# Borderland Wolof: Language variation and a national border across urban and rural space in Senegal and The Gambia

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Although dialectology has long acknowledged the role of spatial distance on language, national political borders have also shown an intervening influence on linguistic spaces (Auer 2005, Boberg 2000, Watt et al 2010). Most studies have focused on urban borders in industrialized countries, and borders resulting from colonial imperialism may play a role in language variation. The border between Senegal and The Gambia, the invention of 19th-century colonial powers, has persisted into African independence and still serves to delineate two independent nation-states. The areas surrounding the border on both sides in precolonial days were part of the Wolof kingdom of Saloum, where Wolof remains the most widely spoken language. Nevertheless, differences between the national varieties of Wolof have been noted (Ward 1939, Njie 1982). While Senegalese Wolof is described as having a mid-central vowel, often described as a schwa, Gambian Wolof is described as lacking this mid-central vowel and having /e/ in this context or /o/ if following a labial (Becher 1999). Given the porousness of this border and the transborder sense of Saloum identity, I ask whether these varieties with their different vowel systems correspond with the political border.

The goal of this study was to examine the influence of the political border on Wolof spoken in the border area across both urban and rural space. During nine months of fieldwork in 2013, sociolinguistic interviews were conducted with Wolof speakers in eight borderland communities. Four communities are within one kilometer of the political border. Two of these communities (one Gambian and one Senegalese) are on the main transnational highway and adjacent to the official border post. Two rural communities are each seven kilometers east of the highway and have no intervening border presence. In addition to the four communities adjacent to the border, interviews from four communities located about 10 km from the border are now being analyzed. Sixteen Wolof speakers (balanced for age group and gender) in each community produced words in a picture-naming task designed to target the central vowel in Senegalese Wolof.

To test the degree of centrality of this vowel for each speaker, standard deviation of F2 was calculated for a subset of words containing a central vowel in Senegalese Wolof with labial and nonlabial preceding contexts. This continuous dependent variable has been fit with a linear model, showing that urban Gambian speakers have a significantly greater F2 standard deviation ($p<0.001$), suggesting a more divergent production of this central vowel across both environments than in Senegalese urban speakers and fitting with previous descriptions of Gambian Wolof. Rural Gambians' F2 standard deviation, however, is not significantly different from that of the Senegalese communities, suggesting that the political border has an effect for this linguistic variable for urban inhabitants. The communities located 10km from the border will add to the analysis the dimension of distance from the border. Together, these results will show how the political border in its urban and rural contexts and at varying distances can influence language variation. Spectral overlap measures (Wassink 2006) will also help determine if speakers have a mid-central vowel category.

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