The Structure of Bambara[1]
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1   Introduction
The focus in this talk will be on the verb. This will be looked at from three angles:
- TAM elements
- copula forms
- derivational suffixes

2   Some general notes on the language
- Bambara is a member of the Mande language family in West Africa (Niger-Congo phylum)
- it is – besides Swahili, Hausa and Fula – one of the most important languages in Africa with regard to distribution and the number of speakers
- it is spoken in Mali, Ivory Coast, Upper Guinea, in the western part of Burkina Faso and in eastern Senegal
- it is a tone language (high / low)
- Bambara has only one pronominal paradigm:

singular		emph.	plural		emph.
1	ń	né	1	ánw / án	
2	ĭ	é	2	áw / á	
3	à	àle	3	ù	òlu

- it is highly isolating and has a very strict word order:

Subject	AUX / TAM	Object	Verb	...

3 TAM elements in Bambara

3.1 An overview of the TAM markers in Bambara[2]

	Simple Present		Present Progressive		Simple Past		Perfect Tense		Past Perfect		Future ("secure")		Future ("insecure")	
	tr.	intr.	tr.	intr.	tr.	intr.	tr.	intr.	tr.	intr.	tr.	intr.	tr.	intr.
aff.	bE	bE	bE ka	bE ka	tun bE	tun bE	ye	**-ra (-na, -la)**	tun ye	**tun -ra (-na, -la)**	na	na	bena	bena
neg.	tE	tE	tE ka	tE ka	tun tE	tun tE	ma	ma	tun ma	tun ma	tena	tena	tena	tena
aff.			bE … la/na	bE … la/na										
neg.			tE … la/na	tE … la/na										

3.1.1 (Simple) Present
a) Transitive verbs

(1)a. Sanu **bE** baara k**E**
Sanu PRES.AFF work do
'Sanu works.'

   b. Sanu **tE** baara k**E**
Sanu PRES.NEG work do
'Sanu does not work.'

b) Intransitive verbs

(2)a. An **bE** taa sugu la.
1PL PRES.AFF go market POSTPOS
"We go to the market."

   b. An **tE** taa sugu la.
1PL PRES.NEG go market POSTPOS
"We do not go to the market."

c) Reflexive verbs

(3)a. n **bE** n ko.
I PRES.AFF PRO.REFL wash
'I wash myself."

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[2] This overview is based on the *Bamankan Learner's Reference Grammar* (Fofarna and Traoré). Changes in the interlinear translation – as for example with regard to the modification of the abbreviation PRED – are my own.

b. n   **tE**   n   ko.
    I   PRES.NEG   PRO.REFL   wash
    'I do not wash myself."

The third person singular constitutes an exception, as the "reflexive pronoun" here is not *a* – as one would expect – but *i*.

c. a   **bE**   i   ko.
    She/he PRES.AFF   PRO.REFL   wash
    'She washes herself.' / 'He washes himself.'

3.1.2 Present Progressive
a) Transitive verbs
(4)a.   N   bE   **ka**   liburu   kalan.
        1SG   PRES.AFF   **PROG**   book   read
        'I am reading the book.'

   b.   N   tE   **ka**   liburu   kalan.
        1SG   PRES.NEG   **PROG**   book   read
        'I am not reading the book.'

(5)a.   U   **bE**   libur**u-k**alan   **na**.
        3PL   PRES.AFF   book   read.**PROG**   POSTPOS
        'They are reading the book.'

   b.   U   **tE**   libur**u-k**alan   **na**.
        3PL   PRES.NEG   book   read.**PROG**   POSTPOS
        'They are not reading the book.'

b) Intransitive verbs
(6)a.   Birama   **bE**   **ka**   taa   so.
        Birama   PRES.AFF   PROG   go   home
        'Birama is going home.'

   b.   Birama**tE**   **ka**   taa   so.
        BiramaPRES.NEG   PROG   go   home
        'Birama is not going home.'

(7)a.   A   **bE**   yaala   **la**.
        3SG   PRES.AFF   take a walk   POSTPOS
        'She is taking a walk.'

   b.   A   **tE**   yaala   **la**.
        3SG   PRES.NEG   take a walk   POSTPOS
        'She is not taking a walk.'

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2.1.3 Simple Past
a) Transitive verbs

(8)a. N **tun** **bE** liburu kalan.
1SG PAST PRES.AFF book read
'I was reading the book.' / 'I used to read the book.'

b. N **tun** **tE** liburu kalan.
1SG PAST PRES.NEG book read
'I was not reading the book.'

b) Intransitive verbs

(9)a. Musa **tun** **bE** taa.
Musa PAST PRES.AFF go
'Musa was going.' / 'Musa used to go.'

b. Musa **tun** **tE** taa.
Musa PAST PRES.NEG go
'Musa was not going.'

