

Lingala is a Bantu language spoken in the western and northern sections of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (including its capital Kinshasa), in northern Angola, and in the eastern part of the Peoples Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville). In all these areas of expansion it has mother-tongue speakers but is at the same time used by others as a lingua franca. In terms of its history, Lingala is particularly known for its recent appearance (late nineteenth century) and the pidgin-like context of its emergence. Structurally, Lingala shares with neighboring and genetically related languages a meaning-distinctive role of tone, a vowel system consisting of seven phonemes, and a use of derivational morphemes to expand the syntactic and semantic range of verb stems. However, Lingala is often viewed as an anomaly in the Bantu family because of the remarkably low complexity of its nominal morphology (i.e., a limited class concord system). Its verbal morphology, and in particular its temporal and aspectual inflection, is nonetheless notoriously complex. TAM distinctions are conveyed through the use of infixes, tone, and auxiliaryization. At the level of syntax, Lingala is marked, among other things, by a specific way of forming cleft-sentences. The present volume presents an overview of the phonological, tonological, and morphological characteristics of this language, and also includes a section on the main syntactic patterns, as well as a sample text with morphemic glosses and a translation.

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## 0. ABBREVIATIONS USED

1: first person
2: second person
3: third person
AN: animate
APP: applicative radical extension
C: consonant
CAUS: causative radical extension
CLEF: cleft marker
CONN: connective
DEM1: demonstrative pronoun of the first group (proximal)
DEM2: demonstrative pronoun of the second group (distal)
DEM3: demonstrative pronoun of the third group
DPRES: present grounded in a distant past
EVS: the expletive verbal suffix <i>-a</i>
HAB: habitual
IMP: imperative
INAN: inanimate
INTENS: verbal suffix of intensification
INTPR: interrogative pronoun
INTRANS: intransitive
PL: plural
POSPR: possessive pronoun
PRES: present
QUANT: quantifier
REC: reciprocal radical extension
REF: reflexive infix
RELPR: relative pronoun
SG: singular
STAT: stative radical extension
SUB: subjunctive
TAM: tense-aspect-modality
TRANS: transitive
UDP: unrelated distant past
URP: unrelated recent past
V: vowel
VP: verbal prefix

## 1. HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATION

Prior to 1876-1877, the years of H.M. Stanley's first exploration of the Congo river, African trade activities flourished along this river between its lower parts — especially the area immediately north of the present city of Kinshasa — and its northernmost bend (*circa* the present city of Lisala). One of the most important languages used in these riverine trade activities was Lobangi. Functioning as a trade language along such an extended stretch, Lobangi was already marked by a considerable degree of regional and other variation in precolonial times, not least through the influence from the local languages it met on its way. However, the linguistic and sociolinguistic events most consequential to the present state of affairs of the language covered in this grammar occurred after, and on account of, the introduction of the colonial state from 1879 onwards.

The Western army officers, settlers, state agents, and traders who started with the foundation of the Congo Free State in 1879 (again under the command of Stanley, now working under a new contract with the Belgian king), did not interact with the local populations directly, but instead used a number of 'intermediaries' (porters, interpreters, soldiers, etc.) of African, but non-native, origins (Samarin 1989). These intermediaries were recruited in Zanzibar, the Comoros, and the Tanganyikan inland,<sup>1</sup> as well as from West-African coastal areas and from the Atlantic coast around the Congo estuary. The intermediaries learned and used the several local realizations of the existing Lobangi continuum and in the process simplified them and imported elements from their own languages (Hulstaert 1989; Samarin 1990). Secondly, the Whites themselves also adopted this changing and highly diversified code as the medium for communication with the colonized, a practice which furthered the linguistic transformation. The colonial personnel in fact adopted it for communication with the colonized in all the newly founded colonial posts along the Congo river and its tributaries. It was, as such, also brought to Leopoldville (an administrative post founded in 1881, proclaimed capital of the colony in 1923-1929, and renamed Kinshasa after decolonization). A third factor of linguistic change in the post-1879 era was the influence of the many local languages: the local populations that were gradually reached by the colonial expansion were forced to take up the language as a foreign language (which is why the Africans nicknamed it *la langue de l'état*, Hulstaert 1989: 107). Fourthly, before the end of the nineteenth century, the language was also adopted as the official language of the armed forces — first raised in the northwestern regions of the Belgian colony and later deployed over the entire territory — which also led to linguistic influence from these recruits' mother tongues. Although the functions of the changing code were first limited to that of a lingua franca, it also rapidly (around the turn of the century and in the first decades of the twentieth century) acquired a body of native speakers, especially in the urban centers along the Congo river.

The precolonial and especially the post-1879 processes of continuing linguistic change were thus characterized by what the current literature identifies as typical of pidgin and creole genesis (see, e.g., Byrne & Holm 1993): a rapid change in structure and lexicon (including massive and varied forms of foreign influence and simplification) and an initial limitation of its social functions as a lingua franca.

In the course of the 1880s, the Whites came to apply the label "Bangala" to this lingua franca, thus establishing it as a 'new' language, distinct from Lobangi. Before being applied

<sup>1</sup> The European writers of those days referred to all three categories as "Zanzibaris", leading to considerable confusion in subsequent historiography.

as a glossonym, "Bangala" was in use as an ethnonym only. The etymology of this ethnonym is a matter of dispute. Both Hulstaert (1974) and Mumbanza (1973), among many other historiographers, agree that the first Westerner to have used the term was H.M. Stanley, while traveling down the Congo river in 1877 (see Stanley 1878: 287). Hulstaert (1974: 177), however, maintains that the term was already known and used by the Africans in the region before colonization as the name of an extant ethnic group, while Mumbanza (1973: 473), like Tanghe (1930: 343-344) and Samarin (1989: 80-81), argues that the term was not authentic but inadvertently 'designed' by Stanley when he misunderstood local populations referring to "the people from the town of Mankanza".<sup>2</sup> In any case, it is received knowledge that after Stanley's first mention of the ethnonym, it was generally adopted by the Western colonizers and missionaries (including the many ethnologists among them) to come after him, and that throughout these times it went through many shifts in denotation.<sup>3</sup> Most important for our purposes is that, as mentioned, the ethnonym soon came to be used as a glossonym as well, referring to the rapidly changing and spreading code that was emerging out of Lobangi.

Around the turn of the century, the glossonym "Lingala" was coined to replace "Bangala" as a glossonym. In 1900-1901, Catholic missionaries of the *Congregatio Immaculae Cordis Mariae* (CICM) working in the northwestern part of the Congo basin were determined to eliminate the ambiguity around the term "Bangala". They coined the new glossonym drawing inspiration from vernacular languages spoken around their mission stations, in which the prefix *li-* is used as a marker for languages.<sup>4</sup> The first written appearances of the term "Lingala" are to be found in the earliest texts published by the CICM missionary Egide De Boeck (1903; 1904). Although after the turn of the century and in some remote areas of the Congo, "Bangala" remained in use as a glossonym as well, in the course of the twentieth century the new glossonym progressively gained ground and has been generally accepted since.

E. De Boeck's conception of the new glossonym was part of a larger project of linguistic intervention into the Bangala (Lingala) language, initiated by a number of Protestant and Catholic missionaries around the turn of the century. At that juncture, missionaries such as the Protestant W. Stapleton and later, and more influentially, E. De Boeck himself judged that the grammar and lexicon of this language were too poor for it to function properly as a medium of education, evangelization, and other types of vertical communication with the Africans in the northwestern and central-western parts of the colony (other media for vertical communication were chosen in the other parts of the colony: Kiswahili in the entire eastern part, Kikongo in the extreme southwest, and Tshiluba in the central-southern part). They set out to 'correct' and 'expand' the language by drawing on lexical and grammatical elements from surrounding vernacular languages (the glossonym itself, as indicated, being one example). These corrections were enacted in a wholesale production of prescriptive grammars and lexicons, in

<sup>2</sup> The misapprehension was, as such, not only morphophonological in nature (mistaking "Mankanza" for "Bangala"), but also conceptual, seeing ethnic criteria ('tribes') where people in fact used topographical criteria to classify each other. In the early as well as later times of Belgian colonization, Westerners arriving in Africa often 'read' ethnic categories 'into' topographical references (see Amselle 1985; Bontinck 1991; Petit 1996; Turner 1993; Young 1965; 1976 for other examples).

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed reconstructions of the history of this label and the ethnic group it has been taken to cover, see Burssens (1954; 1958); Hulstaert (1974); Mumbanza (1973); Samarin (1989: chapter 4); Mbulamoko (1991).

<sup>4</sup> The prefix *li-* was, and still is, not proper to Lingala itself: in Lingala, the marker for languages is the prefix *ki-*, its own name being the only exception (see also section 3.1.3 below).

which they characterized their work as turning the 'corrupt' language into one that would now be 'efficient' in terms of its functions as a language of vertical colonial communication, and 'truly Bantu' in terms of its nature and genius (see, e.g., the work done in Stapleton 1903 and in E. De Boeck 1903; 1904; see Meeuwis in press for a historical discussion). The missionaries partly succeeded in their language-forging ambitions: the populations in those northwestern regions where the education networks were strongly controlled by the CICM missionary congregation did adopt the newly dictated variety and some of them can still be heard to use it as their habitual language today. The Lingala used in the central-western regions of the colony, including the capital Leopoldville (L. De Boeck 1953; De Rop 1953; Van Wing 1953), however, remained largely unaffected by the linguistic manufacturing (with the exception of a few marked domains of language use, such as liturgy and the standards applied in some CICM-run printing businesses — which gave rise to labels such as 'literary Lingala' and 'written Lingala'). This lack of effect in the central-western regions must be related, at least partly, to the fact that education in these regions was less monopolized by the CICM missions than was the case in some northwestern regions. Also, in all parts of the colony almost the entire secular sphere of the colonial apparatus (state officials, trade and factory agents, etc.) disregarded the northern missionaries' language-forging endeavors and stuck to the original, 'uncorrected' variant. Similarly, many missionaries, even within the CICM congregation, remained indifferent to the linguistic ambitions of their conferees and, like the secular part of the White population, stuck to the line of least resistance.

In postcolonial times, and especially in the Zairian epoch (1965-1997), the position of Lingala was further consolidated and its geographical expansion continued. First, Lingala played an important role in the omnipresent Zairian armed forces (Idumbo 1987). Whereas French was the language used in the army's written administration, Lingala was the only language used in all oral contacts, and this throughout the entire country (a usage pattern constituted on the *fait accompli* inherited from colonial times). Secondly, whereas French was the language of horizontal communication in all of Zaire's political structures and administration, Lingala was always strongly preferred as the language of vertical political communication (Nyembwe 1987; Ngalasso 1986): Lingala was used by the single party, the *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (MPR), for the mobilization of the masses in political speeches, mass meetings, television and radio spots, and other forms of ideological consciousness-raising. This preference for Lingala was related to the regional origins of president Mobutu, which was northwestern Zaire. It was also related to the ascendant role of Kinshasa, also a Lingala-speaking city, in the highly centralized Zairian state. Thirdly, after 1965 Lingala dominated all of the country's sociocultural activities of a widely national appeal. One influential sociocultural domain up to today has been modern popular music. In the Zairian epoch, this music started to permeate not only all private spheres of life, but also the religious, social, and even political domains of society, as musicians were often mobilized by religious leaders and politicians to sing their praises or defend their causes. Up to now, the music has always been entirely composed in Lingala, a very low number of exceptions notwithstanding. The position of Kinshasa in the national state is again an important factor in this respect: as the city where all the material infrastructure for a modern music industry has always remained centralized (including between 1990 and 1997, the years of the political and economic centrifugation of the Zairian state), Kinshasa has always been the unavoidable *pied-à-terre* for each coming artist or band.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The post-Zairian era, i.e. the era since Laurent Kabila's assumption of power in May 1997, is at the time of writing too young to be assessed in terms of its linguistic effects. Tentatively, one could draw

Lingala is nowadays both a language with mother-tongue speakers and a lingua franca. It is by far the main native language in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as well as in all urban centers of the central-western and northwestern parts of the country. It is also a native language for many inhabitants of Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire (in the neighboring People's Republic of Congo (PRC)), as well as in northern Angola.

In all these cities and regions, it *additionally* appears as a lingua franca, i.e. as a second language for speakers with different mother tongues obliged to use Lingala in their daily contacts outside the home context.

In the urban centers of the rest of the DRC, in the non-urban eastern parts of the PRC, in the Central African Republic, and in those parts of Gabon and Cameroon that are related to the DRC by trade routes, it appears as a lingua franca *only*. Lingala also operates as the lingua franca *par excellence* in the major Congolese expatriate communities, such as those of Brussels, Paris, Montreal, Tokyo, Johannesburg, Dar es Salaam, etc. (see also Meeuwis 1997a).

The geographical variant described in this grammatical overview is the one spoken by native speakers in and around Kinshasa, this variant being today the most prestigious and influential one throughout the entire area of expansion of the language and thus counting as its 'central' variant. The existing Lingala grammars and dictionaries (not all covering the same geographical variant) are either prescriptive and highly creative in nature with regard to this central variant (e.g., E. De Boeck 1904; 1911; 1920; 1927; 1942; Stapleton 1903; 1911; Van Everbroeck 1985) or they aim at didactic purposes (e.g., Redden & Bongo 1963; Bwantsa-Kafungu 1982). Purely linguistic descriptions of the language do exist but are mostly marked by a low degree of linguistic theorization and conceptual precision (e.g., Guthrie 1935; 1951; Guthrie & Carrington 1988; Bwantsa-Kafungu 1970; Dzokanga 1979; Motingea 1996).

