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The Congolese Yankee: language and identity among youth in Kisangani

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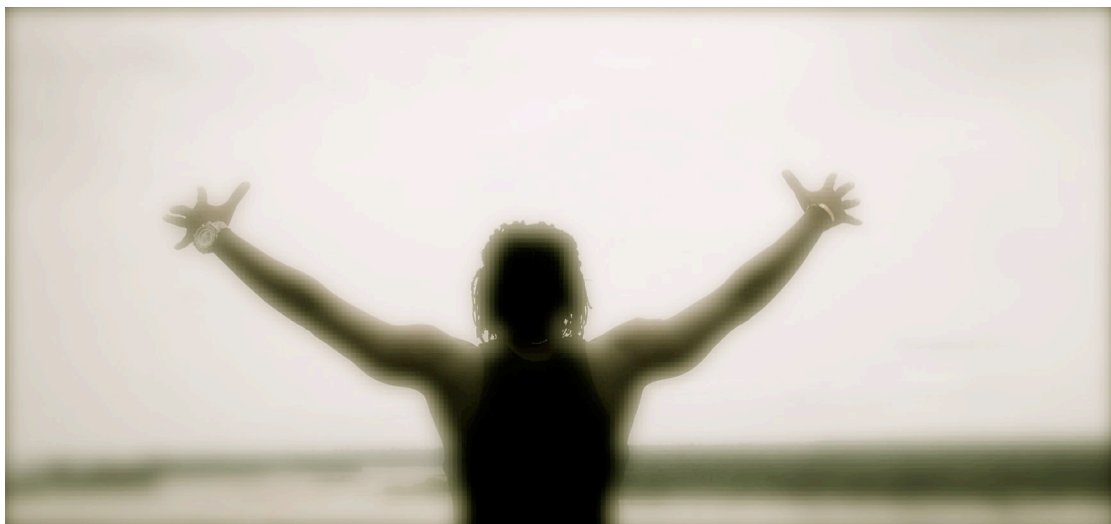
Universiteit Leiden

African
Studies
Centre



The Congolese Yankee

Language and Identity among Youth in Kisangani



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MPhil African Studies

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à ma petite

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I didn't think writing a thesis would take more time than growing a belly. Nine months seemed to be a fair amount of time, but proved insufficient. Nature as opposed to creativity and discipline does follow a strict biological clock. I came back from Congo with two unborn babies to take care of and this is (one half of) the result.

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I. Introduction

1. Research Topic and Theoretical Framework

This thesis deals with the Congolese Yankee and the ways in which he creatively makes use of language and discourse in an attempt to overcome stagnation and enter adulthood. By speaking the urban Lingala variant known as Kindoubil –i.e. a consciously manipulated language that sets him apart from others, the Congolese Yankee builds his own identity and tries to find ways to escape marginalisation and poverty, to navigate his life towards a better position and possibility (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006: 12) and, finally, to “gain the status and responsibility of adulthood” (Vigh 2006: 37).

Broken by unemployment and marginalisation, and imprisoned by cultural, political and economic constraints in a precarious and fragile state of being (Honwana & De Boeck 2005: 7), the Congolese Yankee breaks, in turn, societal norms, conventions and rules. If *Français nde eboma mboka oyo* (French has killed this country), as the actors in the theatre play *Pour en Finir avec Bérénice* cry out, then the Congolese Yankee, too, has killed language, French and Lingala, by making new semantic and grammatical rules, resulting in the birth of the antilanguage – in this case, Kindoubil.

Just like urban youths in other African cities, the Congolese Yankee “manipulate[s] language in a creative way in order to form [his] own varieties as an expression of identity” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 326). The Yankee so demonstrates a tremendous capacity for creativity and generating covert prestige, which emerges from linguistic creativity characteristic of Urban Youth Languages (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 313).

Creativity and new forms of prestige, consequently, “reinforc[e] and replenish the societal whole” (De Boeck & Honwana 2005: 6). By breaking established linguistic paradigms and thus in a certain way “by acting as [a] source of resistance and resilience” (Honwana & De Boeck 2005: 3), the Yankee does not only *break*, but contributes to and even *makes* society, or rather, anti-society. The antisociety is a conscious alternative set up within another society (Halliday 1978: 164), expressing a different social structure of the same social system (Halliday 1978: 171). Just as language has the power to generate reality and shape society, so is the antilanguage capable of generating an antisociety, or alternative society. Language and the antilanguage are both “reality-generating systems” (Halliday 1978: 168).

Marginalisation, economic difficulties and precariousness do not only break the individual; but are also the motor that generate the conditions from which the Yankee can emerge.

These conditions, incarnated in the *mal ville*, become, as we will see, the cause for refuge of youth toward dreamlike spaces of cultural creativity (Gondola 1999: 25).

How does the Yankee then classify under youth in terms of De Boeck's and Honwana's *Makers and Breakers*? Definitions of youth are highly complex. Even though biology is an important element in defining who is and who is not young, youth is, first and foremost, a historically situated social and cultural construction (Honwana & De Boeck 2005: 4) and its definition is "intertwined with issues of power, authority and social worth" (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006: 15).

Youth is, moreover, a plural and heterogeneous category, wherein its subjects, i.e. youngsters, occupy more than one position. Youngsters can be 'younger' or 'older', male or female, students or street children. I believe this plurality is reflected in the ambivalence of the Yankee, as discussed in chapter 4. However, in this thesis, I have chosen to focus on those youngsters who feel confined in the category of youth: the oxymoronic old youngsters who seek to escape youth and try to find ways to access adulthood, but do not always succeed in doing so.

Unlike in the North, where adults "desire if not to be young then at least to be youthful," youngsters in the South feel trapped in "a position of social and political immaturity" (Vigh 2006: 36) and of "heightened social marginalisation" (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006: 13). (Elderly) youth in Kisangani, as in other African cities, hunger after authority and responsibility, hunger after the respect and prestige that are linked to adult status, which is in turn translated into the financial capacity to construct a house, formally marry and raise children (Honwana & De Boeck 2005: 9).

These entrapped and disillusioned youngsters, however, "are not merely passive victims of the societal crisis that pervades [their] world[s]," but search "for their own ways out of a life that they feel to be without a future" (Honwana & De Boeck 2005: 8). They learn how to reap power out of their "perceived liminality" and how to extract agency from "crossing and recontextualizing the boundaries between seemingly contradictory elements" (Honwana & De Boeck 2005: 10).

Youth are active "beings-in-the-present and social actors with an identity of their own" (Honwana & De Boeck 2005: 4) and make "part of a larger societal and generational process" (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006: 11). In this double state of "being" and "becoming" youth position and reposition themselves in society (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006: 11). *Il faut pas traîner les pieds!* (Don't drag your feet!), Bodrigue once told me. Youngsters become

Yankees, hustlers, Bills (La Fontaine 1970 and De Boeck 2004), sapeurs (Gondola 1999), totsis (Glaser 2000) and urban specialists (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009) in order to escape liminality. Herein they make use of the tools that are available to them and the resources over which they do have control (La Fontaine 1970: 208), like language. While navigating towards new opportunities, youngsters create a counter-hegemonic order and construct a new identity.

Liminality is also linked to the fieldwork setting that inspired this thesis: Kisangani. Just like youth draw power out of their liminality, urban creativity does not emanate exclusively from the centre. De Boeck, for instance, underlines the crucial role of liminal towns along the Congo-Angolan border in the production of modernity: “the bush is the place where dollars are generated” (De Boeck 2004: 44). Along similar lines, I suggest to view Kisangani not only as peripheral and backwards, but as a centre of urban creativity in its own right.

First and foremost, Kisangani is geographically and culturally situated where the West meets the East (in Congolese terms that is). It is an Eastern city, in the eyes of Westerners and a Western city, in the eyes of Easterners. Broadly translated into language terms this means that Kisangani is the locus where Lingala (from the West) and Swahili (from the East) meet. Kisangani acts, therefore, as a Congolese microcosm, a linguistic laboratory able to foretell how the relationship between Lingala and Swahili can evolve.

Even if Kisangani might not epitomize urbanity in Congo –the place is taken in by the megapole of Kinshasa, Kisangani does have, like Bell and Jayne’s *small cities*, “its own mode of cityness” (Bell & Jayne 2006: 2). Small cities are “[c]aught between the bigness of the global metropolis dominating global flows of capital, culture and people, and the openness of the rural” (Bell & Jayne 2006: 2). Herein smallness is not so much linked to size in numbers –Kisangani has over 800.000 inhabitants–,¹ but rather to reach and influences, as well as to forms of linkage (Bell & Jayne 2006: 5).

Being the capital of the vast Oriental Province, the starting point of the 1734 km navigable stretch of the Congo River and home to a prestigious university, Kisangani is a regional attraction pole and an “important node in the networks between places of different scales” (Bell & Jayne 2006: 7). *Smallness* does not stand synonym for anti-urban or anti-cosmopolitan. On the contrary, the urban habitus of the Boyomais (as the inhabitants of Kisangani are called), i.e. their “ways of acting, self-image, the sedimented structures of feeling, sense of place and aspiration” (Bell & Jayne 2006: 5) reveals an emic sense of

¹ According to the World Fact Book, Kisangani is the fifth city in Congo, with a population of 812,000 inhabitants (2009). See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cg.html> (viewed on 16/02/2012).

cosmopolitanism.

Placing Kisangani within the framework of Bell and Jayne's Small Cities also grants it an in-between position with which its inhabitants play very cleverly. It allows them, for instance, to call for a redefinition of the capital, the mega-city of Kinshasa, in emic (i.e. of Kisangani) terms. In the eyes of the Boyomais, Kinshasa, just like the mirror of the West for the Kinois (as the inhabitant of Kinshasa is called), "conjures up the property of the marvellous" (De Boeck 2004: 46). For the Boyomais "[t]he collective social imaginary concerning [Kinshasa] is rich in fairy tale images that conjure up the wonderland of modernity, and the luxurious, almost paradisiacal lifestyle of [Kinshasa]" (De Boeck 2004: 46-47).

In their pursuit of adulthood, youth in Kisangani desperately seek to incorporate Kinshasa into their personalities. Manifested, among others, in the use of Lingala and its urban variants, youngsters speak Lingala to become Yankee, to sound simultaneously important and 'cool' (de Swaan 2001: 111-112) and to embody urbanity, civilization, shrewdness, prestige and knowledge, all which are linked to Kinshasa. In the same way the "[s]apeurs resort to the *griffes*—clothing already authenticated—onto which they graft an egotistical discourse" (Gondola 1999: 35), the Yankee resorts to Lingala, and thus to Kinshasa, which carry an already authenticated prestige, onto which they graft an egotistical discourse too, one of success. By speaking Lingala in general, and Kindoubil, the antilanguage, in particular, the Yankee creates an alternative reality, "a distinct social structure" (Halliday 1978: 167), in which he is able to become somebody else.

It is in the embodiment and dramatization of this identity that the boundaries between what is real and what is imagined—and desired—fade away. The Yankee is a Yankee in the first place because he thinks of himself as one. The blurring lines between the real and the desired resonate with the porous boundary between the formal and informal economy, resulting in what Trefon calls a *Reinvention of order*; a state where the division between formal and informal turns oblivious and which is "characterized by tension, conflict, violence and betrayal, as much as by innovative forms of solidarity, networks, commercial accommodation and interdependencies" (Trefon 2004: 2). Herein youngsters prove their cleverness by acting out, through discourse and language, the identity of the Yankee. It is by embodying the Yankee that these youngsters become real Yankees, even more real than the images they try to imitate (Pype 2007: 267).

Dramatization, just like the practice of mystical arts or, even, enchantment, is "[i]n a surging, implosive economy," like the one in Kisangani, "just one element popping up in comparable contexts all over the planet, albeit in a wide variety of local guises. As it does, it

posits fresh (or refashioned) ways of producing immense wealth and power—against all odds, at supernatural speed, and with striking ingenuity” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 284). The Yankee speaks Kindoubil to enchant, to dramatize and internalize that which he is not, an adult. And by so doing he sometimes succeeds in producing, even if not immensely, wealth and power. He succeeds in becoming a man of respect.

2. Methodology

1. On the field

The material on which this thesis is build was collected during the fieldwork I conducted in Democratic Republic of Congo between September 2009 and February 2010. Even though most of the data was collected in Kisangani, the thesis also includes elements that were collected in the couple of weeks I spent in Kinshasa before and after my stay in Kisangani, as well as the weeks I spent in Bumba and on the Congo River. These elements contributed in forming a more complete picture of my observations in Kisangani.

The data was collected mainly through empirical methods lend from the social sciences, more in particular from anthropology, such as written questionnaires, semi-structured and open-answered interviews, focus group discussions, informal conversations as well as participant observation. My starting point was to delineate the general language landscape of the city. Herein, the members of the Research Centre for African Languages and Cultures (CRLCA), among others, assisted me. This landscape was completed by about 40 semi-structured one-to-one interviews.



Figure 1. Researchers at the CRLCA in front of a linguistic map, Feb 2010

As I intended to work closely with students, I spend a lot of time at the university campus.

My plan was to hold focus group discussion with linguistics and anthropology students. After a lot of preparation with their lecturers, the focus group discussion became a reality. Unfortunately, this research method, in which I had put a lot of time and energy, proved almost fruitless. After three meetings, miscommunication and a difference in interests, translated into uncomfortable money issues and the weekly sessions came to an abrupt end. A blessing in disguise, the focus group discussions did lead me, if not to discover, to focus on the character of the Congolese Yankee. Fortunately, I managed to stay on good terms with most of the students.



Figure 2. In front of the Anthropology Department with the third year students Mutuya and Apo and lecturer Kimoni (on the right), Jan 2010 (Virginia Paradinas)

By far the most valuable research tool was a combination of recorded semi-structured interviews (where most of the quotes in this thesis come from) and participant observation. I grew to see my interviewees and informants as acquaintances and friends, rather than as just informants. For that reason I interviewed several among them more than once. Moreover outside the interview, I came to know some of these new friends quite well, as we would meet up regularly in formal and less formal environments. Therefore, the information that is contained in one interview, is, more often than not, representative of a whole set of conversations that took place before and after the interview. These off the record conversations were recorded in my fieldwork notes.

There are of course down sides to the semi-structured interviews too. In some cases my research assistant made me aware that I should take information with care because interviewees might want to please my ears. Informant and researcher, alike, are human beings, with interests and agendas of their own. I believe the only way out in the collection and processing of information is to grant human nature a place and make doubts and flaws

of this nature explicit, rather than ignore them –they actually add value to the research.

Interviewing demands preparation and the questions need to be updated all the way long. Even though recording interviews can be of great help, it is a mentally exhausting activity. On one occasion I tried to interview more than one person a day, this is what I wrote about it in my notes:²

... in addition I had decided not to record, the eve before I had held two interviews, one after the other, it left me with a bitter aftertaste... Looking at people like potential interviewees (only), forcing information. I told myself, no, one a day is enough, I have to be present (in spirit) with the person I'm interviewing, be interested with all the attention I can grant him or her, because this person is also making an effort to talk to me.

Because one never knows when information is heading one's way, I tried to be as attentive as I could at all times. I remember on more than one occasion, having to leave the table, where we were having beers, to go to the bathroom and write down things on my cell phone in the dark. At other times, the 'best' information, would come as a reflection on the interview I just completed:³

Sometimes the unplanned interviews yield the best results. Other than that, an interview can lead to a more interesting and relevant conversation that takes place after switching off the voice recorder. That's what happened at Wedu's place today. After rounding up my interview –and switching off the voice recorder!, we sat down to eat *pondu* (pounded cassava leaves), rice and *Thomson* (Mackerel). Bijou and Wédu began to discuss the questions I had asked them during the interview. With a plate on my legs and a mouth full of food, I surrendered and listened. Now, after a few hours have passed, I try to remember the details of what they said.



Figure 3. Wédu and Bijou after the interview. 22.10.2009

² Fieldwork notes diary (37) on 20.12.2009

³ Fieldwork note diary (15) 22.10.2009

I took long walks with friends, while talking about life. I did a big part of the city by foot and on the back of a *toleka* (taxi-bike). I spent a lot of time greeting people on the streets. I tried to find a balance between observing and participating. Towards the end of my stay I started to take for granted this daily routine. This can lead one to overlook details that are important, on the one hand, however, on the other, I feel I internalised some elements of that routine, which have helped me, together with my notes, a great deal in the writing.

Last but not least, the knowledge of Lingala and Swahili was invaluable. I cannot overstress to what extent it helped me. First of all they made me 'independent' and opened all doors to me. Then again, it was just fun, to play word games and to leave many agape.

2. In the writing

I was soon to realise that fieldwork does not stop once leaving the field. After my return I kept contact with (initially) a dozen of people and tried to keep up to date, through the Internet, with the events taking place in Kisangani. I believe this sort of contact is both an advantage and a flaw. On the one hand it is an advantage because it contributes to the preciseness and correctness of the thesis. On the other hand, it turns one's thesis and writing into an endless endeavour as life does not come to a stop after fieldwork, realities on the ground change on a daily basis: people grow older, new events contradict old observations. A couple of weeks ago I received the saddening news that one of the students whom I worked with passed away, Likilo R.I.P.

Writing is, moreover, part of one's methodology too. The main two methods I employed during this stage were transcription and discourse analysis, as well as the occasional glossing. The transcription and re-transcription of interviews cannot be separated from fieldwork. While listening and re-listening to the recording I discovered new elements over and over.

Because I don't have that many pictures (how do you put language into a photograph?), I have accompanied my thesis with countless quotes: in Lingala, in Swahili and in French. All of them are translated into English. I have tried to turn the translations into written representations of how a given person speaks. Following the unconventional and deviating hetero-graphy, that is the "deployment of literary means in ways different from the orthodox ones" (Blommaert 2005: 252), in other words, writing that moves away from alphabetical code, as we know it, and its rules of organisation (Blommaert 2008: 117), I opted for literal translations and refrain from correcting 'mistakes'. Thus, when citing questionnaires for example, I have tried to keep "inconsistencies and different forms of

coherence” (Blommaert 2005: 122): vernacular writing of names, unconventional use of capital letters, different orthographies to the same name, etc... not in the least to make “non-standard speakers appear less intelligent” (Woolard 1998: 23), but rather because I believe hetero-graphy, as opposed to normative ortho-graphy, is enlightening. Italics in the quotes stand for my questions and names have not been altered, unless mentioned otherwise.

To make the reading more pleasant, I have chosen to be deliberately undiplomatic by avoiding writing every pronoun in its feminine and masculine forms. In Lingala and Swahili, for instance, the third person is not gender-specific. I opted for the masculine form, not to exclude women, but for the sake of clarity. Then again, the Congolese Yankee is in most of the cases, even if not exclusively, a male character and in Kindoubil, like in other urban youth languages, “the role of boys is clearly more prominent than that of girls” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 317). Even though many (male) interviewees would refer to girls as being Yankee and as speaking Kindoubil, I did not often hear girls referring to themselves as such. There is, of course, the odd exception that proves the rule (cf. chapter 4 resourcefulness Madeleine and Elvire).

3. Chapter by chapter

The body of this thesis consists of five chapters. Two of them (chapter 2 and chapter 5) deal with language; the other three (chapter 3, chapter 4 and chapter 6) deal more closely with the Yankee. As the title of this thesis suggests, the thread that connects the chapters is the Yankee. In chronological order, chapter 2 and chapter 3 sketch the background against which to place the Yankee. Through the descriptive lens of language, chapter 2 describes the physical context, i.e. the city, where this fieldwork is set. Chapter 3, then, draws a general socio-economic background and survival strategies. These strategies, or co-ops, reflect the means of livelihood of the Yankee and the values he must grant relationships. Chapter 4 dissects the Yankee and carefully analyses his nature. In Congo, the Yankee epitomises Hansen & Verkaaik’s urban specialist, a person “whose gift it is to know the city and to act decisively, with style and without fear.” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 8). In chapter 5 I will turn again to language. Leaving Swahili behind, I will start by digging into the roots and types of Lingala to then discuss, by means of illustration, the Yankee’s most representative asset: Kindoubil. Kindoubil’s capacity to construct new identities becomes then the subject of discussion in chapter 6. In this final and analytical chapter, I combine the subject, the Yankee, with the tool, Kindoubil, against the background discussed in chapter 2 and 3, to explain what the Yankee does with language. Herein the imaginary, understood as dreams and aspirations, in a way that echoes the distinction (not) made in chapter 3 between the

formal and informal economies, seems to mix with the daily reality. The line between what is imaginary and what is real blurs and the imagined becomes as powerful, if not more, than reality.

II. Kisangani, a cosmopolitan and bilingual city

1. Introduction

As I was preparing to leave Kinshasa in September 2009, friends and acquaintances complained I would forget Lingala by spending almost six months in Kisangani; that little Lingala I had done my utter best to recuperate from the debris left from my last trip to Congo seemed some kind of lost effort. When I landed at Bangoka soon-to-be-(again) international airport in Kisangani, the stewardess welcomed the passengers in Lingala and in Swahili. In response to a short explanation of why I came to Kisangani in the first place, the family that received me and hosted me for the first couple of weeks, nodded acquiescently, Kisangani was indeed a bilingual city, a statement I would repeatedly hear for the months to come.

To get to the house of my hosts, we crossed the whole the city. We drove past mud houses, mosques and pineapple stands. The drilled-in idea of Kisangani being an Eastern and therefore Swahili speaking city was confirmed by the faded out Swahili 'Karibuni' welcoming newcomers and, later, reitified by the Swahili sign *tunashona nguo yako hapa* (literally: we sew your cloths here) of the outdoor sewing atelier in front of the *Simama* (Stand up in Swahili) Centre for disabled people (see picture below). I was unaware of the fact that the road on which we drove, connecting the airport to the city, marked the boundary between Kabondo and Kisangani communes or districts,⁴ both of which are popularly known to have a considerable Muslim population and a majority of Swahili-speakers.



Figure 4. Outdoor sewing atelier (photo by Virginia Paradinas)

In the introduction to the chapter entitled *Kisangani and the Curve of Destiny*, Omasombo

⁴ The commune is an administrative unit of the city comparable to the French 'Arrondissement' or city districts (Collins Robert French-English Dictionary fifth edition 1998). Each district in Kisangani has a local council and a mayor. It is further subdivided into neighbourhoods.

describes Kisangani as follows (Omasombo 2002: 401-404):

By 2001, Kisangani's economic situation was deplorable. The city's largest enterprise, a textile factory called Sotexki, once employed 2500 workers. It now has fewer than a hundred employees. [...] The Sorgerie soap factory does not manage to sell a fourth of its output. The population no longer has the financial means to buy its products and turns instead to handmade substitutes. These, though they are certainly of poorer quality, are less expensive. The river port (fourth largest in the country) has been completely devastated. The railroad does not have a single working locomotive. Of the three Tshopo River dam platforms that supply hydroelectricity to the city, only one continues to operate. This city of almost half a million inhabitants no longer has a public mode of transportation, and there are fewer than ten taxis in circulation. [...] It is not surprising that, in Kisangani's case, many of the various survival strategies developed by its population over a hundred years ago are still very much in place.

Even if I witnessed what Omasombo describes, I believe there is more to say about this city. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, not to look at Kisangani as “the symbol of the collapse of the whole Congo” (Omasombo Tshonda 2005: 97), but through the lens of language. Kisangani's strategic location between the East and the West, in geographical, symbolic and linguistic terms, shapes the city's identity. Its inhabitants, who depending on the context are able to identify themselves to the West and the East, refer to their city in terms of cosmopolitanism.

In the following pages, I will begin by mentioning the events that have led to the present condition: war, its residues and dilapidation. Next, I will turn to the overall language constellation in Kisangani, where I will focus on the bilingual character of the city: Lingala and Swahili. Consequently, I will illustrate the concept of language ideologies by discussing the perceptions and preconceptions of Lingala and Swahili speakers in relation to their own as well as to the other's language; leading, finally, to the discussion of the relation between Lingala and Swahili.

2. Ville de martyrs – Ville d'espoir

I hesitated whether to mention Kisangani's belligerent history in this thesis at all. By mentioning it I give into the fallacy of directing the readers' attention towards war – again. However, by avoiding mentioning it, I would deliberately choose to ignore an important and intrinsic chapter of the city's history. War has marked and shaped Kisangani; it has co-defined the *Boyomais* in their language and speaking habits. Two short examples illustrate this: The first popped up during an informal interview with lecturer Cheko when he dropped the word *kibindakoi*, which he translated as “a gros fusil à destruction massive” (big weapon for massdestruction). Nowadays, he explains, *kibindakoi* has become a metaphor referring to a big man or a big woman.⁵ Interestingly enough, *kibinda koy* was also a popular dance in the times of Laurent-Désiré Kabila's takeover of the country. The *Nkoy*, or leopard (in Lingala

⁵ Little Notebook on 29.09.2009

and other languages), is the totem and name reserved for the crowned lineage chief of the Tetela (Turner 2000: 70);⁶ the leopard being a symbol of power. *Kibinda* points to the dance movement of a wounded, limping leopard and alludes to the fall of Zaire's decade long dictator Mobutu.⁷ The second example of war in language is of phonological, rather than of semantic, order: Since the six-days war in 2000, when the Rwandese-backed forces fought the Ugandan-backed forces, using Kisangani as their stage, Rwandese, but also other Easterners, are mockingly associated with the notorious 'r' in their speech. Thus while imitating Easterners Boyomais overaccentuate the 'r' and even replace the 'l' by the 'r' as, for instance, in 'Arrô?' (cf. *infra*).

