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## THE *KAN* VERBAL FORM IN BASSE MANDINKA – STRUCTURE AND MEANING

**Keywords:** African linguistics, Manding, Mandinka, verbal system, semantics

### Abstract

The present article rectifies a noticeable lacuna in the analysis of the Mandinka verbal system and offers a detailed discussion of the meaning of the *KAN* locution (i.e. of the analytical expression *be* + infinitive + *kan*) as well as a presentation of its most relevant structural properties. First, the author demonstrates that there are no structural or contextual restrictions on the use of the formation. It may be employed in all kinds of environments: transitive and intransitive or affirmative and negative. It likewise tolerates various types of roots, admitting dynamic, static and adjectival predicates. Second, in respect to the semantic content, although the progressive value of the periphrasis clearly predominates various refinements are necessary. The progressive meaning – limited to the present and past temporal sphere – can also be also portrayed as repeated and frequentative. Adjectival predicates are invariably employed with a dynamic transitory-ingressive force. However, certain static verbs employed in the *KAN* form regularly denote continuous situations. Additionally, the periphrasis may indicate general, durative and extended in time activities, corresponding to Indo-European simple tenses. Finally, it also appears with the force of an inclusive perfect.

### 1. Introduction

The topic of the present paper is an analytic verbal formation employed in the Mandinka language,<sup>1</sup> to which – given its form – we will refer to as the *KAN* locution.

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<sup>1</sup> Mandinka is the westernmost member – spoken in Gambia, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau – of Manding, which, itself, belongs to the Western branch of the Mande family (Kasten-

The gram<sup>2</sup> is compounded with the auxiliary *be*<sup>3</sup> ‘be’ (in negative, *te* ‘not be’), the infinitive of a main “meaning” verb and the postposition *kaŋ* ‘on’:<sup>4</sup>

(1) M **be** bukoo **kaŋ** **kaŋ**<sup>5</sup>

I be book read on  
‘I am reading the book’

The formation – although quite a frequent component of the Mandinka verbal system – has surprisingly not attracted the attention of scholars, lacking monographic descriptions and detailed analyses. The construction has been superficially described only in certain general grammar books.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Rowlands (1959), Creissels (1983)<sup>7</sup> and Dramé (2003) classify the gram as a progressive category (cf. Wilson 2000). Likewise, Colley (1995: 8, 14) explains the construction as a prototypical progressive, providing the following example: *Suloolu be tubañoo tiiña kaŋ naako kono* ‘Monkeys are spoiling the corn in the garden’ (literal gloss: monkeys be corn spoil on garden in). He also suggests that the periphrasis is semantically and formally analogous to certain locative expressions, such as *A be munne ke kaŋ?* ‘What is he doing?’ (literal gloss: he be what

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holz 1996: 281, Vydrine et al. 2000 and Williamson, Blench 2000). It should be noted that Manding is not a unified single language but rather a cluster of roughly mutually intelligible tongues such as Bambara, Malinké, Jaahanka and previously mentioned Mandinka (Wilson 2000: 109). The total number of speakers of Mandinka amounts to 1,346,000: 669,000 in Senegal, 510,000 in Gambia and 167,000 in Guinea Bissau (the quoted digits are based on data gathered in 2006; cf. Lewis 2009).

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘gram’ will as used as a synonymously with grammatical formation, grammatical expression, grammatical construction, etc.

<sup>3</sup> The author uses the spelling convention established for Gambian Mandinka in *A practical orthography of Gambian Mandinka* (cf. WEC 1988a) and commonly employed, since then, in various grammatical studies, dictionaries and scientific articles. It shall be noted that, in contrast to other Mande and Manding languages, the official orthography of Gambian Mandinka does not indicate the tone (only two words are marked with a tonal diacritic, i.e. the pronouns *n̄* ‘we’ and *i* ‘they’ in order to differentiate them from *n* ‘I’ and *i* ‘you’). This stems from the fact that Mandinka speakers in Gambia regularly confuse stress and vowel length with the tone feature. As observed in the above-mentioned fundamental position on the Mandinka writing system and phonetics, Mandinka informants usually “struggle[...] in order to determine the right tone” – they simply have problems in identifying the tonal pattern. They get the correct meaning of an ambiguous word rather from contextual information than detecting the adequate tone (WEC 1988: 16–17).

