

# A Polylectal Grammar of Lingála and Its Theoretical Implications

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The much discussed emergence of Lingála as a trade language on the Mongála, Ngiri and Ubangi rivers in the Equateur Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and its eventual spread throughout much of the rest of the country, the Republic of the Congo (RoC), and parts of the nations surrounding this home region continues to fascinate Congolese language researchers for a variety of reasons. Following Bokamba (2009), this paper aims to address three primary objectives: (1) The characterization, from a comparative perspective, of the differences and similarities among three of the language's varieties/dialects: Mankanza Lingála (ML) or Literary Lingála (LL), Spoken Lingála (SL), and Kinshasa Lingála (KL); (2) the provision of possible explanations to account for the sources or causes of the grammatical variations observed in the three varieties; and (3) a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of producing polylectal grammars for languages such as this one.

The paper shows with respect to the first two objectives that all three dialects share, as would be expected, many common core grammatical characteristics; and that the most important and evident difference between ML and any of the other two dialects involves the scope of the operation of the grammatical agreement system, the core dimension of Bantu languages grammar. The second major difference between ML and KL concerns the occurrence of double noun class prefixes in the pluralization of nouns in the latter, and the paradox that this phenomenon exemplifies in the grammatical agreement system. A few other significant differences involving tense-aspects usage and phonological rules are also discussed in response to the first goal. An attempt is made to offer a set of explications of these differences on the basis of the language's contact and planning histories.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Motivation for the study

The emergence of Lingála, a Central Bantu language of Zone C.40, as a trade language along the mighty Congo River and its tributaries in remote northwestern Equateur Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and its eventual spread as one of the major languages of wider communication (LWC) in much of Central Africa to become an urban language continue to be the subjects of considerable interest among specialists of Congolese languages. A number of recent studies (e.g., Knappert 1979, Sesep 1986, Samarin 1990/1991, Meeuwis 2001a-b, Meeuwis and Vinck 1999, 2003, Motingea and Bonzoi 2008, and Bokamba 2008, 2009, among others) have addressed key aspects of the spread of this language with reference to the genesis of the language, agents of its spread, functional allocations, and the extent of the spread per se. While the varieties of the language that have resulted from this spread have been recognized and even documented in one form or another in grammatical references (Guthrie 1935, 1966, De Boeck 1956, Bwantsa-Kafungu 1970, Bokula 1983, Bokamba & Bokamba 2004, Motingea 2006) and various textbooks, including the bible and

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novels, very little attention has been given to the analysis of the salient characteristics that differentiate these dialects. The few publications that offer some descriptions in this respect limit themselves to either one dialect (e.g., Ellington 1974, Motingea 2006), or to the two primary ones that were deemed as “good” or “non-corrupted”: Mankandza Lingála/Literary and Spoken Lingála (Van Everbroeck 1969).

This major research gap leaves researchers uninformed of interesting data and phenomena on multi-dialectal grammars. It is our considered opinion that the pursuit of a comparative study of the Lingála’s dialects is vital both for the advancement of knowledge on the language per se, and also for general descriptive and theoretical interests in linguistics. In view of this interest, the present study continues and expands on the Lingála part of the analysis included in Bokamba (1993) with a focus on the three objectives stated in Section (1) above. The paper’s primary interest is the analysis of the major features that characterize the grammar of Lingála exemplified in its three most popular dialects: Literary, Spoken, and Kinshasa Lingála.

## *2.2. Historical overview of the spread of Lingála*

Lingála is one of the major Bantu languages that form the East Benue-Congo sub-branch of the Niger-Congo phylum in Africa (Heine and Nurse 2000, Williamson and Blench 2000). As it is well known in African linguistics, Bantu languages, estimated to number around 500 out of the estimated 1,436 Niger-Congo languages, cover much of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) from the Cameroon on the West coast of Africa all the way to South Africa, except for a few pockets of Khoisan languages in Tanzania, South Africa, and Namibia (Heine and Nurse 2000). Lingála, which is characteristically a Central Bantu language in its core grammar, is spoken as a first and additional language primarily in DRC, the Republic of Congo (RoC/Congo-Brazzaville), and in parts of five neighboring central African states: northwestern Angola (including the cities of Luanda and Cabinda), eastern Gabon, southern Central Africa Republic, and southwestern South Sudan. In addition, it is used as “the Congolese lingua franca” in a variety of immigrant Congolese communities throughout Africa, Europe, and the Americas where Congolese popular music, the “Soukous” or “Congolese rumba,” is the music of choice that makes everyone dance (Dzokanga 1979, Bokula 1983, Stewart 2000).

It is estimated that Lingála is spoken as a first and second language by 20-25 million speakers in DRC and RoC, and understood as an additional language by several more millions by devotees of Congolese music throughout Africa. As discussed in Bokamba (2009), in DRC where it serves and is recognized in the 2006 Constitution with Kikongo, Kiswahili, and Tshiluba, as a national language, it functions as the dominant or competing lingua franca in four and a half of the current eleven provinces: the Equateur Province (northwest) and the capital city of Kinshasa where it is the dominant lingua franca for daily communication; the Bandundu Province (southwest) and the Bas-Congo Province (west) where it competes with Kikongo; and the Orientale Province (east) where it competes with Kiswahili (Bokamba 1976, 2008, Sesep 1986). During the 1970s and 1980s it penetrated significantly into what is now the North and South Kivu Province so as to become a weak competitor to Kiswahili, the dominant regional lingua franca. In RoC, Lingála is one of the two major lingua francae in its three major cities: the capital city of Brazzaville (southeast), Pointe Noire (west), and Impfondo (northeast). In the first two cities it competes against Kikongo, the dominant lingua franca in that sub-region. Overall, Lingála has a quasi-national status in both DRC and RoC because of its dominant use in the Congolese music, the most popular source of entertainment in much of Sub-Saharan Africa.

As shown in Bokamba’s (2009) detailed study, Lingála’s phenomenal spread in its primary region and parts of surrounding countries camouflages its humble beginning around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (ca 1850) in a small town known as Mankandza or “Nouvelle Anvers” in northwestern Equateur Province in the region encompassed by the Ubangi and Congo rivers (Hulstaert 1940a-b, Mumbanza 1971, 1973, Meeuwis and Vinck 1999, 2003, Bokamba 2009). Unlike the geneses of most of LWC that are relatively well documented, that of Lingála remains obscure, owing in part to the close relations among the languages of the sub-region from which it emerged, and to the lack of documentation on these languages (Hulstaert 1940a). The language is reported to have spread in four ways from Mankandza to the rest of the Congo River basin before and after the colonization of what is today DRC by King Leopold II (1879-1908) and Belgium (1908-1960): (1) riverine trade on the Ubangi and

Congo rivers and their respective tributaries; (2) catholic (initially the Scheutist) and eventually Protestant church missions; (3) security/armed forces and colonial administration agents; and (4) Congolese music (Hulstaert 1940a-b, Mumbanza 1971, 1973, Samarin 1982, 1990/1991, Sesep 1986, Meeuwis 2001a-b, Meeuwis and Vinck 1999, 2003, Bokamba 2008, 2009). The spread in DRC after the decolonization is largely attributed to the use of the language by the Congolese national army and police forces, language policies and practices of the Catholic church, language practices during the 1<sup>st</sup> republic (under President Kasa Vubu and Premier Minister Lumumba) and especially in the 2<sup>nd</sup> republic under President Mobutu (1965-1997), and the ever so popular Congolese music.

