed CL5-ANA-CL5-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL1-child ANA-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub> 3SG-COP.FOC  
 ‘It is not on the bed that the child is.’

### 8. Lack of agreement in a construction including a subject pronoun

The construction dealt with in this section concerns three verbs, *ekkan*, *ecil*, and *etek*. These verbs occur in a canonical transitive construction, but they also occur in a construction expressing causation in which they take a clausal complement expressing the caused event.

Ex. (34) to (36) illustrate the canonical construction of *ekkan*, *ecil*, and *etek* with their literal meanings of ‘hit’, ‘possess’, and ‘do’, respectively.

- (34) *Na-teg-e a-ññil a-k-u.*  
 3SG-hit-PF CL1-child ANA-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘He hit the child.’
- (35) *Atejo a-cil-e y-an y-a-y-u.*  
 Atéjo 3SG.FOC-possess-PF CL3-house CL3-ANA-CL3-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘The house belongs to Atéjo.’
- (36) *A-cila a-kkan-e bu-rokk b-au-b-e.*  
 3SG-EMPH 3SG.FOC-do-PF CL5-work CL5-DEM-CL5-DEIX<sub>1</sub>  
 ‘He did this work himself.’

As verbs of causation, *ekkan*, *ecil*, and *etek* can still occur in a canonical predicative construction, if the cause is encoded by phrases that have the ability to function as canonical subjects: either a canonical NP, as *gasómulol* ‘his/her sickness’ in ex. (37) and *sibé sasú* ‘the cows’ in ex. (38), or an infinitive phrase, as *gabajut bunaa* ‘the lack of sun’ in ex. (39).

- (37) *Ga-sómul-ol gu-teg-e a-kkay-ut e-añ.*  
 CL9-sickness-3SG CL9-hit-PF 3SG-go-NEG CL3-cultivate  
 ‘His/her sickness made that (s)he did not go cultivating.’

(38) *Si-bé s-a-s-u si-cil-e ni gu-ssanumo.*  
 CL4-COW CL4-ANA-CL4-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL4-possess-PF SBD 3PL-get.rich  
 ‘It is owing to the cows that they got rich.’

(39) *Ga-baj-ut bu-naa gu-kkan-e bu-rokk b-a-b-u ni bu-ssum.*  
 CL9-have-NEG CL5-sun CL9-do-PF CL5-work CL5-ANA-CL5-DEIX<sub>2</sub> SBD CL5-be.pleasant  
 ‘The lack of sun made work pleasant.’

The impersonal construction, characterized by the fact that no subject marker is prefixed to the verb, is used when the cause is encoded as a topicalized clause resumed by the pronoun *mó*, as in ex. (40) to (42).

(40) *Na-sómu-sómut, m-o teg-e a-kkay-ut e-añ.*  
 3SG-be.sick-be.sick CL10-PRO hit-PF 3SG-go-NEG CL3-cultivate  
 ‘He is sick, that’s the reason why he did not go cultivating.’

(41) *A-añ-a ámak, m-o cil-e na-mmeḡ e-mmano.*  
 CL1-cultivate-AGNR (CL1)great CL10-PRO possess-PF 3SG-be.full.of CL3-rice  
 ‘He is a great farmer, that’s why he has plenty of rice.’

(42) *Mata e-bekkan-ol e-lú-lú, m-o kan-e na-bbañ.*  
 since CL3-bicycle-3SG CL3-be.pierced-be.pierced CL10-PRO do-PF 3SG-return  
 ‘His bicycle had a puncture, that’s why he returned.’

*Mo* belongs to a paradigm of anaphoric pronouns formed by prefixing a class marker to a constant element *-o*, glossed PRO. Such pronouns occupy nominal positions in the clause, and in subject position, they normally trigger verb agreement like any NP in the same position. In the construction illustrated by ex. (41) to (43), the pronoun of class 10 *mo* does not represent a noun belonging to class 10, but a topicalized clause. Comparison with ex. (38) to (40) supports analyzing it as the subject of a verb expressing causation, but it does not behave like a subject NP, since it is not resumed by a subject marker prefixed to the verb, and it cannot be analyzed as occupying the subject marker slot either, since it does not undergo vowel harmony.

