



# MANDING DEFAULT DETERMINERS: IS DEFINITENESS A GRAMMATICAL FEATURE IN MARKA?

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When can you say that a language has definite articles?

- A. As soon as it has **a marker that can signal** familiarity, uniqueness or any other notion that has been subsumed under definiteness
- B. Only when definiteness is **a grammatical category** in the language, i.e. when every nominal expression is obligatorily either grammatically definite or not



In **how many ways** is a simple English utterance like (3) **ambiguous?**

(1) Giorgia gave a great talk.



## WHAT IS A GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY?

“Thus the true difference between languages is not in what **may or may not** be expressed but in what **must or must not** be conveyed by the speakers.”

Jakobson 1959:492 “Boas' view of grammatical meaning”



“The notion of **grammatical meaning** is best defined via the notion of **obligatoriness**: a meaning is grammatical in a given language if the speaker cannot choose to leave it unexpressed. Strictly speaking, of course, it is not the meaning itself which is grammatical but a **set of mutually exclusive meanings**, a **grammatical category**, to which that meaning belongs (cf. Plungian 2000:107).” (Idiatov 2008:155)

- obligatoriness necessarily implies **paradigmaticity** and **equipollent** oppositions
- A given meaning is grammatical **only with respect to a particular linguistic system**. It cannot be grammatical a priori, universally.