The factors that facilitated the language's spread in RoC, which was ceded to France by King Leopold II and became its colony (1884-1959), other than the riverine trade referenced above and the shared Congolese music, remain unclear. What is clear, however, are two facts: (1) Lingála has firmly established itself in both DRC and RoC as the quintessential national indigenous language of wider communication (LWC); and (2) the spread has led to the emergence of the following six dialects:

- 1) Lingála dialects:
  - a. **Mankandza Lingála/Literary Lingála** (“Lingála littéraire”)
  - b. **Spoken Lingála** (“Lingála parlé”)
  - c. **Kinshasa Lingála** (“Lingála de Kinshasa”)
  - d. **Brazzaville Lingála** (“Lingála de Brazzaville”)
  - e. **Mangála** (a somewhat mutually unintelligible variety spoken in northern and northeastern Oriental province—the Uele District)
  - f. **“Indoubill”** (a highly code-mixed Lingála-Kikongo-French variety spoken by youths in Kinshasa).

The development of these dialects is not surprising for any LWC as other cases have demonstrated (e.g., Arabic, Bamana, English, French, isiZulu, Kiswahili, Portuguese, and Spanish). The paper now takes up this topic to address the goals enumerated in Section (1).

### 3. Variations in Lingála

The birth and subsequent spread of Lingála summarized above, but discussed in greater detail in Bokamba (2009), has exacerbated its variation from the closely-knit Ubangi-Congo rivers region source languages' grammars. This section compares and contrasts the first three dialects; offers plausible explanations for occurrence of the variations under consideration; and then discusses the implications of these data to linguistic theory.

Lingála arose in a stable multilingual sub-region on the Mongála River, a small tributary of the Congo River on which the town of Mankandza, that served as a trading, Scheutist mission, and colonial militia training center in late 1880s. It then spread as a trade language in the Congo-Ubangi rivers region and beyond for decades (cf. Bokamba 2009). The source languages include the often cited Bobangi, spoken in the town of same name that is found at the bottom of the Y-axis formed by the Ubangi and Congo rivers; Balói (on the Ngiri River), Bolóbo (Ubangi River), Dzámbe (sub-region between the Ubangi and Ngiri rivers), Libinza (Ngiri River), Likoká, Lobálá (both in Ubang-Ngiri sub-region), Mabaale (Ngiri River), Ngele (Ubangi River), and Ngombe (Congo River). All these Bantu Zone C.40 languages are closely related to such an extent that many of them are mutually intelligible, as Motingea (1996a) has shown for several of them. All these Ubangi-Congo rivers area Bantu languages are characterized by the typical Bantu family robust agglutinative morphology and a seven-phonemic vowel system. As in most other Bantu languages, three of the core features of the morphological characteristics are noun prefixes that permit the pairing of such nouns into singular and plural on the basis of such prefixes; and the occurrence of a series of grammatical agreement forms on verbs and modifiers that these nouns trigger. An additional feature that characterizes them as Central Bantu languages is the predominance of suffixal, rather than prefixal, tense-aspect markers. At the phonetic and phonological levels one encounters in the C.40 Zone not only the seven-vowel phonemes

mentioned previously, but also two labio-velars and labio-dental, viz., /kp, gb, ŋ/, in several of the languages. Further, there exists a universal tense-lax vowel harmony for the mid-vowels.

### 3.1. Mankandza/Literary Lingála

This variety that was initially codified and eventually code-elaborated by the Scheutist Mgr. Egide De Boeck and his colleagues in the late 1880s to early 1900s and which is often taken as “standard Lingála” reflects the above-stated characteristics. For example, the phonemic contrast between the tense and lax front vowels [e, ε] is exemplified by minimal pairs such as [mabelé] ‘dirt/soil’ versus [mabele] ‘milk/breast’, and [mopepe] ‘tube’ versus [mopepe] ‘wind’. That between the mid-back vowels is similarly in pairs such as [nzoto] ‘body’ versus [nzɔtɔ] ‘stars’, and [libongo] ‘river/sea port’ versus [libɔngɔ] ‘carp’. Labio-velars in Mankandza Lingála occur in words such as /kpaŋga/ ‘manioc/cassava’, /kpɔkɔsɔ/ ‘difficulty or complication’, /gbaba/ ‘bridge’, and /engbele/ ‘cassava bread’.

The vowel harmony involving the assimilation of the tensed mid-vowels to their counterparts in Literary Lingála, as in its source languages or lexifiers, is instantiated in data such as in (2) below where the final suffixal vowel /a/ in an infinitival verb assimilates to the immediately preceding lax stem vowel (2a-d), and /e/ of the applicative suffix {-el-} assimilates accordingly:

2) **Vowel harmony in SL** (with tones omitted for ease of transcriptions on the lax vowels):

- |    |              |                                   |
|----|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. | ko-bɔnd-el-ε | to pray, beg                      |
| b. | ko-mɛsɛn-ε   | to be used to, to habituate       |
| c. | ko-pɛs-ε     | to give                           |
| d. | ko-mɔn-ɔ     | to see, visualize                 |
| e. | ko-bɛt-ε     | to hit, strike                    |
| f. | mo-bɔnd-el-i | one who prays, begs               |
| g. | mo-bɛt-i     | one who hits, a hitter            |
| h. | mobɛt-el-i   | one who strikes, a striker/hitter |
| i. | mo-mɛsɛn-i   | a habit; an habituate             |
| j. | ko-kom-a     | to write                          |
| k. | ko-kom-el-a  | to write for someone              |
| l. | mo-kom-i     | a writer                          |
| m. | mo-kom-el-i  | one who writes for others         |
| n. | ko-beng-a    | to call, invite                   |
| o. | ko-beng-el-a | to call for, invite for someone   |
| p. | mobeng-el-i  | one who invites                   |

Note from the data that /i/, like its corresponding back vowel (not shown here), blocks the application of the vowel harmony that applies iteratively.