## 9. A construction involving a frozen subject marker

In Jóola-Banjál, a construction with an obligatory but invariable subject marker that cannot be explained as expressing agreement with any of the NPs involved in the construction is attested with the verb *ejju*.

This verb occurs in a canonical predicative construction with the meaning ‘begin’ or ‘do something first’; this construction is a raising construction in which the dependent verb may be in the infinitive (if the desired meaning is ‘begin doing something’) or in a finite form (if the desired meaning is ‘do something first’). In both cases, *ejju* ‘begin’ shows a subject prefix representing the first argument of the

dependent verb – ex. (43) & (44). Note that, in ex. (43), the class 7 prefix in *fi-tiñ* functions as an infinitive marker.<sup>9</sup>

(43) *A-ññil a-k-u filay na-jju-e fi-tiñ si-nnaŋ.*  
 CL1-child ANA-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub> this.year 3SG-begin-PF CL7-eat CL4-rice  
 ‘The child began eating rice this year.’

(44) *Gu-jju-e gu-rósor bala gu-kkay lekkol.*  
 3PL-begin-PF 3PL-play before 3PL-go school  
 ‘They first played before going to school.’

Ex. (43) and (44) illustrate the use of *ejju* ‘begin’ in a canonical raising construction. We now examine the impersonal construction, in which this verb invariably takes a subject marker of class 3 which must therefore be analyzed as an expletive. In this impersonal construction *ejju* expresses, either ‘have just occurred’, as in ex. (45) & (46), or ‘occur for the first time’, as in ex. (47). The two meanings are not differentiated in the construction, and the choice is entirely context-dependent. Semantically, the valency of the verb combined with *ejju* undergoes no change. Formally, the argument normally encoded as the subject of the verb in the infinitive is optionally represented by an NP preceding *ejju*, and obligatorily indexed on *ejju* by means of object suffixes that control the missing subject of the dependent verb. In other words, in this impersonal construction, the subject argument of the verb in the infinitive has the behavior that, in canonical predications, characterizes topicalized objects.<sup>10</sup>

(45) *Aare a-k-u e-jju-ol e-cig-ul.*  
 (CL1)woman ANA-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL3-have.just.occurred-3SG CL3-arrive-VEN  
 ‘The woman has just arrived.’  
 lit. ‘The woman, it has just occurred to her to arrive.’

(46) *E-jju-óli e-púr-ul ni bi-it.*  
 CL3-have.just.occurred-1PL CL3-go.out-VEN from CL5-rice.field  
 ‘We have just gone out from the rice fields.’  
 lit. ‘It has just occurred to us to go out from the rice fields.’

(47) *E-jju-om fi-tiñ e-lliw e-ñaru.*  
 CL3-have.just.occurred-1SG CL7-eat CL3-meat CL3-monkey  
 ~occur.for.the.first.time  
 (a) ‘I have just eaten monkey meat.’  
 (b) ‘I am eating monkey meat for the first time.’  
 lit. ‘It has just occurred / occurs for the first time to me to eat monkey meat.’

Given that *ejju* ‘begin’ combines in this construction with a verb in the infinitive, and most infinitives belong to class 3, it may well be that, historically, the expletive subject marker of class 3 originally expressed agreement with an infinitive in subject function. However, this analysis would not account for the synchronic facts since, as

illustrated by ex. (47), infinitives belonging to other classes (such as *fi-tiñ*) do not trigger any change in the subject marker prefixed to *ejju*.

An interesting particularity of this construction is that, if the dependent verb is transitive, object markers indexing its P argument may attach, either to the infinitive, or to *ejju*, after the object marker representing the A argument, as illustrated by ex. (48).

