

## **THE BASSE MANDINKA “*FUTURE*”**

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The present paper provides a detailed analysis of the semantic content of the *BE...LA* formation found in the Basse Mandinka language. It demonstrates that the meaning of this locution corresponds to a complex set of various temporal, aspectual and modal senses: perfective and imperfective future, future perfect, future-in-the-past, intentional future, future with imperative and prohibitive nuances, real factuality as well as real and unreal counterfactuality. The semantic potential of the construction composed of all the atomic values is explained as a consistent whole, i.e., as a manifestation of three typologically plausible evolutionary scenarios: future predestination path, conditional path and modal contamination path.

### **1. Introduction**

Mandinka, a language widely spoken in Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Bissau, is frequently classified as the westernmost variety of the Manding group (Wilson 2000:109) which, in turn, belongs to the Western branch of the Mande family (Kastenholz 1996:281, Vydrine et al. 2000 and Williamson et al. 2000). Manding, itself, includes various regional variants, such as, the above-mentioned Mandinka, Bambara, Malinké or Jaahanka. In 2006 Mandinka speakers numbered some 1,346,000, of whom 510,000 lived in Gambia (cf. Lewis 2009). The present paper deals with Gambian Mandinka, and as will be explained below, the variety of Basse. It examines the semantics of a Gambian Mandinka verbal construction, which is usually referred to as ‘future tense/aspect’. In this study, however, a denomination that does not imply any semantic connotations will be employed. This alternative

label, i.e., the *BE...LA* gram<sup>1</sup>, makes an exclusive reference to the form. The formation is composed of the non-verbal predicator (or locative copula) *be* ‘be’ (cf. Creissels 1983) followed by an infinitive of the main verb and the infinitive marker *la* ‘to’ (cf. 1.a). The unit *la* is sometimes analyzed as a postposition (cf. *Mandinka English Dictionary* 1995:100 and Colley 1995:15) or a locative element (Wilson 2000). Following Creissels (1983), we will understand it as an infinite marker. In accordance with the grammatical tradition of the analysis of the *BE...LA* form in Gambian Mandinka and respecting the official orthography of this language, the entity *la* in the *BE...LA* form will not be viewed as a suffix but will be glossed as an independent slot ‘to’.

The negative variant of the analyzed construction employs the lexeme *te* ‘not be’ instead of the positive *be* (1.b). It should also be noted that with certain verbs, such as *taa* ‘go’ or *naa* ‘come’, alternative forms of the auxiliaries are commonly used, i.e. *bi* and *ti* (1.c). The relevant *BE...LA* forms (i.e. auxiliary *be* + infinitive of a meaning verb + postposition *la*) are rendered in bold here and elsewhere.

- (1) a. Ì            **be**    a   **ke la**<sup>2</sup>  
           they        be    it   do to  
           ‘They will do it.’
- b. A **te**            a   **ke**    **la**  
           he not.be    it   do    to  
           ‘He will not do it.’
- c. Ntel **bi naa** **la**  
           we    be come to  
           ‘We will come.’

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘gram’ will be used as a synonym of grammatical formation, grammatical expression, grammatical construction, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Spelling follows the official orthography of Standard Gambian Mandinka (cf. *A Practical Orthography of Gambian Mandinka* 1988) where tone – with the exception of two pronominal forms – is not indicated. This convention is commonly used in grammars, dictionaries, and other studies, e.g., the *Mandinka Learning Manual* 2002). Since 1988, the “tone-free” orthography has also been used in Gambian schools and governmental agencies.

The issue of the semantics of the *BE...LA* construction in Gambian Mandinka has not received adequate attention in the literature published thus far. The formation has been quite sketchily described in certain general – though still excellent – grammar books, and almost invariably classified as an expression of future activities. For instance, Rowlands (1959) and Creissels (1983) regard the gram as a future, being aware, however, of its continuous, modal and future-in-the-past uses (see also, Dramé 2003). Hamlyn (1935) understands the construction as a contextual variety of the continuous aspect, a gram that functions both as a present and future. Also Gamble (1987) argues that the *BE...LA* formation expresses both continuous actions (approximating a present continuous) and future activities. Lück & Henderson (1993) and *Mandinka Learning Manual* (2002:17-18, 20) defines it as a “future aspect”. The formation may introduce activities that are regarded as prospective from both the present (future tense) and past perfective (future in the past). However, Colley (1995:7, 15) equates the locution with a future tense, stating that it may correspond both to the English *will* and *shall* future expressions. He also suggests that the formation can be used with a future progressive force, e.g., *A be yiroolu tutu la saama* ‘He will transplant / be transplanting plants tomorrow’.

A slightly different view may be found in an outstanding grammar from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its author, Macbrair (1842:17-18), classifies the construction as a ‘second future’ (the label ‘first future’ refers to the *SI* gram (cf. section 2)) or ‘future proximate’. He makes an important observation and affirms that the gram denotes the intention of performing a certain activity, “the going to perform” it or the fact that an action is about to be performed. Under this definition, the *BE...LA* locution functions as an immediate future or an intentional future: *m be diyamu la* ‘I am about to speak, I am to speak’ or ‘I wish to speak, I am going to speak’.

Studies of the future forms (formed with a verbal stem and the entities *bé*, *béna* or *na* and their variants) in Bambara, a closely related variety of Manding, are significantly more advanced and sophisticated. Brauner (1977:385-388) distinguishes two varieties of the future: an immediate future *beñ* and a general future *nà*. According to this author, the locution with *beñ* expresses future events that are imminent and immediate, while the construction with *nà* introduces future actions that are not necessarily immediate or imminent but that rather belong to a general, indefinite and extended future sphere. Houis (1981:18, 47) argues that the entity *bé*

(in negative *té*) shall be defined as a non-completed formation (“non-accomplí absolutif”) that is also able to denote future immediate or certain events. The form may likewise combine with the verb *nà* ‘come’, thus yielding a periphrastic construction which, although external to the system can be classified as “éventuel”. Moreover, the insertion of the lexeme *tùn* converts the future expressions in a non-actual mood (“mode de l’ inactuel”) with an unreal value. Samassekou (1981) defines the formation, which has been viewed by Houis as a periphrastic complex of the absolutive *bé* and the verb *nà*, as a future inchoative, i.e. as a subclass in the group of the indicative non-completed (“l’indicatif inaccompli”); cf. Blecke 2004:14).

Koné (1984:14) classifies the locution with *bé* (and with its negative variant, *té*) as an imperfect (“inaccompli”), a form that besides providing habitual and progressive uses may also function as an “éventuel” (this occurs especially often when the gram is employed with specific future adverbs such as *síni* ‘tomorrow’). In this type of use, the gram expresses future or prospective events and its reading is not modal but rather temporal. A purely temporal interpretation is typical for *béna* and *ná*.

Tera (1984:29) argues that the future is a marginal temporal category in the Bambara system and defines it as a sub-class of the non-completed gram. Accordingly, the future is expressed by *bé* (in negative *té*) – a neutral imperfect form (“inaccompli neutre”) whose future readings are imposed upon by temporal complements that make an explicit reference to the future time frame, or by a general temporal sphere established by the discourse or text. Tera observes that the idea of futurity may also be introduced by the entity *ná* (in negative *té*) which expresses a future that is understood as an inevitable consequence or a result of a condition. This type of future is viewed as certain and/or inevitable. Inversely, the *ná* formation fails to contain a modal component of uncertainty and shall be regarded as a purely temporal expression of close or general future events (Teras 1984:32). The third future formation corresponds to the expressions with *béna* (in negative *téna*) which are defined by Tera as ‘unmarked or neutral future’ (“futur non marqué ou neutre”). This formation is viewed as a simple future which does not necessitate any semantic specification such as is required by the *bé* (*té*) future.