3.1.4 Perfect Tense
a) Transitive verbs

(10)a. Birama **ye** liburu kalan.
Birama PERF.AFF book read
'Birama has read the book.'

b. Birama **ma** liburu kalan.
Birama PERF.NEG book read
'Birama has not read the book.'

b) Intransitive verbs

(11)a. Fali sa-**ra**
donkey die-PERF.AFF
'The donkey has died.'

b. Fali **ma** sa.
donkey PERF.NEG die
'The donkey has not died.'

(12)a. Birama segin-**na**
Birama return-PERF.AFF
'Birama has returned.'

b. Birama **ma** segin.
Birama PERF.NEG return
'Birama has not returned.'

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(13)a. Tabali kari-**la**
        table   break-PERF.AFF
        'The table has broken.'

   b.   Tabali   **ma**   kari.
        table   PERF.NEG   break
        'The table has not broken.'

3.1.5 Past Perfect
a) Transitive verbs
(14)a. Umu **tun**   **ye**   malo   tobi.
        Umu   PAST   PERF.AFF   rice   cook
        'Umu had cooked rice.'

   b.   Umu **tun**   **ma**   malo   tobi.
        Umu   PAST   PERF.NEG   rice   cook
        'Umu had not cooked rice.'

b) Intransitive verbs
(15)a. Anw   **tun**   taa-**ra**   so.
        1PL   PAST   go-PERF.AFF   home
        'We had gone home.'

   b.   Anw   **tun** **ma**   taa   so.
        1PL   PAST   PERF.NEG   go   home
        'We had not gone home.'

3.1.6 Future Tense
a) Transitive verbs
(16)a. Birama   **na**   mobili   ko.
        Birama   NEAR.FUT   car   wash
        'Birama is going to wash the car.'

   b.   Birama   **tena**   mobili   ko.
        Birama   FUT.NEG   car   wash
        'Birama will not wash the car.'

(17)a. Muso **bena**   den   s0r0.
        Muso DIST.FUT   baby   have
        'The woman will have a baby.'

   b.   Muso **tena**   den   s0r0.
        Muso FUT.NEG   baby   have
        'The woman will not have a baby.'

b) Intransitive verbs

(18)a. Umu **na**   taa   market la.
        Umu NEAR.FUT   go   market POSTPOS
        'Umu is going to the market.'

   b.   Umu **tena**   taa   market la.
        Umu FUT.NEG go   market POSTPOS
        'Umu is not going to the market.'

(19)a. Umu **bena**   taa   market la.
        Umu DIST.FUT   go   market POSTPOS
        'Umu will go to the market.'

   b.   Umu **tena**   taa   market la.
        Umu FUT.NEG go   market POSTPOS
        'Umu is not going to the market.'

4   Copula forms in Bambara[3]

4.1   *don*

don is a presentative element and corresponds to English *be*. It expresses existential being.

4.1.1 Present

(20)a. ne   **don**   b.   ne   tE.
        1SG   COP   1SG   COP.NEG
        'It's me.'   'It is not me.'

(21)a. ce-w   **don**   b.   ce-w   tE.
        man-PL   COP   man-PL   COP.NEG
        "They are men.'   'They are not men.'

4.1.2 Simple Past

(22)a. Misi **tun** **don**.   b.   Misi   **tun** **tE**.
        cow   PAST   COP   cow   PAST   COP.NEG
        'It was a/the cow.'   'It wasn't a/the cow.'

4.2   *bE*

This construction expresses and idea or action.

4.2.1 Present

(23)a. Tile **bE**.   b. Tile   **tE**.
        sun   COP   sun   COP.NEG
        'It is sunny.'   'It is not sunny.'

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[3] In some sources the copula forms are labeled as PRED. As I find this term quite misleading, I use COP throughout this section.

4.2.2 Simple Past

(24)a.   Funteni   **tun**   **bE**.
         heat   PAST   COP
         'It was hot.'

    b.   Funteni   **tun**   **tE**.
         heat   PAST   COP.NEG
         'It was not hot.'

4.3   *ye….ye*

The construction with *ye … ye*, in which the noun is surrounded by the two particles, expresses subject focus by which the subject is identified. In negative contexts the first realization of *ye* is replaced by *tE.*

4.3.1 Present

(25)a.   Nin   **ye**   wulu   **ye**.
         this COP   dog   COP
         'This is a dog.'

    b.   Nin   **tE**   wulu   **ye**.
         this COP.NEG   dog   COP
         'This is not a dog.'

4.3.2 Simple Past

(26)a.   Nin   **tun**   **ye**   wulu   **ye**.
         this PAST   COP   dog   COP
         'This was a dog.'

    b.   Nin   **tun**   **tE**   wulu   **ye**.
         this PAST   COP.NEG   dog   COP
         'This was a dog.'