It must be said, finally, that the variant described in the present volume is characterized by profuse codeswitching with French (i.e., Meeuwis & Blommaert 1998). Although this insertion of French lexemes is subject to a number of grammatical (morphological and syntactic) regularities, these regularities are not dealt with here.

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attention to the Kiswahili (eastern Congolese) rather than Lingala (northwestern Congolese) background of the new leaders and their army as a potential threat to the sociolinguistic position of Lingala across the country. However, the limited facts available at this time are not so much indicating an outright replacement of Lingala by Kiswahili, but rather a discontinuation of the spread of the former or, in other words, a sociolinguistic *status quo*.

## 2. PHONOLOGY AND TONOLOGY

### 2.1. Vowels

Lingala is a 7-vowel language. These seven vowel phonemes are, in broad phonetic transcription, [a], [i], [e], [ɛ], [ɔ], [u], and [o].<sup>6</sup> The [o] is pronounced slightly higher than the cardinal vowel, thus approaching [u]. All vowels are short and oral, nasalization of vowels occurring only very exceptionally and without phonological value.

Some contrastive pairs are:

*kobéla* [kobéla]: 'to boil (INTRANS)' vs *kobéla* [kobéla]: 'to be ill'  
*nzóto* [n'zótɔ]: 'human body' vs *nzóto* [n'zótɔ]: 'constellation'  
*kotónga* [kotón'ga]: 'to construct', 'to build' vs *kotónga* [kotón'ga]: 'to criticize'

Diphthongs occur in the following forms: [ei], [ɛi], [ai], [ɔi], and [oi].

*naléi* [naléi]: 'I have eaten'                      *koi* [kɔi]: 'leopard'  
*méi* [méi]: 'even', 'self'                              *litóí* [litóí]: 'ear'  
*mái* [mái]: 'water'

### 2.2. Semi-vowels

Semi-vowels are the voiced labiovelar rounded approximant [w] and the voiced palatal unrounded approximant [y].

### 2.3. Consonants

Lingala makes use of the following phonologically distinct consonants.

/b/: voiced bilabial plosive	/d/: voiced alveolar plosive
/f/: voiceless labiodental fricative	/g/: voiced velar plosive
/k/: voiceless velar plosive	/l/: alveolar lateral approximant
/m/: bilabial nasal	/n/: alveolar nasal
/p/: voiceless bilabial plosive	/s/: voiceless alveolar fricative
/t/: voiceless alveolar plosive	/v/: voiced labiodental fricative
/z/: voiced alveolar fricative	

The consonants /b/, /p/, /z/, /t/, /d/, /s/, /k/, /g/ also appear in prenasalized form. This means that the consonant is introduced by a short nasal sound produced at the same place of articulation as the consonant (bilabial, alveolar, or velar, respectively). In broad phonetic

<sup>6</sup> For technical reasons, and because contrastive pairs can mostly be readily disambiguated on the basis of contextual information, Lingala-speakers use only 5 graphemes in regular writing (plus their majuscule variants): <i> for the phoneme /i/, <ɛ> for /e/ and /ɛ/, <a> for /a/, <u> for /u/, and <o> for /o/ and /ɔ/. This preference is also maintained in this volume. Needless to say, the preference only relates to a pragmatic choice of notational representation; it should cast no doubt on the fact that from the phonemic point of view, Lingala is a 7-vowel language.

transcription, the prenasalized consonants are thus: [m'b], [m'p], [n'z], [n't], [n'd], [n's], [ŋ'k], and [ŋ'g].

In word-initial position, the relationship between the simplex consonants and their corresponding prenasalized forms is more often than not allophonic rather than phonological in nature.

[n'sósó] or [sósó]: 'chicken'	[m'pási] or [pási]: 'pain'
[m'bón'gɔ] or [bón'gɔ]: 'money'	[n'tína] or [tína]: 'root', 'reason'

Especially in the case of voiceless consonants, there is a tendency to prefer the non-prenasalized word-initial allophone to the prenasalized one. In the case of voiced consonants, it is almost always the prenasalized allophone that is heard. Therefore, in the written notation of the language as well, a preceding nasal sound is indicated in the case of the voiced consonants, but not in the case of the voiceless ones. Thus: *pási*, *sósó*, *tína*, etc., and *mbóngo*, etc.

### 2.4. Syllable structure

Approaching the lexicon from a phonological point of view, syllables must be identified as canonically of the CV type (e.g., *mbó-ngo*, *ko-ka-ngi-sa*, etc.). (In section 3.9 below, it will become clear that when the verbal system is approached from a morphological point of view the canonical syllable structure is CVC.)

As a prenasalized consonant must be considered one single consonant, consonant clusters (groups of two or more consonants within one syllable) do not occur.

### 2.5. Tones

Lingala makes use of two basic tonemes, low and high, which can combine to form two additional tonemes: rising (low-high) and falling (high-low).<sup>7</sup>

Tone fulfills a meaning-distinguishing function both in the lexicon and in grammar, where it is effective as a marker of tense-aspect-modality (TAM) distinctions and mood distinctions.

#### Lexicon:

*moto*: 'human being', 'person' vs *motó*: 'head'  
*ngambo*: 'difficulty' vs *ngámbo*: 'the opposite side/bank'  
*kokoma*: 'to write' vs *kokóma*: 'to arrive'

#### Grammar:

*nabétaka* (HAB) *yé*: 'I always beat him' vs *nabétáká* (UDP) *yé*: 'I beat him a long time ago'

<sup>7</sup> Similarly to the case of the 7-vowel distinction, Lingala-speakers do not mark tones in regular writing, as contextual information is mostly sufficient to disambiguate adequately. However, in contrast to the 7-vowel distinction, tone is not only consequential in the lexicon but in the grammar as well. For the present grammatical overview, I therefore prefer to provide an unequivocal indication of the tones. As is customary, high tones are indicated by means of an acute accent on the relevant vowel, low tonemes remain unmarked. A rising tone is represented by means of a haček, and a falling tone by means of a circumflex.

*tómela* (SUB): 'let us drink' vs *tomelá* (DPRES): 'we drank'  
*basáli*: 'the workers' vs *basáli* (PRES): 'they have worked'

### 3. MORPHOLOGY

#### 3.1. The noun

##### 3.1.1. The class system

Lingala nouns are organized in a matrix of noun classes, each of which is marked by a distinguishing noun prefix (the numbers given to these noun classes in the table below are in accordance with the numbering of noun classes used in the Bantuist literature in general — it will be noted, in this respect, that classes 12 and 13 are absent in Lingala). The classes mostly form pairs for singular-plural formation, the classes with odd numbers being used for the singular forms, those with even numbers for the corresponding plural forms (with the exception of class 14, which contains noncount abstract nouns).

1	mo-
1b	Ø-
2	ba-
3	mo-
4	mi-
5	li-
6	ma-
7	e-
7b	ki-
8	bi-
9	Ø-
10	Ø-
11	lo-
6	ma-
14	bo-
15	ko-

##### 3.1.2. General phonological and tonological remarks

The vowel in the noun prefixes of classes 1, 3, 11, 14, and 15 is the half-close back vowel (i.e., /o/, never /ɔ/), the vowel in the prefix of class 7 is the half-close front vowel (/e/, never /ɛ/).

Noun prefixes always have a low tone. Exceptions include, among others: *mónganga*, *mínganga* (3/4): 'doctor'; *mótuka*, *mítuka* (3/4): 'car'; *libenga*, *mábenga* (5/6): 'pocket', 'bag'.

##### 3.1.3. The classes

###### Class pair 1/2

The nouns in this class pair are mostly nouns with animate referents.



*moto, bato*: 'person'  
*moyémbi, bayémbi*: 'singer'  
*mosáli, basáli*: 'worker'

*moníngá, baníngá*: 'friend'  
*mongúná, bangúná*: 'enemy'  
*mokóló, bakóló*: 'adult'

Stems beginning with a vowel are subject to morphophonological and morphotonological contraction.

*mwási (mo-ási), bási (ba-ási)*: 'woman'      *mwána (mo-ána), bána (ba-ána)*: 'child'

As will be clarified more extensively under class pair 3/4 below, some of the nouns in class 1 have two plural forms, i.e. one in class 2 and another one in class 4.

#### Class pair 1b/2

This class pair also contains animate nouns. Words of Indo-European origin with animate referents are also integrated here.

*ndeko, bandeko*: 'family member'      *ndoki, bandoki*: 'magician'  
*ndúmbá, bandúmbá*: 'unmarried girl', 'prostitute'      *léki, baléki*: 'younger sister/brother'

*Santu, baSantu*: 'a Saint'      *sodá, basodá*: 'soldier'

The *ba-* prefix of class 2 is also used for the 'associative plural', i.e. to pluralize proper names in order to convey a collectivity of friends, relatives, acquaintances, colleagues, etc., who are commonly associated with the referent of the proper name. This type of pluralization can only occur when the proper name is used with referential capacity, not when it is used as an address term.

*baPierre*: 'Pierre and his friends', 'Pierre and the people normally seen around him'  
*baTshisekedi*: 'Tshisekedi and his colleagues, supporters, ...'  
*baClinton*: 'Clinton and his administration'  
*baKodi*: 'Kodi and relatives'

#### Class pair 3/4

This pair contains both inanimate and animate nouns.

*motó, mító*: 'head'      *mobangé, mibangé*: 'old person'  
*motúna, mítúna*: 'question'      *moyíbi, miyíbi*: 'thief'  
*motéma, mítéma*: 'heart'      *mobáli, mibáli*: 'man', 'male person'  
*mosálá, misálá*: 'work'      *mondélé, mindélé*: 'white person', 'Westerner'

Morphophonological contraction is applied to stems beginning with a vowel.

*mwésé (mo-ésé), myésé (mi-ésé)*: 'sun'      *mweté (mo-eté), myeté (mi-eté)*: 'tree'

Some of the animate nouns in class 1 have, in addition to their plural form in class 2, a plural form in class 4.

*mongúná, bangúná or mingúná*: 'enemy'      *mokóló, bakóló or mikóló*: 'adult'

#### Class pair 5/6

Almost all nouns in this class pair have inanimate referents. Class 6 also contains mass nouns.

*libála, mabála*: 'wedding', 'matrimony'      *mafúta*: 'oil'  
*litóí, matóí*: 'ear'      *makíla*: 'blood'  
*litungúlu, matungúlu*: 'onion'      *mabelé*: 'earth', 'clay'  
*liloba, maloba*: 'word'      *masúba*: 'urine'

A limited number of nouns have animate referents. For instance,

*lipása, mapása*: 'twin'

Morphophonological contraction applies in the case of vowel-initial stems. Examples are:

*lino (li-ino), mino (ma-ino)*: 'tooth'      *liso (li-iso), miso (ma-iso)*: 'eye'

#### Class pair 7/8

These are mostly, but not exclusively, nouns with inanimate referents.

*elanga, bilanga*: 'field'      *epái, bipái*: 'place'  
*elambá, bilambá*: 'cloth'      *esengo, bisengo*: 'pleasure'  
*etumba, bitumba*: 'war'      *ekólo, bikólo*: 'race', 'tribe', 'country'  
*elóko, bilóko*: 'thing'      *elengé, bilengé*: 'young girl or boy'

#### Class 7b

The *ki-* prefix is used for all names of languages except 'Lingala'. It is also used as a marker for nouns indicating behavior types, manners, ways, etc.

*Kimóngo*: 'the language of the Mongo' (which the Mongo call 'Lomongo')  
*Kitetela*: 'the language of the Tetela' (which they call 'Otetela')  
*kindúmbá*: 'the way of prostitutes', 'prostitute behavior'  
*kimobangé*: 'the way of old people', 'old people's behavior'

#### Class pair 9/10

This class pair contains inanimate nouns. The initial consonant of some, though not all, of these nouns is a prenasalized one.

*ndáko, ndáko*: 'house', 'room'      *ngómbá, ngómbá*: 'mountain'  
*nzelé, nzelé*: 'road'      *taba, taba*: 'goat'  
*mbísi, mbísi*: 'fish'      *zándo, zándo*: 'market'  
*mbelí, mbelí*: 'knife'      *zémi, zémi*: 'pregnancy', 'fetus'  
*kíti, kíti*: 'chair'      *sandíku, sandíku*: 'trunk'

#### Class 11

Nouns in class 11 make use of the prefix *ma-* (class 6) as a plural marker. Class 11 also contains many noncount nouns with abstract referents:

*lokolo, makolo*: 'leg', 'foot'  
*lokásá, makásá*: 'leaf'  
*lopángo, mapángo*: 'plot', 'compound'  
*lobóko, mabóko*: 'arm', 'hand'

*lokutá*: 'falsehood'  
*lokúmu*: 'honor'  
*lokósó*: 'greediness'  
*loyengé*: 'excitement', 'revelry'

#### Class 14

These nouns are all noncount abstract nouns.

*bolingo*: 'love'  
*bondoki*: 'witchcraft'

*bomwána*: 'childhood'  
*bobóto*: 'peace'

#### Class 15

The infinitival forms of verbs belong to this class.