Blecke (2004:39-40) argues that the *bé*, *béna* and *ná* futures in Bambara do not possess any explicit intentional sense. In his view, the future expresses a situation that is considered to certainly occur in the future. The sense of non-factual uncertainty is patent only in uses with the lexeme *tùn*. When this entity appears in

combination with the future forms (yielding locutions such as *tùn bé*, *tùn bé* and *tùn ná*), the resultant constructions express probability, conditionality and uncertainty. Idiátov (2000:13) proposes that the *bé* is a predictive form (“prédicatif”) that may be employed as a relative (rather than absolute) future, commonly occurring in conditional or temporal clauses. However, in these environments, the temporal or modal (conditional) values are stronger than the prediction. Also *béna* and *ná* futures are found in this context, but they (especially the latter) add an even stronger modal value. The predictive *bé* may also be used as a future imperative or future of certainty (ibid.). In this usage, the negative variety *té* expresses polite orders, requirements or suggestions (ibid.). The two other future constructions fail to appear with this same force. The forms with *bé* may also be employed as a non-modal prospective, i.e. as a future form that is unmarked as far as the trait of uncertainty is concerned (ibid.:14). In this function, the gram expresses future events, especially the immediate ones that will occur inevitably. The form with *béna* renders this certitude even stronger and more evident. Finally, the constructions with *bé* may uncommonly express intention. This value, however, seems to be more stable with the *béna* future (ibid.:15).

Taking instruction from these analyses, the current study offers a similarly comprehensive analysis of the semantic content of the *BE...LA* gram in Gambian Mandinka. First, we will show that the meaning of this construction – understood as its total semantic potential – constitutes a complex which includes multiple specific values and nuances. In order to determine the exact nature of the construction’s semantics, we will present all available senses that the construction may offer in all possible contexts (cf. section 2). Next, we will demonstrate that this intricate semantic space may be viewed as a consistent and homogenous whole if one applies certain evolutionary laws or tendencies as matrices for conceptual and diachronic connections that exist among these senses (cf. section 3). As a result, a map of the entire semantic potential of the *BE...LA* gram will be posited and all the values – components of the grid – will be chained together.

The evidence presented in this paper comes from a database collected and elaborated by the author during his field trips and research in the Upper River Region in Gambia in 2010 and 2011. More specifically, the quoted examples reflect the Mandinka language as it is spoken in Basse – the capital city of the Upper River Region – and in neighboring villages (Mansajang, Bassending, Kaba Kama and

Manneh Kunda). This variety – which will henceforth be referred to as Basse Mandinka – diverges slightly from Standard Mandinka, the variety found in dictionaries (e.g., *Mandinka English Dictionary* 1988 and 1995), grammar books (e.g., *A Practical Orthography of Gambian Mandinka* 1988 and 1993 or *Mandinka Learning Manual* 2002), Christian and Islamic sacred texts (e.g., *Kambej Kutoo* ‘New Testament’ 1988, *Kambej Kotoo* ‘Old Testament’ 1998 or *Selections from the Writings of the Promised Messiah* 1988) as well as in television and on the internet. For instance in the Basse vernacular, the voiced velar stop [g] – missing in the standardized language – functions as a fully legitimate phoneme, e.g. *gaadiinoo* or *Gambiya* instead of the literary normalized forms *kaadiinoo* ‘garden’ and *Kambiya* ‘Gambia’. Another slight difference is that in Basse Mandinka, possessive or pronominal constructions can be formed by means of the morpheme *ye* (*Laamini ye bukoo* ‘Lamin’s book’) in addition to the regular construction with the postposition *la* (this is a regular technique in the Standard Mandinka, e.g. *Laamini la bukoo* ‘Lamin’s book’). For a complete list of differences between Basse Mandinka and Standard Mandinka, see Andrason forthcoming (a):9-10). In spite of the fact that Standard and Basse Mandinka display several distinctive traits, it may not be correct to consider the variety spoken in Basse as a distinct dialect. Certain of the features which distinguish Basse Mandinka from the Standard tongue are not restricted to the Basse region but, on the contrary, appear in other parts of Gambia.

The data come primarily from ten native Mandinka speakers who at the time of the research resided in Basse or nearby villages. Some examples were spontaneously produced by informants; others were produced by request, e.g., informants were asked to translate a certain phrase from English into Mandinka. Various examples were also inspired by Christian and Muslim literature, in particular, New and Old Testaments (e.g., informants were asked to pronounce a certain sentence extracted from the above-mentioned religious texts, comment on it and, if necessary, reformulate it). Below are listed the speakers indicating their age, occupation and residence:

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)  
 Mariama Mendi (32, nurse, Mansajang – originally from Fulla Bantang)<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Evidence

As has been noted by several scholars, the *BE...LA* formation very frequently expresses the idea of futurity, indicating plain future events or situations, where the modal component is clearly secondary or almost unavailable. As will be explained in section 3, futures are typically accompanied by modal shades of meaning. However, such co-values may be more or, on the contrary, less evident and/or relevant. In the former case, the idea of modality is equally important to (or even more relevant than) the sense of futurity while, in the latter case, temporal nuances are profiled.

- (2) a. M **be naa la** luŋ luulu ñaato  
 I am come to day five in  
 ‘I am coming / am going to come / will come in five days.’
- b. M faamaa **be futa la** saama  
 my father be arrive to tomorrow  
 ‘My father is arriving tomorrow / is going to arrive / will arrive.’

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<sup>3</sup> The last two informants are entirely bilingual: Fula-Mandinka and Manjago-Mandinka. Their ethnic background is Fula and Manjago respectively.

- c. A **be seyi la** a yaa  
 he be return to him to  
 ‘He is going to return home / will return.’
- d. Suwoo **be bori la**  
 horse be run to  
 ‘The horse is going to run / will run.’
- e. M **be a loŋ na** le  
 I be it know to EMPH  
 ‘I am going to know it / I will know it.’

An analogical future force may be detected in the negative environment. In such cases the construction indicates that a given future activity will simply fail to occur:

- (3) a. A **te** a **ke la** saama  
 he not.be it do to tomorrow  
 ‘He is not going to do it tomorrow / will not do it.’
- b. Ntelu **te naa la**  
 we not.be come to  
 ‘We are not coming / are not going to come / will not come.’
- c. A **te taa la** Banjul  
 he not.be go to Banjul  
 ‘He is not going (to go) to Banjul / will not go to Banjul.’

It should be observed that in the function of a future tense, the gram may correspond to three English expressions that convey future meaning. It approximates the present progressive employed with the force of a future tense (e.g., *I am doing it tomorrow*), the periphrasis *be going to* + infinitive (e.g., *I am going to do it*) and the construction formed with the auxiliary *will* (e.g., *I will do it*). However, the Mandinka formation usually fails to provide cohortative, jussive, imperative (for counter evidence and a “soft” imperative reading of the gram, see below in this section) and deliberative



nuances related to the idea of futurity and usually conveyed by the *will* form in English. In Basse Mandinka such modal shades are commonly expressed by other verbal locutions, especially by the *SI* “future”. Consequently, the *BE...LA* formation is more time oriented and less modally marked than the other typical “future” expression (compare, however, frequent intentional readings offered by the gram, cf. examples 15a-b below).