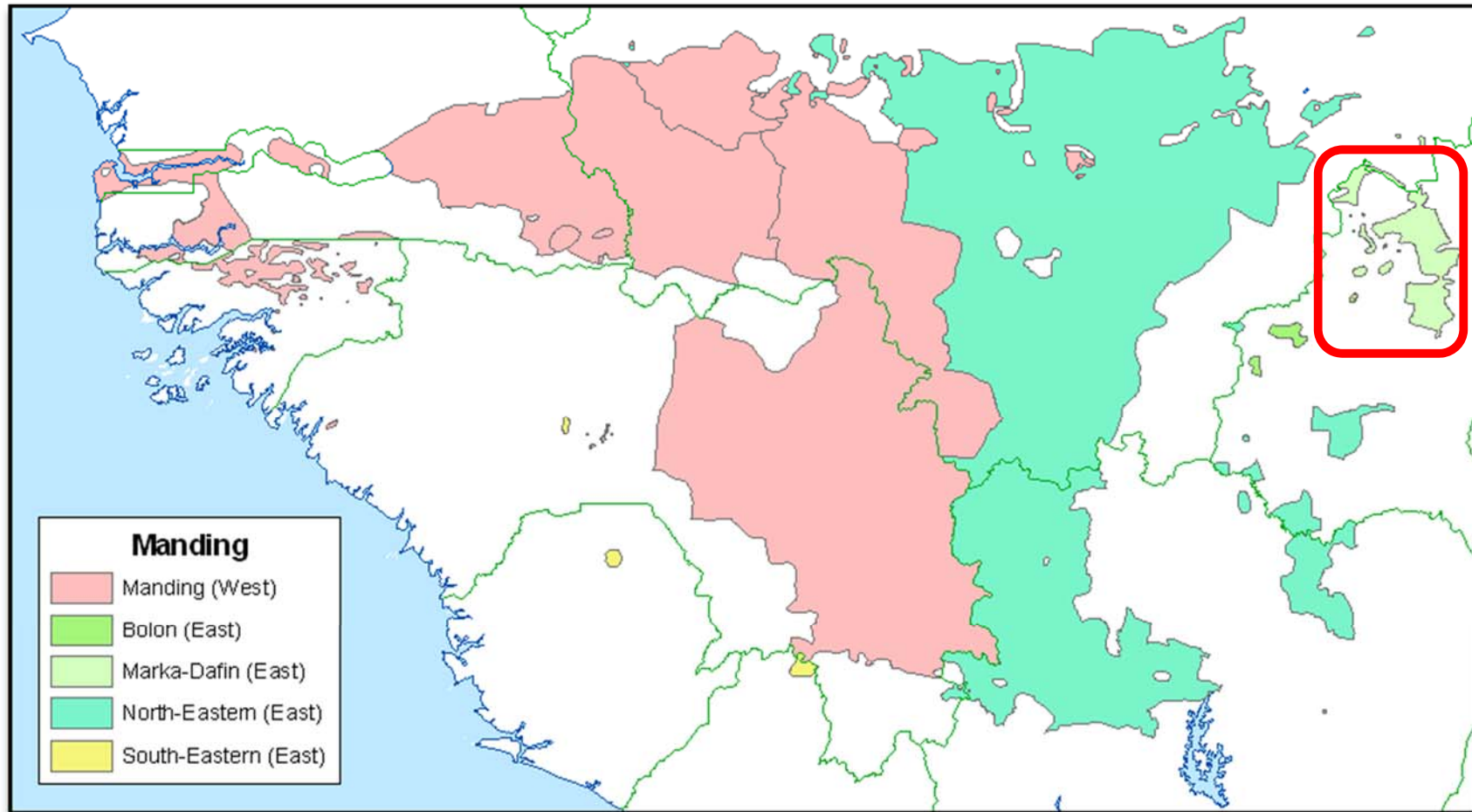


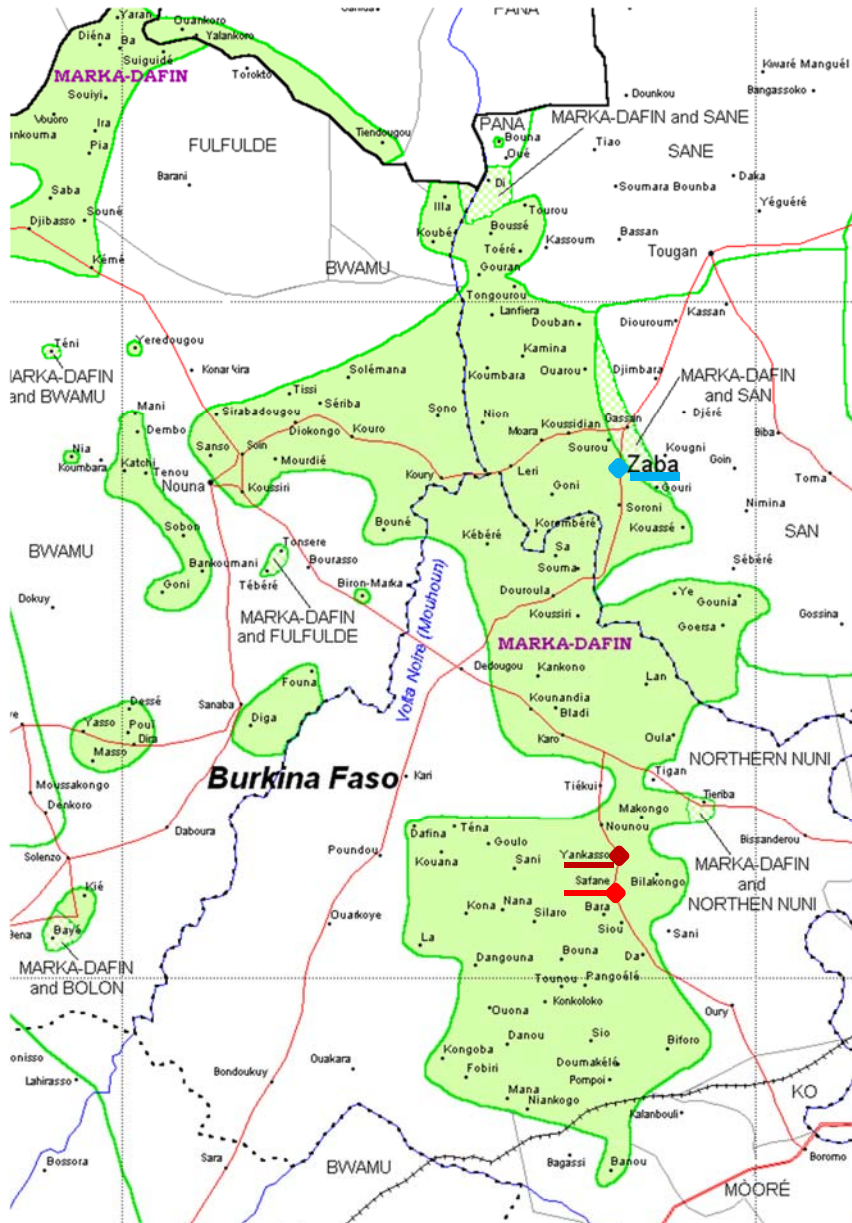
### Conclusions with respect to Bantu:

- Evidence for the emergence of **new determiners of demonstrative origin** (“augments”);
- **Huge potential** for the emergence of definite articles, Stage I in Greenberg’s scenario;
- But this **never clearly materializes**, Stage I appears to be skipped (after perhaps being briefly played with);
- Arguably, because there is no target for the development of a Stage I article: **definiteness is not a grammatical category** in the Bantu languages.



- Mande > Western Mande > Central Mande > Manding > Eastern Manding > Marka (aka Marka-Dafin)





- Marka of Zaba (MZ): Prost (1977), Diallo (1988)
- Marka of Yankasso (MY): Diallo (1988)
- Marka of Safane (MS): Jenks & Konate (2022)





- All Manding languages have a general determiner clitic (“article”) postposed to the noun, viz. **N = ART**.
  - Bambara: =<sup>L</sup>
  - Maninka of Kita: =<sup>L</sup> ~ rarely =ò
  - Mandinka: =ò (with conditioned allomorphs =<sup>L</sup>, =<sup>L</sup>ŋ)
  - Marka: =<sup>L</sup>ŵ, =<sup>L</sup>ó
- The **plural** clitic **follows** the article.
- They also have a number of other less general pre- and postposed determiners.
- Nouns can also appear in their bare form without any determiner.



- The article is usually referred to as a “**definite**” article in descriptions.
- However, more detailed descriptions make it clear that it is rather a **default determiner**, that is a **Stage II article**.
- A **contrast** between the presence and the absence of the article is **only possible in a few contexts**.
- It is easier to describe **the few contexts where it can be absent** rather than the other way around.
- In isolation, nouns are normally **cited with the article**.



- Maninka of Kita (Creissels 2009)

Le marqueur de défini s'oppose en principe à son absence, mais cette **opposition n'est possible que sous certaines conditions**, et il s'agit typiquement d'un cas où c'est l'absence d'une marque morphologique, et non pas sa présence, qui est sémantiquement marquée. La manifestation la plus évidente de ce fait est que **les noms ne peuvent être cités en isolation que pourvus de la marque du défini**.

Dans une phrase assertive positive, en l'absence de toute intention emphatique, les constituants nominaux **comportent ordinairement la marque du défini, sans que cela implique quoi que ce soit quant à l'identifiabilité** de leur référent.

(2)    Ñ        dí        yírì        (\*yírí)    tìgè  
          1SG    PFV    tree = **ART**    tree        cut  
          'I cut a/the tree'



- The two primary contexts where the presence of the article **can contrast** with its absence are **negation** and **polar questions**

(3a) Ñ      mán      yírì      tìgè  
 1SG   PFV   tree = **ART**   cut  
 ‘I didn’t cut **the tree**’

(3b) Ñ      mán      yírí      tìgè  
 1SG   PFV   tree      cut  
 ‘I didn’t cut **a tree**’

(4a) Jí                      †yé   †yán   wà  
 water = **ART**   COP   here   PQ  
 ‘Is **the water** here?’

(4b) Jí      yé      †yán      wà  
 water   COP   here      PQ  
 ‘Is there **water** here?’