4.4   *ka*

ka and its negative correspondent, *man*, link noun and adjective. However, they cannot be used with all adjectives.

4.4.1 Present

(27)a.   N   **ka**   yan.   b.   N   **man**   yan.
         1SG   COP   tall   1SG   COP.NEG   tall
         'I am tall.'   'I am not tall.'

4.4.2 Simple Past

(28)a.   cE   **tun**   **ka**   surun.   b.   cE   **tun**   **man**   surun.
         man   PAST   COP   short   man   PAST   COP   short
         'The man was short.'   'The man was short.'

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5 Verbal Derivation

❖ **-la** (-**na** after nasal) **/-baga** / **-baa**: **Nomina Agentis / Noun Agent**
  ⇨ productive
    -**la** (-**na**) can only be suffixed to transitive verbs with incorporated objects that precede the verbal part within the agent noun. This derivation is used to describe a person with regard to her/his usual and characteristic actions.

-la / -na (Kastenholz 1998):

kà móbili bòli	'to drive a car'	=>	móbili-boli-la	'driver'
kà sEnE kE	'to work on the field'	=>	sEnE-kE-la	'farmer'
kà m0g0 fàga	'to kill a person'	=>	m0g0-faga-la	'killer'

-baga (*The New Bambara Grammar*):

kà sé	'to achieve'	=>	sé-baga	'champion'
kà à kàlan	'to read something'	=>	kàlan-baga	'reader of'
kà tága	'to go away'	=>	tága-baga	'someone who goes away'

-baa (*The New Bambara Grammar*):

kisi	'to save'	=>	Kisi-baa	'Savior'
bange	'to bring forth'	=>	bange-baa	'parent'
dila	'to make'	=>	dila-baa	'maker'

Agent nouns can – as already mentioned – be used in relative-like constructions:

Ne	tè[4]	a	dila-baa	dòn.
1SG	PRES.NEG	3SG	maker	know

'I don't know who made it.'

❖ **-lan** (-**na(n)** after a nasal vowel or consonant):
  Instruments in the broadest sense
  ⇨ highly productive, can be suffixed to all verbs
  ⇨ very often lexicalized and part of the lexicon

Examples (Kastenholz 1998):

sìgi	'sit'	=>	sìgi-lan	'chair'
dátugu	'to cover'	=>	dátugu-lan	'lid'
bàmu	'to carry a child on the back'	=>	bàmu-nan	'sling'

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[4] I did not change tone or vowel quality in these examples, but present them in the way in which they occur in the original sources.

❖ *-li* (*-ni*): **Nomina Actiones / Verbal Nouns**

Examples (Kastenholz 1998):

jìra	'show something'	=>	jìra-li	'the showing'
dúmu	'eat'	=>	dúmu-ni	'the eating'
wúli	'get up'	=>	wúli-li	'the getting up'

The derivations with *-li* can be combined with the postpositions *lá* (*ná, rá..*) and *kàn* to form a kind of progressive in nominal clauses.

Examples (Kastenholz 1998, interlinearization my own):

ń	bE	dúmu-ni	ná
1SG	PRES.AFF	eat-VN	POSTPOS:at / with

'I am eating.'
lit.: 'I am at the eating.'

à	bE	sEbEn-ni	kàn
3SG	PRES.AFF	write-VN	POSTPOS:at / with

'She / He is writing.'
lit.: 'She / He is at the writing.'

❖ *-len* (*-nen* after nasal): **Result of an action / Past Participle (passive)**
Examples (Kastenholz 1998):

nà (intr.)	'come'	=>	nà-nen	'come'
bìn (intr.)	'fall'	=>	bìn-nen	'fallen'
sègin (intr.)	'come back'	=>	sègin-nen	'come back'
d0n (tr.)	'know'	=>	d0n-nen	'known'

The past participle can be used as adjective. It follows the noun, and plural is either marked on the noun or on the participle.

Examples (Kastenholz 1998, interlinearizations are my own):

gán	kò-len
ocra	wash-PPP

'washed ocra '

à	yé	gán	kò-len	kE	dàga	k0n0
3SG	PERF.AFF	ocra	wash-PPP	put	pot	POSTPOS:in

'She put washed ocra into the pot.'

bà	sìri-len-w
goat	tie-PPP-PL

'tied goats'

bá-w	sìri-len	bE	bǐn	Òìmi	(nyìmi)
goat-PL	tie-PPP	PRES.AFF	grass	chew	

'The tied goats chew grass.'

The past participle can also be used in a predicative way. Then it forms the predicate together with the following TAM marker.