In the following examples the two phrases are contrasted. These – otherwise identical – sentences differ uniquely in that one of them contains the verb in the *BE...LA* gram and in the other the *SI* form is employed. In Basse Mandinka, the *SI* construction is formed by means of the auxiliary *si* (or its variety *se*) and the stem of a main verb, i.e., *a si (se) naa* ‘he will come, he may come’. In examples 4, 5, 6, 7 and 11 the entity *si* will simply be glossed as *SI*. While *BE...LA* emphasizes the temporal location of an event (i.e., future time), *SI* offers various modal readings: exhortation (4.b), permission (5.b), and obligation (6.b) and (7.b):

- (4) a. M **be** a **ke la**  
 I be it do to  
 ‘I am going to it / I will do it.’
- b. N **si** a **ke!**  
 I SI it do  
 ‘[I promise,] I will do it!’
- (5) a. Fo m **be duŋ na** jaŋ?  
 whether I be enter to here  
 ‘I am going to enter? / Will I enter?’
- b. Fo n **se duŋ** jaŋ?  
 whether I SI enter here  
 ‘May I come in?’

- (6) a. I            **be** moto doo        **saŋ na**  
 you-SG be car    another buy to  
 ‘You are going to buy another car.’
- b. I            **si** moto doo        **saŋ!**  
 you-SG SI car    another buy  
 ‘You will buy another car! / You must buy another car! / Buy another car!’
- (7) a. A **be naa la**  
 he be come to  
 ‘He is going to come.’
- b. A **si naa!**  
 he SI come  
 ‘He will come! / He must come!’

In certain instances, the *BE...LA* gram may have a subtle imperative force. In such cases, it introduces activities that may be understood as future facts or orders:

- (8) a. Kaatu Yaawe ye ñiŋ fo le ko, ali  
 because Yahweh did this say EMPH saying you-PL  
**te** foño **je la** sako sanjii, bari wulumbaŋo ñiŋ  
 not.be wind see to neither rain but valley this  
**be faa la** jiyo la le  
 be be.filled to water with EMPH  
 ‘For thus said Yahweh: “you shall not see wind, neither shall you see rain; but that valley shall be filled with water.”’
- b. A **be faa la le**  
 he be die to EMPH  
 ‘He shall surely die.’

With the imperative undertone, the gram may express prohibition, although with a significantly less vivid force than the *KANA* form (*kana naa!* ‘do not come!’). In such

cases, the *BE...LA* formation constitutes – together with the mentioned *KANA* gram – a negative counterpart of the *SI* formation. However, while the *KANA* construction denotes a pure prohibition (9.b and 9.d), the *BE...LA* form overtly and invariably points to the future temporal sphere (9.a and 9.b):

- (9) a. I            **te**    **naa**   **la!**  
           you-SG   not.be   come   to  
           ‘You will   not   come!’
- b. **Kana**    **naa!**  
           do.not    come  
           ‘Do not come!’
- c. I            **te**    a   **ke la!**  
           you-SG   not.be   it   do   to  
           ‘You will not do it!’
- d. **Kana**    a   **ke!**  
           do.not    it   do  
           ‘Do not do it!’

Although more temporal than modal, the *BE...LA* formation commonly expresses the intention of performing a given activity, corresponding to the English form *be going to*.

- (10) a. M **be** ñiŋ    bukoo    **karaŋ**   **na**  
           I   be   this    book    read    to  
           ‘I am going to read this book [this is my goal and intention].’
- b. M **be** i            **joo**    **la**   **le**  
           I   be   you-SG   pay   to   EMPH  
           ‘I am going to pay you [this is my intention].’

A more temporal (and conversely less modal) character of the gram may additionally be illustrated by its relation with the verb *noo* ‘be able, can, may’. Namely, when the *BE...LA* construction appears with the modal predicate *noo*, almost invariably, it conveys the meaning of future ability, possibility and probability (11.a and 11.b). In that manner, the periphrasis contrasts with the expression built on the *SI* tense (i.e. *si* + verbal stem + *noo*), which may introduce the possibility both with respect to the future and present (11.c).

- (11) a. I            **be jeroo ke noo la** kotenke  
           you-SG be sight do can to again  
           ‘You will be able to see again.’
- b. M **be a ke noo la**  
           I be it do can to  
           ‘I will be able to do it.’
- c. N **si a ke noo**  
           I SI it do can  
           ‘I can / will be able do it.’

As for the aspect of future activities conveyed by the *BE...LA* formation, the gram may express unique, punctual and entire events (i.e. presented from a global perspective as an entire whole, cf. examples 12.a-c). It can also denote durative actions and situations extended in time (cf. examples 13.a-d). Consequently, the locution corresponds both to the perfective and imperfective future constructions from other languages (the English translations are approximate):

- (12) a. M **be** a **faa** **la** saama  
 I be him kill to tomorrow  
 ‘I will kill him tomorrow (perfective future).’
- b. Noora Kuliŋo **be naa** **la** i kaŋ  
 spirit holy be come to you-SG on  
 ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you (perfective future).’
- c. M **be** a **saŋ** **na**  
 I be it buy to  
 ‘I will buy it (perfective future).’
- (13) a. M **be** ite **kanu** **la** le luŋ-wo-luŋ  
 I be you-SG love to EMPH every.day  
 ‘I will love you every day (imperfective future).’
- b. Alitolu **be baluu** **la**  
 you-PL be live to  
 ‘You will live (imperfective future).’
- c. Ì **te** **diyaamu** **la** beŋo to  
 they not.be talk to meeting at  
 ‘They will not talk / be talking during the meeting (imperfective future).’
- d. Ali **be tara** **la** jee  
 you-PL be remain to there  
 ‘You will be there (imperfective).’

This dual nature of the *BE...LA* form may be illustrated by the following sentence which may correspond both to the perfective and imperfective future.

- (14) Laamini **be jele la**  
 Lamin be laugh to  
 ‘Lamin will laugh.’

One should note that explicitly future progressive activities are usually expressed by three other periphrastic constructions, built themselves on the “future” *BE...LA* tense. The first one is formed by the verb *tara* ‘be, remain’ in the *BE...LA* formation and an participle in *-riŋ*, i.e., *be tara la -riŋ* (15.a and 15.b). The second construction consists of the auxiliary *tara* ‘be, remain’ in the *BE...LA* form and the stem of the main verb followed by the postposition *kaŋ*, i.e., *be tara la + stem + kaŋ* (15.c). Finally, the third expression contains the verb *a ke* ‘do’ in the *BE...LA* tense with a verbal noun as its direct object, i.e., *be + verbal noun + ke la* (15.d and 15.e).

- (15) a. A **be tara la** siinooriŋ  
 he be remain to sleeping  
 ‘He will be sleeping.’
- b. A **be tara la** looriŋ  
 he be remain to standing  
 ‘He will be standing.’
- c. A **be tara la** siinoo kaŋ  
 he be remain to sleeping on  
 ‘He will be sleeping.’
- d. M **be tabiroo ke la** saama le  
 I be cooking do to tomorrow EMPH  
 ‘I will be doing the cooking tomorrow / I will be cooking.’
- e. M **be dookuwo ke la** saama  
 I be work(ing) do to tomorrow  
 ‘I will be working tomorrow.’

Properly stative future situations are expressed by the verb *tara* ‘be, remain’ or *ke* ‘be’ in the *BE...LA* form and an participle in *-riŋ*, i.e., by the sequence *be tara la -riŋ*:

- (16) a. A **be ke la** bataariŋ  
 he be be to tired  
 ‘He will be (being) tired [participle of *bataa* ‘be tired’].’
- b. A **be tara la** saasaariŋ  
 he be remain to sick [participle of *saasaa* ‘be sick’]  
 ‘He will be (being) sick.’