*kolinga*: 'to want', 'to love', 'to like'  
*kotála*: 'to watch'  
*koyéba*: 'to know'

*kozala*: 'to be'  
*kosála*: 'to work', 'to do'  
*koyiba*: 'to steal'

#### 3.1.4. Doubled prefixes

All the prefixes of the plural classes, with the exception of the prefix in class 2, may be doubled by means of the prefix *ba-* to indicate definiteness. The resulting prefixes are, in those cases, *bami-* (class 4), *bama-* (6), *babi-* (8), and *baØ-* (10).<sup>8</sup>

For instance:

#### Class 4

*mibangé*: 'old people'; *bamibangé*: 'the elderly'  
*mibáli*: 'men'; *bamibáli*: 'the men'  
*mitúna*: 'questions'; *bamitúna*: 'the questions'

*mindélé*: 'Westerners'; *bamindélé*: 'the Westerners'  
*miyibi*: 'thieves'; *bamiyibi*: 'the thieves'  
*mikolo*: 'days'; *bamikolo*: 'the days'

#### Class 6

*maloba*: 'words'; *bamaloba*: 'the words'  
*mapása*: 'twins'; *bamapása*: 'the twins'

*matói*: 'ears'; *bamatói*: 'the ears'  
*mapángo*: 'plots'; *bamapángo*: 'the plots'

#### Class 8

*bilóko*: 'things'; *babilóko*: 'the things'

*bilambá*: 'clothes'; *babilambá*: 'the clothes'

#### Class 10

*taba*: 'goats'; *bataba*: 'the goats'  
*mésa*: 'tables'; *bamésa*: 'the tables'

*nzelé*: 'roads'; *banzélé*: 'the roads'  
*ndáko*: 'houses'; *bandáko*: 'the houses'

It must be mentioned that the doubled prefix with *ba-* is not the unique or generalized way to convey definiteness in Lingala, and that the plural variants without the *ba-* doubling are not

<sup>8</sup> There are reasons to at least consider the hypothesis that *ba-* is functioning as an unbound rather than bound morpheme. Yet, as long as this hypothesis has not been thoroughly tested, we must, for the time being, give the benefit of the doubt to the view of *ba-* as a bound morpheme.

necessarily indefinite in all contexts of use. The observation refers to a tendency rather than to a rule or norm.

#### 3.2. The connective

The connective (*ya*) is an unbound morpheme used to link nouns with words or phrases of varied categories in order to further qualify or determine them. The most prototypical usage of the connective is the genitival construction, but many adjectival qualifications (see 3.3 below) are also rendered by this means. The connective is invariable to the class and number of its head.

*mótuka ya Kodi*  
 car CONN Kodi  
 'Kodi's car'  
*bato ya mokili*  
 persons CONN world  
 'the people of the world'

*libála ya bosémbo*  
 wedding CONN virtue  
 'a virtuous couple'  
*bilóko ya kolíya*  
 things CONN INF-eat-EVS  
 'things to eat', 'food'

#### 3.3. Adjectives

Only four adjectives are morphologically variable, i.e. *-néne*: 'big', *-ké*: 'small', *-láí*: 'long', 'tall', and *-kúsé*: 'short'. These adjectives are in concord with the number of the noun they qualify, taking the prefix *mo-* for the singular and *mi-* for the plural (irrespective of the class to which the noun belongs).

*elóko monéne*: 'a big thing'  
*bilóko minéne*: 'big things'  
*lopángo moké*: 'a small compound'  
*mapángo miké*: 'small compounds'

*nzelé molái*: 'a long road'  
*nzelé milái*: 'long roads'  
*moto mokúsé*: 'a short person'  
*bato mikúsé*: 'short people'

All other adjectives are invariable.

*bato malámu*: 'good people'  
*kíti mabé*: 'a bad chair', 'bad chairs'  
*ndáko kitóko*: '(a) beautiful house(s)'  
*mwána kitóko*: 'a beautiful child'

*mobáli makási*: 'a strong man'  
*elambá pémbé*: 'a white cloth'  
*moto mwíndo*: 'a Black person', 'an African'  
*bato mwíndo*: 'Africans'

The list of these invariable adjectives is equally short. Most qualifications of nouns are, in fact, not rendered by means of an adjective but by means of a connectival construction, containing an another noun, adverb, or verb, or a phrase or word from another category, able to qualify the head noun.

*mwána ya mobáli*  
 child CONN man  
 'boy'  
*mwána ya mwási*  
 child CONN woman  
 'girl'

*elambá ya sika*  
 cloth CONN recently  
 'a new cloth'  
*makambo ya pámba*  
 affairs CONN vainly  
 'pointless matters'

*libála ya bosémbo*  
wedding CONN virtue  
'a virtuous couple'

*maloba ya koseka*  
words CONN INF-laugh-EVS  
'joke'

It must be mentioned that, due to their frequent usage, some of these connectival constructions are mostly heard without the connective. For instance, *mwána mobáli* and *mwána mwási* instead of *mwána ya mobáli* and *mwána ya mwási*.

At the same time, the adjectives properly speaking (*-néne, malámu*, etc.) also appear in connectival constructions. For instance, *bilóko ya minéne* (with maintenance of concord) and *ndáko ya kitóko* instead of *bilóko minéne* and *ndáko kitóko*. This use of the connective preceding an adjective properly speaking is obligatory in noun phrases with more than one type of modifier, in which case the adjective always comes at the end (see the section on syntax below).

### 3.4. Pronouns

#### 3.4.1. The personal pronoun

The personal pronouns are:

		<i>Animate</i>	<i>Inanimate</i>
SG	1	ngái	
	2	yó ( <i>also yò</i> )	
	3	yé ( <i>also yè</i> )	yangó
PL	1	bísó	
	2	bínó	
	3	bangó	yangó

As is the case for all nouns and pronouns in Lingala, no case or gender distinction is made. Compare:

*Ngái nabósáni binó té*  
1SG 1SG-forget-PRES 2PL not  
'I haven't forgotten you'

*Binó bobósánáki ngái*  
2PL 2PL-forget-URP 1SG  
'You forgot me'

*Bakopésa yé kíti*  
3PL.AN-FUT-give-EVS 3SG.AN chair  
'They will give him a chair'

The personal pronoun for inanimate referents, *yangó*, corresponds with the demonstrative pronoun (see 3.4.2).

*Ngái nabósáni yangó*  
1SG 1SG-forget-PRES 3SG.INAN  
'I have forgotten it'

As will also be mentioned in the section on syntax, Lingala is a pro-drop language, which means that the subject pronoun is omitted if no contrast, highlighting, or other pragmatic effect is needed.

In conjunctions of personal pronouns, the one appearing first may be pluralized so as to anticipate the plural meaning of the entire conjunction. The referent of that pluralized pronoun remains singular. Compare (vertically):

<i>ngái na yó</i> 1SG and 2SG 'I and you (as two separate individuals)'	<i>yó na yé</i> 2SG and 3SG.AN 'you (SG) and he (as two separate individuals)'
<i>bísó na yó</i> 1PL and 2SG 'I and you (together)', 'we'	<i>bínó na yé</i> 2PL and 3SG.AN 'you (SG) and he (together)', 'you (PL)'

#### 3.4.2. The demonstrative pronoun

There are three types of demonstrative pronouns, indicated as DEM1, DEM2, and DEM3. DEM1 and DEM2 are typically used for exophoric deixis, the former being used as the proximal demonstrative, i.e. to refer to items that are situated close to the speaker ('this'), the second as the distal demonstrative, i.e. for referents close to the hearer ('that'). Both of them, however, also occur as anaphoric rather than deictic devices. The third demonstrative pronoun is used for anaphoric purposes only ('previously mentioned').

*As determiners.* When used as determiners, the demonstrative pronouns are:

DEM1	óyo
DEM2	wáná
DEM3	yangó

These demonstrative pronouns are invariable to class and number, and can be used both with animate and inanimate nouns.

*moto óyo*: 'this person'

*bato óyo*: 'these people'

*elambá óyo*: 'this cloth'

*bilambá óyo*: 'these clothes'

*ndáko óyo* (class 9): 'this house'

*ndáko óyo* (class 10): 'these houses'

*bato wáná*: 'those people'

*makambo wáná*: 'those affairs'

*bilambá wáná*: 'those clothes'

*lopánga wáná*: 'that compound'

*ndáko yangó*: 'this house (which was just mentioned)'

*elambá yangó*: 'this cloth (which ...)'

*mwási yangó*: 'this lady (who ...)'

*mibáli yangó*: 'these men (who ...)'

DEM1 and DEM2 can also be used as determiners of personal pronouns. These constructions are used to highlight the actuality or presence of the referent denoted by the personal pronoun.

*Ngái óyo*

1SG DEM1

'Here I am', 'It's me'

*Bangó óyo*

3PL.AN DEM1

'Here they are', 'It's them'

*Yangó wáná*  
3SG.INAN DEM2  
'That's it'

*Yé wáná*  
3SG.AN DEM2  
'There she is', 'That's her'

*Yangó wáná* also occurs as a sentence-initial adverbial phrase of reason ('that is why').

*As nominals.* When used as nominals, the demonstrative pronouns are:

		<i>Specified</i>	<i>Unspecified (and inanimate)</i>
DEM1	SG	óyo	óyo
	PL	baóyo	
DEM2	SG	óyo wáná	wáná
	PL	baóyo wáná	
DEM3	SG	(yé) (yangó)	yangó
	PL	(bangó) (yangó)	

A distinction is made between nominally used demonstratives whose referents are clearly specified or contrasted (as the English *this one* and *that one* and the French *celui-ci* and *celui-là*, for instance), in which case both animate and inanimate referents can be denoted, and nominally used demonstratives the referents of which are left unspecified or not contrasted and which thus refer to a more general proposition, idea, etc. (as the English *this* and *that* and the French *ceci* and *cela*), in which case only inanimate referents apply.

#### *Specified*

Only DEM1 and DEM2 apply. DEM3 is in these cases commonly replaced by the corresponding personal pronouns (*yé* and *bangó* for animates and *yangó* for inanimates). In the cases of DEM1 and DEM2, the forms are identical for animate and inanimate referents. As can be noticed, DEM2 only occurs as a compound form, combining the nominally used demonstrative pronoun DEM1 with *wáná* as a determiner.

#### *Óyo akendéki na ndáko*

DEM1.SG 3SG.AN-go-URP to house  
'This one went home'

#### *Baóyo wáná ebúkání té*

DEM2.PL 3PL.INAN-break-STAT-PRES not  
'Those ones are not broken'

#### *Nalingi óyo té, nalingi óyo wáná*

1SG-want-PRES DEM1.SG not, 1SG-want-PRES DEM2.SG  
'I don't want this one, I want that one'

#### *Unspecified*

When the referent is unspecified or not contrasted, *óyo* (DEM1), *wáná* (DEM2), and *yangó* (DEM3) are used.

#### *Náyébisa yó óyo: mwána na yó abimaka míngi*

1SG.SUB-know-CAUS-EVS 2SG DEM1: child POSPR.2SG 3SG.AN-exit-HAB QUANT  
'Let me tell you this: your kid goes out a lot'

*Wáná nandimi té*  
DEM2 1SG-believe-PRES not  
'I don't believe that'  
*Oyóki yangó?*  
2SG-hear-PRES DEM3  
'Have you heard that?'

#### 3.4.3. *The possessive pronoun*

*As determiners.* When used as determiners, the possessive pronouns as a rule come after their head in the noun phrase. In these cases, they are formed on the basis of the personal pronouns preceded by *na*.

		<i>Animate</i>	<i>Inanimate</i>
SG	1	na ngái	
	2	na yó	
	3	na yé	na yangó
PL	1	na bísó	
	2	na bínó	
	3	na bangó	na yangó

*kómbó na ngái*: 'my name'      *kómbó na bangó*: 'their name(s)'  
*kómbó na bínó*: 'your name(s)'      *kómbó na yangó*: 'the name(s) of the thing(s) mentioned'

It may be useful to repeat the observation made in 3.2, i.e. that in the case of nouns or proper names the genitive meaning is conveyed by means of the connective, *ya*. Thus:

*ndáko na ngái*: 'my house' vs *ndáko ya Kodi*: 'Kodi's house'

*ndáko na ngái*: 'my house' vs *ndáko ya mobáli na ngái*: 'my husband's house'

Although Lingala is canonically a language with head-initial word order, the case of the possessive pronoun constitutes an exception, as it may also precede its head. In this case, however, usage is made of the connective instead of *na*.

*ya yó kómbó*: 'your name'

*ya bísó kómbó*: 'our name(s)'

The two constructions, i.e. the one in which the possessive pronoun precedes its head and the other one in which it follows it, are semantically and pragmatically equivalent.

*As nominals.* When functioning as nominals, the possessive pronouns are formed by means of the connective *ya*, followed by the personal pronouns.

SG	1	ya ngái
	2	ya yó
	3	ya yé
PL	1	ya bísó
	2	ya bínó
	3	ya bangó

Compare:

*ndáko na ngái*: 'my house' vs *ndáko ezalí ya ngái*: 'the house is mine'

*elambá na bangó*: 'their cloth' vs *elambá ezalí ya bangó*: 'the cloth is theirs'

As the copula *kozala* ('to be') is often omitted, the following two sentences are synonymous.