Similarly, in the noun morphological system, ML/LL exhibits the full range of noun prefixes that characterize its lexifiers and related languages, as shown in Table I below:

**Table I: Morphological noun class system in ML/LL, SL**  
Standard & Spoken Lingála

MNC	Noun Prefix	Example	GLOSS
1	<b>mo-/mw-</b>	<i>mo-to/mw-ási</i>	person/woman
2	<b>ba-</b>	<i>ba-to/ba- ási</i>	persons/women
3	<b>mu-/mo-</b>	<i>mu-nkandá</i>	letter/book
4	<b>mi-</b>	<i>mi-nkandá</i>	letters/books
5	<b>li-</b>	<i>li-báta/li-túnga</i>	duck/basket
6	<b>ma-</b>	<i>ma-báta/ma-túnga</i>	ducks/baskets
7	<b>e-</b>	<i>e-loko</i>	thing/object
8.	<b>bi-</b>	<i>bi-loko</i>	things/baskets
9	<b>N</b>	<b>ndáku/mbwa</b>	house/dog
10	<b>N</b>	<b>ndáku/mbwa</b>	houses/dogs
11	<b>lo-</b>	<i>lo-pángo</i>	fence/enclosure
10	<b>N</b>	<b>m-pángo</b>	fences/enclosures
14	<b>bo-</b>	<i>bo-bóto</i>	kind(ness)/love
14	<b>bo-</b>	<i>bo-ndóki</i>	gun/weapon
6	<b>ma-</b>	<i>ma-ndóki</i>	guns/weapons

These noun prefixes, with the exception of classes 1, 9, and 10, trigger subject agreement prefixes that are characterizable as “copies” of the overt subject noun prefixes. As such and in combination with certain semantic properties, especially for the human class, they define syntactically what is viewed in Bantu linguistics as noun classes (Guthrie 1967, Gregersen 1967, Bokamba 1976, 1993). This pattern is illustrated in Table II for ML/LL:

**Table II. Grammatical Agreement Across noun classes in ML/LL:**  
Standard/Mankandza Lingála

MNC	Noun Prefix	Subject Verb Agreement	Adjectival Agreement <sup>2</sup>	SNC
1	<b>mo-/mw-</b>	<i>a-</i>	<i>mo-</i>	1
2	<b>ba-</b>	<i>ba-</i>	<i>ba-</i>	2
3	<b>mu-/mo-</b>	<i>Mu-/mo-</i>	<i>mu-/mo-</i>	3
4	<b>mi-</b>	<i>mi-</i>	<i>mi-</i>	4
5	<b>li-</b>	<i>li-</i>	<i>li-</i>	5
6	<b>ma-</b>	<i>ma-</i>	<i>ma-</i>	6
7	<b>e-</b>	<i>e-</i>	<i>e-</i>	7
8.	<b>bi-</b>	<i>bi-</i>	<i>bi-</i>	8
9	<b>N</b>	<i>e-</i>	<i>e-</i>	7
10	<b>N</b>	<i>i-</i>	<i>N-/i-</i>	9
11	<b>lo-</b>	<i>lu-/lo-</i>	<i>lo-</i>	11
10	<b>N</b>	<i>i-</i>	<i>N-/i-</i>	9
14	<b>bo-</b>	<i>bu-/bo-</i>	<i>bo-</i>	14
14	<b>bo-</b>	<i>bu-/bo-</i>	<i>bo-</i>	14
6	<b>ma-</b>	<i>ma-</i>	<i>ma-</i>	6

The well-known central role of the noun classes in Bantu languages is exemplified in ML/LL by data such as those in (3) where the morphological prefixes of the subject nouns, which serve also as the head of the adjectival phrase, are essentially copied onto the adjective and the verb:

<sup>2</sup> Adj(ective) is used here to cover all noun modifiers except for non-ordinal quantifiers (e.g., demonstratives, genitive, prepositions, ordinals).

- 3) a. *Mo-lakisi mo-nene a-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*  
 Cl.1-teacher Cl.1 Agr-big Cl.1 Agr-come-Impf here today  
 (A big/an important teacher came here today.)
- b. *Ba-lakisi ba-nene ba-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*  
 Cl.2-teacher Cl.2 agr-big Cl.2-come-Impf here today  
 (Big/important teachers came here today.)
- c. *Mú-ntuka mu-nene mu-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*  
 Cl.3-truck Cl.3 Agr-big Cl.3 Agr-come-Impf here today  
 (A big truck/vehicle came here today.)
- d. *Mí-ntuka mi-nene mi-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*  
 Cl.4-truck Cl.4 Agr-big Cl.4 Agr-come-Impf here today  
 (Big trucks/vehicles came here today.)
- e. *Li-súwa li-nene li-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*  
 Cl.5-boat Cl.5 Agr-boat Cl.5 Agr-come-Impf here today  
 (A big boat/ship came here today.)
- f. *Ma-súwa ma-nene ma-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*  
 Cl.6-boat Cl.6 Agr-boat Cl.6 Agr-come-Impf here today
- g. *E-keko e-nene e-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*  
 Cl.7-statue Cl.7 Agr-big Cl.7 Agr-come-Impf here today  
 (A big statue came here today.)
- h. *Bi-keko bi-nene bi-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*  
 Cl.8-statue Cl.8 Agr-big Cl.8 Agr-come-Impf here today  
 (Big statues came here today.)

This type of alliterative adjectival and subject-verb agreement obtains in all the noun classes wherever the subject and/or the head noun in an AP (adjectival Phrase) carries an overt prefix. The SVA for human Class 1 is, as in almost all Bantu languages, exceptional in not copying the subject noun prefix in Lingála and its source languages (e.g., Likila, Dzamba, Libinza, Bobangi)<sup>3</sup>. Sentences that do not exhibit this type of grammatical agreement are judged as ungrammatical in ML/LL, as the following corresponding examples, with the same meanings and morphological noun classes, show:

- 4) a. *\*Ba-lakisi mo-nene ba-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*  
 (Big/important teachers came here today.)
- b. *\*Mú-ntuka mo-nene e-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*
- c. *\*Mí-ntuka mo-nene e-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*
- d. *\*Li-súwa mo-nene e-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*
- e. *\*Ma-súwa mo-nene e-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*
- f. *E-keko mo-nene e-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*
- g. *Bi-keko mo-nene e-yà-ákí áwa lèlò.*

As will be shown in sections (3.2) and (3.3), however, sentences such as these occur quite frequently in SL, and consistently in KL.

### 3.2. Spoken Lingála (SL)

The expansion of ML to other parts of DRC and RoC before and that of LL after the corpus planning, however, brought it into contact with many other languages among the estimated 214 indigenous Bantu and non-Bantu languages, plus French, which are spoken in DRC and 62 in RoC (Lewis, 2009). These contacts caused ML to undergo numerous variations and changes, especially in its core grammar in the areas of morphological noun classes and grammatical agreement (Bokamba 1993). For example, while SL exhibits the same morphological noun classes as ML/LL, it differs

<sup>3</sup> For data on grammatical agreement in the first three languages, see Bokamba (1976, ff).

considerably from it in three key grammatical agreement aspects: (1) its SVA is consistent with that of ML/LL for the human classes (1 & 2), but for the remaining classes it varies unpredictably; (2) grammatical agreement involving descriptive adjectives and quantifiers is highly sporadic, bordering on the eradication of this type of agreement; and (3) grammatical agreement with respect to demonstratives, prepositions, and possessives has been leveled off, at least judging from the Protestant Bible which, like its Catholic counterpart, is a classic and carefully written text. These features are illustrated in structures such as the following from the Lingála *Biblia* (2007):

