The flexibility of the *noun* vs. *verb* distinction in the lexicon of Mandinka

Denis Creissels
Université Lumière (Lyon 2)
denis.creissels@univ-lyon2.fr
http://deniscreissels.fr

1. Introduction

Mandinka, spoken by approximately 1.5 million speakers in The Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea Bissau, is the westernmost member of the Manding dialect cluster included in the Western branch of the Mande language family:[1]

Mandinka ⊂ Manding ⊂ Western Mande ⊂ Mande ?⊂ Niger-Congo[2]

The area where Mandinka is spoken largely coincides with the territory of the pre-colonial state of Kaabu.[3] Speakers of Mandinka call themselves *Mandiŋkóolu* (singular: *Mandiŋkôo*) and designate their language as *mandiŋkakáŋo*.[4]

Rowlands 1959 and Creissels 1983 constitute so far the main references on Mandinka grammar. Creissels & Sambou (Forthcoming) will provide a more detailed presentation of Mandinka phonology and morphosyntax. For descriptions of other Manding varieties, see Dumestre 2003 (Bambara) and Creissels 2009 (Kita Maninka).

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[1] Etymologically, *Mande, Manden, Manding,* and *Mali,* are variants of the same term, originally a toponym designating the upper valley of the Niger River and a state located in this region, whose capital was Kangaba. In the 13th century the Manding prince Sundiata Keita founded an empire, known as the Manding, Mande(n) or Mali empire, that extended over a large area and flourished until the 16th century. In the terminology of linguistics, *Mande* and *Manding* have been retained with meanings that must be carefully distinguished. In linguistics, *Manding* refers to a set of closely related dialects resulting from the evolution of the language that was spoken in Manding before the expansion of Sundiata's empire, whereas *Mande* refers to the language family that includes Manding dialects. It is commonly admitted that the time distance between the most ancient branches of the Mande language family exceeds 5000 years, whereas the time depth of the Manding dialect cluster does not exceed 8 centuries. On the classification of Mande languages, see
http://mandelang.kunstkamera.ru/index/langues_mande/famille_mande/

[2] The Mande language family was included by Greenberg in the Niger-Congo phylum, but the evidence for a Niger-Congo affiliation of Mande is rather slim, and for example Dimmendaal (2011: 323) argues that Mande is best treated as an independent language family.

[3] According to oral traditions, the Kaabu kingdom originated as a province of the Manding empire which was conquered by one of the generals of Sundiata Keita (see footnote 1) called Tiramakhan Traore. After the decline of the Manding empire, Kaabu became an independent kingdom. Mandinka hegemony in the region lasted until 1867, when the Kaabu capital (Kansala) was taken by the armies of the Fula kingdom of Futa Jallon.

[4] *Mandiŋkôo* is the definite form of a noun stem *mandiŋká* resulting from the addition of the derivative suffix *-ŋká* 'people from ...' to the geographical term *Mandíŋ,* which primarily refers to the region that constituted the starting point of the Manding expansion (see footnote 1). *Mandiŋkakáŋo* is literally 'language of the people from Manding'.

In Mandinka, as discussed at length in Creissels 1983: 11-43, the recognition of predicative constructions involving a verb in predicate function and a varying number of NPs encoding participants in the event represented by the verb is not problematic. The inflectional morphology is rather rudimentary, but the following particularities of Mandinka greatly facilitate the identification of NPs and the distributional analysis of clause structure:

– NP structure involves a 'definite' marker *-o* analyzable as a default determiner which can only be omitted, either in the presence of certain other determiners, or in particular syntactic configurations licensing the use of bare NPs;
– clause structure is characterized by an extreme rigidity of constituent order, the total ban on null core arguments (with either an anaphoric or arbitrary interpretation), and the existence of a paradigm of obligatory 'predicative markers' encoding TAM and polarity distinctions and occupying a fixed position immediately after the subject of Mandinka clauses.

Once the conditions for the omission of the definite marker and the regularities governing the linear order of the elements of the clause and the internal structure of NPs have been established, there is never the slightest difficulty in identifying one of the words found in a Mandinka clause as a verbal head, and others as nouns heading NPs. By contrast, the division of lexemes into a class of nominal lexemes and a class of verbal lexemes is problematic. The discussion of this point constitutes the topic of this paper, which consequently aims at contributing to the longstanding debate about the universality of the noun-verb distinction.[5] I will try to show that, contrary to previous claims according to which Manding only has nominal and verbo-nominal lexemes, the obvious flexibility of the noun-verb distinction in Mandinka is not contradictory with the recognition of a class of verbal lexemes whose nominal use is better analyzed in terms of morphologically unmarked nominalization.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 summarizes the most basic aspects of Mandinka morphosyntax. Section 3 consists of preliminary remarks about the delimitation of lexeme classes in Manding. Sections 4 to 7 discuss the data justifying the recognition of three major classes of lexemes in Mandinka, and Section 8 summarizes the main conclusions.[6]

2. The basics of Mandinka morphosyntax

2.1. Clause structure

2.1.1. The prototypical transitive construction

The two nuclear arguments of the prototypical transitive construction A(gent) and P(atient) obligatorily precede the verb, and A obligatorily precedes P. Assertive and

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[5] For recent discussions of this issue, see Evans & Osada (2005), and references therein.
[6] This paper crucially relies on data collected on field trips to Senegal sponsored by the French National Research Agency (ANR) within the frame of the 'Sénélangues' project (ANR-09-BLAN-0326).

interrogative transitive clauses always include a *predicative marker* encoding TAM and polarity inserted between A and P.

Obliques (most of the time encoded as postposition phrases)[7] usually follow the verb. Some of them (mainly time and place adjuncts) may however occur in sentence initial position. Some verb modifiers are found in pre-verbal position, but no full NP can be inserted between P and the verb, or between A and P.[8]

As shown by Ex. (1), A and P bear no mark of their syntactic role and are not indexed on the verb. Pronouns occupy the same positions as canonical NPs and have an invariable form in all their possible functions.