*ndáko ezalí ya ngái*: 'the house is mine' vs *ndáko ya ngái*: 'the house is mine'

Both *ndáko na ngái* and *ndáko ya ngái* are, therefore, grammatical; but the former is a noun phrase (meaning 'my house'), while the latter is a predicative sentence ('the house is mine').

### 3.4.4. The interrogative pronoun

As *determiners*. When the interrogative pronoun determines an animate noun, Lingala distinguishes between, on the one hand, interrogative pronouns assuming a restricted choice of known answers and thus probing for a specific item within a limited set of possible candidates ('specified'), and, on the other hand, interrogative pronouns not assuming such a restricted choice and thus probing for the quality of the noun in question ('unspecified'). Such a distinction does not apply to the interrogative pronoun determining an inanimate noun.

	<i>Animate</i>		<i>Inanimate</i>
	<i>Specified</i>	<i>Unspecified</i>	
SG	náni	níni	níni
PL	banáni	níni	níni

*mobáli náni?*: 'which man (among the ones we know)?'

*mibáli banáni?*: 'which men? (among...)?'

*mobáli níni?*: 'what (kind of) man?'

*mibáli níni?*: 'what (kinds of) men?'

*lopángo níni?*: 'which/what compound?'

*mapángo níni?*: 'which/what compounds?'

As *nominals*. When functioning as nominals, the interrogative pronouns are:

	<i>Animate</i>	<i>Inanimate</i>
SG	náni	níni
PL	banáni	níni

*Náni akendéki na ndáko?*

INTPR.SG.AN 3SG.AN-go-URP to house

*Banáni bakendéki na ndáko?*

INTPR.PL.AN 3PL.AN-go-URP to house

'Who went home?'

*Obéti náni?*

2SG-beat-PRES INTPR.SG.AN

'Who have you beaten?'

'Who went home?'

*Olobi níni?*

2SG-speak-PRES INTPR.INAN

'What did you say?'

### 3.4.5. The relative pronoun

The relative pronoun is *oyo* and is morphologically invariable. In many cases the relative pronoun remains zero.

*Mobáli oyo amónáki ngái akendéki na ndáko*

man RELPR 3SG.AN-see-URP 1SG 3SG.AN-go-URP to house

'The man who saw me went home'

*Mobáli amónáki ngái akendéki na ndáko*

man 3SG.AN-see-URP 1SG 3SG.AN-go-URP to house

'The man who saw me went home'

*Kiti oyo nasómbáki*

chair RELPR 1SG-buy-URP

'The chair that I bought'

*Bilóko nasómbáki*

things 1SG-buy-URP

'The things that I bought'

More information on the construction of relative clauses will be provided in the section on syntax.

## 3.5. Quantifiers

### 3.5.1. 'Many' and 'Few'

*Mingi* and *ebelé* ('many', 'a lot', 'much') are both invariable. *Mingi* tends to be used with noncount nouns, while *ebelé* is preferred for count nouns. The number of exceptions to this rule is, however, considerable.

*mafúta mingi*: 'a lot of oil'

*makeléle mingi*: 'a lot of noise'

*mobúli mingi*: 'a lot of disarray'

*múngwa mingi*: 'a lot of salt'

*mbóngo mingi*: 'a lot of money'

*bilóko ebelé*: 'many things'

*mibáli ebelé*: 'many men'

*kiti ebelé*: 'many chairs'

*mésa ebelé*: 'many tables'

*matungúlu ebelé*: 'many onions'

In contrast to *ebelé*, *mingi* also occurs as a nominal and as an adverb, used with both verbs and adjectives.

*koyéba mingi*: 'to know a lot'

*kosála mingi*: 'to work much'

*kolinga mingi*: 'to like ardently'

*kitóko mingi*: 'very beautiful'

*Moké* ('a bit', 'few') is invariable and is used with count and noncount nouns.

*bilóko moké*: 'few things'  
*matungúlu moké*: 'few onions'

*mafúta moké*: 'a little oil'  
*múngwa moké*: 'a bit of salt'

(Note that *moké* is variable when used as an adjective ('small'), see 3.3.)

### 3.5.2. The universal quantifier

#### 3.5.2.1. The positive universal

**As a determiner.** *Nyónso* ('each', 'all') is used both for animate and inanimate nouns, and is morphologically invariable.

*ndoki nyónso*: 'each magician'  
*bandoki nyónso*: 'all the magicians'

*lopángo nyónso*: 'each compound'  
*mapángo nyónso*: 'all compounds'

**As a nominal.** *Nyónso* only functions as a nominal if its referent is inanimate. For animates, the noun phrases *moto nyónso* ('each person', 'everyone') and *bato nyónso* ('all people', 'all') are used.

*Nabósání nyónso*  
 1SG-forget-PRES QUANT  
 'I have forgotten everything'

*Bato nyónso balingí yé*  
 people all 3PL.AN-want-PRES 3SG.AN  
 'All like him'

#### 3.5.2.2. The negative universal

The negative universal does not exist as a separate form *per se*, but is based on constructions with *té* ('not') and *móko té* ('not one').

#### As a determiner

*ndoki té*: 'no magician'  
*litungúlu té*: 'no onion'

*ndoki móko té*: 'no magician'  
*litungúlu móko té*: 'no onion'

**As a nominal.** *Elóko (móko) té* ('not (one) thing') and *moto (móko) té* ('not (one) person') are the negative universals used in nominal position.

*Namóni elóko té*  
 1SG-see-PRES thing not  
 'I have seen nothing'  
*Namóni moto té*  
 1SG-see-PRES person not  
 'I have seen nobody'

*Namóni elóko móko té*  
 1SG-see-PRES thing one not  
 'I have seen nothing'  
*Namóni moto móko té*  
 1SG-see-PRES person one not  
 'I have seen nobody'

### 3.5.3. The unspecified quantifier

*Móko* ('one') and *mosúsu* ('other') occur as quantifiers referring to people or things which one wishes to keep unspecified ('certain', 'some'). As such quantifiers, *móko* and *mosúsu* are used with singular as well as plural nouns and always remain invariable.

*molakisi móko*: 'some/a certain teacher'  
*milakisi móko*: 'some/certain teachers'

*bamindélé móko*: 'some/certain Westerners'  
*lopángo móko*: 'some/a certain compound'

*mondélé móko*: 'some/a certain Westerner'

*mapángo móko*: 'some/certain compounds'

*molakisi mosúsu*: 'some/a certain teacher'  
*milakisi mosúsu*: 'some/certain teachers'  
*mondélé mosúsu*: 'some/a certain Westerner'

*mindélé mosúsu*: 'some/certain Westerners'  
*lopángo mosúsu*: 'some/a certain compound'  
*mapángo mosúsu*: 'some/certain compounds'

## 3.6. Numerals

### 3.6.1. Ordinals

*móko*: 1  
*mibalé*: 2  
*misátu*: 3  
*mínei*: 4  
*mitáno*: 5  
*motóbá*: 6  
*sambo*: 7  
*mwambe*: 8  
*libwá*: 9  
*zómi*: 10  
*zómi na móko*: 11  
*zómi na mibalé*: 12  
*zómi na misátu*: 13  
*túkú mibalé*: 20  
*túkú misátu*: 30  
*túkú mínei*: 40  
*túkú mibalé na mwambe*: 28  
*kámá*: 100  
*kámá mibalé*: 200  
*kámá misátu*: 300  
*kámá mínei na túkú motóbá na mitáno*: 465  
*kóto*: 1,000

The ordinals are all invariable:

*balakisi motóbá*: 'six teachers'  
*makambo zómi*: 'ten affairs'

*mapángo mibalé*: 'two compounds'  
*mikolo túkú mibalé na mibalé*: 'twenty-two days'

*Túkú*, *kámá*, and *kóto* are nouns. *Túkú mibalé* (20), *kámá motóbá* (600), etc. must thus be analyzed as 'two tens', 'six hundreds', etc.

As may be gathered from the table, *na* ('and') is used between numbers (like in *túkú mibalé na mwambe*, '28', and *kámá mínei na túkú motóbá na mitáno*, '465')

### 3.6.2. Cardinals

The cardinal numbers are formed by means of the connective followed by the ordinal, with the exception of *ya libosó* instead of \**ya móko*.

*mwána ya libosó*: 'first child'

*bandáko ya libosó*: 'the first houses'

*lopángo ya mwambe*: 'eighth plot'

*elambá ya zómi na minei*: 'the fourteenth cloth'

### 3.7. Adverbs

There is no particular morphological process accounting for the formation of adverbs, which are thus mostly a matter of lexicon. With regard to this lexicon, then, it is useful to mention that there are three basic adverbs of space, *áwa* ('here') referring to a location close to the speaker, *wána* ('there') referring to a location close to the hearer, and *kúna* ('there') referring to a location remote from both speaker and hearer.

Most adjectives and some nouns also function as adverbs.

*Bakósi ngái mabé*  
3PL.AN-lie-PRES 1SG bad  
'They lied to me badly'  
*Azali likoló*  
3SG.AN-be-PRES top  
'She is upstairs'

*Aláti kitóko*  
3SG.AN-dress-PRES beautiful  
'He's dressed nicely'  
*Libosó, alingáki yó té*  
front, 3SG.AN-like-URP 2SG not  
'Before, she didn't like you'

### 3.8. Prepositions

The unbound morpheme *na* (which also functions as the coordinating conjunction 'and') conveys most of the basic prepositional meanings: 'in', 'at', 'on', 'from', 'with', 'to', etc.

*Ozaláki na bureau té*  
2SG-be-URP in office not  
'You were not in the office'  
*Aláli na mbéto*  
3SG.AN-sleep-PRES on bed  
'He's sleeping on the bed'  
*Bavándí na mésa*  
3PL.AN-sit-PRES at table  
'They're sitting at the table'

*Naútáki na Mbándáká*  
1SG-come\_from-URP from Mbandaka  
'I came from Mbandaka'  
*Tokolíya na lútu*  
1PL-FUT-eat-EVS with spoon  
'We will eat with a spoon'  
*Bokei na Kinshása té*  
2PL-go-PRES to Kinshasa not  
'You haven't gone to Kinshasa'

Other prepositional meanings are rendered by means of (mostly highly grammaticalized) nouns, or other prepositional phrases, followed by a connective:

*likoló ya ndáko*  
top CONN house  
'above the house'  
*sima ya ndáko*  
backside CONN house  
'behind the house'  
*libosó ya ndáko*  
front CONN house  
'in front of the house'

*na sé ya mésa*  
at bottom CONN table  
'under the table'  
*na káti ya ndáko*  
at inside CONN house  
'inside the house'

### 3.9. The cleft marker

The construction of cleft sentences is to a large extent a matter of syntax. In terms of morphology, it is important to mention that the cleft markers *moto* ('person') and *elóko* ('thing') are so much grammaticalized that they have become, under certain syntactic conditions, invariable to number. More on these conditions will be mentioned in section 4.5 below.

Other cleft markers are *yé*, *bangó*, and *yangó* (which were also discussed in the section on pronouns above). They are used in interrogative cleft constructions only. In 4.5 below, it will be demonstrated that *yangó*, which cannot be used with animate referents as a pronoun (see 3.4.2), does occur as such when used as a cleft marker.

### 3.10. The verb

#### 3.10.1. The formation of verb forms

A Lingala verb form is made up of a stem or radical (R), which is lexical and, thus, morphologically and tonologically invariable, and a number of bound morphemes.

Among these bound morphemes possibly occurring in verb forms is the verbal prefix (VP), indicating the grammatical subject.

Secondly, there is the reflexive infix (REF), which immediately precedes the radical.

The third category consists of the mood markers. These occur in the form of the prefix *ko-* for the infinitive, a low toneme on the VP for the indicative, a high toneme on the VP for the subjunctive, or a high toneme on the expletive verbal suffix for the imperative.

The fourth category is made up of the tense-aspect-modality (TAM) markers. These are all suffixes, with the exception of the future marker, which is a pre-radical infix.

Then, there is a set of infixes, called 'radical extensions', accounting for the expansion of the grammatical and semantic range of the radical. They are put after the radical but precede the post-radical mood and TAM markers.

Verb forms can never end in a (bare or extended) radical. Therefore, mood or TAM forms that are only marked pre-radically prompt the addition of the expletive verbal suffix *-a* (EVS) after the (bare or extended) radical.

Two examples of verbal templates are:

*nabóngísáki*: 'I arranged'  
*na-bóng-is-áki*  
na-: verbal prefix (1SG)  
-bóng-: radical ('to be in order', 'to fit')  
-is-: causative radical extension  
-áki: unrelated recent past

*tokomítúna*: 'we will ask ourselves'  
*to-ko-mi-tún-a*  
to-: verbal prefix (1PL)  
-ko-: future marker  
-mi-: reflexive infix  
-tún-: radical ('to ask')  
-a: expletive verbal suffix

#### 3.10.2. The radical

Radicals are canonically of the CVC type. Some examples are:

*-lob-*: 'to speak'  
*-tál-*: 'to look'  
*-zal-*: 'to be'

*-món-*: 'to see'  
*-sál-*: 'to work', 'to do'  
*-tún-*: 'to ask'

-*tong*-. 'to sew'  
-*kom*-. 'to write'

-*tóng*-. 'to build'  
-*kóm*-. 'to arrive'

Exceptions do occur, some radicals having a CV structure, others a VC structure, and still others consisting of C or CV plus a semi-vowel, among other things:

-*yá*-. 'to come'  
-*út*-. 'to come from'  
-*zw*-. 'to get'

-*lìy*-. 'to eat'  
-*swá*-. 'to bite'  
-*kwéy*-. 'to fall'

Most of these verbs with exceptional radicals also display morphological exceptions in the inflectional system.

