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The structure and meaning of the Nominal BE...LA "tense" in Basse Mandinka

Abstract: The present paper offers a detailed analysis of the NomBL tense (a periphrasis compounded by the non-verbal predicator be 'be', a verbal noun and a locative entity la 'at') in Gambian Mandinka of Basse, presenting its most salient structural and semantic properties. Besides proposing various refinements and improvements in the classification and description of the locution, the author demonstrates that according to the evidence provided by Basse Mandinka speakers, the expression does not conform to the traditional grammatical analyses. First, the supposed split between the short and long varieties of the NomBL form of the transitive verbs is not respected. Second, nominal objects may appear not only in the bare stem form but also with the suffix -o and the plural morpheme -olu. Third, the gram is not only a progressive category but may likewise be employed with static verbs in the function of a continuous aspect. In addition, it can also be used as an inclusive perfect.

Key words: African linguistics, Manding, Mandinka, verbal system, semantics

1. Introduction

The topic of the present article is a verbal construction commonly found in the Mandinka language² to which, in accordance with its formal characteristics, we will refer to as the

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Mandinka is a language commonly employed in Gambia (our article focuses on Gambian Mandinka), Senegal and Guinea Bissau. In 2006, there were 1,346,000 speakers of Mandinka in the Western Africa of whom 510,000 lived in Gambia, 669,000 in Senegal and 167,000 in Guinea Bissau (Lewis 2009). Mandinka together with Bambara, Malinké and Jaahankan constitutes the Manding cluster of tongues or regional varieties (Wilson 2000: 109). Manding itself forms a part of the Western branch of the Mande family, which in turn belongs to the Niger-Congo realm (Kastenholz 1996:281, Vydrine, Bergman & Benjamin 2000, Williamson & Blench 2000 and Lewis 2009). The entire genetic hierarchical classification of Mandinka is as follows: Mandinka < Manding-West < Manding < Manding-Mokole < Manding-Vai < Manding-Jogo < Central < Central-Southwestern < Western < Mande < Niger-Congo (Lewis 2009; the symbol "<" indicates the relation of inclusion of an entity of a lower lever into a unit of a higher level).

Nominal *BE...LA* gram³ (hereafter, the abbreviation NomBL will be employed). Namely, the locution is a periphrasis compounded by the non verbal predicator *be* 'be' (in the negative *te* 'not be'), a verbal noun and a locative entity, viz. the postposition *la* 'at, with' (see example 1; cf. Creissels 1983 and Colley 1995: 15; however, Macbrair 1842: 21-22 analyzes the lexeme *la* as an infinitive marker).⁴ As may be observed, the main "meaning" verb appears in its nominal form, i.e. as a verbal noun (sometimes, labeled also gerund, cf. Colley 1995: 9) – hence the term 'nominal' in our denomination.

(1)	A	be	tabiroo	la ⁵	
	he	be	cooking	at	
	He is o	cooking			

The formation – although lacking a monographic study or a comprehensive analysis – has received several interesting and insightful descriptions, being uniformly defined as a progressive category which, in case of originally transitive verbs, displays two exclusive (short and long)⁶ variants.

For instance, according to Creissels (1983), the NomBL form shall be classified as a prototypical – and typologically frequent – progressive gram derived by means of a copula (i.e. non verbal predicator *be*) and a locative entity (i.e. the lexeme *la*): A *be dookuwo la* 'He is working' and A *be domoroo la* 'He is eating'. He also observes that the object regularly appears in its bare stem shape, generating together with the verbal noun a compound (object + verb) noun, cf. the slot *bala-kosoo* in the sentence A *be bala-kosoo la* 'He is playing the xylophone' (cf. also Rowlands 1959).

Similarly, Gamble (1987: 25) defines the locution as a progressive, although all examples provided by him refer exclusively to the present temporal sphere. He notes that when a direct object is expressed, the long shape of the verbal noun, i.e., the form in -roo, is not employed. Instead, the short variety in -o is used: A be tabiroo la 'He is eating' and Ì be fiiroo la 'They are planting' versus M be konton taboo la and M be tiya fiyo la 'I am planting groundnuts'.

The term 'gram' will be used as a synonym of grammatical formation, grammatical expression, grammatical construction etc.