<sup>4</sup> A more detailed discussion of the formal characteristics of the *KAN* construction will be offered in section 2.1 below.

<sup>5</sup> The relevant Mandinka forms in the *KAN* construction will be given in bold type.

<sup>6</sup> This fact, however, does not minimize the significance and quality of these studies. The grammars written by Macbrair (1842), Rowlands (1959) or Creissels (1983) indisputably remain excellent descriptions of Mandinka.

<sup>7</sup> Creissels (1983) discusses a subtype of the *KAN* form which employs a verbal noun instead of the infinitive: *M be domoroo kaŋ* ‘I am [at] eating’ (literal gloss: I be eating on). In his view, the meaning of this construction is more immediate (i.e. related more to the actual present sphere) than the value of another progressive locution (connected to the present and, in some instances, to the future sphere): *be* + verbal noun + *la* (e.g. *M be domoroo la* ‘I am [at] eating’ (literal gloss: I be eating at).

do on). Mandinka English dictionary (cf. WEC 1995: 77) defines the *KAN* form as an aspectual marker that indicates continuous actions. However, the extent of its use is supposedly limited to strictly transitive verbs. Likewise, according to Mandinka learning manual (cf. WEC 2002: 16–17), the gram is more commonly employed in transitive constructions. In this environment, it regularly expresses continuous actions, e.g. *M be kontoŋo le tabi kaŋ* ‘I am cooking lunch’ (literal gloss: I be lunch EMPH<sup>8</sup> cook on), *N te mbuuroo kunu kaŋ* ‘I am not cutting the bread’ (literal gloss: I be.not bread cut on) and *M be motoo dada kaŋ* ‘I am fixing the car’ (literal gloss: I be car fix on). Only 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). Most intransitive verbs describing a continuous state are formed with *be...riŋ* expression.<sup>9</sup>

These few descriptions – limited, themselves, to one or two pages and even to a paragraph or a couple of sentences – are certainly insufficient in order to grasp the entire semantic content and, at least, the most salient formal characteristics of the *KAN* construction. The current article aims at rectifying this noticeable lacuna in the analysis of the Mandinka verbal system, offering a detailed discussion of the meaning of the *KAN* gram as well as a presentation of its most relevant structural properties (e.g. alternative shapes of the auxiliaries, admissibility in transitive and intransitive constructions, as well as tolerability of different types of roots).

## 2. Evidence

It shall be observed that our evidence and, hence, the grammatical analysis is narrowed to the Mandinka variety spoken in Basse, the capital of the Upper River Region (the easternmost part of Gambia), and to villages situated in its vicinity (Manneh Kunda, Bassending, Mansajang and Kaba Kama). This local variation (henceforth referred to as Basse Mandinka) albeit highly similar to the “Standard” Mandinka language employed in Gambia in dictionaries (e.g. WEC 1988b and 1995), grammar manuals (e.g. WEC 1988a and 2002, and Lück, Henderson 1993), Christian or Islamic religious texts (e.g. WEC 1989 and 1998 or Islam International 1988) and in television or the Internet, shows certain discrepancies. Among the most salient distinctive features one may quote a regular use of the voiced velar stop [g] (cf. *gaa-diinoo* ‘garden’ or *Gambiya* ‘Gambia’ instead of the standardized forms *kaadiinoo* and *Kambiya*) and a possibility of deriving possessive-genitival constructions by means of the postposition *ye* (cf. *Laamini ye bukoo* ‘Lamin’s book’) in addition to a locution formed with the postposition *la* (e.g. *Laamini la bukoo* ‘Lamin’s book’;

<sup>8</sup> The term EMPH stands for ‘the emphatic particle’, i.e. *le*).

