

## Directive and optative clauses in Manding languages

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### 1. Introduction

Directive speech acts are commonly defined as urging the addressee to bring about (or to contribute to bringing about) the truth of a given propositional content,<sup>1</sup> whereas wishes are commonly classified as a particular type of expressive speech acts. However, directive speech acts normally imply the speaker's wish that the proposition involved in the directive speech act becomes true. Moreover, directive speech acts *stricto sensu* can only concern propositional contents whose realization is conceived as controllable by the addressee, but the distinction between controllable and uncontrollable states of affairs is far from being perfectly clear-cut, and in practice, there is often fuzziness in the limit between commands and wishes. Unsurprisingly, the forms and constructions used in a given language to express commands or wishes may be ambiguous between a directive and a purely optative interpretation, not to speak of the fact that commands are often expressed indirectly, by means of assertive or interrogative utterances which, depending on the context in which they are uttered, may be interpreted as aiming at provoking an action from the addressee.

In the title of this article, 'directive and optative clauses' refers to monoclausal constructions interpreted as commands or wishes concerning the propositional content they encode, as opposed to the expression of commands or wishes by means of complex constructions consisting of a subordinate clause expressing a propositional content and a main clause referring to the manipulation of this propositional content in discourse, as in *I would like you to help me*.

The following particularities of Manding languages are worth being immediately highlighted, since they condition the presentation of the data analyzed in this article:

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<sup>1</sup> See however Kissine (2013: 104–106) for an alternative approach, according to which directive speech acts are best defined as “reasons to act”.

- Manding languages do not have dedicated apprehensive forms or constructions.
- The expression of wishes by means of formulations exactly identical to those used for commands is uncommon in Manding languages.
- Blessing is a very important aspect of social intercourse in Manding culture, but the formulations used for blessing on solemn occasions such as the birth of a child, or marriage, are not distinct from those used for ordinary wishes in everyday life (as for example for wishing a good night when leaving each other before going to bed).

The organization of the article is also conditioned by the fact that Manding languages have a particular TAM construction, the subjunctive construction, which plays a prominent role in the expression of commands and wishes. Section 2 describes the morphology of the subjunctive and its dependent uses. Section 3 describes the independent subjunctive clauses. Section 4 discusses the other possibilities of expressing commands or wishes by means of simple independent clauses. Section 5 summarizes the main conclusions.

In this article, the discussion of Manding directive and optative clauses is mainly illustrated by Bambara and Mandinka examples. The reasons are simply that much more precise data on the syntax of directive and optative clauses are available in the literature for Bambara than for any other Manding language, my personal documentation on Mandinka is much more important than on any other Manding language, and to the best of my knowledge, the available data on directive and optative clauses in the other Manding languages do not reveal the existence of phenomena that would not be also found either in Bambara or in Mandinka.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The subjunctive and its dependent uses

The inventories of predicative markers may vary across Manding languages as regards some details of the TAM distinctions they express,<sup>3</sup> but they invariably include a pair of predicative markers (a positive one and its negative counterpart) whose distribution and functions are broadly similar to those of the verb forms

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<sup>2</sup> The other Manding varieties that have been considered for this study and the sources that have been used are as follows: Baninko Bambara: (Togola 1984); Bolon: (Zoungarana 1987); Kong Jula: (Sangaré 1984); Odienné Jula: (Braconnier 1991); Kgoro: (Creissels 1986; Vydrine 2001); Koro: (Creissels 1984); Koyaga: (Creissels 1988); Kita Maninka: (Creissels 2009); Niokolo Maninka: (Creissels 2013); Guinean Maninka: (Vydrin 2019a); Manyà: Heydorn (Heydorn 1943; Heydorn 1949); Marka: (Prost 1977); Mauka: (Creissels 1982); Xasonka: (Koité-Herschel 1981).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Mandinka has an incompletive predicative marker *kà* distinct from the adverbial copula *bé*, used mainly in habitual contexts, which has no exact equivalent in most other Manding languages.

labeled subjunctive or conjunctive in European grammatical traditions. They are designated here as subjunctive. The same term is used in Creissels & Sambou's (2013) grammar of Mandinka and in Vydrin's (2019b) handbook of Bambara grammar, but other terms can be found in the literature, such as 'projectif' in Dumestre's (2003) grammar of bambara.

In Manding languages, the subjunctive plays a crucial role in the expression of commands and wishes. This section is devoted to a succinct account of the morphology of the subjunctive and of its dependent uses. Independent subjunctive clauses, crucially involved in the expression of commands and wishes, are described in §3.

## **2.1. The subjunctive: morphology**

### **2.1.1. Variation in the form of the subjunctive positive marker**

The subjunctive positive markers found in the sample of Manding languages considered for this study can be divided into four different formal types:

- KA, for example Bambara *ká*,
- YE, for example Mandinka *yè*,
- YA: Koro *yá* (Creissels 1984), Koyaga *yá* (Creissels 1988),<sup>4</sup>
- LA: Baninko Bambara *lá* (Togola 1984).

Within the sample of Manding languages on which this study is based, YA is only attested in Koro and Koyaga (spoken in the center of Ivory Coast), and LA is only attested in Baninko Bambara, whereas both KA and YE have a wide distribution.

The subjunctive markers subsumed under the label YE (such as Mandinka *yè*) are homonymous with a completive predicative marker found in many Manding languages (including Mandinka and Bambara). However, completive YE is found exclusively in transitive clauses, whereas subjunctive YE is not sensitive to transitivity. On a possible analysis of the historical significance of this coincidence, see Idiatov (2020).

Interestingly, in some Manding varieties, subjunctive markers belonging to two different formal types may coexist in complementary distribution. In Mandinka, the most common form of the subjunctive marker is *yè*, but in contact with the pronouns *ɲ* (1SG) and *ɲ* (1PL) the subjective marker is *ɲà*, to be interpreted as a variant of the type KA in nasal context. In Bambara, the subjunctive marker proper is *ká*, but *yé* is found in the 2nd person plural imperative.

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<sup>4</sup> Idiatov (2020) analyzes YA and YE as belonging to one cognate set. However, the decision on this point has no impact on the remainder of the discussion.

Subjunctive KA is segmentally identical with the pan-Manding infinitive marker *kà*, but differs from it in its tonal properties. Section 2.1.2 is devoted to a brief presentation of the *kà*-infinitive and a discussion of its possible relationship with the subjunctive.