Verbs borrowed from other languages may also have a different structure. For instance, (from Kikongo) -*baluk*- ('to stumble'). Their morphological behavior is regular.

The verbal radicals are often the basis on which nouns are derived. For instance:

-*sál*-. 'to work'; *mosáli*: 'worker' (class 1); *mosálá*: 'work' (class 3)  
-*tún*-. 'to ask'; *motúna*: 'question' (class 3)  
-*yíb*-. 'to steal'; *moyibi*: 'thief' (class 3)

Lingala also has a limited set of prepositional verbs:

-*zal na*-. 'to have' ('to be with')  
-*kend na*-. 'to take' ('to go with')

-*yá na*-. 'to bring' ('to come with')

Radicals are the 'source' of a process of progressive phonological assimilation, the 'targets' of this assimilation being all [a] and [e] vowels in the radical extensions, all [a] vowels in the post-radical TAM markers, and the [a] vowel of the EVS. (In the section on the radical extensions below, it will be mentioned that Lingala also operates a process of regressive *tonological* assimilation). Such progressive phonological assimilation occurs when the vowel of the radical is the half-open front vowel [ɛ]. In that case, all [a] or [e] vowels in the above-mentioned morphemes change to [ɛ]. It is important to mention that this rule of vowel assimilation is not at all rigidly applied in everyday language use, and that individual speakers can be heard to use the assimilated variant and the non-assimilated variant side by side.

*kokenda* or *kokende*  
INF-go-EVS  
'to go'

*nakendaka* or *nakendeke*  
1SG-go-HAB  
'I usually/always go'

### 3.10.3. The verbal prefix (VP)

Lingala distinguishes between verbal prefixes for animate subject referents and for inanimate subject referents. There is no class concord.

		<i>Animate</i>	<i>Inanimate</i>
SG	1	na-	
	2	o-	
	3	a-	e-
PL	1	to-	
	2	bo-	
	3	ba-	e-

*nakokwéya*  
1SG-FUT-fall-EVS  
'I will fall'  
*bokokwéya*  
2PL-FUT-fall-EVS  
'you will fall'

*kiti ekokwéya*  
chair 3SG.INAN-FUT-fall-EVS  
'The chair will fall'  
*bakiti ekokwéya*  
chairs 3PL.INAN-FUT-fall-EVS  
'The chairs will fall'

The verbal prefixes are tonologically low in the indicative mood and high in the subjunctive mood.

### 3.10.4. The reflexive infix (REF)

The reflexive infix is -*mi*- (tonologically invariable) for all six persons. Its position is immediately in front of the radical.

*nakomitúna*  
1SG-FUT-REF-ask-EVS  
'I will ask myself'

*Tokomípésa mbóngo*  
1PL-FUT-REF-give-EVS money  
'We will give ourselves money'

### 3.10.5. Mood

#### 3.10.5.1. The infinitive (INF)

Structure: ko-R-EVS

*koloba*: 'to speak'  
*kotála*: 'to look'  
*kozala*: 'to be'

*komóna*: 'to see'  
*kosála*: 'to work', 'to do'  
*kokende* or *kokenda*: 'to go'

The *ko*- prefix is also identified as a noun prefix (class 15).

In CV radicals with -*a*-, contraction occurs of this vowel with the EVS:

*koyá* (*ko-yá-a*): 'to come'

*koswá* (*ko-swá-a*): 'to bite'

#### 3.10.5.2. The indicative

Structure: VP-R-TAM

The indicative is distinguished from the other moods by its obligatory usage of a verbal prefix and by the low toneme on this verbal prefix.

*nasátáki*: 'I did'  
*otúni*: 'you have asked'

*bolobaka*: 'you usually speak'  
*bakendá*: 'they have gone'



3.10.5.3. *The imperative (IMP)*

Structure: R-EVS(high)

The marker of the imperative is a high toneme on the EVS.

*sálá!*: 'work!', 'do!'*kendé!* or *kendá!*: 'go!'

One exception to this morphological rule is the imperative of *koyá* ('to come'), which is *yáká*.

This structure only accounts for the imperative of the second person singular. All other persons take the subjunctive to convey an imperative force.

The negative imperative for the second person singular and plural consists of the infinitive plus the negative particle *té*.

*kosála té!*: 'don't work!', 'don't do!'*kokende té!* or *kokenda té!*: 'don't go!'3.10.5.4. *The subjunctive (SUB)*

Structure: VP(high)-R-EVS

The subjunctive is marked by a high toneme on the verbal prefix.

*ásála*: 'may he work', 'may he do'  
*tótúna*: 'let's ask'*bóloba*: 'may you speak', 'speak!'  
*bákende* or *bákenda*: 'may they go'3.10.6. *Tense-Aspect-Modality*<sup>9</sup>

All TAM markers are tonologically fixed, but the post-radical TAM markers are phonologically variable, namely as the targets of the above-mentioned process of progressive vowel assimilation.

3.10.6.1. *The future (FUT)*

Structure: VP-ko-R-EVS

*nakosála*: 'I will work/do'  
*tokotúna*: 'we will ask'*bokoloba*: 'you will speak'  
*bakokende* or *bakokenda*: 'they will go'3.10.6.2. *The present (PRES)*

Structure: VP-R-i

*nazáli*: 'I am'  
*olingi*: 'you want/like/love'*bobánzi*: 'you think'  
*toyébi*: 'we know'*nasáli*: 'I have worked/done', 'I work/do'  
*totúni*: 'we have asked', 'we ask'  
*nabéti*: 'I have beaten', 'I beat'*obandi*: 'you have started', 'you start'  
*bolobi*: 'you have said', 'you say'  
*batáli*: 'they have looked', 'they look'

<sup>9</sup> This discussion is a largely reduced version of Meeuwis (1995). The reader is referred to that publication for a more detailed and motivated account.

When R ends in a consonant followed by the semi-vowel /w/, the PRES marker is *-é* instead of *-i*.

*nakámwé*: 'I am surprised'*bolongwé*: 'you have left', 'you leave'*epumbwé*: 'it has flown off', 'it flows off'

The verbs *koyá* ('to come'), *koliya* ('to eat'), *kokende* ('to go'), and *koswá* ('to bite') have irregular PRES forms.

*nayéi*: 'I have come', 'I come'*nakéi*: 'I have (am) gone', 'I go'*naléi*: 'I have eaten', 'I eat'*naswéi*: 'I have bitten', 'I bite'

Spoken language imposes several types of contraction on the PRES form of the verb *kozala* ('to be'). A very common one drops the final syllable and transposes the high toneme of the TAM marker onto the preceding vowel:

*nazá*: 'I am'*tozá*: 'we are'

The semantics of the PRES is highly dependent on the distinction between states of affairs conceptualized as 'imperfective', such as 'to be', 'to like', 'to think', 'to know', 'to understand', etc., and actions or events conceptualized as 'perfective', such as 'to eat', 'to beat', etc.<sup>10</sup> In the case of imperfectives, the PRES denotes states that are happening, true, or valid at the moment of speech, as well as both in an (unspecified) portion of the time zone that precedes the moment of speech and in an (indefinite) portion of the time zone that follows it (e.g., *nayébi*, 'I know'). In the case of actions or events conceptualized as perfectives, the PRES denotes the recent completion of the action or event as well as its lingering effects (as is the case, for instance, for the English present perfect) (e.g., *nasáli*, 'I have worked/done').

Of course, perfective actions or events can also be imperfectivized (in English, e.g., 'he works in London', 'he doesn't eat meat', etc.). Although Lingala mostly makes use of the habitual (see 3.10.6.11 below) for this imperfectivization of perfectives, the PRES at times also appears with this meaning. In these (limited) cases, the PRES form of perfective verbs can thus either indicate an action's recent completion with lingering effects or a state's occurrence (validity, etc.) at the moment of speech and in indefinite parts of time before and after this moment. Compare:

*Leló asáli na Londres*  
today 3SG.AN-work-PRES in London  
'Today, she has worked in London'*Asáli na Londres*  
3SG.AN-work-PRES in London  
'She works in London'

<sup>10</sup> The distinction between 'imperfective' and 'perfective' is a matter of *Aktionsart* (the internal temporal construal of the verbal process) and is thus not to be confused with notions such as 'perfect', which pertain to the matter of 'aspect' (the external construal of the verbal process). According to the notion of *Aktionsart*, perfective actions or events involve a certain internal temporal evolution of distinct components ('to beat', e.g., consists of a preparatory phase in which the arm is lifted, a subsequent forward acceleration of the arm, a moment of impact, etc.). Imperfectives are usually states in which the individual components are similar and qualify as equally valid instances of the global notion ('to be a child' is a general state of affairs which involves a series of qualitatively identical instances of 'being a child').

3.10.6.3. *The present grounded in a distant past (DPRES)*

Structure: VP-R-á

*nazála*: 'I have been (since long)'      *bobánzá*: 'you have been thinking (since long)'  
*olingá*: 'you have been wanting, etc. (since long)'      *toyébbá*: 'we have been knowing (since long)'

*nasála*: 'I worked/did (long ago)'      *obandá*: 'you started (long ago)'  
*totíná*: 'we asked (long ago)'      *bolobá*: 'you said (long ago)'  
*nabétá*: 'I beat (long ago)'      *batála*: 'they looked' (long ago)'

In the case of imperfectives, the DPRES, like the PRES, also situates states of affairs as coinciding with the moment of speech and with an indefinite portion of time before and after it, but it stresses that the starting point or onset of this state is situated in a distant and undefined or unspecified past. (The best way to translate this in English may be by using the English present perfect continuous. Translations should, of course, never be taken to exactly cover the semantic complexity of the tense in the original language.)

In the case of perfective actions or events, the DPRES almost exclusively refers to actions or events completed in the past with lingering effects in the present (and is, in other words, virtually unattested for the imperfectivization of perfectives). The completion of the action or event is, however, situated in a more distant and undefined or unspecified past than is the case for the PRES. (Although not completely equivalent, I here choose to use the English simple past for the translations, as all other English tenses could lead to even more confusion. Again, the semantic explication 'actions or events completed in the distant past with lingering effects' is much more important than any translation.)

3.10.6.4. *The unrelated recent past (URP)*

Structure: VP-R-ákí

*nasálákí*: 'I worked/did'  
*totúnákí*: 'we asked'

*bolobákí*: 'you said'  
*bakendéki* or *bakendákí*: 'they went'

The URP describes actions or events for which no special connection with the present is highlighted and situates them in a past recent enough to be readily remembered. The moment in the past which is referred to is thus either explicitly identified (through adverbial phrases, etc.) or implicitly identifiable (on the basis of context), but always recent and salient in memory.

*Tomónákí yó leló na tóngó*  
 1PL-see-URP you today at morning  
 'We saw you this morning'

3.10.6.5. *The unrelated distant past (UDP)*

Structure: VP-R-áká

*nasáláká*: 'I worked/did (a long time ago)'      *bolobáká*: 'you said (a long time ago)'  
*totúnáká*: 'we asked (a long time ago)'      *bakendéké* or *bakendáká*: 'they went (a long time ago)'

Like the URP, the UDP describes actions or events without highlighting a special connection with the present. It is different, however, in that it refers to a more distant past and in that it is quite often (but not as stringently as is the case for the DPRES) used with reference to undefined or unspecified moments in the past.

3.10.6.6. *Compound forms: the present continuous*Structure: *kozala* ('to be') in PRES + infinitive.

*nazali kosála*: 'I am working/doing'      *bozali koloba*: 'you are saying'  
*tozali kotúna*: 'we are asking'      *bazali kokende*: 'they are going'

There are a number of contracted forms of the present continuous. One of the most common consists of the contraction of the PRES form of the auxiliary (see also 3.10.6.2), with maintenance of the full infinitival form.

*nazá kosála*: 'I am working/doing'      *bozá koloba*: 'you are saying'

Secondly, a very common construction consists of the structure VP-zó-R-EVS, i.e. elision of the auxiliary's three final phonemes and of the infinitive's first phoneme, a high toneme being retained on the second phoneme of the infinitive.

*nazósála*: 'I am working/doing'      *bozóloba*: 'you are saying'

The present continuous has a durative and present meaning. It refers to an ongoing action or event that takes place at the time of speaking. In addition, it can also be used to indicate a habit. In this case, it shares with the habitual (HAB, see 3.10.6.11 below) an iterative aspect. In contrast with the habitual, however, the habit denoted by the present continuous is bound to a specific portion of time: the habit does not extend indefinitely into the past and will not persist into the indefinite future.

*Kodi azali kobima míngi mikolo óyo*  
 Kodi 3SG.AN-be-PRES INF-exit-EVS QUANT days DEM1  
 'Kodi is going out a lot these days'

3.10.6.7. *Compound forms: the future continuous*Structure: *kozala* in FUT + infinitive

*nakozala kosála*: 'I will be working/doing'      *bokozala koloba*: 'you will be saying'  
*tokozala kotúna*: 'we will be asking'      *bakozala kokende*: 'they will be going'

The future continuous is semantically equivalent to its present counterpart, but it situates the action or event in a future span of time.