⁴ I consider the analysis of the lexeme *la* as a postposition more adequate. First, the entity *la* does not introduce a proper infinitive but a verbal noun – clearly, a nominal formation. Second, the NomBL "tense" parallels a purely nominal expression built on a nominal unit, e.g., the interrogative pronoun *munne* 'what': *I be munne la?* 'What are you doing?' (lit. 'What are you at?'). In this periphrasis, the lexeme *la* is doubtlessly a postposition. Third, there is another formation built on the auxiliary *be* and a verbal noun. This periphrasis, clearly analogous to the NomBL locution, employs the lexeme *kay* 'on' instead of the entity *la*: *M be diyaamoo kay* 'I am talking'. This entity is indisputably a postposition (see also *I be munne kay* 'What are you doing?', lit. 'What are you busy with?'; cf. Andrason 2012c).

⁵ The relevant NomBL forms (i.e. auxiliary be + verbal noun of a meaning verb + postposition la) will be given in bold type.

⁶ For the explanation of these labels see below in this section as well as in the second part of the paper.

In the same vein, Colley (1995: 14-15) understands the NomBL gram as a progressive category (a compound of a gerund and postposition la), which supposedly displays an identical semantic force as the KAD gram⁷: A be taamoo la = A be taama kaŋ 'He is walking' or A be taamoo kaŋ nug = A be taama kaŋ nug 'He was walking'. He affirms that the construction offers two alternative varieties for transitive verbs: one with an overtly expressed object and one with no object. According to this author, forms without any explicit object can be treated as intransitive and take the long -roo ending: M be domoroo la 'I am eating'. In cases where the direct object is overtly uttered, the noun returns to its bare stem shape and the verbal noun displays the short -o suffix: M be duuta domoo la (Colley 1995: 8-9).

Finally, following an analogical analysis, *Mandinka Learning Manual* (2002: 17-18) explains the NomBL periphrasis as a progressive aspect, commonly derived from dynamic transitive verbs. Furthermore, as in the previously quoted studies, an identical distribution of the two varieties of NomBL gram is noted. Namely, when the direct object is not expressed, the long form of the verbal noun is used (i.e. with *-roo* or *-diroo*). On the contrary, if the object is overtly provided (as well as in the case of intransitive verbs) the short variant (verbal nouns in *-o*) appears. In the latter case, the nominal object is regularly found in its stem form.

Despite the uniformity of the descriptions and an almost perfect agreement among linguists, the author of the present article has observed during his field work in Basse in 2010, 2011 and 2012 that the NomBL formation in the Mandinka variety spoken in the capital of the Upper River Region and neighboring villages does not conform to the definition offered in the existing literature. More specifically, its semantic content is more complex than the meaning of a simple progressive category and the morphological split between long and short variants is far less clear-cut than usually claimed.

This dissimilarity between the Basse vernacular (henceforth labeled as Basse Mandinka) and the language that we could call Standard Gambian Mandinka (i.e. a tongue used in Gambia in wordlists and lexicons, ⁸ grammar manuals, ⁹ Christian and Islamic religious books ¹⁰ as well as in television or the Internet) is not surprising. Namely, although the variety employed in Basse is highly similar to the normalized language, it does in fact display certain peculiarities. For instance, while Standard Mandinka lacks the voiced velar stop [g], this consonant is a genuine member of the phonetic and phonemic system in Basse Mandinka (cf. *gaadiinoo* or *Gambiya* instead of the standard forms *kaadiinoo* 'garden' and *Kambiya* 'Gambia'). Another important distinctive trait is a possessive-genitival construction formed by means of the postposition *ye* 'for' (e.g. *Laamini ye bukoo* 'Lamin's book' or *a ye bukoo* 'his book' besides the normalized expressions *Laamini la bukoo* and *a*

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⁷ The *KAD* formation is a periphrastic construction built on the non verbal predicator *be 'be'*, the infinitive of a meaning verb and the postposition *kaŋ* 'on' (cf. Andrason 2012c).

⁸ E.g., Mandinka English Dictionary (1988) and (1995).

E.g., A Practical Orthography of Gambian Mandinka (1988) and (1993) or Mandinka Learning Manual (2002).

E.g., Kamben Kutoo 'New Testament' (1988), Kamben Kotoo 'Old Testament' (1998) or Selections from the Writings of the Promised Messiah (1988).

la bukoo; for a comprehensive treatment of the distinctiveness of Basse Mandinka, see Andrason 2012a: 9-10)¹¹.

