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The structure and meaning of the Nominal BE...LA “tense” in Basse Mandinka

Abstract: The present paper offers a detailed analysis of the NomBL tense (a periphrasis compounded by the non-verbal predicator be ‘be’, a verbal noun and a locative entity la ‘at’) in Gambian Mandinka of Basse, presenting its most salient structural and semantic properties. Besides proposing various refinements and improvements in the classification and description of the locution, the author demonstrates that according to the evidence provided by Basse Mandinka speakers, the expression does not conform to the traditional grammatical analyses. First, the supposed split between the short and long varieties of the NomBL form of the transitive verbs is not respected. Second, nominal objects may appear not only in the bare stem form but also with the suffix -o and the plural morpheme -olu. Third, the gram is not only a progressive category but may likewise be employed with static verbs in the function of a continuous aspect. In addition, it can also be used as an inclusive perfect.

Key words: African linguistics, Manding, Mandinka, verbal system, semantics

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