Examples (Kastenholz 1998, interlinearization my own):

kú   túru-len   bE
yams   plant-PPP   PRES.AFF
'The yams is planted.'

bà-w   sìri-len   tE   túgun
goat-PL   tie-PPP   PRES.NEG   anymore
'The goats are not tied anymore.'

mùso-w   sìgi-len   tùn   bE   só   k0n0
woman-PL   sit-PPP   PAST   PRES.AFF   house   POSTPOS: in
'The women sat in the house.'

The past participle can also be used to express a temporal sequence.

tìle   bìn-nen,   Ncí   wúli-la
sun   fall-PPP   Ncí   get up-PERF.AFF
'When the sun had fallen, Nci got up.'

The New Bambara Grammar gives an example of a past participle in a relative context (interlinearizations are my own):

O   mògò   sigi-len   na-na   yan   kunun.
DEM.PROX   person sit-PPP   come-PERF.AFF here yesterday
'This person who is seated came here yesterday.'

❖ *-t0.* **Expression of an action during its occurrence / Present Participle**
  This suffix is used to form the present participle of transitive and intransitive verbs. With transitive verbs the reading is passive. These participles follow the noun and have adjectival function. The plural is marked on the noun or on   another attribute, but not on the participle.

Examples (Kastenholz 1998):
sé   'reach '   =>   sé-t0   'reaching'
sègin   'come back'   =>   sègin-t0   'coming back'
túru   'to plant'   =>   túru-t0 'being planted'

According to Kastenholz these participles are most often used as sentence-   initial complement and express simultaneity ('when', 'while' etc.).

sán   nà-t0,   m0g0   sí   má   yé
rain   come-PPA   person   not at all   none   see
'When / While it rained no person was seen.'

The following examples from *The New Bambara Grammar* illustrate further usage of the present participle (interlinearizations are my own.)

<u>predicative</u>:

I	taa-tò	don	min?
2SG	go-PPA	COP	where

'Where are you going?'

Ne	tun	taa-tò	tè	lakòli	la	wa?
1SG	PAST	go-PPA	PRES.NEG	school	POSTPOS:in	INT.PART

'Was I not going to school?'

<u>modifying</u>:

Jiri	bi-tò	ye	cè	faga.
tree	fall-PPA	COP	man	kill

'The falling tree kills a man.'

<u>instead of a relative clause</u>:

O	cè	na-tò	ye	ne	fa	ye.
DEM.DIST	man	come-PPA	COP	POSS.PRO.1SG	father	COP

'That man coming is my father.' / 'That man who is coming is my father.'

<u>as complement</u>:

A	ma	sa	don-tò	ye	wo	kònò.
3SG	PERF.NEG	snake	enter-PPA	see	hole	POSTPOS:in

'He did not see the snake entering into the hole.'

<u>with the copula *don*</u>:

A	na-tò	don.
3SG	come-PPA	COP

'He is coming.'

❖ *-ta*: **Anticipation of an action / Potential / Anticipatory Participle**
The suffix *-ta* can only be combined with transitive verbs to form the so-called Anticipatory Participle. *The New Bambara Grammar* describes this form as "adjective of quality" and compares it to the English forms ending in *-ible* und *-able*.

ye	'to see'	=>	ye-ta	'visible'
sa	'to die'	=>	sa-ta	'mortal'
mèn	'to endure, to last'	=>	mèn-ta	'durable'

❖ *-bali*
Another verbal suffix mentioned in *The New Bambara Grammar* is *-bali*.
It is an 'adjective or noun expressing the opposite of the quality indicated in the Verb (English form *un-*, *in-*)'.

Examples (Ebermann 1986)

ka .. ye 'to see something'   =>   fèn ye-bali   'invisible thing'
ka ban   'to come to an end,   =>   fèn ban-bali   'eternal thing'
                to stop'

In addition to these (and other) derivational suffixes, tonal derivation is another means of forming new words in Bambara.

6   Summary

In this talk I illustrated the strategies of a highly isolating language to express forms – in this case verbal forms and actions – in the absence of rich morphology. For me personally this study was and is very interesting, as it is a good means to overcome stereotypical views on different kinds of languages, on the concept of "simplicity" as well as ability.

Abbreviations

COP	copula
COP.NEG	negated copula
DEM.DIST	distal demonstrative
DEM.PROX	proximal demonstrative
DIST.FUT	distant future
FUT.NEG	negated future
INT.PART	particle marking a clause as a question
NEAR FUT	near future
PAST	past
1/2/3SG / PL	first, second and third person singular / plural
POSS.PRO	possessive pronoun
POSTPOS	postposition
PA	anticipatory participle
PERF.AFF	perfect affirmative
PERF.NEG	perfect negative
PPA	present participle
PPP	past participle
PREP	preposition
PRES.AFF	present affirmative
PRES.NEG	present negative
PRO.REFL	reflexive pronoun
PROG	progressive
VN	verbal noun

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