- 5) a. *Ma-komí na Bulee na Njambe Ma-biang-ámí Nkómbo Biblia*  
 Cl.6-writings Poss sacred Poss God Cl.6 Agr-call-Psv name  
 (God's sacred writings called the Bible.) (*Biblia* 2007: Title page)
- b. *Mo-sálá na Yoane mo-bátisi*  
 Cl.3-work Poss John Cl.1-baptizer  
 (The work of John the baptizer.) (*Biblia* 2007: 925)
- c. *Ekei bango, tala ba-mo-susu kati na ba-kengeli ba-ingeli na mboka mpe ba-yebisi ba-nganga mi-nene ma-kambo y-ɔnsɔ ma-bimi. Esili bango kojuana na mi-kolo na mboka mpe koyangana mwango, ba-pesi mi-sɔlɔ na palata epai na ba-soda, mpe ba-lobi éte, Boloba éte ba-yekoli na ye ba-yei na butu naino e-jalaki biso kolala mpɔngi. Sɔkɔ mpe li-kambo oyo e-kokoma na ma-toi na Mo-kolo-na-mokili, biso to-kobongisa li-kambo mpe bino bo-kojua mpasi tɛ. Boye ba-kamati mo-sɔlɔ mpe ba-sali lokola e-lakisami bango. Mpe li-loba y-ango e-sili kopalanga[na] kati na Bayuda kino lɛlɔ oyo. Biblia (2007: 925, verses 11-15).*

(As they left, some of them among the guards entered the town and told the big/important medicine men what transpired/occurred. After they had met with the town leaders and made a plan, they gave silver coins to the soldiers, and they said that, say that his disciples came at night to take him away while we were still sleeping. If this matter gets to the attention of the head of the state, we will take care of it and you will not have any difficulty. So they [the soldiers] took the money and did what they were instructed. And that story spread among the Jews until today.) (Our free translation).

What the examples in (5) show is this. In (5a), the highlighted invariant preposition **na** 'of' is supposed to agree with the Cl(ass) 6 noun **ma-komí** *ma-á* *bulee* *ma-á* *Njambe*. Similarly, in (5b) *Mo-sálá na* should have been realized as *mo-sálá mw-á* 'the work of' where the morpheme {mw-} (underlyingly {mo-á}) represents the proper grammatical agreement for the Cl.3 noun.

The long passage in (5c) exhibits, as highlighted, similar invariances and inconsistent grammatical agreements. For example, the sequence of prefixes {**ba-mo-**} before the adjectival root {-susu} 'other' in line 1, is an uncommon and unexpected occurrence in any Lingála variety, because it combines the Cl.2 noun prefix, which is a plural morpheme, with the singular morpheme {mo-} for Cl.1. The prefixing of {ba-} in this manner suggests that the actual root is {-mosusu}, and this is incorrect. In the same line, the preposition indicated as **na** should be **ya** in agreement with *kati* 'among/between'. While the SVA between the Cl.2 noun *ba-kengeli* and the verb *ko-ingel-a* 'to enter' is realized correctly, viz., *ba-kengeli ba-ingel-I* 'the guards entered', the adjectival agreement in the phrase *ba-nganga mi-nene* 'big or established medicine men/persons' (literarily 'medicine men/persons big') is only partially correct in that there is agreement with the plurality feature but not the morphological class. The proper adjectival agreement, if SL were consistent, should have been *ba-nganga ba-nene*. Similarly and as indicated on the verb in the last phrase of the first sentence, line 2, viz., *ma-kambo y-ɔnsɔ ma-bimi* 'matters all occurred', the proper adjectival agreement on the quantifier {-ɔnsɔ} 'all', should have been *ma-ɔnsɔ* to reflect the Cl.6 head noun *ma-kambo*. These and other variations, in some cases changes, which are not discussed thus far, are summarized in Table III below, along with the corresponding ML/LL versions to show the contrast between the two dialects.

**Table III: Illustrative variations in SL as contrasted to ML/LL**

MNC	SL example	Type of grammatical agreement	Corresponding ML/LL example	Meaning
9	kati <b>na</b>	Prepositional	kati <b>ya</b>	Among
2	<i>ba-kængeli ba-ingeli</i>	SVA	<i>ba-kængeli ba-ingeli</i>	The guards entered
2	<i>ba-nganga mi-nɛnɛ</i>	Adjectival	<i>ba-nganga ba-nɛnɛ</i>	
6	<i>ma-kambo y-ɔnsɔ ma-bimi</i>	Quantifier/SVA	<i>ma-kambo ma-ɔnsɔ ma-bimi</i>	All that transpired
4	<i>mi-kolo <b>na</b> mboka</i>	Possessive	<i>mi-kolo <b>my-á</b> mboka</i>	Town's leaders
2	<i>ba-yekoli <b>na</b> ye ba-yei</i>	Possessive/SVA	<i>ba-yekoli <b>ba-á</b> ye ba-yei</i>	His disciples came
9	<i>e-jalaki biso kolála</i>	SVA w/implicit Cl.9 surface subj. <i>ntango</i> 'time/period/when'	<i>e-jalaki biso kolala</i>	When we were sleeping
5	<i>li-kambo oyo e-kokoma</i>	Demonstrative/SVA	<i>li-kambo li-ye li-kokoma</i>	This matter will get out
6	<i>ma-toi <b>na</b></i>	Possessive	<i>ma-toi <b>ma-á</b></i>	Ears of
1	<i>Mo-kolo-<b>na</b>-mokili</i>	Possessive	<i>Mo-kolo-<b>wa-á</b> mokili</i>	Leader of the land/country
9	<i>e-lakisami bango</i>	SVA w/implicit surface subj. <i>ndenge</i> 'how/manner'	<i>e-lakisami bango</i>	As they were instructed
2; 1 <sup>st</sup> plur.	biso <i>to-kobongisa</i>	SVA	biso <i>to-kobongisa</i>	We will fix
2; 2 <sup>nd</sup> plur.	bino <i>bo-kojua</i>	SVA	bino <i>bo-kojua</i>	You (plur.) will get
2; 3 <sup>rd</sup> plur.	<i>ba-kamati</i>	SVA	<i>ba-kamati</i>	They took
5	<i>li-loba y-ango e-sili</i>	Demonstrative/SVA	<i>li-loba li-ango li-sili</i>	That matter has

An aspect of the SVA that shows consistency across the two varieties but is not fully documented in the narrative in (5c), but illustrated partially as indicated in the three examples before the last one in Table III, is the agreement involving the Cl.1/2 personal pronouns. The full paradigm, using the verb *ko-kamat-a* 'to take/seize', is as follows in both dialects:

- 6) a. Ngái    *na-kamat-áki*    I took  
 b. Yɔ     *o-kamat-áki*     You (sg.) took  
 c. Yé     *a-kamat-áki*     He/She took  
 d. Bisó    *to-kamat-áki*     We took  
 e. Bínó    *bo-kamat-áki*     You (plur.) took  
 f. Bangó   *ba-kamat-áki*     They took

What the data in Table III indicate is that the morphological noun class (MNC) in SL is identical to that of ML/LL, the syntactic noun class (SNC) is variable or in flux based at least on the determinative core are: SVA, and the subsidiary ones often referred to globally in Bantu linguistics as the nominal agreement. In other words, this variability obscures the notion of syntactic noun class.