### 2.1.2. Subjunctive KA and the *kà*-infinitive

Manding languages have infinitival phrases that can be described as subjectless dependent clauses whose missing subject is interpreted either as arbitrary, or as coreferential with a nominal term of the matrix clause, depending on the wider construction in which the infinitival phrase is inserted. All Manding languages have at least one construction meeting this definition, the *kà*-infinitive construction, characterized by the presence of the infinitive marker *kà* or a variant thereof (glossed INF) in phrase-initial position.

The structure of the *kà*-infinitive construction can be schematized as [*kà* (O) V (X)], with a verb in its bare form possibly combined with the same object and oblique phrases as in independent clauses projected by the same verb. In all the Manding languages for which data are available, the *kà*-infinitive has at least the three types of uses illustrated in the remainder of this section with Mandinka examples.<sup>5</sup>

The *kà*-infinitive is spontaneously used by speakers as the quotation form of verbs, and this is consistent with the use of *kà*-phrases in topic position at the left periphery of clauses, resumed by a demonstrative pronoun within the clause, as in (1). In this use, the missing subject of the infinitive has an arbitrary interpretation.

#### (1) Mandinka

[*Kà fùlá-kán-ó kàràŋ*]<sub>i</sub>, *wöö*<sub>j</sub> *kòlèyâa-tá* *báakè* *lè*.  
 INF Fula-language-D learn DEM be.difficult-CPL.ITR very FOC  
 ‘Learning Fula is very difficult.’

The *kà*-infinitive is also used in the complementation of modal or aspectual verbs, as in (2). In this use, the missing subject of the infinitive is interpreted as coreferential with the subject or the object of the matrix clause, depending on the higher verb.

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<sup>5</sup> Readers are referred to Dumestre’s (2003) Bambara grammar (chapter 14) and Vydrin’s (2019b) handbook of Bambara grammar (chapter 33) for detailed descriptions of the uses of the *kà*-infinitive in a Manding variety in which the *kà*-infinitive has a particularly broad range of uses. Vydrin (2020) elaborates a diachronic hypothesis accounting for some apparent oddities in the behavior of the infinitive in clause-chaining.

## (2) Mandinka

*Ǫ lǎfí-tá [kà ñŋ súnkútò fútúu].*

1SG want-CPL.ITR INF DEM girl.D marry

‘I want to marry this girl.’

The third well-attested type of use of the *kà*-infinitive is its use in the clause-chaining construction, typically used to express sequentiality. In this construction, an independent clause is followed by one or more infinitival phrases referring to events conceived as the successive phases of a complex event, the missing subject of the infinitival phrases being interpreted as coreferential with the subject of the first clause, as in (3).<sup>6</sup>

## (3) Mandinka

*Kèê wúlì-tá [kà mùrôo fúntíndí bòotôo kónò].*

man.D stand.up-CPL.ITR INF knife.D go.out.CAUS bag.D in

‘The man stood up and took out a knife from the bag’.

Across Manding languages, the infinitive marker *kà* is consistently L-toned (or H-toned in the Manding languages characterized by tonal inversion, such as Odienné Jula or Niokolo Maninka), whereas the subjunctive markers whose segmental form is *ka* show irregular variation in their tonal properties. However, this difference in their tonal behavior is not sufficient to exclude that the subjunctive markers whose segmental form is *ka* might originate from the transgrammaticalization of infinitive *kà*, since there is evidence that, in Manding languages, the acquisition of the status of predicative marker may trigger irregular tone changes.<sup>7</sup> In fact, as rightly observed by Vydrin (2014), in subordinate clauses, the only difference between the subjunctive and the infinitive is the presence / absence of an overt subject. This strongly supports the hypothesis that the subjunctive markers whose segmental form is *ka* result from the replacement of a more ancient subjunctive marker *yé* or *yè* by the infinitive marker *kà*, whose tone may have been subsequently aligned with the high tone of the pre-existing predicative markers. The fact that *yé* subsists in the imperative clauses of Bambara (see §3.1) provides further support to this hypothesis.

Interestingly, in Soninke, which belongs to a distinct branch of West Mande but shares many typological features with Manding, probably due to long-standing contact, the infinitive and subjunctive markers (transitive *nà* and intransitive *nàn*) are fully homonymous.

<sup>6</sup> An in-depth analysis of this construction in Bambara is provided by Vydrin (2020).

<sup>7</sup> A particular clear case is that of the future predicative marker of Bambara *ná*, whose obvious etymology is the verb *nà* ‘come’.

### 2.1.3. The subjunctive negative

The subjunctive negative marker shows less variation in its form than its positive counterpart, at least segmentally. The vast majority of Manding languages have forms that can be summarized as KANA, with, however, variations in tone and vowel length that do not conform to the regular phonetic correspondences between Manding varieties: Bambara *kàná*, Kita Maninka *káná* ~ *kánà*, Mandinka *kánàa*, etc.

However, a variant KA (with a high tone) in free variation with KANA is found in the southernmost Manding languages (Koro, Koyaga). Since the vowel *a* in this variant is neither long nor nasalized (as should be expected if KA resulted from the deletion of the intervocalic nasal of KANA), a plausible explanation is that, originally (i.e., before the creation of a subjunctive positive marker KA in some Manding languages), the subjunctive negative marker was *ká* (distinguished from the infinitive marker *kà* by tone only), and KANA resulted from the grammaticalization of the subjunctive negative form of the verb *nà* ‘come’. It is quite common in the languages of the world that inflected forms of ‘come’ or ‘go’ verbs grammaticalize as auxiliaries expressing various TAM values (Kuteva et al. 2019), and consequently a plausible scenario is that KANA emerged from the routinization of formulations whose original meaning was ‘don’t come and V!’, but in which the movement component of meaning became more and more bleached. This phenomenon can be observed in French, where for example *Ne viens/va pas me dire que tu n’es plus d’accord*, lit. ‘Don’t come/go and tell me that you don’t agree anymore’, is normally interpreted as an emphatic way of expressing ‘Don’t tell me that you don’t agree anymore’, without any idea of movement.

Incidentally, such a use of the subjunctive negative of ‘go’ appears in example (15) below. Moreover, contrary to an objection raised by an anonymous reviewer, the length of the second vowel in Mandinka *kánàa* is not a problem for the analysis proposed here, quite on the contrary, since in western Manding varieties, most monosyllabic verbs (including *náa* ‘come’) have a long vowel.