(1) a. *Wul-óo ye   díndíŋ-o   kíisá-ndí (dimbáa ma).*
       dog-D PF.POS child-D   escape-CAUS fire.D OBL
       'The dog saved the child (from the fire).'

    b. *A   yé   a   kíisá-ndí (a   ma).*
       3SG PF.POS 3SG escape-CAUS 3SG OBL
       'He/she/it saved him/her/it from it.'

    c. *Jat-óo si   dánn-óo   barama.*
       lion-D POT hunter-D   hurt
       'The lion may hurt the hunter.'

    d. *Dánn-óo maŋ   jat-óo barama.*
       hunter-D PF.NEG lion-D hurt
       'The hunter did not hurt the lion.'

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[7] In the examples below, postpositions marking oblique arguments are glossed according to the meaning they typically express as heads of postposition phrases in adjunct function, with three exceptions: *lá, má,* and *tí,* for which the generic gloss OBL is used. The reason is that the analysis of the uses of these three postpositions as extensions of some 'central' or 'prototypical' meaning is particularly problematic. Note also that *lá* in its use as a genitive marker is glossed GEN. Since this postposition plays a role in the progressive periphrasis discussed in this paper, it may be worth mentioning that it probably originated as a locative postposition (as suggested by comparative evidence), but is now used only marginally in this function, and has developed a variety of other uses that can hardly be analyzed as particular instances of some abstract meaning in a strictly synchronic description. For more details, see Creissels & Sambou (Forthcoming).

[8] As illustrated by the following example, phrases expressing accompaniment or manner apparently occur between P and the verb, or between A and P, but they behave syntactically as dependents of the noun in A or P role, as discussed by Creissels & Sambou (Forthcoming), chapter 18. They must therefore be included in the noun phrase headed by the noun in question, which means that they do not constitute real exceptions to the rule according to which no noun phrase in oblique role can be inserted within the sequence *A P V*:

[A   [*níŋ cak-óo-lu*]]ₐ   *yé*   [*a   lá   naafúl-óo*]ₚ *kasáara.*
3SG with prostitute-D-PL PF.POS   3SG GEN wealth-D   squander
'He squandered his wealth with prostitutes.'

    e. *Íŋ   báamáa   ka   ñéw-o   wáafi   (lúum-óo to).*
       1SG   mother.D   HAB.POS   fish-D   sell   market-D   LOC
       'My mother sells fish (at the market).'

2.1.2. Intransitive predication

The NP representing the unique argument U (alias S) of monovalent verbs precedes the verb. It bears no mark of its syntactic role and is not indexed on the verb. Obliques behave exactly in the same way in transitive and intransitive clauses.

    In intransitive predication, the perfective positive is not encoded by the predicative marker *yé* used in transitive predication, but by the verbal suffix *-tá*. In addition to that, the predicative marker of the perfective negative and the negative form of the locative copula used as a predicative marker in analytical predication are tonally different in transitive and intransitive predications (*máŋ* vs. *mâŋ* and *té* vs. *tê*).[9] The other TAM and polarity values are encoded by the same predicative markers in transitive and intransitive constructions. In intransitive predication, the predicative markers common to transitive and intransitive predication are inserted between U and the verb.

(2)   a. *Yír-óo boyi-ta   (síl-óo kaŋ).*
        tree-D   fall-PF.POS   road-D   on
        'The tree fell down (on the road)'

     b. *Nins-óo si   kana.*
        cow-D   POT   escape
        'The cow may escape.'

     c. *Kew-ô máŋ   naa.*
        man-D   PF.NEG   come
        'The man did not come.'

     d. *New-ó ka   kómóŋ (jíy-o kóno).*
        iron-D   HAB.POS   rust   water-D   inside
        'Iron rusts (in water)'

2.1.3. Intransitive alignment, and the notions of subject and object

Among the coding properties of core NPs, A and P show no contrast in either case marking or indexation, and both precede the verb. The only coding property of A and P that can be used to characterize Mandinka clause structure with respect to intransitive alignment is that A precedes the predicative markers, whereas P follows them. The fact that A and U equally precede the TAM-polarity markers that are not suffixed to the verb, whereas P follows them, constitutes therefore the only coding

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[9] Note however that tonal sandhi may neutralize this distinction, which is therefore not always apparent in the examples we quote.

property of the core terms of transitive and intransitive clauses on the basis of which a notion of subject conflating U and A can be recognized.

The following formula, in which S, O and X stand for 'subject', 'object' and 'oblique' respectively, summarizes the structure of Mandinka clauses:

S (O) V (X) (X') ...

2.1.4. Constraints on transitivity, passive and antipassive

Although transitivity is not the central topic of this article, a relatively detailed presentation of the transitivity system of Mandinka is in order here, since constraints in the expression of arguments of verbal lexemes used nominally are crucial for the distinction between verbal and verbo-nominal lexemes.

In Mandinka, the subject position can never be left empty in independent assertive or interrogative clauses. By contrast, it is always possible to find transitive verbs in constructions including no object, but such constructions are overtly marked as intransitive (in the perfective positive, the predicative marker is obligatorily *-tá*), and the intransitive use of verbs that can also be used transitively has important semantic consequences.

Mandinka has about 30 A-labile verbs that can be used transitively or intransitively without any change in the semantic role assigned to their subject, as in Ex. (3).

(3) a. *Sul-óo   sele-ta   yír-ôo   sánto.*
        monkey-D   climb-PF.POS   tree-D   on_top
        'The monkey climbed up the tree.'

    b. *I   búka   yír-óo selé a   jamb-óo   la.*
        3PL   HAB.NEG   tree-D   climb 3SG   leave-D   OBL
        'One does not climb a tree by the leaves.'

The general rule is however that the intransitive use of a verb also found in transitive constructions implies that the subject is assigned a semantic role similar to that assigned to the object in the transitive use of the same verb (P-lability). Two cases must be distinguished.

Mandinka has a class of P-labile verbs characterized by a *causative / anticausative alternation*: the referent of the subject of the intransitive construction is presented as undergoing the same process as the object of the transitive construction, but without any hint at a possible external cause – Ex. (4).

