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Semantics of the *ta* construction in Basse Mandinka

1. Introduction – Standard Mandinka and Basse Mandinka

Mandinka is the westernmost variant of Manding languages which, in turn, belong to the West branch of the Mande family (Kastenholz 1996: 281, Vydrine, Bergman & Benjamin 2000 and Williamson & Blench 2000). Manding tongues form a group of languages (or dialects) which are comparatively mutually intelligible (Wilson 2000: 109). Their most important members are Bambara (spoken language in Mali), Malinké (employed in Guinea) and Mandinka. According to Lewis (2009), Mandinka has approximately 1,346,000 speakers and is one of various idioms spoken in the Republic of Gambia (510,000), Senegal (669,000) and Guinea Bissau (167,000; the quoted numbers reflect the situation from the year 2006).

The language is still greatly limited to colloquial situations. Nevertheless, attempts have recently been made to standardize the spelling (cf. *A practical Orthography of Gambian Mandinka* 1988 and 1993 or *Mandinka English Dictionary* 1988 and 1995, as well as Tera 1979) and to promote a more official use of the tongue (for instance a certain radio use of Mandinka). Furthermore, various Muslim and Christian religious texts – such as *Kambeŋ kutoo* ('New Testament' 1989), *Kambeŋ Kotoo* ('Old Testament' 1998) and *Selec-*

tions from the Writings of the Promised Messiah (1988) – have been published employing the standardized form of Mandinka, giving the language a more respectful literary character and a more uniform shape.

The vernacular described in this article represents a Mandinka variety used in the Upper River Division (the most eastern part of Gambia), more specifically in the area of its capital, Basse (henceforth, the term Basse Mandinka will be used to refer to this regional variant). Before presenting the most important dissimilarities between Standard Mandinka (i.e. the language that has been employed in the works quoted in the previous paragraph) and the vernacular employed in the Upper River Region, it should be noted that Basse Mandinka is spoken in the territory where not Mandinka but Fula and Serehule tribes – and thus idioms – are dominant. Furthermore, in the Basse area another dialectal Manding variety, *Jaahanka* (clearly distinct from Mandinka) is extensively spoken. As a result, Mandinkas from Basse and its proximities are constantly exposed to other prevailing linguistic organizations and to a system which, albeit similar, is – at least in the speakers' linguistic self-consciousness – sovereign.

Although Basse Mandinka is highly similar to Standard Mandinka and the overall grammatical structure and linguistic strategies available in the two varieties are almost identical, one may detect certain minor features which distinguish the vernacular spoken in the Upper River Region from the standardized language. As far as phonetics are concerned, while the normalized variety includes only one velar stop in its phonemic inventory (i.e. the consonant [k]), in Basse, both the voiceless and voiced variants may be found. Consequently, in various cases – especially in borrowed words – where Standard Mandinka uses an voiceless velar stop [k], the Basse vernacular employs its voiced homologue [g], in accordance with the sound employed in the original lexeme, e.g., *Gambiya* instead of the standard form *Kambiya* 'Gambia' or *gaadiinoo* instead of *kaadiinoo* 'garden'.

As for the morphosyntactical level, one may detect several characteristics which distinguish Basse Mandinka from the normalized language. First, the following forms and constructions, quite common in Basse, are absent in Standard Mandinka: a genitival (possessive) and pronominal expression, formed by means of the postposition *ye* (e.g., *Laamin ye motoo* 'Lamin's car' or *A ye bukoo* 'His book'); an interrogative and relative pronoun *joŋ* 'who, which'; relative pronoun *miŋ* 'which, that, who'; functional lexemes such

as *pasike* 'because' and *puuru* 'to, for'. Second, Basse Mandinka offers alternative forms of morphemes and locutions employed in the standardized tongue (it shall be observed that the standard forms may also be used in Basse). Among the most important variations, one may quote a negative habitual auxiliary *muka* (*A muka a loŋ* 'He does not know it'; a by-form of the standard *buka*); prepositions / conjunctions *ke* and *ki* 'to, in order to' (*N naata jaŋ ki motoo saŋ* 'I came here to buy a car; by-forms of the regular *ka*); past tense auxiliaries *na*, *ñe*, *ne* (*Na a ke* 'I did it'; by-forms of the normalized morpheme *ŋa*); a possessive construction *n ne* (*n ne bukoo* 'my book'; a by-form of the normalized expression *n na*).[1]

Finally, it shall be noted that Basse Mandinka fails to be a unified tongue with a constant number of rules. There is nothing such as a 'Basse Mandinka norm'. Quite the opposite, there is considerable variation concerning the forms and strategies employed by speakers. For example, the *ye* genitive is not accepted by all informants. Likewise, speakers disagree when indicating the correct form of the past tense auxiliary for the 1st person singular: *na*, *ne*, *ñe* or *ŋa*. Consequently, Basse Mandinka could be defined as a conglomerate of all possibilities provided by and available to Mandinka native speakers in Basse Mandinka and its proximities (for a detailed review of the differences between Basse Mandinka and Standard Mandinka and a discussion of the status of the variety used in Basse, see Andrason 2012).