<sup>9</sup> In fact, also the transitive type is regarded as less frequent than another progressive formation, viz. the periphrasis *be* + verbal noun + *la*.

this is a regular method of expressing broadly understood possession in Standard Mandinka).<sup>10</sup>

All the examples<sup>11</sup> quoted below were provided by ten native Mandinka speakers and recorded by the author of the present paper during his field research in Basse in 2011. As has already been mentioned, all of these persons at the time of recording were dwelling in Basse or in neighbouring villages. Below we offer a list of our informants, specifying their age, occupation/profession and place of residence:<sup>12</sup> Keba Suso (13 years old, primary school student, Bassending), Malick Suso (18, high school student, Bassending), Musa Yaffuneh (24, watchman, Basse), Lamin Manneh (25, university student, Manneh Kunda), Mamanding Sanyang (27, nurse assistant, Basse), Musa Sanneh (29, driver, Kaba Kama), Baba Kamara (30, teacher, Mansajang), Saikou Drammeh (44, nurse, Basse – originally from Serekunda but living in Basse for ten years), Kumba Jallow (56, cook, Mansajang) and Mariama Mendi (32, nurse, Mansajang – originally from Fulla Bantang).<sup>13</sup>

Let us begin the presentation of the *KAN* locution in Basse Mandinka with a discussion of its most salient structural characteristics: a possible availability of alternative forms of components employed in the periphrasis as well as the admissibility of the gram in different syntactical environments or with different types of verbal roots (cf. section 2.1). Next, we will provide a detailed analysis of the semantic content of the formation in respect to its temporal, aspectual and taxis<sup>14</sup> (perfect) values (cf. section 2.2).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For a complete analysis of differences between Basse Mandinka and Standard Mandinka, see Andrason (forthcoming c: 9–10). As I have frequently affirmed, a relative number of distinctive traits between Basse and Standard Mandinka does not necessarily imply that the vernacular spoken in Basse should be classified as a dialect of the standardized languages. Nevertheless, it is a truism that the categorization of a given linguistic system as a dialect or as an independent language is not a pure and exclusive linguistic issue. It is unquestionably related to various political, sociological and economic factors. Moreover, one shall note that certain traits that distinguish the Basse variety from normalized Mandinka are not limited to the Basse region. On the contrary, they may be found in other parts of Gambia.

<sup>11</sup> Our examples display a “threefold nature”. Some were spontaneously produced by native speakers; others were formulated under the demand of the author (i.e. informants were required to translate a sentence from English into Mandinka); yet another group was inspired by Christian and Muslim religious literature (i.e. informants pronounced a fragment of a given text, commented on it and, if needed, reformulated it).

<sup>12</sup> The list has been arranged following the age of the informants.

<sup>13</sup> The last two informants are entirely bilingual: Fula-Mandinka and Manjago-Mandinka. Their ethnic background is Fula and Manjago, respectively.

<sup>14</sup> The term ‘taxis’ makes reference to the concepts of anteriority, simultaneity and posteriority (cf. Maslov 1988).

<sup>15</sup> It shall be emphasized that the discussion of the semantic load of the gram is not presented from the perspective of the English language. In describing various shades of meaning the *KAN* locution may provide, we make use of more universal semantic domains which are usually employed in descriptions of African (Nurse 2008), Semitic (Waltke, O’Connor 1990) or Indo-European languages (Dahl 2000) as well as in general linguistic studies (Bybee et al. 1994). This means that we will decompose the total semantic potential of the *KAN* formation into more specific “atomic” values that are not limited to English but, quite the reverse, are actually typologically common.

## 2.1 Structure

In Basse Mandinka – as in the standard language – the *KAN* formation is compounded with a locative non-verbal predicative copula *be* ‘be’, the infinitive of a main “meaning” verb<sup>16</sup> and the postposition *kaŋ* ‘on’ (2a and 2b). The negative variant employs the entity *te* instead of *be* (3a and 3b). Additionally, two verbs (*naa* ‘come’ and *taa* ‘go’) admit alternative shapes of the auxiliaries, namely *bi* and *ti* besides the usual *be* and *te* (2c and 3c). Our data indicate that the *KAN* form does not display any constraints as far as the syntactic environments are concerned, allowing both – and with an equal intensity – intransitive (2a, 2c, 3a and 3c) and transitive (2b and 3b) constructions. Likewise according to our evidence, there are no restrictions on the type of roots employed in the gram. This means that virtually *all* verbs, including adjectival predicates, may be used in the *KAN* periphrasis (cf. again 2a; more examples of the adjectival roots may be found in section 2.2 below).