- The article **is absent** (or optional, depending on the language) in some constructions and with some types of nouns:
    - “suspended” qualification: ‘They have a woman there, (and) she is beautiful’.
    - N + V compounds: *mùsù hùdù* ‘marry a woman’
    - “idiomatic [**possessed**] subjects”, viz. [Possessor + N], where N is a body part, or [Possessor + N] with some quality verbs.
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>(5) Ñ túlú y=á là<br/>                 1SG ear COP=3SG at<br/>                 ‘I hear it’ (lit.: ‘My ear is at it’)</p> | <p>(6) À mòngò-lá kà dì<br/>                 3SG person-at QUAL be.pleasant<br/>                 ‘He is kind to people’</p> |
|---|---|
- Vocatives (nouns used as terms of address)
  - Some kinship terms



- The **absence** of the article in the constructions where it should normally be present can be used as a way **to mark emphasis**

(7a) Í dí ná dí-mán †tóbí  
 2SG PFV sauce be.pleasant-NMLZ = **ART** cook  
 ‘You have made a good sauce’

(7b) Í dí ná dí-mán tóbí  
 2SG PFV sauce be.pleasant-NMLZ cook  
 ‘You have made a really good sauce’



- Prost (1977), Diallo (1988) and Jenks & Konate (2022) all describe the Marka determiner as a **definite** article.
  - The definite meaning of the article is illustrated with elicited examples.

(8a) bá = <sup>+</sup>ó      tí              yán      wà  
 goat = ART COP.NEG here NEG  
 ‘The goat is not here.’

(8b) bá      tí              yán      wà  
 goat COP.NEG here NEG  
 ‘There isn’t a goat here.’



- The Marka article seems to be used **somewhat differently** than elsewhere in Manding
  - In isolation, nouns are spontaneously **cited without the article** in MY and **either with or without the article** in MZ (Diallo 1988:145, 351)
  - A **contrast** between the presence and absence of the article is **possible in more contexts**.

(9) múrú mù  
knife COP

‘[A: What is it? B:] It’s a knife.’ (MY: Diallo 1988:352)

Mandinka

(10) mùsó = ò            lè    mù  
woman = **ART** FOC COP

‘It’s a woman’ (Creissels & Sambou 2013:460)





- (11) Áá ká tà **fóó** b̀̀. [Áá tàà ʃ̀̀è ró,] áá ká **fóó=ʋ́** b̀̀  
 3PL PFV go field start 3PL PFV field = **ART** start  
 ‘They (= Hyena and Hare) went to start a field. [So when they arrived,] they started **this field.**’ (MY: Diallo 1988:II-74)
- (12) Áá dó ká **sóó** dón. Áá ní **sóó=ʋ́** dón,  
 3PL then PFV bean plant 3PL PFV bean = **ART** plant  
 b̀̀è káà **sóó=ʋ́** ká dèn  
 each POSS bean = **ART** PFV bring.fruit  
 ‘Then they (= Hyena and Hare) planted **beans.** They planted **those beans,** (and) **the beans** of each produced’ (MY: Diallo 1988:II-74)



- But we also find **similar idiosyncrasies** with respect to the use of the article in Marka as elsewhere in Manding.
  - (Some) **kinship terms** and **body parts** seem to be used **without the article**

(13a) án bà  
 1PL mother  
 ‘our mother’

(13b) ò sén  
 1SG foot  
 ‘my foot’ (MY: Diallo 1988:373)

(14) á dà = ó  
 3SG mouth = ART  
 ‘its (of the house) door’ (MY: Diallo 1988:II-96)



- But we also find **similar idiosyncrasies** with respect to the use of the article in Marka as elsewhere in Manding.
  - **Animal characters in stories** can be used **with or without the article** (but more commonly without, like proper names), as opposed to other characters, such as ‘woman’, ‘girl’, ‘hunter’, ‘spirit’, etc. Compare Creissels (2013:183) on Mandinka.