2. Objective and method of the study

In the present paper, we aim at familiarizing the reader with one feature of Basse Mandinka, namely the meaning of a component of its verbal system – the *ta* construction. This formation, exemplified in (1), has been labeled as the *ta* construction due to its main structural property: it is derived by adding the suffix -*ta* to the verb. The gram[2] is invariably intransitive and its transitive homologue is formed by employing the *ye*₁ periphrasis: *A keta* 'It was / is done' versus *A ye a ke* 'He had done it / he did it'; cf. Andrason 2012).

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[1] One should note that some of these characteristics are not restricted to Basse Mandinka but may likewise be found among other territories.

[2] The term 'gram' will be used as a synonym for a grammatical formation, grammatical expression, grammatical construction, etc.

(1)   N **naata³** suwo kono
       I come-TA home in
       I came home

Besides the *ta* expression, the verbal system of Basse Mandinka consists of the following constructions which, contrary to the above mentioned gram, are all formed analytically: *ye₁* gram – a perfect-perfective-past and stative category (e.g., *A ye a saŋ* 'He (has) bought it'); *ye₂* gram – a modal subjunctive category (e.g., *A ye naa* 'May he come!'); *ka* gram – a present and past habitual-progressive category (e.g., *A ka a ke* 'He does it'); *kaŋ* gram – present and past progressive category (e.g., *A be siinoo kaŋ* 'He is sleeping'); *si* gram – a prospective and modal category (e.g., *I si a ke* 'You will do it / you must do it'); *be…la* gram – an intentional prospective category (e.g., *M be a faa la* 'I will kill him'); *naata* gram – a perfect-perfective category (e.g., *A naata ke* 'It (has) happened'); *be naa…la* gram – a future perfect and past conditional category (e.g., *A be naa faa la* 'He will have died / He is almost dead'); *be … riŋ* gram – a stative-progressive category (e.g., *A be keriŋ* 'it is happening'); nominal *be…la* gram – a progressive past-present-future category (e.g., *M be seneroo la* 'I am cultivating'); nominal *be..kaŋ* gram – a progressive present-past category (e.g., *M be safeeroo kaŋ* 'I am writing'); and several *tara* grams – progressive and stative categories (e.g., *N tarata siinooriŋ* 'I am sleeping'; the terms which designate these verbal grams make reference to a specific entity (or entities) employed when forming a corresponding locution). It shall be emphasized that the meta-linguistic explanations of the forms listed above do not account for the entire semantic potential of the grams which usually combine the ideas of tense, aspect, taxis and mood (sometimes also affirmation/negation). Rather, they are designed as general labels which inevitably simplify the real state of affairs. Additionally, the language includes two non-verbal predicators: *be* (in negative *te*) and *mu* corresponding to the English present and past forms of the verb *to be* (cf. Creissels 1983). For a comprehensive discussion of the Basse Mandinka verbal system and detailed description of the semantic load offered by its constituents, see Andrason (2012).

The *ta* expression – a component of the Basse Mandinka verbal organization which constitutes the topic of this article – has received a rather limited

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³ The relevant Mandinka forms in the *ta* construction will be given in bold type. The verbs employed in the *ta* formation will be glossed as TA.

interest among the scientific literature, which is moreover almost invariably restricted to the standard language. The formation has been defined in different manners, for instance, as an aorist of neuter – i.e. intransitive – verbs (Macbrair 1842: 16), as a completive aspect and past tense (Gamble 1987: 17 and Colley 1995: 15), as an intransitive past (Dramé 2003: 47, 91), as an intransitive perfective-completive positive (Creissels 2008: 77, 2010a: 3, 2010b: 3 and 2007, cf. also Rowlands 1959, Spears 1965 and Long 1971). In particular, in his grammar, Creissels (1983) classifies the form as a stative with two primary semantic nuances: ongoing state and completed action. Under his analysis, the construction can be employed in both the present and past time as well as, denoting future eventuality, in conditional sentences (cf. also Wilson 2000: 112).

No article or monographic study dedicated solely to the semantics of the *ta* formation has been published thus far. And in particular, no such analysis has been offered for the vernacular employed in Basse. This paper aims at nullifying this lacuna and offers a thorough presentation of the tense-aspect-mood-taxis properties of the *ta* construction as they appear in Basse Mandinka. However, in doing so, we not only aspire to provide a detailed description of the semantics of the *ta* form in the vernacular found in the capital of the Upper River Region, we also believe that our research may be profitable for Mandinka dialectology and especially, for a more detailed analysis of the *ta* expression in the standard literary language. It shall also be acknowledged that we will not discuss structural and morphosyntactical properties of the construction such as, for instance, intransitivity and its relation to transitive forms (for a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of valency, and thus that of (in)transitivity, see Creissels (2011).