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|--|--|
| <p>(2) a. M <b>be bataa kaŋ</b><br/>I be be.tired on<br/>‘I am getting tired’</p> <p>b. M <b>be a saŋ kaŋ</b><br/>I be it buy on<br/>‘I am buying it’</p> <p>c. M <b>bi naa kaŋ</b><br/>I be come on<br/>‘I am coming’</p> | <p>(3) a. A <b>te taama kaŋ</b><br/>he not.be walk on<br/>‘He is not walking’</p> <p>b. Ì <b>te bukoo karaŋ kaŋ</b><br/>they not.be book read on<br/>‘They are not reading the book’</p> <p>c. N <b>ti taa kaŋ</b><br/>I not.be go on<br/>‘I am not going’</p> |
|--|--|

The entire paradigm of the *KAN* locution in intransitive and transitive constructions as well as in the positive and negative environments is schematized below, employing the verbs *naa* ‘come’ and *a saŋ* ‘buy’ as illustrations:

	intransitive construction		transitive construction	
	singular	plural	singular	plural
1p	<i>m be naa kaŋ</i>	<i>m̄ be naa kaŋ</i>	<i>m be a saŋ kaŋ</i>	<i>m̄ be a saŋ kaŋ</i>
2p	<i>i be naa kaŋ</i>	<i>ali be naa kaŋ</i>	<i>i be a saŋ kaŋ</i>	<i>ali be a saŋ kaŋ</i>
3p	<i>a be naa kaŋ</i>	<i>i be naa kaŋ</i>	<i>a be a saŋ kaŋ</i>	<i>i be a saŋ kaŋ</i>
1p	<i>n te naa kaŋ</i>	<i>n̄ te naa kaŋ</i>	<i>n te a saŋ kaŋ</i>	<i>n̄ te a saŋ kaŋ</i>
2p	<i>i te naa kaŋ</i>	<i>ali te naa kaŋ</i>	<i>i te a saŋ kaŋ</i>	<i>ali te a saŋ kaŋ</i>
3p	<i>a te naa kaŋ</i>	<i>i te naa kaŋ</i>	<i>a te a saŋ kaŋ</i>	<i>i te a saŋ kaŋ</i>

Table 1. Review of transitive and intransitive forms of the *KAN* gram

<sup>16</sup> The infinitive (or non-finite form) is indistinguishable from a “bare” verbal stem, e.g. *naa* ‘(to) come’. It is a form with no auxiliary entities or suffixes, regularly used for quotation in lexicons (cf. WEC 1995). Sometimes, however, the infinitive is also defined as a verb preceded by the infinitive marked *ka*: *ka naa* ‘to go’ (cf. Dramé 2003).

The structure of the *KAN* formation is certainly related to a “busy” progressive periphrasis formed by the lexeme *be* (in the negative *te*), a noun and the postposition *kanj*:

- (4) a. I **be** munne **kanj**?  
 you be what on  
 ‘What are you busy with?’ / ‘What are you doing?’
- b. M **be** a **kanj**  
 I be it on  
 ‘I am busy with it’ / ‘I am doing it’ (cf. Gamble 1987: 39)

Frequently, the noun employed in such a construction is a verbal noun, i.e. a noun describing an action which corresponds to the verb from which it has been derived: *diyaamu* ‘to talk’ > *diyaamoo* ‘(the act of) talking, talk’, *taama* ‘to walk, to travel’ > *taamoo* ‘travelling, a travel’, *a safee* ‘to write’ > *saferoo* ‘writing’ and *a kendi* ‘teach’ > *kendiroo* ‘teaching’. In such cases, one is dealing with a prototypical locative progressive formation, virtually parallel (and semantically analogous) to the locution built on the infinitive – the topic of the present article (cf. also Creisels 1983 and Wilson 2000: 115).

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>(5) a. M <b>be</b> <b>diyaamoo</b> <b>kanj</b><br/>         I be talking on<br/>         ‘I am talking’</p> <p>b. M <b>be</b> <b>taamoo</b> <b>kanj</b><br/>         I be traveling on<br/>         ‘I am travelling’</p> | <p>c. M <b>be</b> <b>saferoo</b> <b>kanj</b><br/>         I be writing on<br/>         ‘I am writing’</p> <p>d. A <b>be</b> <b>kendiroo</b> <b>kanj</b><br/>         he be teaching on<br/>         ‘He is teaching’</p> |
|--|--|

## 2.2 Meaning

In Basse Mandinka, the *KANj* gram most commonly conveys progressive meaning. Progressive categories portray an action as ongoing at a given reference time and typically apply to dynamic predicates, hence excluding stative ones (Bybee et al. 1990: 126). They are likewise employed for activities that necessitate a steady flux of energy to be sustained (ibid.). Within a present time frame, the *KANj* locution expresses thus progressive and invariably dynamic present activities, i.e. actions which are currently in the process of being performed:

- (6) a. M **be** bukoo **karanj** **kanj** saayin  
 I be book read on now  
 ‘I am reading the book now’
- b. M **bi** **naa** **kanj**  
 I be come on  
 ‘I am coming’

- c. A **be** motoo **saŋ kaŋ**  
 he be car buy on  
 ‘He is buying the car’
- d. Ì **be** jiyo **miŋ kaŋ**  
 they be water drink on  
 ‘They are drinking water’
- e. Ì **te** duutoolu **domo kaŋ**  
 they not.be mangos eat on  
 ‘They are not eating mangos’

An analogous progressive meaning may be found with a past temporal reference. This means that within a past time frame, the gram approximates the category of a past progressive:

- (7) a. M **be** bukoo **karaŋ kaŋ** kunuŋ talaŋ seyi  
 I be book read on yesterday hour eight  
 ‘Yesterday at eight, I was reading the book’
- b. Ì **be** ì la jaloolu **kuu kaŋ** nuŋ  
 they be they of<sup>17</sup> nets wash on then  
 ‘They were washing their nets’
- c. A **be** jiyo **miŋ kaŋ** nuŋ  
 he be water drink on then  
 ‘He was drinking water’
- d. Bii soomandaa, a **be taama kaŋ** bedoo kaŋ  
 Today morning he be walk on street on  
 ‘Today in the morning he was walking in the street’

It shall be noted that it is not possible to employ the *KAN* form in main clauses within a future time frame with the force of a future progressive (or future continuous, cf. below) category, *will be walking* or *will be doing it*:

- (8) \*M **be** bukoo **karaŋ kaŋ** saama talaŋ seyi  
 I be book read on tomorrow hour eight  
 Intended meaning: ‘Tomorrow at eight I will be reading the book’

In order to express future progressive activities, different locutions are employed. One of them – structurally and semantically parallel to the *KAN* formation – consists of the verb *tara* ‘be, remain’ in the “future” tense *BE...LA* (i.e. *a be tara la*, cf. Andrason forthcoming a), a verbal noun and the postposition *kaŋ*, e.g. *a be tara la siinoo kaŋ* ‘he will be sleeping’ (literal gloss: he be remain to sleep on).

<sup>17</sup> The slot *ì la* (lit.: ‘they of’) corresponds to the English possessive pronoun of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural *their*.

On the other hand, it is possible to construct contexts where the *KAN* gram is admissible though the reference time be that of a future:<sup>18</sup>

- (9) Sooma nin ali ye nin kuwolu je,  
 tomorrow when you have this things see,  
 ‘Tomorrow, when you see all these things happening,  
 i be ke kan, ali si a loj ko...  
 they be happen on, you will it know that  
 you will know that...’

The *KAN* construction is also used with a descriptive force. It introduces activities simultaneous to the main event – which also establishes the main reference time – and presents them as conditions characterizing a given person, creature or thing. The entities that are portrayed in that manner regularly correspond to the direct objects of perception-verbs (e.g. *a je* ‘see’). This descriptive situation, nevertheless, remains progressive and hence dynamic in nature:

- (10) Nja a je a be i don kan  
 I.did him see he be REFL<sup>19</sup> dance on  
 ‘I saw him (as he was) dancing’

Sometimes, the subject of the verb in the *KAN* form and the locative entity *be* is missing, giving rise to a more idiomatic descriptive expression. In such cases, the postposition *kan* may be analyzed as introducing a non-finite verbal form which expresses the co-occurring action performed by an object:

- (11) a. A ye kewo doo je naa kan a yaa  
 he did man certain see come on him toward  
 ‘He saw a man coming toward him’  
 b. Nte ye musoolu je jii kan  
 I did women see descend on  
 ‘I saw women coming down’