The *BE...LA* construction can also introduce actions which are viewed as future but from the past time perspective, approximating the category of a past future or future in the past. In such instances, the formation corresponds to English expressions such as *was going to do* or *would do*:

- (17) a. M maŋ a loŋ ko i **be naa la**  
 I did.not it know that they be come to  
 ‘I did not know that they were going to come / would come.’
- b. Ate siyo be sanji taŋ niŋ fula le kabiriŋ a **be**  
 his age was year ten and two EMPH when he be  
**ke la** mansa ti  
 become to king EXIS<sup>4</sup>  
 ‘He was twelve years old when he was going to become king.’

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<sup>4</sup> The lexeme *ti*, glossed as EXIS, is an existential particle that accompanies certain verbs with the meaning of ‘be’ or ‘become’ (e.g., *mu* or *ke*).

- c. A siyo be sanji taŋ niŋ wooro le kabiriŋ a **be**  
 his age was year ten and six EMPH when he be  
 mansayaa **dati la**  
 kingdom begin to  
 ‘He was sixteen years old when he was going to begin to rule.’
- d. Wo waatoo la ate naata kuuraŋ baake, fo a **be**  
 that time at he became be.sickvery.much until he be  
**faa la**  
 die to  
 ‘At that time, he was so sick that he was going to die.’
- e. Ate le **be a jamfaa la**  
 he EMPH be him betray to  
 ‘He was going to betray him.’

In certain cases, this future-in-the-past value triggers modal shades of meaning, in particular the nuance of past possibility-probability (18.a and 18.b) or past irrealis (18.c)

- (18) a. A maŋ a loŋ, i **be meŋ fo la**  
 he did.not it know, they be what say to  
 ‘He did not know what they could say.’
- b. Ì kambenta ka feeroo dadaa i **be a faa la** ñaameŋ  
 they agreed to plan make they be him kill to how  
 ‘They plotted how they might destroy him.’



- c. I            ñanta      bankoo    fadi    la    le            nuŋ    ko    siiña    luulu  
 you-SG    should    country    struck to    EMPH    then    as    time    five  
 waraŋ    wooro,    tennuŋ    i            **be**    Aramu    bankoo    **noo**    **la**  
 or        six        so.then    you-SG    be    Syria    country    conquer    to  
 ‘You should have struck the country five or six times; then you would have conquered Syria.’

The gram is also extensively employed in conditional periods. In protases, it may be used instead of the more regular *TA* and *YE* formations, proving, however, slightly distinct meaning. The *TA* formation is formed by suffixing *-ta* to the verb: *naa* > *naata*. The *TA* gram approximates the categories of present perfect, past (perfective, simple and durative), pluperfect, future perfect (exclusively in certain subordinated clauses), stative and present (for a complete review of the *TA* expression see Andrason 2011a). The *YE* gram is formed by means of the auxiliary *ye* (or its variant in the first person singular and plural: *ŋa* and *ŋà* respectively), e.g. *a fo* ‘to say’ > *a ye a fo* ‘he has said it / he said it’. The formation is a transitive variant of the *TA* expression, which itself is restricted to intransitive contexts.

While the verb in the *TA* and *YE* tenses expresses the realization of a future condition or a future anteriority (e.g., *if you come...* i.e., *once you have come...*), the use of the *BE...LA* formation does not indicate the ideas of completion and anteriority, but rather the intention of performing an action, corresponding to the English sentences such as *if you are going to* + infinitive. To demonstrate this difference, we provide the following pairs of sentences in which one contains the verb in *TA* / *YE* forms while the other employs the same predicate in the *BE...LA* tense:

- (19) a. Sooma, niŋ ite **naata**, ntel bi taa la marisewo  
 tomorrow if you-SG have.come, we be go to market  
 to ntel bi taa la marisewo to  
 to we be go to market to  
 ‘Tomorrow if you come (when you have come), we will go to the market.’
- b. Sooma, niŋ ite **bi naa la**, m be i batu la suwo kono  
 tomorrow if you-SG be come to, I be you-SG wait to home in  
 ‘Tomorrow, if you are going to come, I will wait for you at home.’
- c. Sooma niŋ ite **ye** motoo **saŋ**, ntel bi taa la  
 tomorrow if you-SG have car bought, we be go to  
 Banjul niŋ motoo la  
 Banjul with car with  
 ‘Tomorrow, if you buy (when you have bought) the car, we will go to Banjul.’
- d. Sooma niŋ ite **be** motoo **saŋ na**, m be taa la ka  
 tomorrow if you-SG be car buy to, I be go to to  
 ite maakoyi  
 you-SG help  
 ‘Tomorrow, if you are going to buy the car, I will go to help you.’

In conditional apodoses, the gram introduces hypothetical – since depending on the completion of certain requirements – but still possible future activities which logically and temporarily follow events expressed in the protasis. In this real and factual function, the gram corresponds to the indicative future of future perfect in other languages, e.g., *modus realis* in Latin, or to the use of the English *will* + infinitive formation in the conditional environment.

- (20) a. Niŋ ŋa kodoo soto, m **be** bokoo ñiŋ **saŋ na**  
 if I money have, I be book this buy to  
 ‘If I have money I will buy this book (i.e. once I get some money, I will buy this book).’
- b. Niŋ dindiŋolu ye booroo miŋ, i **be kendeயaa la le**  
 if children have medicine drunk, they be be.healthy to EMPH  
 ‘If children drink the medicine, they will be well (i.e. once they drink the medicine they will get well).’

In other instances, the gram expresses counterfactual yet currently possible (real) activities or situations, approximating the Latin *coniunctivus imperfecti* in the *modus irrealis* in the present. In that function, the gram roughly corresponds to the English apodosis with the auxiliary *would*:

- (21) Niŋ ali ye wo moolu kanu, menna ye ali kani,  
 if you-PL do/did that people love, who do you-PL love,  
 wo **be** ali **nafaa la** muŋ ne la?  
 that be you-PL benefit to what EMPH with  
 ‘Even though you loved, people who love you (i.e. you do not love them but you still could) how would that benefit you?’

Additionally, the formation may appear in past conditional periods, expressing counterfactual and unreal events or situations. In such cases, it matches the use of the Latin *coniunctivus plusquamperfecti* in the *modus irrealis* in the past or the English construction: *would have* + participle:

- (22) Niŋ ite ye wo ke nuŋ, tennuŋ nte baarinkewo  
 if you-SG did that do then, so.then my brother  
**te faa la** nuŋ  
 not.be be.dead to then  
 ‘If you had done it, my brother would not have died.’

The *BE...LA* formation frequently appears with the conjunction *janniŋ* ‘before’ introducing two – certainly related – types of meaning. First, the *BE...LA* gram may introduce past activities which occurred after other past events, being additionally accompanied by certain modal undertones of possibility or probability:

- (23) a. Ite ye nte kanu le, janniŋ duniyaa **be daa la**  
 you-SG did me love EMPH, before world be create to  
 ‘You had loved me before the world was founded.’
- b. Nte kiita<sup>5</sup> le a ñaato, janniŋ ate **be naa la**  
 I was.sent EMPH him before, before he be come to  
 ‘I had been sent ahead of him, before he came / would come.’
- c. A ye a baŋ loo la le, janniŋ mansa  
 he did it finish construct to EMPH, before king  
**be muru la ka bo naŋ** Damasikusi  
 be return to from to.here Damascus  
 ‘He finished constructing it before the king returned / would return from Damascus.’

Second, in the present-future time frame, the gram denotes future actions that will take place after other future events have occurred. Once again the activities expressed by the *BE...LA* construction provide modal meanings, such as possibility and probability.

- (24) a. Alifaa, naa, janniŋ n diŋo **be faa la**  
 sir, come, before my child be die to  
 ‘Sir, come down before my child dies / may die.’