The purely analytic character of the paper does not signify that our objective is scientifically poor or less ambitious than goals designed in more synthetic studies. Mandinka – both the standard and Basse varieties – is a language whose grammatical description is still incomplete. In particular, a great number of descriptive surveys are required in order to reach a comprehensive picture of the Mandinka verbal system. Only once the most important components of the verbal organization have meticulously been described, a synthetic explanation will be possible (for a more synthetic treatment of the Basse Mandinka verbal system and, in particular, an explanation of the interrelations among its components, see Andrason 2013).

The present article is a result of an extensive field research carried out by the author in the Upper River Region in 2010 and 2011, and dedicated to writing a Basse Mandinka grammar (cf. Andrason 2012). For that purpose, ten Mandinka native speakers have carefully been selected in order to represent different age groups and educational, professional or even ethnic backgrounds. At the end of the research activities, a massive database was assembled – a record of some 5.000 entries/phrases in which each example was recorded with audio-video instruments and thoroughly discussed with the following informants: Keba Susso (13 years old, male, primary school student, Bassending),[4] Malick Susso (18, male, high school student, Bassending), Musa Yaffuneh (24, male, watchman, Basse), Lamin Manneh (25, male, university student, Manneh Kunda), Mamanding Sanyang (27, female, nurse assistant, Basse), Musa Sanneh (29, male, driver, Kaba Kama), Baba Kamara (30, male, teacher, Mansajang), Saikou Drammeh (45, male, nurse, Basse, originally from Brikama), Kumba Jallow (56, female, cook, Mansajang) and Mariama Mendy (32, female, nurse, Basse – originally from Fulla Bantang).[5]

Finally, it shall be observed that all the examples provided in this paper – and extracted from the author's database – may be classified into three sorts: some were spontaneously produced by speakers, others were formulated by informants under the request of the author in order to study a given grammatical phenomenon, and finally, yet another group was inspired by written texts (Bible translation and Muslim literature) but again, pronounced and, if necessary, reformulated by the above-mentioned persons.

3. Semantic properties of the *ta* formation – the evidence

In the present section of the paper, we will provide a detailed description of the semantic load of the *ta* gram, specifying all possible shades of meaning offered by the locution. Since our study – as well as the database from which the evidence has been extracted – is concerned with semantic diversity, all the values presented below (with the exception of the performative function, limited to a few verbs) are treated as equally common and significant.

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[4] In the parentheses, the name, age, occupation and residence place of each informant will be indicated. The list has been arranged in accordance with the age of the informant.

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

In our record, all such meanings are illustrated by an almost identical number of examples. In the real world, the amount of these illustrative cases may be extended *ad infinitum* so that, *per se*, there is no difference in their relevance for the total semantic content of the *ta* formation. The concepts of prototypical and marginal values are related to corpus linguists and to pragmatic factors – certain uses are more prototypical or marginal in determined contexts or types of discourse. To establish such a difference in frequency of meanings displayed by the *ta* gram, several studies are needed where different corpora and different pragmatic environments will be examined. Such an analysis obviously exceeds the ambit of this article.

The *ta* construction is frequently employed as a resultative present perfect of current relevance. In such a use, it offers a clear resultative value indicating that certain effects of a previously accomplished action are still available and pertinent to the present state of affairs:

(2) a. A **funtita** le
          he go.out-TA EMPH[6]
          He has left (i.e. he is not here)
     b. A **taata** marisewo to
          he go-TA market to
          He has gone to the market (i.e. he is still there)
     c. A **naata** suwo kono
          he come-TA home in
          He has come home (i.e. he is at home)
     d. Fo itelu **jiita**?
          whether they descend-TA
          Have they come down? (i.e. are they here downstairs?)
     e. A **boyita**
          he fell.down-TA
          He has fallen down (i.e. he is on the floor)
     f. N **ñinata** i too la
          I forget-TA his name with/at[7]
          I have forgotten his name (i.e. I do not remember it)

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⁶ The lexeme *le* is an emphatic particle which will be glossed as EMPH.
⁷ The word *la* is a postposition with a broad range of uses and values. Hereafter, we will gloss it as 'with/at' (cf. however, footnote 9 below).

    g. Ì **moota** katiroo ye le fokabaŋ
        they be.ripe-TA harvesting for EMPH already
        They are already ripe for being harvested
    h. Wo moo **kiitiita** le fokabaŋ
        that person be.judged-TA EMPH already
        That person has been already judged (i.e. he has been condemned)

The *ta* category is also employed with the sense of an inclusive perfect, denoting that a given action or state has been continuing for an uninterrupted period of time from a particular moment in the past unto the present day:

(3) a. M **faamata** taa la Banjul[8] baake
        I fail-TA go to[9] Banjul very-much
        I have not been to Banjul for a long time
    b. M **faamata** i je la baake
        I fail-TA you see to very-much
        I have not seen you for a long time
    c. N **faamata** suboo domo la bake
        I fail-TA meat eat to very-much
        I have not eaten meat for a long time
    d. Alitolu le mu moolu ti, mennu niŋ nte **tententa** n na marisakuwolu kono
        You EMPH are people EXIS[10] who with me continue-TA I of[11] temptations in
        You are those who have continued with me in my temptations
    e. Nte **tarata** ali fee le fo waati jaŋ saayiŋ
        I remain-TA you with EMPH until time long now
        I have been with you for so long now

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  [8] There are three possible words for the capital city of Gambia in Basse Mandinka: *Banjulu*, *Banjunu* and *Banjuloo*. Moreover, the first two lexemes commonly lose their final vowel, yielding forms such as *Banjul* and *Banjun*.

  [9] In this example, the lexeme *la* may be analyzed either – in accordance with what we stated in footnote 7 – as a postposition 'with/at' or as an infinitive marker 'to'.

  [10] The lexeme *ti* is an existential particle that accompanies certain verbs with the meaning of 'be' or 'become' (e.g., *mu* in our example). It will be glossed as EXIS.

  [11] The slot *n na* (i.e. *n/ŋ* + *la*) corresponds to a possessive adjective with the meaning of the English *my*.

f. Ate **faata** kabiriŋ 2003
he be.dead-TA since 2003
He has been dead since 2003

The function of an inclusive perfect is particularly frequent with adjectival verbs (on the values displayed by adjectival verbs,[12] i.e. verbs which correspond to Indo-European adjectives, see below in this section):

(4) a. N **kuuranta** kabiriŋ 1992
I be.sick-TA since 1992
I have been sick since 1992
b. Ñiŋ kewo **finkita** kabiriŋ a wuluuta
this man be.blind-TA since he was.born
This man has been blind since he was born

The formation may also suggest that a given resultative activity has repeatedly occurred, approximating an iterative present perfect:

(5) a. N **ketuta** siiñaa jamaa bii
I faint-TA time many today
I have fainted many times today
b. I **naata** jaŋ siiñaa jelu?
you come-TA here time how-many
How many times have you come here?
c. A **podita** siiñaa fula
he jump-TA time two
He has jumped twice

The construction is also acceptable in the experiential perfect sense. In this use, the event expressed by the verb constitutes a subject's experience that has taken place at least once during his or her lifetime. The current relevance nuance is still unmistakable, but the resultative value ceases to be pertinent.

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[12] This group of predicates is usually denominated as 'stative verbs'.

(6) a. Ite nene **taata** Gambiya?
         you ever go-TA Gambia
         Have you ever gone to Gambia? (but you may have come back)
     b. Haa, n **taata** Gambia
         Yes, I go-TA Gambia
         Yes, I have been to Gambia (but I may have returned)

The *ta* formation may likewise be employed with the force of an indefinite past or, using an alternative denomination, indefinite perfect. In that function, although expressing events that belong to the past time sphere, the construction fails to be introduced by words that would explicitly locate the activity in a precise moment of past time, e.g., adverbs or adverbial locutions such as *yesterday*, *a week ago* etc. Put differently, while the *ta* form undoubtedly connotes a past action, its definite temporal location is not overtly specified:

(7) N **naata** Banjul, añiŋ n **taata** Basse, añiŋ m **muruuta** Birikama
     I come-TA Banjul, I go-TA Basse, and I return-TA Brikama
     I came to Banjul, I went to Basse, and I returned to Brikama

The locution is sometimes found with the performative force, approximating the performative perfect of languages such as Arabic, Biblical Hebrew and Akkadian. In such cases – limited in Basse Mandinka to a few roots that are already performative by nature, i.e. verbs of giving and endowing as well as *verba dicendi* – the sole fact of pronouncing the sentence is equivalent with performing a certain act:

(8) a. N **sonta** a la!
         I agree-TA it with/at
         I agree with that!
     b. N **sonta** a ma!
         I agree-TA him with
         I agree with him!

However, the *ta* construction can also be used with an explicit past reference, being thus accompanied by past time adverbs or phrasal expressions and functioning as a prototypical definite past. In this usage, it may appear in

contexts with different degrees of remoteness or temporal distance from the enunciator's here-and-now. It is found in environments that point to immediate-hodiernal (9.a), recent-hesternal (9.b and 9.c), general (9.d, 9.e and 9.f) and remote (9.g) past moments:

(9) a. Waati jumaa le i naata? N **naata** waati wooro kooma.
         Time which EMPH you come-TA? I come-TA hour six ago
         When did you come? I came six hours ago
     b. Dindiŋo **wuurita** buŋo kooma kunuŋ
         child shout-TA house behind yesterday
         The child shouted behind the house yesterday
     c. A **siinoota** kunuŋ hoteloo to
         she sleep-TA yesterday hotel at
         She slept yesterday at the hotel
     d. N **naata** jaŋ luŋ luulu kooma
         I come-TA here day five ago
         I came here five days ago
     e. A **taata** Gambiya sanji taŋ kooma
         he go-TA Gambia year ten ago
         He went to Gambia ten years ago
     f. A **keta** sanji naani kooma
         it happen-TA year four ago
         It happened four years ago
     g. Mansa doo nene **sotota**. A **naata** Gambiya…
         king certain once be-TA he come-TA Gambia…
         Once upon a time there was a king. He came to Gambia…

As far as the aspectual value of the past time *ta* gram is concerned, the formation frequently introduces perfective – unique and punctual – events:

(10) a. N **taata** Banjul kunuŋ talaŋ saba
          I go-TA Banjul yesterday at three
          I went to Banjul yesterday at three
      b. A **faata** kari fula kooma
          he die-TA month two ago
          He died two months ago

However, in various instances, the construction corresponds rather to a simple past. It is also able to denote past activities and situations of an extended duration, approximating a durative past:

(11) a. N **sabatita** Banjul sanji fula. Saayiŋ m muruta Basse.
  I live-TA Bunjul year two. now I have.returned Basse
  I lived in Banjul for ten years. Now I have returned to Basse

  b. Sanji jelu i **jiyaata** Basse?
  year how-many you lodge-TA Basse
  For how many years have you lived in Basse?

  c. Aduŋ a niŋ wulakono daafeŋo **tarata** jee fo tili taŋ naani
  and.then he with wild creatures be-TA there during day ten four
  And for forty days he was there with the wild beasts

  d. N **tarata** jee fo tili fula
  I be-TA there until day two
  I stayed there for two days

  e. Juudankoolu niŋ Jerusalemunkoolu bee **taata** Yaayaa kaŋ
  Judea-people and Jerusalem-people all go-TA John to
  All the people of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to John

  f. Kuraŋo **naata** kunuŋ suutoo bee
  electricity come-TA yesterday night all
  Yesterday the electricity was on the whole night

  g. Feetoo **sotota** Basse
  feast be-TA Basse
  A feast was (being celebrated) in Basse

  h. A **keta** mansa ti le fo sanji taŋ naani
  he be-TA king EXIS EMPH until year ten four
  He was king during forty years

The durative value, similar to the imperfective past, is particularly evident and common with adjectival verbs:

(12) a. N **konkota** nuŋ
  I be.hungry-TA then

I was hungry (cf. Spanish translation *tenía* [imperfective past] *hambre*)

b. A **kuuranta** le waati jamaa
he be.sick-TA EMPH time many
He was sick for a long time (cf. Spanish translation *estaba* [imperfective past] *malo*)

c. N **saasaata** fo luŋ luulu
I be.sick-TA until day five
I was sick during five days (cf. Spanish translation *estaba* [imperfective past] *enfermo*)

The imperfective sense may clearly be observed in the following narrative passage where the *ta* form co-occurs with the habitual-progressive-imperfective construction *ka* + infinitive (*ka karandiroo ke* 'he used to teach' and *ka taa sabati* 'he used to go to dwell') providing an iterative (or iterative-progressive) sense:

(13) a. Luŋ-wo-luŋ Yeesu ka karandiroo ke nuŋ...
Everyday Jesus used-to teaching do then…
Everyday Jesus used to teach (was teaching)…

    Bari sutoo a ka taa sabati konkoo le to...
    but at-night he used-to go stay mount EMPH at…
    but he used to go out and spend the night on the mount…

        Aduŋ soomandaa juunoo, moolu bee **naata**
        and morning early people all come-TA
        and early in the morning people used to come

It is likewise important to note that the *ta* form of the verb *tara* 'be, remain, abide' is commonly employed to generate locutions which approximate the progressive past, such as the English expression *was doing* from a typological perfective, past progressive constructions are frequently derived using auxiliaries which appear in the imperfective (cf. Spanish *estaba leyendo* 'he was reading') or simple past (cf. Icelandic *hann var* að *lesa* 'he was reading'), but not in the perfective past tense. This would hence harmonize with the non-perfective value of the *ta* formation, discussed in the previous paragraphs.

(14) a. Ì **tarata** jalakaroo le la

   they be-TA sewing.net EMPF with/at
   They were mending the nets

b. Finkintee doo le **tarata** siiriŋ silabaloo la
   blind certain EMPH be-TA sitting roadside at
   A blind man was sitting by the road

c. A **tarata** yankankati kaŋ
   he be-TA be.in.torment at
   He was being tormented / he was in torments

The prototypical perfect value of anteriority – besides being available in the present temporal sphere (cf. examples 1–6 above) – may also be observed within the past and future time frame. This means that the *ta* construction can function as a past perfect (pluperfect, 15.a-e) and – although exclusively in subordinate temporal clauses – as a future perfect (16.a-e):

(15) a. Kabiriŋ a **funtita** naŋ jiyo kono, a ye m je
        when he went.out-TA to.here water in, he did me see
        When he had come out of the water, he saw me

   b. Kunuŋ kabiriŋ a **naata**, n diyaamuta a la
      yesterday when he come-TA I talked him with/at
      Yesterday when he had come I talked to him

   c. Ì ye kuwolu je mennu **keta**
      they did things see which happen-TA
      They saw the things that had happened

   d. N naata jaŋ, kaatu i faamaa **lafita** a la
      I come-TA here because your father want-TA it with
      I came here because your father had wanted it

   e. Jee niŋ jee ate ye a loŋ ko semboo **bota** a bala
      there and there he did it know that force come-TA him on with/at
      He knew immediately that the strength had abandoned him

(16) a. Niŋ i **naata**, m be diyaamu la i la
        when you come-TA I am talk to you with/at
        When you have come, I will talk to you

   b. M be taa la, niŋ sanjiyo **teyita**
      I am go to when rain stop-TA

I will go when the rain has stopped

c. Ali ñiŋ dookundi, foniŋ m **muruta** naŋ
you this make.work/make.use until I return-TA here
Make use of it (do business with it) until I have come

d. N te a domo la kotenko, foniŋ a **naata**
I am-not eat to again unless he come-TA
I will not eat anymore unless he has come

e. Foniŋ ali **tuubita** ali la junuboolu la
unless you repent-TA you of[13] sins with/at
Unless you have repented,

    ali be yankankati la le fanaa ko ñinnu
    you are be-punished to EMPH too as these
    you will likewise perish

It should be noted that the *ta* construction is commonly employed with the conjunction *niŋ* 'if' in conditional protases, indicating future hypothetical activities on the accomplishment of which other subsequent future actions and situations depend. Thus, the event expressed in the protasis, both logically and temporarily, precedes the activity expressed in the apodosis.

(17) a. Sooma niŋ i **naata**, m̀ be taa la mariseewo to
tomorrow if you come-TA we are go to market to
If you come tomorrow we will go to the market (i.e. you will come and then we will go to the market)

b. Niŋ Laamini **naata**, mol be karaŋ na
if Lamin come-TA we are study to
If Lamin comes we will study (i.e. first Lamin will come and then, if this is accomplished we will study)

The *ta* formation may also appear in unreal counterfactual conditional phrases:

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[13] The slot *ali* [you] *la* [of] corresponds to a possessive adjective of the 2nd person plural, such as the English word *your.*

(18) a. Niŋ ali **naata**, ali be seewoo la nuŋ
         if you come-TA you are rejoice to then
         If you had come, you would have rejoiced
      b. Niŋ ite **muruta** nuŋ, tennuŋ nte baarinkewo te faa la nuŋ
         If you return-TA then, so.then my brother is.not be.dead to then
         If you had returned, my brother would not have died

With qualitative adjectival (stative) roots and certain intransitive verbs, the *ta* formation equates a simultaneous-resultative, indicating that the present condition or quality has been acquired due to a previously performed action:[14]

(19) a. Dokoo **faata** le
         bottle be-full EMPH
         The bottle is full (i.e. it has been filled out and now it is full)
      b. M **bataata**
         I be.tired-TA
         I am tired (I have gotten tired and now I am tired)
      c. N **kamfaata**
         I be.angry-TA
         I am angry (I have gotten angry and I remain angry)[15]

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[14] This value is similar to that which is offered by the resultative perfect of current relevance (cf. example 2). The main difference consists in the fact that, this time, it is the static situation, condition and quality which are attributed with prominence while the previous event is merely suggested. The internal semantic arrangement of the resultative perfect is quite the reverse: the most important portion of the meaning corresponds to the dynamic event, which is somehow related to a present situation.

[15] One should observe that the language includes in its verbal system a form which prototypically provides stative meaning with no patent dynamic resultative nuances: *be* + participle. In consequence, if one wishes to express only the static condition of being full, tired and angry (corresponding to examples 19a.c) without any evident traces of a dynamic resultativity, one can employ the *BE* + participle construction:

(A)   a. Dokoo be faariŋ
         bottle is be.full-PART
         The bottle is full
      b. M be bataariŋ
         I am be.tired-PART
         I am tired
      c. M be kamfaariŋ
         I am be.angry-PART
         I am angry

However, with various adjectival verbs – in a present or unspecified time frame – the *ta* formation most frequently offers a present stative value, indicating present qualities or conditions. In this widespread use, the resultative sense is unavailable and thus the meaning of the construction is virtually equivalent to the previously mentioned stative *BE* + participle (cf. footnote 21).

(20) a. A **kandita**
         it be.hot-TA
         It is hot
     b. A be kandiriŋ
         it is be.hot-PART
         It is hot

The present stative situation may be either actual (21.a-g) or permanent (22.a-e):

(21) a. N **konkota** saayiŋ
         I be.hungry-TA now
         I am hungry now
     b. Bii, a **kuuranta** le
         today he be.sick-TA EMPH
         He is sick today
     c. Bii, a **ñiiñaata** baake
         today she be.beautiful-TA very.much
         Today she is very beautiful
     d. A **kutunkannayaata** baake
         he be.arrogant-TA very.much
         He is very arrogant
     e. A **koleyaata**
         it be.difficult-TA
         It is difficult
     f. Bii a **kandita** baake
         today it be.hot.-TA very.much
         Today it is very hot
     g. Sumayaa **warata** baake

cold be.big-TA very.much

It is very cold (lit.: the cold is being very intense)

(22) a. Ñiŋ bukoo **beteyaata**

this book be.good-TA

This book is good

b. Ñiŋ taabuloo **kutuyaata** le

this table be.new-TA EMPH

This table is new

c. A **ñaamenta**

he be.wise-TA

He is wise (wisdom is his permanent quality)

d. Ñiŋ kewo **tilinta** le

this man be.righteous-TA EMPH

This man is righteous (righteousness is his permanent quality)

e. Kee fula naata jaŋ. Ì **koyita**

man two came here. They be.white-TA

Two men have come here. They are white (as opposite to the blacks)

In yet other cases, the construction does not express qualities but rather indicates simple present activities, approximating thus a simple present tense:

(23) a. A **lafita** taa la Banjul

he want-TA go to Banjul

He wants to go to Banjul

b. Kadoo **sotota** le

Money be-TA EMPH

There is money (i.e. money is available)

c. Motoo **jarita** kodi jamaa le la

car be.worth-TA money many EMPH at

The car is worth a lot of money

d. Maanoo **mankita** jaŋ ne

rice be.scarce-TA here EMPH

Rice is scarce here

e. N **suulata** a la

I need-TA it with/at
I need it

As was the case with the dynamic perfect (anterior) meaning, the resultative-simultaneous, stative and simple temporal values of the *ta* formation may also be found in the past time frame, yielding past simultaneous, past stative and simple past uses:

(24) a. Soomandaa m **bataata** baake
          morning night I be.tired-TA very.much
          I was very tired in the morning
     b. Kunuŋ a **kuuranta**
          yesterday he be.sick-TA
          He was sick yesterday
     c. Ñiŋ filimoo **beyaata** nuŋ
          this film be.good-TA then
          This film was good
     d. Mansa **lafita** a faa la
          king want-TA him kill to
          The king wanted to kill him

It is also possible to employ adjectival verbs in the future temporal sphere, although exclusively in subordinated temporal phrases:

(25) Saama, niŋ ite **kuuranta**, kana naa jaŋ
     tomorrow if you be.sick-TA do.not come here
     If you are sick tomorrow, do not come here!

This means that the following sentence – analogue to 24.b – is incorrect:

(26) *N kuuranta le sooma
     I be.sick-TA EMPH tomorrow
     Intended meaning: I will be sick tomorrow

One should note that when the *ta* formation is used as an intransitive counterpart of a transitive verb (e.g., *samba* 'be taken' vs. *a samba* 'to take'), thus

approximating a passive construction, the sense may be both stative (as in English 'is taken') and dynamic ('has been taken'):[16]

(27) a. A **kendeyaata** saayiŋ
he be.cured-TA now
He is cured now (i.e. now he is healthy)
b. Kewo **kendeyaata** wo loodulaa kiliŋo le to
man be.cured-TA that place one/same EMPH at
The man was cured (had been cured / he became well) immediately
c. A **sambata** arijana kono
he be.taken-TA heaven in
He has been taken (is taken) to heaven

Finally, as for the text properties, the *ta* formation – besides being regularly employed in discourse and dialogues (cf. examples 1–6) – also functions as a principal (together with the *ye* construction) narrative form of foreground in either recited or written stories. This use may be illustrated by the following examples extracted from the Bible and subsequently recited by native speakers:

(28) a. Wo to le a **wulita** jee, a **taata** Tire maafaŋo la.
that at EMPH he arise-TA there, he go-TA Tyre region at
And from thence he arose, and went to the region of Tyre
Kabiriŋ a futata, a **dunta** buŋo kono.
when he arrive-TA, he enter-TA house in
When he arrived, he entered a house
Musu doo tarata jee. A **boyita** a siŋolu koto...
woman certain be-TA there. she fall-TA her feet in
A woman was there. She fell at his feet…

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[16] It is hence not surprising that the form *a safeeta* is commonly used in the translation of the Bible together with the purely stative expression *a be safeeriŋ* to render the Greek perfect γέγραπται 'it is written / it stands written' (cf. Acts 7.42 *a safeeta* but Mark 1.2 *a be safeeriŋ*). On the other hand, the *ta* formation of the verb *safee* may also be used with a dynamic sense, for instance: *bukoo safeeta ka bo nte la* 'The book has been written by me'. Another example is the verb *faa*: *a faata* 'he is dead' vs. *a faata ka bo nte la* 'he has been killed by me'.

> Wo to le musoo taata suwo kono
> that at EMPH woman go-TA house in
> Then, the woman went home

   b. Bituŋ Yeesu **bota** Tire maafaŋo la.
      then Jesus leave-TA Tyre region at
      Then, Jesus departed from the region of Tyre

> A **taata** ka bo niŋ Sidoni la ka taa Galilee baa to.
> he go-TA from Sidoni at to Galilea sea to
> He went from Sidon to the Sea of Galilee

>> A **tambita** ka bo niŋ saatee taŋo la
>> he pass-TA through village ten at
>> He came through the midst of the region of the Ten Towns

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the *ta* form can also introduce the background (for example, recuperated) information (cf. also examples 15):

(29) Kabiriŋ ì **bota** Yahuudi diina bendulaa to doroŋ,
     when they come-TA Jew religious meeting.place at only,
     As soon as they had left the synagogue,
     ì dunta Sayimoni niŋ Anduru la buno kono
     they entered Simon and Andreas of house in
     they went to Simon and Andreas' place

4. Conclusion

The evidence introduced in the previous section indicates that the *ta* construction displays the following semantic load. First, in respect to the domain of anteriority ("perfectness"), the *ta* form approximates a present perfect (resultative, inclusive, iterative, experiential and indefinite; cf. as well, the performative value), pluperfect and future perfect (although only in certain subordinated clauses). Second, the formation is commonly employed as a past tense. In this function, the degree of remoteness spans from an immediate to remote past, passing through the domains of hodiernal, hesternal, recent and general past time. Yet in its role as a past tense, the locution may introduce aspectually perfective actions as well as activities that are normally expressed by simple past tenses (*preterites*), all the while, offering in some instances

a durative – clearly non-perfective – sense. Third, determined verbs (in particular, adjectival roots) are employed in the *ta* construction with the force of a present simultaneous resultative, present stative and simple present tense. As was the case with the concept of anteriority, these three values may also be found with a past temporal reference (past simultaneous resultative, past stative and simple past) and – again exclusively in subordinated clauses – in a future time sphere. Fourth, the *ta* construction in its passive function may yield both static and dynamic readings. Fifth, the formation is extensively used in conditional protases with a patent modal meaning: it conveys the idea of real future possibility or introduces unreal counterfactual hypothetical situations. And finally, sixth, as for text linguistic properties, the locution appears both in discourse (dialogues) and narratives (written and recited). It is a principal form of the narrative foreground which may, however, also introduce background – for example, recuperated – information.

Our study *grosso modo* harmonizes with the analysis provided by Creissles (1983) and other scholars (cf. section 1) who view the *ta* formation in Standard Mandinka as a stative-perfective form, an expression of the ongoing state and completed action in the present and past time frame, additionally employed to convey the sense of future eventuality.

Nevertheless, we have also detected certain values absent in studies published thus far: simple (non-perfective) past, durative past, performative perfect, future perfect and counterfactual unreality. We have also specified all perfect meanings (resultative, inclusive, iterative, experiential and indefinite) and discussed the textual values of the construction. Furthermore, as for the adjectival or lexically non-dynamic verbs, we have offered a more detailed description of their semantic properties. We have divided all such uses displayed by these predicates into three main classes: simultaneous-resultative, stative and simple (present or past) tense.

To conclude, our analysis – although agreeing for the most part with traditional studies – proposes important refinements in the determination of the semantic load of the *ta* formation in Basse Mandinka. We are convinced that these modifications can in the future be used to similarly improve the description of the *ta* construction in the standardized language. The results of the present study may furthermore enable scholars to develop more synthetic examinations of the Basse Mandinka verbal system, designing a comprehensive model of its structure and specifying relations among its components.

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Znaczenie formy czasownikowej *ta* w języku mandinka na obszarze Basse

(s t r e s z c z e n i e)

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia dogłębną analizę znaczeń charakteryzujących konstrukcję czasownikową języka mandinka, tworzoną przez dodanie do tematu czasownika przyrostka -*ta* (tzw. *ta construction*). Przedstawione dane – zebrane podczas prac badawczych na terenie miasta Basse i jego okolic we wschodniej Gambii – pozwalają stwierdzić, że formacja ta może funkcjonować jako perfektum (czasu teraźniejszego, przeszłego oraz przyszłego), czas przeszły (dokonany, prosty – tzw. *praeteritum* – oraz duratywny), statyczny (właściwy i z implikacjami rezultatywnymi) oraz czas teraźniejszy prosty. W użyciu pasywnym opisywana konstrukcja ma zarówno znaczenie dynamiczne, jak i statyczne. Forma na *ta* jest ponadto używana w poprzedniku (*protasis*) zdań warunkowych, gdzie – będąc silnie nacechowana walorem modalnym – wprowadza wydarzenia przyszłe, ewentualne i możliwe bądź też sytuacje hipotetyczne, nierealne i kontrfaktyczne. Ponadto w odniesieniu do wartości tekstowych formacja pojawia się zarówno w dyskursie, jak i w narracji (pisanej lub recytowanej). We fragmentach narracyjnych badana konstrukcja wprowadza zwykle wydarzenia należące do pierwszego planu (*foreground*) historii, będąc jednak w stanie dostarczać również informacji drugoplanowych (*background*).