(15) ñ n(í) á blá **súra = ʰó** á ñì **yáá** rà  
 1SG PFV 3SG put monkey = **ART** 3SG and lion at  
 ‘[It has stayed so.] I have put it (= the story) down about **Monkey**  
 and **Lion.**’ (MY: Diallo 1988:II-69)

(16) ... **sùṅùù** dó rà. **Sùṅùù = ú** á bà...  
 girl some at girl = **ART** 3SG mother  
 ‘[The story will be] about **some girl.** The mother of **the girl...**’ (MY:  
 Diallo 1988:II-82)



- And there is the same **tendency to overuse the form with the article** in Marka as elsewhere in Manding.
  - “Statistiquement, c’est la forme qui présente une grande occurrence dans les textes” (MZ: Diallo 1988:146)



- However, **in texts** there are various examples where **neither the analysis in terms of a “Stage II” article nor the analysis in terms of definiteness** would make any sense.

(17) cíé = ù ní jón béèn **zúji** bé  
 man = PL PFV each.other meet chief at  
 ‘The men gathered at the chief’s place’ (MY: Diallo 1988:380)

(18) kàrù ó kàrù, á yè tà á **mósó = †ó** bé  
 month DIST month 3SG IPFV go 3SG woman = **ART** at  
 ‘Every month, he goes to his wife.’ (MY: Diallo 1988:357)



(19) áá ká wà sò ló  
 3PL PFV leave house build

‘They left to build a house [in order to put a woman inside and all the food she would need to stay there until the end of the rainy season, so that they can see whether by then she gives birth while being there all alone or she does not give birth.]’

áá ká ná cè sò só  
 3PL PFV come gather.together house in

‘[They went through all the villages. They looked for all kinds of food.] They came to put it in the house.’

dà tì á rà wà, sò kún ká búrí  
 mouth COP.NEG 3SG at NEG house head PFV cover

‘It didn’t have a door. They roofed the house (lit.: The head of the house was covered.’ (MY: Diallo 1988:II-94)



(20) ... áá ká pèèrè áà **ɲó = ʔó** má  
 3PL PFV enjoy 3PL.POSS millet = ART on  
 ‘[...when they went] to enjoy their millet (lit.: ‘the millet of them’)’

**ɲó** tì **bóón** só (w)à  
 millet COP.NEG granary in NEG  
 ‘the millet was not in the granary.’ ~ ‘there was no millet in the granary.’

**yáá** kó mí mù **pónà** yè  
 lion QUOT DEM COP lie as  
 ‘Lion said that it can’t be true (lit.: ‘This is a lie’).’

**ɲó = ʔó** tì **bóón** só?  
 millet = ART COP.NEG granary in  
 ‘The millet is not in the granary?’ (MY: Diallo 1988:II-115)



(21) **tée** yè è ló, ló ék!  
 sun IPFV 3SG.REFL stand stand IDEO  
 ‘The sun stops moving, stops moving *ék!*’

**sàn** yè ó pín, pín yúrúlúlú!  
 sky IPFV 3SG.REFL blacken blacken IDEO  
 ‘The sky gets dark, gets dark *yúrúlúlú!*’

**kábá** **sàn** yè ó pín, pín yérelélé!  
 firmament sky IPFV 3SG.REFL blacken blacken IDEO  
 ‘The firmament of **the** sky gets dark, gets dark *yérelélé!*’

**sò=ó** ká pín sà!  
 sky = **ART** PFV blacken then  
 ‘The sky got dark!’ (MY: Diallo 1988:II-88)





- The article in Marka seems to be evolving from some kind of **optional determiner** (having primarily something to do with specificity) **to a Stage II article** (default determiner) **without going through Stage I** (definite determiner).
- Although Jenks & Konate (2022) analyze the Marka determiner as a “plain” (i.e. unique) definite, it looks like definiteness is **not a grammatical feature** in Marka of which the article would be the marker.



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