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<sup>5</sup> The form *kiita* is derived from the intransitive predicate *kii* ‘be sent’ that is employed in the *TA* formation (formed by adding the suffix *-ta* to a verbal stem) which typically provides perfect, perfective and past values. Verbs that have a transitive counterpart (cf. *a kii* ‘to send something or someone’), when used intransitively (especially in the *ta* form which is always intransitive) may have a passive reading.

- b. Ali si ñiŋ domoroo domo, janniŋ m **be toora la**  
 you-PL will this meal eat, before I be suffer to  
 ‘You will eat this meal before I suffer / may suffer.’

The *BE...LA* gram can sometimes express future anterior events, i.e., activities which will have occurred before other future situations. Observe that in each one of the following sentences, the *BE...LA* formation is employed twice, i.e. in the main and subordinate clauses. In the main clauses it introduces future events which will precede other future activities, expressed in the subordinate clause headed by *janniŋ*:

- (25) a. Janniŋ duntuŋo be kuma la bii,  
 before rooster be call to today,  
 i **be n soosoo la** siiŋaa saba  
 you-SG be me deny to time three  
 ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times / you will have denied.’
- b. Bari janniŋ ñiŋ kuwolu bee be ke la,  
 but before this things all be happen to,  
 i **be ali muta la**  
 they be you-PL seize to  
 ‘But before all this occurs, they will imprison you / they will have imprisoned.’

Finally, it must be observed that the *BE...LA* gram in Basse Mandinka is never employed to express present progressive activities. This means that a present progressive reading of the sentence in example 26.a is impossible. This phrase is always interpreted as referring to a prospective time sphere (i.e., as a future or as a future in the past). In order to express a non-future (present or past) progressive meaning by means of a periphrasis built on the entities *be* and *la*, one must employ a verbal noun (*boroo*) instead of the verbal stem (*bori* (26.b)).

- (26) a. A **be bori la**  
           he be run    to  
           ‘He is going to run / will run.’
- b. A be boroo    la  
           he be driving at  
           ‘He is driving.’

The data show that the *BE...LA* gram displays a broad range of values. It functions as a future tense (i.e. as a simple and straightforward expression of future actions and situations), being sometimes accompanied by subtle imperative and prohibitive undertones. It also commonly indicates the aim and intention, thus corresponding to the English form *be going to*. As for the aspectual load, the formation may introduce both perfective (punctual and entire) and imperfective (durative) future activities. It is also employed as a future in the past, additionally providing modal meanings of possibility, probability and past counterfactuality. The locution regularly appears in conditional periods. In protases, it expresses the intention of performing a given activity (contrasting with the idea of future anteriority and certain realization conveyed by the *TA* and *YE* forms). In apodoses, it expresses three different values. Namely, it denotes factual real events (i.e., future situations depending on the completion of certain conditions), counterfactual real activities, and counterfactual unreal situations. In temporal clauses headed by the conjunction *janniŋ*, the gram indicates past activities which occurred after other past events or future actions that will take place after other future events have occurred. In both cases, the formation offers modal shades of possibility and probability. In a few cases, the construction expresses future events which will have occurred before other future situations (future anteriority). Finally, the data show that the *BE...LA* gram is never employed with a non-future or non-prospective reference. Thus, it fails to function as a present progressive or present continuous.

The evidence clearly demonstrates that the gram’s semantic content greatly exceeds the sole idea of a simple futurity. First – as has already been noted by Macbrair (1842) – the evident future value is frequently accompanied by a nuance of intention or aim. Second, the *BE...LA* locution is extensively used as a future in the past category. Third, the construction conveys certain modal values, although usually

restricted to determined syntactic or semantic environments. Some future events directed to the second person can be interpreted as subtly imperative or prohibitive. In conditional apodoses, in temporal subordinated clauses or with the past temporal reference, the gram – besides connoting futurity – may denote the ideas of possibility, probability and, in particular, real and unreal counterfactuality. Fourth, the locution rarely offers future anterior readings. And fifth, the gram never shows a progressive or continuous present force. Having described all the senses conveyed by the *BE...LA* form, the following question arises: can we explain the meaning of the *BE...LA* formation as a coherent phenomenon? Is, for instance, the future value compatible with the sense of unreal counterfactuality? In order to respond to these, and other, questions, the following discussion offers a systematic theoretical analysis of the semantics of the *BE...LA* formation, emerging from a cognitive perspective.

### 3. Meaning of the *BE...LA* gram

**3.1 Meaning of a gram and its description.**<sup>6</sup> Characterizing the meaning of a verbal gram is far from an easy and straightforward tasks. Does a form have or can it even have an invariant meaning? How many senses does it have? How can we explain them, especially if they seem to be, to a degree, unrelated? Should a given formation be understood as an aspect, a tense or a mood? Does a verbal system constitute a system of binary oppositions?

First of all, as is defended by cognitive linguistics and cognitive science in general, the diversity of senses conveyed by a single form or, polysemy, is a regular phenomenon in the world’s languages (Evans & Green 2006:169). Grammatical entities are typically polysemous to an extent that they may easily provide senses which are judged as disparate or, at least, difficult to relate. This inherently polysemous nature of grams stems from the fact that language is fundamentally a contextual phenomenon. In line with a cognitive view of language, a concrete sense is the value of a form provided in a specific environment. Since no two contexts can be perfectly identical, no two senses are indistinguishable. Two contexts always

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<sup>6</sup> Due to a methodological character of this section, some fragments may overlap (although without being literally reproduced) with similar theoretical discussions offered by the author in other papers.

differ in some parameters, whether they are co-textual, pragmatic or even extra-linguistic. In some ways they may appear as identical; however, it is always possible to extend the scope of factors intervening in the context to the point that two formulae describing two – previously identical – environments will begin to diverge (Wagensberg 2007:60).

The impossibility of a perfect correspondence between two contexts (or two series describing a phenomenon) has been widely recognized in science. Real word systems of any kind are prototypically complex. They include an infinite number of constituents and an uncontrollable quantity of relations among such elements. There is no end to the complexity of realistic systems and hence it is impossible to determine a total set of conditions which define them. In fact, one cannot even determine the entire set of properties that specify the smallest fragment of real-world phenomena (Wagensberg 2007:56-56). Since physical magnitudes are real numbers and since our world's systems can be infinitively complex, there is no limit to a longitude of a given empirical series (Wagensberg 2007:56-57). When defining a natural series – due to the fact that it belongs to a complex system where the amount of constituents and interconnections is extremely high or *infinite* (Auyang 1998:344, Schneider & Sagan 2009:55) – scientists necessarily abbreviate (or approximate) that series, being, however, aware that it may be extended indefinitely up to the infinite (Wagensberg 2007:60, see also Smith 1998:115-177). In other words, by providing any scientific description, scholars generalize and determine the limits of precision, leaving certain elements outside the description (Auyang 1998:344).

It is, however, highly important to note that a form's polysemy is not random or accidental. One of the most fundamental claims of cognitive science establishes that diverse values which are carried by the same form must be related. In other words, relatedness of senses is a typical phenomenon in languages (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2007:140). This inevitable connection is necessitated by the fact that new senses are “created” by means of human universal cognitive mechanisms (e.g., metaphors or metonymy) which guarantee a conceptual link among numerous, even the most disparate, senses (Evans & Green 2006:352). In other words, since the spreading out of a form to new uses (i.e. the growth of its compatibility with certain contexts) is built on cognitively “natural” procedures, the evolution of one sense into another must follow determined possible paths of extension. These paths constitute channels that rationally link the most incongruent polysemous structures: in harmony



with possible lines of cognitive extension, they lead from one value to another. Furthermore, an expansion of a gram into new contexts, and hence a conceptual progression from one value to another necessarily entails a chronological arrangement: an original sense is a basis for a previously unavailable use in a novel context, and thus also for an extension to new sense. Consequently, the connection among components of a polysemous complex (among senses offered by a gram) is not only conceptual but also inherently diachronic. A given polysemy arises, grows, and fluctuates by following a determined historical process by expansion (new values are incorporated) or reduction (previously acquired values are lost).