In addition to the three key aspects of the grammatical agreement described above, there are several others that distinguish SL from its assumed parent: ML/LL. These will be presented in section 3.4 below. In the meantime and continue with the comparison and contrast among the three dialects, consider next the case of Kinshasa Lingála (KL).

### 3.3. Kinshasa Lingála

As described in Bokamba (1993, ff) with respect to grammatical agreement, KL is characterized saliently by three features: (1) the occurrence of double noun prefixes involving the spread of the CL.2 prefix to all other classes; (2) a drastic simplification of this core aspect of Bantu languages; and (3) a high percentage of either French loanwords or of Lingala-French code-mixed concatenated words.

With reference to the first characteristic, KL exhibits double noun prefixes such the examples below where the CL.2 prefix (*{ba-}*) has spread to all other noun classes (Bokamba 1993):

**Table IV: Kinshasa Lingála’s morphological noun classes**

MNC	Noun Prefix	Example	GLOSS
1	<i>mo-/mw-</i>	<i>mo-to/mw-ási</i>	person/woman
2	<i>ba-</i>	<i>ba-to/ba- ási</i>	persons/women
3	<i>mo-</i>	<i>mo-kándá</i>	letter/book
4	<i>(ba-)mi-</i>	<i>ba-mi-kándá</i>	letters/books
5/7?	<i>li-/ki-</i>	<i>li-báta/ ki-túnga</i>	duck/basket
6	<i>(ba-)ma-</i>	<i>(ba-)ma-báta</i>	ducks
7	<i>e-</i>	<i>e-lóko</i>	thing/object
8	<i>(ba-)bi-</i>	<i>(ba-)bi-lóko/bi-túnga</i>	things/baskets
9	<i>N-</i>	<i>ndáko/mbwa</i>	house/dog
10	<i>ba-N</i>	<i>ba-ndáko/ba-mbwa</i>	houses/dogs
11	<i>lo-</i>	<i>lo-pángo</i>	Fence/enclosure
6	<i>(ba-)ma-</i>	<i>(ba-)ma-pángo</i>	fences/enclosures
14/7?	<i>bo-</i>	<i>bo-bóto/bolingo</i>	kind(ness)/love
	<i>ki-</i>	<i>ki-ndumba/ki-ndóki</i>	bachelorette stage/sorcery
14/3	<i>bo-/mo-</i>	<i>bo-ndóki</i>	gun/weapon
6	<i>(ba-)ma-</i>	<i>(ba-)ma-ndóki</i>	guns/weapons

The occurrence of these double noun affixing is very common not only on Bantu originating nouns, but also on French loanwords such as *ba-livres* ‘books’, *ba-voitures* ‘cars’, *ba-options* ‘options’ where the French root is already suffixed with a plural. For some speakers the double affixing is not constant, but variable depending on the interlocutor being addressed or the occasion or context for the speech; hence the use of the parentheses in the table above. Note further the replacement or supplementation of the ML/LL’s CL.5 noun prefix *{li-}* by the Kikongo CL.7 noun prefix: *{ki-}*, for many noun roots that usually take *{li-}*, e.g., *li-tambála* ‘head-scarf’ realized as *ki-tambála* pluralized as *bi-tambála* instead of *ma-tambála*; *ki-túnga* ‘basket’ instead of *li-túnga*; *ki-sanóla* ‘comb’ instead of *li-sanóla*, etc. The same prefix is also utilized for forming certain abstract noun (that usually take *{bo-}*), e.g., *ki-ndúmba* ‘state of being a bachelorette’ instead of *bo-ndúmba*, *ki-ndóki* ‘witchcraft’ instead of *bo-ndóki*, *ki-bo-mwasi* ‘womanhood’ instead of *bo-mwasi*, *ki-bo-mwana* ‘childhood’ instead of *bo-mwana*.

The complexification of the MNC summarized in Table IV, however, has not had any corresponding effect on the grammatical agreement system. Instead, KL offers an extremely reduced agreement system in two ways: (1) SVA has been reduced to three syntactic noun classes (SNC): Human singular and plural (CL.1 & 2), and everything else (CL.7); and (2) nominal agreement (*viz.*, adjectival, demonstrative, possessive, quantifier, and prepositional) has been completely eradicated or lost. These characteristics are best illustrated in the KL’s edition of the Protestant Bible that was published for the first time in 2000 after decades of rejection of this dialect as “corrupted” or “street Lingála” by this important ecumenical organization that comprises over 60 denominations and their Catholic counterparts. The publication legitimized KL. Here are some illustrative data from this book, extracted from the same text sections as those from SL:

- 7) a. BIBLE: **BO-YOKANI** YA KALA PE **BO-YOKANI** YA  
 Bible Cl.14-understanding of ancient and Cl.14-understanding of  
 SIKA NA LI-NGALA YA LELO **OYO**  
 new of Cl.5-ngala of today this  
 (Bible: [the] Ancient/old Testament and New Testament) (Bible 2000: Title page)
- b. **Ma-teya ya** Yoane Mo-batisi  
 Cl.6-teach of John Cl.1-baptizer  
 (The teaching of John the Baptist)
- c. Tango *b-asi ba-zalaki* kokende, *ba-soda mo-susu oyo ba-zalaki* kokengela simetiere *ba-zongi* na mboka, po *bá-yebisa* na **ba-konzi ya** ba-nganga-Nzambe **ma-kambo ny-onso oyo e-lekaki**. **Ba-konzi ya** ba-nganga-Nzambe na *\*ba-mbuta-muntu ba-sangani* pe *ba-yokani*, bongo *ba-pesi* basoda mbongo mingi; pe *ba-lobi* na bango: “*Bó-loba boye: ba-yekoli na ye ba-yei* koyiba ebembe na ye na butu, tango biso *to-zalaki* na pongi. Soki Pilate *a-yoki li-kambo wana*, *to-kokitisa* ye motema; *bó-banga* eloko te.” *Ba-soda ba-zwi* mbongo, pe *ba-sali* ndenge *ba-lobelaki* bango. Yango wana *li-solo oyo e-panzaná* na *\*Bayuda tii* na moi ya lelo. (Bible 2000: 41 (of the New Testament section))

(When the women were going [to the cemetery], some of the soldiers/guards who were guarding the cemetery were returning to town in order to tell the chief priests everything that transpired. The chief priests and the elders met and they agreed on a plan, and they gave the guards a lot of money; and they said this: ‘You say this: his disciples came to steal his corpse at night when we were asleep. If the governor hears this story, we will calm him down; do not be afraid. The guards took the money, and they did what they were told. This is how this story has spread among all the Jews to this day.’) (Our free translation).