(4) a. *Máŋk-óo jolón-tá   baŋk-óo   to.*
        mango-D   fall/drop-PF.POS   ground-D   LOC
        'The mango fell on the ground.'

b. *Kew-ó   ye   mur-óo jolóŋ   baŋk-óo   to.*
    man-D   PF.POS   knife-D   fall/drop   ground-D   LOC
    'The man dropped the knife on the ground.'

The productivity of this alternation is limited not only by the possibility to conceive events as more or less spontaneous processes affecting a single participant, but also by the existence of a causative derivation making explicit the involvement of an agent.

Mandinka also illustrates another type of P-lability, characterized by *active / passive alternation*. In this alternation, a verb that can be used transitively also has an intransitive construction interpreted as implying the same participants as the transitive construction. The subject of the intransitive construction encodes the same participant as the object of the transitive construction, whereas the participant encoded as the subject of the transitive construction is left unexpressed – Ex. (5) & (6).

(5)   a. *Kew-ó   ye   wot-ôo dádaa.*
         man-D   PF.POS   car-D   repair
         'The man has repaired the car.'

      b. *Wot-ôo dádáa-ta.*
         car-D   repair-PF.POS
         'The car has been repaired.'

(6)   a. *Kambaan-óo ye   nás-óo   feereetoo-bóŋ   kolóŋ-o kóno.*
         boy-D   PF.POS   magic_water-D cleverly-pour   well-D   in
         'The boy cleverly poured the magic water into the well.'

      b. *Nás-óo   feereetoo-bón-tá   kolóŋ-o kóno.*
         magic_water-D cleverly-pour-PF.POS   well-D   in
         'The magic water was cleverly poured into the well.'

Active / passive alternations giving rise to morphologically unmarked passive constructions, although extremely rare in the languages of the world, are common among Mande languages. In spite of the absence of anything that could be analyzed as passive morphology, the construction illustrated by sentences (5b) & (6b) is passive in the sense that the patient is the subject of an intransitive construction in which the agent is syntactically *demoted* without however being *deleted* from argument structure. A decisive proof of the passive nature of the intransitive constructions involved in this alternation is their ability to include an agent-oriented adverb, such as *feereetoo* 'cleverly' in Ex. (6b).

The active / passive alternation is fully productive, and the passive reading of intransitive clauses involved in this alternation is not bound to any particular condition on aspect, mood, or referentiality. Mandinka speakers use intransitive constructions with a passive reading in the same conditions and with the same

semantic implications as agentless passive clauses in languages that have canonical passive constructions.

In Mandinka, the general rule with transitive verbs is consequently that in their use in intransitive constructions, the semantic role assigned to the subject is modified, as in Ex. (5) & (6) above – see also (12a) below. Constructions in which the patient of transitive verbs is left unexpressed and is interpreted as non-specific, whereas the agent is expressed, are however possible.

Mandinka has a suffix *-rí* (with the allomorph *-dírí* in combination with stems ending with a nasal) found exclusively with transitive verbs in constructions in which the P argument is left unexpressed, cannot be identified to the referent of a noun phrase included in the same construction, and is interpreted as non-specific. This distribution makes it possible to analyze *-rí* as a valency operator of the antipassive type.[10] However, in other respects, *-rí* has properties quite unusual for an antipassive marker, since with just one exception (*dómó* 'eat'), *rí*-forms cannot be used as the verbal predicate of finite clauses, and the suffix *-rí* occurs only in the following conditions:

  – when the verb is used nominally as an event noun, as in (7c);
  – when the verb is used in a non-finite form expressing temporal simultaneity, marked by a suffix *-tôo*, as in (8b);
  – in agent nominalization, marked by a suffix *-láa ~ -náa,* as in (9b);
  – in instrument nominalization, marked by a suffix *-ráŋ ~ -láŋ ~ -dáŋ,* as in (10b);
  – in the causativization of transitive constructions, as in (11b).[11]

(7) a. *Mus-óo   be   maani-túw-o la.*
        woman-D   LCOP   rice-pound-D   OBL
        lit. 'The woman is at the rice-pounding.' → 'The woman is pounding rice.'
        (*maaní* 'rice' saturates the P valency of *tŭu* 'pound', and the subject of the copula is identified to the unexpressed A argument)

     b. *Maan-óo be   tuw-ó   la.*
        rice-D   LCOP   pound-D OBL
        lit. 'The rice is at the pounding.' → 'The rice is being pounded.'

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[10] In the descriptions of other Manding varieties, the cognates of this atypical antipassive suffix have never been identified as antipassive markers, and are commonly analyzed as nominalization markers. This identification is somewhat problematic, since unmarked nominalization is productive in all Manding varieties. However, the cognates of *-rí* in other Manding varieties cannot be analyzed as encoding patient demotion. They are found mainly in the same contexts as Mandinka *-rí*, but are not restricted to such contexts: contrary to Mandinka *-rí*, they can also combine with intransitive verbs, and their presence with transitive verbs used as action nouns does not block the expression of the patient (see for example Dumestre 2003: 74-5 on Bambara *-lí*). Different historical scenarios can be imagined, but comparison with other West Mande languages supports the hypothesis that Manding *-rí ~ -lí* is the reflex of an ancient antipassive suffix tending to be reanalyzed as a nominalization marker, and that Mandinka represents a more ancient stage in the evolution of this suffix than other Manding varieties, rather than the other way round – see Creissels (In preparation).

[11] Note that the use of the antipassive marker in the causativization of transitive constructions is consistent with the fact that, in the causativization of transitive constructions, as illustrated by Ex. (11), the initial object is demoted, and the syntactic role of object is taken by the causee

(if none of the arguments of *tŭu* 'pound' is expressed, in the absence of the antipassive suffix, the subject of the copula is identified to the unexpressed P argument)

b. *Mus-óo   be   tuu-r-óo   la.*
woman-D   LCOP   pound-ANTIP-D   OBL
lit. 'The woman is at the pounding.ANTIP.' → 'The woman is pounding.'
(the antipassive suffix saturates the P valency of *tŭu* 'pound', and the subject of the copula is identified to the unexpressed A argument)

(8) a. *Ŋ́   ŋá   mus-óo   maani-tuu-tôo   jé.*
1SG   PF.POS   woman-D   rice-pound-SIMULT see
'I saw the woman pounding rice.'

   b. *Ŋ́   ŋá   mus-óo   tuu-ri-tôo   jé.*
1SG   PF.POS   woman-D   pound-ANTIP-SIMULT   see
'I saw the woman pounding.'