Since grammatical formations are invariably polysemous, their meaning cannot be viewed as invariant. As mentioned before, at the ultimate fragmentation of reality (in the most microscopic view) there are as many senses as contexts and thus as uses – each use of a form is somehow distinct! In fact, not only does a gram fail to possess an invariant (understood as identical) meaning on the whole, but it also does not necessitate an invariant (i.e. constant) string in all of its values. Pasts are sometimes used as presents or futures, perfectives are used as imperfectives, indicatives are used as moods, etc. The traditional structuralist contrast between the inherent invariant meaning and its contextual realizations is replaced by a far more accurate distinction. This new view coordinates an empirical level analysis (where, employed in a specific place and time, a gram provides “experimental” data, viz. concrete atomic senses) with a system level analysis (where the gram’s total semantic potential is computed into a homogenous aggregate, a set-theoretic union of individual senses; cf. Dahl 2000a:14). This semantic potential equates the entire semantic space that comprises all the possible atomic values offered in concrete cases that empirically exist in specific environments. Moreover, since atomic senses are obviously influenced and determined by contextual factors (either linguistic or extra-linguistic), the meaning of a gram, i.e. its entire semantic potential, is likewise a contextual phenomenon (Evans and Green 2006: 352-53, 368 and Nikiforidou 2009: 17, 26).

Cognitive linguistics, respecting a form’s semantic diversity, context-dependency, and obligatory relatedness regarding the components of a polysemy, models the semantic potential of grammatical formations as a spatially ordered collection of specific senses or uses. In such a map, each value is conceptually related to another so that all of the senses form a network of interrelated elements (Evans & Green

2006: 331-33). However, since the extension of senses which are based upon human cognitive mechanisms necessarily entails a chronological spread, the connection among the components of a map is also historical. In this manner, cognitive maps typically reflect chronological growths of grams (Lawandowska-Tomaszczyk 2007:140). Tracing the historical development of the senses provided by a given formation, we may not only reconstruct the step-by-step conceptual extensions of meaning but, even more importantly, impose the order and logic of a given synchronically “measured” network. Put differently, since synchronic polysemies are tangible vestiges of conceptual extensions and thus of diachronic processes where certain conceptual developments (i.e. the spread of a form to novel contexts) have objectively taken place, one may use the form’s history in order to chain different values provided by it. Each of such senses corresponds to “specific” time and place where a certain sense was expanded to another. This means that synchronic inventory of values or uses may be arranged in a manner that would mirror a realistic evolution.

Unfortunately, in various cases, it is impossible to posit a connection of elements of a polysemous space by employing direct diachronic evidence because such historical data fail to exist. However, although we cannot without doubt establish the historical linkage – and thus propose a conceptual organization of a network, by means of tracing the form’s history – the chaining of components of a semantic grid may be posited indirectly by using typological principles. Namely, we can employ typological evolutionary universals or common tendencies according to which grams develop (i.e. ‘paths’) as matrices for extensions of meaning.

**3.2 Paths as matrices of semantic networks.** As far as the verbal system is concerned, paths (typological-diachronic rules or tendencies) are understood as models of exemplary developmental scenarios that apply to determined types of formations. *Grosso modo*, paths determine where certain types of aspects, tenses and moods come from, how they evolve and, finally, how they expire (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994 and Dahl 2000b). Put differently, they constitute idealized representations of the grammatical life of verbal formations showing – with an inevitable margin of error – the order in which grams incorporate and/or lose new senses, expanding and reducing their polysemy. Generally speaking, such clines specify the most probable growth of a given polysemous compound and thus, predict

the most probable trajectory of semantic extensions that a particular class of grams can undergo.

When employing these trajectories as matrices – which to a degree may be understood as universal (because the most likely) evolutionary patterns – one may hypothesize a highly probable (because typologically plausible and cognitively justifiable) linkage of components of a semantic network, imposing in this manner an order (both diachronic and conceptual) in a synchronic semantic potential of a form. We reinterpret the synchronic inventory of uses, offered by a gram at a precise historical moment, as corresponding to stages of a universal developmental scenario. Consequently, a form’s semantic space – its entire polysemy, which is understood as a set-theoretic union of concrete individual senses – is structured and represented as a portion of a path or as an aggregate of various clines (cf. Van der Auwera & Gast 2011: 186-88, 281). Thus, in conformity with the relatedness principle, this dynamic path-like chaining enables us to re-connect all the components of a grid, even the most dissimilar ones. As a result, the semantics of a formation can be explained as a homogenous, consistent and holistic phenomenon.

In order to explain the synchronic potential of the *BE...LA* gram three dynamic phenomena must be discussed in more detail: future path, modal contamination path and diachronic link between the future or future perfect, on the one hand, and real and unreal counterfactuality on the other.

### *Future path*

Future tenses have four typologically plausible sources, according to Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994. First, various futures start their grammatical life in explicit agent-oriented modal expressions that convey the sense of desire or willingness, attempt, obligation and ability. Second, just as common are futures that sprout from periphrases built on movement verbs (especially, on predicates with the meaning ‘come’ or ‘go’). Third, future expressions arise from analytical expressions that are formed with temporal adverbs. And finally fourth, future tenses constitute highly advanced version of original imperfectives and presents.

All modally based future tenses can be divided into four classes that reflect four semantic ages of the futurity. The first group – which corresponds to the initial phase

in the life of futures – includes future constructions that convey agent-oriented modal values such as desire, intension, obligation and ability. The second stage is exemplified by futures that are accompanied by the meaning of possibility and intention. The third type comprises formations with simple future as their unique or, at least, most prototypical use (future proper tense). Finally, there are futures that are restricted to subordinate clauses, epistemic and speaker-oriented senses such as the imperative. The entire path of future grams may thus be schematized in the following manner:

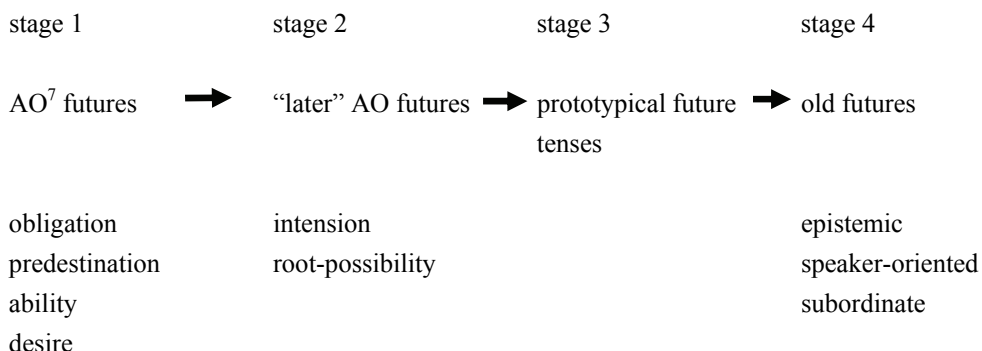


Figure 1: General future path (adapted from Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994)

It is evident that the central function of all future grams (either derived from explicitly modal formations or having originated in other sources) is the intention or the prediction. Consequently, future tenses or future forms are less exclusively a temporal category, but more “resembling agent-oriented and epistemic modality, with important temporal implications” (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994:280). Thus, the concept of futurity necessarily implies uncertainty, possibility and probability (Auyang 1998). This signifies that modal shades of meaning almost always accompany future grams during their entire grammatical life. Even at stages where a given formation has been grammaticalized as a central expression of futurity and in its most typical uses expresses simple future statements (since such statements refer to a world that has not been materialized yet,) their validity is only probable or possible.