- (48) *E-jju-om*                      *e-jug-ol*                      = *E-jju-om-ol*                      *e-juk*.  
 CL3-have.just.occurred-1SG    CL3-see-3SG                      CL3-have.just.occurred-1SG-3SG    CL3-see  
 ~occur.for.the.first.time  
 (a) ‘I have just seen him.’  
 (b) ‘I am seeing him for the first time.’

The possibility to attach a second object marker representing the P argument of the dependent verb is however limited by a person hierarchy (1 > 2 > 3): the object marker representing the P argument of the dependent verb can ‘climb’ only if the A argument (obligatorily indexed on *ejju*) stands higher in person hierarchy.

## 10. Arbitrary reading of the second person singular and third person plural subject markers

In addition to constructions that formally depart from the usual constraints on subject markers, Jóola-Banjál has two cross-linguistically very common constructions that show no deviance from a strictly formal point of view, but in which second person singular is not interpreted as referring specifically to the addressee, and third person plural is not interpreted as referring to a specific group of individuals known to the addressee. As observed in typical ‘pro-drop’ languages like Spanish, the arbitrary reading of 2nd person singular and 3rd person plural is limited to person markers attached to the verb, in constructions in which the morphosyntactic slot for subject NPs is left empty. The corresponding independent pronouns always have a specific reading.

The semantics of arbitrary 2nd person singular and 3rd person plural subject markers in Jóola-Banjál is in accordance with what has been observed for similar constructions in other languages (see Cabredo Hofherr 2003 and references therein).

Clauses including an arbitrary 2nd person singular subject marker express generalizations (‘In general, or when certain conditions are met, it occurs that ...’), and the arbitrary 2nd person subject marker is inclusive, in the sense that the generalizations expressed by such clauses may apply to the speaker and the addressee too. This impersonal use of the 2nd person singular is particularly common in utterances that give instructions not bound to a specific situation, or which describe the usual way an activity is performed. Ex. (49), (50), and (51) are taken from texts describing palm-wine making, fishing, and marriage customs, respectively.

- (49) ... *nu-kok ga-ndapa-i ni ñi-it ñ-a-ñ-u*  
 2SG-tie CL9-climbing.belt-2SG on CL12-palm.tree CL12-ANA-CL12-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘... you tie your climbing-belt on the palm tree

*min u-pirik u-bes-ño.*  
 and 2SG-cut CL6-branche-CL12  
 and you cut its branches.’

- (50) *U-ban-me nu-tos bi ti-cce*  
 2SG-finish-SBD 2SG-move up.to CL13-other  
 ‘When you have finished, you move to another place

*min u-bet y-a-y-u e-mbal.*  
 and 2SG-throw CL3-ANA-CL3-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL3-fishing.net  
 and you throw the other fishing-net.’

- (51) *No anaare u-ñes-ol ikki u-re netut nu-rem-ol*  
 CL15.PRO (CL1)woman 2SG-fetch-3SG until 2SG-reach middle 2SG-get.engaged.with-3SG  
 ‘In that time, a woman, once you had courted her up to a certain point, you asked for her hand.’

By contrast, clauses including an arbitrary 3rd person plural subject marker refer to specific events, and express indetermination as to the identity of the subject argument: either the precise identity of the subject argument is not known to the speaker, or for some reason (s)he does not want to make it explicit. The arbitrary 3rd person plural subject marker is exclusive, in the sense that the speaker and the addressee cannot be included in the group of people referred to. In the following examples, the 3rd person plural subject marker presents the same ambiguity between an indeterminate and a specific reading as *they* in the English translation.

- (52) *Gu-jo-jok a-kkú a-k-u.*  
 3PL-catch-catch CL1-thief ANA-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘They have caught the thief.’  
 or ‘The thief has been caught.’

- (53) *Gu-ppeg-e bu-lago b-a-b-u b-aa súndo.*  
 3PL-shut-PF CL5-road CL5-ANA-CL5-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL5-GEN home  
 ‘They have blocked the road that leads to our village.’  
 or ‘The road that leads to our village has been blocked.’