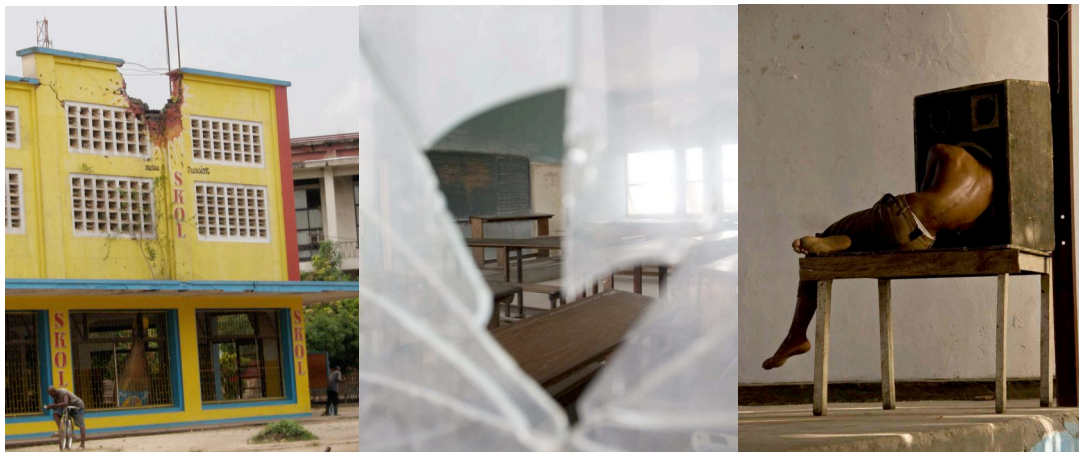


Figure 5. Reminiscences of war (Photos by Kongo Bush and Virginia Paradinas)

Today the situation has subsided and Kisangani has been rebaptised *Ville d'espoir* (city of hope), instead of the former *Ville de martyrs* (city of martyrs), a phrase that, according to the rapper Aposnot, underlines the insolence of those who did not suffer war:⁸

Les politiciens ont à faire à nos psychologies, pas à nos personnes. Ils veulent donner une autre image pour ceux-là qui viennent. Ils savent que ces transitions ne vont rien servir à ceux qui ont perdu des parents, des frères, des sœurs, nous on croira jamais que Kisangani c'est une ville d'espoir. [...] Mais pour toi qui est venue là, toi t'as pas vécu ça, quand on te dit que c'est une ville d'espoir, tu crois, parce que tu es venu faire tes recherches et ça va, ça évolue.

-- o --

Politicians try to manipulate our psyches, not our persons [i.e. they do not change our daily reality]. They want to give another image for those who come. They know that these kind of transitions will not help at all those who have lost their parents, brothers, sisters, we will never believe that Kisangani is a city of hope. [...] But for you who came here, you who haven't witnessed that, when they tell you that it is a city of hope, you will believe it, because you came here to do your fieldwork and it goes well, it progresses.

Kisangani has a bivalent character. It looks to the East as it looks to the West, it talks to the East in Swahili as it talks to the West in Lingala. It imports food from the fertile and high-

⁶ The Tetela people live in the region between the Sankuru and the Luluaba (Upper Congo) rivers in Central East Congo. Patrice Lumumba was their most famous son.

⁷ I am grateful to Filip De Boeck for pointing this out.

⁸ Interview held on 07.12.2009 in French

yielding planes of Eastern Congo and manufactured goods from Dubai and Guangzhou through Nairobi and Kampala, while searching for role models in Kinshasa and street wisdom in the lyrics of the capital's musicians. War and language seem to align themselves along the same lines: the strategic location of the city.

During my fieldwork, I felt Kisangani blossoming. After a war-induced period of isolation, the road N4 towards the East connecting Kisangani to Beni (in North Kivu) –and a stepping-stone towards Kampala, Nairobi and beyond– was rehabilitated⁹ and in full use during my stay. On the Western front, the reappearance of bigger vessels travelling more frequently the 1734 km to and fro Kinshasa on the Congo River announced the opening up of the city. In November 2009 Kenya Airways even inaugurated an international flight between Kisangani and Nairobi.

The opening up of the city has stimulated an influx of people and has had an impact on day-to-day matters: the Boyomais now enjoy a more varied diet that includes potatoes and Goma beans into their menus. These beans are then transported by boat to Kinshasa where they can be sold for threefold the price. Vehicles and public transport buses slowly replace the famous *toleka* or taxi-bicycle.¹⁰



Figure 6. *Toleka with passenger (Photo by Kongo)*

The communication arteries arriving to and leaving from the city corroborate the linguistic bivalency. The East-West axis is more developed than the North-South one; the latter being in a deplorable state of dilapidation. The eastward N4 to Beni was the first road to be recently rehabilitated, while others, such as the road Kisangani-Buta to the North, and the railtracks Kisangani-Ubundu to the South still await reparation.¹¹ Commercial airplane routes echo the preponderant East-West axis; flights connect Kinshasa to Goma, and back, with a stopover in Kisangani. On the ground too, the city expands along the East-West axis

⁹ Journal Mongongo (12) article entitled : “La route N4, axe vital pour la région, se dégrade déjà”

¹⁰ The term *toleka* is borrowed from Lingala and it literally means “let’s pass.” Tolekas are equipped with colourful cushions on which passengers are carried towards their destination.

¹¹ Journal Mongongo (8) article entitled : “Poules, Porcs, maïs et amarantes... remplacent le salaire;” Journal Mongongo (19) “Kisangani-Ubundu: la route change la vie des habitants;”, Journal Mongongo (21) “Le désenclavement, un défi pour la ville de Kisangani;” Journal Mongongo (22) Bofungoli banzela, likambo mpo ya engumba Kisangani”

and it is not a coincidence that the three districts on the Eastern ends of the city are known to be Swahili-speaking, while the three districts on the Western end are known to be Lingala-speaking.

But where on this axis do the Boyomais situate themselves? While for the Kinois, Kisangani lies in the East of Congo and for the Easterners, Kisangani symbolizes the starting point of a long descent downriver towards the West, and symbolically also a descent towards decadence; the Boyomais see themselves as neither or as both. When, shortly upon my arrival, I asked Kongo whether Kisangani was in the East of the country he responded defensively:¹²

Est biso oyo tobenga Est, biso biso tobengi Est nde yango wana Bagoma, Babeni, Butembo, nini nini, mais biso, toseconsideraka Est té. [...] Selon globe terrestre ou bien carte na biso Kisangani eza Est. Province Orientale eza na Est ya pays. Mais biso? Non, non.

-- o --

The East, that what we call the East, we we consider East places like Goma, Beni, Butembo, what not, but ourselves, we don't consider ourselves to be part of the East. [...] According to the globe or maybe in our map, Kisangani is in the East. The Province Orientale is in the East of the country. But ourselves? No, no.

The Boyomais creatively play with their bivalent identity: Kinois in the East and Easterner in Kinshasa. As I grew more acquainted with the city, I discovered that speakers use one or the other language, when needed, to identify or to distance themselves from a given group, even if they might not be fully bilingual. Slowly but surely a Congolese microcosm – probably one of the many – was unfolding in front of my eyes.

Next to Kisangani's bivalent character, there is another element that resurfaced in almost every new encounter I had. In lecturer Cheko's¹³ and Pépé's¹⁴ words, respectively:

Vous voyez, ici nous sommes à Kisangani, Kisangani c'est une grande ville. Un lieu hétérogène là où on trouve des gens de cultures vraiment différentes.

-- o --

You see, here, we are in Kisangani, Kisangani is a big city. A heterogeneous place where one can find people with very different cultures.

And:

Bon Kisangani eza mpenza na mutu té, Kisangani omoni eza ville neti balobaka na Français cosmopolite.

-- o --

Well Kisangani doesn't really have one people, you see Kisangani is, like they say in French, a cosmopolitan city.

Kisangani is a cosmopolitan city. Taking into account that the city is peripheral even inside

¹² Interview held on 12.12.2009 in Lingala

¹³ Interview held on 19.10.2009 in French

¹⁴ Interview held on 22.10.2009 in Lingala

Congo –“eza mboka,” or backwards, claims dismissively the Kinois–, Kisangani is and has been cosmopolitan for quite some decades. I challenge the reader to understand cosmopolitanism from an emic perspective, that of Kisangani. Once the third biggest city in one of the most populated and heterogeneous countries in Africa,¹⁵ Kisangani has a cosmopolitan character. Not to forget that it lies where over 1700 km of navigability on the mighty river come to an end, connecting people for over centuries; and that it houses the Université de Kisangani, UNIKIS, one of the three traditional and prestigious Congolese universities,¹⁶ attracting people from all over the province, but also from all over the country. I will use UNIKIS as a symbol of cosmopolitanism.



Figure 7. *Amphithéâtre de L'Université de Kisangani (Photo by Virginia Paradinas)*

Despite of its state of dilapidation, UNIKIS has subsisted and is reviving. New faculties and departments, such as the Faculty of Economics or the Department of Anthropology, have opened their doors over the past few years. UNIKIS' contribution to the diversification of the city is one of the many examples proving Kisangani's magnetic power. As mentioned before, youngsters, and less young people, from all over the province, and even all over the country, engage in a student career at UNIKIS. The table hereunder displays the background and lingua franca (the language students prefer to use for general communication) of some of the students of the Anthropology and Linguistics departments.¹⁷

Name	Ethnic Roots	Province	Lingua Franca
Apollinaire	Nande	Nord Kivu	Swahili
Ruphin	Lokele	Province Oriental, West of Kisangani	Lingala
Blaise	Mbesa	Équateur	Lingala
Faustin	Angba	Province Orientale	Swahili/ Lingala
Jonas	Nande	Nord Kivu	Swahili
JP	Mbole	Province Orientale, South West of	Lingala

¹⁵ According to Omasombo Kisangani receded to fourth and even fifth position, after Mbuji-Mayi and Kolwezi (Omasombo 2005: 4).

¹⁶ The other are UNIKIN in Kinshasa and UNILU in Lubumbashi.

¹⁷ The data is drawn from the questionnaire 'Petit croquis d'habitudes de locution'.

		Kisangani	
Gabriel	Manga ¹⁸	Province Oriental, North of Kisangani	Lingala/ Swahili
Christoph	Lokele	Province Oriental, West of Kisangani	Lingala
JPS	Kumu	Maniema	Swahili
Sylvain	Around Lisala	Équateur	Lingala
Jagger	Topoké	Province Oriental, West of Kisangani	Lingala/ Swahili

Figure 8. Origin and preferred lingua franca

3. Kisangani's language constellation

Cities around the globe have always been language laboratories and Kisangani makes no exception to the rule. First and foremost, like in the case of other Congolese cities, several ethnic groups, each speaking their own language, encircle Kisangani and end up bringing their languages along as they move into the city, for instance: Kilokele, Kitopoke, Kibudu, Kiboa, Mba, Zande and others. People from further away bring along their languages as well, and as a result languages that are spoken further away, even beyond the boundaries of the Province Orientale, are imported, heard and spoken in Kisangani, think of: Kinande, Kirega, Shi, Mongo, Kikongo, Ciluba, Kitetela. Among this pool, or constellation, of languages, Swahili and Lingala serve the role of vehicular languages in the city, creating a Congolese microcosm where bilingualism, though not uncompetitively, cohabits peacefully. Meanwhile French remains the official language in (higher) education, administration, politics, media coverage and the predilect language among the intellectuals and upper class. It needs to be mentioned, however, that English is slowly but surely sipping through and wining ground in relation to French.

Placing the myriad of languages spoken in Kisangani within de Swaan's *language constellation* helps to make sense of diversity. De Swaan subdivides the languages of the world into four categories: (a) peripheral languages, (b) central languages, (c) supercentral languages and (d) one hypercentral language, English (de Swaan 2001: 110). English aside, transposing the constellation to the Congolese context would read as follows: (a) local languages or vernaculars (b) national or vehicular languages and, (c) French.

One could argue that at the level of the world and maybe at the level of the nation, de Swaan's constellation applies more or less smoothly. However, when it comes down to the context of Kisangani, de Swaan's *galactic model*, even if enlightening, turns out to be a tricky tool. First and foremost, placing local or languages of 'ethnic communication' under one and the same banner seems problematic. Within this group there are languages that serve, just as Lingala and Swahili, inter-ethnic purposes, even if, on a lower scale: for example the

¹⁸ Or Mba, this language does not belong, like the others, to the Bantu but to the Adamawa-Ubangi language group.

Bangala pidgin. Secondly, to what extent should different kinds of one language be taken into account? The Swahili spoken by those who just arrived to Kisangani – *Swahili ya kolala* – not only differs from the variety spoken by those who live in the centre of town – *Swahili ya ville* –, it also does not have the same scope. The former is considered as backward and unprestigious, the latter embodies enlightenment and is more often heard among youngsters. Should in this case, the village-Swahili fall under the peripheral and the city-Swahili fall under the central level? Finally, where do the boundaries between the levels run? While at a national level there are four national languages: Lingala, Swahili, Kikongo and Cilubà; this is not the case in Kisangani. The latter two fall under peripheral rather than under central languages. Moving up a level, French's supercentrality seems to be jeopardised. This latter point is even acknowledged by de Swaan, who basing himself on Ngalasso (1990), in the case of Kikwit, and Goyvaerts (1997), in that of Bukavu, states that (de Swaan 2001: 111-112):

Clearly, in Kikwit as in Bukavu, Lingala represents the language of the political centre, Kinshasa. The military and the civil servants all speak it. It is the language of the lower ranks of central government, and hence of radio and television, and therefore of popular music and entertainment. Thus it can make one sound important and 'cool' at the same time. On the basis of his observations of the competition between French, Swahili and Lingala in Bukavu, Goyvaerts even speculates that in the end "Lingala may well become the exception an African language that succeeds in conquering its country."

And further (de Swaan 2001: 112):

The observations by Goyvaerts and Ngalasso signal a grass-roots process of national integration, against all the odds of political fragmentation: an increasing orientation of provincial town dwellers towards the national centre of politics and culture, military power and economic clout. This undercurrent may well be reversed by civil war, foreign intervention and separatist strivings, but it did manifest itself unmistakably in the language choices of Zairese in the outer regions.

If this is so, the author himself too contests the classification in which Lingala falls under the central languages with the other three national languages. Even French with all its prestige and emanation of intellectualism, cannot compete against Lingala's pandemic scope. It needs to be mentioned, however, that Lingala's emanating power, is not unconditionally positive. In the case of Kikwit De Boeck, in contrast to de Swaan, suggests that Lingala is not necessarily viewed as important and cool *because* it is the language of Kinshasa. Notorious for their critical stand on Mobutu –think of the Mulele rebellion in the late sixties– and more recently a stronghold of the PALU (Unified Lumumbist Party or Parti Lumumbiste Unifié, which is part of the Presidential Majority, i.e. the regroupment of political parties that support Kabila's presidency), the people of Kikwit prefer to hear and use Kikongo ya Leta, instead of Lingala, in the local radio and administration. Does it mean that youngsters in Kikwit prefer speaking Kikongo ya Leta to Lingala? Can Kikongo ya Leta embody prestige and worldliness? What role, then, does music play in the language use of Kikwit's

youngsters, given that the biggest Congolese star at the moment, Werrason, originary from the Bandundu, sings in Lingala rather than in Kikongo ya Leta? This discussion, alas, falls beyond the scope of my work. Turning to the main argument, I would like to underline that, at least in Kisangani, Lingala, more than any other language, is well on its way to become the supercentral language.

Making use of de Swaan's *language constellation* theory has two purposes. On the one hand, it places the relationship between Lingala and Swahili not against a fictional language vacuum, but within a web of interactions between languages belonging to all the three levels.¹⁹ While on the other hand, by underlining that "[m]utually unintelligible languages are connected by multilingual speakers" (2001:4), de Swaan's shifts the focus from the language itself to the speaker. The constellation becomes, as such, more than a web of relations between languages, a web of relationships between (groups of) individuals. Beyond spelling out how Boyomais relate to one another linguistically, the constellation is a first step towards unravelling their language perceptions, attitudes and ideologies, which will then lead to unravel how languages are used as tools used by individuals in order to gain symbolic power.

4. On bilingualism and code-switching



¹⁹ For the extensive literature on the relationship between the official and other languages see, among others, Bamgbose 2000 and Goke-Pariote 1993.

Figure 9. Church Programme (Photo by Kongo)

This picture was taken in front of the Borne Church at one of Kisangani's busiest crossroads. As it can be read on their programme, the Borne offers a bilingual mass service on Sunday mornings at 10 o'clock. If Kisangani is a language laboratory, then the Borne's 10 o'clock Sunday mass is one of the many chemical test tubes of this laboratory, i.e. a concrete setting where Lingala and Swahili speakers meet.

By far all of the people whom I met in Kisangani would proudly refer to their city as the bilingual city. But what does bilingualism actually mean? Should it be strictly limited to two languages? What level of fluency is accepted to classify as a bilingual speaker? When I asked Pépé (29) whether all people in Kisangani spoke Lingala and Swahili, he replied:²⁰

Koloba, eza pasi koloba que balobaka nyoso, mais un peu eza nano bato ebele bayokaka minoko nyoso mibale. Po omoni différence eza na koyoka na koloba. Bato bazoyoka, mais ta mosusu po na ye koloba nde eza mwa pasi.

– o –

To speak, it is hard to say everyone *speaks* both, but one could say many *understand* both languages. Because, you see, there is a difference between understanding and speaking. People understand, but sometimes speaking is a bit more difficult.

Pépé's words resonate in Myers-Scotton's appeal to find a balance between bilingualism as "speaking two or more languages with native-like ability," which would rule out most bilingual speakers (Myers-Scotton 2006: 36) and "knowing just a few words or phrases" (Myers-Scotton 2006: 44). It is hard to draw the line, but Pépé convincingly offers a way out of the dilemma. Understanding, more than speaking, is here the key term; however, as I came to realise towards the end of my stay, *understanding* a language in Kisangani does not merely mean passively making out the meaning of words, but also embraces casual conversations – such as greeting, calling out for a *toleka*, buying something in the streets, and the like. This resonates once again in Myers-Scotton's definition of bilingualism: "the ability to use two or more languages sufficiently to carry on a limited casual conversation" (Myers-Scotton 2006: 44).

Returning to the above example of the Borne Church, I am inclined to believe that, even if most people are bilingual, both Lingala and Swahili are used in the ten o'clock service in order to attract a bigger number of people; to fish in both linguistic pools, as it were. Being a protestant church, the Borne might ideologically seek to stand closer to its followers by using the languages in which the latter feel more comfortable. On the other hand, it is also true that, as a rule of thumb in Kisangani, it is expected of the speaker, in this case the

²⁰ Interview held on 22.10.2009 in Lingala

preacher, to make himself understood and to put the interlocutor, in this case the crowd, at ease. This reflects the willingness to switch to the crowd's language in order to facilitate communication, an attitude that will be discussed at more than one reprisal along this work. There is in Kisangani an operating guideline, a roadmap one could say, which indicates in what language to set off a conversation. The first step to take into account is the geographic location of the speaker, followed by the context and finally by the addressee or interlocutor. The geographic location stipulates the expected language or unmarked code. Myers-Scotton defines unmarked codes as those codes that do not surprise the addressee and indicate acceptance, on the side of the speaker, of the role relationship in which he finds himself (Myers-Scotton 1993).

Kisangani is built up of six districts (See Figure 10 below): Makiso (basically the centre of town, but also its two extremes, the airport to the East, and the neighbourhood of Simi-Simi to the West), Tshopo, Mangobo, Kabondo, Kisangani and, on the left bank of the Congo River, Lubunga. It is commonly believed that Kabondo, Lubunga and Kisangani are Swahili speaking districts; while the other three, Makiso, Mangobo and Tshopo are Lingala speaking ones. The dotted line divides Lingala from Swahili speaking areas.²¹

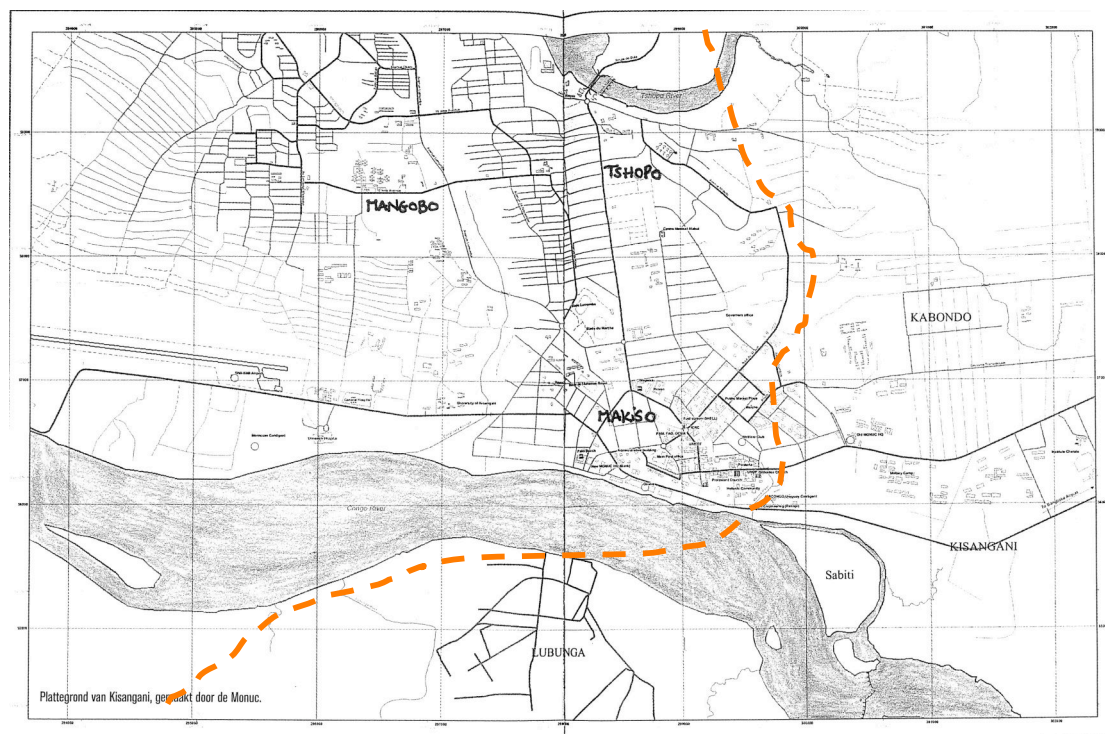


Figure 10. *Kisangani's six districts (Zinzen 2004 with personal additions)*

If one were to zoom out and look at the map of the whole country, one would see that the

²¹ Among many: Fieldwork notes diary (8) 24.09.09

(nonetheless fictive) line that runs across Kisangani, separating the Lingala speaking from the Swahili speaking districts, is the same line that runs across the country, dividing it into, among others, Lingala and Swahili speaking areas. Figure 11 illustrates the geographical spread of the four national (or regional) languages, the location of Kisangani is indicated by an orange circle.



Figure 11. Geographical spread of National languages in Congo.²²

The repartition of Swahili and Lingala districts is geographically supported and reflects the East-West axis I was speaking of above. Makiso, Mangobo and Tshopo lie on the Western half of the city and thus the 'green area' in Figure 11. Mangobo, in particular, is popular among riverine immigrants, whose vehicular language is Lingala. Jean-Claude Sombo (± 40) who lives in Mangobo, describes it as follows:²³

Mangobo ezali mingi Lingala à dominance, parce que na Mangobo il y a des gens qui quittent l'intérieur par voie fluviale qui viennent s'installer là-bas. [...] Bawuti territoire ya Isangi, Basoko, équateur, ngambo kuna Lingala nde balobaka. Tango mutu azoya alingi té abima le milieu d'accueil, parce que Mangobo c'est à la périphérie. [...] Kabondo, commune Kisangani, Lubunga, Swahili, c'est le berceau du Swahili. C'est ça la carte linguistique de Kisangani.

-- o --

In Mangobo Lingala dominates, because the people who leave the interior by river settle down in Mangobo. [...] They come from the territories of Isangi, Basoko, Equateur, that area where Lingala is spoken. When a person arrives, he prefers not to leave that area of first settlement, because Mangobo belongs to the periphery. [...] Kabondo, Kisangani district, Lubunga, Swahili, it is the cradle of Swahili. That is the linguistic map of Kisangani.

²² http://www.ethnologue.org/show_map.asp?name=CD&seq=10, viewed on 01.10.2010.

²³ Interview held on 17.12.2009 in Lingala

While those who come from the West by river first settle in the Western outskirts of the city, where they are best understood; the immigrants from the East, who arrive by the N4 road and who are more prone to speak Swahili as their vehicular language, first settle in the Eastern outskirts of the city, that is, the 'purple area' in Figure 11 which, more or less, encompasses the districts of Kabondo, Kisangani and Lubunga. The area of first settlement is sort of an extension of the rural areas many of them left behind (there is no electricity, houses are built from mud) and serves as a transition zone into the city. Urbanites view these areas as the periphery.

This division needs to be treated with care. It is not because there are more Swahili speakers in Kabondo, that, by definition, everyone who lives in Kabondo speaks Swahili at home. The majority will be able to *understand* Lingala too, but convention says that conversations are initiated in Swahili, the unmarked code, rather than in Lingala, the inadequate and marked code. By using the unmarked code the speaker keeps a low profile while making an effort to blend in the environment. Furthermore, there are liminal cases, of course, some grey, or rather green-purple areas, such as the centre of town, where all inhabitants meet and French is also present, but also the district of Tshopo. With some nuance Jean-Claude Sombo continues his description of the city in the following terms:²⁴

Sikoyo Tshopo, Tshopo ezali oyo bato babenga métissage, un peu de Swahili, un peu de Lingala. Makiso c'est le métissage, parce qu'à la commune de Makiso on parle plus de Français parce que se sont des évolués, c'est une commune scientifique ou universitaire. Omoni rencontre wana bato mingi, même na marché mingi oyokaka bamamans mingi ils ont tendance à mêler le Français, tango bazopesa yo prix.

-- o --

Now Tshopo, Tshopo is what people call mixing, a bit of Swahili, a bit of Lingala. In Makiso there is also a mix, because in the Makiso district people speak French because they are intellectuals, it is a scientific or university district. You see, there people often meet, even at the market you will hear women are more prone to mix French within, when they give the prices.

Next to geography, context plays a prominent role. On one occasion, Kongo took me to visit the Kisangani district, a Swahili speaking district. We parked the motorbike in front of somebody's house and Kongo politely asked the woman selling pili pili (pepper) behind the table, in Swahili, whether we could leave the motorbike there. She agreed. Ten minutes later, as we were crossing a cemetery in order to arrive to the riverbank, Kongo stopped a man transporting charcoal on his bicycle to ask the way. I could not believe my ears – especially after he had just lectured me on the importance of speaking Swahili in the Kisangani district – when I heard him addressing this man in Lingala. When I asked him why he did so, he replied the man was 'moving' and that when somebody is 'on the way' it is more likely that that person understands Lingala.²⁵ In this particular case, both Lingala and

²⁴ Interview held on 17.12.2009 in Lingala

²⁵ Fieldwork notes diary (9) on 30.09.2009

Swahili would have been unmarked or expected choices: Lingala because the cyclist was ‘moving’ and Swahili because we were in the Kisangani district.