(9) a. *maani-tuu-laa*   b. *tuu-ri-laa*
rice-pound-AGNM   pound-ANTIP-AGNM
'person who pounds rice'   'person who pounds'

(10) a. *maani-tuu-raŋ*   b. *tuu-ri-laŋ*
rice-pound-INSNM   pound-ANTIP-INSNM
'rice-pestle'   'pestle'

(11) a. *Ŋ́   ŋá   kitáab-ôo jóo.*
1SG   PF.POS   book-D   pay
'I paid for the book.'

   b. *I   ye   ŋ́   jóo-rí-ndí   kitáab-óo la.*
3PL   PF.POS 1SG   pay-ANTIP-CAUS book-D   OBL
'They made me pay for the book.'

Consequently, with the only exception of *dómó* 'eat', the antipassive form of Mandinka transitive verbs cannot be used as the verbal predicate of clauses in which the A argument only would be expressed. It is however commonly found in a functionally equivalent antipassive periphrasis, in which the antipassive form of a transitive verb used nominally is the object of *ké* 'do' – Ex. (12).

(12) a. **Mus-óo   ye   Ø tuu.*   **Mus-óo   tuu-ta*
woman-D PF.POS   pound   woman -D   pound-PF.POS
Intended: 'The woman pounded.' – the first sentence is absolutely impossible, and the only possible reading of the second one is 'The woman was pounded.'

b. *Mus-óo   ye   tuu-r-ôo   ké.*
    woman-D   PF.POS   pound-ANTIP-D   do
    lit. 'The woman did the pounding.ANTIP.' → 'The woman pounded.'

2.2. NP structure

Mandinka has no agreement mechanism between head nouns and their dependents, and more generally, head-dependent relationships within NPs are not morphologically marked, with the only exception of 'alienable' possession, in which the genitival dependent is marked by the postposition *lá*. The following formula, in which GEN, DET, ADJ and NUM stand for 'genitive', 'determiner', 'attributive adjective' and 'numeral' respectively, summarizes the possible positions for the different types of noun dependents in canonical Mandinka NPs:[12]

(GEN) (DET$_1$) Head Noun (ADJ) (NUM) (DET$_2$)

As already mentioned in the introduction, Mandinka has a marker *-o* commonly designated as definite marker. It occurs in the position labeled DET$_2$ in the formula above, and precedes the other determiners that occupy this position and are compatible with it.[13] This marker *-o* originates from the demonstrative *wǒ*, and at some stage in the history of Manding, it probably had functions similar to those of the definite articles found in European languages, but in the present state of the language, in positive assertive clauses, *-o* constitutes most of the time a default determiner that does not carry any particular semantic specification, and can be omitted only in the presence of some other determiners (such as *kóté(ŋ)* 'other'). Negative clauses, interrogative clauses, and NPs including a numeral, constitute the main contexts in which the definite marker still contrasts with its absence and has a clear impact on the meaning of the construction. Ex. (13) illustrates the interaction between negation and definiteness marking in Mandinka.

(13) a. *Ŋ́   ŋá   mus-ôo   jé.*   *mus-ôo < musu + ⸾o*
     1SG   PF.POS   woman-D   see
     'I saw the/a woman.'

   b. * *Ŋ́   ŋá   musu   jé.*
      1SG   PF.POS   woman   see

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[12] Note that:
(a) Relative clauses are not mentioned in this formula for the simple reason that Mandinka uses the correlative strategy of relativization, in which relative clauses are not syntactically treated as noun dependents.
(b) The formula includes two possible positions for determiners, but with the exception of *ñîŋ* 'this', each determiner can only occur in one of the two positions.
(c) Some combinations of determiners are possible in the position labeled DET$_2$, in which case each of them occupies a fixed position in the sequence.
[13] *-o* is a typical phrasal affix in the sense that it occupies a position at the edge of a construction, without being necessarily contiguous to the head of the construction, but at the same time interacts with its host in a way that excludes identifying it as a clitic.

c. *Ŋ́   máŋ   mus-ôo   jé.*
   1SG   PF.NEG   woman-D   see
   'I did not see the woman.'

d. *Ŋ́   máŋ   musu   jé.*
   1SG   PF.NEG   woman   see
   'I did not see any woman.'

3. Nouns vs. verbs in the lexicon of Mandinka: introductory remarks

The recognition of 'parts of speech' in Manding is a controversial question. Vydrine 1999 provides an overview of the positions taken by different authors on this matter. With regard to the *noun* vs. *verb* distinction, the views expressed by Houis in several publications (see among others Houis 1981) have been particularly influential. Houis rightly observed that, in the description of many African languages (including Manding and other Mande languages), approaches that do not posit lexical categories as logically secondary in relation to the notions of noun phrase and verbal predicate may be problematic because of the categorial flexibility of many lexemes. Expressed in terms less idiosyncratic than the ones he used, the idea was that verbal clauses should be defined as constructions with a given structure, and noun phrases should be defined with reference to their internal structure and contribution to the construction of the clause, without presupposing the existence of classes of lexemes specialized as heads of either clauses or NPs. Houis further elaborated a theory according to which Manding and other African languages have two major lexical categories he designated as 'nominal lexemes' and 'verbo-nominal lexemes':

– 'nominal' lexemes are monocategorial in the sense that, in their underived form, they can be used as heads of NPs, but not of verbal clauses;
– 'verbo-nominal' lexemes are polycategorial in the sense that they can be used in both functions without necessitating the intervention of derivational morphology.

In Ex. (14) & (15), the notion of verbo-nominal lexeme in the sense defined by Houis is illustrated by the Mandinka lexemes *kuuráŋ* 'be sick / sickness' and *tŭu* 'pound'. In (14a), *kuuráŋ* occupies the V slot in the construction of an intransitive clause, whereas in (14b), the same lexeme in the same non-derived form but with the definite marker attached to it constitutes by itself an NP occupying the subject slot in the same construction.