<sup>7</sup> “AO” is an abbreviation for ‘agent-oriented’.

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that futures do differ in the intensity of such modal components. For instance, Germanic futures (as in Icelandic or Scandinavian languages, e.g. *ég skal gera* ‘I will/shall do’, *ég mun gera* ‘I will/may do’ or *ég ætla að gera* ‘I am going/I intend to do’) are strongly modally laden. Quite the contrary, the Polish future *zrobię* ‘I will do’ fails to provide explicit or overt modal nuances. In order to make such modal readings patent, one must employ specific adverbs.

Among various modally-based future clines, one may identify a trajectory which applies to expressions that are built on the verb ‘be’, e.g. *He is to come*. At the beginning of their grammatical life, such constructions commonly provide either a strong sense of predestination or the value of obligation. Subsequently, the predestination (as well as the obligation) shades of meaning give rise to the sense of intention and finally to the properly future reading which, in turn, may entail further extensions in accordance with the general future path, outlined above (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994:262-263). This ‘predestination path’ – exemplified by the Latin future in *-b-* or the Scandinavian futures with the verb *bliva* – may be schematically represented as follows:

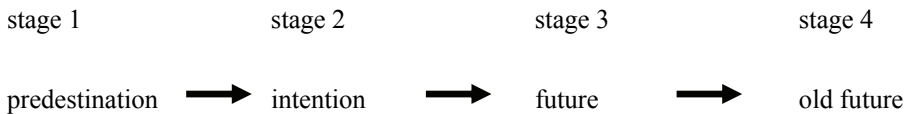


Figure 2: Future predestination path of *be*-futures (adapted from Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994)

### *Modal contamination path*

As explained, future grams are typically accompanied by various modal shades of meaning. The character and intensity of such modal strings depend on a particular origin of a future gram as well as on its advancement on the path (cf. Figure 1, above). However, besides being prompted by the explicitly modal inputs from which certain futures arise (especially by periphrases with the value of ability, obligation, desire, intention and predestination; Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994:240), some

modal values provided by future grams may also be “genetically external” to the verbal form itself. In such cases, they have their roots in clearly modal contextual or pragmatic factors, e.g. overt lexemes or particles and determined syntactic contexts (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994: 26, 253-326).

This phenomenon concords with the fact that modality – besides being a result of properly modal clines (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994:240-241) – can derive from originally indicative grams. According to this evolutionary principle, because of their frequent use in explicitly modal milieus, indicative inputs gradually develop into grammatical moods. More specifically, due to their regular use in modal environments, non-modal formations progressively assume the meaning of the context as their own to the degree where initially indicative locutions become entirely identified with a modal value generated by their context. This entire process of transforming indicatives into moods has been referred to as a ‘modal contamination’ (Andrason 2011b:6-8) – a subtype of the common process of ‘conventionalization of implicature’ (Dahl 1985:11 and Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994:25-26, 296), ‘context-induced reinterpretation’ (Heine, Claudi & Hünemeyer 1991:71-72), or ‘semanticization’ (Hopper & Traugott, 2003:82). As far as the syntactic environments are concerned, the most prototypical milieus for a possible contamination are conditional periods, final/purpose clauses and subordinated clauses introduced by verbs ‘want’, ‘order’, ‘desire’ (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994:230-236).

It shall be noted that during the modal contamination, present indicatives and future tenses most commonly acquire senses of real factual modality (e.g., present subjunctive), past tenses generate the value of counterfactual real modality, and pluperfects yield new extensions of counterfactual unreal modality (cf. the modalization of the French present, imperfective past and pluperfect in conditional protases (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994: 235). Since future grams are closely tied to the concept of modality, they almost naturally lend themselves for modal contamination. This may in turn strengthen the modal component in the semantics of future grams.

*“Futures” and real and unreal counterfactuality*

Futures are also dynamically (both conceptually and historically) linked to present (real) and past (unreal) conditionals. As far as present or real conditional categories are concerned, such formations commonly derive from grams developing along a future path whose original reference time is not present (as is the case of locutions that evolve into future tenses) but past. This means that a future path may originate in agentive prospective periphrases located in the past temporal frame (e.g. *j’allais faire* vs. *je vais faire* in French). During the development of such expressions, the original agent-oriented modal meaning is extended into the value of a future-in-the-past or prospective past, and subsequently into modal sense of counterfactual real possibility, probability or eventuality, thus yielding prototypical conditional formations (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994:235). This evolution may be illustrated by the Spanish conditional *escribiría* ‘I would write’ that derives from a Latin agent-oriented expression *scribere habebam* lit. ‘I had to write’ (cf. the future *escribirá* ‘I will write’ that derives from the same periphrasis with the auxiliary verb in the present *scribere habeo* ‘I have to write’). The English conditional locution *I would do* shows an analogical origin, stemming from an older agent-oriented desiderative periphrasis built on the Germanic verb *\*wiljan* ‘to want’ employed in the past tense (cf. the Icelandic *ég vildi skrifa* ‘I wanted to write’). The future *I will write* originated in an equivalent expression but uses the verb *\*wiljan* in the present (cf. the Icelandic *Ég vil skrifa* ‘I want to write’).

Just as futures are related to conditionals (the former derive from present agent-oriented expressions, while the latter stem from analogical past constructions), future perfects are connected to “past” conditionals. From a typological perspective, both types of locutions are combinations (at least from a diachronic perspective) of a future and perfect morphologies. In addition, conditionals employ morphological marking which is typical for past categories. More specifically, while perfect futures tend to derive from agent-oriented present perfect locutions, “past” conditionals quite regularly stem from agent-oriented past perfect formations. The two categories employ similar structures which are differentiated solely by the fact the former uses an inflected verb (auxiliary) in the present tense, while the other selects a verb in the past tense. For examples, the Spanish future perfect *habrá escrito* ‘I will have sung’

reflects the Latin sequence *habere habeo scriptum* (lit. ‘I have to have written’ > Sp. ‘I will have written’. The Spanish past conditional *habría escrito* ‘he would have written’ differs from the future perfect in the fact that, this time, the form also employs features used in order to compose past tenses. Thus, the Spanish past conditional copies the structure of the future perfect with the distinction that in the past conditional locution, the verb *haber* ‘have’ stands in the conditional tense (*habría*) instead of being employed in the simple future (*habrá*). As has already been explained, the conditional form itself (*habría*) diachronically derives from a Latin future-in-the-past expression or, in other words, a “past” variety of the simple future (*habrá*). This means that the past conditional form *habría escrito* is a descent of the Latin agent-oriented past perfect locution *habere habebam scriptum* (lit. Lat. ‘I had to have written’; cf. Hopper & Traugott 2003: 31 and 52-55).<sup>8</sup> The evolution of conditional (a ‘conditional path’) may be outlined in the following manner:

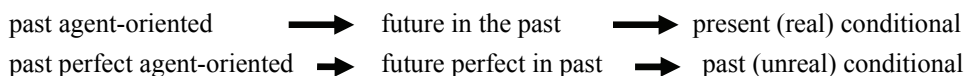


Figure 3: Conditional path

**3.3 Semantic map of the *BE...LA* gram.** Following the principles of the cognitive understanding of verbal meaning, we shall now posit a map of the semantics of the *BE...LA* gram by employing the evolutionary scenarios outlined in section 3.2 above.