As pointed out with respect to the SL in contrast to the same text sections as those from ML/LL, the erosion of the expected grammatical agreement that typifies ML/LL and other Bantu Zone C languages is evidenced in the examples above in the lack of agreement between the preposition and its head noun (7a), the demonstrative its head noun (7a), and the possessive marker (referred to as the “-a of relationship” in Bantu linguistics) in (7b). The selected examples of the rest of the deviating features documented in (7c) are summarized in **Table V** below.

**Table V: Illustrative variations in KL as contrasted to ML/LL**

MNC	KL example	Type of grammatical agreement	Corresponding ML/LL example
2	<i>b-asi ba-zalaki</i>	SVA	<i>b-asi ba-zalaki</i>
2	<i>ba-soda mo-susu oyo</i>	Adjectival & Demonstrative	<i>ba-soda ba-susu ba-ye</i>
5	<i>Ma-kambo ny-onso</i>	Quantifier	<i>Ma-kambo ma-nsó</i>
5	<b>ma-kambo ... oyo e-lekaki</b>	Possessive	<i>ma-kambo ... ma-ye ma-lekaki</i>
2	<i>ba-zalaki</i>	SVA (w/ <i>ba-soda</i> )	<i>ba-zalaki</i>
2	<b>ba-konzi ya</b> ba-nganga-Nzambe	Possessive	<i>ba-konzi ba-á</i> ba-nganga-Nzambe
2	<i>ba-yekoli na ye ba-yei</i>	Possessive & SVA	<i>ba-yekoli ba-á ye ba-yei</i>
5	<b>li-kambo wana</b>	Demonstrative	<i>li-kambo lí-na</i>
5	<i>li-solo oyo e-panzaná</i>	Demonstrative & SVA	<i>li-solo li-ye li-panzaná</i>

Notice the mismatch, or lack of SVA with non-human noun classes: both *ma-kambo* (Cl.6) in row 5 and *li-solo* (Cl.5) in row 10 trigger Cl.7 or 9 agreement in KL, instead of their own respective classes as shown in ML/LL. And as stated above, agreement with demonstratives has been neutralized for all classes, unlike in SL where there is a remnant of classes (1 & 2); that with other modifiers (viz., adjectives, demonstratives, and possessives) has been eradicated.

When all the grammatical agreement features presented above are compared and contrasted across the three dialects, they yield **Tables VIa-b**.

**Table VI a: Grammatical Agreement Variations Across MNC in ML/LL& SL<sup>4</sup>:**

		Mankandza/Literary Lingála			Spoken Lingála				
MNC	Noun Prefix	Agr/ Subj	Agr/ Adj <sup>5</sup>	SNC	MNC	N Prefix	Agr/ Subj	Agr/ Adj	SNC
1	<b>mo-/mw-</b>	<i>a-</i>	<i>mo-</i>	1	1	<b>mo-/mw</b>	<i>a-</i>	ø-/(mo-)	1
2	<b>ba-</b>	<i>ba-</i>	<i>ba-</i>	2	2	<b>ba-</b>	<i>ba-</i>	ø-/(ba-)	2
3	<b>mu-/mo-</b>	<i>Mu-/mo-</i>	<i>mu-/mo-</i>	3	3	<b>mo-</b>	<i>e-/mo-</i>	ø-	??
4	<b>mi-</b>	<i>mi-</i>	<i>mi-</i>	4	4	<b>mi-</b>	<i>e-/mi-</i>	ø-	??
5	<b>li-</b>	<i>li-</i>	<i>li-</i>	5	5	<b>li-</b>	<i>e-/li-</i>	ø-	??
6	<b>ma-</b>	<i>ma-</i>	<i>ma-</i>	6	6	<b>ma-</b>	<i>e-/ma-</i>	ø-	??
7	<b>e-</b>	<i>e-</i>	<i>e-</i>	7	7	<b>e-</b>	<i>e-</i>	ø-	??
8.	<b>bi-</b>	<i>bi-</i>	<i>bi-</i>	8	8	<b>bi-</b>	<i>e-/bi-</i>	ø-	??
9	<b>N</b>	<i>e-</i>	<i>e-</i>	7	9	<b>N-</b>	<i>e-</i>	ø-	??
10	<b>N</b>	<i>i-</i>	<i>N-/i-</i>	9	10	<b>N</b>	<i>e-</i>	ø-	??
11	<b>lo-</b>	<i>lu-/lo-</i>	<i>lo-</i>	11	11	<b>lo-</b>	<i>e-/lo-</i>	ø-	??
10	<b>N</b>	<i>i-</i>	<i>N-/i-</i>	9	10	<b>N</b>	<i>e-</i>	ø-	??
14	<b>bo-</b>	<i>bu-/bo-</i>	<i>bo-</i>	14	14	<b>bo-</b>	<i>e-/bo-</i>	ø-	??
14	<b>bo-</b>	<i>bu-/bo-</i>	<i>bo-</i>	14	14	<b>bo-</b>	<i>e-/bo-</i>	ø-	??
6	<b>ma-</b>	<i>ma-</i>	<i>ma-</i>	6	6	<b>ma-</b>	<i>e-/ma-</i>	ø-	??

<sup>4</sup> As pointed out with regard to the SL's data draw from the Protestant Biblia (2007), the grammatical agreement in ML/LL and SL is a bit more complicated than the table suggests in that consistency is not uniformly found in texts that are produced in these dialects. For example, there are constructions such as the following that are found in a LL written public document (cf. Ngalufa (1955?: 5)): (a) *Sikawa moinda [i.e., mwinda] mopeli kati. ... Likambo monene eluka banganga yango oyo ebandi. ... Na nsuka ya libanda, motambwisi ameki bisaleli bia ye nyonso, binso bizali malamu*; instead of (b) *Sikawa moinda [i.e., mwinda] mopeli kati. ... Likambo linene liluka banganga liye libandi. ... Na nsuka ya libanda, motambwisi ameki bisaleli bia ye binso, binso bizali malamu*. What is interesting about the passages in (a) is not only the internal inconsistencies within the same sentence, but also the fact that the book's author was a sergeant in the Force Publique (the Belgian Congo's colonial army and editor of its magazine: *Nsango na Bisu*).

<sup>5</sup> Adj(ective) is used here to cover all noun modifiers except for non-ordinal quantifiers (e.g., demonstratives, genitive, prepositions, ordinals).

**Table VI b: Grammatical Agreement Changes Across MNC in KL**

Kinshasa Lingála				
MNC	N Prefix	Agr/Subj	Agr/Adj. & other modifiers	SNC
1	<b>mo-/mw-</b>	<i>a-</i>	∅-	1
2	<b>ba-</b>	<i>ba-</i>	∅-	2
3	<b>mo-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
4?	<b>ba-mi-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
5/?	<b>li-/ki-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
6?	<b>ba-ma-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
7	<b>e-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
8?	<b>ba-bi-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
9	<b>N-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
10?	<b>ba-N</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
11	<b>lo-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
10?	<b>ba-ma-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
14	<b>bo-/ki-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
14/3	<b>bo-/mo-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?
4?	<b>ba-mi-</b>	<i>e-</i>	∅-	7?