<sup>18</sup> In this example, the *KAN* formation introduces a continuous activity that is ongoing at the reference time. Of course, the future reading of the *KAN* clause stems from the fact that the verb *a je* ‘see’ appears in a temporal-conditional protasis, overtly located in the future time frame (*sooma* ‘tomorrow’). The clause with the *KAN* is embedded in this temporal-conditional protasis and hence interpreted as having a future temporal reference. Our discussion does not signify that the *KAN* gram is a Future Tense; it just demonstrates that it is possible to design contexts where due to certain contextual or even pragmatic factors, the gram refers to a situation that is located in a future temporal sphere. The fact that a gram is defined or labeled as, for instance, a Present Tense does not imply that it exclusively displays the present temporal value. Presents may – and commonly do – express other meanings. And such meanings are not less important than more frequent or more prototypical values. Both are contextually determined and both constitute what we could call the semantic potential of a formation, i.e. a gram’s total meaning (cf. Dahl 2000). An analogous comment applies to example 10 below (cf. also footnote 21).

<sup>19</sup> The gloss ‘REFL’ stands for a reflexive marker (in this case, for a reflexive pronoun *i*).

In the progressive function, both in the present and past temporal sphere, the *KAN* gram contrasts with a properly habitual-iterative locution – the *(BU)KA* gram (cf. Andrason forthcoming b). Let us illustrate this “opposition” by the following pair of phrases which differ only in respect of the verbal construction, employed, be it the *KAN* periphrasis or the *(BU)KA* form. While example (12a) expresses an ongoing (at a given moment in the past) progressive action, sentence (12b) indicates the habit of performing it:

- (12) a. M **be** leetaroolu **safee kaŋ** nuŋ  
 I be letters write on then  
 ‘I was writing letters’
- b. N **ka** leetaroolu **safee** luŋ-wo-luŋ nuŋ  
 I used.to letters write every.day then  
 ‘I used to write letters every day’

In cases where the *KAN* formation is accompanied by iterative temporal adverbs, the form indicates the repetition of a given progressive action. This means that the *KAN* locution again interacts with the *(BU)KA* gram: while the former depicts a progressive activity occurring repeatedly or frequently (13a), the latter expresses the pure idea of habits, customs and routines (13b).<sup>20</sup>

- (13) a. M **be** dasaamaa **domo kaŋ** luŋ-wo-luŋ talaŋ 8.00  
 I be breakfast eat on every.day hour 8.00  
 ‘I am having breakfast everyday at 8.00’ (i.e. everyday at 8.00 I am in the process of having breakfast)
- b. N **ka** dasaamaa **domo** luŋ-wo-luŋ  
 I do breakfast eat every.day  
 ‘I have breakfast every day’ (it is my habit)

The two values of the *KAN* locution (progressivity and repeated-frequentative progressivity) may be illustrated by the following sentences. While example (14a) indicates that the moon is right now turning around the earth, proposition (14b) connotes the idea that such a progressive actual phenomenon occurs every day:

- (14) a. Karoo **be** i **muruŋ-muruŋ kaŋ** Bankoo nooma saayin  
 Moon be REFL turn on Earth after now  
 ‘The Moon is turning now around the Earth’
- b. Karoo **be** i **muruŋ-muruŋ kaŋ** Bankoo nooma luŋ-wo-luŋ  
 Moon be REFL turn on Earth after every.day  
 ‘The moon is turning (in the process of turning) around the Earth everyday’

<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, this habitual value gives rise to various modal uses of the *(BU)KA* formation (cf. Andrason forthcoming b).

Although the progressive dynamic nature of the *KAN* locution is clearly predominant, certain less prototypically dynamic verbs (e.g. *siinoo* ‘sleep’) may also appear in this periphrasis. In such instances, the gram expresses the continuity of an activity, thus approximating a continuous aspect. Continuous categories are more general than progressive grams admitting non-dynamic predicates: they view the situation, either being dynamic or stative, as ongoing at the reference time (Bybee et al. 1994: 127):

- (15) A **be siinoo kaŋ**  
 He be sleep on  
 ‘He is sleeping’

Nevertheless, it shall be noted that several static predicates (such as *lafi* ‘like’ or *a loŋ* ‘know’) acquire a dynamic progressive reading in the *KAN* expression:

- (16) a. M **be lafi kaŋ**  
 I be like on  
 ‘I am getting to like’  
 b. M **be a loŋ kaŋ**  
 I be it know on  
 ‘I am getting to know it’

Furthermore in some cases, the progressive value is “weakened” and the gram, especially in the present time sphere, approximates the category of a simple (present) tense denoting durative general activities extended in time. In these instances, the meaning of “ongoing-ness” is secondary, while the durative sense of an activity viewed as a more or less constant situation becomes primordial.<sup>21</sup>