*Nakozala kolámba ngolo tángo okokóma na ndáko*  
 1SG-FUT-be-EVS INF-cook-EVS catfish time 2SG-FUT-arrive-EVS in house  
 'I will be cooking catfish when you arrive home'

3.10.6.8. *Compound forms: the recent-past continuous*

Structure: *kozala* in URP + infinitive

*nazaláki kosála*: 'I was working'  
*tozaláki kotúna*: 'we were asking'

*bozaláki koloba*: 'you were saying'  
*bazaláki kokende*: 'they were going'

The recent-past continuous is semantically equivalent to its present counterpart, but situates the action or event in the span of time referred to by the auxiliary's URP.

*Nazaláki kolámba ngolo tángo okómáki na ndáko*

1SG-be-URP INF-cook-EVS catfish time 2SG-arrive-URP in house  
 'I was cooking catfish when you arrived home'

3.10.6.9. *Compound forms: the distant-past continuous*

Structure: *kozala* in UDP + infinitive

*nazaláká kosála*: 'I was working'  
*tozaláká kotúna*: 'we were asking'

*bozaláká koloba*: 'you were saying'  
*bazaláká kokende*: 'they were going'

The distant-past continuous is semantically equivalent to its present counterpart, but situates the action or event in the span of time referred to by the UDP.

*Ngái na léki tozaláká koswána míngi na bomwána*

1SG and younger sibling 1PL-be-UDP INF-bite-REC-EVS QUANT in childhood  
 'My younger sister and I quarreled a lot when we were little'

3.10.6.10. *Compound forms: the auxiliary functions of kolinga ('to want'), kouíta ('to come from'), kokóma ('to arrive', 'to become'), and kosíla ('to end')*<sup>11</sup>

Apart from their uses as simplex verbs with a basic lexical meaning, the verbs *kolinga* ('to want'), *kouíta* ('to come from'), *kokóma* ('to arrive', 'to become'), and *kosíla* ('to end') also occur in auxiliary position, in which case their basic lexical meaning is not always maintained. In the case of *kosíla*, some morphological alterations are involved as well. The evidence suggests that these verbs, and especially *kosíla* and *kolinga* (see also section 4.7 below), are in a transitional phase of grammaticalization.

The two possible moods of the second verb in a compound form taking *kolinga* as an auxiliary are the infinitive and the subjunctive. In these constructions, *kolinga* either retains its basic lexical meaning of volition,

*Alingi násómba ndáko*

3SG.AN-want-PRES 1SG.SUB-buy-EVS house  
 'She wants me to buy a house'

*Alingi kosómba ndáko*

3SG.AN-want-PRES INF-buy-EVS house  
 'She wants to buy a house'

<sup>11</sup> The following description of *kolinga* is a summary of Meeuwis (1997b).

*Alingi ásómba ndáko*

3SG.AN-want-PRES 3SG.AN.SUB-buy-EVS house  
 'She wants to buy a house'

or, the construction is used to convey a notion of 'imminence', i.e. a combination of reference to the very near future, to the incipient stages of an action or event, and to the high degree of certainty of its occurrence. Included in imminence are thus a temporal component (the very near future), an aspectual component (inchoativity), and a modal component (epistemic necessity). In its denotation of imminence, the basic volitional meaning of *kolinga* is often left aside.

*Mwána alingi ákwéya or kokwéya!*

child 3SG.AN-want-PRES 3SG.AN.SUB-fall-EVS or INF-fall-EVS  
 'The kid is going to fall!'

*Film elingi ébanda or kobanda*

Movie 3SG.INAN-want-PRES 3SG.INAN.SUB-start-EVS or INF-start-EVS  
 'The movie is about to start'

The choice between a volitional reading and a reading in terms of imminence is not so much a matter of form (subjunctive vs infinitive) as of world knowledge, the imminence reading being triggered when the action described (e.g., 'to fall') or the subject referred to (e.g., an inanimate thing such as a movie) cannot be construed in volitional terms.

When *kouíta* ('to come from') is followed by an infinitive, it refers to a recent completion of an action or event.

*Naiúti kobénga yé*

1SG-come\_from-PRES INF-call-EVS 3SG.AN  
 'I've just called him'

When *kokóma* ('to arrive', 'to become') is followed by an infinitive, it denotes an acquired habit or quality.

*Akómi kotóngá ngái*

3SG.AN-arrive-PRES INF-criticize-EVS 1SG  
 'He's acquired the habit of criticizing me (whereas before he wouldn't do this)'

When *kosíla* ('to end') is followed by a verb in the PRES, DPRES, URP, or UDP, it conveys the meaning of 'already'. In each of these cases, however, the morphology of the auxiliary is VP-*sí*, including in careful speech.

*Bosí bosómbí ndáko*

2PL-end 2PL-buy-PRES house  
 'You have already bought a house'

*Nasí nabálá*

1SG-end 1SG-marry-DPRES  
 'I am already married (since a long time)'

*Osí obéngákí ngái*

2SG-end 2SG-call-URP 1SG  
 'You had already called me'

*Basí balobáká*

3PL.AN-end 3PL.AN-speak-UDP  
 'They had already spoken'

3.10.6.11. *The habitual (HAB)*

Structure: VP-R-aka

*nasálaka*: 'I always/usually work'  
*tomítúnaka*: 'we always/usually ask ourselves'

*bolobaka*: 'you always/usually speak'  
*bakendeke*: 'they always/usually go'

Like some uses of the present continuous, this form includes an iterative aspect and as such refers to habits. In contrast to the present continuous, however, the habits indicated by HAB are not temporally restricted. The utterance encompasses both the present and the past and allows for predictions concerning the future. Compare the following example with its counterpart given in 3.10.6.6:

*Kodi abimaka míngi*

Kodi 3SG.AN-exit-HAB QUANT

'Kodi (is the kind of person that) goes out a lot'

3.10.6.12. *The intensifying suffixes (INTENS)*

Structure: VP-R-áká, -aka

The suffix *-áká* may replace the EVS of the infinitive (including in the continuous forms), the future, and the imperative to modalize the radical. The modal meaning produced by *-áká* is epistemic modality (certainty), or, in the case of the imperative, it denotes the speaker's insistence. The suffix *-aka* is the equivalent used with the subjunctive, in which case it also denotes speaker's insistence. (Full interchangeable distribution of *-aka* and *-áká* may sometimes be observed as well, however.)

*Nakósi té, Kodi azaláki kopésáká babólá bilambá!*

1SG-lie-PRES not, Kodi 3SG.AN-be-URP INF-give-INTENS the poor clothes

'I'm not lying, Kodi was really distributing clothes to the poor!'

*Kodi akopésáká babólá bilambá!*

Kodi 3SG.AN-FUT-give-INTENS the poor clothes

'Kodi will really give clothes to the poor!'

*Pésáká babólá bilambá!*

give-INTENS the poor clothes

'Now do give clothes to the poor!'

*Bápésaka babólá bilambá!*

3PL.AN.SUB-give-INTENS the poor clothes

'(I would so much want) them to give clothes to the poor!'

3.10.7. *Radical extensions*3.10.7.1. *General observations*

As mentioned above, the radical extensions are bound morphemes which are positioned immediately after the radical (and before the TAM-distinctive suffixes) and which expand the grammatical and semantic range of the verb.

The degree of productivity (i.e., the degree to which the extensions may freely be attached to existing stems for the creation of a locally needed term) is variable, some of them being

almost fully productive, other extensions occurring only in fixed lexical items. The following table presents the seven extensions in descending order of productivity.

-el-	applicative
-is-	causative
-an-	reciprocative, reflexive, stative
-am-	passive
-w-	reversive
-ol-	causative (of -w- forms)
-al-	stative

The extensions are the object of the process of progressive phonological assimilation explained above.

The most typical formal characteristic of the radical extensions is their tonological neutrality. In contrast to radicals, the VP, the EVS, and the mood and TAM markers, the tone of the extensions is not fixed but is the object of regressive tonological assimilation. This means that they adopt the tone of the EVS or mood or TAM marker that follows. When several extensions are combined, the assimilation runs from right to left over all extensions (the radical always remaining unaffected).

*kolámba*: 'to cook (TRANS)'; *kolambela*: 'to cook for (someone)'; *nalámbéli*: 'I've cooked for (someone)'; *nalámbelaka*: 'I usually/always cook for (someone)'

*kokita*: 'to descend (INTRANS)'; *kokitisa*: 'to bring down (TRANS)'; *nakitísaka*: 'I always/usually bring down'; *nakitísélákt*: 'I brought down for (someone)'

3.10.7.2. *-el-*

The applicative extension expands the range of the root form towards an object or person that receives, benefits from, or experiences the results of the action or event.

*koloba*: 'to say'; *kolobela*: 'to say to (someone)'*kotúna*: 'to ask'; *kotúnela*: 'to ask to (someone)'*kopona*: 'to choose'; *koponela*: 'to choose for (someone)'*kokúfa*: 'to die'; *kokúfela*: 'to die in (someone's family)'*kobima*: 'to go/come out'; *kobimela*: 'to appear to (someone)'3.10.7.3. *-is-*

The causative extension indicates that the action or event described by the verb is caused to be performed.

*kobonga*: 'to conform', 'to be fit'; *kobongisa*: 'to arrange', 'to repair'*kobánga*: 'to be afraid'; *kobángisa*: 'to frighten'*kokita*: 'to descend (INTRANS)'; *kokitisa*: 'to descend (TRANS)', 'to bring down'*koyéba*: 'to know'; *koyébisa*: 'to inform', 'to tell'*kobúnga*: 'to be lost'; *kobúngisa*: 'to lose'

The verbs *kolíya* ('to eat'), *koswá* ('to bite'), and *koyá* ('to come') have irregular forms.

*koléisa*: 'to feed'*koswéisa*: 'to make (someone) bite'

*koyéisa*: 'to make (someone) come'

Some causative forms are fixed lexical items in that no root form can be attested (anymore).

*kokana*: 'to think'; \**kokana*

*kolimbisa*: 'to forgive'; \**kolimba*

The regressive tonological assimilation remains applicable to these forms. Compare the infinitival forms with:

*Nakanísákí oyébi yé*

1SG-think-URP 2SG-know-PRES 3SG.AN

'I thought you knew her'

*Alimbísá yó*

3SG.AN-forgive-DPRES 2SG

'He forgave you'

### 3.10.7.4. -an-

The *-an-* extension makes the root form reciprocal, stative (referring to the resulting state of affairs, rather than to the process itself) or reflexive.

*kolinga*: 'to want', 'to love'; *kolingana*: 'to love each other'

*kobóya*: 'to refuse', 'to detest'; *kobóyana*: 'to refuse each other', 'to detest each other'

*koswá*: 'to bite'; *koswána*: 'to quarrel'

*kokáta*: 'to cut'; *kokátana*: 'to be (in a state of being) cut off'

*kobómba*: 'to hide (TRANS)'; *kobómbana*: 'to hide each other' or, with singular subject 'to be (in a state of being) hidden'

*koyéba*: 'to know'; *koyébana*: 'to know each other' or, with singular subject 'to be (in a state of being) known'

*kotúta*: 'to hit', 'to bang'; *kotútana*: 'to bang into each other' or, with singular subject 'to hurt oneself at'

An example of extended verb forms without attested root form (but always with maintenance of regressive tonological assimilation) is:

*kobósana*: 'to forget'; \**kobósa* *kokesene* or *kokesana*: 'to differ from each other'; \**kokese*

In a very limited number of cases, the *-an-* extension is used for the reversive, indicating the opposite of the original meaning.

*kobénga*: 'to call', 'to summon'; *kobéngana*: 'to chase away', 'to expell'

### 3.10.7.5. -am-

The *-am-* extension occurs in passive forms.

*kobóta*: 'to give birth to'; *kobótama*: 'to be born'

*kokánga*: 'to close'; *kokángama*: 'to be closed'

*kokúnda*: 'to bury'; *kokúndama*: 'to be buried'

*kobúnga*: 'to be lost'; *kobúngama*: 'to be lost (by someone)'

*kotónnda*: 'to be full'; *kotóndama*: 'to be filled'

Verbs without attested root form include:

*kolimbama*: 'to be forgiven'; \**kolimba* (but *kolimbisa*, 'to forgive')

*kotélema*: 'to stand'; \**kotéla* (but *kotélemisa*: 'to lift')

*konyókwama*: 'to suffer'; \**konyókwa*, \**konyóka* (but *konyókola*, see below)

A morphological exception is the verb *kosála* ('to do'), which has both *kosálama* and *kosálema* ('to be done') as its passive form.

### 3.10.7.6. -w-

The reversive extension turns the process designated by the verb around, resulting in what can be conceived of as the opposite of the meaning of the root form.

*konyángwa*: 'to solidify (INTRANS)'; *konyángwa*: 'to melt (INTRANS)'

*konyángisa*: 'to solidify (TRANS)'; *konyángwisa*: 'to melt (TRANS)'

In some cases, the extension both reverses and passivizes the root form.

*kokunda*: 'to bury'; *kokundwa*: 'to be unearthed', 'to be exhumed' (see also *kokundola* below)

There are, again, forms for which no root form can be attested. Some of these forms show, as will also be mentioned in the following section, that the *-w-* extension must be considered to operate in interaction with the *-ol-* extension, without it being identifiable which one of the two counts as the primary and which one as the extended form.