The question marks under the MNC and SNC columns indicate that the classes to which these double prefixed nouns belong morphologically and syntactically are unclear. What can reasonably be concluded is that the overgeneralization of the {ba-} prefix is semantically vacuous as plurality for these nouns is conveyed through the second noun prefix, which happens to be the expected one (Bokamba 1977, 1993).

With regard to the 3<sup>rd</sup> feature that characterizes KL mentioned above, viz., the occurrence of a high percentage of either French loanwords or of Lingala-French code-mixed concatenated words, in addition to unassimilated French loanwords such as *simetiere* ‘cemetery’ in (7c) above, one finds structures such as the following both in common speech and written texts:

- 8) a. Neti **ba chevaux** ezalaki te, **mobylette ou vélos** ebandaki kosala makambo. ([www.mbokamosika.com](http://www.mbokamosika.com)). (Cited in Mongaba, this volume; our emphasis)  
(There are no horses, motorcycle or bicycles are doing things.)
- b. **Hotel** Okapi oyo **place bacheval** bazalaki kokima ekufa. ([www.congo2000.com](http://www.congo2000.com)). (Cited in Mongaba, this volume; our emphasis)  
(Hotel Okapi is a place where they do not want horses to die.)
- c. Mobali na yó a-**téléphon-àkà** yó **deux fois par jour**. (Luambo Makiadi 1985, cited in Bokamba 1989) (Your husband calls you twice per day.)
- d. To-mi-**déranger**-ákí kaka pamba: **patron** asi akeí. (Bokamba 1989)  
(We bothered ourselves for nothing: the boss has already gone.)

The hybridization exemplified in (8) with respect to insertion of an unassimilated French single lexical elements or phrases (8a, b, c) or the embedding of a French verb root into Lingála (and other Bantu languages Zone C.40) with high frequency clearly distinguishes KL from its ML/LL and SL counterparts. Unlike the latter, this variety, precisely because of the locality of its birth and practice, viz. DRC’s capital city, is viewed as a prestigious dialect. Its frequent use in the Congolese ever so popular music has also enhanced this view; hence, its stigmatization appears to have waned.

In addition to the above described features, KL is distinguished from ML/LL and SL by the occurrence of several grammatical characteristics, including the following at the phonetic phonological levels:

- 9) a. Reduction of ML/LL and SL's seven phonemic vowel ([a, e, ε, i, o, ɔ, u]) system by a five-vowel one ([a, e, i, o, u]) in which the lax mid-vowels [ε, ɔ] function in free variation with their counterparts ([e, o]), except in root/inherent positions;
- b. Frequent replacement of the Standard Lingála's [u] by [o], e.g., *mu-nkándá* → *mo-kándá* 'book/letter', *mo-bulu* → *mo-bolo* 'misbehavior; disorder', *ndáku* → *ndáko* 'house, building', etc.;
- c. Loss of the vowel harmony rule involving the assimilation of the tense mid-vowels ([e, o]) to their counterparts ([ε, ɔ]) whenever either of these two is contained in a root or stem that precedes a suffix with a non-high vowel (e.g., *ko-bɔndel-a* → *ko-bɔndel-ε* 'to pray, beg', *ko-bɔndel-el-a* → *ko-bɔndel-el-ε* 'to pray for/on behalf of someone'; *ko-kɔmb-el-a* → *ko-kɔmb--el-ε* 'to sweep for someone'; *ko-pɔn-el-a* → *ko-pɔn-el-ε* 'to choose for someone', etc.); and the complete assimilation of the back low vowel ([a]) to either [ε] or [ɔ] depending on which of them precedes in a root, e.g., *ko-pɔn-a* → *ko-pɔn-ɔ* 'to choose', *ko-b et-a* → *ko-bet-ε* 'to hit/strike'). In the absence of the vowel harmony, in KL these words are realized only in their underlying forms.
- d. Deletion of the root-initial nasal in a nasal consonant clusters when the following consonant is voiceless, (e. g., *mpasi* 'pain/suffering' in ML/SL is realized as *pasi* in KL; *nsango* 'news' as *sango*; *nkómbó* 'name' as *kómbó*; *nsóso* 'chicken' as *sóso*; and *mpoko* 'rat/mouse' as *poko*; versus. *mbwa* 'dog' for *mbwa*, *ndáko/ndáko* 'house,' *nzila/nzela* 'road, roadway', *ngonga/ngonga* 'time, clock, hour', etc.).

At the higher levels of the grammar, KL is distinguished from ML/LL and SL by the morphological features stated in (10) and (11), and syntactically by that indicated in (12):

- 10) Conflation of the **Recent Imperfective** {-*áki*} which is used in SL to describe events that have been completed earlier on the day of the speech event with the **Past Imperfective/Simple Past** {-*áká*} that is used for describing events that occurred yesterday and beyond but whose effects are still felt today. For example, whereas ML/LL and SL would use (10a, b), KL would use (10c) that is judged ungrammatical in ML/LL and SL:
- a. Mu-nkándá mu-kom-*áki* lɛlɔ.  
letter/book 3Agr-arrive-Imperf today  
(The letter/book arrived today.)
- b. Mu-nkándá mu-kom-*áká* ndɛlɛ/pɔsɔ eleká.  
letter/book 3Agr-arrive-PImperf yesterday/week last  
(The letter/book arrived yesterday/last week.)
- c. \*Mu-nkándá e-kom-*áki* ndɛlɛ/pɔsɔ eleká  
(The letter/book arrived yesterday/last week.)
- 11) Occurrence of selective verb forms involving the auxiliary *ko-zal-a* 'to be' and the modality/aspectual verb *ko-sil-a* 'to finish/get done' as illustrated below:
- a. (Ngá) na-za kaka awa. (Instead of (Ngái) *na-zal-i kaka awa* in ML/LL and SL)  
(I am (still) here).
- b. (Yé) a-si a-kei. (instead of (yé) *asili akei*)  
(He/She has already gone.)
- c. (Ngá) na-zo-kɛnda sikoyo. (Instead of (Ngai) *na-zal-i kokɛnde sikoyo/sikawa*)  
(I am leaving (right) now.)
- 12) Replacement of the Standard and Spoken Lingála's three types of relative clause constructions by a single paratactic construction, thus entailing, among other things, the loss of the characteristic "SVI" (Subject-Verb-Inversion) structure in relativization that targets any VP-dominated constituent (e.g., *mu-nkándá mu-ye mu-yáki lɛlɔ mu-zaláki mwá Mado* (ML/LL) → *mo-kándá e-yáki lɛlɔ e-zaláki ya Mado* (KL) 'the letter/book that arrived today

was Mado's'; *mu-nkanda é-mu-tindeláki Mado bana mu-komáki lelɔ* (ML/LL) → *mo-kándá Mado a-tindeláki bana e-komáki lelɔ* 'the letter/book that Mado sent (to) the children arrived today').

Note from example (11c) that the ML/LL's verbal structure requires that the tensed auxiliary be followed by a non-tensed main verb. The KL's fused verbal compound, for the lack of a better term, would be unacceptable in ML/LL and SL.