This paper offers a significantly more detailed analysis of the NomBL gram than that available in the traditional literature, presenting the most salient structural and semantic properties of the formation according to the data collected in Basse. Such an extensive study of the gram will subsequently enable us to determine the range of the formal and semantic dissimilarity of the NomBL locution in comparison with its homologue in the standardized language, described in the previously quoted studies.

2. Evidence

The evidence introduced in this article is extracted from an extensive database that has been elaborated upon by the author of the present study since 2010 and which has been also employed in his work on the *Introducción a la gramática de Mandinka de Basse* (2012a). The entirety of the following examples has been provided by ten native Mandinka speakers. All of them have resided in Basse or in villages situated in the surrounding area since the time they were born or for an extended period of time. Below, we offer a list including the names of all our informants, specifying their age (in 2012), occupation/profession and place of residence: Keba Suso (13 years old, primary school student, Bassending), Malick Suso (18, high school student, Bassending), Musa Yaffuneh (24, watchman, Basse), Lamin Manneh (25, university student, Manneh Kunda), Mamanding Sanyang (27, nurse assistant, Basse), Musa Sanneh (29, driver, Kaba Kama), Baba Kamara (30, teacher, Mansajang), Saikou Drammeh (44, nurse, Basse – originally from Serekunda but living in Basse for ten years), Kumba Jallow (56, cook, Mansajang) and Mariama Mendi (32, nurse, Mansajang – originally from Fulla Bantang).

Let us begin the analysis of the NomBL gram in Basse Mandinka with the discussion of its formal properties (morphosyntactial shape, alternative variants, admissibility with determined verbs etc.). Afterwards, we will turn our attention to the semantics of the periphrasis, identifying all possible pieces of meaning (within the categories of time, aspect and mood) the locution is able to convey.

The fact that Basse Mandinka differs in some aspects form the normalized language does not necessarily signify that it should be classified as a rightful dialect of Standard Gambian Mandinka. Although speakers in Basse are conscious of a relative peculiarity of their tongue, they never regard it as substantially different from the standard language. The similarity of the two varieties is yet remarkable. Nevertheless, the author of the present article is aware of the fact that a determination whether a linguistic system is an authentic dialect or an independent tongue is not a pure linguistic question. Quite the reverse, it is importantly conditioned by political, sociological and economic factors.

¹² In case a person is not originally from the Basse area, this will be indicated (see the list introduced below in this paragraph).

¹³ The list has been arranged following the age of the informants.

The last two informants are entirely bilingual: Fula-Mandinka and Manjago-Mandinka. Their ethnic background is Fula and Manjago respectively.

2.1. Structure

It possible to distinguish two morphological types of the NomBL construction, depending on the original or underlying argument structure of the main "meaning" verb employed in the periphrasis: one for intransitive roots (their infinitives do not take a direct object, e.g., *boyi* 'fall' or *diyaamu* 'talk') and another for transitive predicates (their infinitives necessitate a direct object, e.g. *a wafi* 'to sell' or *a sene* 'to plant').

2.1.1 Intransitive verbs

In the case of intransitive verbs, only one variety of the NomBL gram is found – itself being built upon the unique verbal noun available (note, however, the exception of the stems ending in a long e [e:] discussed below). In general terms, all intransitive predicates derive their verbal noun by suffixing the morpheme -o, which may additionally trigger certain phonetic modifications of the final portion of the original stem.

For instance, while the verbs in -n simply add the vowel -o (kuuran 'be sick' > kuurano 'being sick, sickness'), predicates ending in a short vowel or in a diphthong, merge the suffix -o with the last vocalic element, generating a long o [o:], spelled oo (e.g., muyi 'smile' > muyoo 'smiling, a smile', jele 'laugh' > jeloo 'laughing, laughter', taama 'walk, travel' > taamoo 'walking, travelling, travel' etc.). Verbal nouns derived from stems whose final vowel is a long u [u:] or i [i:] (noted in the Mandinka orthography as uu and iirespectively) link the suffix -o to the original verbal form by means of a glide w or y, displaying simultaneously a short variant of the final vowel (e.g., baluu 'live' > baluwo 'living, life'). Roots in a long e [e:] (written ee) offer two alternative forms: one does not differ from the infinitive itself while the other is derived by adding the -o and a linking glide w (e.g., kiidee 'be lonely' > kiidee or kiidewo 'loneliness'). Finally, in verbs which end in either a long o [o:] or a long a [a:] (spelled oo and aa respectively) no change in the vocalic quantity or quality is observed (e.g., siinoo 'sleep' > siinoo 'sleeping, a sleep' and kacaa 'chat' > kacaa 'chatting, a chat'). 15 Here below, we offer various examples of the NomBL construction formed with intransitive verbs, providing also the original shape of the stem or infinitive:

(2)	a.	M	be	boyoo	la (from boyi 'to fall')		
		I	be	falling	at		
		I am falling					
	b.	M	be	seyoo	la (from seyi 'to return')		
		I	be	returning at			
		I am ret	urning				
	c.	M	be	taamoo la (from	n taama 'to walk')		
		I I am ret	be urning	returning at	, ,		

This morphological excursus shall not be understood as exhaustive. For a more comprehensive treatment of the morphology of verbal nouns, see Dramé (2003) and Andrason (2012a).

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	I	be	walking	at	
	I am wal	king			
d.	M	be	diyaamo	0	la (from diyaamu 'to talk')
	I	be	talking	at	
	I am talk	ing			
e.	M	be	futoo		la (from futu 'to arrive)
	I	be	arriving	at	
	I am arri	ving			
f.	M	be	jeloo		la (from jele 'to laugh')
	I	be	laughing	at	
	I am laug	ghing			
g.	M	be	kacaa		la (from kacaa 'to chat')
	I	be	chatting	at	
	I am cha	tting			
h.	M	be	suusuwo	la (from	suusuu 'to suck')
	I	be	sucking	at	
	I am suc	king			

It shall be noted that within the intransitive group, certain adjectival verbs may likewise be found in the VN formation:

(3) a. M be kuuraŋo la (f				o la (from <i>kuuraŋ</i> 'l	be sick')				
		I	be	being.si	ck at				
	I am getting sick								
	b.	Ñiŋ	buŋo	be	koyoo	la (from koyi 'be white')			
		this	house	be	being.white	at			
		This house is getting white							

Nevertheless, most adjectival verbs – in particular those that end in a properly verbal-adjectival morpheme -yaa (e.g. beteyaa 'be good' vs. bete 'good') – do not form the NomBL locution. They appear in a similar, though genetically clearly distinct, expression, viz. the BE...LA gram. This formation, as the NomBL periphrasis, is a compound of the auxiliary be as well as the postposition la. However instead of the verbal noun, it employs an infinitive, c.f. example (2.c) M be diyaamoo la with the following sentence: M be diyaamu la. The meaning of the BE...LA locution most commonly corresponds to a future tense (e.g., M be diyaamu la 'I will talk', M be seyi la 'I will return' or M be futu la 'I will

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arrive'; for a detailed discussion of the semantic content of the *BE...LA* gram, see Andrason 2012b).

(4)	a.	M	be	kendeya	a	la		
		I	be	be.well	to			
		I will	I will be well / get well					
	b.	A	be	beteyaa	la			
		it	be	be.good	to			
		I will	be good					

In order to form a locution, which would be semantically analogous to the NomBL gram, the immense majority of adjectival verbs employ another verbal periphrasis, in particular the KAD gram. This periphrasis consists of the auxiliary non-verbal copula be, the infinitive of the meaning verb and the postposition kap 'on' (for a detailed description of the values displayed by this gram, see Andrason 2012c):

(5)	a.	M	be	kendeyaa	kaŋ
		I	be	be.well on	
		I am g	getting wel	1	
	b.	A	be	bataa	kaŋ
		he	be	be.tired on	
		He is	getting tire	ed	

The entire conjugational pattern of intransitive verbs in the NomBL formation may be schematized in the following manner:

	Α	negative						
	singular	plural	singular					
1p	m be siinoo la	m be siinoo la	n te siinoo la					
2p	i be siinoo la	ali be siinoo la	i te siinoo la					
3p	a be siinoo la	ì be siinoo la	a te siinoo la					
Table 1: NomBL gram – intransitive verbs								

2.1.2 Transitive verbs

As for the transitive stems, predicates which in their majority possess two variants of the verbal noun (cf. Andrason 2012a) – i.e., one short, most commonly in -o (which grosso modo follows the same rules as those introduced previously in the section dedicated to intransitive verbs) and another long in -roo, suffixed directly to the infinitive – usually derive two varieties of the NomBL formation: one short (6.a) and another long (6.b), respectively:

(6)	а	M	he	kawandoo	la

	I	be	preaching	at			
	I am preaching						
b.	M	be	kawandiroo	la			
	I	preaching	at				
	I am p	I am preaching					