(14) a. *Díndíŋ-o   máŋ   kuuraŋ.*
      child-D   PF.NEG   be_sick/sickness
      'The child is not sick.'

   b. *Kuuráŋ-o   mâŋ   díyaa.*
      be_sick/sickness-D   PF.NEG   be_pleasant
      'Sickness is not pleasant.'

Similarly, in (15a), *tǔu* occupies the V slot in the construction of a transitive clause, whereas in (15b), to be compared with (15c), *tǔu* combined with the definite marker constitutes by itself an NP, and this NP combined with the postposition *lá* is the complement of the locative copula *bé*.

(15) a. *Mus-óo   ye   maan-óo   tuu.*
        woman-D   PF.POS   rice-D   pound
        'The woman pounded the rice.'

   b. *Maan-óo   be   tuw-ó   la.*
      rice-D   LCOP   pound-D   OBL
      'The rice is being pounded.' lit. 'The rice is at the pounding.'

   c. *Maan-óo   be   boot-ôo kóno.*
      rice-D   LCOP   bag-D   inside
      'The rice is in the bag.'

The theory elaborated by Houis excludes the existence of lexemes specialized in verbal predicate function, allowing for just two major classes of lexemes, those specialized as nouns, and those unspecified for the *noun* vs. *verb* distinction.

   In the sketch of Mandinka grammar I published in 1983, I adopted this theory without trying to discuss it further, because it constitutes the simplest possible theory accounting for the obvious observation that no Mandinka lexeme (with the only exception of *sǎa* 'die') is exclusively found in the function of verbal predicate. In the meantime, several works dealing with Bambara and other Manding varieties have argued that the notion (and the label) of verbo-nominal lexeme can be dispensed with in Manding, and that the lexemes analyzed by Houis as verbo-nominal are simply verbs with a limited ability to be used as nouns in their non-derived form. Others have argued that the dichotomy between nominal and verb(o-nomin)al lexemes must be replaced by a finer-grained classification.

   The position defended in this paper is that the dichotomy proposed by Houis results in an over-simplified view of the categorial flexibility of Mandinka lexemes, because it leads to grouping together lexemes that are equally productive in the function of verbal predicate but greatly differ in the way they can be used as heads of NPs, both formally and semantically. The data presented in this paper supports the recognition of three major classes of lexemes, for which I will use the labels 'verbal', 'verbo-nominal', and 'nominal'.

   The point is that *kuuráŋ* 'be sick / sickness' in Ex. (14) and *tǔu* 'pound' in Ex. (15), equally identifiable as lexemes unspecified for the *verb* vs. *noun* distinction according to definitions that do not go beyond the most obvious observations on the distribution of lexemes, can in fact be used to illustrate a major contrast among the lexemes of Mandinka that have the ability to occupy the slot V in the construction of

a verbal clause. Both are fully productive in this function, and both have nominal uses in their non-derived form, but the semantic and syntactic properties shown by *tǔu* in its nominal use justify identifying *tǔu* as a verbal lexeme whose nominal use must be analyzed as an instance of morphologically unmarked event nominalization. By contrast, *kuuráŋ* can be used as a noun exactly like typical nouns referring to concrete entities, and its meaning as a noun, although clearly related, cannot be predicted from the meaning it conveys in its verbal use. Consequently, *kuuráŋ* belongs to a distinct class of lexemes for which I use the label 'verbo-nominal'. The distinction between verbal and verbo-nominal lexemes that will be discussed in more detail in the following sections is therefore defined as follows:

– a verbal lexeme can be used in its non-derived form as the verbal head of predicative constructions, and its only possible meaning as the head of noun phrases is that of event nominalization;
– a verbo-nominal lexeme, in addition to its use as the verbal head of predicative constructions, can be used as the head of noun phrases with meanings that, although semantically related to the meanings it conveys in its verbal use, are not limited to event nominalization.

4. Verbal lexemes

With the only exception of *sǎa* 'die' (with can only be nominalized as *saayáa* 'death'),[14] Mandinka lexemes that can be found in verbal predicate function can also occur as heads of noun phrases with a meaning of event nominalization ('the fact/action/process of *V*-ing or of being *V*-ed') without necessitating any morphological operation. This is consistent with the lack of any morphological device whose function would be deriving event nouns from verbs. As already mentioned above (see Footnote 9), descriptions of other Manding varieties identify the cognates of the antipassive suffix *-rí* as a nominalizer, but at least in the case of Mandinka, this analysis must be rejected. On the one hand, in Mandinka, the presence of *-rí* is always motivated by constraints on the expression of the patient of transitive verbs, and the same verbs can always be used nominally without the suffix *-rí*, but with different valency properties. On the other hand, the suffix *-rí* is found not only when verbal lexemes are used nominally, but also in other uses of verbal lexemes, with exactly the same effect on their valency properties.

Moreover, a closer look at the constraints on the expression of arguments in the nominal use of such lexemes and of their possible dependents provides additional evidence supporting an analysis in terms of morphologically unmarked nominalization.

A first observation is that the progressive periphrasis illustrated by Ex. (15b) above (reproduced below as (16b)) does not mean simply that the subject of the locative copula is involved in a pounding event. It is in fact a raising construction in which the subject of the locative copula receives its semantic role from *tǔu,* and the way the semantic role assignment rule operates clearly supports the nominalization

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[14] I have no explanation for the aberrant behavior of the suffix *-yáa* (normally used to derive verbs from nouns, not the other way round) in combination with *sǎa.*

analysis. The point is that, if the verbal lexeme used in this construction is just followed by the definite marker, the subject of the locative copula can only be interpreted as the transposition of an intransitive subject or of an object. As illustrated by Ex. (16), if the object of the corresponding clause is not mentioned in the progressive periphrasis, the interpretation of the subject of the locative copula as the transposition of a transitive subject requires the use of the antipassive suffix *-rí*.