## 2.2. The dependent uses of the subjunctive

The dependent uses of the subjunctive illustrated in sections 2.2.1 to 2.2.7 are found in all the Manding languages for which the relevant data are available. Section 2.2.8 describes a dependent use of the subjunctive which, as far as I am aware of, is only attested in Mandinka, and section 2.2.9 mentions a dependent use of the subjunctive that so far has only been signaled in Bambara. Since detailed syntactic descriptions are available for relatively few Manding languages, it cannot be excluded that perhaps other dependent uses of the subjunctive could be found in less documented Manding varieties.

### 2.2.1. The subjunctive in complement clauses

In the complementation of verbs expressing commands, advices, wishes, or agreement / disagreement, the complement clause can only be in the subjunctive or in the infinitive. When the subject of the complement clause is different from the subject of the matrix clause, as in (4), the subjunctive is the only possible choice.

(4) Bambara

*Ń má sòn [í ká táa yèn].*  
 3SG CPL.NEG agree 2SG SBJV go there  
 ‘I don’t agree that you should go there.’

### 2.2.2. The subjunctive in reported speech

In reported utterances marked as such by the quotative marker *kó* (equally used for direct and indirect quotations), the subjunctive marks reported commands, as opposed to reported assertions. Example (5) illustrates a construction in which the identity of the original speaker is not specified.

(5) Kita Maninka<sup>8</sup>

(5a) *Kó Sékù bé nà.*  
 QUOT Sékou FUT come  
 ‘It is said that Sékou will come.’

(5b) *Kó Sékù ká nà.*  
 QUOT Sékou SBJV come  
 ‘Sékou is asked to come.’

### 2.2.3. The subjunctive in adverbial clauses of purpose

The subjunctive is used to mark adverbial clauses of purpose that need not be introduced by a conjunction, as in examples (6) to (8).

(6) Bambara (Dumestre 2003: 349)<sup>9</sup>

*À yé gánsilí ké [mògô-ú ká nà*  
 3SG CPL.TR announcement.D made person.D-PL SBJV come  
*nyógónyé lá].*  
 meeting.D POSTP  
 ‘He made an announcement to ensure that people will come to the meeting.’

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<sup>8</sup> Note that, in Kita Maninka, *bé* is not found in copula function, and is used exclusively in verbal predication with a future meaning (Creissels 2009: 52), hence the gloss FUT rather than ICPL or AdvCOP.

<sup>9</sup> In the Bambara examples that do not come from my personal documentation, the tonal notation has been adapted to the system I use for my own examples.

- (7) Bambara (Vydrin 2017: 129)  
*Fántà nà-ná [nê ká à dèmɛ].*  
 3SG come-CPL.ITR 1SG SBJV 3SG help  
 ‘Fanta came to me for help.’

- (8) Mandinka  
*Jɛŋké [wòtòo yè tàmbi].*  
 stand.aside car.D SBJV pass  
 ‘Stand aside so that the car can pass.’

However, depending on the individual languages, purpose clauses introduced by conjunctions can also be found. The conjunctions that introduce purpose clauses invariably trigger the use of the subjunctive in the clauses they introduce.

Note also that, if the matrix clause is in the negative form, another reading of the same construction is possible, according to which the state-of-affairs denoted by the subjunctive clause is incompatible with that expressed by the matrix clause, as in (9).

- (9) Mandinka  
*Wòntòo búká sàwúŋ [à díŋ-ò yè ɲúnúmà].*  
 giraffe.D ICPL.NEG jump 3SG offspring-D SBJV crawl  
 lit. ‘The giraffe does not jump for its offspring to crawl.’  
 > ‘The giraffe jumps, how could its offspring crawl!’

#### 2.2.4. The subjunctive in subordinate clauses introduced by conjunctions

In adverbial clauses introduced by conjunctions specifying various semantic types of adverbial subordination, the use of the subjunctive depends on the choice of the conjunction. For example, in Bambara, the subjunctive is obligatory with *sání* ‘before’.

- (10) Bambara (Dumestre 2011: 872)  
*À bé nà [sání dùgú ká jé].*  
 3SG ICPL come before atmosphere.D SBJV become.clear  
 ‘He will come before dawn.’ lit. ‘... before the atmosphere should become clear.’

#### 2.2.5. Subjunctive clauses in topic position

The subjunctive is also used in clauses that occupy a topic position at the left periphery of another clause and are interpreted as the expression of a propositional content resumed in the main clause by a 3rd person singular or demonstrative pronoun.

- (11) Bambara (Vydrin 2017: 127)  
*[Fúrá ká gèlèyá lásé mɔ̀gɔ̀ mà]i,*  
 medication.D SBJV problem.D bring person.D POSTP



ò<sub>i</sub> bé kòlòsí kósébé.

DEM ICPL observe very

lit. 'That medication brings problems to people, this is observed very much.'

> 'It is often observed that medication has undesirable side effects.'

(12) Mandinka

[Kèé yè wúlúu]<sub>i</sub>, í ñàa néné yè wǒ<sub>i</sub>  
man.D SBJV give.birth.D 2SG eye.D ever CPL.TR DEM

jé mìn<sub>tóo</sub> lè?

see where FOC

lit. 'That a man gives birth to a child, where did your eyes ever see that?'

This use of the subjunctive emphasizes the affinity between subjunctive clauses and the *kà*-infinitive construction, since, as already observed in section 2.1.2, infinitive phrases introduced by *kà* have the ability to fulfill the same function.

### 2.2.6. Subjunctive triggered by modal particles

#### 2.2.6.1. The obligative construction

Manding languages have an obligative construction consisting of the unanalyzable obligative particle *fǒ* 'it is necessary that...' and a clause in the subjunctive.

(13) Bambara (Dumestre 2011: 329)

Í nàkân yé fēn mîn yé, díyá<sub>g</sub>óyâ lá,  
2SG destiny NomCOP thing.D REL as in.any.case

fǒ ò ká í sòrò.

OBLG DEM SBJV 2SG get

'If something is your destiny, in any case, it must happen to you.'

(14) Mandinka

Níη í yè sólóo bàrà<sub>m</sub>á,  
2SG 2SG CPL.TR panther.D wound

fó í yè sílá-kútòo ñín<sub>ñ</sub>.