Here below, we provide examples of verbs with a different shape of the final phonetic entity in the infinitive (or stem), and the corresponding forms of their verbal nouns:

inf	initive	vei	verbal noun		
form	meaning	short	long		
a saŋ	'buy'	saŋo	sandiroo		
a fáliŋ	'change'	falindoo	falindiroo		
a kumpabo	'visit'	kumpaboo	kumpaboroo		
a sene	'farm'	senoo	seneroo		
a saba	'smoke'	saboo	sabaroo		
a waafi	'sell'	waafoo	waafiroo		
a tutu	'plant'	tutoo	tuturoo		
a moyi	'hear'	moyoo	moyrioo		
a suuñaa	'steal'	suuñaa	suuñaaroo		
a joo	'pay'	joo	jooroo		
a safee	'write'	safee	safeeroo		

Table 2: Verbal nouns of transitive verbs

On the other hand, it shall be noted that certain types of transitive verbs derive only one verbal noun and consequently, admits exclusively one variety of the NomBL "tense". Among such predicates, we may quote stems which are stressed on the last syllable and end in the consonant $-\eta$ (e.g., a karáŋ 'read' > karaŋo 'reading') or certain monosyllabic verbs in $-\eta$ (e.g., a miŋ 'drink' > miŋo 'drinking').

The direct object of the verb, obligatory in the infinitive or other verbal grams, may also be overtly expressed in the NomBL construction (cf. 7.a). In such cases, the direct object of the infinitive may be analyzed as a genitive given the fact that the verbal noun is a nominal entity. It shall nevertheless be observed that direct objects can also be left unexpressed (7.b; see also below in this section).

(7)	a.	M	be	motoolu	wafiroo	la	
		I	be	cars		selling	at
		I am sel	ling cars				
	b.	M	be	wafiroo	la		
		I	be	selling		at	
		I am sel	ling				

This means that transitive roots may be found with no overt object, yet preserving their active character. Inversely, contrary to the norm in the Basse Mandinka language, the

NomBL gram does not generate a passive function in "object-less" uses (cf. a faa 'to kill' vs. faa 'be killed; die'):

(8)	a.	M	be	senoo	/ seneroo	la	
		I	be	cultiva	ating	at	
		I am c	ultivating				
	b.	*Yiroo	olu be	senoo	/ seneroo	la	
		trees		be	cultivati	ng	at
		Intend	ed meanin	g: The tre	es are being	planted	

Intended meaning: The trees are being planted

The two variants of the NomBL gram formed with transitive verbs may be exemplified in the following manner:

	0110	g		
No o	vert (object – long form		
		af	firmative	negative
		singular	plural	singular
	1p	m be kawandiroo la	m̀ be kawandiroo la	n te kawandiroo la
	2p	i be kawandiroo la	ali be kawandiroo la	i te kawandiroo la
	3p	a be kawandiroo la	ì be kawandiroo la	a te kawandiroo la
No o	overt (object – short form		
		•	firmative	negative
		singular	plural	singular
	1p	m be kawandoo la		
		i be kawandoo la		i te kawandoo la
	3p	a be kawandoo la		a te kawandoo la
Ove	rt obje	ect – long form		
	3	_	rmative	negative
		singular	plural	singular
1p	m b	e motoo waafiroo la	m be motoo waafiroo la	n te motoo waafiroo la
2p			ali be motoo waafiroo la	i te motoo waafiroo la
3p		*	ì be motoo waafiroo la	
Ove	rt obj	ect – short form		

affirmative negative singular plural singular 1p m be motoo waafoo la m be motoo waafoo la n te motoo waafoo la

i te motoo waafoo la i be motoo waafoo la ali be motoo waafoo la 3p a be ka motoo waafoo ì be motoo waafoo la a te motoo waafoo la

Table 3: Conjugation of the NomBL gram - transitive verbs

In certain cases, the selection of a determined shape of the NomBL gram (i.e. the preference for the long variant or the short variety) depends on the presence of the direct object: the short and long forms appear if the direct object is overtly expressed (9.a, 10.a, 11.a, 12.a and 13.a), but only the long form is possible in case the object is not explicitly uttered (9b-c, 10.b-c, 11.b-c, 12.b-c and 13.b-c):