(16) a. *Mus-óo   ye   maan-óo   tuu.*
        woman-D   PF.POS   rice-D   pound
        'The woman pounded the rice.'

    b. *Maan-óo   be   tuw-ó   la.*
        rice-D   LCOP   pound-D   OBL
        'The rice is being pounded.'

    c. *Mus-óo   be   maani-túw-o   la.*
        woman-D   LCOP   rice-pound-D   OBL
        'The woman is pounding the rice.'

    d. *Mus-óo   be   tuu-r-óo   la.*   *tuu-r-ôo < tŭu + -rí + -o*
        woman-D   LCOP   rice-pound-ANTIP.D OBL
        'The woman is pounding.'

    e. **Mus-óo   be   tuw-ó   la.*
        woman-D   LCOP   pound-D   OBL
        impossible with the meaning 'The woman is pounding.'
        only possible interpretation: 'The woman is being pounded.'

If we now turn to the combination of such lexemes with genitive modifiers (which are the only noun dependents they are commonly found with), we observe that a similar rule constrains the interpretation of the genitival modifier. In general, the only constraint in the interpretation of genitival modifiers in Mandinka is a very general and abstract classification of relationships between entities as 'inalienable' or 'alienable', manifested in the contrast between morphologically unmarked genitival dependents and genitival dependents marked by the postposition *lá*. Provided this classification is respected, the relationship between the referents of a genitival modifier and its head can be any conceivable relationship between the entities in question. By contrast, the genitival modifiers of a verbal lexeme used nominally can only refer to core arguments of the same lexeme used as a verb, and the rule accounting for their interpretation is very similar to that accounting for the assignment of semantic roles in the progressive periphrasis: the genitival modifier of a verbal lexeme used nominally is interpreted as the transposition of a transitive subject if either the object is mentioned in the same construction, as in (17h), or the verb takes the antipassive suffix *-rí*, as in (17g). Subjects, irrespective of their precise semantic role, are transposed as 'alienable' genitives (marked by the postposition *lá*),

whereas objects are transposed as 'inalienable' genitives (juxtaposed to their head without any morphological marking).[15]

(17) a. *Wǒ   le   ké-tá   a   lá   kan-óo   ti.*
      DEM FOC become-PF.POS 3SG GEN escape-D OBL
      'This is how he escaped.' lit. 'This became his escaping.'

  b. *A   lá   naâ   máŋ   kúyáa   ŋ   ye.*
      3SG GEN come.D PF.NEG be_bad 1PL BEN
      'His coming does not worry us.'

  c. *Wo   maŋ   ń-te   fáŋ-o   la   tâa   síi.*
      DEM PF.NEG 1SG-EMPH INT-D GEN go.D reach
      'This is not important enough for me to go in person.'
      lit. 'This does not reach my own going.'

  d. *Baá   la   sel-óo   ka   dǎŋ   tuŋ-ó   le   to.*
      goat.D GEN climb-D HAB.POS be_limited anthill-D FOC LOC
      'Goats do not climb higher than the anthill.'
      lit. 'The goat's climbing is limited to the anthill.'

  e. *I   súutéw-o   si   díyaa.*
      3PL recognize-D POT be_easy
      'They should be easy to recognize.' lit. 'Their recognizing should be easy.'

  f. *Ŋ́   ŋa   í   kílíy-ó   moyi.*
      3PL PF.POS 2SG call-D hear
      'I heared that you were being called.' lit. 'I heard your (inalien.) call.'

  g. *Ŋ́   ŋa   í   la   kílíi-r-ǒo   moyi.*
      3PL PF.POS 2SG GEN call-ANTIP-D hear
      'I heared that you were calling.' lit. 'I heard your (alien.) call.'

  h. *Alikáal-oo   lá   i   dóoyaa,   a   sáab-oo   mú   ñĭŋ   ne   ti.*
      chief-D GEN 3PL scold.D 3SG cause-D IDCOP DEM FOC OBL
      'This is why the chief scolded them.'
      lit. 'Their scolding by the chief, its cause is this.'

Moreover, the nominal use of verbal lexemes in their non-derived form not accompanied by a genitive modifier is totally productive in the progressive periphrasis, but rare in other syntactic contexts. This use seems to be conditioned by the possibility to identify the unexpressed U/P argument of the nominalized verb to an argument of the main verb. For example, in (18a), *fó* 'say, tell' is used nominally without the addition of the antipassive suffix and without being combined with a

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[15] Note that Mandinka constitutes a clear exception to the well-known tendency of nominalizations toward ergative alignment.

genitive modifier, but the unexpressed P argument ('their lie') is identified to the subject of the main verb ('reach'), as indicated in (18b), where Ø indicates the position that could be occupied by a genitive representing the P argument of *fó* 'say'.

(18) a. *I   lá   faniyâa   síi-ta   fóo   ma   le.*
     3PL   GEN   lie.D   reach-PF.POS   say.D OBL   FOC
     'Their lie is such that it must be disclosed.'
     lit. 'Their lie has reached being said.'

    b. [*I   lá   faniyâa*]ᵢ *síi-ta*   [Øᵢ   *fóo*] *ma   le.*
     3PL   GEN   lie.D   reach-PF.POS   –   say.D OBL   FOC

The examination of the possible dependents of verbal lexemes used nominally provides additional support to the analysis proposed in this paper. A first observation is that, in the corpus I have constituted, most determiners do not occur with verbal lexemes used as heads of noun phrases. I have no attestation with the plural marker either. However, given the relatively modest size of the corpus in question and my reluctance to use elicitation data in such matters, I would not like to draw premature conclusions. By contrast, what is absolutely uncontroversial is that verbal lexemes used as heads of noun phrases can be further modified by postposition phrases or adverbs exactly like verbal heads of clauses, whereas heads of noun phrases that lack the ability to be used as verbs cannot combine with such modifiers. This property of verbal lexemes used as event nominalizations is illustrated by Ex. (19):

– in (19a), *kanôo* (definite form of *kaná* 'escape' used nominally) is modified by *wulóo ma* ;
– in (19b), *bôo* (definite form of *bó* 'go out' used nominally) is modified by *furóolu kóno.*

(19) a. *Sula-wúléŋ-o lá   kan-óo wul-óo ma, a   mâŋ   féeyaa,*
     monkey-red-D GEN   escape-D dog-D OBL 3SG   PF.NEG   be_easy
     'It is not easy for red monkeys to escape from dogs,

       fó   níŋ a   sele-ta   yír-óo to.
       except if   3SG   climb-PF.POS tree-D LOC
       unless they climb a tree.'

    b. *Furu   kílíŋ na   bóo   fur-óo-lu   kóno,*
     tilapia   one   GEN   go_out.D tilapia-D-PL in
     'The fact that a tilapia[16] leaves the shoal (litt. 'one tilapia's going out from the tilapias')

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[16] A kind of fish.

wo	*búka*	*i*	*balí*	*i*	*la*	*yáar-óo la.*
DEM	HAB.NEG	3PL	prevent	3PL	GEN	wander-DOBL

does not prevent the others from keeping wandering.'