- (17) a. M **be Mandinka kaŋo** **karəŋ kaŋ** Basse to  
 I be Mandinka language learn on Basse in  
 ‘I study Mandinka language in Basse’  
 b. M **be sabati kaŋ** Basse to  
 I be live on Basse in  
 ‘I live in Base’

<sup>21</sup> The fact that the gram can express the simple present value does not imply that it *is* a Simple Present Tense. It signifies that in certain situations the locution is not used with an aspectual force of progression or on-goingness, but rather provides a value that is usually conveyed by simple present constructions. It shall be noted that by saying that the formation offers a given sense, I mean that it is compatible with a context typical for a determined verbal domain. Verbal formations usually provide a broad range of meanings – they are polysemous as verbal semantic domains are concerned. This polysemy reflects an evolutionary progression of a gram whereby new meanings are incorporated in accordance with certain diachronic typologically universal scenarios, viz. paths (cf. Bybee et al. 1994). Thus, verbal constructions may convey values that correspond to taxis, aspectual, temporal and modal semantic areas. In different environments, a different meaning is activated. Consequently, it is not necessary that a gram *always and exclusively* express a determined aspect or a tense (definite time), or a taxis (anteriority), or even a mood. Its semantic load may make use of all of these domains.

The *KAN* formation may also be employed with the force of an inclusive perfect indicating that a given activity or situation began in an explicitly specified moment in the past but has continued into the present without interruption (e.g. *I have been living here for 10 years* or *I have been living here since 2000*).<sup>22</sup>

- (18) a. A **be siinoo kaŋ** waati taŋ  
 he be sleep on hour ten  
 ‘He has been sleeping for ten hours’
- b. M **be leetaroo safee kaŋ** waati saba  
 I be letter write on hour three  
 ‘I have been writing the letter for three hours’
- c. M **be taama kaŋ** waati fula  
 I be walk on hour two  
 ‘I have been walking for two hours’

As has been mentioned, adjectival verbs may also be found in the *KAN* formation. In such cases, the value of these predicates becomes clearly “actional” and dynamic, corresponding to the English construction *get + adjective*, e.g. *get white* or *get tired*. More precisely, the *KAN form* – derived from adjectival roots – may function as an actual progressive present of transition: a given quality is in the process of materializing or inversely the subject is in the process of acquiring a determined property. This means that adjectival static<sup>23</sup> roots are not employed with the force of a continuous aspect but are semantically “reshaped” as dynamic (i.e. transitory-ingressive) in order to “fit” into the progressive nature of the construction (cf. also static verbs in 16a and 16b above).

- (19) a. Maaliki la dendikoo **be koyi kaŋ**  
 Malik of shirt be be.white on  
 ‘Malik’s shirt is getting white’
- b. Ì **be bataa kaŋ**  
 they be be.tired on  
 ‘They are getting tired’

<sup>22</sup> Observe that in various languages, such as Polish or Spanish, the semantic domain covered by the inclusive perfect (or inclusive anterior) is expressed by “present” tenses. This means that in these tongues the grammatical present temporal sphere includes a portion of the physical past time, e.g. *Mieszkam tu od siedmiu lat* ‘I have lived here for seven years’, *Lleva estudiando desde ayer* ‘He has been studying since yesterday’. This phenomenon may clearly be perceived in Mandinka where various grams – including the *KAN* construction – which function as present tenses (progressive, habitual, durative, simple or stative) also express the inclusive perfect sense.

<sup>23</sup> Adjectival verbs are treated as static in Mandinka (cf. Creissles 1983 who labels them as statives and Lück, Henderson 1993). In various verbal constructions, they offer distinct values from the values that are conveyed by prototypically dynamic verbs. For instance, while the TA gram usually derives past and perfect meanings (*A naata* ‘He came / he has come’), when derived from adjectival stems, it normally provides the sense of a current state (*A bataata* ‘He is tired’). An analogical behaviour may be observed in other static verbs (non-adjectival ones), such as *lafi* ‘like’, *a loŋ* ‘know’ or *a koy* ‘hate’ (see examples 16a and 16b above).