(9)	a.	M	be	sigareeto	olu	saboo / s	abaroo	la			
		I	be	cigarette	smoking		at				
		I am sn	noking cig	garettes							
	b.	M	be	sabaroo	la						
		I	be	smoking	at						
		I am sn	noking								
	c.	*M	be	saboo		la					
		I	be	smoking	at						
		Intende	ed meanin	g: I am smol	king						
(10)	a.	M	be	yiroolu	tutoo / tu	ıturoo	la				
		I	be	trees		planting		at			
		I am pl	I am planting trees								
	b.	M	be	tuturoo	la						
		I	be	planting	at						
		I am pl	anting								
	c.	*M	be	tutoo		la					
		I	be	planting	at						
		Intende	ed meanin	g: I am plan	ting						
(11)	a.	M	be	pataatool	u	waafoo /	waafiroo	la			
		I	be	potatoes	selling			at			
		I am se	lling pota	toes							
	b.	M	be	waafiroo	•	la					
		I	be	selling		at					
		I am se	elling								
	c.	*M	be	waafoo	la						
		I	be	selling		at					
		Intende	ed meanin	g: I am selli	ng						
(12)	a.	M	be	domodaa	taboo / ta	abiroo	la				

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		I	be	domoda	cooking	at	
		I am cool	king domo	da			
	b.	M	be	tabiroo	la		
		I	be	cooking	at		
		I am cool	king				
	c.	*M	be	taboo		la	
		I	be	cooking	at		
		Intended	meaning:	I am cool	king		
(13)	a.	M	be	moolu		jaaroo / jaaraloo la	
		I	be	people		curing	at
		I am curi	ng people				
	b.	M	be	jaaraloo	la		
		I	be	curing		at	
		I am curi	ng				
	c.	*M	be	jaaroo	la		
		I	be	curing		at	
		Intended	meaning:	I am curi	ng people		

However, the above-mentioned tendency in the selection of the short or long form cannot be understood as a rigid law since in various cases the short variety is also found, although the object is not expressed overtly:

(14)	a.	M	be	yiroolu	senoo /	seneroo	la	
		I	be	trees	cultivati	ng	at	
		I am cul	tivating tr	ees				
	b.	M	be	senoo / s	seneroo	la		
		I	be	cultivati	ng	at		
		I am cul	tivating					
(15)	a.	M	be	motoo	ñiŋ	borindo	oo / borindiroo	la
		I	be	car	that ¹⁶	driving		at
		I am dri	ving that c	ar				

¹⁶ The lexeme *ñiŋ* usually signifies 'this', e.g., *ñiŋ bukoo* 'this book'. However, when it follows a noun its value approximates the pronoun 'that'

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	b.	M	be	borindoo / borind	iroo	la
		I	be	driving		at
		I am dri	ving			
(16)	a.	M	be	leetaroo mutoo /	mutaroo	la
		I	be	letter	receiving	g at
		I am rec	eiving a le	etter		
	b.	M	be	mutoo / mutaroo	la	
		I	be	receiving	at	
		I am rec	eiving			

It should likewise be noted that although the nominal object is commonly employed in its stem shape (17.a and 17.b), in Basse Mandinka forms with the suffix -o as well as those with the plural morpheme -olu are equally common (17.c and 17d):

(17)	a.	A	be	jii	miŋo	la	
		he	be	water	drinking at		
		He is dri	inking wat	er			
	b.	A	be	yiri	tutoo	la	
		he	be	tree	planting at		
		He is pla	anting tree	(s)			
	c.	M	be	leetaroo	mutoo / mutaroo	la	
		I	be	letter	receiving	at	
		I am rec	eiving a/th	ne letter			
	d.	M	be	bukoo ni	in waafoo	/ waafiroo la	
		I	be	book	this selling		at
		I am sell	ing that b	ook			
	e.	M	be	yiroolu	senoo / seneroo	la	
		I	be	trees	cultivating	at	
		I am cul	tivating tro	ees			

2.2. Meaning

In Basse Mandinka, the most frequent function of the NomBL construction is to convey progressive meaning. As a prototypical progressive category, the gram regularly admits dynamic predicates, presenting the action expressed by the stem as an ongoing activity

(Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1990: 126). Consequently, in the present reference time, the NomBL formation denotes present dynamic progressive activities, approximating the English Present Continuous:

(18)	a.	M	be	bukoolu saŋo	la saayiŋ
		I	be	books	buying at now
		I am buy	ing books		
	b.	N	be	domooroo	la
		I	be	eating	at
		I am eati	ng		
	c.	A	te	duutoolu domoo	la
		he	not.be	mangoes eating	at
		He is no	t eating ma	angoes	
	d.	A	be	sandiroo la	
		he	be	buying at	
		He is bu	ying		

An identical value can be detected within the past time frame, where the NomBL construction expresses past dynamic progressive activities, corresponding to the English Past Continuous gram:

(19) talan 10.	a. .15	M	be	n	na	motoo	waafoo	la	kunuŋ	
hour 10.		I	be	me	of^{17}	car	selling	at	yesterday	
nour ro.	Yesterday at 10.15, I was selling my car									
b.	A	be	duutoolu	domoo	la	kunuŋ				
	I	be	mangoes	s eating		at	yesterda	y		

I was eating mangoes yesterday Ì c. be jiyo miŋo la nuŋ they be water drinking at then

They were drinking water

d. be suuñaaroo la nuŋ

 $^{^{17}}$ The slot n na (the pronoun of the 1 st person singular n + a possessive-genitive marker la) functions as a possessive pronoun corresponding to the English word my.

	he	be	stealing	at	then			
	He was s	tealing						
e.	Ì	be	jalafayoo)	le	la	baa	kono
	they	be	throwing	.net	EMPH at		sea	in
	They wer	e throwing	g a net in	the sea				
f.	Luntaŋo	te	miŋo		la	nuŋ		
	guest		not.be	drinking	at	then		
	The gues	t was not o	drinking					

In rare cases, the formation may be employed in order to introduce future progressive actions:

(20)	a.	Jaari	ñiŋ	waatoo,	m	be	waafiro	O	la		
		next.year	this	time,		I	be	selling		at	
		Next yeat	t at this ti	me, I will	be selling						
	b.	Saama	talaŋ	seyi,	M	be	sigareeto	olu	saboo		
la											
		tomorrov	v hour	eight,	I	be	cigarette	S	smoking	; at	
		Tomorrow at eight, I will be smoking cigarettes									

In most cases, if one wishes to express the future progressive value, verbal nouns necessitate the infinitive of the verb $a\ ke$ 'do'. This means that another construction is used, i.e. the future BE...LA compounded by the auxiliary be, an infinitive (in these instances, the verb $a\ ke$ with a verbal noun as its direct object) and the infinitive marked la 'to'. It should nevertheless be observed that such periphrases may also express prospective events where the actual progressive nuance is secondary or almost unavailable, approximating the category of a simple future tense:

(21)	a.	M	be	tabiroo	ke	la		
		I	be	cooking	do	to		
		I will be	cooking /	I will do c	ooking = 1	I will cook		
	b.	Musoo ñ	iŋ	be		paasiroo	ke	la
		woman t	his	be		ironing	do	to
		The won	nan will be	e ironing /	she will d	o ironing =	she will	iron

Even though the progressive meaning of the NomBL construction predominates – and hence, the gram is particularly common with dynamic predicates – static verbs are also tolerable in the periphrasis. In particular, certain non-dynamic predicates, employed in the NomBL formation, do not indicate the idea of progressivity, but rather express the continuity of a given action. In such cases, the NomBL locution functions as an exemplary

continuous aspect portraying an activity, either dynamic or static, as simply ongoing (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994: 127):

(22)	M	be	siinoo	la
	I	be	sleeping at	
	Lams	leening		

However, in accordance with the dominant progressive character of the gram, various static predicates receive a dynamic – more specifically, ingressive – reading in the NomBL construction. They indicate that a given static activity is in the process of being acquired.

(23)	a.	M	be	a	loŋo		la	
		I	be	its	knowing	at		
		I am getting to know it						
	b.	M	be	a	koŋo		la	
		I	be	his	hating		at	
		I am getting to hate him						
	c.	M	be	lafoo		la		
		I	be	liking		at		
		I am getting to like						
	d.	M	be	pasoo		la	a	la
		I	be	be.fed.up at		it	at	
		I am getting fed up with it						

The NomBL form – as any Basse Mandinka locution which is able to express meanings related to the present temporal sphere (such as progressive, habitual, durative, simple or stative) – can also be employed as an inclusive perfect. In that case, it denotes activities that began in an overtly stated moment in the past but have continued into the present in an uninterrupted manner (e.g., *I have stayed here since 2000* or *I have been reading for two hours*; on this phenomenon in other "present" constructions, see Andrason 2012c).

It has previously been observed that determined adjectival verbs can be employed in the NomBL construction. In such instances, the meaning is evidently transitory and/or ingressive, and the entire periphrasis approximates the English locution *get* + adjective, e.g., *get tired* or *get sick*. In other words, adjectival verbs – if they appear in the NomBL formation – invariably receive a dynamic reading, indicating that qualities and properties, expressed by the meaning verb, are currently being acquired or materialized. Thus, the

gram again displays the prototypical function of a dynamic progressive category. Inversely, with adjectival predicates, the locution is not employed with the force of a continuous aspect (cf. static verbs in examples 23.a-d above).

Adjectival roots may likewise appear in the NomBL gram with a past temporal reference, thus expressing past progressive dynamic activities and corresponding to the English construction *was/were getting* + adjective:

3. Conclusion

Before formulating final conclusions, let us first recapitulate the evidence provided in the previous sections of the paper.

As for structural properties, we have noted that all intransitive verbs – with a noticeable exception of the stems ending in ee – offer one variety of the NomBL gram, built most commonly on verbal nouns in -o. In respect to adjectival verbs, only those that do not finish in -yaa may be found in the NomBL formation. On the other hand, originally transitive verbs most frequently display two varieties of the NomBL locution: one short (built on the short verbal noun in -o) and another long (built on the long verbal noun in -roo). Some verbs, however, (such as a karáŋ or a miŋ) tolerate only one NomBL variant. We have noted that in certain cases, the preference for a given form (i.e. long or short) is conditioned by the overt presence of the direct object. Namely, the short and long varieties are used if the direct object is explicitly uttered, while if the object is left unexpressed, only the long form is admissible. Nevertheless, in various instances, the short variant may also be employed although the object is not provided overtly. Finally, it has been observed that even though the nominal object commonly appears in its stem shape, forms with the suffix -o as well as those with the plural morpheme -olu are likewise admissible and frequent.

As far as semantic properties of the NomBL gram are concerned, the periphrasis – being used with dynamic predicates – expresses present, past and sporadically future progressive activities (functioning as a prototypical present, past and future progressive, respectively). Nevertheless, it can likewise be employed with static verbs. Some of these static predicates, employed in the NomBL formation, denote the continuity of a given action. In such instances, the locution approximates the category of a continuous aspect. Furthermore, the

gram may appear with the force of an inclusive perfect. Finally, when formed with some adjectival verbs (especially with adjectival predicates that do not end in -yaa) and certain static predicates, the meaning is again dynamic and progressive (hence, not continuous), and in particular, transitory and/or ingressive. In such cases, the locution approximates the English expression get + adjective (or get + infinitive) and may be used both in the present and past temporal sphere.

Consequently, the results of our study show that the NomBL gram in Basse Mandinka – at least in certain important aspects – does not conform to the descriptions formulated thus far and dedicated to Standard Mandinka.

Taking into consideration the structural character, the supposed categorical split between the short and long varieties of the NomBL form of the transitive verbs is not respected. A different tendency may be noted: short and long variants may equally be used with the overt object, while the long form seems to be more common when no object appears (namely, some verbs do not tolerate the short form in this environment; others, however, may likewise employ the short variety). Moreover, nominal objects may appear not only in the bare stem form but also with the suffix -o and the plural morpheme -olu. In respect to semantics, the gram is not only a progressive category but may likewise be employed with certain static verbs in order to express the idea of "ongoing-ness". In this function, the locution behaves as an exemplary continuous aspect. In addition, the NomBL form can also be used as an inclusive perfect.

Besides detecting these novel traits, we have refined and improved other portions in the description of the NomBL gram. First, although the intransitive verbs regularly display only one variant of the locution, the predicates in *-ee* offer two varieties. Second, adjectival roots in *-yaa* do not appear in the NomBL periphrasis. Third, contrary to the norm, certain transitive verbs admit only one variant of the gram (e.g., a káraŋ and a miŋ). Fourth, the formation is most commonly employed in the present and past time frame, although future uses are also possible. Fifth, when built on adjectival verbs and certain static predicates, the value is dynamic: transitory and/or ingressive and never continuous.

Finally, we may aspire that the results of our study stimulate a better understanding and new, more comprehensive analysis of the NomBL gram in Standard Mandinka in Gambia. We are convinced that some of the properties displayed by the Basse Mandinka locution may similarly be detected in its normalized homologue and in varieties spoken in other regions of the country. The verification of this proposition will constitute one of the research activities planned by the author in the near future.

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