- (54) *Gu-kic-ol e-letar figen.*  
 3PL-write-3SG CL3-letter yesterday  
 ‘They wrote a letter to him yesterday.’  
 or ‘A letter was written to him yesterday.’

With transitive verbs, the use of an arbitrary 3rd person plural is functionally similar to the use of a passive construction in which the P argument is encoded as the subject of a derived verb form marked by the passive suffix *-i*. Some precisions about Jóola-Banjál passive are in order at this point. In Jóola-Banjál, the only possible functional equivalent of passive constructions with an agent phrase in oblique function is an active construction combining object topicalization and subject focalization, as in ex. (55).

- (55) *A-ññil a-k-u, e-joba e-rum-ol*  
 CL1-child ANA-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub> CL3-dog CL3-bite-3SG  
 ‘The child has been bitten by a dog.’  
 lit. ‘The child, A DOG has bitten him.’

The passive suffix *-i* is found in the construction illustrated by ex. (56), in which the agent cannot be expressed but is semantically implied. The passive character of this suffix (in the sense that it semantically implies the participation of an agent, which however cannot be expressed), follows from the contrast with anticausative forms that occur in superficially similar constructions with different semantic implications, since they imply removing the agent from argument structure – Bassène 2007: 165-168.

- (56) *A-ññil a-k-u na-rum-i.*  
 CL1-child ANA-CL1-DEIX<sub>2</sub> 3SG-bite-PASS  
 ‘The child has been bitten’

Semantically, the only difference between this passive construction and the arbitrary 3rd person plural construction is that the latter implies a human agent, whereas the agent implied by the passive construction is not necessarily human, as illustrated by ex. (56).

## 11. Lexicalization of verb forms devoid of subject marker

For the sake of completeness, it must also be mentioned that Jóola-Banjál has isolated cases of verb forms devoid of subject marker. They may be used by themselves or included in frozen idioms, with a more or less transparent but in any case non-compositional meaning. This can be illustrated by *kakkan* ‘apparently’ (< *ekkan* ‘do’) or *imbi púr to* ‘after that’ (< *imbi* obligative marker, *epúr* ‘come out’, *to* pronoun of class 13).

Such expressions are not amenable to regularities that would justify recognizing additional constructions involving verb forms devoid of subject marker. They are best analyzed as adverbs that must be listed in the lexicon and that, historically, result from isolated lexicalization processes having affected individual verb forms, much in the same way as French *peut-être* or English *maybe*. The verbal origin of such expressions is clearly not relevant to a synchronic account of impersonal constructions in Jóola-Banjál morphosyntax.

## 12. Conclusion

In this paper, we have shown that Jóola-Banjál has a variety of impersonal constructions comparable to that observed in European languages, and that the functional domains in which these constructions are found are largely the same as in European languages. There are however some interesting contrasts, and on several points the data of Jóola-Banjál bring an interesting contribution to the general discussion of impersonality:

- (a) None of the subject markers of Jóola-Banjál has a zero realization. Consequently, the absence of the otherwise obligatory subject markers in several of the impersonal constructions of Jóola-Banjál facilitates the recognition of these constructions as impersonal. This situation contrasts with that of languages in which the forms found in the impersonal constructions are identical to forms triggering an anaphoric interpretation of the subject in canonical predications.
- (b) In many languages, the status of clauses describing meteorological events as impersonal is controversial. Jóola-Banjál has constructions describing meteorological events that are uncontroversially impersonal in the sense that they include no subject marker. The same impersonal construction of intransitive verbs is however also found in situations in which the argument structure clearly includes an S argument, but an S argument which is only vaguely identified. Consequently, the idea that the absence of the subject marker should always straightforwardly reflect an argument structure including no S argument must be abandoned. This aspect of the impersonal constructions of Jóola-Banjál supports the idea that, as already suggested for the meteorological constructions of other languages, verbs in meteorological expressions (whatever their formal make-up) are not characterized by the absence of an S argument, but rather by a low degree of referentiality of their S argument.
- (c) Possible variations in the extension of the subset of intransitive verbs that can occur in a presentational focus construction of the type found for example in French have been widely discussed in the unaccusativity literature. Jóola-Banjál contributes to the discussion by providing an example of a language in which such a construction has been observed with one intransitive verb only.
- (d) Among the cross-linguistically common functional types of impersonals, Jóola-Banjál entirely lacks affective impersonals, i.e., impersonal constructions motivated by the presence of an experiencer in argument structure.