*kodóndwa*: 'to jump', 'to boast'; \**kodónnda*

*kolongwa*: 'to depart'; ?*kolonga* ('to conquer')

*konyókwama*: 'to suffer'; \**konyóka*, \**konyókama* (but *konyókola*, see below)

*kotámbwisa*: 'to walk (TRANS)', 'to escort'; \**kotámba*, \**kotámbisa* (but *kotámbola*, see below)

### 3.10.7.7. -ol-

The *-ol-* extension operates in interaction with the *-w-* extension. In some cases, the *-ol-* form is the causative pendant of the *-w-* form (or, the *-w-* form the stative/passive pendant of the *-ol-* form).

*konyángwa*: 'to melt (INTRANS)'; *konyángola*: 'to melt (TRANS)' (compare *konyángwisa* above)

*kodóndwa*: 'to jump', 'to boast'; *kodóndola*: 'to cause to jump'

*kolongwa*: 'to depart'; *kolongola*: 'to remove'

*kokundwa*: 'to be exhumed'; *kokundola*: 'to unearth'

In a number of special cases, other extensions are involved in the interaction between *-w-* and *-ol-*.

*konyókola*: 'to distress (TRANS)'; *konyókwama*: 'to suffer' (*-w-* and *-am-*)

*kosukola*: 'to wash'; *kosukwama*: 'to be washed' (*-w-* and *-am-*)

*kokabola*: 'to divide'; *kokabwana*: 'to be in a state of division' (*-w-* and *-an-*)

*kotámbola*: 'to walk (INTRANS)'; *kotámbwisa*: 'to escort (TRANS)' (-w- and -is-)

There are, finally, verb forms which only occur in their *-ol-* form:

*koyékola*: 'to study'; \**koyékwa*, \**koyéka*

### 3.10.7.8. *-al-*

The *-al-* extension is the least productive and is virtually unattested beyond the following case.

*kotika*: 'to leave (TRANS)'; *kotikala*: 'to stay'

## 4. SYNTAX

### 4.1. Word order

#### 4.1.1. Noun phrase

The word order in the noun phrase is head-initial, which means that heads precede their qualifiers, quantifiers, and other modifiers.

*ndáko malámu*: 'a good house'  
*ndáko na bisó*: 'our house'  
*ndáko ya Kodi*: 'Kodi's house'

*ndáko nyónso*: 'all houses'  
*ndáko mínei*: 'four houses'  
*ndáko ebelé*: 'many houses'

One of the few exceptions is that variant of the possessive pronoun that precedes its head (see 3.4.3).

*ya bisó ndáko*: 'our house'

Another exception is the adverb *mwá* ('slightly', 'somewhat', 'a bit'), which always precedes the word it modifies.

*mwá kitóko*: 'somewhat beautiful'

With regard to the relative order of the determiners in the noun phrase, the possessive pronoun precedes all other determiners. Quantifiers and numerals follow the possessive pronoun, and the adjective or equivalent qualifier comes at the end. In this end position, the adjective or equivalent qualifier *must* be tied to the preceding part of the noun phrase by means of the connective (see also 3.3).

*ndáko kitóko*  
 house beautiful  
 'a beautiful house'  
*ndáko na ngái ya kitóko*  
 house POSPR.1SG CONN beautiful  
 'my beautiful house'  
*bandáko na ngái nyónso ya kitóko*  
 houses POSPR.1SG QUANT CONN beautiful  
 'all my beautiful houses'

#### 4.1.2. Verb phrase

##### 4.1.2.1. Declarative sentences

Lingala word order at sentence level is SVO. Indirect objects precede direct objects.

*Kodi apési ngái mokandá*  
 Kodi 3SG.AN-give-PRES 1SG letter  
 'Kodi has given me a letter'

*Sukóla mwána!*  
wash-IMP child  
'Wash the baby!'  
*Sukóléla ngái yé!*  
wash-APP-IMP 1SG 3SG.AN  
'Wash him for me!'  
*Pésá ngái yé!*  
give-IMP 1SG 3SG.AN  
'Give him to me!'

All adverbial and prepositional phrases come after the objects.

*Nakosukolela binó yé na sima*  
1SG-FUT-wash-APP-EVS 2PL 3SG.AN at backside  
'I will wash him for you later'  
*Nakosukolela binó yé libosó ya ndáko*  
1SG-FUT-wash-APP-EVS 2PL 3SG.AN front CONN house  
'I will wash him for you in front of the house'

#### 4.1.2.2. Negative sentences

Negation is rendered by means of the particle *té* (sometimes *té*), which comes at the end of the clause to which the negation is applicable.

*Nakoki kokenda na ndáko na yé té*  
1SG-can-PRES INF-go-EVS to house POSPR.3SG.AN not  
'I cannot go to her house'  
*Nayébi té sókó alingi komónisa ngái mótuka na yé ya sika*  
1SG-know-PRES not if 3SG.AN-want-PRES INF-see-CAUS-EVS 1SG car POSPR.3SG.AN  
CONN recently  
'I don't know if she wants to show me her new car'

#### 4.1.2.3. Interrogative sentences

In yes/no questions, the word order is the same as in declarative sentences.

*Okoki kokenda na ndáko na yé?*  
2SG-can-PRES INF-go-EVS to house POSPR.3SG.AN  
'Can you go to her house?'

In WH-questions, the interrogative pronoun appears in front of the sentence if it functions as its subject. Interrogative adverbs, as well as interrogative pronouns that are not the subject of the sentence, can appear both in front and at the end, the end position being the least marked option.

*Náni abéngáki yó?*  
INTPR.AN 3SG.AN-call-URP 2SG  
'Who called you?'  
*Obéngáki nání?*  
2SG-call-URP INTPR.AN

*Okendáki wápi?*  
2SG-go-URP where  
'Where did you go?'  
*Wápi okendáki?*  
where 2SG-go-URP

'Whom did you call?'  
*Bolingí nini?*  
2PL-want-PRES INTPR.INAN  
'What do you want?'

'Where did you go?'  
*Oyébi yé bóni?*  
2SG-know-PRES 3SG.AN how  
'How do you know her?'

It is common for an interrogative pronoun or interrogative adverb to be followed by a noun or pronoun. The construction must be interpreted as a predicative construction with ellipsis of the copula.

*Wápi yó?:* 'Where are you?'  
*Wápi bangó?:* 'Where are they?'  
*Wápi kiti?:* 'Where's the chair?'

*Nini yangó?:* 'What's that?'  
*Bóni Kodi?:* 'How's Kodi?'

## 4.2. The verb and its subject

### 4.2.1. Pro-drop

Personal pronouns in subject position are dropped when no contrast or other discourse function is intended.

*Toyébi té*  
1PL-know-PRES not  
'We don't know'

*Kási bangó bayébi*  
but 3PL.AN 3PL.AN-know-PRES  
'But they do'

### 4.2.2. Concord

Although the verb of a sentence is in concord with the number and the animate-inanimate distinction displayed by the subject, in some cases this concord may be semantically rather than grammatically based. This occurs especially when the subject is an inanimate noun suggesting a generic animate referent.

*Mokili bayóki*  
world(class3) 3PL.AN-hear-PRES  
'The whole world has heard'

When a complex subject covers distinct grammatical numbers, a plural verbal prefix is used, privileging first person over second person and third person, and second person over third person.

*Ngái na Kodi tokei na ndáko*  
1SG and Kodi 1PL-go-PRES to house  
'I and Kodi have gone home'  
*Yó na Kodi bokei na ndáko*  
2SG and Kodi 2PL-go-PRES to house  
'You and Kodi have gone home'

In the discussion of conjunctions of personal pronouns in section 3.4.1 above, it was mentioned that the first personal pronoun may be pluralized — although it retains a singular

referent — so as to anticipate the plural meaning of the entire conjunction. The verbal prefix can also be subject to this process of anticipatory pluralization. Compare (vertically):

*Nazali na mopáya*  
1SG-be-PRES with guest  
'I have a guest'

*Tozali na mopáya*  
1PL-be-PRES with guest  
'I am together with a guest'

*Obimí na yé*  
2SG-exit-PRES with 3SG.AN  
'You've gone out with him'

*Bobimí na yé*  
2PL-exit-PRES with 3SG.AN  
'You (SG) and he have gone out together'

#### 4.3. Comparative and superlative as verbal relations

Comparatives and superlatives are rendered at the level of the verbal phrase. Usage is made of the verbs *koleka* ('to pass', 'to surpass') and, less common, *kopusa* ('to surpass'). The grammatical subject of the verb is the first term of the comparison and the grammatical object the second term. A prepositional phrase then indicates in which domain the comparison holds.

*Kodi alekí Kalúlu na makási / kitóko*  
Kodi 3SG.AN-surpass-PRES Kalulu in strength / beauty  
'Kodi is stronger / prettier than Kalulu'

The superlative is based on the same verbal relation, but the second term is mostly the pronoun *bangó* and has generic reference.

*Kodi alekí bangó na makási / kitóko*  
Kodi 3SG.AN-pass-PRES 3PL.AN in strength / beauty  
'Kodi is the strongest'

#### 4.4. Relative clauses

As mentioned in the section on morphology (3.4.5), the relative pronoun is *oyo*, which is invariable, or zero. Relative clauses follow the antecedent.

*Mibáli oyo bamónáki ngái bakóti na ndáko wána*  
men RELPR 3PL.AN-see-URP 1SG 3PL.AN-enter-PRES in house DEM2  
'The men who saw me have gone into that house'

*Mobáli amónáki ngái akóti na ndáko wána*  
man 3SG.AN-see-URP 1SG 3SG.AN-enter-PRES in house DEM2  
'The man who saw me has gone into that house'

*Basodá oyo namónáki bakóti na ndáko wána*  
soldiers RELPR 1SG-see-URP 3PL.AN-enter-PRES in house DEM2  
'The soldiers whom I saw have gone into that house'

*Basodá namónáki bakóti na ndáko wána*  
soldiers 1SG-see-URP 3PL.AN-enter-PRES in house DEM2  
'The soldiers whom I saw have gone into that house'

In object relative clauses containing prepositional verbs (see section 3.10.2), the antecedent is not resumed once (by the relative pronoun) but twice: by the relative pronoun

(whether zero or not) and by a personal pronoun placed after the preposition in the SVO structure of the relative clause.

*Mótuka oyo nazali na yangó ekendeke malémbe*  
car RELPR 1SG-be-PRES with 3SG.INAN 3SG.INAN-go-HAB slow  
'The car that I have is slow'

*Mwána oyo nayéi na yé azalaka malámu*  
child RELPR 1SG-come-PRES with 3SG.AN 3SG.AN-be-HAB good  
'The child that I've brought is good'

#### 4.5. Cleft sentences

Cleft sentences make use of the cleft markers *moto* ('person'), *elóko* ('thing'), *yé*, *bangó*, and *yangó* (see also 3.9). *Moto* and *elóko* are so much grammaticalized that they often remain invariable to number while the verb remains in concord with the heads of *moto* and *elóko*. *Yé*, *bangó*, and *yangó* (also displaying some level of grammaticalization, see below) are used in interrogative cleft constructions.

##### 4.5.1. Animate heads in subject cleft constructions

*Moto* ('person') is used in cleft sentences with animate heads. In the case of a subject cleft construction, *moto* can be pluralized (*bato*) to take the number of its head but mostly remains invariable.

*Kodi moto asómbi ndáko*  
Kodi CLEF 3SG.AN-buy-PRES house  
'It's Kodi who has bought the house'

*Ngái moto nasómbi ndáko*  
1SG CLEF 1SG-buy-PRES house  
'It's me who has bought the house'

*Yó moto osómbi ndáko*  
2SG CLEF 2SG-buy-PRES house  
'It's you who has bought the house'

*Bisó moto or bato tosómbi ndáko*  
1PL CLEF 1PL-buy-PRES house  
'It's us who have bought the house'

*Bangó moto or bato basómbi ndáko*  
3PL.AN CLEF 3PL.AN-buy-PRES house  
'It's them who have bought the house'

*Bamibáli moto or bato basómbi ndáko*  
men CLEF 3PL.AN-buy-PRES house  
'It's the men who have bought the house'

The head of the cleft construction is quite frequently followed by the adverb *ndé* ('really', 'actually', 'in fact') for additional stress.

*Bangó ndé moto basómbi ndáko*  
3PL.AN actually CLEF 3PL.AN-buy-PRES house  
'It's actually them who have bought the house'

##### 4.5.2. Animate heads in object cleft constructions

In the case of object cleft constructions, *moto* always follows the singular-plural distinction.

*Yó moto nabétáki*  
2SG CLEF 1SG-beat-URP  
'It's you that I slapped'

*Bangó bato nabétáki*  
3PL.AN CLEF 1SG-beat-URP  
'It's them that I slapped'



#### 4.5.3. Inanimate heads

*Elóko* ('thing') is used in cleft sentences with inanimate heads. Like *moto*, *elóko* is so much grammaticalized that it can (but need not) remain invariable to the number of its head. Moreover, in the case of *elóko* this process of grammaticalization is at an equal stage for subject clefts and object clefts.

*Kiti elóko ekwéyi*  
chair CLEF 3SG.INAN-fall-PRES  
'It's the chair that has fallen'  
*Bakiti elóko* or *bilóko ekwéyi*  
chairs CLEF 3PL.INAN-fall-PRES  
'It's the chairs that have fallen'

*Kiti ndé elóko nabúki*  
chair actually CLEF 1SG-break-PRES  
'It's actually the chair that I have broken'  
*Bakiti elóko* or *bilóko nabúki*  
chairs CLEF 1SG-break-PRES  
'It's the chairs that I have broken'

#### 4.5.4. Interrogative cleft constructions

In addition to *moto* (for animates) and *elóko* (for inanimates), interrogative cleft sentences also make use of *yangó*, *yé*, and *bangó* as cleft markers. *Yangó* is used with both animate and inanimate referents, while *yé* and its plural form *bangó* are used with animates only. Note, with regard to grammaticalization, that outside cleft constructions, i.e. as a nominally used demonstrative or personal pronoun, *yangó* cannot be used for animates (see 3.4.1 and 3.4.2).

##### Animate head

*Moto* almost always follows the number of the head (*bato*), *yé* always (changing to *bangó*), and *yangó* has no plural form.

The construction is similar for subject cleft constructions and object cleft constructions.

*Náni moto asómbi litungúlu?*  
INTPR.SG.AN CLEF 3SG.AN-buy-PRES onion  
'Who is it that has bought an onion?'  
*Náni yangó asómbi litungúlu?*  
INTPR.SG.AN CLEF 3SG.AN-buy-PRES onion  
'Who is it that has bought an onion?'  
*Náni yé asómbi litungúlu?*  
INTPR.SG.AN CLEF 3SG.AN-buy-PRES onion  
'Who is it that has bought an onion?'  
*Náni yé obéti?*  
INTPR.SG.AN CLEF 2SG-beat-PRES  
'Who is it that you've slapped?'

*Náni yangó obéti?*  
INTPR.SG.AN CLEF 2SG-beat-PRES  
'Who is it that you've slapped?'  
*Banáni bato obéti?*  
INTPR.PL CLEF 2SG-beat-PRES  
'Who is it that you've slapped?'  
*Banáni bangó obéti?*  
INTPR.PL.AN CLEF 2SG-beat-PRES  
'Who is it that you've slapped?'  
*Banáni yangó obéti?*  
INTPR.PL.AN CLEF 2SG-beat-PRES  
'Who is it that you've slapped?'

##### Inanimate head

When the head is inanimate, the possible cleft markers are *elóko* and *yangó*. (Their equivalent plurals are not applicable as the interrogative pronoun *nini* has no plural form (see 3.4.4).)

*Nini elóko ekwéyi?*  
INTPR.INAN CLEF 3SG.INAN-fall-PRES  
'What is it that has fallen?'  
*Nini elóko obúki?*  
INTPR.INAN CLEF 2SG-break-PRES  
'What is it that you've broken?'

*Nini yangó ekwéyi?*  
INTPR.INAN CLEF 3SG.INAN-fall-PRES  
'What is it that has fallen?'  
*Nini yangó obúki?*  
INTPR.INAN CLEF 2SG-break-PRES  
'What is it that you've broken?'

#### 4.6. Complementation

##### 4.6.1. Non-interrogative clauses

Non-interrogative clauses are mostly introduced by a zero complementizer or, more rarely, by the complementizer *te* ('that', 'as follows').

*Nayébisi yé tozali kokenda na ndáko*  
1SG-know-CAUS-PRES 3SG.AN 1PL-be-PRES INF-go-EVS to house  
'I've told her we are going home'  
*Nayébisi yé te tozali kokenda na ndáko*  
1SG-know-CAUS-PRES 3SG.AN that 1PL-be-PRES INF-go-EVS to house  
'I've told her that we are going home'

##### 4.6.2. Yes/no-interrogative clauses

Yes/no interrogative clauses are introduced by *sóki* or the synonym *sókó* ('if', 'whether').

*Nayébi té sóki akomónisa ngái mótuka na yé*  
1SG-know-PRES not whether 3SG.AN-FUT-see-CAUS-EVS 1SG car POSPR.3SG.AN  
'I don't know if he's going to show me his car'

##### 4.6.3. WH-interrogative clauses

WH-interrogative clauses are also introduced by *sóki* (or *sókó*) ('if', 'whether'), but they repeat the interrogative pronoun or adverb of the equivalent interrogative sentence.

*Nayébi té sóko atingi nini*  
1SG-know-PRES not whether 3SG.AN-want-PRES INTPR.INAN  
'I don't know what he wants'  
*Toyébi té sóki akei wápi*  
1PL-know-PRES not whether 3SG.AN-go-PRES where  
'We don't know where she has gone'

#### 4.7. Condition

##### 4.7.1. Open condition

If the question as to whether the condition will be fulfilled or not remains open, the verb in the subordinate clause is put in the PRES and the verb of the main clause in the FUT. *Sóki* or *sókó* ('if') introduce the conditional clause; *mbele* ('then', 'in that case') may be used to introduce longer main clauses.

*Sókó oléi mápa na ngái, nakobéta yó*  
if 2SG-eat-PRES bread POSPR.1SG, 1SG-FUT-beat-EVS 2SG  
'If you eat my bread, I'll slap you'  
*Sóki mbúla ebéti, mbele nakokenda mosála té*  
if rain 3SG.INAN-beat-PRES, then 1SG-FUT-go-EVS work not  
'If it rains, then I won't go to work'

#### 4.7.2. Hypothetical and counterfactual conditions

If the fulfillment of the condition is unlikely (hypothetical) or if it is altogether excluded (counterfactual) (there is no formal distinction between the two in Lingala), the verb in the subordinate clause is put in the SUB or in the URP. For the verb in the main clause, a compound form with *kolina* ('to want') in the URP is used, followed by either the subjunctive or the infinitive. (This usage of *kolina* is one more instance of its being situated in a transitional phase of grammaticalization, see also section 3.10.6.10 above).

*Sókó óbénga, nalingáki kosálisa yó*

if 2SG.SUB-call-EVS, 1SG-want-URP INF-do-CAUS-EVS 2SG

'If you called (had called), I would help (have helped) you'

*Sóki obéngáki, mbele nalingáki kosálisa yó*

if 2SG-call-URP, then 1SG-want-URP INF-do-CAUS-EVS 2SG

'If you called (had called), then I would help (have helped) you'

*Sókó óbénga, nalingáki násálisa yó*

if 2SG.SUB-call-EVS, 1SG-want-URP 1SG.SUB-do-CAUS-EVS 2SG

'If you called (had called), I would help (have helped) you'

*Sóki mwána ásála mabé, alingáki ákenda libándá*

if child 3SG.AN.SUB-do-EVS bad, 3SG.AN-want-URP 3SG.AN.SUB-go-EVS outside

'If the kid behaved (had behaved) badly, he would have to go (would have had to go) outside'

#### 4.8. Consecutio temporum

In complex sentences, the temporal deictic center is not the speaker, but the subject referent of the main clause. Thus, the tense in which the verb of the subordinate clause is to be inflected is not relative to the tense in which the speaker chooses to inflect the verb of the main clause (or, in other words, the tense of the subordinate clause remains that of its original proposition). Compare:

*Akanisi tokokenda na ndáko*

3SG.AN-think-PRES 1PL-FUT-go-EVS to house

'She thinks we will go home'

*Akanisáki tokokenda na ndáko*

3SG.AN-think-URP 1PL-FUT-go-EVS to house

'She thought we would go home'

*Akanisi tozali kosukola bilambá*

3SG.AN-think-PRES 1PL-be-PRES INF-wash-EVS clothes

'He thinks we are washing clothes'

*Akanisáki tozali kosukola bilambá*

3SG.AN-think-URP 1PL-be-PRES INF-wash-EVS clothes

'He thought we were washing clothes'

*Akanisi nayibi mótuka na yé*

3SG.AN-think-PRES 1SG-steal-PRES car POSPR.3SG.AN

'He thinks I have stolen his car'

*Akanisáká nayibi mótuka na yé*

3SG.AN-think-UDP 1SG-steal-PRES car POSPR.3SG.AN

'He thought (long ago) that I had stolen his car'

#### 5. SAMPLE TEXT

*Note: French words, appearing through codeswitching, are marked in italic font.*

A: Lóbi tokútánáki ngái na Sendi.

Lóbi to-kút-án-áki ngái na Sendi

yesterday 1PL-meet-REC-URP 1SG and Sendi.

'I met Sendi yesterday.'

Topésánáki mbóte, toliyáki.

To-pés-án-áki mbóte, to-liy-áki

1PL-give-REC-URP greeting, 1PL-eat-URP

'We said hello and we had dinner.'

Nasha moto alámbéláki bisó.

Nasha moto a-lámb-él-áki bisó

Nasha CLEF 3SG.AN-cook-APP-URP 1PL

'It was Nasha who cooked for us.'

B: Na sima bosáli níni?

Na sima bo-sál-i níni

at backside 2PL-do-PRES INTPR.INAN

'What did you do next?'

A: Na sima ayébísi ngái likambo mökó ebángísáki ngái míngi.

Na sima a-yéb-ís-í ngái likambo mökó e-báng-ís-áki ngái míngi

at backside 3SG.AN-know-CAUS-PRES 1SG affair QUANT 3SG.INAN-fear-CAUS-URP

1SG QUANT

'Next he told me something that appalled me a lot.'

Kútu likambo mökó ya kobánga.

Kútu likambo mökó ya ko-báng-a

really affair QUANT CONN INF-fear-EVS

'Really something scary.'

B: Ezaláki níni?

E-zal-áki níni

3SG.INAN-be-URP INTPR.INAN

'What was it?'

A: *Bon*, bokiló na yé abimáki kosómbe bilóko ya kolíya.

*Bon*, bokiló na yé a-bim-áki ko-sómb-a bilóko ya ko-liy-a

well, sibling-in-law POSPR.3SG 3SG.AN-exit-URP INF-buy-EVS things CONN eat

'Well, his sister-in-law had gone out to buy food.'

Azwi *bus*.

A-zw-i *bus*

3SG.AN-get-PRES bus

'She took the bus.'

Tángo bakómí na *rond point*, bus etútání na mótuka mökó ya pémbé.  
Tángo ba-kóm-í na *rond point*, bus e-tút-án-í na mótuka mökó ya pémbé  
time 3PL.AN-arrive-PRES at junction, bus 3SG.INAN-hit-STAT-PRES on car QUANT  
CONN white  
'When they arrived at the junction, the bus collided with some white car.'

Ezalákí kokende na *vitesse* mökó ya kobánga.  
E-zal-ákí ko-kend-e na *vitesse* mökó ya ko-báng-a  
3SG.INAN-be-URP INF-go-EVS with speed QUANT CONN INF-fear-EVS  
'It was driving at a frightening speed.'

Bato ebelé bazalákí na káti, bazokákí *moyen té*.  
Bato ebelé ba-zal-ákí na káti, ba-zok-ákí *moyen té*  
people QUANT 3PL.AN-be-URP at inside, 3PL.AN-be\_injured-URP way not  
'There were many people inside, they got injured like you wouldn't believe.'

Na káti ya bato wáná, bamemákí bato motóbá na *hôpital*.  
Na káti ya bato wáná, ba-mem-ákí bato motóbá na *hôpital*  
at inside CONN people DEM2, 3PL.AN-carry-URP people six to clinic  
'Out of those people, they brought six to the hospital.'

Bokiló na yé pé azalákí na káti ya bangó.  
Bokiló na yé pé a-zal-ákí na káti ya bangó  
sibling-in-law POSPR.3SG also 3SG.AN-be-URP at inside CONN 3PL.AN  
'His sister-in-law was also among them.'

Tángo bakeí na *hôpital*, tángo batálí yé, bamóní lobóko na yé ebúkánákí.  
Tángo ba-ke-í na *hôpital*, tángo ba-tál-í yé, ba-món-í lobóko na yé e-búk-án-ákí  
time 3PL.AN-go-PRES to clinic, time 3PL.AN-look-PRES 3SG.AN, 3PL.AN-see-PRES arm  
POSPR.3SG 3SG.INAN-break-STAT-URP  
'When they went to the hospital, and when they examined her, they saw that her arm was broken.'

Na káti ya *hôpital*, moyíbi mökó azalákí kolála pembéni ya bokiló ya Sendi.  
Na káti ya *hôpital*, moyíbi mökó a-zal-ákí ko-lál-a pembéni ya bokiló ya Sendi  
at inside CONN clinic, thief QUANT 3SG.AN-be-URP INF-sleep-EVS side CONN  
sibling-in-law CONN Sendi  
'At the hospital, there was a thief lying next to Sendi's sister-in-law.'

Moyíbi wáná *bapolic* bazaláká koluka yé bandá kala.  
Moyíbi wáná *ba-police* ba-zal-áká ko-luk-a yé bandá kala  
thief DEM2 PL-police 3PL.AN-be-UDP INF-seek-EVS 3SG.AN since a long time ago  
'The police had been looking for that thief since long.'

Nzokandé tíí leló bayákí kozwa yé na *hôpital* té.  
Nzokandé tíí leló ba-y-ákí ko-zw-a yé na *hôpital* té

however until today 3PL.AN-come-URP INF-get-EVS 3SG.AN at clinic not  
'However, until today they haven't come to the hospital to get him.'

B: Kási, baSendi bálóngola bokiló na bangó kúná!  
Kási, ba-Sendi bá-longol-a bokiló na bangó kúná  
but, PL-Sendi 3PL.AN.SUB-remove-EVS sibling-in-law POSPR.3PL.AN there  
'Why, Sendi and his relatives should get their sister-in-law out of there!'

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