5. Verbo-nominal lexemes

Lexemes such as *kuuráŋ* 'be sick / sickness' or *kúmá* 'speak / speech, word, story' are used as verbs with the same freedom as the verbal lexemes whose behavior has been described in Section 4, but at the same time they can be used nominally with the same properties as typical nominal lexemes referring to concrete entities, with meanings that are not limited to the designation of the event they represent as verbs.

This kind of categorial flexibility is radically different from that exhibited by verbal lexemes in the sense that, in spite of the obvious semantic relatedness, it is impossible to formulate rules according to which some semantic types of verbs could be used as nouns with meanings different from the mere designation of the event they encode as verbs, or the other way round. In other words, verbo-nominal lexemes must be explicitly registered as such in the dictionary, and their meanings as nouns and as verbs must be stipulated separately, whereas in the case of verbal lexemes, such a stipulation would be a mere redundancy.

Syntactically, a crucial observation is that the rules that constrain the interpretation of genitives modifying verbal lexemes used nominally do not apply to verbo-nominal lexemes. This is illustrated by the two interpretations of the genitival modifier of *kúmá* in Ex. (20). If *kúmá* 'speak / speech, word, story' were a verbal lexeme, the interpretation of the genitival modifier as referring to the speaker, as in (20a), would be its only available interpretation. But since *kúmá* is a verbo-nominal lexeme, depending on the context, the genitival dependent of *kúmá* lends itself to other interpretations, for example the person whose story is being told, as in (20b), in spite of the fact that the person whose story is being told cannot be encoded as a core argument of *kúmá* used as a verb.

(20) a.
Ŋ́	*máŋ*	*í*	*lá*	*kúm-óo*	*moyi.*
1SG	PF.NEG	2SG	GEN	speech-D	hear

'I did not hear what you said.' lit. 'I did not hear your speech.'

b.
Ŋ́	*bé*	*Sunjáta*	*la*	*kúm-ŏo*	*le*	*fó-lá*	*ali*	*ye.*
1SG	LCOP	Sunjata	GEN	speech-D	FOC	tell-INF	2PL	BEN

'I am going to tell you the story of Sunjata (= the story in which Sunjata is the main protagonist).'

6. The semantics of verbo-nominal lexemes

6.1. Semantic types of verbo-nominal lexemes

Semantically, two broad types of verbo-nominal lexemes can be distinguished. Some of them, when used nominally, still have meanings directly related to the event they encode in their verbal use: cause of the event (*batáa* 'be annoyed / problem'), result

of the event (*táláa* 'divide / half'), particular varieties of a given type of event (*dǒŋ* 'dance (V) / dance (N)', *kuuráŋ* 'be sick / sickness). Others refer to concrete entities that have no necessary relationship with the event, but are typically involved in it, often as instruments (*búsá* 'hit / whip'). I am aware of no syntactic correlative of this semantic distinction, although it could *a priori* be expected to have consequences for syntax.

I am not aware of any possibility to predict the semantic nature of the meaning encoded by verbo-nominal lexemes used nominally either. For example *kelé*, used as a verb with the meaning 'fight' – Ex. (21a-b), can be used as a noun with two distinct (although clearly related) meanings: 'battle' and 'army' – Ex. (21c-e).

(21) a. *Kúnuŋ mǒo-lu kele-ta máríséw-o to.*
  yesterday person.D-PL fight-PF.POS market-D LOC
  'Yesterday the people quarreled at the market.'

  b. *Fúl-oo-lu yé Kaabú kele.*
  Fula-D-PL PF.POS Kaabu fight
  'The Fulas fought against the Kaabu.'

  c. *Alí kel-óo bula !*
  2PL fight-D abandon
  'Stop fighting!'

  d. *Ŋ́ naa-ta í kaŋ ŋ́ ko í yé kel-ôo díi ŋ́ na.*
  1SG come-PF.POS 2SG on 1SG QUOT 2SG SUBJ.POS army-D give 1SG OBL
  'I came to you so that you give me an army.'

  e. *Kel-ôo tíñáa-tá le.*
  fight/army-D spoil-PF.POS FOC
  'The war ended badly.' or 'The army was destroyed.'

It does not seem possible to explain why *kelé* has these two possibilities in its nominal use, whereas the overwhelming majority of verbo-nominal lexemes have just one.

6.2. Verbo-nominal lexemes and identificational predication

Contrary to what can be observed in some languages, in Mandinka and more generally in Manding, lexemes that can be used as nouns are never used as verbs to express a meaning glossable as 'be/become an X', X being the type of entities to which NPs headed by the same lexeme refer. As illustrated by Ex. (22), identificational predication is expressed in Mandinka via a construction involving the identificational copula *mú* followed by a postposition phrase headed by the postposition *tí.*

(22) a. **Faatú musu-ta.*
    Fatou   woman-PF.POS
    Intended: 'Fatou is/became a woman.'

  b. *Faatú mu mus-óo le ti.*
    Fatou   IDCOP   woman-D   FOC   OBL
    'Fatou is a woman.'

In other words, the flexibility of the *verb* vs. *noun* distinction in the lexicon of Mandinka has nothing in common with the kind of categorial flexibility coined 'omnipredicativity' by Launey (1994).

It is also interesting to mention here that, contrary to other Manding varieties in which this phenomenon may occur sporadically, the conversion of nouns into verbs with a meaning glossable as 'possess a property typical of X' is not attested in my Mandinka data.

6.3. Categorial flexibility and polysemy

An interesting aspect of the categorial flexibility of Mandinka lexemes is that polysemous lexemes may show the behavior of strictly nominal lexemes in some of their meanings, and that of verbo-nominal lexemes in others.