## Abbreviations

AGNR: agent nominalizer

ANA: anaphoric determiner

CL: noun class  
COP: copula  
DEIX<sub>1</sub>: in the sphere of the speaker  
DEIX<sub>2</sub>: in the sphere of the addressee  
DEIX<sub>3</sub>: 'vague' deixis  
DEM: demonstrative  
EMPH: emphatic pronoun or determiner  
FOC: focalization  
GEN: genitive  
HAB: habitual  
IPF: imperfective  
NEG: negation  
PASS: passive  
PF: perfective  
PL: plural  
PRO: pronoun  
REL: relativizer  
SBD: subordinator  
SG: singular

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> On Bantu presentational focus constructions, see among others Bresnan & Kanerva 1989, Marten 2006, van der Wal 2008, Creissels 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The distinction between class agreement with non-human NPs and person-agreement with human NPs follows from the fact that, with non-human subjects, the subject marker always reflects the class prefix of the noun, whereas human subjects that exceptionally do not belong to classes 1/2 are represented by the same subject markers as human nouns belonging to classes 1/2.

<sup>3</sup> The demonstrative determiners and pronouns of Jóola-Banjál include a fixed element *-au-*, glossed DEM, and a variable deictic element with 3 possible values: *-e* (in the sphere of the speaker, glossed DEIX<sub>1</sub>), *-u* (in the sphere of the addressee, glossed DEIX<sub>2</sub>), and *-ua* (vague, glossed DEIX<sub>3</sub>). Jóola-Banjál also has an anaphoric determiner combining a specific formative *-a-* (glossed ANA) and the second deictic marker.

<sup>4</sup> A = agent of transitive verbs, S = single core argument of intransitive verbs, a/s = verbal prefix representing the A or S argument, P = patient of transitive verbs, X = oblique.

<sup>5</sup> The reduplicated form of the verb found in these examples has the same TAM value as the form characterized by the suffix *-e* (glossed PF); it differs from it by implying emphasis on the verb, whereas the *e*-form is compatible with the focalization of other constituents of the clause. Sensitivity of verb morphology to focus phenomena is a feature Jóola languages share with other groups of languages included in the Atlantic family.

<sup>6</sup> On the notion of 'sujet indistinct' in French, see Corblin 1991.

<sup>7</sup> *-aw* can be analyzed as a cliticized variant of *wawu* (anaphoric determiner, class 6).

<sup>8</sup> In Jóola-Banjál, infinitives are not immediately recognizable as such (hence the absence of the abbreviation INF in the glosses), since they consist of a noun class prefix and a verbal stem, like other deverbal nouns. They however differ from other deverbal nouns by retaining verbal characteristics in their 'internal' syntax, i.e., in the internal structure of the phrases they head – Bassène 2009: 181-185.

<sup>9</sup> Infinitives in Jóola-Banjál are marked by a lexically determined noun class prefix. The class 3 prefix is particularly productive in infinitive marker function, but other noun class prefixes fulfill the same function with limited subsets of verbs.

<sup>10</sup> As observed by Andrej Malchukov, this construction shows some analogy with the impersonal construction of *slučít'sja* 'occur, happen' in Russian (*On prišel* 'he came' → *Emu slučilos' prijti* lit. 'Him (DAT) happened to come (INF)').

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