First, the values of an intentional future (later agent-oriented future), “simple” (both perfective and imperfective) future (the “maximal” temporal value of futures) as well as imperative-prohibitive future (the speaker-oriented future) closely match a general future path. Since the formation seems to copy the structure of *be*-futures and since it provides intentional value (failing, on the other hand, to convey the sense of obligation or ability/capacity), one may argue that we are dealing with a predestination sub-cline. Put differently, the morphosyntactic characteristics of the gram and its understanding as an old periphrasis which is compounded with the predicator *be* (an equivalent to the *be*-type verbs) and the infinitival marker *la* (an earlier postposition) – i.e. *m be a ke la* lit. ‘I am to do (it)’ as well as the semantic

<sup>8</sup> Analogical developments may be found in English (*I would have done*), Icelandic and other Scandinavian languages (*Ég mundi hafa gert*) or in Polish (*był by napisał*).



properties (e.g. intentional meaning) suggest that the gram has followed the predestination path.

This proposal may indirectly be supported by certain properties displayed by the variety of English employed in Basse. In “Basse English” speakers tend to substitute the future tenses with *will* or *shall* by a predestination expression *be to* (*I am to come tomorrow*). This usage could constitute a typological parallel with the *BE...LA* “future”. In other words, Mandinkas from Basse would employ a predestination future expression in English in analogy with the formation available in their mother tongue. Such a phenomenon is typical for second-language speakers or users of pidgin languages. On the other hand, it should be observed that a predestination sense fails to occur in *BE...LA* gram in Basse Mandinka.

It should be noted that the *BE...LA* functioning as a general future is also able to provide a future perfect sense – this corresponds to a common extension of general futures to future perfect uses. This means that the behaviour of the *BE...LA* is not typologically odd. Quite the contrary, in various languages, general future tenses are employed both in the simple future and future perfect function (cf. in Polish *napiszę* ‘I will (have) written’).

The present (real) conditional senses (possibility, probability and eventuality) may be explained as having arisen due to the conditional path. Since the predicator *be* in Basse Mandinka is used both in a present and past time frame, the *BE...LA* predestination periphrasis could have been employed with a past reference, giving rise to the future-in-past value and next real counterfactual reading (present conditional). In a similar manner, the compatibility with the future perfect domain, would justify the formation of a past (unreal) conditional sense. Since the *BE...LA* gram may convey the meaning of a future perfect and since the predicator *be* may be used in the past temporal sphere, the locution typologically approximates past perfect agent-oriented modal expressions (in our case, a predestination periphrasis) that frequently evolve into past conditionals. Modal readings are particularly intense in conditional apodoses where the *BE...LA* gram introduces factual real, counterfactual real and counterfactual unreal situations and activities. This intensity would stem from a modal contamination that is imposed by the explicit modal environment. In this manner, the modal context (contextual periods) would strengthen modal strings of meaning available on the future (real factual) and conditional (counterfactual real

and unreal) clines. The entire semantic map of the *BE...LA* formation may be designed in the following – certainly idealized and approximating – manner:

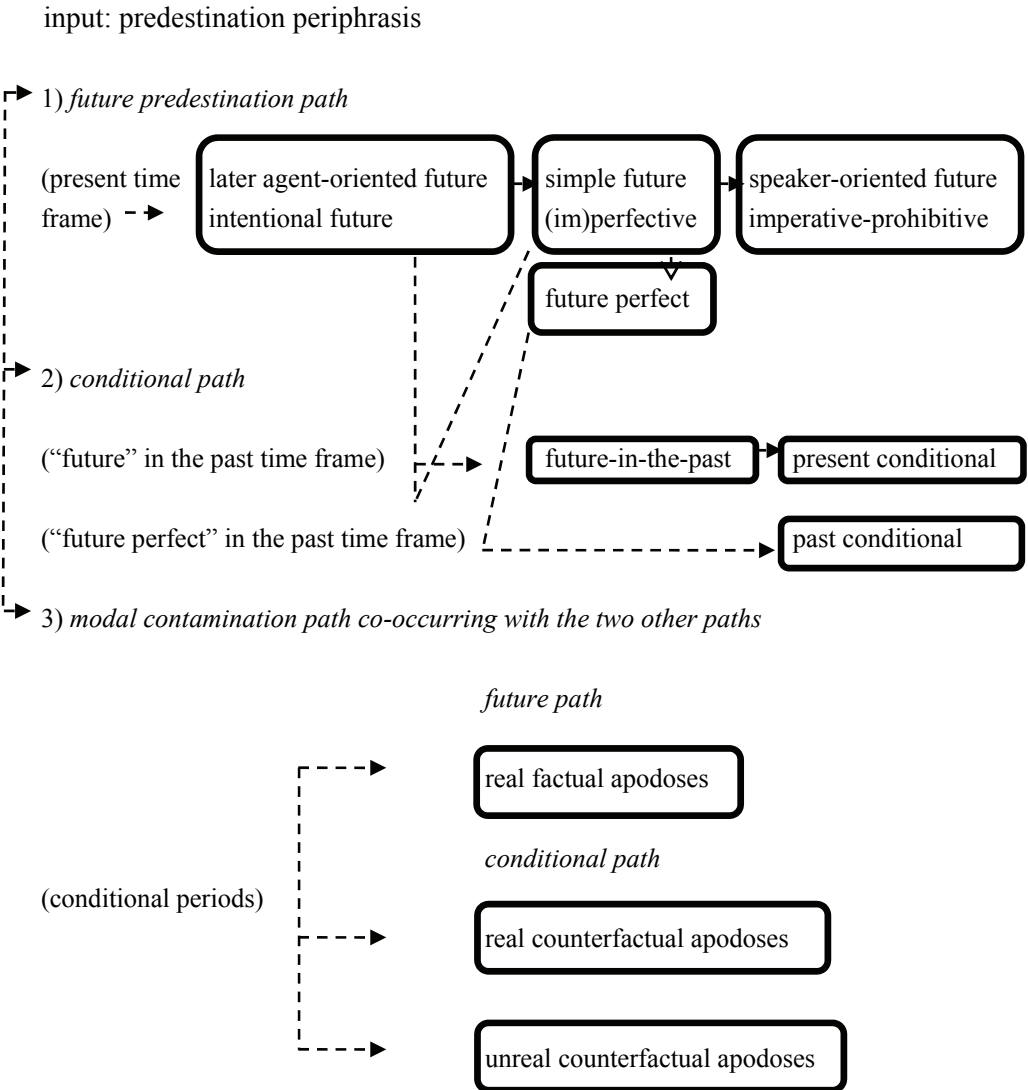


Figure 4: The semantic network of the *BE...LA* gram in Basse Mandinka

#### **4. Conclusion**

Our study has provided a detailed analysis of the semantic content of the *BE...LA* gram in a variety of Gambian Mandinka spoken in Basse. We have demonstrated that the meaning of the formation corresponds to a set of various and specific temporal, aspectual and modal senses. In this manner, we have offered a description of the inventory of synchronic values conveyed by the gram. Furthermore, we have shown that the multifaceted semantic potential of the *BE...LA* form can be understood as a rational and coherent whole by employing three typologically plausible paths as matrices for a conceptual chaining: future predestination and conditional clines with all their extensions as well as a concurrent modal contamination cline.

We are strongly convinced that our results, limited to the Basse region, may be extended to the entire Gambian territory. In other words, given the grammatical proximity of Standard Mandinka and its variety employed in Basse, we may tentatively propose that the semantic content of the *BE...LA* gram in the normalized literary language should be identical to that which is displayed by its homologue in Basse Mandinka. Although this statement appears plausible, it must be carefully analyzed and supported by substantial evidence. The verification of that proposition will constitute one of the inevitable research activities conducted by the author in the near future.

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