For example, *díŋ* used as a noun has the two possible meanings 'child, young (of an animal)' and 'fruit' – Ex. (23a-c). *Díŋ* can also be used as a intransitive verb, but exclusively with the meaning 'bear fruit' in reference to plants, in spite of the fact that a verbal use with the meaning 'give birth' in reference to humans or animals would also be perfectly conceivable – ex. (23d-e).

(23) a. *A ŋaañáa-tá a díŋ-o la.*
    3SG   be_proud-PF.POS   3SG   son-D   OBL
    'He is proud of his son.'

  b. *Kun-ôo búká tumbu-jáw-ŏo dǔŋ a díŋ-o dâa kóno.*
    bird-D   HAB.NEG   worm-bad-D   put   3SG   young-D   mouth.D   inside
    'The bird does not put a bad worm into the mouth of its young.'

  c. *Ñiŋ yír-oo díŋ-o díyáa-tá kun-óo-lu ye.*
    DEM   tree-D   fruit-D   be_pleasant-PF.POS   bird-D-PL   BEN
    'Birds like the fruit of this tree.'

  d. *Máŋk-oo dín-tá le.*
    mango-D   produce_fruit-PF.POS   FOC
    'The mango produced fruit.'

  e. **Ñaŋkúmoo dín-tá le.*
    cat-D   give_birth-PF.POS   FOC
    Intended: 'The cat gave birth.'

> correct : *Ñaŋkúmoo wúlúu-tá le.*

As can be seen from (23e), Mandinka expresses 'give birth' in reference to humans or animals by means of the non-related lexeme *wúlúu. Díŋ* in the meaning of 'child, young (of an animal)' is therefore a strictly nominal lexeme, whereas in the meaning of 'fruit / bear fruit', it behaves as a verbo-nominal lexeme.

Note incidentally that this supports the analysis of *díŋ* as a polysemous lexeme with two distinct (although related) meanings, rather than a monosemous lexeme with an abstract meaning subsuming 'child, young (of an animal)' and 'fruit'.

7. Nominal lexemes marginally used as verbs

For the sake of completeness, I present in this section a type of categorial flexibility that marginally affects some nominal lexemes without however necessitating re-analyzing them as verbo-nominals, since this verbal use is not only marginal, but also fully predictable.

For example, in the Mandinka-French dictionary I published in co-authorship with S. Jatta and K. Jobarteh in 1982, *kudée* is described as a verbo-nominal lexeme that can be used as a noun with the meaning 'portion of meat', and as a transitive verb with the meaning 'provide someone with a portion of meat'. I am now of the opinion that *kudée* can be simply classified as a noun, since the information about the verbal use of this lexeme is superfluous. The point is that the ability to be used as transitive verbs with the meaning 'provide someone with X' is shared by all nouns referring to things that can be given. Given the predictability of the verbal use of such lexemes, definitions leading to classifying them as 'verbo-nominal' are clearly not adequate, and their verbal use is better analyzed as an instance of semantically conditioned conversion. Moreover, as already mentioned, this use is extremely marginal and seems to have stylistic implications.

The flexibility of a verbo-nominal lexeme such as *búsá* 'whip / hit' is of a different nature. Not all Mandinka nouns referring to objects typically used as instruments can be used verbally to encode the action typically performed with the instrument in question, and not all verbs denoting actions typically performed with the help of some instrument can be used nominally to denote the instrument typically associated with the action in question. For example, *murú* 'knife' cannot be used as a verb expressing 'cut', and *kuntú* 'cut' can be found as a formative of compound nouns with the meaning 'piece (of something)', but cannot be used as a noun to designate objects typically used to cut. Whatever the notions and/or labels used to account for it, and whatever its historical origin, the ability of some Mandinka lexemes to be used in the same form as nouns referring to an instrument and as verbs referring to the action performed with this instrument must be treated as lexical information. The instrumental suffix *-ráŋ* (as in *sii-ráŋ* 'chair' from *sĭi* 'sit') constitutes in Mandinka the productive way to derive nouns referring to instruments from verbs.

These two examples confirm the shortcomings of an approach to lexical categories in which recognizing lexemes as either strictly specialized in verbal or nominal uses or non-specified with respect to the *verb* vs. *noun* distinction are the only available options.

8. Conclusion

Manding is typically a language for which a superficial observation of the categorial flexibility of lexemes may suggest that no distinction between nouns and verbs exists at lexical level (as was argued by Tomčina (1978) for Guinean Maninka), or that the only contrast is between lexemes unspecified for the *verb* vs. *noun* distinction and lexemes specialized as nouns (as was proposed by Houis). In this paper, I have tried to show on the example of Mandinka that the mere observation of the ability to occupy the morphosyntactic slots of verbal head of a clause or of head of a noun phrase results in a grossly distorted view of the division of Mandinka lexemes into classes, since this approach leads to lumping together lexemes whose nominal and verbal uses are not related in the same way, semantically and syntactically.

The categorial flexibility of Mandinka lexemes with respect to the *noun* vs. *verb* distinction involves both productive rules and unpredictable properties of individual lexemes, whose combination results in the distinction between three major classes of lexemes: verbal lexemes (whose nominal uses must be accounted for in terms of morphologically unmarked nominalization), nominal lexemes (whose verbal use is either impossible, or limited to the expression of 'provide someone with X'), and verbo-nominal lexemes (whose nominal and verbal uses are equally productive, and semantically related, but at the same time cannot be related to each other by any productive rule).

Abbreviations

AGNM: agent nominalization, ANTIP: antipassive, BEN: benefactive, COP: copula, D: definite, DEM: demonstrative, EMPH: emphatic, FOC: focalization, HAB : habitual, IDCOP: identificational copula, INF: infinitive, INSNM: instrument nominalization, INT: intensive, LOC: locative, LCOP: locative copula NEG: negative, OBL: postposition in oblique marker function, PL: plural, PF: perfective, POS: positive, POSS: possessive postposition, POT: potential, QUOT: quotative, SG: singular, SIMULT: simultaneity, SUBJ: subjunctive.

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