OBLG 2SG SBJV road-new.D look.for

'If you have wounded a panther, you must look for a new road.'

As illustrated by example (15), in the negative, an apprehensive reading of the obligative construction is possible.

(15) Mandinka

Núntó kèebâa-lú máη làfí túbá<sub>ab</sub>òo-lú sìñóoyàa  
formerly elder.D-PL CPL.NEG want European.D-PL cohabitation.D

*lá,        ì       kánàa       táa ì       díŋ-ò-lú*  
 POSTP 3PL SBJV.NEG go 3PL child-D-PL

*káafíriyá-ndì*

become.an.unbeliever-CAUS

‘Formerly, the elders did not want to live together with Europeans, lest they deter their children from religion.’

One may wonder whether the obligative particle *fɔ̃* was borrowed from French (*il faut* ‘it is necessary’, or is the result of language-internal evolution. The point is that the obligative particle might be cognate with the conjunction *fɔ̃* ‘until’ (or ‘unless’). Moreover, the hypothesis of a language-internal evolution is strongly supported by the observation that the same coincidence between an obligative particle and a conjunction ‘until’ is found in the Soninke-Bozo branch of West Mande with completely different forms (Soninke *mà*, Jenaama (Bozo) (*ŋ*)*kàlà*). However, the historical scenario that might relate a conjunction ‘until’ / ‘unless’ and an obligative particle is unclear.

#### 2.2.6.2. Others

Individual Manding languages may have other modal particles triggering the use of the subjunctive in the clauses they introduce. For example, Mandinka has an optative particle *dàŋkó*.

(16) Mandinka

(16a) *Dàŋkó ñ        ɲà       ké       mànsàkêe tí.*  
 OPT 1SG SBJV become king.D as

‘If only I could become a king!’

(16b) *Dàŋkó í       kánàa       kátóo sǒo.*  
 OPT 2SG SBJV.NEG ball.D pierce

‘Let’s hope you won’t poke a hole in the ball!’<sup>10</sup>

#### 2.2.7. The subjunctive in sequences of direct commands

A general rule in Manding languages is that, in sequences of direct commands concerning the same addressee, the first clause may instantiate the dedicated imperative construction described in §4.1, but the following clauses can only be in the subjunctive, as in (17a, b).

<sup>10</sup> In this particular example, an apprehensive reading is possible: ‘Be careful, you might poke a hole in the ball!’.

(17) Mandinka

(17a) *Fùntóo tǎa í yè táabúlòò fítà!*  
 cloth.D take 2SG SBJV table.D wipe  
 ‘Take (sg.) a cloth and wipe the table!’

(17b) *Álí kìní-tòo-lú jì-ndí nǎŋ*  
 2PL food-leftover.D-PL go.down-CAUS VEN  
*áli yé ì dí wùlôo-lú là.*  
 2PL SBJV 3PL give dog.D-PL POSTP  
 ‘Bring the food leftovers and give them to the dogs!’

### 2.2.8. The sequential use of the subjunctive in assertive contexts

As mentioned in §2.1.2, all Manding languages have clause chains expressing sequentiality in which the non-initial clauses are reduced to infinitival phrases. In Mandinka, a clause-chaining construction with the non-initial clauses in the subjunctive, as in (18), is also possible (and is in fact more usual than the clause-chaining construction with the *kà*-infinitive).

(18) Mandinka

*Í sì í bùlá bòotòo kónò,*  
 1SG POT 2SG put bag.D in

*í ɲá à dáa sítí jùlùkésòo lá,*  
 1SG SBJV 3SG opening.D tie rope.D POSTP

*í ɲá nǎa í fáyì baa kónò.*  
 1SG SBJV come 2SG throw river.D in

‘I can put you in a bag, tie its opening with a rope, and throw you in the river.’

The sequential use of the subjunctive found in Mandinka may be a trace of an earlier stage in the development of the sequential construction, if one accepts Idiatov’s (2020) analysis. However, one may also think that contact with Atlantic languages has played a role in either the maintenance or the emergence of the sequential use of the subjunctive in Mandinka, since in the Atlantic languages in contact with Mandinka (such as Balant Ganja or Jóola Fóoñi) a form whose uses are broadly comparable to those of the Manding subjunctive is commonly used in clause chains expressing sequentiality.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For Balant Ganja, cf. Creissels & Biaye (2016: 273–274); for Jóola Fóoñi, see Creissels & Bassène (2022).

### 2.2.9. The subjunctive and the expression of quasi-simultaneity

Vydrin (2019b: 435–438) describes a Bambara construction in which two clauses denoting two events that immediately follow each other are coordinated by *àní* ‘and’ and followed by a third clause expressing the quasi-simultaneity of the two events. In this construction, there is some variation in the form of the first clause, but the second one (i.e. the clause that follows *àní*) is invariably in the subjunctive, as in (19).

(19) Bambara (Vydrin 2019b: 436)

*Nzõn-ù fáná tló dòn ò kùlékân ná,*  
 thief.D-PL also ear.D enter DEM scream.D POSTP

*àní ò-lú fàná ká ù yèrê jíni,*  
 and DEM-PL also SBJV 3PL self look.for

*ò bée ké-rá kélén yé.*  
 DEM all do-CPL.ITR one as

lit. ‘That the thieves heard this scream, and that they ran away, all that was one.’

## 3. Independent uses of the subjunctive and the expression of commands and wishes

In Manding languages, simple independent clauses in the subjunctive constitute the standard way of expressing various kinds of commands and wishes, depending on the nature of the subject and on the context (§§3.1-5). However, an independent use of subjunctive clauses that cannot be considered as either directive or optative is also attested (§3.6).

### 3.1. Independent subjunctive clauses with a second person subject

Independent subjunctive clauses with a second person subject are a usual way of expressing a request to the addressee(s) to perform the action denoted by the verb (or, in the negative, to refrain from performing it), as in (20).

(20) Bambara

(20a) *Í ká dúnán fò!*  
 2SG SBJV guest.D greet  
 ‘Greet (sg.) the guest!’

(20b) *Í kànâ wárí tà!*  
 2SG SBJV.NEG money.D take  
 ‘Don’t (sg) take the money!’

(20c) *Áú ká Fántà wéelé ñ yé!*  
 2PL SBJV Fanta call 1SG for  
 ‘Call (pl.) Fanta for me!’

- (20d) *Áú kàná ǹ b̀̀g̀!*  
 2PL SBJV.NEG 1SG hit  
 ‘Don’t (pl.) hit me!’

In this use, the subjunctive is in competition with the dedicated imperative forms described in §4.1. The nuance is that, in the expression of commands, the subjunctive is perceived by speakers as less abrupt than the imperative.

In the world’s languages, it is common that the use of constructions typically used for commands is also possible with reference to states of affairs beyond the control of the addressee(s), in which case they are interpreted as expressing a wish rather than a command, as in English *Get well soon!* or *Have a good night!*. Interestingly, the available descriptions of Manding languages do not provide examples unambiguously suggesting this possibility, and from my experience of working with native speakers of Manding languages, I am inclined to conclude that Manding speakers tend to avoid using subjunctive clauses with second person subjects or imperative clauses in contexts that would force a purely optative reading. Manding speakers strongly prefer to formulate wishes in a way that unambiguously triggers a purely optative interpretation, i.e. by means of either subjunctive clauses with *Álá* ‘God’ in subject role (see §3.3), or dedicated optative constructions (see §4.2).

### 3.2. Independent subjunctive clauses with a first person plural subject

Independent subjunctive clauses with a first person plural subject express a request to the addressee(s) to perform the action denoted by the verb jointly with the speaker (or, in the negative, to refrain from performing it).

- (21) Bambara  
*Án ká s̀̀g̀n kà táa só!*  
 1PL SBJV return INF go home  
 ‘Greet (sg.) the guest!’
- (22) Mandinka  
 (22a) *Ì ñà ẁ̀l̀!*  
 1PL SBJV get.up  
 ‘Let’s go!’
- (22b) *Ì ñà t̀̀t̀t̀ǹ ñ ná k̀̀c̀c̀a lá!*  
 1PL SBJV continue 1PL GEN conversation.D POSTP  
 ‘Let’s continue our conversation!’

### 3.3. Independent subjunctive clauses with ordinary third person subjects

Independent subjunctive clauses with a third person subject other than *Álá* ‘God’ are interpreted as requests to collaborate in some way or another to the realization of the state of affairs denoted by the clause, minimally by not opposing it.

(23) Bambara (Dumestre 2003: 212)

(23a) *Á ká sà!*  
3SG SBJV die  
‘Let him die!’

(23b) *Õ kànâ fǝ òlú sí yé!*  
DEM SBJV.NEG tell 3PL none to  
‘This should not be told to any of them!’

(24) Mandinka

(24a) *Á kánáa fùlàñjâŋ!*  
3SG SBJV.NEG happen.a.second.time  
‘Let it not happen again!’

(24b) *Fitiròo kánáa í tàrá sàatêe kónò!*  
dusk.D SBJV.NEG 2SG find village.D in  
lit. ‘Let the dusk not find you in the village!’ > ‘Come home before dusk!’

### 3.4. Independent subjunctive clauses with *Álá* ‘God’ in subject role

As already indicated, in Manding languages, the strategy of expressing wishes by simply using constructions that normally express commands in contexts that force a purely optative reading is not used with the same freedom as in languages such as English or French. In Manding languages, it is possible to express wishes concerning states of affairs conceived as being beyond the control of the speech act participants by means of independent subjunctive clauses, but in such cases, the possibility of a directive interpretation is normally ruled out by the choice of formulations in which the subject role is not fulfilled by a noun phrase referring to a participant in the state-of-affairs referred to, but by *Álá* ‘God’, as in (25).

(25) Bambara (Dumestre 2003: 212)

(25a) *Álá ká dùgú ìn lá-bìn!*  
God SBJV village DEM CAUS-fall  
‘May God cause the ruin of this village!’

(25b) *Álá kànâ né bèn ní d̀̀l̀̀m̀̀innà wéré yé ǹ̀n kó!*  
God SBJV.NEG 1SG meet with drunkard other with DEM after  
‘May God prevent me from meeting another drunkard after this one!’

### 3.5. The subjunctive in independent interrogative clauses

The subjunctive can be used in independent interrogative clauses with a first person subject (either singular or plural) to express request for confirmation about what the speaker(s) is/are expected to do, or request for clarification about a command or instruction, as in (26).

(26) Mandinka

(26a) *Ĭ ɲà álí dándáŋ bǎŋ?*  
 1PL SBJV 2PL accompany Q  
 ‘Should we accompany you?’

(26b) *Ĭ ɲà mú nè tábí lúntáŋò-lú yè?*  
 1SG SBJV what FOC cook guest.D-PL for  
 ‘What should I cook for the guests?’

However, with a first person singular subject, depending on the context, such clauses are not necessarily interpreted as true questions calling for a reaction from the addressee, and can also express a deliberative meaning. For example, (26b) can also express ‘I wonder what I could cook for the guests’.

### 3.6. The exclamative use of independent subjunctive clauses

Independent subjunctive clauses may also constitute exclamative utterances glossable as ‘How is it possible that ...!’, as in (27).

(27) Bambara (Vydrin 2017: 80)

*Ée! Málòkìsè dén kélén ká kòlôn fá í kùn!*  
 INTERJ grain.of.rice unit one SBJV mortar.D fill 1SG on  
 ‘Hey, how is it possible that a single grain of rice fills my mortar!’

A plausible explanation of the exclamative use of independent subjunctive clauses is that it developed as an instance of insubordination from the construction described in §2.2.5 above, in which a subjunctive clause occupies a topic position at the left periphery of another clause in which the propositional content denoted by the subjunctive clause is resumed by a pronoun. According to this hypothesis, the exclamative use of subjunctive clauses illustrated in (26) might have resulted from conventionalization of the use of subjunctive clauses in topic position with the main clause left implicit.

## 4. Other possibilities of expressing commands or wishes by means of simple independent clauses

### 4.1. The imperative

All Manding languages have a dedicated imperative construction, at least for commands concerning a single addressee (imperative singular). A dedicated

imperative construction is sometimes also found for commands formulated positively that concern two or more addressees, but never for negative commands (or prohibitions) concerning two or more addressees.

As already mentioned, commands expressed by means of the dedicated imperative construction are perceived by speakers as more categorical than commands conveyed by subjunctive clauses.

In Manding languages, as illustrated in (28), the distinctive mark of the imperative singular is the lack of an overt subject, plus, in the positive, the lack of an overt predicative marker. In the negative, the predicative marker of the subjunctive negative is also used in the imperative construction.

(28) Mandinka

(28a) *Wùlôo fúntí-ndì búŋò kónò!*  
 dog.D go.out-CAUS room.D in  
 ‘Chase (sg.) the dog out of the room!’

(28b) *Kánàa dindìŋò-lú búsà!*  
 SBJV.NEG child.D-PL hit  
 ‘Don’t hit (sg.) the children!’

In the plural, some Manding languages have a dedicated imperative construction in the positive, but never in the negative. In the imperative plural, the subject slot is occupied by the second person plural pronoun. What distinguishes the imperative plural from the subjunctive with a 2nd person plural subject is that, in the imperative plural, the predicative marker slot is either empty, as in Mandinka (29), or occupied by a special predicative marker, as in Bambara (30).

(29) Mandinka

*Álí wùlôo fúntí-ndì búŋ-ò kónò!*  
 2PL dog.D go.out-CAUS room-D in  
 ‘Chase (pl.) the dog out of the room!’

(30) Bambara

*Á yé fàrá ñ ná!*  
 2PL IMP.PL separate 1SG POSTP  
 ‘Leave (pl.) me alone!’

As already observed, the fact that Bambara has a dedicated imperative plural marker *yé* coinciding with the subjunctive marker found in many other Manding languages supports the hypothesis that the situation currently observed in Bambara results from the (incomplete) replacement of the subjunctive marker *yé* by an innovative subjunctive marker whose origin is the pan-Manding infinitive marker *kà*.



Mandinka also has a special marker *àlìṅà* whose meaning is that two or more addressees are asked to perform the action denoted by the verb jointly with the speaker. Etymologically, this marker can be decomposed as *àlì* (irregular tonal form of *állí* (2PL)) + *ṅ* (1PL) + *ṅà* (allomorph of the subjunctive marker in contact with a first person pronoun).

(31) Mandinka

*Àlìṅà Músáa dèemá!*  
 IMP.1+2PL Moussa help  
 ‘Let’s help Moussa!’

Another particularity of the Mandinka imperative that does not seem to be found in the other Manding languages is the possibility to express commands in a less categorical way by adding to the imperative construction the particle *bǎṅ* (32b), otherwise used to convert assertions into yes/no questions (32a).

(32) Mandinka

(32a) *Í bé kùurôo ké-lá bǎṅ?*  
 2SG AdvCOP washing.D do-INF Q  
 ‘Are you going to do the washing?’

(32b) *Kùurôo ké bǎṅ!*  
 washing.D do Q  
 ‘Please, do the washing!’

Finally, some Mandinka varieties (for example the Kaabunka variety spoken in the northeastern part of Guinea Bissau) have a suffix *-nnu* marking plurality of addressees that optionally attaches to verbs in the imperative construction. The etymology of this suffix is unclear, and nothing similar has been signaled in the other Manding languages.

(33) Mandinka (Kaabunka variety)

*Màndìṅkà-díndìṅ-ò-lú kò “Fúlá-díndìṅ-ò-lú félé nǎṅ,*  
 mandinka-child-D-PL QUOT fula-child-D-PL look VEN  
*àlìṅà táa ì bǔutèe-nnú!”*  
 IMP.1+2PL go 3PL hit-PL

‘The Mandinka children said: “Here come Fula children, let’s go and hit them!’

## 4.2. The optative construction

### 4.2.1. The pan-Manding optative construction

In all Manding languages, the expression of wishes by means of subjunctive clauses with *Álá* ‘God’ in subject role (see §3.4) is in competition with a dedicated optative construction that can be schematized as follows:

*Álá* ‘God’ – OPT – VP<sub>OPT</sub>

The second element of the optative construction is an optative marker found exclusively in this construction, in which it seems to occupy the position occupied by the predicative marker in other types of verbal clauses: Mandinka *màa*, Kita Maninka *mán*, Bambara *má ~ mà ~ máa*, etc.

The third element of the optative construction is a transitive verb phrase (i.e., a verb obligatorily preceded by an object NP and optionally followed by one or more oblique phrases) in which the verb is marked by the optative suffix *-la* (with variants *-na* in nasal context, and *-ra* in the Manding languages in which *r* may be the reflex of a former *l*, such as Bambara).

(34) Mandinka

*Álá màa ñ níñ í só-lá sìimàayàa-bâa nñ*  
 God OPT 1PL and 2SG give-OPT life-large.D and  
*jáatákéndéyàa lá!*  
 health.D POSTP

‘May God give you and us long life and health!’

As illustrated by example (35), to be compared with (34), in Mandinka, the optative suffix *-la* coincides with a suffix *-la* that can be analyzed as an infinitive suffix used for example in the complementation of modal verbs in competition with infinitive *kà*.

(35) Mandinka

(35a) *Í làfi-tá í só-lá í dímmúsò lá.*  
 1SG want-CPL.ITR 2SG give-INF 1SG daughter.D POSTP

‘I want to give you my daughter.’

(35b) *Í làfi-tá kà í só í dímmúsò lá.*  
 1SG want-CPL.ITR INF 2SG give 1SG daughter.D POSTP

‘I want to give you my daughter.’

However, across Manding languages, the suffix that marks verbs in the optative construction does not always coincide with a suffix analyzable in other constructions as in infinitive suffix. For example, in Bambara, the optative suffix has the same allomorphs (*-ra*, *-la* and *-na*) as the completive marker in intransitive clauses, but the distribution of the allomorphs of the optative suffix is less regular than that of the allomorphs of the completive suffix (Vydrin 2019b: 104).

An interesting particularity of the optative construction is that analyzing it as monoclausal requires introducing a rule according to which the optative construction imposes a transitive use of all verbs, regardless of their inherent valency properties,

and triggers what can be analyzed as morphologically unmarked causativization of the verbs that are in principle strictly intransitive. For example, analyzing (36) as monoclausal implies considering that, in this construction, Mandinka *bálúu* ‘live’ is interpreted as ‘let live’, whereas in other contexts, ‘let live’ is normally expressed as *bálúndì* (where *-ndi* is a causative suffix).

- (36) Mandinka  
*Álá màa dínđìṅò bálúu-lá!*  
 God OPT child.D live-OPT  
 ‘May God let the child live!’

Of course, in a historical perspective, this particularity of the optative construction can rather be viewed as evidence that it developed from an originally biclausal construction in which the verb in the embedded clause had its normal behavior with respect to valency and transitivity.

The dedicated optative construction exists only in the positive. Clauses in the subjunctive negative with *Álá* ‘God’ in subject role, as in (37), are the only possible option for wishes formulated negatively.

- (37) Mandinka  
*Álà kánáa à ké àlìfàa-sòkì-díṅò tí!*  
 God SBJV.NEG 3SG make elder-contradict-child.D as  
 ‘May God not let him become a child that doesn’t obey his elders!’

As regards the etymology of the Manding optative marker, it can be observed that, cross-linguistically, the expression of wishes often involves formulations such as French *Dieu fasse que* (lit. ‘let God make that’), cf. for example Jóola Fóoñi *Emitey ekaan* (*Emitey* ‘God’, *ekaan* subjunctive of *-kaan* ‘do’). This suggests that the pan-Manding optative marker might well be a reflex of the Mande root *\*ma* ‘do, make’, which is widely attested across the Mande language family but has not subsisted in Manding as a verb. Note, however, that the Maninka varieties of Eastern Senegal have an optative marker *mu* whose historical relationship with the other forms of this marker is unclear.

#### 4.2.2. A variant of the optative construction

In Mandinka (but apparently not in the other Manding languages), the optative construction has a variant in which the optative marker is not followed by a verb phrase, but by a subjunctive clause. Although *màa* is clearly not a verb (at least synchronically), its syntactic status in this variant of the optative construction is comparable to that of the verb of the matrix clause in a complex construction.

(38) Mandinka

*Álá màa [díndíṅò yè kéndéyâa]!*

God OPT child.D SBJV recover

‘May God grant that the child should recover!’

#### 4.2.3. The grammaticalization of the sequence *Álá màa* as an optative particle in Mandinka

Mandinka is to the best of my knowledge the only Manding language in which the phenomenon described in this section is attested, but a similar evolution is found in Jóola Fóoñi, an Atlantic language in close contact with Mandinka (Creissels & Bassène 2022).

In Mandinka, it is possible to find sentences that seem to instantiate the construction described in §4.2.2, with, however, *Álá* ‘God’ repeated as the subject of the subjunctive clause.

(39) Mandinka

*Álá màa [Álá yè ṅ só sìmàayàa-bâa lá]!*

God OPT God SBJV 1PL give life-large.D POSTP

‘May God give us long life!’

However, in its literal reading, the construction illustrated in (39) violates a very general constraint on subordinating constructions. Normally, if a term of a subordinate clause is coreferential with the subject of the matrix clause, it cannot be expressed as the repetition of the NP fulfilling the subject role in the matrix clause, as seems to be the case in (39), and can only be expressed as a pronoun, or left unexpressed.

This suggests that, in a construction that was originally a biclausal construction with *Álá* as the subject of the matrix clause, the verb of the subordinate clause is being reanalyzed as the nucleus of a monoclausal construction, whereas what was originally the matrix clause is being reanalyzed as an optative particle. In example (39), the repetition of *Álá* ‘God’ as the subject of the verb denoting the desired state of affairs can only be analyzed consistently by positing that the first occurrence of *Álá* does not act as a referential expression anymore, and that the sequence *Álá màa* behaves as a syntactically unanalyzable block acting as an optative particle. In other words, the construction described in §4.2.2 is being reanalyzed as the combination of a subjunctive clause with an optative particle *álámàa*, and clauses such as (38) and (39) are best analyzed synchronically as indicated in (40).

(40) Mandinka

(40a) *Álámàa dínđínò yè kéndéyâa!*

OPT child.D SBJV recover

‘May the child recover!’

(40b) *Álámàa Álà yè ñ só sìmàayàa-bâa lá!*

OPT God SBJV 1PL give life-large.D POSTP

‘May God give us long life!’

### 4.3. Infinitival phrases as utterances expressing commands or wishes

In some Manding languages, infinitival phrases can be used as independent interrogative clauses whose function is to check or confirm a command (for example, in Bambara, *kà taa*, infinitive of *taa* ‘go’, uttered with an interrogative intonation or combined with an interrogative particle, is interpreted as ‘Should I / we go?’).

Another use of infinitival phrases as constituting utterances by themselves, attested in Bambara (but not in Mandinka), is the optative use of infinitival phrases, as in (41b). Such utterances are perceived by speakers as the elliptical form of subjunctive clauses such as (41a), with *Álá* ‘God’ in subject role (see §3.4), which provides further support to the hypothesis of a historical relationship between subjunctive *ká* and infinitive *kà*.

(41) Bambara (Dumestre 2003: 213)

(41a) *Álá ká dén cámán dí í mà!*

God SBJV child many give 2SG to

‘May God give you many children!’ (optative use of a subjunctive clause)

(41b) *Kà dén cámán dí í mà!*

INF child many give 2SG to

infinitival phrase used as an optative utterance with the same meaning as (a)

Example (42) further illustrates this use of infinitival phrases in the formulation of wishes commonly expressed in everyday life.

(42) Bambara

(42a) *Kà sù hérê cáyá!*

INF night.D happiness.D increase

‘Good night!’

(42b) *Kà án bèn!*

INF 1PL meet

‘Goodbye!’

- (42b) *Kà sirâ díyá!*  
 INF road.D be.pleasant  
 ‘Have a good trip!’

#### 4.4. Assertive or interrogative clauses interpreted as suggesting a request

Indirect commands by means of assertive or interrogative clauses interpreted in a given context as suggesting a request are very common in the world’s languages, and Manding languages are no exception. Language etiquette is a crucial aspect of social interaction in Manding societies, and Manding speakers tend in particular to develop more or less conventionalized strategies for avoiding formulations that may be perceived as rude, such as negative answers or direct commands.

##### 4.4.1. The directive use of interrogative clauses in the future negative

In Manding languages, the use of interrogative clauses in the future negative with a second person subject constitutes a very common politeness strategy for suggesting a request to an addressee with whom an explicit formulation of the request could be considered inappropriate.

- (43) Bambara  
*Í ténà í ká nègèsó síngá í mà?*  
 2SG FUT.NEG 2SG GEN bicycle.D lend 1SG to  
 ‘Won’t you lend me your bicycle?’ > ‘Please, lend me your bicycle!’

##### 4.4.2. The directive use of the potential construction of Mandinka

Mandinka has a potential predicative marker *sì ~ sè* which has no exact equivalent in the other Manding languages. Not surprisingly, the potential clauses of Mandinka can often be translated by future clauses in the other Manding languages, since in the languages that do not have a dedicated potential marker, it is not uncommon that potentiality is expressed by TAM forms whose primary function is the expression of future (see for example Vydrin (2019a) on Guinean Maninka *di*). However, in Mandinka, potential *sì ~ sè* contrasts with the dedicated future construction *bé ...-lá*, and is consequently more clearly anchored in the modal domain than the future constructions that may constitute its translational equivalents in other languages. Example (44) illustrates the basic modal meaning of this *sì ~ sè* in Mandinka. For more details on *sì ~ sè*, readers are referred to Creissels & Sambou (2013: 76–80).

- (44) Mandinka  
*Níj í yé wõo dómò, à sì í kónòò dímîj.*  
 if 2SG CPL.TR DEM eat 3SG POT 2SG belly.D hurt  
 ‘If you eat this, it might cause tummy aches to you.’

What concerns us here is that potential clauses with second person subjects are commonly used as a polite way of expressing commands. Commands formulated by means of potential clauses are presented as if they were rather proposals, advices or suggestions, as in (45).

(45) Mandinka

*Í sí jèe-môo-lú sàláamú íj ñè.*  
 2SG POT there-person.D-PL greet 1SG for  
 ‘You might greet the people there for me.’  
 > ‘Please, greet the people there for me!’

#### 4.4.3. The directive use of assertive clauses with future or incomplete predicative markers

It is cross-linguistically common that TAM forms or constructions whose basic meaning can be defined as future or incomplete are used to express commands, and this phenomenon is attested in Manding languages too, as observed by Vydrin (2019b: 91, 95).

### 5. Conclusion

In this article, I have described the coding of directive speech acts and wishes in Manding languages within the frame of monoclausal constructions. In Manding languages, the subjunctive plays a prominent role in the expression of commands and wishes, in competition, however, with dedicated imperative and optative constructions. The main conclusions are as follows:

- In Manding languages, dedicated imperative constructions are never obligatory, in the sense that direct commands can always be expressed by means of subjunctive clauses with a 2nd person subject, and when a dedicated imperative construction is also available, it is perceived as relatively rude in comparison with the subjunctive.
- As regards the expression of wishes, an interesting particularity of Manding languages is that, even if they do not involve specific optative marking, the clauses expressing wishes (be they ordinary wishes in everyday life, of blessings as uttered in highly ritualized contexts) tend to be explicitly distinguished from clauses expressing directive speech acts by the systematic use of formulations with *Álá* ‘God’ in subject role.
- Mandinka has a variant of the pan-Manding dedicated optative construction in which the desired state-of-affairs is encoded as a subjunctive clause, but in this variant of the optative construction, the sequence *Álá màa* (where *màa* is the optative marker) is being reanalyzed as an optative particle.

### Abbreviations

AdvCOP	adverbial copula	NomCOP	nominal copula
CAUS	causative	OBLG	obligative
CPL	completive	OPT	optative
D	default determiner	PL	plural
DEM	demonstrative	POSTP	postposition
FOC	focus marker	POT	potential
FUT	future	Q	interrogative particle
GEN	genitive	QUOT	quotative
ICPL	incompletive	REL	relativizer
IMP	imperative	SBJV	subjunctive
INF	infinitive	SG	singular
INTERJ	interjection	TR	transitive
ITR	intransitive	VEN	venitive
NEG	negative	VP	verb phrase.
NegCOP	negative copula		

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### Directive and optative clauses in Manding languages

This article discusses the structure of directive and optative clauses in Manding languages. The discussion mainly relies on a comparison between the two Manding languages for which detailed data on directive and optative clauses are available: Mandinka and Bambara. In Manding languages, the subjunctive plays a prominent role in the expression of commands and wishes, but speakers avoid expressing wishes by means of formulations exactly identical to those used for commands. Manding languages have a dedicated optative construction in which *Álá* ‘God’ is followed by a dedicated optative marker, but in Mandinka, the sequence ‘*Álá* + optative marker’ is freezing into an optative particle, as evidenced by the fact that *Álá* can be repeated as the subject of the clause following the optative marker.

**Keywords:** Mande, Bambara, Mandinka, directive clauses, optative clauses, subjunctive, grammaticalization.

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### Propositions directives et optatives dans les langues manding

Cet article discute la structure des phrases directives et optatives dans les langues mandingues. La discussion repose essentiellement sur une comparaison entre les deux langues mandingues pour lesquelles des données détaillées sur les phrases directives et optatives sont disponibles : Mandinka et Bambara. Dans les langues mandingues, le subjonctif joue un rôle de premier plan dans l'expression des ordres et des souhaits, mais les locuteurs évitent d'exprimer les souhaits au moyen de constructions exactement identiques à celles utilisées pour formuler des ordres. Les langues mandingues ont une construction

optative spécialisée dans laquelle *Álá* 'Dieu' est suivi d'un marqueur optatif spécialisé, mais en Mandinka, la séquence '*Álá* + marqueur optatif' se fige pour devenir une particule optative, comme le montre le fait que *Álá* peut être répété comme le sujet de la proposition qui succède au marqueur optatif.

**Mots-clés :** Mandé, Bambara, Mandinka, phrases directives, phrases optatives, subjonctif, grammaticalisation.

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### **Директивные и оптативные предложения в языках манден**

В статье обсуждается структура директивных и оптативных предложений в языках манден. В первую очередь, речь идёт о сравнении двух языков, по которым имеется достаточно данных: мандинка и бамана. В языках манден конъюнктив играет ведущую роль в выражении приказов и пожеланий, однако говорящие на этих языках избегают выражения пожеланий при помощи тех же самых конструкций, которые используются для выражения приказов. В языках манден имеется специализированная оптативная конструкция, в которых за словом *Álá* 'Бог' следует особый показатель оптатива, при этом в мандинка последовательность «*Álá* + показатель оптатива» превращается в оптативную частицу, и это видно по тому, что *Álá* может интерпретироваться как подлежащее предложения, следующего за показателем оптатива.

**Ключевые слова:** манде, бамана, мандинка, директивные предложения, оптативные предложения, конъюнктив, грамматикализация