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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 language[2] to which, in accordance with its formal characteristics, we will refer to as the

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[2] 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).

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Nominal *BE…LA* gram[3] (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 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 kontoŋ taboo la* and *M be tiya fiyo la* 'I am planting groundnuts'.

[3] 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 *kaŋ* 'on' instead of the entity *la*: *M be diyaamoo kaŋ* 'I am talking'. This entity is indisputably a postposition (see also *I be munne kaŋ* '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.

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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 *KAƆ* gram[7]: *A be taamoo la = A be taama kaŋ* 'He is walking' or *A be taamoo kaŋ nuŋ = A be taama kaŋ nuŋ* '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*

[7] The *KAƆ* 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).

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

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

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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.[12] Below, we offer a list including the names of all our informants, specifying their age (in 2012), occupation/profession and place of residence:[13] 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).[14]

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.

[11] 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.

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

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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 *-ŋ* simply add the vowel *-o* (*kuuraŋ* 'be sick' > *kuuraŋo* '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 *ii* respectively) 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 returning

c. M **be** **taamoo** **la** (from *taama* 'to walk')

[15] 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 walking				
d.	M	**be**	**diyaamoo**	**la**	(from *diyaamu* ‘to talk’)
	I	be	talking	at	
	I am talking				
e.	M	**be**	**futoo**	**la**	(from *futu* ‘to arrive)
	I	be	arriving	at	
	I am arriving				
f.	M	**be**	**jeloo**	**la**	(from *jele* ‘to laugh’)
	I	be	laughing	at	
	I am laughing				
g.	M	**be**	**kacaa**	**la**	(from *kacaa* ‘to chat’)
	I	be	chatting	at	
	I am chatting				
h.	M	**be**	**suusuwo la**	(from *suusuu* ‘to suck’)	
	I	be	sucking	at	
	I am sucking				

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**	(from *kuuraŋ* ‘be sick’)	
		I	be	being.sick	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** **kendeyaa** **la**
I be be.well to
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 *KAƝ* gram. This periphrasis consists of the auxiliary non-verbal copula *be*, the infinitive of the meaning verb and the postposition *kaŋ* '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 getting well

b. A **be** **bataa** **kaŋ**
he be be.tired on
He is getting tired

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

	Affirmative		negative
	singular	plural	singular
1p	*m be siinoo la*	*m̀ 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) a. M **be** **kawandoo** **la**

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	I	be	preaching	at	
	I am preaching				
b.	M	**be**	**kawandiroo**	**la**	
	I	be	preaching	at	
	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:

infinitive		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 *-ŋ* (e.g., *a karáŋ* 'read' > *karaŋo* 'reading') or certain monosyllabic verbs in *-ŋ* (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 selling cars					
	b.	M	**be**	**wafiroo**	**la**		
		I	be	selling	at		
		I am selling					

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

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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 cultivating at
I am cultivating

b. *Yiroolu **be** **senoo** / **seneroo** **la**
trees be cultivating at
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:

No overt object – long form

	affirmative		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 overt object – short form

	affirmative		negative
	singular	plural	singular
1p	*m be kawandoo la*	*m̀ be kawandoo la*	*n te kawandoo la*
2p	*i be kawandoo la*	*ali be kawandoo la*	*i te kawandoo la*
3p	*a be kawandoo la*	*ì be kawandoo la*	*a te kawandoo la*

Overt object – long form

	affirmative		negative
	singular	plural	singular
1p	*m be motoo waafiroo la*	*m̀ be motoo waafiroo la*	*n te motoo waafiroo la*
2p	*i be motoo waafiroo la*	*ali be motoo waafiroo la*	*i te motoo waafiroo la*
3p	*a be motoo waafiroo la*	*ì be motoo waafiroo la*	*a te motoo waafiroo la*

Overt object – short form

	affirmative		negative
	singular	plural	singular
1p	*m be motoo waafoo la*	*m̀ be motoo waafoo la*	*n te motoo waafoo la*
2p	*i be motoo waafoo la*	*ali be motoo waafoo la*	*i te motoo waafoo la*
3p	*a be ka motoo waafoo la*	*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

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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** sigareetoolu **saboo** / **sabaroo** **la**
I be cigarette smoking at
I am smoking cigarettes

b. M **be** **sabaroo** **la**
I be smoking at
I am smoking

c. *M **be** **saboo** **la**
I be smoking at
Intended meaning: I am smoking

(10) a. M **be** yiroolu **tutoo** / **tuturoo** **la**
I be trees planting at
I am planting trees

b. M **be** **tuturoo** **la**
I be planting at
I am planting

c. *M **be** **tutoo** **la**
I be planting at
Intended meaning: I am planting

(11) a. M **be** pataatoolu **waafoo** / **waafiroo** **la**
I be potatoes selling at
I am selling potatoes

b. M **be** **waafiroo** **la**
I be selling at
I am selling

c. *M **be** **waafoo** **la**
I be selling at
Intended meaning: I am selling

(12) a. M **be** domodaa **taboo** / **tabiroo** **la**

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I be domoda cooking at

I am cooking *domoda*

b. M **be** **tabiroo** **la**

I be cooking at

I am cooking

c. *M **be** **taboo** **la**

I be cooking at

Intended meaning: I am cooking

(13) a. M **be** moolu **jaaroo** / **jaaraloo** **la**

I be people curing at

I am curing people

b. M **be** **jaaraloo** **la**

I be curing at

I am curing

c. *M **be** **jaaroo** **la**

I be curing at

Intended meaning: I am curing 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 cultivating at

I am cultivating trees

b. M **be** **senoo** / **seneroo** **la**

I be cultivating at

I am cultivating

(15) a. M **be** motoo ñiŋ **borindoo** / **borindiroo** **la**

I be car that[16] driving at

I am driving that car

[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** / **borindiroo** **la**
I be driving at
I am driving

(16) a. M **be** leetaroo **mutoo** / **mutaroo** **la**
I be letter receiving at
I am receiving a letter

b. M **be** **mutoo** / **mutaroo** **la**
I be receiving at
I am receiving

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 drinking water

b. A **be** yiri **tutoo** **la**
he be tree planting at
He is planting tree(s)

c. M **be** leetaroo **mutoo** / **mutaroo** **la**
I be letter receiving at
I am receiving a/the letter

d. M **be** bukoo niŋ **waafoo** / **waafiroo** **la**
I be book this selling at
I am selling that book

e. M **be** yiroolu **senoo** / **seneroo** **la**
I be trees cultivating at
I am cultivating trees

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

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(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 buying books

b. N **be** **domooroo** **la**
I be eating at
I am eating

c. A **te** duutoolu **domoo** **la**
he not.be mangoes eating at
He is not eating mangoes

d. A **be** **sandiroo** **la**
he be buying at
He is buying

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) a. M **be** n na motoo **waafoo** **la** kunuŋ talaŋ 10.15
I be me of[17] car selling at yesterday hour 10.15
Yesterday at 10.15, I was selling my car

b. A **be** duutoolu **domoo** **la** kunuŋ
I be mangoes eating at yesterday
I was eating mangoes yesterday

c. Ì **be** jiyo **miŋo** **la** nuŋ
they be water drinking at then
They were drinking water

d. A **be** **suuñaaroo** **la** nuŋ

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

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	he	be	stealing	at	then		
	He was stealing						
e.	Ì	**be**	**jalafayoo**	le	**la**	baa	kono
	they	be	throwing.net	EMPH at		sea	in
	They were throwing a net in the sea						
f.	Luntaŋo	**te**	**miŋo**	**la**	nuŋ		
	guest		not.be drinking	at	then		
	The guest was not drinking						

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

(20)	a.	Jaari	ñiŋ	waatoo,	m	**be**	**waafiroo**	**la**
		next.year	this	time,	I	be	selling	at
		Next yeat at this time, I will be selling						
	b.	Saama	talaŋ	seyi,	M	**be**	sigareetoolu	**saboo la**
		tomorrow	hour	eight,	I	be	cigarettes	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 cooking = I will cook				
	b.	Musoo ñiŋ	**be**	**paasiroo**	**ke**	**la**
		woman this	be	ironing	do	to
		The woman will be ironing / she will do 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

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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

I am sleeping

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).

(24) M **be** **safeeroo** **la** waati saba

I be writing at hour three

I have been writing for three hours

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

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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).

(25) a. M **be** **kuuraŋo** **la**
I be being.sick at
I am getting sick

b. Ñiŋ buŋo **be** **koyoo** **la**
this house be be.white at
This house is getting white

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:

(26) a. M **be** **kuuraŋo** **la** nuŋ
I be being.sick at then
I was getting sick

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

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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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