### 3.4. Summary

What the paper has clearly shown above is that (a) all three varieties of Lingála share the morphological noun class (MNC) system, although these prefixes are complexified in KL without any discernible effect on the overall grammatical agreement phenomenon; (b) that the notion of SVA agreement remains an integral part of the core grammars of each variety, except that the scope of its application shows variability in SL, and drastic simplification of the paradigm in KL; (c) that grammatical agreement regarding other modifiers pervades the grammar of ML/LL, notwithstanding some sporadic inconsistencies in certain texts, but in SL and KL its application ranges from minimal in the former to null in the latter; and (d) that in all other structural features, SL is similar to ML/LL, while KL represents both an extreme simplification of the core grammar of Lingála as a Zone C-40 derived language and interesting innovations in its incorporation of morphological and lexical elements from Kikongo and French.

Four of the principal questions that arise at this juncture are: (1) how does one account for the apparent minimal simplification of the language's grammar observed in SL to its extreme reduction observed in KL? (2) What do the facts presented above tell us about language variation in pervasively and stable multilingual societies? (3) How can linguistics capture and best present this knowledge? And (4), what descriptive and theoretical implications do these data have on the characterization of knowledge of language? Space constraints do not permit the pursuit of all four questions in this paper, so the remainder of it will focus on the last two. The reader is referred to Bokamba (1977, 1993) for a discussion of the first two questions.

## 4. Implications of Lingála variation to language knowledge

Educated speakers of Lingála, especially those who reside in major DRC and RoC cities and who have traveled extensively in such cities, are either productively or receptively fluent in the three dialects described above. As such, they would easily recognize a speaker of any of these dialects in a conversation. These aspects of the speakers' linguistic competence cannot be captured under our usual practice in linguistics of analyzing language from a mono-dialectal perspective. To capture this knowledge so as to enhance comprehensively multi-dialectal linguistic knowledge, linguists must study language, especially languages of wider communication (LWC) such as Lingála, from a multi-dialectal point of view and write polylectal or what is referred to as comprehensive reference grammars. The present chapter constitutes an initial contribution to this pursuit with regard to Lingála.

### 4.1. Representation of multi-lectal knowledge of language

The various core grammar variations and changes presented in Section (3) above are not surprising for a LWC, as has been documented amply elsewhere with regard to English across cultures (e.g., Kachru 1982/1992, 1986, Cheshire 1991, McArthur 1992, 2005, Bamgbose, et al. 1995, Schneider 1997). The variations documented have been attributed largely to language contacts in multilingual and multi-cultural societies, to the bilingual creativity, and to intergeneration child language development. While these are important empirical findings that dispel eloquently the long held myth of L1 interference that results in interlanguage (Selinker 1972, ff) in the so-called second language acquisition (SLA) research that is largely informed by data from pervasively monolingual societies, what is equally important and interesting, but seldom emphasized or even addressed, is the

characterization of such multi-dialectal knowledge and its implications for empirical linguistic research.

Specifically the data described above offer us a window into the mental sub-grammars of a proficient multi-dialectal speaker of Lingála when they are considered not as occurrences that are specific to each of the dialect, but rather integral components of the grammar of Lingála that is internalized by such a speaker. In this respect, the full range of grammatical structures contained in ML/LL as an offspring of Zone C.40 Bantu languages like Bobangi, Dzámámba, Libinza, Likila, etc., arguably instantiate what might be viewed as the standard grammar of Lingála. In contrast, SL, with its features of ML/LL and SL that appear to be in relative free variation, can be regarded for practical purposes as common Lingála grammar: the practical grammar for daily use of the language. In further contrast, KL can be characterized as the colloquial grammar that has acquired a certain prestige and large community of practitioners because of its association with Kinshasa, the capital of DRC, and its counterpart in RoC: Brazzaville, on the one hand; and Congolese popular music on the other hand (Stewart 2000, Gondola 2003, Bokamba 2009). Viewed from these perspectives, the three dialects represent descriptively a continuum of acrolectal to basilectal Lingála grammar. If a linguist were to produce a comprehensive grammar of Lingála à la Greenbaum, et al. (1989) and Newman (2000), then a detailed description of these varieties, along with others that are not described here, would be presented to elucidate the similarities and differences among them to permit comparisons. Currently, there is no such a grammar of Lingála, except to a very limited degree Van Everbroeck (1969) that describes ML/LL and SL. As this huge gap suggests, there is considerable ignorance concerning the language's grammar, and myths abound and thrive regarding KL and offshoot of it referred to as "Lingála facile" (easy Lingála), "Indoubil" (a street kids' variety spoken in Kinshasa) and "Bangála" (an established variety spoken in Orientale Province in northeast DRC). So, from a descriptive point of view a polylectal grammar of Lingála is essential.

#### *4.2. Descriptive and theoretical implications of the Lingála data*

Descriptive analyses of Lingála, just like those of other languages, offer users and learners not only important documents for a variety of practical applications, but they also provide linguists crucial tools for theoretical research in all basic areas of language structure (i.e., phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics) and at least language variation in sociolinguistics and the acquisition of additional languages. For example, questions about the characterization of linguistic competence and performances cannot be addressed fully by drawing on mono-dialectal data, because of the use of such data only provide a partial picture of what constitutes knowledge of language (Chomsky 1986). It fails to capture the fuller grammar that can be adequately defined only via the constituent language dialects. Similarly and from a sociolinguistic perspective, explanations involving language variation generally make reference to an assumed standard variety of the language in question without making reference to or acknowledging intermediate varieties that may be the source of variation, as suggested in part with regard to the apparent evolution of KL from SL. That conclusions based on this dichotomous view would be erroneous at best, is attested in part by the Lingála data described in Section (3). Arguments of this type can be presented across the linguistic subfields, suffices it to point out here that linguistic theory would gain enormous insights from research on polylectal grammars. The results would be the achievement of higher levels of explanatory theories in the different subfields than our current monolingual and mono-lectal ones.

## **5. Conclusion**

The primary objectives of this chapter were essentially to offer a comparative and contrastive analysis of three of the principal Lingála's dialects: ML/LL, SL, and KL, and to ascertain the implications of the findings on linguistics description and theory. What the paper has shown is that the variation exemplified in the three dialects is extensive in that it affects all the core components of the grammar, except for the semantic that is not included in this chapter. Further, it has demonstrated that there exist points of connection between the three varieties to such an extent that one can reconstruct a

probable path of core grammar erosion and changes from ML/LL to SL to KL: ML/LL > SL > KL. There are historical facts, not included in this paper, but that are discussed elsewhere (e.g., Meeuwis 2001a-b, Meeuwis and Vinck 1999, Bokamba 2009), that substantiate this trajectory. Furthermore and finally, the paper has argued strongly for the utility and necessity of undertaking multi-dialectal research with a view not only to gain a better and more comprehensive understanding of grammar in general, but also for producing polylectal grammars of LWC such as Lingála.

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