Next to the geography and certain specific contexts, speakers, generally do not expect the interlocutor to adapt his or her language use to theirs; but are, on the contrary, willing to switch to the interlocutor’s language in order to facilitate communication, as mentioned before. The table hereunder illustrates this recurrent attitude. It is divided as follows: the first column conveys the interviewee’s name and age; the second one the language in which he feels more at ease; the third bears the date the interview was held on; in the fourth column the interviewee explains in what situation he would switch to the other language, which is finally translated, in the last column, to English.

Name & Age	S/L	Date	Quote	Translation
Emmanuel 35	L	12.10.2009	Je préfère m’exprimer dans une langue que l’interlocuteur comprend [...] pour faciliter la communication. (<i>French</i>)	I prefer to express myself in a language the interlocutor understands [...] in order to facilitate the communication.
JC 20	S	20.10.2009	Atarudisha na Lingala, <u>n</u> inasumulia na Lingala. Atarudisha Swahili, <u>t</u> unasumulia Swahili. [...] Il y a un peu ce qu’on appelle le métissage de la langue, brassage. (<i>Swahili</i>)	If he responds in Lingala, <u>I</u> will converse in Lingala. If he responds in Swahili, <u>we</u> will talk Swahili. [...] There is what we call the mixing of the language, a brew.
Olivier ±40	S	19.11.2009	Nitapima na Swahili, kama minaona que mutu haniifate muzuri naingia mara moja ku Lingala. (<i>Swahili</i>)	I will try in Swahili, if I see that the person cannot follow me well, I will immediately continue in Lingala.
Pépé 29	L	22.10.2009	Soki namoni nano mutu nalobelaki ye kaka nano Lingala, soki namoni ayoki ngai te, nde nameki Swahili “eh hausemake Lingala, unasemaka njoo Swahili ah njoo sasa nasumulia na ye na Swahili”. (<i>Lingala - Swahili</i>)	If I see someone I will talk to him in Lingala first, if I see he doesn’t understand me, then I will try Swahili [<i>switches from Lingala to Swahili</i>] “eh you don’t speak Lingala, so you speak Swahili, ah then I will speak to him in Swahili”.
Sébastien 20	S/L	14.12.2009	Okoki okuta pe bato mosusu, neti baolombo, baolombo mingi, bayebaka bango Lingala te, kaka Swahili. Sikoyo tango yo okei, okobanda ta mosusu koyebisa ye na Lingala, mais ye akozongisaka, ye ayebi neti Lingala té, azongisela yo na Swahili. Sikoyo okozala obligé oyeba nini? Oloba Swahili. Bolobisi ye Swahili. (<i>Lingala</i>)	You can also meet other kind of people, like the Olombo, many among the Olombo don’t know Lingala, only Swahili. So when you go, you start telling him in Lingala, but he replies, he doesn’t know Lingala, he replies in Swahili. Now, you will be forced to know what? To speak Swahili. You will make him speak Swahili.
Stommy 29	L	22.10.2009	Po tango apesi yo mbote na Swahili, il faut kozongisa na Swahili. (expected – not go against the rules) (<i>Lingala</i>)	Because when [someone] greets you in Swahili, you must greet back in Swahili.

Figure 12. Speakers’ willingness to adapt to the language of the other

The Boyomais, whether he feels more comfortable in Lingala or Swahili, makes an effort to switch to the language of the addressee. If someone starts in Swahili, but is replied to in Lingala, he will switch to Lingala, for instance Olivier; and vice versa, if someone is addressed in Lingala, but does not seem to understand, the speaker will recur to Swahili, see Pépé and Sébastien. Note how, when talking about Lingala, JC uses the first person singular, while when referring to Swahili, he makes use of the first person plural, revealing his Swahili-phone roots. When greeted, as Stommy pointed out, one has to reply the greeting in the language in which one is greeted. The switching of languages to balance the feeling of being at ease of both parties will follow the greeting. Because greetings consist of a set of fixed formulas, being greeted in Swahili and replying in Lingala would bring about an undesirable and ‘unpleasant interaction’ (Bokula 2005: 61)²⁶ and would result in an infelicitous performative utterance. According to Austin, performative utterances ‘are not aptly described as false, but rather as improper, unsuccessful, or, in general, infelicitous’ (Sadock 2004: 56). In the case, ‘misgreeting’ would fall under the category of misexecutions, ‘in which the act is vitiated by errors or omissions’ (Sadock 2004: 57).

Provided that communication is the first and foremost goal of the linguistic transaction, the switching between Lingala and Swahili, and vice versa, occurs smoothly and, even, inadvertently. The switching is neither loaded nor marked, but expected and *monolectal* in the sense that the switching implies neither strategic moves per definition, nor it requires full competence of the monolingual repertoires (Blommaert & Meeuwis 1998). If encouraged by the context the speaker chooses a language that does not fit the situation, or which surprises, either positively or negatively, the interlocutor, one can speak of a marked code. Hereby, the speaker negotiates the social distance between the participants, either by increasing – differentiating himself from the group – or by decreasing it – identifying himself to the group – (Myers-Scotton 1993). Conscious choices of this type, and their rationales, and the use of the unmarked code will be fully analysed in Chapter 6.

Bilingualism, or multilingualism, is rather the rule than the exception in Kisangani. I have discussed above the unproblematic and unmarked switching between languages. There are, however, some other elements that could hamper or load the communication: One them is the personal agenda of speakers and how speakers utilise language to accomplish their goals; Another is the language perception and preconceptions speakers have of one another’s but also of their own language, to which I will now turn.

²⁶ “Toutefois, cette parole sociale peut devenir désagréable lorsqu’elle n’est pas bien accomplie par l’un des partenaires.”

5. Language Perception, Language Attitudes and Language Ideology

A thin and permeable line runs through perception, attitude and ideology. Language perception implies the ways in which individuals become aware of something. These are, first and foremost, shaped by the context in which the individual is situated, his place within that context, his social background, level of education, access to opportunities, mother tongue and the like. Taking perception one step further leads to language attitude. Language attitudes are the settled 'feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others' (Crystal 1992: 186) and are reflected by their own behaviour. In other words, the perception of a language, which is already conditioned by the social context, conditions in its turn the (more concrete and visible) attitude that a person takes towards a language, which will then make that person act in way x or y in relation to that language.

Perceptions and attitudes add up to language ideology. Blommaert (2005: 253) defines language ideology as 'socially, culturally, and historically conditioned ideas, images and perceptions about language and communication'. More pragmatically, moving from ideas towards practices, Woolard (1998: 3) formulates language ideology as '[r]epresentations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world.' She focused on 'construed practice' rather than on 'ideas' (Woolard 1998: 11). One could say that while Blommaert's definition runs parallel with that of language perception, that of Woolard does so with language attitude.

In this thesis, I will treat language ideology as the informal institutionalisation of language attitudes, which, as we saw above, are built on the speaker's language perception(s). Taking into account that '[i]deology cannot be attributed to one particular actor, no[r] located in one particular site, but that it penetrates the whole fabric of societies or communities and results in normalised, naturalised patterns of thought and behaviour' (Blommaert 2005: 159), the way a speaker thinks and acts towards a language, should be seen as an indicator of the overall ideology of a group of people, a linguistic habitus as it were.²⁷ This ideology, disguised as 'common sense' will consequently 'reinforce' itself, that is, reinforce the 'perceptions', 'naturalised activities' and 'patterns of power' (ibid) that it carries within. While perceptions and attitudes are the building blocks of ideology, ideology, too, influences those very same perceptions and attitudes.

The interaction between language perceptions and attitudes, on the one hand, and language ideology, on the other, takes place on two different levels, which mutually influence one another. Whereas the former two make sense of world, language ideology influences the way in which perceptions and attitudes come into being. Moreover, language ideology

²⁷ The notion of Habitus will be fully developed in chapter 5.

confirms itself in the language perception and attitude (thus by influencing thoughts and acts) that an individual or a group of people have of a given language. In line with Eagleton (Eagleton in Woolard 1998: 11), I believe this comes down to the ‘performative aspect of ideology under its constative guise.’ In other words when ‘ideology creates and acts in a social world while it masquerades [*i.e. pretends to be*] as a description of that world’ (Eagleton in Woolard 1998: 11).

Let me shortly illustrate language perception, attitude and ideology by means of an example: the negative feelings Easterners have towards Lingala. Olivier grew up in the Katanga Province where Lingala is perceived as the language of banditry. ‘[S]elf-evident ideas a group holds concerning roles of language [...] contribute to the expression of the group’ (Health in Woolard 1998: 4) towards that language. As such, because of its negative connotation, Olivier developed a negative attitude towards Lingala, which was concretely translated in the lack of interest Olivier paraded, before his arrival to Kisangani, when it came down to learn this language. Moving away from the initial negative preconception of Lingala, poses a problem for someone like Olivier, who grew up in that context. But it does not need to be a dead-end street. As we shall see below, moving to Kisangani shook Olivier’s initial perception, attitude and, finally, underlying ideology (in as far as an ideology can be carried by one individual) towards Lingala. Olivier grew to understand that Lingala is just a language like any other.²⁸

The question I will try to answer in this section is how Lingala and Swahili speakers perceive their own and one another’s language. In order to do so, I will base my analysis on excerpts of sixteen in-depth interviews I held with respondents I came to know fairly well. Figure 12 to Figure 16 are meant to serve as a visual aid. Horizontally, the schemes are divided into two levels, the upper level of the speakers and the lower level of the languages. *L* on the upper level stands for a Lingala speaker, while *L* on the bottom level stands for the language, Lingala. Similarly, *S* on the upper level represents the Swahili speaker, while *S* on the bottom level represents the language, Swahili. Vertical arrows symbolize the ways in which Lingala and Swahili speakers view their own language. Diagonal arrows represent how they stand with respect to the other’s language, in other words how Lingala speakers view Swahili and how Swahili speakers view Lingala. The arrows thus represent the various relationships there exist; I will discuss them one by one. Each discussion is so preceded by the same scheme wherein the highlighted arrow indicates the examined interlanguage relationship.

²⁸ Interview held on 19.11.2009 in Swahili: Mais kwa sasa Lingala iko lugha, iko lugha, haiko tu mutoto ya soda njo anasemaka, mutu yote anasema Lingala. -- o -- But by now Lingala is a language, it is a language [like all others], it isn’t just the child of a soldier who speaks it, anybody speaks Lingala.

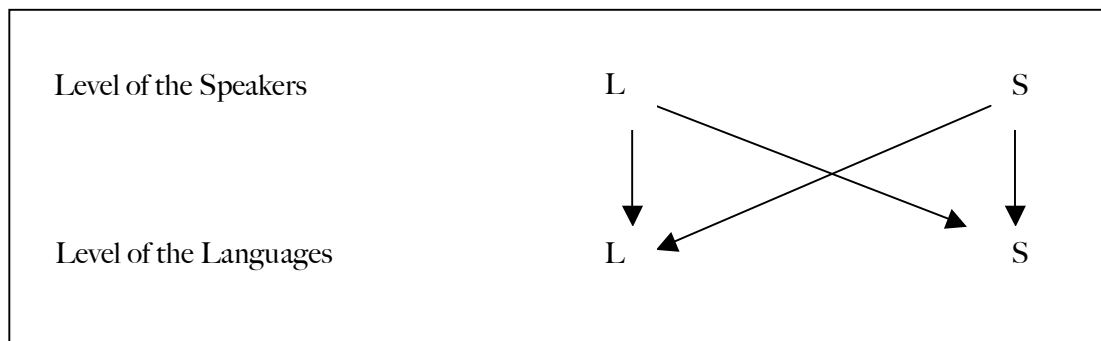


Figure 13. Language Perception

I am fully aware that Figure 12 might appear simplistic and does not represent reality accurately and therefore I invite the reader to look at it in a multi-dimensional, rather than in a two-dimensional way. Perceptions from sixteen different speakers, and thus also, perceptions relating to different periods of time as well as to different locations (not all speakers were born in Kisangani) heap one upon the other. Figure 12 so forms a palimpsest of language perceptions, in which the traces of more than one perception, albeit sometimes outdated or mutated through time and movement (like migration or displacement), are discernible.

There are, moreover, other facts that complicate the figures and should be taken into account. I can think of the following four: (1) The relationship between a speaker to either Lingala or Swahili is, in many cases, not that to a mother tongue, even if many feel more comfortable speaking one of these two languages, than they do their respective mother tongues.²⁹ Hence the identification to either Lingala or Swahili might be guided by efficacy and not by sentimentality. (2) Linked to this, there is fluency. The fluency degree of an individual in a language, might influence his perception on that language. However, the perception about a language can, of course, also influence the motivation to learn it and thus also the degree of fluency that will be acquired. There seems to be a discrepancy between Lingala-phones willing to learn Swahili and Swahili-phones willing to learn Lingala. I will touch upon this point in the subsection entitled 'Politeness and Wealth'. (3) Just as the knowledge of people with regard to a language diverges, I would like to suggest that there is not one kind of Lingala, nor, for that matter, one kind of Swahili either. As will be further discussed in Chapter 5, an individual can be fluent in Lingala Facile (the medium of wide communication for the Kinois and the name of the popular news broadcast) while feel uneasy in a more Kiyanki type of Lingala and not understand Inverted Kindoubil whatsoever. (4)

²⁹ A mother tongue is not necessarily the language in which someone is most fluent; it is linked to the person's ethnic origins and sense of identity, rather than to proficiency.

One cannot lump all Lingala or all Swahili speakers together. Above all, people remain individuals with individual perceptions, individual degrees of fluency and personal willingness to make more or less effort. Similarly, positive and negative perceptions are far from uniform. However, as I already have mentioned above, perceptions are formed within a particular cultural framework, which forms a common denominator to its speakers and co-shapes their language (and cultural) perceptions. As the discussion unfolds, I will attempt to surmount these and other obstacles. If I fail, I hope to, at least, offer the reader a lens through which to look at bilingualism in Kisangani.

Extracting all the perceptions speakers have about Lingala and Swahili is an overwhelming task and therefore I have chosen to focus on those perceptions that were most recurrent during my fieldwork. I will first take a look at how Swahili speakers view their own language, followed by how they regard Lingala. Then I will turn to the Lingala speakers, I will analyse how they view their own language followed by how they perceive Swahili. Each subsection is accompanied by a figure. These figures should be comprehended as part and parcel of Figure 13, but highlight, in each case, one 'arrow,' i.e. the perception in discussion.

1. Politeness and wealth

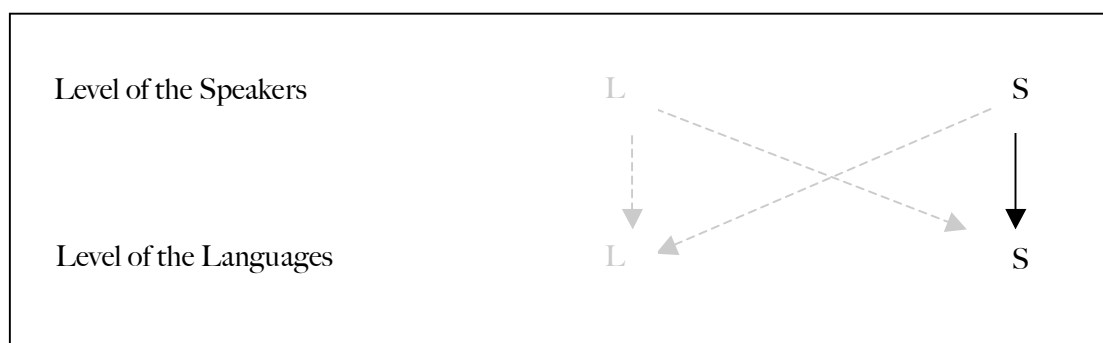


Figure 14. Swahili speakers on Swahili

When asked to compare Lingala to Swahili, Cosmas, originally from the South Kivu Province, responded:³⁰

Swahili iko langue ya adabu na njo unaonaka batu ya Est banakuaka na mwa kimia.

-- o --

Swahili is a language of politeness and that is why you see that people from the East are usually quiet.

When asked to do the same, Peter (27), born and raised in a Swahili speaking family in

³⁰ Interview held on 04.12.2009 in Swahili

Kisangani, commented about Lingala:³¹

C'est un peu trop voyou, ça na pas trop de politesse quand tu parles, parce qu'il y a trop de mots Lingala qui ne sont pas polis.

-- o --

It is a little to rascally, it does not have politeness when you speak, because there are too many words in Lingala that are not polite.

The respective softness and rudeness, or roughness, appear to be linguistically corroborated by the contrasting prosodies of the two languages. Whereas Swahili is musical to the ears, Lingala consists of tones that take the listener into a staccato roller coaster. Frère Christophe, who has been living over twenty years in Kinshasa, but who is originally from Kalemie, a city on the shores of the Lake Tanganyika, calls Lingala 'une langue saccadée'.³² Saccadée can be translated as chopped, cut into little pieces, jerky, produced by irregular and brisk movements and this is exactly where Frère Christophe sees the beauty in Lingala, in its ups and downs. As opposed to Swahili, Lingala is a language with high and low pitches and the Congolese, Swahili speakers in particular, are often fond of this. In lecturer Cheko's words:³³

En Swahili il n'y a pas ce qu'on appelle les tons, mais il y a plutôt l'accent, mais il y a plutôt ce qu'on appelle l'accent dynamique « Habari », c'est un peu adoucissant lorsqu'on parle en Swahili. « Habari yako, uko muzuri ? » Si vous êtes en bonne santé « Ndiyo », c'est pour dire oui. Mais en Lingala, tt, c'est un peu brutal là, « Sango nini ? Oza malamumu ? » On sent les tons hauts les tons bas, les tons moyens et les tons descendants. [...] Dans le Lingala il y a les tons, mais au niveau du Swahili, il y a la mélodie.

-- o --

In Swahili there aren't what we call tones, but there is rather the accentuation, there is what we call the dynamic accent "Habari", when one speaks in Swahili, it is softening [*sings while speaking slowly*] "Habari yako, uko muzuri?" If you have a good health [you reply] "Ndiyo", it is to say yes. But in Lingala, tt, it is quite brutal, [*tone of voice changes*] "Sango nini? Oza malamumu?" One feels the high and low pitches, the middle tones and the descending tones. [...] In Lingala there is tonality, but in Swahili there is melody.

Even though the expression 'music to one's ears' has a positive connotation, musicality does not need to be interpreted positively in all cases, nor is *all* Swahili musical. Kongo, for instance, differentiates between *their* Swahili, i.e. Swahili from the East, and *our* Swahili, i.e. from Kisangani. Instead of choosing Cheko's poetical 'melody', he expresses himself in terms of 'sleeping':³⁴

Swahili ya bango eza ya kolala mingi, ya pete mingi, koloba na kimia nyoso: "Ha-baa-ri," ozobendabenda, ya biso: "Habari," mais ye aloba bongo té, "Habari yako? Uko bien ou uko comment?" Ozomona différence?

-- o --

³¹ Interview held on 24.10.2009 in French

³² Fieldwork notes diary (2) on 15.09.2009 – Lingala saccadé

³³ Interview held on 19.10.2009 in French

³⁴ Interview held on 12.12.2009 in Lingala

Their Swahili is *of sleeping*, too soft, speaking with all the peace in the world: “Ha-baa-ri,” you keep on stretching it out. Ours is [tone of voice changes]: “Habari,” but he doesn’t speak like that, “What’s up? Are you well or are you what?” Do you see the difference?

Kongo draws a line between different kinds of Swahili. On the one end there is the sleepy, stretched-out Swahili, on the other end there is the urban Swahili, which he speaks (hence ‘ours’). Not everyone, however, views this staccato Boyomais Swahili, in positive terms. Bijou (30), on the other hand, who is originally from the East and identifies himself as a Nande, but has lived in Kisangani, Kinshasa and the West for most of his life, refers to the Boyomais Swahili in terms of arrogance and aggressiveness: It is a rude Swahili tainted by Lingala from which he rather takes distance, he says.³⁵

Extending politeness to wealth in vocabulary, Peter values Swahili as being rich, in the same degree as French or English, while he deems Lingala as ‘limited’ and ‘not rich’.³⁶ The most recurrent example I was provided with in these occasions is the use of yesterday and tomorrow.³⁷ While in Swahili there are distinct words for ‘yesterday’ (*jana*) and ‘tomorrow’ (*kesho*), Lingala employs one and the same word for both adverbs of time – *lobi*. In the case of the latter, it is the verb itself, instead of the adverb, which specifies the tense. In a rather derogatory tone, Peter sees Lingala’s *limitation* leading to ambiguity, because it may obscure the message and lead to miscommunication.³⁸ From my own experience I cannot say I encounter troubles due to the dual use of *lobi*.

Lingala speakers do acknowledge Swahili’s degree of difficulty. Aposnot (+- 30), who was born and raised in Kinshasa speaking Lingala and French, referred to a Swahili speaking friend in the following terms:³⁹

Quand il parle le Swahili, je suis uff, je n’y me retrouve pas, c’est trop vaste cette langue.

-- o --

When he speaks Swahili, I am uff, I am lost, this language is too vast.

This attitude seems to be supported by Faustin (23), a Swahili speaker who underlines the fact that despite of the willingness of Lingala speakers to learn Swahili, they do not succeed because it is too difficult:⁴⁰

Bato ya Lingala banapendaka kujifunza Swahili, lakini habajiletaki na hawawezaki. Banasema

³⁵ Notebook (27) on 22.10.2009

³⁶ Interview held on 24.10.2009: Le Swahili c’est une langue qui est trop riche comme le Français, comme l’Anglais. Le Lingala c’est une langue qui est trop limitée, ce n’est pas riche.

³⁷ Fieldwork notes diary (6) on 23.09.2009 – ii. Langue riche vs. Langue déprivée.

³⁸ Interview held on 24.10.2009: “Tu vois, c’est limité, peut-être ça peut compliqué quelqu’un.”

³⁹ Interview held on 07.12.2009 in French

⁴⁰ Interview held on 18.11.2009 in Swahili

Swahili iko nguvu, kwa juu mutu mwenye anajua Swahili ana bahati ya kujua Lingala kwa haraka.

-- o --

The Lingala people want to learn Swahili, but they are not gifted and they cannot. They say Swahili is difficult, because the one who knows Swahili has the luck of knowing Lingala quickly.

Cosmas, in contrast to Faustin, believes that Lingala-speakers do not learn Swahili because it is too difficult, but because they lack the willingness to do so:⁴¹

Wenzetu wenye banasemaka Lingala, kwa kubadirisha lugha yabo inakuaka un peu difficile. Bao banasema tu Lingala, hawapendi kujifunza ata Swahili.

-- o --

Our comrades [*in the university*] who are used to speaking Lingala, for them to change their language is difficult. They only speak Lingala, they don't like even learning Swahili.

This attitude, consequently, forces Swahili speakers to learn Lingala, what Cosmas labels in terms of 'social constraint,' i.e. to find oneself in a situation where in order to be understood one needs to speak the language of the environment:⁴²

Mie nilijifunza Lingala par contrainte sociale, c'est-à-dire sikujifunza ku volonté yangu. [...] Ninasikia mingi na barafiki, banasema Lingala, ninasikia zaidi sana ku église yetu, pasteur anaprécher ku Lingala, prières... Nikiprier ku Swahili, bato habajibia kabisa muzuri, juu ninajifunza kidoko ya Lingala pour que bato banisikie muzuri. C'est-à-dire niko nafournir tu effort kusema kidoko ya Lingala pour être à l'aise à l'église.

-- o --

I learned Lingala by social constraint, that means I didn't learn it by own will. [...] I hear it a lot at my friends, they speak Lingala, I hear it in our church, the priest preaches in Lingala, prayers ... If I pray in Swahili, people won't grasp me well, therefore I learned a bit of Lingala, so that people could understand well. Thus, I am trying to provide an effort by speaking a bit of Lingala in order to feel comfortable in the church.

At such instances, the communicative value of language exceeds its value for identification, which in turn underlines the speakers' flexibility –and their readiness to learn – if they need to be understood by others. Instead of picking out one of the uncountable churches that offer services in Swahili in the city, Cosmas did not see language as a barrier and preferred to learn Lingala in order to be understood in 'his' church.

The taboo of language as a barrier seems to be readily transgressed. The transgression happens voluntary when the speaker can gain advantage from it without putting himself in a position of too great discomfort (this will be further discussed in chapter 6). Conversely, the apparent incapacity or unwillingness Lingala speakers parade vis-à-vis learning Swahili leading to a higher vehicularity in Lingala in Kisangani will be discussed hereunder (cf. *infra* Lingala ekomi kodominer). Meanwhile I would like to focus on the remaining three

⁴¹ Interview held on 04.12.2009 in Swahili

⁴² Interview held on 04.12.2009 in Swahili

perceptions, turning in the first place to the ways in which Swahili speakers perceive Lingala.

2. Army, thieves and vanity

Mutu wa Swahili yote ajua kama iko clair, anaikala kimia, ata iko na franga iko simple. Mais wakusema Lingala hawakuake simples, anavala matata, anatembea matata, anasema matata. Mutu wa Swahili anavala simplément, anasema pole pole, ata anasilika hautajua kama anasilika. Mais walingala wakisilika, utakimbia.

-- o --

Every Swahili person knows whether he is clear or not, he sits peacefully, even if he has money he is modest. But those who speak Lingala are not modest, he dresses vulgarly, he walks, he speaks vulgarly. A Swahili person dresses modestly, speaks slowly, even if he is angry you will not notice he is angry. But the Lingala people if they get angry, you will run away.⁴³

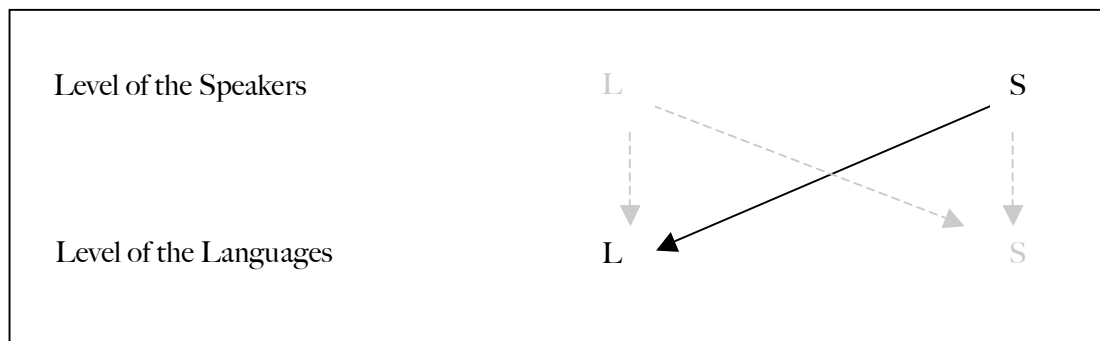


Figure 15. *Swahili speakers on Lingala*

Lingala in Congo has been associated to the army for decades. This association does not only date back to the Mobutu era, but is rooted in the late nineteenth century. Even during the early days of the Congo Free State, the Force Publique, or colonial army, recruited its soldiers in the area of the Haut-Fleuve, later to be renamed Equateur Province (Gondola 1997: 66). Many of the recruits were sent to the Force Publique's main quarters, these were at first housed in Boma and later in Léopoldville. Their language, Lingala, arrived to the expanding city and, because of its link to the Force Publique, it soon became synonym to savagery, brutality and incompetence (Gondola 1997: 14). To the chagrin of the Bakongo of Léopoldville, it was Lingala and not, the then more usual, Kikongo, that became the youth's predilect language and that subsequently turned into the capital's lingua franca, conveying an air of urbanity and modernity.

Nowadays, more than a decade after Mzee Kabila overthrew Mobutu and his Lingala speaking armed forces, Lingala still seems to be more suited to give orders than any other Congolese language. While, it is said, an order in Swahili takes the form of a request, an order in Lingala is short and strong. In innumerable cases, people would explain me the, in

⁴³ Ibid.

their ears, obvious contrast between the Swahili *kuja hapa* (come here) and the Lingala *yaka!* (come!), the exclamation mark behind the latter is not just a matter of punctuation. Cosmas is among them:⁴⁴

Lingala iko na ton moja impératif ya kumukaza mutu. [...] Par exemple niko nakuita, Catherine yaka, Catherine kuja. « Yo ! Yo Catherine yaka ! » « Toi Catherine » unanona que iko un peu impolie.

-- o --

Lingala has an imperative tone of tightening somebody. [...] For instance, I am calling you Catherine yaka, Catherine kuja. “Yo! Yo! Catherine yaka!” “You Catherine” you see that it is a bit impolite.

Linking Lingala to the military equals linking Lingala to authority. Because orders are intended to be obeyed, those who speak Lingala do so to (mis)use authority and acquire advantages, such as the prestige that is irrefutably linked to positions of authority. In this case, language, or discourse, in Bourdieu’s terms, is not designed to facilitate an overall understanding of the parties involved, but rather consists of signs of authority, destined to be accepted and obeyed (Bourdieu 2001: 99).⁴⁵ There where authority is used to frighten people, analogically, Lingala becomes a tool to incite fear or according to Dorine (20):⁴⁶

Dans les taxis bus pour qu’un homme en civil dise qu’il est militaire, il aimerait dire ça en Lingala qu’en Français ou en Swahili, pour que ça puisse effrayer les gens, ça puisse faire trembler les autres.

-- o --

In the buses for a man to say he is a military, he prefers to say it in Lingala above French or Swahili, so that it scares the people, so that it makes the people tremble.

But in a country where the armed forces are badly payed, the authority derived from a uniform is abused. As such, over the past decades, the military in Congo have more often than not been linked to pillage and banditry. In the East, where the image of a Lingala-speaking army is still vivid, this language is inevitably linked to the very same pillage, banditry and fraud. Both Olivier⁴⁷ (from Katanga) and Cosmas⁴⁸ (from South Kivu) agree on this point. Moreover, before arriving to Kisangani they both refused to learn Lingala because of its negative associations, respectively:

Nilikuwa na shida kabisa ya kusema Lingala. Juu mie sikujua Lingala, kule kwetu banasema mutu anasema Lingala iko mutoto ya soda, enfant militaire, na Lingala ilikuwa lugha ya wezi. Donc sikukuwa nasema Lingala, tu niliacha.

-- o --

I had a big problem speaking in Lingala. Because I didn’t know Lingala, where I come from

⁴⁴ Interview held on 04.12.2009 in Swahili

⁴⁵ [L]es discours ne sont pas seulement des signes destinés à être compris, déchiffrés ; ce sont aussi des signes de richesse destinés à être évalués, appréciés et des signes d’autorité, destinés à être crus et obéis.

⁴⁶ Interview held on 30.01.2010 in French

⁴⁷ Interview held on 19.11.2009 in Swahili

⁴⁸ Interview held on 04.12.2009 in Swahili

they say that a person who speaks Lingala is a soldier's child, the child of a military and Lingala was the language of thieves. Thus I didn't use to speak Lingala, I just left it aside.

And:

Sikukuaka napenda kusema Lingala juu sie tulishalika période ya Mobutu, Bukavu mutu yote anasema Lingala c'est un bandit, au iko militaire, au anavutaka bangui, chamvre, tulibaconsidérer wezi.

-- o --

In the past, I didn't want to speak Lingala because we who were born under Mobutu's period, in Bukavu every person who speaks Lingala is a bandit, or he is a military, or smokes grass, weed, we consider them to be thieves.

The perception of Lingala being the language of thieves dissuaded Olivier and Cosmas to make any effort to learn it, which turned into a concrete negative attitude towards Lingala. Because a language and its speakers cannot be separated, speakers of a language end up embodying the characteristics that others attribute to the language. In other words, Swahili speakers perceive Lingala in negative terms and thus ascribe a negative value to those who speak Lingala. More concretely, in the eyes of the Swahili speakers, Lingala is not only the language of thieves, but conversely, those who speak Lingala *are* thieves *because* they speak Lingala. Once in Kisangani, where the two languages actually meet peacefully, Olivier and Cosmas outgrew their preconceptions regarding Lingala and even made the effort to learn it. Olivier, who, by now, has been living for over twenty years in Kisangani, admits that:⁴⁹

Mais kwa sasa Lingala iko lugha, iko lugha, haiko tu mutoto ya soda njo anasemaka, mutu yote anasema Lingala.

-- o --

But by now Lingala is a language, it is a language [like all others], it isn't just the child of a soldier who speaks it, everybody [any kind of person] Lingala.

While Cosmas, at first reluctant to learn Lingala, explained to me:⁵⁰

Mais kufika huko njo tuliona que iko pia tu lugha ya bato bote, njo na sie tunaanza kusema.

-- o --

But arriving here, we saw that it is also just a language of all people, thus we too started to speak it.

It goes almost without saying that Lingala-speakers are less judgemental of Lingala than Swahili speakers. However, this does not mean that the former are not aware of the fact that Lingala carries a negative connotation from which, when needed, they prefer to take distance. Travelling in the East, Stommy (29), originally from the West, was once told:⁵¹

⁴⁹ Interview held on 19.11.2009 in Swahili

⁵⁰ Interview held on 04.12.2009 in Swahili

⁵¹ Interview held on 23.10.2009 in Lingala

Ekomela nga déjà une fois, nazosolola na mutu ya côté wana na Lingala, ayebisi ngai “bino boza baorgueilleux trop, bino bato ya Lingala.” Ayebisi ngai na Swahili.

-- o --

It has happened to me already, I was talking with a person from that side [*referring to his trip to Beni, in the East of Congo*] in Lingala, he told me “you are too proud, you Lingala people.” He told me in Swahili.

Lingala is undeniably linked to pride and prestige, and thus speaking it is a way to embody that pride and prestige. Dorine rightly points that Lingala:⁵²

C'est une langue d'orgueil, [...] les gens qui la parlent l'utilisent pour être orgueilleux. Donc c'est devenu la preuve d'être de la capitale, puisqu'à la capitale on ne parle que Lingala.

-- o --

It is a language of pride, [...] the people who speak it use it to be proud. Thus it became the proof of being from the capital, because in the capital only Lingala is spoken.

Rudeness can hardly be explained in terms of tonality, nor politeness in the lack thereof. It is not tonality that makes Lingala a language of orders, but rather its decades long association to the army. However, speakers seem to have internalized tonality, and in particular Lingala's tonality, as a sign of orders. Because orders are intended to be obeyed, Lingala is linked to authority and those who speak it (mis)use authority to acquire not only tangible advantages, but also less tangible ones, such as the pride that is irrefutably linked to positions of authority.

3. When vanity turns into pride

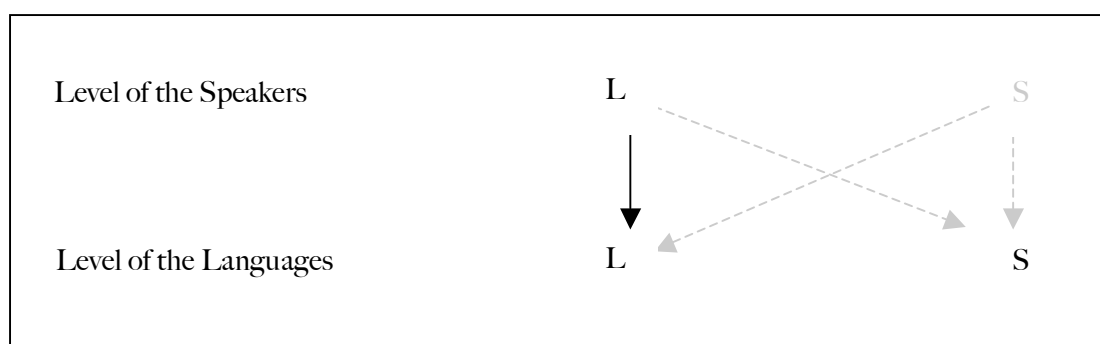


Figure 16. Lingala speakers on Lingala

Is vanity a negative characteristic? In this section, I would like to invert the negative value of vanity, vainglory and egotism. I believe that, especially in a context where one has to fend for oneself, vanity needs to be viewed from another angle as well: it constitutes a tool that helps its users navigate through adversity.

⁵² Interview held on 30.01.2010 in French

If positively loaded, i.e. when vanity turns into pride, vanity is a quality to be acquired. In this sense, pride is not linked to arrogance, but to prestige, personal development, self-respect and self-fulfilment. Lingala helps, as such, to boost one's self-esteem and serves as proof that one knows about the world. Corollary, Swahili paradoxically, as will be discussed below, becomes not only the language of humility, but of backwardness, of the *villageois*. It should come as no surprise that youngsters who were raised in a Swahili speaking family prefer to speak Lingala once outside the confinements of their compounds. Peter is very much aware of this:⁵³

Quand tu vois la personne qui te parle en Lingala, tu es complexé, tu ne vas pas trop parler le Swahili parce qu'on va te voir c'est comme si tu es quelqu'un qui ne connaît pas trop, quelqu'un qui est villageois, quelqu'un qui vient de la basse classe.

-- o --

When you see somebody who addresses you Lingala, you will be perplexed, you will not speak a lot in Swahili because you will be considered as somebody who doesn't know a lot, somebody who is a country bumpkin, somebody who comes from a lower social class.

In order not to loose face, Peter sees himself forced to interact in Lingala, which he also speaks. Speaking Lingala turns out to be a way to protect oneself from prejudice, as well as a tool to embody prestige and civilisation. The more Lingala resembles the Kinois variant, the better. Speaking a villager Lingala will not entitle the speaker to embody prestige. Roger (27), a talented comic drawer planning on leaving to Nairobi in order to advance in his career in the arts, tags the link between Lingala and prestige, but especially the need to own that prestige by speaking Lingala, as a psychological problem:⁵⁴

Et surtout, Lingala eza langue un peu moko, lokola na capitale par exemple, yango nde ezoprimer, eza question, problème mosusu psychologique, celui qui parle Lingala aza na mwa lokumu (valeur), aza approché mingi na Bakinois, na capitale, c'est-à-dire mwa civilisation.

-- o --

And especially, Lingala is a language a bit, like in the capital for instance, it stands out, it is a question of, a psychological issue, the one who speaks Lingala has value, he is very close to the Kinois, to the capital, i.e. to civilization more or less.

Lingala is used with fervour to acquire and, once embodied, put forward a particular type of identity. Just like not all Lingala speakers are thieves, not all people who speak Lingala are Lingala speakers per se; in fact Lingala is mainly spoken as a second tongue, just as Swahili.⁵⁵ Lingala is spoken not only because people are forced to *do* so (cf. supra Cosmas '*contrainte sociale*'), but because there are those who *want* to do so. The motivation behind this is a desire to resemble the Kinois and to appropriate the (positive) qualities that are linked to Kinshasa, even though they have never been in the capital. When I asked Dorine

⁵³ Interview held on 24.10.2009 in French

⁵⁴ Interview held on 25.11.2010 in Swahili

⁵⁵ www.ethnologue.org

why youngsters preferred Lingala to Swahili, he replied:⁵⁶

Justement c'est parce qu'ils veulent ressembler les gens de la capitale. *Mais beaucoup d'entre eux n'arriveront jamais à la capitale.* Justement! [...] Ils parlent le] Lingala pour impressionner les autres, du genre « je viens de la capitale. »

-- o --

It is exactly because they want to resemble the people from the capital. *But many among them will never arrive to the capital.* Exactly! [...] They speak] Lingala in order to impress others, to say "I come from the capital."

In the eyes of the Boyomais, the force the capital irradiates, and which is carried through Lingala, outdoes Swahili's vehicularity. How can Swahili not be vehicular taking into account that it is widely spoken in East Africa? Swahili has an (semi)official status in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, the Comoros and Congo. Moreover it is widely used in Rwanda and Burundi and it is even spoken in parts of Somalia, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and South Sudan. How can Swahili not be prestigious while it is a language of high culture, of Islam, of commerce, a worldly and international language and, above all, while it has more speakers than Lingala?

Boyomais do not seem to be oblivious to Swahili's importance. Kisangani is turned, as I mentioned before, towards the East too: there are Kenya Airways flights connecting Kisangani to Nairobi,⁵⁷ trade is oriented to the East... How come then that Swahili, paradoxically, on the local level, has such a low status? Why do people seemingly chose to ignore how widely spread it is? From my experience, I can say that Boyomais, and Kinois for that matter, are more surprised to meet a foreigner who speaks Swahili, than one who speaks Lingala. I believe this is indicative to the fact that within the borders of Congo, Lingala, in contrast to Swahili, is not only more spread out and readily available, even among the *mindele* (literally whites), but also enjoys more exposure, from an emic perspective, with regard to the world. This attitude endorses youngsters in Kisangani to turn their back to Swahili. In a couple of words, Kongo puts it as follows:⁵⁸

Lingala eza fin na RDC, tous les langues ezoya na se ya Lingala.

-- o --

Lingala is the end in DRC, all the other languages come behind [literally under] Lingala.

Swahili simply does not offer the tools and qualities that link Congolese to their capital nor does it put individuals on a path to acquire value, prestige and civilisation.

⁵⁶ Interview held on 30.01.2010 French

⁵⁷ Kenya Airways has been forced to cancel the flights between Nairobi and Kisangani not because of lack of interested travellers, but because travellers cannot obtain their travelling documents, such as the newly introduced biometric passport, in Kisangani. For this type of documents, they need to render themselves in Kinshasa. Once in Kinshasa, it is absurd to return to Kisangani in order to take an international flight; moreover, Kenya Airways also flies between Kinshasa and Nairobi.

⁵⁸ Interview held on 12.12.2009 in Lingala

The fact that since 1997 a Swahili speaking elite governs the country has had little impact on the glamour Lingala still carries. However, I cannot say the balance has not tilted; people's perceptions and attitudes towards Swahili have started to change, also in Kinshasa. Here Swahili is, simultaneously, winning ground –it is convenient to learn the language of those who are in power– and cultivating enemies –the Kinois views Swahili speaking soldiers in Kinshasa as occupiers. Perceptions do not change overnight; it will take time before youngsters in Kisangani value Swahili as they value Lingala today. I would like to turn now to the tilting scale, the changing value of Swahili in the eyes of the Lingala speakers.

4. Swahili the (new) language of the Congolese army

At several reprises in this thesis, I have associated Swahili to backwardness. This seemingly absurd perception reflects what I encountered on the field: it is the emic perception of Boyomais youth. I have tried to counter or complete this backwardness, firstly, by presenting Swahili as a polite and wealthy language. However, politeness is not 'cool', nor symptomatic of worldliness. Thus, I have underlined Swahili's international scope in East Africa and I would like to, in what follows, counter Swahili's backwardness by looking at it in terms of dynamism, power and prestige within the borders of Congo.

How can Swahili simultaneously be *and* backward *and* powerful? I believe the answer lies within the palimpsest of language perceptions. As I have tempted to explain in the introduction to this section, each figure, thus each perception, should be placed against a multidimensional background, which enables to visualise the traces left by space or movement, i.e. the impact that different geographical locations leave on speakers, on the one hand, and by time, on the other. Within the palimpsest, Swahili can carry more than one connotation, even in the eyes of one and the same person. To understand the palimpsest, a note on Swahili's history in Congo is needed.

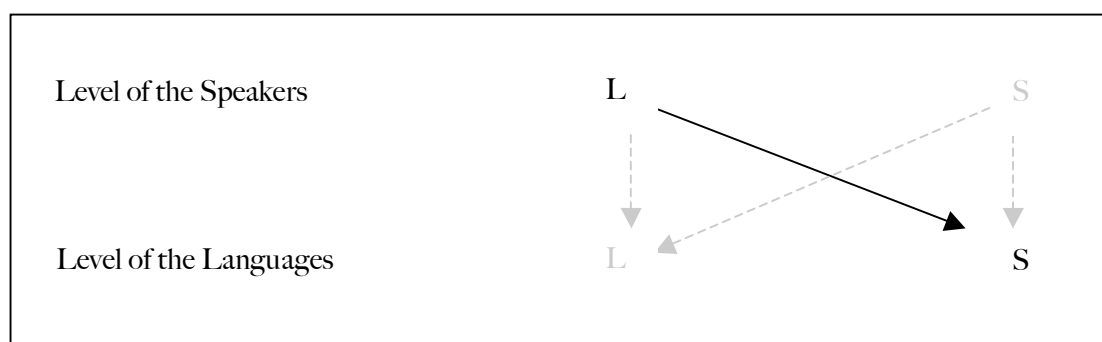


Figure 17. Lingala speakers on Swahili

Swahili emerged in the Eastern parts of Congo at the end of the nineteenth century. The infamous Zanzibari slave and ivory trader Tippu Tip is often put forward as the one who introduced Swahili to the area. I prefer to adopt Fabian's "processual" frame in which Tippu Tip is not presented as the sole introducer of Swahili in the region, but rather as a contributor in the creation of an "'interaction sphere' in which Swahili could spread from the East Coast to the Upper Congo" (Fabian 1991: 8-9). The Swahili of the traders met Bantu and non-Bantu languages of the area and developed into a creole Swahili, known as Kingwana (Kutsch Lojenga 2009: 1). The conditions of the population in the decades that followed Tippu Tip's first arrival facilitated the adoption of Swahili as a *lingua franca*. Swahili started to grow roots and turned into the vehicular language of a vast area that encompasses today the Kivus, Maniema, Katanga and part of the Oriental Province (cf. Figure 11).

During colonial times, Swahili, just as Lingala, was vertically privileged and grew to be a means of communication between colonial agents and their subjects, at least in the Eastern Katanga province (Fabian 1991). But it was the latter that, emanating from the capital, grew to be the language, after French, of the centralised colony. Lingala was the language of the recruited soldiers, the capital and the emerging, and later thriving, Congolese music scene. Lingala's prestige grew further under the Mobutu era: it was the language of the government, the civil servants, etc... Swahili did not adhere to Lingala's informal prestige and in the eyes of the Kinois it remained a second-degree language.

Kabila's march towards the capital in the late nineties with his army of young Swahili-speaking kadogos, which concluded in his take-over of the country and Mobutu's flight into exile, did not only established a new government and placed a new elite, but also forged a new language order. Bijou, counting himself among the Swahili speakers or *minasema*⁵⁹, once recounted that when he answered his cell phone in Swahili while travelling on a bus in Kinshasa, he felt all eyes, filled with question marks, turning towards him: is he maybe a distant cousin of the president?⁶⁰ Almost a decade and a half after Kinshasa's take-over, dropping one or two words in Swahili in conversation suffices to give the impression of belonging to the presidency's entourage.

In contrast to Kinshasa, Swahili is not taboo Kisangani and the Boyomais, unlike the Kinois,

⁵⁹ Minasema are Swahili speakers. The word itself is derived from the colloquial Swahili form of 'I speak' (minasela) and adopted to give the Lingala form. Just like the plural for man and white person in Lingala, *mibali* and *mindele* respectively, the prefix *mi-* fits under class 4. I must underline I never came across the singular form *monasema.

⁶⁰ Fieldwork notes diary (15) on 22.10.2009

will not raise their eyebrows when hearing Swahili in public. However, here again, when used in the right context and with the right pronunciation, Swahili does not relate to backwardness, but gives the speaker a defiant air. Those who speak Swahili, even if just a little, know this all too well. Out his pool of anecdotes, Kongo fished an occasion when he was trying to set up a meeting with Olivier Kamitatu, the former president of the Senat:⁶¹

Ngai nakota na bureau na ye, sans audience! Po na nini? Po na muswahili, seulement na telephone: “Oui allô, sasa buko wapi?” Mutu azoyoka ndenge nazoloba Swahili, protocole natelama na porte, nga nazoloba Swahili, ah!

-- o --

I was allowed into his office, without a hearing! Why? Because of [being] Swahili, just on the phone [holds his hand next to his ear and simulates conversation in Swahili]: “Yes, hello, where are you now?” They hear how I speak Swahili, I follow a protocol of I standing at the gate, I am speaking Swahili, ah!

Standing in front of the office of Olivier Kamitatu, Kongo simulates a conversation in Swahili in order to access the Senat’s president’s office. Kongo is very aware that in this particular case Swahili, associated to power, is a key into the spheres of the government. But it is not the use of Swahili as such, he goes on, but the use of the alveolar trill /r/, that, according to him, grants Kongo entry to exclusive domains:⁶²

Mais soki nalinga naintimider mutu lisusu, il faut naloba mutu nini: “Arrô?” Est-ce que ngai soki naza na telephone nalobi “Arrô”? Mais soki ngai nalingi kolobela mutu que non mutu abanda kobanga: “Arrô”. Parce que Rwandais ou bien bakatanga baloba “Allô” té, bango baloba “Arrô.” Batu, presque bacôté kuna, même Bandande, bango tout baloba “Arrô”.

-- o --

But if I want to intimidate someone even more, I have to say: “Arrô?” If I am on the phone, do I [usually] say “Arrô”? But if I want to speak to someone and I want him to start fearing [me]: “Arrô”. Because Rwandans or else Katangans don’t say “Allô”, they say “Arrô”. Almost all the people from that area, even the Nande, all of them say “Arrô”.

Even if in the Swahili of Kisangani the /l/ seems to have replaced the /r/, becoming, as it were, allophones,⁶³ it is debatable whether, as Kongo puts it, Rwandese and Katangese respond to phone calls with “Arrô.” It is not so much the linguistic, but rather the social aspect that is of interest here. “Arrô” might be unaccustomed, but for Kongo it is a logical hypercorrection symbolising a very specific identity, that of the East.⁶⁴ The knowledge of when to pronounce /r/ instead of /l/ is illustrative of how language is owned and consciously (mis)pronounced in order to gain advantage or access. As we will proceed, we

⁶¹ ‘Kabila Swahili et tonalité ya Kinshasa’ conversation in Lingala recorded on 12.11.2009

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ By means of an example, the word for cold in Kisangani Swahili can be pronounced “balili” instead of “baridi.” In standard Swahili, but also in other kinds of Swahili within Congo, on the contrary, /l/ and /r/ are no allophones, but two distinct phonemes, /l/ and /r/ form a minimal pair. The interchangeability between these two phonemes did not seem constant in my eyes, some people would differentiate while others would not. I believe other social factors hide herein.

⁶⁴ See also fieldwork notes diary (11) 07.10.2009 Kongo abeti masolo: “et surtout le swahili avec le fort R symbolisant l’accent de Rwanda.”

will learn that Kongo only speaks Swahili in a very restricted number of cases, out of which the one above is an example.

In the past fifteen years Swahili outgrew its backwardness, to become, in the eyes of many Kinois, what Lingala was already (or still is) for someone from the East: the language of the army and of force. Just as Lingala once symbolised force and power in the East, Swahili is nowadays in Kinshasa a language of power and of the army. Swahili speaking soldiers in Kinshasa are looked with disdain,⁶⁵ probably just as Lingala speaking soldiers in the East were in the past. Making sense of these contradictory, paradoxical, yet overlapping, perceptions is best done in terms of the palimpsest: both Swahili and Lingala, depending on the context, but especially on the speaker and the ‘audience,’ can be interpreted, or not, and used, or not, as a language of power.

Swahili is currently undergoing a status change. Its rurality and backwardness stripped away, Swahili has become a national language, not in terms of the recognised status it already had –Swahili, Lingala, Kikongo and Cilubà are the four national languages in Congo –, but in the eyes of non-Swahili speakers, who see the need in learning it and speaking it.⁶⁶ But why, despite the change in perception, does Swahili seem to be a long way from toppling Lingala? In Kisangani it even seems that Lingala is winning ground vis-à-vis Swahili. This is not an exception. In several Eastern Congolese cities, as I was told, Lingala has been (partly) stripped off its negative military varnish, retaining an underlying wordly gleam, which, according to Bijou, makes youngsters dream.⁶⁷

6. Lingala “ekomi kodominer”

Et pourtant Kisangani iko mungine hii banasema Swahili, mais Swahili inanza kupotea, inanza kupotea.

-- o --

And actually Kisangani is a city where people speak Swahili, but Swahili is getting lost, it is getting lost.⁶⁸

Peter lives right in the centre of town, a couple of meters away from the Congo River. He grew up in Kisangani in a Swahili-phone family, but is also fluent in French and in Lingala. After obtaining his university degree in communication sciences, Peter turned to music. He is a songwriter and contrived his own music genre –RAM.⁶⁹ Next to music and running a film editing studio, Peter is the head of Danckis –Danceurs et Choréographes de Kisangani.

⁶⁵ Fieldwork notes diary (50) on 28.02.2010

⁶⁶ Fieldwork notes diary (48) 22.02.2010

⁶⁷ Fieldwork notes diary (8) 24.09.09 and (11) 07.10.2009: Lingala c'est une langue qui fait rêver.

⁶⁸ Interview held on 16.10.2009 with Jef in Swahili

⁶⁹ RAM or Rythme Afro Métissé (Mixed Afro Rhythm) combines a humanitarian message with different music genres such as gospel, zouk and R&B. Document: ‘Biography de l’artiste’.

Danckis is composed of over hundred-twenty (mostly) young men between twelve years and twenty years old. It offers these youngsters a podium to perform and develop their dancing skills. Even if Peter grew up hearing Swahili at home, he frequents today, outside his compound, Lingala speaking circles: the world of music, of youngsters and that of the centre of town, which force him to use Lingala more often than Swahili. He notes that:⁷⁰

Vraiment ça sera comme Kinshasa où tout le monde parle Lingala, [...] peut-être dans la maison, mais quand tu sors à l'extérieur c'est fini pour le Swahili. [...] Et c'est cette habitude qui commence à venir à Kisangani, peut-être dans la famille que tu parlais en Swahili mais [*laughs*] quand tu sors déjà c'est le Lingala.

-- o --

Really, it will be like Kinshasa where everybody speaks Lingala, [...] maybe at home, but when you go out it is finished for Swahili. [...] And it is this practice that is arriving to Kisangani, maybe in your family you spoke in Swahili but [*laughs*] when you go out it is already Lingala.

Alain (28) is originally a Swahili speaker too. He was born in Katanga and raised within a Muslim family. Alain lives in the centre of town, a couple of blocks away from the central market and a couple of blocks away from Peter. He studied law for a year at the university but had to stop his studies. Lately, he has invested in building up a social network and gives the impression to be a successful co-operant (cf. chapter 3). Alain, who in contrast to Peter does enjoy speaking Lingala, also claims that once outside his compound, he immediately switches to Lingala, out of own will rather than by constraint or force, that is. His mother lives in Kinshasa where the same rules apply: within the compound the family members speak Swahili; outside of it they use Lingala.⁷¹

Peter's and Alain's point of view are illustrative of Lingala taking the upper hand in Kisangani's downtown. Jef (38), also a Swahili speaker, corroborates their point of view. Not only is Lingala more commonly heard, but in most cases, it makes more sense to dispose of it in order to make the first contact with a stranger:⁷²

Inakuwa sasa habitude premier contact na mutu, paka ule mutu akusemesha "Ngai na... eh sijuake Lingala." Njo tunarudia ku Swahili.

-- o --

It is usual nowadays that the first contact takes place in Lingala, until the other person tries to respond [*in a broken Lingala*] "I, I... [*and then turns to Swahili*] "I don't know Lingala." Then we turn to Swahili.

It is stupefying to think that two Swahili speakers initiate a conversation in Lingala! It is a vicious circle: the more Lingala is spoken, the more and the easier people will contract a conversation in Lingala. Guided by the economical principle of the least possible effort to

⁷⁰ Interview held on 24.10.2009 in French

⁷¹ Interview held on 14.11.2009: "Ninasemaka Lingala en dehors ya lupango".

⁷² Interview held on 16.10.2009 in Swahili

ensure a maximum communication, (Swahili) speakers generally choose, in the centre of town, Lingala above Swahili. Peter, who regrets the loss of Swahili among youngsters, admits that:⁷³

Et même si tu as envie de parler et tu vois, ah non, ttt, même pour faciliter les choses c'est le Lingala.

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And even if you feel like speaking [*Swahili*] and you see, ah no, ttt, even to facilitate things, it is Lingala.

Two concrete and illustrative contexts prove the dominance of Lingala in the centre of town: the language use (1) in petty trade and shops and (2) the language use at University campus. There is yet another important setting where Lingala dominates that will be discussed in Chapter 6, namely the *nganda* or bar. For now, returning to the first setting mentioned above, when it comes to small transactions that take place on the side of the road such as: filling petrol, changing money, buying a cigarette and ordering a taximan or toleka, Peter observes that:⁷⁴

Mais dans les boutiques, les alimentations, même les pharmacies, c'est maintenant toujours Lingala parce que c'est maintenant une langue qui a pris d'ampleur dans cette ville par rapport au passé. [...] Tout le monde, dans tous les domaines, les gens sont influencés, toujours maintenant en Lingala. Les gens qui ne connaissent pas le Français, c'est toujours le Lingala. Même prendre un taxi "taximan yaka, tika ngai awa," pour dire que "kuja, uniache hapa" c'est ça ça ça.

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But in the shops, in the grocery stores, even in the pharmacies, today it is always Lingala because it is a language that has gained magnitude in this city, in contrast to the past. [...] Everyone, in all domains, people are influenced, now it is always in Lingala. For those who do not know French, it is always Lingala. Even to order a taxi [*in Lingala*] "taxi driver, come, leave me here," to say [*in Swahili*] "come, leave me here" it is that that that.

Sébastien (20), born in a Swahili speaking family residing in Mangobo, agrees that at a first instance, in the first contact and when the first words are uttered, Lingala is (becoming) more common and convenient:⁷⁵

C'est-à-dire dans un premier temps tango ozokenda na zando, ou bien na centre ville, ou bien ozosolliciter bus, ou bien nini, Lingala nde okobanda koloba. Soki okokutana esika mutu wana Swahili, nde okweyisi pe na Swahili.

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That is to say, initially, when you go to the market, or to the centre of town, or you stop a bus, or no matter what, you will start speaking in Lingala. If you meet someone who speaks Swahili there, then you will fall into [switch to] Swahili too.

This does not need to mean Swahili is disappearing. As I mentioned before, if the speaker is

⁷³ Interview held on 24.10.2009 in French

⁷⁴ Interview held on 24.10.2009 in French

⁷⁵ Interview held on 14.12.2009 in Lingala

aware the interlocutor speaks Swahili, he will address him in Swahili. Within the petty trade context there is one concrete location where it is better to start a conversation in Swahili: at the numerous Nande-owned retailer shops that have mushroomed in Kisangani in the past few years. Originally from the East, the Nande use Swahili, next to the mother tongue Kinande, as a vehicular language. Their clients, looking for a price advantage, as we will see, do the same:⁷⁶

Swahili soki okutana mutu neti mundande. Un commerçant Ndande po azoteka biloko na ye, ata yo soki [okei] Lingala, ye ta mosusu azongiseli yo na Swahili.

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Swahili if you meet a Nande for instance. A Nande businessman in order to sell his goods, even if you speak in Lingala, he will reply in Swahili.

The University of Kisangani attracts students and lecturers from all over the country. Both alike agree that Lingala is more commonly used among students on campus than either Swahili or even French (the courses are nevertheless given in French).⁷⁷ It is quite significant to think that even in the context of the university, Lingala is winning ground to French, the language of the Congolese intellectuals. Parallel to what we saw above, it is more common to see students from the East learning Lingala, than students from the West learning Swahili. Even Swahili speakers from outside Kisangani are, according to Alain, encouraged to speak in Lingala with Kisangani's Swahili speakers in order to avoid misunderstandings –another stupefying example of two Swahili speakers who communicate in Lingala with one other. Alain advances Swahili, or rather particular Swahili regiolects, in this case Bunia Swahili, to be in-group languages only:⁷⁸

Saa vile nilikuwa ku campus, tulikuwa kusema deux langues : Français, Lingala, hapana Swahili. [...] Bon ukasema Swahili kabisa batu habacomprendre juu Swahili ya Bunia na Swahili yetu déjà iko na différence, grande différence. Bon Swahili yabo sie, ya kwanza, hatucomprendaka muzuri. Mutu ya Bunia anapasha kuja saa hivi mie ninakuja hapa, anapasha niambia [...] : « leta kiti, leta kiti chini ya matakoto ya mutu ». Bon, sie batu ya Kisangani ku cõtê ya mot ya 'matakoto' iko déjà difficile macho ya batu, bon batu ya Bunia njo Swahili yabo. [...] Sasa selon sie tunasikia saa moja iko derangement. [...] Saa sie tunaambiaka : « Leta kitu umupatia mutu aikale », différence iko pale hivi. [...] Bon awa sasa banaoga baili batermes mingi, inye baappliquaka boye, sie kwetu ukasema vile tunaona saa moja mutu iko impoli ou bien iko nadéranger bato, haikuwe normal, njo mingi sasa, tu vois, au campus hatuweza kusema nabo Swahili, tulikuwa nabaforcer sana baseme Lingala ou bien Français. Bakasema Swahili banakutana, banasema Swahili entre batu ya Bunia yabo peke, pale banasema Swahili.

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When I was at the campus, we would speak two languages: French, Lingala, no Swahili. [...] Well if you speak strong Swahili people won't understand because the Bunia Swahili and our Swahili is already different, big difference. First we don't understand their Swahili well. Someone from Bunia can come at the same time I come, he can tell me [...] *literally in Bunia Swahili*]: "bring a chair, bring a chair underneath the buttocks of the person." Well, we people

⁷⁶ Interview held on 14.12.2009 in Lingala with Sébastien

⁷⁷ Interview held on 19.10.2009 with Cheko "Le Lingala, vraiment avec les étudiants, nos étudiants ici le Lingala." See additionally interviews with Faustin on 18.11.2009 and Cosmas on 04.12.2009.

⁷⁸ Interview held on 14.11.2009 in Swahili

from Kisangani when it comes to the word ‘matako’ [*buttocks*] it is already difficult in the eyes of people, but for the Bunia people, that is their Swahili. [...] Now, we consider it to be rather disturbing. [...] We usually say [*literally in Kisangani Swahili*]: “bring a chair to give to the person to sit down,” the difference is there. [...] Well, they insert those terms a lot, which they apply in their way, and if you talk like that here we will see you as somebody who is rude or somebody who disturbs others, he is not normal, so, you see, at the campus we cannot speak Swahili with them, we force them to speak Lingala or French. They talk in Swahili if they meet, Swahili only among the people of Bunia, in that context they talk in Swahili.

On the contrary to Lingala, Swahili seems to hamper communication. Even though Bunia and Kisangani lie in the same province, the respective Swahili’s are, in Alain’s opinion, not fully intelligible. One should not forget that the languages spoken in the surroundings of Bunia and those spoken around Kisangani differ greatly, partly accounting for differences in this two ‘types’ of Swahili (Bokula 2005: 129). Nevertheless, instead of focusing on the similarities rather than on the differences, or promoting a universal version of Swahili, such as the older Kingwana form (why not?), Alain describes the Swahili of Bunia as ‘disturbing’ and ‘abnormal’ and even encourages Swahili speakers to learn Lingala and to switch to it for out-group communication –and that even among Swahili-phones! Alain’s example is not unique. Dorine, who moved recently to Kisangani from Lubumbashi, corroborates this attitude: even among Swahili-phones, he prefers to force himself to speak in Lingala rather than to adapt to another, more neutral, but seemingly unintelligible and even embarrassing Swahili.⁷⁹

Et je me gêne de parler parfois mon Swahili que les gens comprennent parfois mal, alors je m’efforce à parler Lingala avec les autres, avec les gens de l’extérieur.

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And I sometimes feel embarrassed to speak my Swahili, which others often understand wrongly, so I make an effort to speak Lingala to others, to the people outside.

Lingala is gaining ground in conversations between Lingala and Swahili speakers. Lingala is gaining ground among Swahili speakers from different regions. Even when Swahili is spoken, Lingala seems to be gaining ground on the intralingual level, altering the morphology of Swahili; hereunder two examples:

Example one:⁸⁰

“Ah mon cher, **unipesa** maji kidogo”

Translation “Ah my friend, give me some water”

u-ni-pes-a

2SG-OBJ1SG-ROOT:give-SUBJ

1. The Lingala root –pes- (kopesa) is used instead of the Swahili –p- (kupa) for ‘to give’
2. The final –a instead of final –e indicating the subjunctive tense

⁷⁹ Interview held on 30.01.2010 in French

⁸⁰ Fieldwork notes diary (20) on 02.11.2009

Example 2:⁸¹

“Ule mutoto ule **balimuopereke**, alipita hapa”

Translation: “That kid who was operated, past here”

ba-li-mu-oper-eke

3PL-PAST-OBJ3SG-ROOT:opérer-PAST

1. -oper- from the French opérer, bastardized in Lingala and Swahili
2. Lingala tense marker -aki- pronounced as eke to indicate the past tense

Note that the use of the prefix –li- and the suffix –eke- (from –aki-) is tautologic in that both morphemes indicate the past tense but in different languages, the prefix in Swahili, the suffix in Lingala.

The language balance is tilting towards Lingala. Is it really that surprising? Is it really that novel? But even though there reigns a general consensus that Kisangani was originally a Swahili speaking city, Lingala is by no means ‘new’ to the city. I will not refute that the Genia fisherman who are indeed considered by many to be the original inhabitants of the city, speak Swahili, next to their native Kigenia, rather than Lingala.⁸² I will also not dispute that elders in Kisangani often speak Swahili instead of Lingala.⁸³ I will not deny that the Swahili speaking troops of Tippu Tip had an impact on the language situation when they settled in what was to become Stanleyville and later Kisangani. But by its location on the Congo River, it is difficult to argue that Lingala, the riverine language par excellence, has ever been alien to this city.

I believe Lingala did not need –retrospectively– for Mobutu’s regime, the colonial administration nor Stanley’s expeditious troops (de Saint-Moulin 1975: 32)⁸⁴ to emerge in the area of Kisangani. While I will not deny that each one of these historical episodes stimulated and further expanded the use of Lingala, I would like to maintain that Lingala is not foreign to the city, or at least not much more foreign than Swahili is. Pépé even claims that the widespread use of Swahili –not Swahili itself that is– is new to the city: Mzee Kabila breathed new life into it when, during the rebellion in the late nineties, he passed through Kisangani on his way to Kinshasa. Swahili, according to Pépé, has been heard more often in Kisangani since. In spite of this, it has not managed to topple Lingala either in number (or

⁸¹ Interview held on 25.11.2009 with Roger in Lingala

⁸² Interview held on 22.10.2009 with Pépé

⁸³ Interview held on 24.10.2009 with Peter, interview held on 16.10.2009 with Jef and interview held with Papa Deduze on 23.10.2009.

⁸⁴ « La pénétration coloniale amena à Kisangani de multiples étrangers : des soldats haoussa et bangala en 1883 » - “The colonial penetration brought to Kisangani several foreigners: Haoussa and Bangala soldiers in 1883”

seniority):⁸⁵

Lingala depuis kala ebandaki kolobama déjà mingi, depuis kala. Swahili mikolo oyo emati mwa moke, mingi lisusu po na rébellion. Omoni, neti rébellion ewutaki na Est, na Laurent-Désiré Kabila, bakondimi mingi oyo bamilitaires ebele bayaki na bakonzi ebele oyo bazalaki côté ya rébellion, babandi koloba Swahili. Et puis bacadres, bacadres politiques, militaires mingi ya bamouvement ya rebelles, babandi koloba Swahili. Nde pe bango basali que Swahili ekoti, omoni, ata ti na Kinshasa, bakomi koloba Swahili ti na armée, bakomi koloba Swahili moke. Mais Lingala ebandaki déjà kodominer kala mingi. Lingala eleki Swahili.

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Long ago Lingala started to be spoken a lot, since long. Recently, Swahili went up a bit, a lot again due to the rebellion. You see, just like the rebellion came from the East, and Laurent-Désiré Kabila, many followers, a lot of militaries came and many of the landlords who supported the rebellion, started to speak Swahili. And then the politicians, many of them former militaries of the rebel movements, started to speak in Swahili. So, through them also Swahili entered, you see, even in Kinshasa, they started to speak Swahili in the army, they started to speak a little bit of Swahili. But Lingala has been dominant since long. Lingala surpasses Swahili.

Prof. Bokula deems Lingala as the emerging *super-vehicular language* not only in Kisangani, but also in Congo in general.⁸⁶ He describes the emergence of a *super-vehicular language* as follows (Bokula 2005: 160 italics in the original, my translation):⁸⁷

After Independence, several factors –modern Congolese music, audio-visual media, education, commercial activities, evangelisation campaigns and the like– have contributed to the development of the vehicular languages that imposed themselves as *dominant* and *commonly used languages*. In fact, in practice, some languages exercise more functions than others and the relation between the forces could bring about profound changes in the development of their vehicular role. This new process of the sociolinguistic development could gradually lead, on the long term, to the emergence of one *super vehicular* language that would become the only national language likely to carry the national signature and identity in a wide range of domains of use.

Prof. Bokula describes the process of Lingala: its expansion and dissemination through music and media, the change in ‘forces’ whereby the symbolic force of the capital is winning ground. Even beyond the borders of Congo, in the Congolese diaspora, Lingala “serves the purpose of communication between [Congolese] of different regional origins” (Blommaert and Meeuwis 1998: 84). When I tried to explain to Kongo that Swahili was also heard in Brussels, he ferociously responded with more questions (Kongo’s words are transcribed in normal case, mine in italics):⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Interview held on 22.10.2009 in Lingala

⁸⁶ Fieldwork notes diary (5) on 21.09.09: Super-véhicularité

⁸⁷ Après l’indépendance, beaucoup de facteurs tels que la musique congolaise moderne, la presse audio-visuelle, l’enseignement, les activités commerciales, les campagnes d’évangélisation, etc; ont contribué au développement des langues véhiculaires qui se sont imposées comme *langues dominantes* et *langues communes*. -- En effet, sur le terrain, certaines langues exercent plus de fonctions que d’autres et le rapport des forces pourrait amener, en perspective, des changements profonds dans le développement de leur rôle véhiculaire. Petit à petit, ce nouveau processus du développement sociolinguistique pourrait conduire, à long terme, à l’émergence d’une langue *super véhiculaire* qui deviendrait la langue nationale unique susceptible de porter la marque et l’identité nationales dans plusieurs domaines d’usage.

⁸⁸ Interview held on 12.12.2009 in Lingala

Eza côté nini? Babengaka yango nini? *Eza katikati na Matonge pé.* Ahh, omoni que Lingala eza dominier, même na Poto balakisi yo exemple que Lingala... nalingaka kaka nayebe po nayebe eza na kati ya place ya bato baloba Lingala. Pour te dire que Lingala eza fin na RDC.

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Where is it? What is it called? *It is just inside Matongé too.* Ahh, you see that Lingala dominates, even in Europe there is an example that Lingala... I wanted to understand because I know that it [*the place where people speak Swahili*] is inside the place where people talk in Lingala. Just to tell you that Lingala is the end in DRC.

Indeed, Blommaert and Meeuwis note that in the Congolese diaspora in Brussels Swahili is the “language for ingroup interaction among eastern [Congolese], and [that] it is *exclusively reserved* for this type of interaction” (Blommaert and Meeuwis 1998: 84 italics in original). Turning to the other side of the planet, in Guangzhou, in South East China, not only the Congolese diaspora speaks Lingala, as van Reybroeck suggests (van Reybroeck 2010: 577),⁸⁹ but there are even local Chinese merchants who, while they have never set foot in Congo, speak Lingala fluently as well (van Reybroeck 2010: 570)! Does Lingala carry the national signature and Congolese identity beyond the borders of Congo? In a country where everybody is raised as a multilingual speaker, it is hard to provide a clear-cut answer to this question. Furthermore, the ‘forces’ to which Prof. Bokula alludes are constantly in flow; with a Swahili speaking president a privileged Lingala might soon be dethroned.

But today, in Kisangani, Stommy will teach, next to French, Lingala to his children so “they are able to communicate with the rest of the population.”⁹⁰ And today, in Kisangani, in the eyes of Jef, a Swahili-phone, there is no doubt that Lingala is emerging as the *super-vehicular* language.⁹¹

Lingala iko njo langue moja ya valeur, kama unasumulia Lingala njo unakuwa na valeur. Njo ile, petit à petit, Lingala inadominer.

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Lingala is a language of value, if you speak in Lingala, then you have value. That is how, little by little, Lingala begins to dominate.

Lingala carries intrinsically the value of the capital with all what Kinshasa entails. Boyomais are aware of Lingala’s worth when they hear it, but also when they speak it. Language is at their disposal. But there is not just one type of Lingala, there are several and each one of them carries its own set of values, some of which are sought after, others which speakers do not desire to embody. If we take into consideration Lingala does not form one indivisible

⁸⁹ Aan de muur hangt een zin in Lingala. ‘*syp Ndeko awa ezali esika ya mosala*’, beste vriend dit is een werkplek. ‘Ik heb dat uitgeprint en opgehangen,’ zegt Georges, ‘omdat de Congolezen hier anders toch maar komen kletsen.’
-- o -- On the wall hangs a sentence in Lingala. ‘*syp Ndeko awa ezali esika ya mosala*’, my friend this is a workplace. ‘I printed it and put it up,’ says Georges, ‘because Congolese would otherwise just come to have a chat.’

⁹⁰ Interview held on 23.10.2009 in Lingala: “Lingala po épermettre ye pe azala na communication na reste ya population.”

⁹¹ Interview held on 16.10.2009 in Swahili

unit, will Prof. Bokula's *super-vehicularity* still hold? And which kind is, then, more prone to carry Kinshasa-ness and super-vehicularity within? On the other hand, Swahili exhibits interesting characteristics, which, within the right context, turn into powerful tools as well. Do Lingala and Swahili compliment or exclude one another? To what extent do all these questions relate to the language itself and not to the speaker that uses them as tools? Is it possible to draw a boundary between the language and the person? And why are languages used, if used, as tools?

After having sketched and expanded the boundaries of Kisangani by analysing the relationship between Lingala and Swahili, I will turn in the following two chapters away from language and towards the individual, that is the speaker or the Yankee, starting with the socio-economic context in which he lives. In Chapter 5, I will turn again to language, or rather, to the use of language, Lingala in particular, as a tool for identity-building.

III. Co-ops: the socio-economic context

1. Introduction

In order to provide a background to the Yankee and his language use I presented, in the last chapter, the city of Kisangani in terms of language. This chapter is equally meant as a background to understand the Yankee; but instead of using language as a lense, I will sketch the Yankee's socio-economic context, with its consecutively livelihood and values. Even though, I will not (yet) focus on the ways individuals resist and contest exclusion, I will provide a background against which resistance and contestation take place. By describing the functioning of co-ops, to begin with, I hope to shed some light on how the informal economy works, and is *de facto* formalized. After that, I will define the term co-op and illustrate it by means of an elaborated example. I will, then, turn to diversifying and round up with a discussion on the importance of investing in relationships. In this way I hope to approach the discussion of the Yankee in chapter 4, who is often considered as someone who masters the act of *la débrouille* (fending for himself), a professional in striking co-ops or deals.

2. The informal economy

Gondola describes the *mal ville* or "urban jungle" (Gondola 1999: 44 note 2) as a place of economic and social frustrations characterised by "difficult living conditions of deprivation, frustration, unemployment, boredom, hunger, heat and illness" (Gondola 1999: 30-31). The state that gives rise to the *mal ville* is one that has forgotten its citizens and which apparatus only serves the enrichment of its leaders. But when the state's institutions stop distributing wealth and power resources and its leaders, enriching their own pockets and ultimately betraying the population, the population, too, can withdraw its contingent consent and refuse to comply to the established norms (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 158). Without norms "life still goes on: somehow, sometimes, somewhere, things work, though in unexpected and extraordinarily ingenious ways" (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 4).

Ironically, the *mal ville* triggers youngsters to look for alternative paths, become creative, find new ways to fend for themselves and to forge opportunities for themselves. In Bissau, Vigh refers to the "dynamic quality of attentiveness and ability [needed] to act in relation to the movement of the social terrain one's life is set in [...] requiring both an assessment of *immediate* dangers and possibilities as well as an ability to envision the unfolding of the social terrain and to plot and actualise one's movement from the present into the *imagined* future" in terms of *dubriagem* (Vigh 2006: 52). Within the Congolese context *dubriagem* is translated to *la débrouille* or *article 15*. *La débrouille* emerged as an emic response to the

state's absence. "[B]y using their own (opposed to imported) resources, networks and ideas to adapt to adversity" (Trefon 2004: 8), people have created a solution for themselves. *La débrouille* is "surviv[al] by adapting to the predatory rule of the street" and the state (De Boeck 2004: 89).

In a country where the rate of unemployment fluctuates between 40% to 85%, one may question the definition of employment, as well as the definition of the (in)formal economy. "[I]t has been many years", writes Nzeza, "since the idea of work has meant a secure, salaried job in the formal economy. For the vast majority of Kinshois work is any small job or activity that provides enough francs to buy a meagre meal or pay for the collective taxi fare home" (Nzeza 2004: 20). The question that poses itself is rather the following: Is the formal-informal dichotomy still relevant?

Even though the terms informal (and formal) and secondary are problematic, understanding the dichotomy can be a useful starting point. MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga define the informal or second economy in terms of "activities that are unmeasured, unrecorded and, in varying degrees, outside or on the margins of the law, and which deprive the state from revenue" (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 4).

But what if everyone, regardless of his or her social class and status, takes part in the informal economic sphere? What if that small percentage of civil servants, such as teachers, professors, administrators and police men, who (ought to) receive a salary in the formal sector, cannot get by on it at the end of the month?⁹² What if the state functionaries, who should actually condemn the activities that deprive the state from revenue, are the ones who practice them mostly?

The petty trader, the teacher, the doctor and the politician, all alike, participate in the informal economy. Several university lecturers complain that if it were not for the students' extra bits, in the form of *primes*, they would not be able to travel to University at all. Schoolteachers, among them many full-time university students, complain their monthly wages do not even suffice to cover the transport expenses to and from work. Civil servants face a similar fate. The Mongongo journal raises several questions in an article entitled "A civil service of the unmotivated"⁹³. Herein, the author asks rhetorically how can civil servants who are paid \$44,4 a month, if paid at all, and whose working environment lacks furniture and even paper provide a good service?

⁹² Journal Mongongo (9) 30.12.2009 "Les policiers aiment plus les conducteurs généreux qu'en ordre" - See also La "désalarisation" de Villers (2002: 12)

⁹³ Journal Mongongo (17) 22.04.2010 "Une fonction publique de démotivés"

There is the petty trader, on the one end, who “[i]n a city where the ordering and accumulation of things rarely works beyond the simple architectures of the ‘heaps of’” (De Boeck 2004: 259), struggles to remain afloat by reselling milk and sugar in ever smaller quantities; and there is the, state functionary, on the other end, who both, strikes lucrative deals in the ‘formal’ economy and draws “authority from their ability to control informal markets” (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 30). Moreover, the petty trader, people at the bottom (“gens d’en bas”), and the political leader, people at the top (“gens du haut”) often collaborate (see Villers 2002: 20-21).⁹⁴ If ‘shadow states’⁹⁵ come into existence, does then a division between formal and informal still make sense?

“The looting that destroyed a large number of modern businesses” as well as the erosion and absence of state institutions, which is so characteristic of the *mal ville*, also “created new opportunities for informal competitors” (De Herdt & Marisse in MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 33). In the same vein as Trefon claims for the Kinois, the Boyomais, despite years of dictatorship, crisis, war, pillage, rebellion and a malfunctioning government, has come up with new political, economic, cultural and social structures (Trefon 2004: 5). These apparently subordinated social actors are not just passive actors, but are actively engaged agents of the own lives (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 166).

Thus, contrary to what would be expected, (informal) social institutions have not fallen apart, but appear to be diversifying and even strengthening (Trefon 2004: 5). New, colloquial rules and laws have been established, as illustrated in Prisca’s example below. Moreover, “as people take matters into their own hands and create a functioning alternative economy, and also functioning alternative social institutions,” the economic power base shifts (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 171). The line that separates the formal from the informal does not only blur away but turns futile and outdated.

3. Co-ops and Co-operants

When asked about his occupation today, Kongo, who could not *grab* his secondary school diploma, replied:⁹⁶

Mosala... Bon mosala na ngai, ngai naza coopérant. Biso, babengaka biso coopérants.
Coopérants toza bato tosala bacopes, neti epai na bino babengaka yango bajobs. Mais eza na

⁹⁴ De Villers (2002: 20-21): “Généralisation du processus d’informalisation”

⁹⁵ “The shadow state develops from the emergence of rulers drawing authority from their ability to control informal markets. These markets provide them with alternative material and political support as the administrative capacity of the state collapses, with its exploitation for the private benefit of its personnel” (Reno 1995 in MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 30).

⁹⁶ Interview held on 12.12.2009 in Lingala

mosala bozosala, mais biso, eza bajobs oyo yo moko ozomilukela. Eza na job té que mutu moko akoya na restaurant moko, mutu apesi yo trois heures ya kosala ou bien ndenge moko ya kosala. Té. Job yo moko ozoluka que ‘ah mon cher que ah nazoteka cahiers’, ozwi cahiers ya mutu wana olukeli ye client, yo ozwi pourcentage na yo. Ou bien mutu aza na besoin na ndako olukeli ye ndako, babiloko ya marque wana, nde tobenga bacoopérants. Nde boulot na ngai yango wana.

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Work... Well my work, I am a co-operant. We, they call us co-operants. Co-operants are people who do co-ops, just like in your country they call it jobs. But it is a work you do, but we, there are those kinds of jobs you have to search for yourself. It is not like a job where a person goes to a restaurant, somebody gives you three hours of work or explains how the work is done. No. It is a job you have to search yourself like ‘ah my friend I am selling notebooks’, you take the notebooks of that person, you search a client for him, you get your own percentage. Or somebody needs a place where to stay, you will search a house for him, those kinds of things, that’s what we call co-operants. So that is my work.

1. Defining the co-op

In literature, the term co-op, an abbreviation of ‘co-operate’ or ‘co-operation’ has been discussed and defined by a few scholars: MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga, for instance, define it as “the entire system of relationships involved in a clandestine business deal and the making of the necessary contacts for commercial purposes” (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 56). Even if defining co-op in terms of ‘clandestine’ is not untrue, it is not elucidating either, considering the dichotomy of formal-informal economy does not make sense any longer. Along the same lines, co-op has outgrown its translation in terms of ‘corruption’ or ‘scheming,’ striking co-ops, can but does not need to be a deceitful act. In what follows, I will define co-op in terms of *komilukela* (to search for oneself), intermediaries and bargaining (Nzeza 2004) and opportunities (De Boeck 2004).

How can co-operating be an answer to the question “what is your job”? And in what way is it a full time enterprise? In the above quote Kongo mentions, ‘there are those kinds of jobs you yourself have to *search for yourself*’. ‘Search for oneself’ is a translation of the Lingala verb *komilukela*, a short semantic analysis of this verb might be useful to better understand the meaning of co-op.

The root of *komilukela* (-luk-) means in Lingala ‘to search’ or ‘to look for’. To this radical two affixes are attached: (1) The reflexive prefix -mi- carrying the meaning ‘oneself’ and (2) the applicative suffix -el- representing the act of ‘doing for someone’. *Komiluka*, with only the reflexive, can be translated as ‘to look for oneself’, ‘to search oneself’, while *kolukela*, with only the applicative, means ‘to search for someone’. (In both cases the prefix ko- marks the infinitive.)

When combining both affixes, ‘*komilukela*’ can be translated in two very similar yet nuanced ways. These two nuances are important as they point towards two different aspects of the

‘co-op’. ‘Komilukela’ means (1) ‘to search something for oneself’ and, also, (2) ‘to search oneself something for someone [else]’. In the first case, there is no other person involved than the one who is looking, the subject and the beneficiary are one and the same. This refers to the way the ‘co-operant’ falls outside any formal structure and is forced to look for a revenue, a means of subsistence and existence. It denotes the co-operant’s self-reliance and also underlines the inventiveness and creativity needed in this endeavour.

In the second case, the semantics of the verb involve two people; the subject and the beneficiary are not one and the same person. Being a ‘co-operant’ is playing the role of an intermediary, literally a person standing in the middle, a ‘go-between’ in Nzeza’s terms (Nzeza 2004: 20): someone between the person who is looking for something and the object or service he is looking for. The cooperation and contact with the other person is hereby heightened. The co-operant works for himself and for somebody too.

The person looking for a good or service for the other is with no doubt a co-operant, however the person for whom this good or service is found, the client, is not necessarily a co-operant, or does not necessarily see him/herself as being one. Only when the two cooperate more than once together, then it can be said they are co-operants of another, or literally ‘a person who is cooperating with another’:⁹⁷

Coopérant, mutu azocoopérer na ye na kati ya bacopes, baaffaires. Neti, mutu ayaki kotekele ngai sapato wana, ayebi que coopérant na ngai aza wana place ya prison, namemela ye, donc ngai naza coopérant.

-- o --

Co-operant, a person who cooperates with another regarding co-ops and business. For example, someone came to sell to me those shoes, he knows ‘my co-operant is there close to the prison, let me take it to him’, that makes me a co-operant.

More than just working together, cooperating entails benefiting together. If there is more than one co-operant involved, the different actors will share the profit according to their part in the co-op or as Bijou explains:⁹⁸

C’est plus des trucs du genre commissions ou est-ce que tu as aidé à réaliser telle histoire, on te donne un pourcentage. C’est plus écho, la marge, c’est plus ça qu’on utilise pour cope.

-- o --

It is more commission-type things or have you helped to fulfil such or such, they will give a percentage. It is a commission, a margin, that kind of thing is used for co-op.

In many cases, the co-operant does not earn money directly from the profit of sold goods, but from a delivered service –that is the co-operants role in the venture. It ties in with

⁹⁷ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

⁹⁸ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

Trefon's and Nzeza's "perpetual bargaining system that pertains to every economic sector in daily life," from buying a bag of charcoal to applying for an administrative document, and where "[i]n any kind of transaction there are a number of intermediaries who expect a commission" (Nzeza 2004:10). Selling services is not exclusive to Kisangani, or to Congo for that matter. Co-operants, brokers, agents, middlemen and the like, i.e. people who buy and sell goods and assets for others, exist around the globe. Co-ops are goods, assets, and services that are bought and sold by a co-operant for a client.

Nzeza translates co-op into the English *bargain*. According to him whether 'used as either a noun or a verb, [(to) bargain] best captures the spirit and practice of *la coop*' (Nzeza 2004: 20). Seen as a noun and a verb, co-ops do not only mean goods in the strict sense of the term, but also stand for services. While selling (or buying) the goods of others, the co-operants sell their services. It is their service that becomes their belonging, which converted into a good or an asset can be sellable to others. Albeit the services are not tangible, their results, which are sold as assets, are. Making or striking co-ops or deals (*kosala* or *kobeta co-op*) more than related to income, are also linked to "looking for opportunities" (De Boeck 2004: 89), whether these deals and opportunities are clandestine or not, seems to be of less importance.

2. Prisca's case

Using Prisca's anecdote as an illustrative case,⁹⁹ I hope to better ground the meaning of co-op in Kisangani's context. The relation between goods and services will come to the foreground and notions such as *Banque Lambert* and *engage*, which are important constituents of the co-op, will be clarified. However, this case illustrates just one kind of co-op, that of borrowing and lending money. A further exploration into other meanings of the co-op will follow.

Gislaine is in her mid-twenties and lives in Kampala with her two children. In December 2009 she came to visit friends and family in Kisangani and Buta. She suddenly decided to prolong her trip because Werrason, Congo's biggest musician, was performing in Kisangani for the first time and Gislaine, herself a big fan, could not miss upon the opportunity. In order not to spend out her money for the trip, *mbongo eza muselu* (money is slippery), Gislaine entrusted Kongo with the amount of money she would need for the bus ride to Kampala, that is \$200.

Around the same time, Prisca, who gave me the impression of a well-established business

⁹⁹ Notebook (81) on 19.12.2009

woman, smartly dressed, driving on her *boda boda* (vespa-like motorbikes fancied by women in Kisangani), was waiting for her merchandise to arrive from the East. She wished for it to arrive in Kisangani before Christmas to benefit from the Christmas shopping rush.

Unfortunately, the bridge at Epulu's level, on the only road connecting Kisangani to the East, broke down. Prisca had to find a way to get her sacks of beans across the river, hire extra manpower, and pay for an additional transport from the bridge to Kisangani, she was in urgent need of \$250.

Prisca asked Kongo, with whom she already had co-operated in past occasions, to find her the \$250. Kongo, having Gislaine's \$200 in his pocket, only lacked \$50 to complete the amount. For the sake of participatory observation I took part in this co-op and added the missing \$50. Kongo was, in this way, able to lend Prisca the \$250. Time not being on our side, we could only hope Prisca's merchandise would arrive before Gislaine's departure.

What makes this a co-op? And what is in it for Kongo, the co-operant? Lending money is a service, profit can be earned of it; it is in Nzeza's words 'the stake of the bargain' (Nzeza 2004: 20). However, borrowing and lending money in Kisangani is not an at random activity, it follows an established social procedure with strict social rules locally known under the *Banque Lambert*. According to Bijou, lending out is a classic example of a co-op and it works as follows:¹⁰⁰

Les trucs du genre tu donnes à quelqu'un \$100, il te remets après une semaine avec 50% d'intérêt; ça on appelle le cope.

-- o --

Kind of when you give someone \$100, after a week he will reimburse you with 50% interest; that is called co-op.

Person A needs an x amount of money. She finds person B to lend her the money. It is agreed beforehand person A will pay person B the money back with 50 percent interest. In other words, if person A borrowed \$x, she will have to pay person B \$x plus half the amount of x back. Prisca borrowed \$250 from Kongo. Once her merchandise would arrive in Kisangani, she would have to pay Kongo \$250 plus \$125. Added to the initial \$250, Prisca would have to pay Kongo a total of \$375 back. Kongo's profit in this case amounts to \$125, that is after returning Gislaine her \$200 and paying me \$50 back. He earns \$125 from selling a service, i.e. finding and lending Prisca the money. Finding and lending the money *is* thus the co-op, the sellable and rentable service and the profit, or commission, *is* the stake of the bargain.

¹⁰⁰ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

But, there is an additional constraint to borrowing money. Because the 50 percent profit to be earned does not provide any concrete insurance that the borrower will keep his word, the latter will have to pawn something to cover the loan. The object in question needs to exceed the total value of the money that has to be reimbursed. In Prisca's case, she needed to pawn Kongo something exceeding the value of \$375. Prisca pawned him her *boda boda*, which has in Kisangani an estimated value of \$800 when newly bought. Hers was already a bit older. For the time being, Kongo could dispose of Prisca's *boda boda*. The object that is pawned, in this case Prisca's *boda boda*, is locally referred to as *engage*. According to Pa Nico, except with those one really knows and trusts, an *engage* is needed because:¹⁰¹

Congolais aza malhonnête, aza mutu ya lokuta, arespetaka baengements té, baaccords té. Alors nasalaka pe yango [*Banque Lambert*] mais il faut nayeba yo. Neti yo, napesi yo, nayebi Katy akoki kozongisela ngai, sans problèmes. Mais mutu nayebi ye té, il faut wana engage. Engage, tango atiki engage na yé akoya mbango po récupérer eloko na ye. Eza neti nakotikela yo oyo, Katy simba, pesa ngai 1000 francs, otali valeur ya tasse oyo, té tasse oyo eza na valeur ya 1000 francs té, soki nateki verre oyo eza na valeur ya 500 francs, neti oza kotekela ngai eloko po osimbisa ngai touche.

-- o --

The Congolese is fraudulent, he is a person of lies, he doesn't respect engagements nor accords. So I also do it [*Banque Lambert*] but I have to know the person. Like you, I give you, I know Katy can pay me back, without problems. But someone I don't know, there needs to be a pawn. A pawn, when he leaves his pawn he will come back quickly in order to recuperate his belonging. It is as if I leave you this [*Pa Nico picks up a mug from the table*], Katy keep it and give me 1000 francs, you look at this mug, no it doesn't have the value of a 1000 francs, if I sell this mug it has a value of 500 francs, like you are selling me something to trick me.

The *Banque Lambert* is a very commonly used method to get by. In many cases I could not reach Kongo on his mobile because he had engaged it. After paying back the money with interest, he would have to reinstall all the settings because the other user, the lender thus, would change ring tones and other functions. At occasions I noticed Pa Nico wearing a glittering watch and parading with a digital camera that were not his.

Even though, there is a good end to Prisca's case: Kongo got his profit, Gislaine used her \$200 to join her kids in Kampala, Prisca managed to transport her goods and I got my input back too; the *Banque Lambert* remains a risky endeavour for all parties. Interest rates are exceedingly high and can often not be reimbursed, leading a person to borrow from other potential lenders, which results in even bigger debts. Not for nothing Bijou once told me, when speaking about the *Banque Lambert* practice, that the debts it creates are *terribles*, *terribles, ah ça tue les gens*. (Terrible, terrible ones, ah, it kills the people.)

Co-ops, however, do not refer to loans only, but encompass a wide range of potential services. Co-ops can be described in terms of Nzeza's *Kinshasa bargain*. The *Kinshasa bargain*

¹⁰¹ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

is ‘an agreement between two or more parties that provides a return. [...] Anyone in need of either a good or a service, or anyone who needs to resolve a problem, is invariably the ‘client’ of one or more go-betweens’ (Nzeza 2004: 20). What goods and services are to be sold? When I posed this question in Kisangani, to Bijou,¹⁰² Kongo¹⁰³ and Pa Nico,¹⁰⁴ they respectively responded:

Le cope peut aussi avoir de différents senses.

-- o --

The co-op can have different meanings.

Nyoso. Tout. Biso tozosala bacopes nyoso oyo intérêt eza na kati. Donc oyo nayebi que nazoseretrouver, nasali. [...] Présentement, ndenge naza awa, wana nazoseretrouver yango? Bacopes ya bandako, ezoyaya, ta mosusu bacopes ya bitinda, bacopes na marque wana na minute oyo ezosimba mwa moke moke.

-- o --

Everything. Everything. We take part in all co-ops if there is an interest within. So, if I know I am good at something, I will do it. [...] Lately, the way I am nowadays, I am good at what? Co-ops relating to housing, it comes from time to time, also sendings and deliveries, that kind of co-ops is working out at the moment, a bit.

Ngai naza coopérant ya makambo tout. [...] Coopérant aza mutu azocoopérer biloko nyoso ya bien. Ezala moyibi té ya mabé té. Sapato, omoni ngai, naza na diamant awa, donc naza full business [laughs].

-- o --

I am a co-operant of everything. [...] A co-operant is someone who cooperates all things that are good. It is not a thief, not in the bad sense. Shoes, you see me, I have a diamond here, I am full of business [laughs].

The most salient element, on which Bijou, Kongo and Pa Nico seem to agree, is that a co-op can be everything: Anything with the slightest real or perceived value can be transformed into a coveted consumer item (Nzeza 2004: 22) and so become a potential co-op. The bought and sold goods literally range from shoes, notebooks and beans to diamonds. Co-operants also sell their expertise in matters of sending and delivering packages (*bitinda*) or transferring money. Many among them work as housing agents. Concrete goods, thus, do not always need to be involved.

Kongo and Pa Nico bring out two other important elements, which fall under what I would like to term *diversification* and its corresponding *flexibility*. Kongo says that in these times the kind of co-ops that are working out, or literally ‘are touching’ (*ezosimba*), are the ones related to housing and *bitinda*. However, this does not mean that he specialises in just these two issues. Both, the market and the nature of the co-ops change very quickly –the co-

¹⁰² Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

¹⁰³ Interview held on 12.12.2009 in Lingala

¹⁰⁴ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

operant follows. For now, diversification can be understood in terms of Pa Nico's state of *full business*. It points, once again, towards the flexibility required to get involved in, and hence be knowledgeable about, more than one matter.

But, before digging deeper into flexibility and diversification, the opposition between the 'good' and 'bad' co-op has cropped up and is worthwhile analysing. Pa Nico says to cooperate in 'all that is good'; implying he does not take part in those co-ops that involve stealing. Interestingly, stealing is thus regarded as a co-op too. Nzeza resonates this very idea when he compares bargaining activities to "trickery" and "theft" (Nzeza 2004: respectively 20 and 22). According to him, as long as there are customers, theft and bargaining will go hand in hand. Sébastien, a youngster who lives in Mangobo, seems to confirm this when he warned me not to take motorbike taxis at night:¹⁰⁵

Voir même bataxi moto, baebele pe basala pe bacopes na taxi moto, surtout bataxis moto na butu. Ezalaka kaka habitude na butu, soki oza na Kisangani, neti yo par exemple, komataka nini té, komata taxi moto té.

-- o --

Also motorbike taxis, many of them also do co-ops on the motorbike, specially the taxis at night. It should be a habit at night if you are in Kisangani, like you far example, don't take a what, don't take a motorbike taxi.

The co-op does not only embrace every sellable good and every sellable service, but also deeds that are socially deemed as wrong, like theft, trickery and looting. The co-op reflects an economy of despair (Nzeza 2004: 22). The deeds seem to be justified because there exists an imbalance 'between the desire to attain social values such as success, prestige or power, and the objective means available to [...] attain these values'. Thus, along the lines of Durkheim's definition of anomie, socially unacceptable behaviours such as fraud, violence or corruption are not only acceptable, but even necessary to meet vital needs (Durkheim in Nzeza 2004: 21).

However, there is a bright side to it too. Latouche suggests the informal sector is not only anomic but also possesses an original and creative element, which is socially appropriated as a development strategy (Latouche in Nzeza 2004: 21). Just as in the Kinshasa bargain, or as I would have it, among co-operants in Kisangani, anomie can lead to new forms of solidarity among individuals. It is a response to daily survival problems with valid and creative emic tools.

3. Hunting co-ops, a matter of efficiency

In addition to goods, services and forms of trickery, the co-op's meaning extends to embrace

¹⁰⁵ Interview held on 14.12.2009 in Lingala

all kinds of enterprises youngsters embark on. People would often tell me: “tomorrow we cannot meet because I am out on a co-op” or “sorry I am late I am coming back from a co-op”. Both Sébastien and Kongo leave their houses if there is an explicit reason to do so, ‘hunting’ for a co-op is one of them. Wandering on the streets seems futile because they are exposed to unnecessary, and preventable, risks and, most of all, expenditures. Sébastien contended, while speaking about the youngsters who hang around the roundabouts, that:¹⁰⁶

Eza difficile mademoiselle okuti ngai, nafandi bongo po kaka kotala balabala. Non, nakei cope na ngai, soki naza na cope té nafandi na ndako. Tofandi na mwasi ngai, tozosolola, soki courant eza tozosedistraire na télé, esili.

-- o --

It is difficult Miss for you to find me, sitting like that just watching the streets. No, I go on a co-op, if I don't have a co-op I sit at home. I sit together with my wife, we chat, if there is electricity we entertain ourselves with the TV and that's the end of it.

Thus, except leaving the house for work (Sébastien makes and burns clay bricks and tutors from time to time French) and on a casual co-op, Sébastien prefers to sit at home with his wife. Kongo corroborates this attitude. Since he has a mobile phone, he does not need to be constantly on the street hunting for co-ops; instead he can just be at home. The logic of hunting and gathering has not only metaphorically and practically infused the urban world (De Boeck 2004: 43), but the urban world in turn, and more in particular, the introduction of mobile telephony, has redefined the sole nature of hunting.

With cell phones, being away from home on the streets has become an unnecessary exposure. If he walks too much under the sun, for instance, the co-operant gets tired and will want to buy a drink, an avoidable expenditure. Co-operants rather wait for the mobile phone to ring. The mobile phone has inverted the hunt for co-ops (that is, if the mobile phone is charged of course!): Only when the phone rings, the co-operant leaves the house in the co-op's pursuit. He will then know how to carry out his task efficiently, he will know where to go and at what time and he will be able to calculate with precision how much money he will spend on travelling, if needed, from A to B.

Even if today the logic of the hunting is still a strategy of self realization, as De Boeck suggests (De Boeck 2004: 44), and even if it still offers the possibility of remaking both identity and place, and generating, to some extent at least, a social environment” (De Boeck 2004: 43), it has to be taken into account that not only the nature of the hunter, but also the nature of hunting has changed. Today's hunter does not physically hunt its prey any longer, but through his network of social contacts, which he can call from his mobile, the hunter efficiently arranges for the prey to come towards him.

¹⁰⁶ Interview held on 14.12.2009 in Lingala

I do not mean to imply that people have grown to lock themselves indoors. On the contrary, for one thing, contacts need to be cared for and looked after. For another the lack of privacy, the deficient electricity and running water forces the Boyomais to live outdoors. The physical realities do not allow people to stay at home. Meeting up with friends for a chat, cooking, playing around, working behind a sewing machine, preaching, buying dollars, getting a haircut or braiding hair, watching TV, studying under a lamp that actually lights, all of these and more take place outdoors. But leaving the house just for the sake of hunting co-ops, to challenge faith, is futile and needs to be reconsidered and weighed against the possible costs and risks. Money-generating activities can, but do not need, physical displacement *per se*.

4. Diversifying

Trefon's *Reinvention of the Order* and 'process of indigenization in post post-colonial Congo' (Trefon 2004: 8) sheds some light on the ways people adapt to adversity. Relationships and diversifying, for instance, fall within the framework of the prolonged indigenization of *la débrouille*. Regarding the latter, not only social institutions diversify, but individuals do too. In order to keep head above water, even within the informal economy, it is unthinkable to dedicate oneself to just one job. To increase one's chances of attaining a dignified level of subsistence (*and existence*) people diversify. Pa Nico notes that:¹⁰⁷

Mosala ya cambiste eza kaka kochanger mbongo té. Omoni awa na pays, donc biso, soki osali business moko okoréussir té. Ta mosusu okokweya parce que kolia wana, basorties wana, makambo ebele, donc okosensortir té. Il faut osala kocombiner na bacope mwa ebele, ta mosusu ba, donc... kaka mosala moko en tout cas, okoréussir té, okokweya, okangi, ozangi na ndako. Alors ngai nacombinaka cambiste na coopes, commissions.

-- o --

The work of a moneychanger is more than just changing money. You see in the country, we, if you do only one thing you will not succeed. You will 'fall' because eating, going out, many things, so you won't cope. You need to combine quite a few co-ops, for example, thus... just one job, without doubt, you will not succeed, you will fall, you will close, you will lack a house. Thus I combine the work of a moneychanger with co-ops, commissions.

Diversifying is the need to be involved in more than one field or business in order to survive and not to 'fall'. It requires what Trefon calls: '[a] legendary cleverness and inventiveness of peoples' practices and mental constructions' to attain 'the very basic [means for] survival at the individual and family levels' (Trefon 2004: 3). Because the nature of the commodities and services requested keeps on changing, the co-operant has to be receptive, flexible and have an understanding of the market of the moment. He needs to fluctuate with the fluctuations of the market. "[S]uccess depends on being able to adjust one's activities swiftly

¹⁰⁷ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

to new opportunities as old ones disappear” (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 47).

Everybody diversifies. Even those who participate in the ‘formal economy,’ like the example of the lecturers above, “need to combine second-economy activity with their official activities to make profits” (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 46). In the same way as “[r]ich and poor alike participate in solidarity networks” (Nzeza 2004: 32), they also diversify. These social networks will be discussed in the following section on relationships. For now I would like to give a couple of concrete examples of people’s swift adaptations and methods of diversifying to make a living on anything that crosses their path.

During most of my stay, I rented a studio from my neighbours, Mémé and Pépé. This elderly couple is somehow unusual in Kisangani. Having both reached an age when most people stop working, Mémé and Pépé continue to be active. To begin with, they run the Greek-owned and dilapidated *Résidence Equateur* in the heart of the city, which comprises about forty apartments of different sizes. At the backside of this compound, they breed pigs. Before the war and pillage, Mémé was the owner of the most fancy clothing ateliers in town, situated on the ground floor of the *Résidence*, retailing locally produced Sotexki waxes and training future designers with the help of Master Papa Deduze.

If Mémé’s and Pépé’s daughter, Maman Brigitte, and grandson, Eric, are added to the familiar equation, the economic activities of the family spread out over even more fields. Maman Brigitte used to run one of the only hotels in the city. Nowadays she rents out rooms for longer periods of time and is the head of Gracia Fondation, an NGO that takes psycho-medical care of patients suffering from sickle cell anaemia. Eric, who studied theology in Uganda and speaks fluently English, loves to play the synthesizer in church and drives around in one of the few privately owned Land Rovers. While owning musical devices permits him to rent it out for all kind of events, The Land Rover allows him to drive people around. It was Eric who drove me twice to and fro the airport. On an occasion he chauffeured Norwegian journalists to Epulu National Park and back, a total journey of about a thousand kilometres. The family as a whole has also bought some acres in the outskirts of the city in order to set up a small-scale agriculture program.

Another example of a well-off individual who partakes in several activities is Pépé.¹⁰⁸ Pépé (29) works fulltime as the chief editor of the *Mongongo Journal*,¹⁰⁹ currently the only

¹⁰⁸ Interview held on 22.10.2009 in Lingala

¹⁰⁹ This biweekly journal first saw the light in July 2009. Its name is borrowed from the Lingala word for ‘voice’ and it is realised in partnership with UNIKIS and Syfia International. It falls under the label ‘journal de proximité’ (proximity account), a new form of political mediation and communication (for more see Pype 2011: 625-645). See also *Mongongo*’s website: <http://journalmongongo.over-blog.com/> (viewed on 13.01.2012).

written press in Kisangani. He also studies full-time at UNIKIS' faculty of Law. Moreover, he coordinates different kinds of events in the Juvenile Centre GRADI Jeunes through which he participates in a weekly radio programme. Finally, Pepe owns a *nganda* (bar). Ambition and personal motivation play, without doubt, a role in Pépé's arsenal of activities. But I believe more than ambition, this arsenal of activities results from the need to diversify.

For those who do not work within the boundaries of formality, nor belong to the more privileged social classes, nor can afford to pay a formal education, the situation is more precarious. They can neither count on an insufficient wage nor do they enjoy the same social status and prestige that accompanies public figures. Inventiveness and agency are nevertheless present. Such is the case of Pa Nico. Pa Nico did not obtain his secondary diploma; he started out on the streets, first as a *Khadafi*, selling petrol in commission, later as an independent *cambiste* (moneychanger) and co-operant. Nowadays, Pa Nico sustains not only his wife and their little son, but also his two elderly parents and he pays for the school fees of one of his younger sisters. At work, meaning the table in front of the prison, he employs two workers who depend on him for their income, among them Pa Mbidi, who has in turn a wife and four children.



Figure 18. Sitting at Pa Nico's bureau, November 2009

5. Relationships

Donc, tozovivre na ndenge wana, na barélations. Relations important, eza richesse.

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So, that is how we live, with relationships. Relationships are important, they are wealth.

Pa Nico¹¹⁰

On my last Friday in Congo I went out dancing with some people I had met during my stay, old and new friends. At the end of the evening only three of us were left over; my 'new' friends had deserted the rest of us. As we separated to go to rest, my 'old' friends, rather than telling me they had enjoyed the evening or something along those lines, thanked me for putting them into contact with new people.

It is almost impossible to underestimate the importance of relationships in Congo. In Pitshou's eyes relationships are like other vital needs, they keep you alive:¹¹¹

La vie, la vie se cherche, on toque par si par là pour attraper la vie, mais si on ne toquait pas, est-ce que ozwa vie ndenge nini? Soki oza na barélations té, mm, ici chez nous les relations comptent. [...] Relations nde ezofaire vivre bato na Congo.

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One has to search life [read life as a means of survival], one knocks here and there to catch life, but if one wouldn't knock, where will you find life? If you don't have relationships, mm, here relationships matter. [...] Relationships make people live in Congo.

Relationships open doors to new opportunities, to new jobs, to new co-ops and to (new) means of survival. "[T]hose without the necessary connections or ethnic background find themselves excluded from promotions and jobs" (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 42). Pitshou claims that one needs to knock at doors, to establish new and nurture old relationships in order to survive. However, knocking at doors is perceived as futile if one does not own the right connections. For those who are not alert, but know the right people, the doors seem to be always open. Pitshou explains:¹¹²

Avec relations, po na bato baza éveillés té, na gouvernement, naza na gouvernement, tu peux rester chez toi à la maison, ozwi sms tu es nommé tel. Tu comprends? Des relations ici au Congo c'est comme ça.

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With relationships, for those people who are not alert, in the government, I am in the government, you can stay at home, you receive an sms you have been appointed such or such. You understand? Relationships here in Congo work like that.

Jean-Claude (20), who is about to start university, is also very aware of the importance of relationships, when asked why it is so hard to find a job in Congo, he replied:¹¹³

Sitakulongofia. Iko na bato bengine, ana compétence, capacité intellectuelle ya kudiriger par exemple entreprise, mais tellement nduku yake iko par exemple gouverneur. [...] Vous allez voir ku concours mwenye anapata iko mutu mwengine. [...] Par exemple gouverneur anafanya recommandation, bon numéro un de la province anafanya recommandation, vous voyez on n'a

¹¹⁰ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

¹¹¹ Interview held on 08.12.2009 in Lingala

¹¹² Interview held on 08.12.2009 in Lingala

¹¹³ Interview held on 09.12.2009 in Swahili

pas de choix, vous comprenez un peu ça.

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I will not lie to you. There are other people, he is not competent, has no intellectual capacity to direct, for example, an enterprise, but his relative is for example the governor. [...] You will see that in an examination the one who will come out as first is someone else [will not get the job]. [...] For example, the governor makes a recommendation, well the number one of the province makes a recommendation, you see, we have no choice, you understand?

Even if education does not seem to offer a way out of the *mal ville*, it does not discourage Jean-Claude to dream of finding a job after his studies and to study in the first place. He is courageous and determined, but, at the meantime, invests on relationships as well:¹¹⁴

Bon kupata kazi, inafataka courage na mutu na détermination. [...] Au cas où mie ninamaliza, napendaka mwa courage inye Mungu ananipatishiaka avec des petites relations yetu, je compte un jour avoir le travail, par l'amour de Dieu.

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Well, find a job, it depends on the courage and the determination of a given person. [...] The day I will finish [my studies], with the courage God will grant me and with our little relationships [belittling tone], I hope to have a job, by God's will.

1. Wealth in people

"Constructing and maintaining personal ties constitutes an investment in 'social capital'" (Coleman in MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 107). Relationships, just as diversifying, need be understood within the framework of *Reinvention of Order*. 'Given the precariousness of life in [the city]', Nzeza claims for Kinshasa, 'people have been forced to depend on – that is, bargain with – others' (Nzeza 2004: 21). *La débrouille* drives people to count on one another. Pa Nico explains the importance of relationships as follows:¹¹⁵

Nagardaka pe barelations. Po lelo nakozanga, ye aza na mbongo, apesi ngai, akoki kopesa, kosalisa pe. Na bomoyi il faut kotalaka lobi. Kolinga té mutu soki azangi, osalisi ye, obandi kotungisa ye heure nyoso "ah Katy oza na nyungu na ngai, futa kaka sikoyo, té nakomema lelo, té nazokufunda kaka la police." Oyebi lobi té, il faut otala pe lobi. Na bomoyi il faut kotala futur; nde akopesa, nayebi akolukaka mbongo, aza na mosala, ta mosusu contre-temps eza na mosala, akopesa ngai. Relations na anffaires, mais esengaka motema, il faut oyeba anffaires. Yango nde, omoni, relations très important na nature.

Koleka mosala ya cambiste?

Relations eleki mosala ya cambiste. Po mosala ya ezosenga yo ozala na rigueur na motema ya mabe. Ta mosusu akoki kosenga yo 100 franc, bon yo ozoboya kopesa ye, mais ngai napesaka, relations, eza richesse. Mutu wana aye kosenga yo 100 francs, taa mosusu lobi akoyela yo \$200 ochanger yango. Bon relations eza richesse na bomoyi. Okoki kozanga ndako, mais relations, ekopesa munoko [porte?], ekopesa makambo ebele oyo oza na yango té. Très important na bomoyi.

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I foster relationships. Because today I might be short of money, he has money, he gives me, he can give me, help me. In life one must look into the future. If a person is short of money, you

¹¹⁴ Interview held on 09.12.2009 in Swahili

¹¹⁵ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

help him out, you should not nag him at all times “ah Katy you are indebted to me, pay me now, no, I will bring it tomorrow, no I’ll report you to the police.” You don’t know tomorrow, you have to look into tomorrow as well. In life you need to look into the future; he will give me back, I know he is looking for money, he has got a job, sometimes he has an impediment at work, he will give me back. Relationships and business, but it requires having a heart, you need to feel at home in business. So, you see, relationships are very important in life.

Are they more important than the work as a moneychanger?

Relationships are more important than the work of a moneychanger. This work requires you to be rigorous with the bad-hearted. Someone can ask you 100 francs, well you refuse to give him 100 francs, but I give, relationships are wealth. That person who came to ask you for 100 francs, might come tomorrow with \$200, you exchange it. In life, relationships are wealth. You can be short of a house, but relationships, it will give you many things you don’t have. It is very important in life.

More than money, more than even a house, Pa Nico underlines the importance of relationships. Relationships are never neglected because they can be of use in future, difficult times. Relationships are so translated into a network for the future, a kind of insurance, or as Lomnits comments an “obligation [that] is stored in a sort of savings account of future services to be rendered to various persons and drawn upon as the need arises” (Lomnits in MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 109). Beyond the daily bargaining and struggle to get by, Pa Nico, like many others, looks into the future and tries to build up a long-term, be it, precarious net of social liaisons.

In order to better understand the working and deontology of this social net, Villers’ *reciprocity* (Villers 2002: 30) and Nzeza’s *despair solidarity* (Nzeza 2004: 23) might turn useful. Both, slightly different, concepts fall under the parallel there exists between “the accumulation of capital or goods and the accumulation of people” (De Boeck 2004: 244), where “wealth in things and wealth in people often reinforce each other or are even interchangeable” (De Boeck 2004: 247).

Reciprocity underlines the fact that people help one another because it entitles them to expect something in return. The logic behind reciprocity is not one measured in monetary terms, but rather in obligations. In this way reciprocity serves to establish and reproduce interpersonal relationships and sociality. These reciprocal relationships “induce people to remain socially indebted to each other” without the possibility of complete repayment (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga in Villers 2002: 30-31).

Despair solidarity, Nzeza writes, results from poverty. In other words, solidarity turns desperate because material and financial constraints prevent an unconditional proffer of solidarity. Herein an individual is driven to help another by “a pragmatic system of exchange.” “People,” continues Nzeza, “help each other primarily if they expect something in return. Debt, whether it be in the form of a loan, a service rendered or a favour, will

ultimately have to be redeemed” (Nzeza 2004: 23).

The debt does not always need to be of material nature. Pa Nico, for instance, does look beyond relationships’ material benefits. In his point of view, developing new contacts and fostering old ones, more than an asset, becomes a goal in itself. (Material) services are, then, not necessarily reciprocated by money or other material returns, but “may be reciprocated with non-material returns, such as esteem and social approval” (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 109). This esteem turns into prestige, which can be useful to access, as we will see in chapter 6.

2. Appearance: *Molato*

“If you are well dressed, all doors are open to you...”
 — Djo Balard (in Gondola 1999: 34)

Given the importance of relationships, people are propelled to act in accordance with others. Herein public appearance plays an important role; together with the “urban aesthetics of display,” writes De Boeck, “public appearance [is] most clearly illustrated in [...] the body” (De Boeck 2004: 54). Just like the Kinois (and partly because of the Kinois), the Boyomais “[i]n sharp contrast with the decrepit state of the city’s material infrastructure, put a tremendous amount of energy [...] in building their bodies into a state of beauty and perfection” (De Boeck 2004: 238). The Boyomais invests time and money to make himself presentable in the eyes of others. Present-ability is best translated by *kotia presence*, a term that, in several occasions, slipped out of Pa Nico’s tongue, he explains:¹¹⁶

[Kotia présence] ezodéfinir bacritères nyoso na nzoto ya mutu. Alataka molato kitoko. Déjà mutu alobeli yo bongo c’est que elakisi oza kitoko na makambo presque nyoso. [...] Soki oza sale, jamais bato bakoapprocher yo na nature par tout. Parce que mutu akomona que oza bizarre, akoapprocher yo té. Il faut mutu amona que ah aza kaka bien, aza na soin. [...] il faut kozala présence à tout moment, parce que po mutu aya pene, aapprocher il faut kozala présence. Parce que soki nakolata chemise ya sale, neti bashégué, nde naza na valeur epai na yo té. Molato epesaka mutu valeur pe epai ya mutu. Ngai nalataka molato ya kitoko po bamona que ah Papa Nico aza mutu ya respect, azomitosa, aza bien. Ata naza na eloko té, mais molato ngai nalata ezopesa ngai lokumu. [...] Donc molato eza pe richesse.

— o —

To put presence defines all criteria of a person’s body. He dresses nicely. If someone tells you so it means that you are nice in almost all matters. [...] If you are dirty, people will never approach you, nowhere. Because someone will think you are weird, he will not approach you. The person must see that ah you are good, that you take care [of yourself]. You have to be presentable at every moment, because if you want somebody to come close, to approach, you have to be presentable. Because, if I wear a dirty shirt, like the shégués [street children], then I have no value in your eyes. Clothing gives a person value in the eyes of another. I wear nice clothes so they see that ah Papa Nico is a person of respect, he respects himself, he is good. Even if I don’t have anything, but the clothing that I wear gives me honour. [...] Thus, clothing is also wealth.

¹¹⁶ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala. Also notebook (103) on 16.01.2010

Kotia présence refers mainly to *molato* (clothing), but also to cleanliness, elegance and eloquence, all which are, as we will see in chapter 4, urban charisma markers. In a country where somebody can literally wear (the money's worth of) a house or a car,¹¹⁷ *molato* says a lot about the person. A person who dresses properly is someone who irradiates other 'kinds of beauty' too. In regard to relationships this outer beauty has decisive consequences as it encourages others to approach the person who is wearing nice clothes, making the latter more credible. By being approached, not only one's value will rise, but also one's possibility to be of service to someone else, to enter in cooperation with someone and so to increase the chances of finding *un petit rien* (a little nothing) before the end of the day. Through clothes, through the body, and also through the language use, the individual "can transcend the raw functionalities of life as mere survival. [Clothes, the body and language] offer a road to something else, an extra, an elusive aesthetics that the harshness of the city and its infrastructures of decay do not offer otherwise" (De Boeck 2004: 238).

3. Greeting and (nick)name giving

Besides appearing to be someone of respect, and thus invest in oneself, the logic of reciprocity encourages the individual to invest in others and entertain relationships too. The importance of greeting in Congo is hard to overestimate. Kongo, who often presented himself as *un homme de contacts* (a man of contacts), was continually greeted on the streets and would, responsively, interrupt any conversation to greet back, cross over the road, shake hands or knock heads. Frère Patrice Ngoy Musoko, one of the country's best-known religious artists, sings that *Bonjour* is among the three most important words, because 'Bonjour' opens the doors to new relationships and helps to nurture old ones.¹¹⁸

In several occasions, especially at the beginning, I was told 'greet back, they know you', even if I would not remember people's faces. It took me some time to realize that when walking in a group,¹¹⁹ of two or more, others can greet the group in two ways. The first one is by a single "Bonjour", which means they are greeting only the person they know in the group. Only the greeted person is ought to reply the greeting. The second one is by the double "Bonjour, Bonjour", meaning that all the people in the group are greeted and, thus, not only the person who they know, but everybody in the group must verbally reply the greeting. Those who don't greet back are quickly brought to order:

A: Bonjour!

B: (sourire)

A: Loba bonjour!

¹¹⁷ Fieldwork notes diary (40) on 01.02.2010: *Nalati palais* and *Voiture na makolo*

¹¹⁸ Fieldwork notes diary (43) on 11.02.2010

¹¹⁹ Fieldwork notes diary (43) on 11.02.2010

B: (Ah) bonjour.
-- o --

A: Hello!
B: (smile)
A: Say Hello!
B: (Oh) Hello.

Nicknames are given mainly as a sign of closeness, friendship and respect. Pa Nico is called *Niconzau*, Pa Mbidi *Mbidi koko*, Bijou *Kamvu* and Kongo *Américain, président* and *yongzhu*. In Pa Nico's bureau, the table in front of the central prison, I often heard people calling one another by different names. I felt quite honoured when they 're-baptized' me *Kati Kayenne*, according to Pa Nico's that was exactly the goal:¹²⁰

Kati Kayenne napesi yo, ngai nalinga pe kokumbisa bato, kopesa mutu honneur, alors il faut natiela ye mwa surnom, po kopesa yo mwa plaisir, ata ozalaki na kanda, olobi ah Papa Nico abenga ngai Kati Kayenne, osepeli. Donc, naza mutu na ndenge wana, naza mutu ya kopesa mutu plaisir, ata ozo fanda kokanisa, ah Catherine kokanisa té.

-- o --

I gave you Kati Kayenne, I like to rever people, honour a person, so I must give him a nickname, to give you a bit of pleasure, even if you were angry, you will say, ah Papa Nico called me Kati Kayenne, you will be happy. So, I am that kind of person, I give others pleasure, even if you sit and worry, ah Catherine don't worry.

Often nicknames are accompanied by a little phrase, which says something about the person in question. Ma Marie turns into the Virgin's ever faster tempo catholic prayer: '*Marie maman mère de Jésus, mama na Yesu' losako otondi gracia ya mokonzi...*', Pa Nico becomes '*Niconzau akomi kofuta*', (Niconzau is starting to pay, pointing towards the growth in his business activities), Kongo '*président de tous les présidents*' (president among the presidents).

However, nicknames are not given irrationally. Pa Nico explains he only gives nicknames to those people who are important to him, people for whom he has respect. In this case, important does not only mean 'dear', but is related to the above discussion on reciprocity:¹²¹

Soki nazwi problème, nazwi makambo, akoki koassister, po naza na relation na ye bien bien, nakopesa ye surnom. Epesa ye, asepela, ah Nico azala bien. Wana comportement. Ata mutu soki alingi asala yo mabe, atali ah té garçon wana alobaka bien na bato, aza na problème na bato té. Bato kodéfendre pe yo, mutu akomi kosalela yo bainterventions.

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If I have a problem, he can assist, I am on good good terms with him, I will give him a nickname. It will give him, he will be pleased, ah Nico is a good man. That is the behaviour. Even when someone wants to hurt you, he will take a look, ah no, that boy speaks nicely to the people, he doesn't have any problems with anyone. People will stand up for you too, someone can start doing interventions for you.

Beyond pleasing, giving nicknames ensure relationships. Just like the presence of name-

¹²⁰ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

¹²¹ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

dropping in Congolese popular music, as will be discussed in chapter 5, nicknames suggest that “traditional networks of social reciprocity are not as reliable or as desirable as in the past” (White 2008: 194). Nickname giving creates a link of trust between two people, but it is also accompanied by expectancies and reciprocity. Stating that a nickname is given in order to concretely receive something back, when in trouble, might be too blunt. It does, however, increase the hope of, when falling, falling into a kind of social net, where others will stand up for your cause because you are ‘good’ to people.

6. Conclusion: Brokers, bargainers, go-betweens

By analysing and illustrating the meaning of co-ops, this chapter provides, in combination with chapter 2, a framework in which to place the Yankee. In chapter 3 I have tried to explain what co-ops are. This led me to take a closer look at the definition and application of the ‘second’ economy, that is: activities that do not create any revenue for state. In a country where the state has forgotten its citizens, the latter do not have a choice but to take care for their own survival. The precariousness in Congo seems to push everyone, rich, poor and poorer towards the ‘second’ economy. Because everyone is part of this informal economy, it seems therefore pointless to continue making a difference between the formal and the informal. Moreover, because the latter works, among others, according to a well-established deontology of reciprocity and a code of appearance, one may say it is even formalised.

In Kisangani, Nzeza’s bargaining system, which according to classic, free-market, Western norms might be chaotic or subversive, turns into a powerful form of social organization, inextricably linked to the local political economy (Nzeza 2004: 31). Co-ops are opportunities in precariousness. Co-operants create co-ops by inventively searching and selling solutions. These solutions can be of material nature, but also include services. The profit earned from the delivery of a service is the stake of the bargain. The existence of co-ops is indicative of the Congolese’s commitment to maintain the struggle for individual and collective survival (Trefon 2004: 12).

But a blind and uncritical appraisal of emic solutions to local problems, and thus to the system of co-ops, is best avoided. Diversifying, for one thing, often takes place at the cost of quality: think of the poor health and education systems. Moreover, while flexibility can be praised, I have observed that the co-op is not a reliable means of income. At times a co-operant can be full of business, there are a lot of co-ops to be carried out and there is a lot of revenue. The money, which is cashed in dollars, is often spent with the same ease it is earned, often to pay outstanding debts. But as the tide changes, good luck turns sour very quickly. Weeks, sometimes months, can go by without a fructuous co-op showing itself.

New debts are created for survival making it difficult to step out of this vicious circle. With respect to relationships, for another thing, “the highly acclaimed African solidarity might have something touching in times of crises, but in times of recovery and reconstruction it allows for an infernal logic that undermines long-term projects: the little money available is immediately crumbled amongst many mouths.” Many are those who emigrate in order to avoid these asphyxiating family ties (van Reybroeck 2010: 576).¹²²

If I have taken up so many pages to write about the co-op, it is because the mechanism of the informal economy, with all its duties and obligations and systems of bargaining reveals something about the livelihood and the values of the Yankee. It is not for nothing that Pitshou emphasises that the Yankees:¹²³

Baza sùrtout bato ya bacopes, il ne vit que de copes, soki copes eza té, mwasi na ye akolia té.
-- o --

They are above all co-ops people, he lives from just co-ops, if there are no co-ops, his wife will not eat.

Co-operants are Yankees can both be ‘urban specialists’: “individuals who by virtue of their reputation, skills and imputed connections provide services, connectivity and knowledge to ordinary dwellers in slums and popular neighbourhoods” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 16). They both know how to dress well, how to greet others properly; they know how to invest in relationships in order to create the right conditions for the best bargains.

But it is only when the co-operant is able to quickly adapt to a constantly fluctuating market¹²⁴ and provide beyond services, also ‘connectivity and knowledge to ordinary dwellers in slums and popular neighbourhoods’, that he becomes a Yankee. He might be called a hustler, a big man, a community worker, a broker or even a gangster (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 16). The Yankee distributes certainty, convinces followers of his own special qualities and self-sufficiency and demonstrates new potential and possibility (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 8). He creates himself and reshapes the environment; he re-invents order.

Not all Yankees are co-operants though, nor are all co-operants Yankees. If something is certain is that the nature of the Yankee is intrinsically ambivalent, just as his position in society. The link between co-operant and Yankee is not to be taken for granted either. Bijou, for instance, does not see the Yankee as a co-operant per se. When I asked him whether

¹²² Veel Congolezen trekken naar het buitenland om de verstikkende familiebanden te ontlopen. In tijden van crisis heeft de veel geroemde Afrikaanse solidariteit iets ontroerends, maar in tijden van wederopbouw zorgt ze voor een infernale logica die langetermijnprojecten onmogelijk maakt: het beetje beschikbare geld raakt onmiddellijk verbruimd over vele monden.

¹²³ Interview held on 08.12.2009 in Lingala

¹²⁴ Fieldwork notes diary (4) on 11.09.2009: ‘souple’ (supple) in Bodrigue’s words.

there is a link between the co-ops and the Yankees, he responded:¹²⁵

Moi personnellement je ne le dirais pas comme ça. Parce que les Yankees c'est qui? Le Yankee c'est celui qui, selon moi, dans la situation dans laquelle il se trouve, il peut s'en sortir. Je vais prendre un exemple Maître Jean-Paul c'est un avocat, mais c'est un Yankee. Donc dans son métier d'avocat il sait faire des combines pour que ça marche bien. Moi je suis dans la médecine, bon je suis un Yankee, donc je peux toujours savoir que non il faut peut-être aller là-bas, toucher là-bas à ceci et ça pour que ça donne.

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I personally wouldn't put it that way. Because, who are the Yankees? The Yankee is the one who, in my opinion, in whatever situation he finds himself, finds a way out. I will give you an example, Maître Jean-Paul is a lawyer, but he is a Yankee. Thus, within his occupation he knows what to do for things to go well. I am a doctor, well I am a Yankee, so I can always know that no I should maybe go there, touch upon that or this for things to work out.

This and many other contradictions will be discussed in the next chapter, where I attempt to find a definition of the ambivalent persona known as the Congolese Yankee.

¹²⁵ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

IV. The Yankee

1. Introduction

On the day I first met Kongo, he came to pick me up by motorbike; we were going to the beach to meet a common friend. On the way he filled up a litre of petrol in one of the many *khadafis* (little petrol stands where petrol is sold out of bottles and jerry cans) and once arrived at the beach entrance, he paid for our tickets. Not paying, or rather letting somebody else pay for me, made me feel uncomfortable. It later became clear the motorbike was not Kongo's motorbike and the money he used to pay the petrol and the entrance fees was not coming out of his pocket. However the impression of being somebody who 'has' was successfully transmitted. This anecdote is significant in the way it portrays the mysterious and undefined Yankee persona.

Originally corrupted from the Dutch Jan Kees,¹²⁶ the Yankee is commonly used to designate, derogatively, a person from the United States. In Japan the *Yanki* is used for youth that dresses, acts and even speaks (!) in a peculiar manner. The Yankee in Congo is neither of these two, or better, it wickedly shares elements from both. He wants to inhale the worldliness and success of the former, while embodying the youthfulness and rebelliousness of the latter. Adulthood, and especially the exclusion thereof, form the backbone of Kiyantee and will be discussed at length in chapter 6.

In addition to his dialectical relationship to adulthood, the Yankee falls under the banner of "urban specialists", or in Hansen and Verkaaik's terms: "people whose gift it is to know the city and to act decisively, with style and without fear. These figures distribute certainty, they convince followers of their own special qualities and self-sufficiency and demonstrate new potential and possibility" (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 8). *Urban charisma*, as we will see, can best be translated by the Lingala *Kiyantee*, literally Yankee-hood.

One can hardly speak of just one kind of Yankee. To start with, not all Yankees look, nor speak, nor dress, nor act the same. Rather than attempting to define who the Yankee is, I prefer to discuss the Yankee's features and registers of conduct. Thus, to define the Yankee, my starting point will be the description of the possible features of Kiyantee (Yankee-hood) rather than the description of the personage itself. When embodied, the features can either be positive or negative. Sharpness, for instance, is needed to fend for oneself and one's

¹²⁶ The Online Etymology Dictionary suggests it could be a corruption of the Dutch name Jan Kees or Janneke: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Yankee> viewed on 27.05.2010

family, just as a good thief needs to be lucid too. I will then place these features in relation to a prototype of Kiyantee. Making use of the Prototype Theory allows me to better grasp the meaning of Kiyantee and the Yankee. The Prototype theory, with its fuzzy boundaries, grants more room to subjective interpretations. Because I have based the definition of Kiyantee mainly on quotes, the inclusion of subjectivity is central to my analysis.

Along this chapter, I will contrast the Yankee to at least eight other characters: (1) the Bills or forefathers of the Yankee, (2) the Yuma or anti-Yankee, (3) the *sapeur* who exists through appearance and fashion, (4) the co-operant from last chapter, (5) the figure of the trickster, (6) the *shegue* or street kid, who epitomises the negative prototype of the Yankee, (7) the Kinois musician who embodies success, and finally (8) the responsible father who represents the ultimate positive Yankee. Because the Yankee is an ambivalent persona, his features can be interpreted either from a positive or a negative angle. Starting from the positive, going over to the negative and, finally, thanks to music, returning to the positive conceptualisation of the Yankee, I hope to, at least, sketch a picture of this interesting character.

2. Bills and Yantees

1. A short history of Billism

Because “[b]illism laid the foundation for much of the contemporary urban youth culture” (De Boeck 2004: 39), in order to understand the roots of the Yankee I have to refer to the predecessors of the Yantees: the Bills. For this, it is necessary to take a look at the political and socio-economic developments Leopoldville underwent between the late 1950s and early 1960s.

At a time when Congolese were initially fighting for and then struggling to accommodate to Independence, Leopoldville, as Kinshasa was called at that time, was a growing and pauperising city. The already over-populated capital continued to grow by the flood of rural immigrants fleeing from rebellion and warfare in the interior (De Boeck 2000: 63). They, in turn, fed the already growing unemployment rate, which further rose by the dislocation of industry after independence. On the political scene, the new political setting fuelled the opposition between the provincial and the newly installed central government. The former cut down supplies of fresh foods to the capital (La Fontaine 1970: 191) as a political weapon one could say, to intensify the economic distress among its inhabitants.

Two social developments flowed out of this social setting. Firstly, the informal economy emerged as an alternative way of survival. La Fontaine explains that some unemployed found a living in marginal commercial activities or subsisted by begging and borrowing,

while others resorted to criminal activities (La Fontaine 1970: 192). Secondly, flowing out of the former, new alliances among people were formed as an alternative way out of economical and social distress. It is against this background of socio-economic change, political unrest and parental breakdown, that new methods of survival were created and that, according to De Boeck, “street gangs of youngsters without schooling or a salaried job start to make an appearance in the streets of the Leopoldville” (De Boeck 2000: 63).

The changes that took place at the macro level were echoed at the level of the family. Just as the socio-economic crisis set in motion the breakdown of the colonial state, it also propelled the “breakdown of parental authority” (La Fontaine 1970: 194). The latter was mainly based on two factors: the first is an economic one –poverty– the second one lies at a symbolic level: Poverty stricken parents saw themselves unable to take care of their children. ‘Poverty,’ thus La Fontaine writes, “weaken[ed] the authority of the head of the household, by eroding both his economic power over his dependants and the basis for the respect he is generally thought entitled to expect” (La Fontaine 1970: 195).

The generational gap was symbolically heightened because many parents were not city dwellers, but country bumpkins unable to find their way around the city. Parents, as such, lacked the tools to provide their children with a training that would help them establish themselves as adults in an urban environment (La Fontaine 1970: 196). Youngsters who identified themselves with the city, preferred to take distance from their parents’ rural origins –conversely pushing kinship and ethnic ties to the background. The lack of means and guidance was heightened by the growth of the young population in Leopoldville; more than half was under the age of 18, out of which only half were scholarised (De Boeck 2000: 63). Many youngsters found themselves hanging around in the streets idly trying to make sense of their lives.

In her article ‘Two Types of Youth in Kinshasa,’ La Fontaine divides these youngsters into two groups: gangs and the scholar’s associations. Even though, the latter might not have resorted to delinquent activities, they were both excluded from “access to the means essential to engage in competition [over] economic resources” (La Fontaine 1970: 208-209) and thus also from adulthood. Job opportunities for those who finished secondary schools turned as gloomy as for those who were not or only partly scholarised.

Excluded from many forms of civil and political participation and, thus, from adulthood, the urban youth was left to compete with means and “resources over which they [did] have control” and by which they could “demonstrate their superiority and so win both prestige and power” (La Fontaine 1970: 208 and 209 respectively). These means included personal

attributes such as: “sexual rivalry, physical violence, intellectual debate” and, why not, the creative use of language skills. Youngsters were thus ranked and considered by achievement, rather than by virtue of ascribed characteristics (Fontaine 1970: 208).

De Boeck writes that around the same period, between 1957 and 1959, six movie theatres opened their doors in the popular neighbourhoods of Leopoldville (De Boeck 2000: 64). French versions of U.S. westerns became accessible to Leopoldville’s populace. The movies featured Cowboys, Indians and Buffalo Hunters. Because of their bravery, all these characters provided the youngsters with role models; especially the character of Buffalo Bill left a deep impact on the imagination of the urban youth. The youth started to imitate and mould “their behaviour after those movie characters and by doing so, showed off a readiness to challenge and to defy the established order of things, colonial authority included” (Kabongo-Mianda 1988: 240). Theatres flourished and became a favourite meeting place for “youngsters at the margins of the colonial urban order” (De Boeck 2000: 64).

While the initial idea of the colonial powers was to calm down the worrisome growth of the unsettled youth, “perhaps as part of a ‘last-ditch effort’ on the part of Belgians [...] to save the colony” (White 2008: 69), it stirred up quite the opposite. Movies did not keep audiences quiet, but offered youngsters an array of tools with which to build new (resistant) identities. The youth started to express themselves in terms of Cowboys, Indians and the character of Buffalo Bill. Unemployed youngsters with no future perspectives were given the imaginary tools to rebel against the colonial authorities and their parents; but especially they were given the tools to protest against the gloomy future that awaited them.

It is out of the combination of socio-economic changes and hardships, on the one hand, and the screening of Westerns, on the other, that *Billism* was born. Billism was a movement by which youngsters consciously differentiated themselves from the rest of the population – youngsters became *Bills*. *Billism* was characterised, much like Glaser’s Tsotsis, by the way urban youth dressed, behaved and talked. They wore “blue-jeans, chequered shirt, neckerchief, lasso,” imitated “the tics of the Hollywood actors” (De Boeck 2000: 64) and considered themselves “real ‘men of action’, not fearing danger and fully capable of getting sufficient money for self-support” (Goyvaerts 1988: 233).

But “[w]hat distinguished the *Bills* above all was the use of a particular argot, known as Hindoubill,¹²⁷ a mixture of French, Lingala, English and local vernacular languages” (De

¹²⁷ There are different spellings of Hindoubill. In his article ‘Borderland Breccia’ (2000), De Boeck utilises Hindoubill, so does Stewart in his book ‘Rumba on the River’ (2003). Goyvaerts, on the one hand, and Kiessling & Mous, on the other, use Indoubil in, respectively ‘Indoubil: A Swahili Hybrid in Bukavu’ (1988) and ‘Urban

Boeck 2000: 66). The name of this language is extracted from the Westerns. *Bill* refers to Buffalo Bill. *Hindou* is most likely traced to the Indians in the movies, however other explanations are put forward too. According to De Boeck, it “possibl[y]” betrays the influence of Hindi movies shown in the theatres of Leopoldville” (De Boeck 2000: 66). Goyvaerts, alternatively, traces the *Indou* component back to an Indian magician with mysterious forces named Indou Sankara, by whom *Bills* claimed to be inspired. In any case, this “esoteric hybrid language” (Goyvaerts 1988: 233) was a key characteristic of *Billism*.

Interestingly, not only the *Bills*, but also the Scheutist Father Jef De Laet, better known as Père Buffalo, played an important role in the spread of Hindoubill around the same period. Père Buffalo was dedicated to the social reinsertion of idle youngsters and former gang members. Speaking to them in Hindoubill, and even preaching “the Gospel in Hindoubill,” he encouraged youngsters to join the Catholic youth movement (Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique or Katholieke Arbeidersjeugd) –which would later be included into Mobutu’s youth party (JMPR – Jeunesse du mouvement populaire de la révolution)– and “to learn various trades, including masonry, bakery, mechanics and couture” (Gondola 2009: 94).

Whereas the term *Bill* can etymologically be traced to Buffalo Bill, its meaning, nonetheless, shifted. Leopoldville’s urban youth did not literally hunt buffalos, but a way out of precariousness. The term grew to be a synonym for the “resourceful, clever town dweller” (Goyvaerts 1988: 233), or “urban specialist” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 16) as opposed to the gullible country bumpkin. The shift in meaning is proof of urban youth’s creativity. Youngsters were not merely imitating nor copying the Buffalo Hunter Buffalo Bill, a more intricate and meaningful process was taking place.

The bravery exhibited by Buffalo Bill was being translated into the local idiom and appropriated by youngsters in need for bravery in order to deal with frustrations and survive daily hardships. Pype refers to the *Bills* as being “the first young men who incarnated a modern model of masculinity transposed through mass media” (Pype 2007: 264). The *Bills*, just like Pype’s fighting boys today, indulged in the consumption of modernity. According to Pype, citing Appadurai and Breckenridge, consuming modernity is ‘an activity that is to be understood as “the work of the imagination” and one “that draws attention to new forms of social identity” (Pype 2007: 266-267). By consuming and acting out the bravery of their movie heroes, “the masculinity of the young [*Bills*] is ‘more real’ than the images they imitate” (Pype 2007: 267). Just as “Asian and American films projecting strong fighters are domesticated by youngsters who literally ‘become them’

Youth Languages in Africa’ (2004). I opted, in agreement with my fieldwork, for Kindoubil spelled with an initial ki- prefix.

(Pyper 2007: 267), so were the Cowboy, the Indian and the Buffalo Hunter; the *Bills* literally became their own interpretation of Buffalo Hunters.

In a process of resistance and identity building, the young inhabitants of the fifties and sixties in Leopoldville creatively assembled two worlds. The enacted world of Western movies, on the one hand, restructured to fit local realities, was incorporated into the other, real and idle world of daily hardships. Real people borrowed acted identities, restructured them and produced their own, real identities. This process is not one of mere imitation, but of translation and appropriation. Virtues exhibited by foreign characters are first carried across geographical and cultural boundaries, then converted by the incorporation of local qualities and, finally, appropriated and made useful as an instrument of dealing with the world, of building a new identity and, hence, also as an instrument of personal emancipation. The enactment of Cowboys and Buffalo Hunters more than being a mask, translated itself into a real and useful persona: the Congolese Bill. The roles were then turned upside down: the Congolese Bill identified himself with the personage of the Cowboy, i.e. the colonizer of the Far West, rather than with the oppressed Indian. In fact, just like the Cowboy colonised the Indian, the Congolese Bill, in his role-playing, was capable of ‘colonising’ the Belgian oppressor.¹²⁸

Because the “*Bills* played an important role in the lootings and the uprising that spread through Kinshasa in January 1959,” according to De Boeck, “the persona of the Cowboy emerge[d] as [an] emancipatory figure, representing the spirit of the coming independence” (De Boeck 2000: 66). The goal of these youngsters did not, however, end with the achievement of Independence. For them Independence was only a milestone on the path to social justice, employment opportunities and, eventually, a more dignified standard of life; and, not a mere transfer of power from colonials to local elites. As powerful office posts fell in hands of a small number of powerful young men (La Fontaine 1970: 212) and internal struggles for power surfaced, it soon became clear that the majority of the people for whom the independence struggle was fought, would not benefit from it. Bereaved from progress and feeling betrayed, youngsters in the cité soon found new ways to voice the discontent that had previously been hidden behind the discontent towards the colonial authorities. The once heroic *Bills* turned sour and disillusioned, and the initial enthusiasm about *Billism* among the population would soon follow.

Building upon La Fontaine, one could say that the feeling of exclusion had two major consequences for the already marginalised youth. Firstly, street gangs, which had been brewing in the last decade, were driven into outright delinquency; secondly, the socio-

¹²⁸ I am grateful to Filip De Boeck for this observation.

economic context made it impossible for youths to make the transition into adulthood as they could neither find a job, nor collect enough money to pay the marriage dowry. Urban youth, excluded from adulthood, grew older and older.

Just as elsewhere, the disillusion and discontent gave birth to youth gangs. Glaser, for instance, describes the emergence of the Tsotsis, and the Tsotsi subculture, in the popular neighbourhoods of Johannesburg around the same period (Glaser 2000). Fuelled by the mounting “‘Congo crisis’ and the increasing unrest through the country” (De Boeck 2000: 67), the Bills formed gangs around well-known local delinquents. These were ruled by a hierarchical set of chiefs, sub-chiefs, ritual specialists and maîtres; and installed in well-defined territories in which they ‘made the law,’ ‘created order’ and implemented systems of taxation. In order to join a gang, youngsters had to undergo initiation rituals, whereby great value was placed on violence, endurance, physical strength and courage (De Boeck 2000: 65). The page was turned and the once brave and heroic *Bills* were soon frowned upon (Kabongo-Mianda 1988: 241).

2. Signified - Signifier

It is within these gangs that the shift of the *Bill* ‘from the figure of the Cowboy to that of the Soldier’ can be witnessed (De Boeck 2000: 67). Words followed, the vocabulary of the heroic *Bills* shifted to describe the realities of the urban youth gangs. But, how different is the Soldier from the Cowboy? In order to respond to this question, I will make use of De Boeck’s distinction between signifier and signified. Signifier stands for ‘a shape-shifting and outgoing form,’ while signified is the ‘underlying content [of the signifier] which is culturally embedded and locally defined and circumscribed’ (De Boeck 2000: 75).

De Saussure (1913) made the same distinction between the signified (*signifié*) and the signifier (*signifiant*). Both the signified and the signifier constitute the ‘sign’, however, while the former refers to the mental concept of the thing itself, the latter is the uttered word, that is, the representation of that ‘sign’. In other words, the signified is the content by which something exists, while the signifier is the container, which carries the content and which can be perceived by others.

Placing the signified-signifier into the Congolese context turns the Saint, the Soldier-Rebel, the Hunter, the Cowboy, the Bill, the Diamond Trader, the Fighting Gorilla – and I would like to add the Congolese Yankee– into “materialisations of one underlying cultural figure, the Mutant Hero” (De Boeck 2000: 31). De Boeck’s Mutant Hero can be read in terms of De Saussure’s signified. While the signifier ‘floats’ and might change over time; the signified is

inbuilt in much older historical trajectories and does not disappear but keeps on resurfacing in “changing configurations” (De Boeck 2000: 73). Both the *Bill* and the Yankee are examples of these changing configurations.

Pype’s ‘more-real-than-the-images-they-imitate’ type of masculinity falls within De Boeck’s historical trajectories of the Mutant Hero. By consuming modernity youngsters creatively translate imported elements to fit local realities. As mentioned before, beyond a mere copy-paste, these foreign elements are made useful in producing new forms of identity through which the daily hardships become manageable. The Mutant Hero turns this translation and appropriation into a process that is inherent to the history of Congo. The turbulent history of the country, the precariousness of life and the ongoing exclusion of youngsters from adulthood promote the production of these personae.

By accommodating some peculiarities to the present context in Kisangani, the Yankee embodies the always-resurfacing Mutant Hero. Just as the *Bills*, I would like to argue that individuals resort to Kiyankée as a means to create an identity for themselves, which can turn out to be a useful tool in fighting exclusion from adulthood. In contrast to the Bills or other youth gangs, however, the Yankee is more of a lonely ranger –he does not belong to a well-defined group. This allows for a personal, often ambivalent, interpretation of the Yankee. It is precisely this ambivalence that triggered my interest for Kiyankée, while offering a potential starting point to unravel its at-first-sight contradictory characteristics.

3. What is Kiyankée?

Definitions are, in reality, subject to exceptions. A three-legged one-eared hairless cat is still a cat.

— Evans and Green (2006: 253)

There is not one, all-embracing definition of Kiyankée simply because there is not one type of Yankee. Everybody can be a Yankee. Being a Yankee entails ambivalence and subjectivity, a personal appropriation and reinterpretation of what Yankee means. The following is an attempt, if not to define, at least to give an idea of who the Yankee is.

Kiyankée can be translated as ‘the condition of being a Yankee’ or (Congolese) Yankeeism. Because I prefer to use the Lingala term, Kiyankée, a little linguistic note is appropriate. In many Bantu languages the prefix *ki-* stands for the name of a language, think of *Ki-swahili*. In Lingala however, *ki-* is a rare, notwithstanding, productive prefix. If used in front of another prefix it is translated as ‘the condition of being.’ In *ki-mobali*, for instance, *mobali* means ‘man’; the *ki-* alters the meaning to ‘the condition of being a man’ or ‘manhood’ (Pype 2007: 252). As such, *Ki-yankee* can be translated as ‘the condition of being a Yankee.’

1. The Prototype Theory

In order to dissect Kiyankee, I will analyse its features, or characteristics, within the margins of the Prototype Theory of categorisation. Categorisation relates to “our ability to identify perceived similarities (and differences) between entities and thus group them together” (Evans and Green 2006: 248). Categorisation helps us to make sense of what we see and experience. In my work I have chosen to include a theory of categorisation in order to better understand the divergent and ambivalent conceptualisations of Kiyankee and the ‘kinds’ of Yankees. How can a persona that seems to take upon so many forms be understood under one same banner? If there are good and bad Yankees, how can it be they are Yankees all the same? What do they share?

The Prototype Theory might provide an answer. Instead of categorising a concept because it responds to “necessary and sufficient conditions,” the Prototype Theory posits that humans categorise “with reference to a prototype” (Evans and Green 2006: 249). A prototype should be understood as “a relatively abstract mental representation [or concept] that assembles the [...] most salient or central [see even exemplar] characteristics associated with members of the category in question” (Evans and Green 2006: 249). In other words, “the more frequent a particular attribute is among members of a particular category, the more representative it is” (Evans and Green 2006: 266).

The choice of this theory is motivated by two factors. The first one is related to typicality, allowing room for diversity within one specific category. The second makes use of the fluid membership and fuzzy boundaries, allowing for subjectively constructed categories. Typicality or rather *Typicality Effects* convey the asymmetries between category members, that is between “‘good’ or ‘typical examples’ and ‘less good examples’” (Evans and Green 2006: 254). In other words, the typicality of a concept is defined by the amount of features to which it responds, but also by the place that these features take along the stereotypical – atypical spectrum.

If one imagines a dartboard, the stereotypical conceptualisation of a category hits the bull’s eye and the atypical conceptualisations hit the outer portions nearing the boundaries of the board; the latter happen to be fuzzy and are represented by fading rings. The dart that hits the bull’s eye and the other darts on the board have, nevertheless, a connection – they hit the *same* board and are all conceptualisations of one category. Following this line of thought, these conceptualisations do not need to own all the characteristics of Kiyankee to belong to this category. In other words, whether a Yankee is or not a stereotypical example of

Kiyankee, he still belongs to the category. A less representative or atypical Yankee, conversely, does not fall outside the category.

If we link the Prototype Theory to the above signifier – signified discussion, the signifier corresponds to all the conceptualisations of Kiyankee, whereby the best example hits the bull's eye and the other examples hit around it. Good and less good examples are conceptualisations of the category of Kiyankee. The signified is found on the meta-level, it is the underlying mental and a-temporal structure. One could say that the dartboard reunites all the necessary conditions for the signifiers to surface, or the darts, which are the context-bounded examples.

The Prototype Theory deals with subjectivity as well. Since systems of categories are not objectively 'out there' in the world but are rooted in people's experiences, Evans and Green, suggest that categorisation arises from 'perceptual stimuli' (2006: 262) and is 'partly determined by the nature of the interaction between human experiences and their environment' (2006: 264). '[P]ossessing a concept is not dependent upon knowing its definition' (Evans and Green 2006: 255), but is rather grounded in how humans experience, understand –and hence categorise– the world that surrounds them. Our environment does not only have consequences for what we put into a certain category, but it also 'has consequences for what we judge as good examples [within that] category' (Evans and Green 2006: 273). Meaning becomes a subjective construct with a changing character.

Conceptual categories, and its accompanying conceptualisations, change if removed from one culture and placed into another. But what is of more interest here is that these categories and conceptualisations might change for every single individual within a given culture. The categorisation, as such, turns to be not only a subjective but also a highly personalised process. In addition to this, Lakoff claims that next to (subjective) experience, human imagination also plays an important role (Lakoff 1987: 7-9). Subjectivity and imagination allow for respondents to possess a concept while not knowing or being mistaken about its properties. This does not forcibly need to discredit their responses; on the contrary, 'mistaken responses' often offer unexpected insights within a category.

Men and women, young and old, poor and rich, educated and illiterate all seem to respond to Kiyankee. They are all eligible to be called a Yankee. The Yankee is an ambivalent persona and the Prototype Theory tolerates ambivalence. One could say that ambivalence constitutes one of Kiyankee's axioms and it will be dealt within the multiple layers of Kiyankee meaning along the remainder of this chapter.

There is one particular opposition, however, which has intentionally been omitted; an opposition by which Kiyankée cannot abide. Within the urban – rural distinction, x and its opposite cannot both define the Yankee. Even if it is true that not everyone who claims to be urban *is* urban, I would like to, for the time being, stress that city dwellers and country bumpkins cannot both be Yankees, simply because Kiyankée leans on urbanity.

2. Urbanity

Because cities are “no place for the weak” (De Boeck 2004: 226), urbanity is the first parameter by which I will measure Kiyankée. The Yankee, just like Hansen and Verkaaik’s urban type, senses the city, he ‘knows’ the city and he knows how “to act decisively, with style and without fear” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 8). In Congo, one cannot mention urbanity without talking about Kinshasa. The capital encompasses in all, except geographic, terms the centre of the country, turning every place that lies outside it into the *mboka*, i.e. the countryside or ‘inferior’ periphery. The city – *mboka* dichotomy becomes an interesting parameter to situate Kiyankée. However, instead of describing the urban characteristics of the Yankee, I will proceed the opposite way, I will first define the Yankee’s antagonist: the Yuma. Having a less ambivalent nature than the Yankee, an analysis of the original from the *mboka*, the Yuma, will expose the urban nature of the former.

1) The Yuma

If we look at the Yuma as a non-Yankee, it would entail that the Yankee is a non-Yuma. These two propositions, however, are not interchangeable; the nuance needs to be clarified. Because the Yankee encompasses both a negative and a positive component, its meaning is broader than that of its counterpart, the Yuma. If Yuma would be the contrary of Yankee, it would entail the scope of the Yuma would also have a negative and a positive component. Save, this is not the case because the Yuma’s positive component, from a Boyomais point of view, is as good as missing. The Boyomais allocates a negative scope to the Yuma, effectively restricting its application as the fully opposite term for Yankee. Moreover, the semiotics of the Yankee’s negative and positive components stands both in stark opposition to the understanding of the Yuma. Looking at the Yuma in terms of the non-Yankee, as the first proposition above suggests, is not helpful.

Looking at the Yankee as non-Yuma, however, is surprisingly more useful. The restrictive and less ambivalent scope of Yuma turns the boundaries of this persona more useful to word a definition. Looking at the Yankee as the non-Yuma, might bring us closer to grasp Kiyankée because a Yankee *is* a non-Yuma in, both, the positive and the negative sense. Being a Yankee or non-Yuma in the positive sense entails a person knows about the world

around him and beyond, has travelled and seen, is enlightened, etc... Being a Yankee or a non-Yuma in the negative sense entails a person always looks for his own benefit above that of his fellow friends. Thus, when looking at Kiyankee in the positive sense motivates individuals to call themselves Yankees, understanding Kiyankee in the negative sense leads to the opposite, it discourages individuals to compare themselves to the Yankee. Few are those, however, who eagerly call themselves Yuma instead.

The Yuma and all its derogatory synonyms (*mbokatier, kumba, mbakasa, kiozo, ngotobobo, mbendele, mbokart, youstro...*)¹²⁹ refer to one and the same persona, the country bumpkin, somebody from the rural area, someone who does not know anything about the world and who fears others.¹³⁰ Pa Nico describes the Yuma as follows:¹³¹

Mutu aza Yankee té? Ah, tobengaka bango bakumba, kumba. Taa mosusu pe mbakasa, tia deux mots wana pe Ma Cathy. Donc eza deux mots wana babengaka mutu aza civilisé té, aza kumba, aza mbakasa. Eza batu baza éveillé té, bakumba bayebi eloko té.

Être Kumba c'est mauvais?

Eza mabe. Kumba aza mutu aza éveillé té, ayebi ata eloko moko té, ayebi té que civilisation nini yango ezali, aza na kati ya molili, obscurité.

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Someone who is not a Yankee? Ah, we call them bakumba [*plural*], a kumba [*singular*]. Even mbakasa, write those two words down Ma Cathy. Thus, those are two words people use to name someone who is not civilized, he is a kumba, he is an mbakasa. They are people who aren't awake, the bakumba don't know anything.

Is it bad to be a Kumba?

It is bad. A Kumba is someone who is not awake, he doesn't know a thing, he doesn't know what civilization there is, he finds himself midst the dark, in darkness.

Notice how Pa Nico excludes himself from the *Kumba* category by using the third person plural *them* and singular *he* to talk about the *Kumba*. While many are proud to be called a Yankee and enjoy embodying Kiyankee, very few refer to themselves as being Yuma. During my fieldwork I encounter only two: FM and Jean-Claude. When asked (1) what a Yankee meant and (2) whether he saw himself as a being one, FM (22) responded:¹³²

(1) Pomba, mutu oyo alekelaka baninga

(2) Naza yankee te; mpo nalingaka komatela batu te. Naza na ngai yuma (le contraire de Yankee).

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¹²⁹ All these Names surfaced in several interviews with: Pa Nico, Pitshou, Bijou, the youth at Salon Victoire. See also De Boeck (2004: 171): "[...] a *fopaner* (a poor thief, who only steals during the daytime), a *mbakasa* (someone who is afraid and who doesn't know how to find money) or an idiot (*yuma*)."

¹³⁰ Interview held on with Christian in Swahili: "anamugopa mutu"

¹³¹ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

¹³² Franck Moka, Questionnaire on the Yankees

- (1) 'Pomba', a person who surpasses his friend
 (2) I'm not a Yankee; because I don't like to climb on people. I'm a Yuma (the opposite of Yankee).

Pomba stands for a physically strong person, somebody who has a big torso.¹³³ In FM's eyes, it carries, like the Yankee, a negative connotation. It refers to a person who wants to surpass or overtake his friends. In order to make clear he is not a Yankee, FM opts for calling himself Yuma instead. Similarly, Jean-Claude (20), with whom I had many conversations and whom I grew to know quite well, referred to himself in one of our interviews as being a Yuma, he uses the term 'zoba' instead:¹³⁴

Bato banapendaka kunipitilia, surtout ku maneno ya franga. Bon, sipendaki kabisa nipate badifficultés, même na franga. Mutu anapasha kusema que non unikupeshe franga, emprêter eh, namukupesha, saa ya kunilipa, anakatala kunilipa. Naévitaka difficultés, naacha, pale banasema que mie niko zoba. Batu banapendaka njo mutu akuwe Yankee. