

A CONTRIBUTION TO MANDINKA DIALECTOLOGY – BASSE MANDINKA VERSUS STANDARD GAMBIAN MANDINKA

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This article provides a detailed overview of the most distinctive features of Basse Mandinka (a Mandinka variety used in Basse, the capital of the Upper River Division in the easternmost part of Gambia) as compared with Standard Gambian Mandinka (a normalized Mandinka language, widely employed in Gambia). Based upon his own original fieldwork dedicated to Basse Mandinka, the author lists all the dissimilarities between the two tongues, whether they concern phonetics and phonology, lexicon, morphology and morphosyntax, as well as the usage (i.e. an exact range of functional and semantic properties of certain grams). The author concludes that despite the profound similarity of the Mandinka varieties in question, their differences are not insignificant and span across all the levels of the two systems, from the referential vocabulary to the core grammar.

Key words: linguistics, West-African languages, dialectology, Mandinka, Manding

1. Introduction

Mandinka is a western variety of Manding, a language that is widely spoken in Africa in the area that spans from Mali in the north to Ivory Coast in the south, and from the Senegalese and Gambian shores of the Atlantic Ocean in the west to Burkina Faso in the east. In reality Manding is a cluster of local tongues that to some extent are mutually intelligible. In addition to Mandinka, this cluster includes Bambara, Maninka, Dyula and Jaahanka. Manding forms a part of the Western branch of the Mande family, which, in turn, is a part of the Niger-Congo realm.¹ The detailed genetic classification of Mandinka may be

¹ KASTENHOLZ, R. Sprachgeschichte im West-Mande: Methoden und Rekonstruktionen, p. 281. See also VYDRINE, V., BERGMAN, T. et al. Mandé

schematized as follows: Mandinka < Manding-West < Manding < Manding-Mokole < Manding-Vai < Manding-Jogo < Central < Central-Southwestern < Western < Mande < Niger-Congo.²

Nowadays, Mandinka is most commonly employed in Gambia (510,000 speakers), Senegal (669,000) and Guinea Bissau (167,000). To a much lesser degree, this idiom is also used in other countries of Western Africa such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. Additionally, there is a Mandinka diaspora in Africa, Europe and America. Mandinka has around one and half million speakers in total.³

The present article deals with phenomena that are related to the Mandinka language in Gambia and in particular to one of its provincial variants, Basse Mandinka (for more on Basse Mandinka, see below). The official language of Gambia is English, which clearly predominates in all possible formal situations: in governmental meetings and official documents, in education (especially at the secondary level and at universities) and in trade and business. Despite the supremacy of English in all spheres of modern life in recent times, Mandingoes have succeeded in upgrading the status of their mother tongue. To be exact, in the last twenty years the orthographic convention and grammatical norm of the language have officially been adopted.⁴ This standardized spelling and normalized grammar have subsequently been implemented in translations of the main works of Muslim and Christian literature, which are of key importance in the life of Gambians.⁵ The same normalized language has increasingly been used in various official governmental brochures and educative texts, traditional tales and grammars and learning manuals.⁶ Highly similar linguistic systems

Language Family of West Africa: Location and Genetic Classification; WILLIAMSON, K., BLENCH, R. Niger-Congo, pp. 11 – 42; LEWIS, P. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*.

² The symbol “<” indicates the relation of inclusion of an entity of a lower level into a unit of a higher level.

³ LEWIS, P. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*.

⁴ See for instance WEC INTERNATIONAL. *A Practical Orthography of Gambian Mandinka*; WEC INTERNATIONAL. *Mandinka English Dictionary*; PEACE CORPS GAMBIA. *Mandinka-English Dictionary and English-Mandinka Dictionary*.

⁵ See for instance WEC INTERNATIONAL. *Kambeŋ Kutoo* [‘New Testament’]; WEC INTERNATIONAL. *Kambeŋ Kotoo* [‘Old Testament’ [in parts]]; ISLAM INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATIONS. *Selections from the Writings of the Promised Messiah*.

⁶ For examples of governmental brochures and educative texts, see GAMBIA FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION, WEC INTERNATIONAL. *Faa kuu bee lonnaa* [‘Father know-it-all’]; WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, WEC INTERNATIONAL. *N niŋ Eeds jankaroo* [‘Me and AIDS’]; NON-FORMAL EDUCATION SERVICES. *Dontoroo ñiniŋo safeeña* [‘How to apply loans’] (compare also TERA, K. *Le manding: situations et usages officiels*). For examples of folk tales, see NATIONAL LITERACY ADVISORY COMMITTEE, WEC INTERNATIONAL. *Sunjata*; WEC INTERNATIONAL. *Suluu buka a jikoo baayi* [‘The hyena will not leave its habit’];

and grammatical rules can in fact already be found in the grammars written by Hamlyn, Rowlands, Gamble and Creissels, which all focus on western Mandinka, including the type spoken in Gambian.⁷

The standardized language of the Mandingoes that live in Gambia, a variety that seems to be gradually acquiring a higher status expanding to the official and formal domains of linguistic usage, is sometimes referred to as ‘Standard Gambian Mandinka (SGM)’ or ‘Gambian Mandinka’.⁸ In this paper, the label ‘Standard Gambian Mandinka’ will be employed as the denomination of the aforementioned normalized language, while the term ‘Gambian Mandinka’ will include all the Mandinka varieties spoken within the territory of Gambia.

Over the last four years, the author of the present paper has conducted extensive research concerning the grammar and lexicon of a local subtype of Gambian Mandinka, a vernacular spoken in Basse, the capital city of the Upper River Division situated in the easternmost part of Gambia. This idiom – referred to as ‘Basse Mandinka’ – is also widely employed in neighbouring villages in the Upper River part of the country such as Manneh Kunda, Mansajang, Bassending and Kaba Kama. In the course of this research activity, it was evident that although Basse Mandinka is highly similar to Standard Gambian Mandinka – the two varieties are mutually intelligible to the fullest extent – and despite the fact that the core of the grammatical structure of the two languages is almost identical, several characteristics differentiating Basse Mandinka from the regulated „national” variant may be identified. This article will introduce a detailed overview of all the most distinctive features of the Mandinka idiom used in the Upper River Division as compared with Standard Gambian

WEC INTERNATIONAL. Suluu buka a jikoo baayi 2 [‘The hyena will not leave its habit 2’]; WEC INTERNATIONAL. Suluu buka a jikoo baayi 3 [‘The hyena will not leave its habit 3’]. For examples of grammar and learning manuals, see LÜCK, M., HENDERSON, L. *Gambian Mandinka: A Learning Manual for English Speakers*; COLLEY, E. *Mandinka Grammar Manual*; WEC INTERNATIONAL. *Mandinka Learning Manual*.

⁷ HAMLIN, W. *A Short Study of the Western Mandinka Language*; GAMBLE, D. *Elementary Mandinka*; ROWLANDS, E. *A Grammar of Gambian Mandinka*; CREISSELS, D. *Eléments de grammaire de la langue mandinka*. See also WILSON, W. *Creissels’s Mandinka Grammar*. It should be observed that this normalized version of the tongue has also spread to the radio and television as well as more and more frequently to the Internet.

⁸ The denomination ‘Standard Gambian Mandinka’ is used by A. Andrason (see for example ANDRASON, A. *Semantics of the TA Construction in Basse Mandinka*; ANDRASON, A. *The Basse Mandinka “Future”*; ANDRASON, A. *Introducción a la gramática descriptiva del mandinka de la región de Basse* [‘Introduction to the descriptive grammar of Basse Mandinka’]). The label ‘Gambian Mandinka’ is employed by WEC INTERNATIONAL (cf. WEC INTERNATIONAL. *A Practical Orthography of Gambian Mandinka*).

Mandinka.⁹ Our study will start with a description of the phonetic and phonological properties that distinguish Basse Mandinka from Standard Gambian Mandinka (section 2.1). Then lexical characteristics will be presented (section 2.2), and then morphological and morphosyntactic issues will be discussed (section 2.3). Finally, the main results of the research will be presented and a general conclusion will be drawn.

2. Distinctive traits of Basse Mandinka versus Standard Gambian Mandinka

Before introducing the most relevant traits that differentiate Basse Mandinka from the standardized language, two highly significant facts should be acknowledged. Firstly, as far as the sociological environment is concerned, one must note that Basse Mandinka is spoken in the region where, instead of Mandinka, the Fula and Serehule tribes (and thus their idioms) are dominant. Additionally, another dialectal Manding variety in the Basse area, Jaahanka (similar yet distinct from Mandinka) is extensively spoken. As a result, Mandingoes from Basse and its proximities are constantly exposed to other prevailing linguistic organizations (viz. Fula and Serehule) and to a system which, albeit similar, is sovereign – at least in the speakers' linguistic self-consciousness (viz. Jaahanka).

Secondly, it must likewise be clearly stated that in contrast to Standard Gambian Mandinka, Basse Mandinka is not a unified idiom with a constant number of well-defined rules. There is no such thing as a 'Basse Mandinka norm'. On the contrary, one finds considerable variation concerning the forms, uses and strategies chosen by native speakers. In some cases speakers disagree on the admissibility of a given construction: for some, the consulted form was fully correct. For others it was admissible, although they would not employ it themselves. Others openly reject the possibility of the use of the form in question. The Mandinka language of Basse could best be understood as a *de facto* conglomerate of all grammatical possibilities that Mandinka native speakers – as well as second-language Mandinka users – in Basse and its vicinity are bestowed with. This lack of grammatical uniformity can likewise be described in another manner: Basse Mandinka is a continuum of forms which range from more standard (a person employing a variety that strongly resembles Standard Gambian Mandinka) to forms that are radically different and even

⁹ It is important to acknowledge that the comparison will involve Standard Gambian Mandinka (an official normalized literary language) and will not involve Gambian Mandinka (a set of all possible local Mandinka vernacular available in Gambia; see also section 3).

inadmissible in the normalized language. This absence of homogeneity most likely stems from the exclusively oral character of Basse Mandinka and reflects the aforementioned tribal and linguistic diversity of Basse and its vicinity.

Basse Mandinka, as described in the present article, is a linguistic „system” – or rather a set-theoretic sum of subsystems characterizing a part of a village, a family or even an individual – that emerged from evidence collected during extensive field research carried out by the author in the Upper River Region in 2010, 2011 and 2012. The principal aim of this empirical study was to examine various grammatical aspects of Basse Mandinka¹⁰ and to write a grammar and a dictionary of this vernacular.¹¹ For this purpose, ten Mandinka native speakers were carefully selected. Mirroring the linguistic and socio-ethnic non-uniformity of Basse Mandinka, the informants were intended to represent distinct age groups, different educational and professional strata as well as various ethnic backgrounds. Below we offer a list of the people who participated in our research, indicating their names, age, gender, profession, place of residence and tribal origin:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. Keba Suso | 13, male, primary school student, Bassending, |
| Mandingo-Fula | |
| 2. Malick Suso | 18, male, high school student, Bassending, |
| Mandingo-Fula | |
| 3. Musa Yaffuneh | 24, male, watchman, Basse, Mandingo |
| 4. Lamin Manneh | 25, male, university student, Manneh Kunda, |
| Mandingoe | |
| 5. Mamanding Sanyang | 27, male, nurse assistant, Basse, Mandingo |
| 6. Musa Sanneh | 29, male, driver, Kaba Kama, Mandingo |
| 7. Baba Kamara | 30, male, teacher, Mansajang, Mandingo |
| 8. Mariama Mendi | 32, female, nurse, Mansajang – originally from |
| | Fulla Bantang but living in Basse for many |
| | years, Manjago ¹² |

¹⁰ See for instance ANDRASON, A. The Basse Mandinka “Future”; ANDRASON, A. Semantic Network of the Basse Mandinka BANTA Form.

¹¹ ANDRASON, A. Introducción a la gramática descriptiva del mandinka de la región de Basse.

¹² The list has been arranged in accordance with the age of the native speakers. As far as tribal origin is concerned, the two first persons on the list are ethnically Mandingo (by father) and Fula (by mother). Informant No. 8 is Manjago, while the last speaker on the list is Fula. All the remaining speakers are Mandingoes by their father and mother. In addition to the abovementioned native speakers, various second-language Mandinka users (with language proficiency ranging from good to nearly equal to natives) were consulted. Most of them were Fulas.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 9. Saikou Drammeh | 44, male, health worker, Basse – originally from Serekunda but living in Basse for many years, Mandingo |
| 10. Kumba Jallow | 56, female, cook, Mansajang, Fula |

At the end of the research activity, a comprehensive database was assembled that consisted of more than 5000 phrases. Each example was recorded with audio-video instruments and thoroughly discussed with the informants. We are convinced that the corpus of examples contained in this database constitutes a solid representative empirical specimen of the Mandinka vernacular found in Basse.

2.1. Phonetics and phonology

As far as the phonetic and phonologic systems are concerned, Basse Mandinka includes in its inventory a consonant that is missing in the normalized language. Namely, this is the voiced velar stop [g]. This consonant typically appears at the beginning of a lexeme that in most cases was borrowed from a language in which the original source word was pronounced with the sound [g]. It should be noted that in all such cases, Standard Gambian Mandinka regularly employs a voiceless counterpart, viz. [k]. This also means that the pronunciation with [k] is perceived as a trait of the „Komboo” language – Gambian Mandinka as it is spoken at the coast. This use of the consonant [g] instead of the Standard Gambian Mandinka [k] is the most stable characteristic of Basse Mandinka, being virtually shared by all the Mandingoes from the Basse area.

Gambiya	instead of SGM Kambiya	‘Gambia’ ¹³
gañee	instead of SGM kañee	‘win’
gaadiinoo	instead of SGM kaadiinoo	‘garden’
gurupoo	instead of SGM kurupoo	‘group’
galaasoo	instead of SGM galaasoo	‘ice’

The consonant [g] may likewise appear in an intermediate position in compounds: **ñaagilaasoo** ‘glasses’ (< **ña** ‘eye’ + **gilaasoo** ‘glasses’). Additionally, there are some typically Mandinka words that can be pronounced both with [k] and [g] (**kodoo** or **godoo** ‘money’), although the use of the voiced consonant [g] here seems to be significantly less frequent.

¹³ In this paper, the author follows the spelling convention established by WEC INTERNATIONAL in A Practical Orthography of Gambian Mandinka.

One can observe that the status of the consonant [g] is phonemic in Basse Mandinka. For example, one finds oppositions of the classes such as [ka] : [ga] (cf. **ka-na** ‘that not’ versus **ga-ñee** ‘win’), [go:] : [ko:] (cf. **goo-loo** ‘goal’ versus **koo-laa** ‘behind’) or [gu] : [ku] (cf. **gu-rupoo** ‘group’ versus **ku-ruboo** ‘sowing *findo*, clearing’).

Additionally, in certain instances, the SGM consonant [g] in an intervocalic position is pronounced as [w]. For example, besides the SGM form **dugoo** ‘vulture’, which is also extensively employed in Basse, there is the alternative and less common variety, **duwoo**.

Finally, in borrowings the labiodental voiced consonant [v] may be preserved in accordance with the original pronunciation of the source language. This means that besides the form **bineegaaroo** ‘vinegar’ – that corresponds to the SGM pronunciation in which the sound [v] is generally replaced by [b]¹⁴ – one finds speakers who say **vineegaaroo**.

2.2. *Lexicon*

As may be expected, and principally due to its colloquial and informal status, Basse Mandinka speakers use a wide range of lexical borrowings, especially from the English language. Anglicisms are prevalent in everyday speech in Basse, and English loanwords are extremely common although they are adjusted to Mandinka pronunciation, as can be seen in words like **pleya** ‘player’, **loya** ‘lawyer’, **gool** ‘goal’, **Speyin** ‘Spain’, etc. In fact, the intrusion of the English language may not only be observed in the referential lexicon but also in the typically functional or grammatical component of the Mandinka idiom. For instance, certain speakers in Basse quite frequently use the conjunction **dat** ‘that’ – an evident loanword from English.

- (1) **A** **ko** **dat** **a** **be** **naa** **la** **siniŋ**
 he said that he NVP¹⁵ come to later

He said that he would come later.

Less commonly one finds words that are borrowed from French. However, two of them are extremely frequent. These are functional entities: the conjunction **pasike** ‘because’ (2.a) and the preposition and/or conjunction **puuru** ‘to, for’ (2.b – d). Both constitute alternatives to the Standard Mandinka lexemes

¹⁴ In some words, the original [v] appears as [w] in Mandinka: **wuluuroo** ‘velvet’ from French *voulure*.

¹⁵ The abbreviation NVP stands for ‘non-verbal predicator’.

kaatuŋ ‘because’, **ye** or **la** ‘for’ and **fo** or **ka** ‘to, in order to, so that’. In Basse these two lexemes are exceptionally frequent, being *de facto* more common than their still available SGM counterparts.

- (2) a. **M maŋ naa karambuŋo to pasike m maŋ kendeŋaa**
 I did.not come school to because I
 did.not be.well
 I did not come to school because I was not well.
- b. **Puru nte aniŋ puru Laamin**
 for me and for Laamin
 For me and for Laamin
- c. **N naata jaŋ puru ka Maalik kumpabo**
 I came here to INF¹⁶ Maalik visit
 I came here to visit Maalik.
- d. **N lafiŋa puru itolu si naa jaŋ**
 I want so.that you will come here
 I want that you come here.

Additionally, Basse Mandinka vocabulary includes lexemes missing in the standardized language that have not been borrowed from English or other European languages. The most important of them is the interrogative and relative pronoun **joŋ** ‘who, which’ (3.a – c; as well as its derivatives, cf. 3.d)¹⁷ – a possible alternative to the normalized forms **jumaa** ‘who?’ and **meŋ** ‘who’, which are likewise acceptable in Basse.

- (3) a. **Joŋ naata?**
 who came
 Who came?
- b. **I ye joŋ kumpabo?**
 you did whom visit
 Whom did you visit?
- c. **I ye buku joŋ karaŋ?**
 you did book which read
 Which books did you read?

¹⁶ The gloss INF stands for an infinitive marker.

¹⁷ One should note that the form **joŋ** is regular in Bambara.

- d. **Fo** **i** **ye** **a** **loŋ**
 QUES¹⁸ you did it know
 Do you know
 i be **naa** **la** **tuma** **joŋ** (instead of **waati jumaa**)
 they NVP come to time which
 when they will come?

2.3. Morphosyntax

With respect to the morphosyntactic component of the language, one may identify three main types of peculiarities available in Basse Mandinka if we compare this tongue with Standard Gambian Mandinka. The first kind involves BM forms that are absent in the standardized language (cf. section 2.3.1). The second group of differences consists of instances where Basse Mandinka offers alternative shapes of morphemes and locutions that already exist in Standard Gambian Mandinka (cf. section 2.3.2). It can be observed that usually these standard forms are also employed in Basse. The third type of differences includes cases where the same form or construction offers a slightly dissimilar range of uses in the two linguistic varieties discussed here. Put simply, Basse Mandinka and Standard Gambian Mandinka diverge in their usage of the formations that exist in both of them (cf. section 2.3.3).

2.3.1. New constructions

An excellent example of constructions that are missing in Standard Gambian Mandinka but that are available in Basse is a possessive or pronominal expression formed by means of the postposition **ye** ‘for’ (see example 4, below). The sequence [noun + **ye** + noun] expresses possession or certain values typical for the genitive case (cf. 4.a – d), while the chain [pronoun + **ye**] approximates the meaning and use of possessive pronouns (cf. 4.e – f). This is an alternative construction to the standard possessive and pronominal locution derived by means of the postposition **la** ‘with, at, of’: **Laamini la motoo** ‘Laamin’s car (lit. gloss: ‘Laamin with/at/of car’) or **A la bukoo** ‘His book’ (lit. gloss: ‘he with/at/of book’).

- (4) a. **Laamin** **ye** **motoo**
 Laamin for car
 Laamin’s car

¹⁸ The abbreviation QUES stands for a ‘question word’ similar to *est-ce que* in French or *czy* in Polish.

- b. **Tubaaboolu** **ye** **duŋ feŋolu**
white.men for clothing
White men’s clothing
- c. **Gambiyankoolu** **ye** **aadoolu**
Gambians for habits
The habits of the Gambians
- d. **Bukoo** **ye** **kayitoo**
book for page
The page of the book
- e. **A** **ye** **bukoo**
he for book
His book
- f. **Nte** **ye** **sayikuloo**
I for bicycle
My bicycle

Just like the possessive-pronominal construction with **la**, the form with **ye** is not employed if one wishes to express the idea of a family relationship. Thus the forms ***Keebaa ye musoo** (intended meaning: ‘Keebaa’s wife’) or ***Faatu ye kewo** (intended meaning: ‘Fatu’s husband’) are incorrect. However, a few speakers exceptionally accepted forms such as **n te ye dindiŋolu** ‘my children’ and **n ye [ɛ] musoo** ‘my wife’.

Apart from the lexemes **ntelu** and **n̄** (and their varieties **ntel**, **ntolu**, **ntol** and **m̄**) ‘we’, Basse Mandinka also has an alternative pronoun of the first person plural, i.e. **mol** (see examples 5.a – b). This word is clearly derived from the lexeme **moolu** ‘people; they’, typically pronounced **mool** [mo:l]. However, in contrast to this word the pronoun invariably shows the short vowel [o] instead of the long variant [o:] (cf. example 5.c – d).

- (5) a. **Mol** **ye** **naa!**
we may come
Let us come!
- b. **Kabiriŋ** **Maalik** **naata**
when Maalik came
When Maalik comes,
mol **be** **taa** **la** **marisewo** **to**
we will go to market to
we will go to the market.
- c. **Mool** **ye** **naa!**
people may come
Let them come / May they come.

- d. **Mool naata fokabaŋ**
 people came already
 The people have already come / They have already come.

While Standard Gambian Mandinka lacks a genuine passive voice in which the agent would be overly expressed by means of an adpositional phrase, similar to the English locution (*it is done*) *by him*, the variety used in Basse seems to tolerate, at least to a certain degree, postpositional agents. This means that Basse Mandinka has (or rather is in the process of developing) a proper passive voice. According to the majority of our informants, the circumposition **ka bo...la** (originally ‘though, by means of, because of’) may introduce the agent of verbs that are used de-transitively and/or passively. This is possible in all the “tenses” that tolerate intransitive (or more correctly speaking, de-transitive) constructions (6.a – e). Although the literal reading ‘through, by means of’ is also possible (cf. 6.f), constructions such as those in examples (6.a – e) are tolerably acceptable in Basse Mandinka. In these cases, the most natural interpretation – the first to come to the speakers’ minds – is the passive one where the circumposition expresses the agent of the action and not its “means”.¹⁹

- (6) a. **Bukoo ñiŋ ka safee ka bo nte la**
 book this do write through me -
 The book is being written by me.
- b. **Bukoo ñiŋ be safee la ka bo nte la**
 book this NVP write to through me -
 The book will be written by me.
- c. **Bukoo ñiŋ safeeta ka bo nte la**
 book this has.been.written through me -
 The book has been/was written by me.
- d. **Motoo tiñaata ka bo nte la**
 car was.destroyed through me -
 The car was destroyed by me.

¹⁹ Basse Mandinka offers another way of emphasizing the patient of the action and thus acts in a similar manner to a passive voice. In these cases, speakers use the object (patient) in the first position, in a type of a *status pendens*, and the active transitive construction in which the previously expressed object is indicated again by means of an appropriate pronoun: **Ñiŋ bukoo nte le ye a safe** ‘This book, I have it written’, i.e. ‘This has been written by me’.

- e. **Ponosiijo** **be** **soo** **kaŋ** **ka** **bo**
 ate **la**
 tyre NVP be.punctured on through
 him -
 The tyre is being punctured by him.
- f. **A** **be** **bataariŋ** **ka** **bo** **taamoola**
 he NVP being.tired through travelling -
 He is tired because of travelling.

2.3.2. Alternative constructions

Among the most important variations of the Standard Gambian Mandinka constructions and forms, one may quote the negative habitual marker **muka**, a by-form of the standard **buka** (cf. example 7.a); the non-verbal predicators **bi** ‘be’ and **ti** ‘not be’, by-forms of the SGM forms **be** and **te**, respectively (7.b); the prepositions or conjunctions **ke** and **ki** ‘to, in order to’, by-forms of the SGM lexeme **ka** (cf. 7.c); the past tense “auxiliaries” of the 1st person singular **na**, **ñe**, **ne** ‘did, have done, -ed’, by-forms of the normalized morpheme **ŋa** (cf. 7.d); the possessive construction of the 1st person singular **n ne** ‘my’, a by-form of the normalized expression **n na** (cf. 7.e); the form **miŋ** ‘who, that, which’, a by-form of the SGM relative pronoun **meŋ** (7.f); and the future-modal marker **se** ‘will, shall’, a by-form of the SGM **si** (cf. 7.e).²⁰

- (7) a. **A** **muka** **a** **loŋ**²¹
 (instead of **A** **buka** **a** **loŋ**)
 he do.not it know
 He does not know it.
- b. **M** **bi** **taa** **kaŋ**
 (instead of **M** **be** **taa** **kaŋ**)
 I NVP go on
 I am going.

²⁰ The denominations of the taxis-tense-aspect-mood morphemes and other entities are only approximate. For a detailed discussion of these formations (particularly the verbal grams), see ANDRASON, A. The Basse Mandinka “Future”; ANDRASON, A. The Meaning of the YE Constructions in Basse Mandinka; ANDRASON, A. Description of the Semantic Potential of the Si-Construction in Basse Mandinka; ANDRASON, A. Introducción a la gramática descriptiva del mandinka de la región de Basse [‘Introduction to the descriptive grammar of Basse Mandinka’].

²¹ The examples are intended to facilitate the comparison.

c.		N	naata	jaŋ	ki/ke	motoo	saŋ
	(instead of	N	naata	jaŋ	ka	motoo	saŋ)
		I	came	here	to	car	buy
		I came here to buy a car.					
d.		Na/ne/ñe		wo	ke		
	(instead of	Da		wo	ke)		
		I.did		it	do		
		I did it.					
e.		N	ne	bukoo			
	(instead of	N	na	bukoo)			
		I	of	book			
		My book					
f.		Kewo	miŋ	naata			
	(instead of	Kewo	meŋ	naata)			
		man	who	came			
		The man who came					

While forms such as **muka**, **ke**, **ki** and **miŋ** are employed and/or considered correct by all the informants, the acceptance of the morphemes **na**, **ne** and **ñe** as well as **n ne** (even though relatively widespread) seems to be less uniform.

Additionally, Basse Mandinka possesses the relative plural pronoun **mellu** ‘(those) that, who, which’, which is a variant of the regular SGM form **mennu**, still extensively used in Basse. While **mennu** shows a typical assimilation of the plural morpheme **-lu** to the final consonant **ŋ** (i.e. **meŋ** [who, that, which (singular)] + **lu** > **mennu**), the form **mellu** displays a less common type of consonantal adjustment. This time, it is the final consonant **ŋ** that assimilates to the plural morpheme **-lu** (**meŋ** [who, that, which (singular)] + **lu** > **mellu**).

(8)	Kewolu	mellu	naata
	men	who	came
	Men who came		

2.3.3. Differences in usage

Standard Gambian Mandinka possesses a verbal construction 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’.²² As may be deduced from

²² Cf. CREISSELS, D. *Eléments de grammaire de la langue mandinka*; COLLEY, E. *Mandinka Grammar Manual*. However, also see Macbrair, who analyzes the lexeme **la** as an infinitive marker (MACBRAIR, M. *A Grammar of the Mandingo Language*, pp. 21 – 22).

most grammatical descriptions,²³ this periphrasis – referred to as the Nominal BE...LA gram – displays the following distribution in its use of the two varieties of verbal noun that are available in the language: when the direct object of the underlying verb is not expressed, the long form of the verbal noun is used (most commonly in **-roo** or **-diroo**; cf. 9.a – b). On the contrary, if the object of the underlying verb is overtly provided (as well as in the case of intransitive verbs), the short variant appears (most typically in **-o**). In the latter case, the nominal object²⁴ is regularly found in its stem form (9.c – d).

- (9) a. **M** **be** **domoroo** **la**
 I NVP eating at
 I am eating.
- b. **ì** **be** **fiiroo** **la**
 they NVP planting at
 They are planting.
- c. **M** **be** **duuta** **domoo** **la**
 I NVP mango eating at
 I am eating mangoes.
- d. **M** **be** **tiya** **fiyo** **la**
 I NVP groundnut planting at
 I am planting groundnuts.

The usage in Basse Mandinka seems to diverge from the formula presented above. To be exact, the distribution concerning the use of the long and short verbal noun of underlying transitive roots is both different and less categorical. Although in certain cases the selection of the long or the short variety of a verbal noun depends on the presence of the direct object, the principle governing it differs from the rule that holds in Standard Gambian Mandinka: the short and long forms appear if the direct object of the underlying verb (i.e. the complement of the verbal noun in the BE...LA gram) is overtly expressed (10.a), but only the long form is possible in cases where the object/complement is not explicitly uttered (10.b – c).²⁵

²³ Cf. GAMBLE, D. *Elementary Mandinka*, p. 25; COLLEY, E. *Mandinka Grammar Manual*, pp. 14 – 15; WEC INTERNATIONAL. *Mandinka Learning Manual*, pp. 17 – 18.

²⁴ Properly speaking, this entity (e.g. **duuta** and **tiya** in 9.c and 9.d respectively) is not the direct object of the verb but a complement of the verbal noun.

²⁵ Cf. ANDRASON, A. *The Structure and Meaning of the Nominal BE...LA “Tense” in Basse Mandinka*, pp. 29 – 31.

- (10) a. **M** **be** **sigareetoolu** **saboo / sabaroo** **la**
 I NVP cigarette smoking at
 I am smoking cigarettes.
- b. **M** **be** **sabaroo** **la**
 I NVP smoking at
 I am smoking.
- c. ***M** **be** **saboo** **la**
 I NVP smoking at
 Intended meaning: I am smoking

However, the above-mentioned tendency in the selection of the short or long form cannot be understood as a rigid law, and in numerous instances the short variety is *de facto* found although the underlying object is not expressed overtly:

- (11) a. **M** **be** **yiroolu** **senoo / seneroo** **la**
 I NVP trees cultivating at
 I am cultivating trees.
- b. **M** **be** **senoo / seneroo** **la**
 I NVP cultivating at
 I am cultivating.

It can also be observed that even though the nominal object of the underlying verb (which as explained is the complement of the verbal noun in the Nominal BE...LA gram) is commonly employed in its stem shape (cf. **yiri** in 12.a), in Basse Mandinka forms with the suffix **-o** as well as those with the plural morpheme **-olu** are just as common (cf. **letaaroo**, **bukoo ñiŋ** and **yiroolu** in 12.b – d, respectively).²⁶

- (12) a. **A** **be** **yiri** **tutoo** **la**
 he NVP tree planting at
 He is planting tree(s).
- b. **M** **be** **lectaroo** **mutoo / mutaroo** **la**
 I NVP letter receiving at
 I am receiving a/the letter.
- c. **M** **be** **bukoo ñiŋ** **waafoo / waafiroo** **la**
 I NVP book this selling at
 I am selling that book.

²⁶ Cf. ANDRASON, A. The Structure and Meaning of the Nominal BE...LA “Tense” in Basse Mandinka, p. 32.

d.	M	be	yiroolu	senoo / seneroo	la
	I	NVP	trees	cultivating	at
	I am cultivating trees.				

Standard Gambian Mandinka includes in its verbal repertoire a similar formation to the construction discussed above. Just like the Nominal BE...LA gram, this locution is also composed of the non-verbal predicator **be** ‘be’ followed and the entity **la** ‘to’. This time, however, it is the base of the main verb (and not its verbal noun) that appears between these two components.²⁷ From grammatical studies, one can imply that this form (labelled as a BE...LA gram) has two main uses: functioning as the future (or a prospective category, since it can be employed as a future in the past) and the progressive present. The double-faced use of this locution has been defended by Hamlyn, Gamble, Creissels and Wilson.²⁸

(13)	A	be	baloo	kosi	la
	he	NVP	xylophone	play	to
	He is playing/will play the xylophone (Wilson 2000:116).				

In Basse Mandinka, however, the BE...LA construction is never employed in order to express present progressive activities: it is never used with a non-future or, more exactly, non-prospective reference. This means that the present progressive readings of the sentences in examples 13 and 14.a are impossible. The phrase in 14.a is always interpreted as referring to a prospective time sphere, i.e. as a future or as a future in the past. In order to express a non-future (present or past) progressive meaning by means of a periphrasis built on the entities **be** and **la**, one must employ a verbal noun (**boroo**) instead of the verbal base (**bori** [14.b]; see Andrason 2012e). A double reading – i.e. as both progressive and future – is possible only if the verbal noun of a given verb is identical to its base, e.g. **kumboo** ‘cry’ and ‘(the act of) crying’ (cf. 14.c and 14.d).

²⁷ The unit **la** in this construction is analyzed as a postposition of a locative element (cf. WILSON, W. Creissels’s Mandinka Grammar) or an infinitive marker (CREISSELS, D. *Éléments de grammaire de la langue mandinka*). When used in the Nominal BE...LA gram in this paper, it will be glossed as ‘to’.

²⁸ HAMLYN, W. *A Short Study of the Western Mandinka Language*; GAMBLE, D. *Elementary Mandinka*; CREISSELS, D. *Éléments de grammaire de la langue mandinka*; WILSON, W. *Creissels’s Mandinka Grammar*. For a detailed review of the definitions and classifications proposed thus far, see ANDRASON, A. *The Basse Mandinka “Future”*.

- (14) a. **A** **be** **bori** **la**
 he NVP run to
 He will run.
- b. **A** **be** **boroo** **la**
 he NVP running at
 He is running.
- c. **A** **be** **kumboo** **la**
 he NVP cry to
 He will cry.
- d. **A** **be** **kumboo** **la**
 he NVP crying at
 He is crying.

Another formation whose usage is different in Standard Gambian Mandinka and Basse Mandinka is the so-called BE...KAIJ gram. As indicated by its name, this verbal construction consists of the non-verbal predicator **be** ‘be’ (in negative, *te* ‘not be’), the postposition **kaŋ** ‘on’ and the base of the main “meaning” verb that is placed between these two elements. The KAIJ form is typically defined as an aspectual marker indicating continuous actions that is supposedly only limited to transitive verbs.²⁹ Very infrequently, the locution may be derived from certain intransitive verbs, thus denoting continuous states: **A be duwaa kaŋ** ‘He is praying’ (literal gloss: he be pray on) and **A be bori kaŋ** ‘He is running’ (literal gloss: he be run on). According to these studies, the majority of the intransitive verbs describing a continuous state are formed with the BE RIIJ expression that uses the non-verbal predicator **be** and the participle in **-riŋ**. In fact, even the transitive type itself is regarded as less frequent than another progressive formation, viz. the BE...LA periphrasis (**be** + verbal noun + **la**).

Our data indicate that the BE...KAIJ form does not display any constraints as far as the syntactic environments are concerned, allowing both transitive and intransitive (15.a – e) constructions and with equal intensity. Likewise, there are no restrictions on the type of roots employed in the gram (dynamic [15.a – b], non-dynamic [15.c] and stative [15.d – g]). This means that virtually all verbs, including non-dynamic and adjectival predicates,³⁰ may be used in the BE...KAIJ periphrasis.³¹

²⁹ WEC INTERNATIONAL. Mandinka-English Dictionary, p. 77; WEC INTERNATIONAL. Mandinka Learning Manual, pp. 16 – 17; see also LÜCK, M., HENDERSON, L. Gambian Mandinka: A Learning Manual for English Speakers.

³⁰ What happens is that adjectival roots in the BE...KAIJ gram acquire an ingressive meaning.

³¹ Cf. ANDRASON, A. The KAIJ Verbal Form in Basse Mandinka – Structure and Meaning.

- (15) a. **M bi naa kaŋ**
 I NVP come on
 I am coming.
- b. **N ti taa kaŋ**
 I NEG.NVP go on
 I am not going.
- c. **A be siinoo kaŋ**
 he NVP sleep on
 He is sleeping.
- d. **M be lafi kaŋ**
 I NVP like on
 I am getting to like.
- e. **M be bataa kaŋ**
 I NVP be.tired on
 I am getting tired.
- f. **A be kuuraŋ kaŋ**
 he NVP be.sick on
 He is getting sick.
- g. **M be kontaani kaŋ**
 I NVP be.happy on
 I am getting happy/I am becoming happy.

Yet another verbal construction that offers slightly different uses in Basse Mandinka is the above-mentioned BE RIIḡ gram. As already explained, this locution is compounded from the non-verbal predicator **be** and the participle in **-riḡ**. In Standard Gambian Mandinka, the BE -RIIḡ formation is regularly used with adjectival verbs (e.g. **koyi** ‘be white’, **kuuraŋ** ‘be sick’; cf. also **bataa** ‘be tired’ and in 16.a, below) and with intransitive verbs that possess a transitive equivalent (cf. **safe** ‘be written’ vs. **a safe** ‘write (it)’ and **tiña** ‘be spoiled’ vs. **a tiña** ‘spoil (it)’; see example 16.b). It is also quite commonly employed with intransitive roots that express processes or less dynamic situations, such as **loo** ‘stand’, **sabati** ‘stay at, live’ or **siinoo** ‘sleep’ (16.c). However, intransitive predicates of motion display a certain reluctance to appear in the BE RIIḡ gram.

- (16) a. **M be bataariḡ**
 I NPV be.tired-PART
 I am tired.
- b. **A be tiñaariḡ**
 it NVP be.spoiled-PART
 It is spoiled.

- c. **Dindiŋo** **be** **siinooriŋ**
 child NVP sleep-PART
 The child is sleeping.

In Basse Mandinka one may observe the further grammaticalization of the BE RIIḐ construction and its relative acceptance with motion verbs. To be exact, movement verbs such as **naa** ‘come’ and **boyi** ‘fall’ are regularly found in this formation (cf. 16.a – b), while others are admitted by some speakers (for example, **seyi** ‘return’, **bo** ‘come from’ and **taama** ‘travel’ in 17.c – e). Nevertheless, the spread to all motion verbs has not been concluded because certain predicates are still unacceptable for all the informants in the BE RIIḐ gram (cf. **taa** ‘go’ in 17.f).

- (17) a. **A** **be** **naariŋ**
 he NVP come-PART
 He is coming.
- b. **A** **be** **boyiriŋ**
 he NVP fall.down-PART
 He is on the floor / He is fallen down.
- c. **A** **be** **seyiriŋ**
 he NVP return-PART
 He is back.
- d. **A** **be** **boriŋ**
 he NVP leave-PART
 He has left / He is absent.
- e. **A** **be** **taamariŋ**
 he NVP travel-PART
 He is travelling / He has left to travel.
- f. ***A** **be** **taariŋ**
 he NVP go-PART
 Intended meaning: He is going.

Additionally, it shall be noted that the use of certain reflexive verbs in the BE RIIḐ gram, such as **i kuu** ‘wash oneself’ or **i doŋ** ‘dance’, has also become admissible. In such cases, the typical object-place is occupied by the pronominal reflexive entity, e.g. **n** ‘myself’. Again, not all the informants considered such a usage as admissible.

- (18) a. **M** **be** **n** **dondiŋ**
 I NVP REFL dance-PART
 I am dancing.

- b. **M** **be** **n** **kuuriŋ**
 I NVP REFL wash-PART
 I am clean / I am washing myself.

Another SGM formation whose range of uses seems to be distinct in Basse and in the standardized language is the so-called BANTA gram.³² This locution consists of the auxiliary **banta** – originally the verb **baŋ** ‘be finished, end’, employed itself in the TA form³³ – and the stem of the meaning verb. Our data demonstrates that the semantic potential of this locution greatly exceeds the meaning of the epistemic past (19.a), which is typical for Standard Gambian Mandinka.³⁴ In Basse this formation offers a significantly wider scope of uses that regularly employ two semantic domains. One includes taxis-aspectual-temporal senses: the present perfect, perfective and simple past, pluperfect, resultative, stative and simple present (values that match the semantic potential displayed by the TA form).³⁵ The other consists of the following modal

³² It should be noted that the results of the comparison of the three BM constructions that will be discussed in the following paragraphs (i.e. the BANTA, NAATA and perfective NAA forms) with their respective SGM counterparts must be taken with some caution. To be precise, although the three formations are present in literary works composed in Standard Gambian Mandinka, their analysis in works dedicated to this normalized variety (or to the Mandinka language, including other territories in general) is either superficial (cf. BANTA) or entirely missing (NAATA and perfective NAA). This fact may complicate (and in a way obscure) an adequate comparison of the two vernaculars. On the other hand, one should acknowledge that certain uses of the entity **naa** are better described in Bambara; see, for instance, BIRD, C., HUTCHISON, J. et al. *An Ka Bamanankan Kalan*. Beginning Bambara; BRAUNER, S. *Zur Definition einer Kategorie ‘unmittelbares Futur’ (futur immediat) im Bambara*; SAMASSEKOU, A. *Éléments de morphologie verbale du bambara*; KONÉ, D. *Le verbe bambara: Essai sur les propriétés syntaxiques et sémantiques*; TERA, K. *Contribution à l’étude du futur en bambara et en jula tagbusi*; IDIATOV, D. *Le sémantisme des marqueurs aspecto-temporels du bambara: une tentative d’analyse*; BLECKE, T. *La Fonction du Morphème tùn en Bambara*. Une analyse dans le système de temps, aspect et mode.

³³ The TA form is sometimes referred to as the completive-perfective aspect or past tense (see MACBRAIR, M. *A Grammar of the Mandingo Language*, p. 16; ROWLANDS, E. *A Grammar of Gambian Mandinka*; CREISSELS, D. *Éléments de grammaire de la langue mandinka*; GAMBLE, D. *Elementary Mandinka*, p. 17; LÜCK, M., HENDERSON, L. *Gambian Mandinka: A Learning Manual for English Speakers*; COLLEY, E. *Mandinka Grammar Manual*, p. 15). The TA gram is formed by adding the suffix **-ta** to the verb, as in our case: **naa** ‘to come’ > **naata** ‘has (have) come / came’. The TA formation displays a broad range of uses. It approximates the categories of the present perfect, past (perfective, simple and durative), pluperfect, future perfect (exclusively in certain subordinated clauses), stative and present; for a complete review of meanings conveyed by the TA expression, see ANDRASON, A. *Semantics of the TA Construction in Basse Mandinka*.

³⁴ Cf. WEC INTERNATIONAL. *Mandinka-English Dictionary*, p. 11.

³⁵ ANDRASON, A. *Semantic Network of the Basse Mandinka BANTA Form*.

nuances: evidential (19.b – c) inferential and, just like in normalized language, epistemic (probability or likelihood). In all concrete instances, the BANTA form combines one atomic semantic component of the former group with one atomic element of the latter class. This means that in comparison to Standard Gambian Mandinka, the gram in Basse conveys evidential and inferential values beside the past epistemic sense, and the epistemic value itself is not limited to a past time sphere but may also refer to actual present situations and activities (19.d – e).

- (19) a. **A** **banta** **naa** **Basse** **nuŋ**
 he be.finished-TA³⁶ come Basse then
 He might have come to Basse / He probably came to Basse.
- b. **Ponosijo** **be** **feeteeriŋ**.
 tyre NVP flat
 The tyre is flat.
 A **banta** **soo**
 it be.finished-TA be.punctured
 It must be punctured / I guess it is punctured.
- c. **A** **maŋ** **naa!** **A** **banta** **saasaa**
 he did.not come he be.finished-TA be.sick
 He has not come. He must be sick / I guess he is sick.
- d. **Itolu** **banta** **bataariŋ** **saayiŋ**
 they be.finished-TA be.tired now
 They may be tired / They are (have got) probably tired now.
- e. **A** **banta** **a** **loŋ**
 he be.finished-TA it know
 He may know it / He probably knows it.

Basse Mandinka also possesses a verbal gram that undeniably exists in the standardized language but which has almost entirely been overlooked in grammars, teaching manuals and scientific articles available thus far. The construction in question is the so-called NAATA form.³⁷ The NAATA gram is

³⁶ In examples 19.a – e, 20.a – c and 21.a – b, the glosses of the elements **banta** and **naata** make reference to the origin of the two formations: the entity **banta** is glossed as ‘be.finished-TA’ and **naata** as ‘come-TA’. However, as the reader could already note, in various examples quoted previously where other grammatical issues were the focus of analysis, the verbs employed in the TA gram were glossed by means of an English form which made reference to a specific sense conveyed by the Mandinka construction: a past tense (cf. *came* in 2.c) or present tense (cf. *want* in 2.d).

³⁷ Cf. ROWLANDS, E. *A Grammar of Gambian Mandinka*; CREISSELS, D. *Eléments de grammaire de la langue mandinka*; GAMBLE, D. *Elementary Mandinka*; LÜCK, M., HENDERSON, L. *Gambian Mandinka: A Learning Manual for English Speakers*;

a locution compounded from the verb **naa** ‘come’ (itself employed in the TA form) and the base of a meaning verb (cf. **n naata taa** ‘I went’ in 20.a) This expression is extremely common in Basse Mandinka and has been grammaticalized as the main expression of the dynamic perfect and perfective past. To be exact, the semantic potential of this formation consists of the following elements: in the majority of occurrences, the formation functions as the dynamic present perfect (resultative, iterative, experiential, inclusive and indefinite) or as the perfective past tense (punctual, terminative and ingressive). By conveying the perfect and perfective past senses, the gram partially overlaps with the TA and YE³⁸ forms that are also frequently used with these values. However, the meaning of the NAATA construction is clearly distinguishable from these two formations. Namely, only the TA and YE forms – and not the NAATA gram – are able to convey general preterite or stative-durative senses. Accordingly, even though the semantic potential of the TA and YA forms and the meaning of the NAATA gram coincide to a certain degree, the NAATA formation never denotes durative and stative senses: it is invariably perfective (see examples 20.a – c). This dynamic perfective nature – in contrast to the motionless stative value of certain uses of the TA and YE forms – may best be observed in the following use of the verb **a loŋ** ‘to know’. In the YE formation, this root most commonly conveys a stative meaning of knowing (**a ye a loŋ** ‘he knows’ or ‘he knew’). However, when employed in the NAATA gram, the value of the entire locution corresponds either to a dynamic perfect or perfective past, offering a strong ingressive sense of ‘get to know, understand, realize’ (**n naata a loŋ** ‘I understood, got to know’).

- (20) a. **A** **naata** **taa** **kunuŋ**
 he come-TA³⁹ go yesterday
 He went yesterday.

COLLEY, E. Mandinka Grammar Manual; WEC INTERNATIONAL. Mandinka Learning Manual; WILSON, W. Creissels’s Mandinka Grammar. However, see the relatively frequent use of this form in WEC INTERNATIONAL. Kamben Kutoo [‘New Testament’].

³⁸ The range of uses of the YE form is comparable with the semantic potential of the TA gram. The construction expresses the ideas of the present perfect, past (perfective, simple and durative), pluperfect, future perfect (exclusively in certain subordinated clauses), stative and present for a complete review of meanings conveyed by the YE gram. The two formations (i.e. TA and YE) differ in the fact that the former is intransitive while the latter is transitive. Additionally, there is another YE gram that provides various modal shades of meanings (ANDRASON, A. The Meaning of the YE Constructions in Basse Mandinka).

³⁹ The auxiliary **naa** in the NAATA formation will be glossed respecting its origin, i.e. ‘come-TA’, i.e. the verb **naa** ‘come’ in the TA gram.

- b. **A** **maŋ**⁴⁰ **naa** **ke** **moo** **betoo** **ti**
 he did.not come become person righteous EXIS⁴¹
 He did not become a good man.
- c. **Ì** **naata** **kendeyaa** **kunuŋ**
 they come-TA be.well yesterday
 They were cured yesterday / They got well yesterday

Besides being profoundly grammaticalized as the expression of a dynamic perfect and perfective, by which the gram may diverge from its SGM homologue,⁴² the NAATA formation offers certain senses that seem to be missing in the texts published in Standard Gambian Mandinka. Namely, in Basse the NAATA form often expresses the ideas of non-intentionality, accidentality or spontaneity of a corresponding perfect or past event.⁴³ In other words, it indicates especially in discourse that a given perfect or past action has occurred spontaneously and accidentally, or due to the fact that the subject has changed his or her original intention:⁴⁴

- (21) a. **N** **naata** **naa**
 I come-TA come
 It happened that I came (first, I was not going to come,
 but I came).

⁴⁰ The construction [**maŋ** + verbal base] corresponds to a negative variety of the TA gram. Thus, **naata** in the negative is **maŋ naa**.

⁴¹ The gloss EXIS stands for an existential particle.

⁴² However, in order to conclude whether the NAATA form is more grammaticalized in Basse Mandinka than in Standard Gambian Mandinka, more research is needed. The only fact is that all the studies of the Mandinka language have jointly ignored this construction, while in Basse the gram has been generalized as the most explicit expression of the dynamic perfect (both present and past perfect) and perfective past that the language actually possesses.

⁴³ We employ the term ‘modal’ because the speaker expresses his or her attitude toward the activity conveyed by the main “meaning” verb by using this construction. We are, however, aware of the fact that the gram is not a grammatical mood *sensu stricto*. For an exhaustive study of the semantic of the NAATA form, see ANDRASON, A. The Meaning of the NAATA + Infinitive Construction in Basse Mandinka.

⁴⁴ This portion of the semantic potential seems to be missing in Standard Gambian Mandinka. First, it has never been mentioned in grammar books where the similar TA form is discussed (as explained the NAATA construction has been omitted in scholarly works so that the only manner of detecting the non-intentional and/or accidental sense is to see whether they are available in the TA formation from which the NAATA gram is derived). Additionally, the value of non-intentionality and accidentality is missing in the various books and texts consulted by the author. Nevertheless, once again in order to ensure the validity of this conclusion, more research is needed.

- b. **N** **naata** **a** **ke**
 I come-TA it do
 It happened that I did it (first, I was not going to do it,
 but I did it).

In the previous paragraph, we observed that the NAATA construction is grammaticalized as a dynamic perfect and perfective past. From a larger perspective, it is possible to propose that in Basse Mandinka one of the most important functions of the morpheme **naa** in general is the expression of a dynamic perfect and perfective aspect. This dynamic perfect and perfective value of the entity **naa** may be perceived if one compares a given “simple tense” (i.e. a verbal construction without **naa**) with its counterpart accompanied by **naa**. This interaction consists of the following: while a simple tense can express both perfect/perfective senses and non-perfective (sometimes, even durative and progressive) senses, the varieties extended by the entity **naa** are typically limited to perfect and perfective values. As mentioned above, the contrast between “simple” and **naa** varieties can be found in other formations: for instance, in the negative perfect-past MAD form (22), the modal-future SI gram (23), the future BE...LA gram (24), the modal (jussive, hortative and imperative) YE gram (25) and the imperative (26). In all these examples, the morpheme **naa** emphasizes the fact that a given action has been performed (the sense of the dynamic perfect) and that it was punctual (it was temporarily bounded; it was ingressive or terminative; the sense of a perfective aspect). For instance, in 22.a the form **naa** makes the perfect or perfective sense explicit, contrasting with **a maŋ ke** (22.b) that can have both the perfective and non-perfective readings of ‘he was’.

- (22) a. **A** **maŋ naa ke** **moo** **tilindiŋo ti**
 he did.not come become person righteous EXIS
 He did not become a righteous man.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The English renderings are not too helpful since English lacks a genuine perfective aspect. The interaction between the perfective **naa** and an unmarked simple gram can better be perceived if one uses Polish translations. Polish is a language with an opposition of the perfective versus the imperfective that affects almost all the constructions and levels of the verbal system. In our cases, the forms with **naa** are invariably rendered by the corresponding perfective constructions in Polish (*nie został* [22.a], *zrobi* [23.a], *zrobię* [24.a], *usiądnę* [25.a] and *zrób* [26.a]), while the simple forms without **naa** can be translated by means of both the perfective and imperfective expressions (*nie został/nie był* [22.b], *zrobi/będzie robił* [23.b], *zrobię/będę robił* [24.b], *usiądnę/siadaj* [25.b] and *zrób/rób* [26.b]).

- b. **A** **maŋ** ---- **ke** **moo** **tilindiŋo** **ti**
 he did.not become person righteous EXIS
 He was not a righteous man / He did not become
 a righteous man.
- (23) a. **A** **si** **naa** **a** **ke**
 he will come it do
 He will have done it / He will do it (completely).
- b. **A** **si** ---- **a** **ke**
 he will it do
 He will do it.
- (24) a. **M** **be** **naa** **a** **ke** **la**
 I NVP come it do to
 I will [certainly] do it.
- b. **M** **be** ---- **a** **ke** **la**
 I NVP it do INF
 I will do it.
- (25) a. **Ite** **ye** **naa** **sii** **siiraŋo kaŋ!**
 you may come sit chair on
 Sit down on the chair!
- b. **Ite** **ye** ---- **sii** **siiraŋo kaŋ!**
 you may sit chair on
 Sit down on the chair!
- (26) a. **Naa** **a** **ke!**
 come it do!
 Do it!
- b. ---- **A** **ke!**
 it do!
 Do it!

All of this means that the entity **naa** is an overt and explicit vehicle of the sense of a dynamic perfect or perfective aspect. As indicated above, its use in the NAATA form is particularly frequent, although it may also be found in all the remaining constructions. To put it simply, since **naa** is a highly grammaticalized marker of ‘perfect’ or ‘perfective aspect’, it can be employed in various verbal locutions, deriving their perfect or perfective counterparts.

To conclude this review, one may also quote a peculiar usage of the interrogative pronoun **muŋ** ‘what’, which in Basse can also be used as a relative

pronoun (cf. example 26.a). In the plural, the corresponding forms are **munnu** or **mullu**, depending on the type of assimilation (26.b – c; cf. a similar phenomenon with **mej** in section 2.3.2 above)

- (26) a. **Kammoo** **muŋ** **ka** **n** **karandi**
 teacher who does me teach
 The teacher who teaches me
- b. **Kammoolu** **munnu** **ka** **n** **karandi**
 teachers who do me teach
 The teachers who teach me
- c. **Musoolu** **mullu** **naata**
 women who came
 The women who came

3. Conclusion

In the present article we have presented all the traits that in a way distinguish Basse Mandinka from Standard Gambian Mandinka. In general terms, we may conclude that the Mandinka vernacular employed in Basse differs in various aspects from the standardized language: these differences are phonetic, phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic and semantic-functional (i.e. they consist in a dissimilar usage of certain constructions). They span all the levels of the language and affect both the vocabulary and core grammar.

It is therefore not surprising that Mandingoes from Basse and neighbouring villages are aware of their distinctiveness when compared with the standardized language, and in particular with the Mandinka of Komboo. To be exact, when speakers of the Mandinka variety in Basse are exposed to Standard Gambian Mandinka, they usually say, “So speak people in Komboo”. As already mentioned, Komboo is the denomination used for the coastal region and the dominant part of the country as far as politics, economy and education is concerned. The most important cities, such as Serekunda, Brikama and the capital Banjul, are there, along with the principal governmental and ministerial agencies, universities and vibrant economical life. This means that Mandingoes from the Basse area have a consciousness of employing a slightly different variety of Mandinka. This awareness, which is certainly based on an economic-political-educative background and opportunities, enables them to position themselves as being different to Komboo Mandingoes and their tongue. Consequently, the geographical-economic-political-educative difference between Komboo and the Upper River Region would likewise be reflected at the linguistic level.

However, this relatively high number of distinctive traits between the normalized language and the variety used in Basse does not necessarily imply that the vernacular spoken in Basse should be classified as a genuine dialect of Standard Gambian Mandinka. Most importantly, the two varieties are perfectly mutually intelligible, and it is hardly imaginable that a Mandingo from Basse and Komboo would not understand each other.

There are four factors that make it difficult to clearly establish the dialectological status of Basse Mandinka. Firstly, as already mentioned, Basse Mandinka is far from being a coherent system – it is rather a continuum of idiolects that range from varieties profoundly similar to Standard Gambian Mandinka to varieties more divergent. Secondly, in our study we did not make claims that the traits mentioned in this paper were limited to Basse Mandinka. Certain characteristics that distinguish the Basse variety from the normalized language may very likely be found in other parts of Gambia. To determine this, more research is needed. Thirdly, the categorization of a given linguistic system as a dialect or as an independent language is not a pure and exclusively linguistic issue. It is unquestionably related to various political, sociological and economic factors. Since no sociological or anthropological study on Basse Mandingoes has been undertaken thus far, it is difficult to conclude to what extent they consider themselves to be different from other Mandingoes. Our observations mentioned in the previous paragraph are very general, being extrapolated from linguistic interviews. They make no claim to provide evidence comparable to scientific anthropological studies. Fourthly, as mentioned in footnote 17, certain differences between the two tongues may stem from the imprecision and/or scarcity of grammatical studies published thus far. In particular, it is possible that the prototypical properties of the BANTA, NAATA and perfective NAA constructions (which are common in Basse Mandinka but almost entirely ignored in works dedicated to Standard Gambian Mandinka and Gambian Mandinka in general) can also appear in the standardized language.⁴⁶ Since more research concerning the meaning and sense of the BANTA, NAATA and perfective NAA grams in Standard Gambian Mandinka is needed, a conclusive determination of the exact range of dissimilarity in the usage of these grams in the two languages must be postponed. These four factors, which obstruct and *de facto* impede a definitive dialectological classification of Basse Mandinka, also represent the main limitations of the present paper.

Nevertheless, and despite these limitations, we are convinced that the present analysis casts a new light on Mandinka dialectology, both as far as Gambia and Western Africa are concerned, by noting all the possible differences between

⁴⁶ Note for instance that the NAATA gram is frequently used in the Mandinka Bible (WEC 1989).

Standard Gambian Mandinka and Basse Mandinka. It also points out the areas in SGM grammar that need to be studied in a more detailed manner (for instance, the status of the BANTA, NAATA and perfective NAA constructions).

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