- c. A **be kuuraŋ kaŋ**  
 he be be.sick on  
 'He is getting sick'
- d. M **be kontaani kaŋ**  
 I be be.happy on  
 'I am getting happy' / 'I am becoming happy'
- e. Ì **be fiŋ kaŋ**  
 they be be.black on  
 'They are getting black'
- f. A **te kendeyaa kaŋ**  
 he not.be be.healthy on  
 'He is not getting well'

Finally, as was the case with other intransitive or transitive predicates, the *KAN* locution formed with adjectival verbs may also be employed in the past time frame. In such instances, the gram denotes past progressive dynamic activities, approximating the English locution *was/were getting* + adjective:

- (20) a. Suutoo, m **be kuuraŋ kaŋ**  
 night, I be be.sick on  
 'I was getting sick at night'
- b. Sanji fula kooma m musoo **be saasaa kaŋ**  
 year two ago my wife be be.ill on  
 'Two years ago, my wife was getting ill'
- c. Kunuŋ, ntel **be bataa kaŋ** baake  
 yesterday, we be be.tired on very.much  
 'Yesterday, we were getting very tired'
- d. A la dendikoo **be noo kaŋ** nuŋ  
 he of shirt be be.dirty on then  
 'His shirt was getting dirty'

### 3. Conclusion

Let us recapitulate the evidence provided in the previous sections of the article. We have initially observed that there are no restrictions on the use of the *KAN* form. The gram may be employed in all kinds of constructions: transitive and intransitive or affirmative and negative. Moreover, from the formal perspective, it likewise "tolerates" various types of roots: the locution may be formed with properly dynamic actional verbs as well as with originally adjectival predicates. However, in the latter case, adjectival predicates acquire a dynamic interpretation and thus function as actional verbs (cf. the next paragraph).

In respect to its meaning, the *KAN* periphrasis almost invariably offers dynamic actional readings, indicating processes, most commonly progressive and transitory (ingressive) ones. More specifically, it regularly functions as a present and past progressive. Yet, a given progressive activity may also occur repeatedly, without however giving rise to properly habitual or customary uses. Nevertheless, admitting certain less dynamic predicates (e.g. *siinoo* ‘sleep’), the formation can also approximate a continuous aspect. Moreover, in certain less common cases, the aspectual force of on-goingness and progressivity ceases being pertinent and the gram indicates general, durative and extended in time activities, corresponding to simple tenses (cf. footnote 21). The *KAN* expression is also employed to describe a situation that characterizes the object of perception-verbs. Furthermore, the periphrasis quite commonly appears with the force of an inclusive perfect. Finally, when the *KAN* “tense” is formed with adjectival verbs, it approximates a dynamic progressive transitional present or past, corresponding to the English periphrasis *is/was getting* + adjective.

Our results indicate that although the progressive value of the gram clearly predominates – and that consequently, for simplicity’s sake, the formation may be labeled as a progressive category – various refinements are necessary. First, the *KAN* locution is limited to the present and past temporal reference; conversely, it fails to function (at least in main independent clauses) as a future progressive. Second, as for adjectival roots and certain static verbs (*a lafi* ‘like’ or *a loŋ* ‘know’), these predicates are invariably employed in the *KAN* form with a dynamic transitory-ingressive force; inversely, they never appear with a continuous meaning. Third, the progressive meaning may be portrayed as repeated or frequentative, or be employed in order to describe a situation affecting the object of another verb. Fourth, the construction can sometimes denote continuous activities (cf. certain less typical dynamic verbs, such as *siinoo* ‘sleep’) as well as general durative situations extended in time that go beyond the actual here-and-now of the speaker. And fifth, this temporal extension may also “descend” to a determined moment in the past: in such cases, the grammatical present includes a portion of the past temporal sphere, too.

Consequently, even though our analysis *grosso modo* confirms the semantic analysis of the *KAN* formation offered in traditional studies, it also provides some additional modifications and improvements. Namely, it determines values that have been ignored thus far (e.g. durativity, frequentativity, “descriptivity” and inclusive anteriority, as well as the transitory-ingressive sense of adjectival roots and static predicates) and specifies the range of the dominant progressive meaning (cf. the exclusion of the future progressive sense). Furthermore, as for the syntactic-semantic constraints, we have demonstrated that in contrast to traditional opinion, the gram is commonly employed in intransitive contexts as well as with adjectival roots.

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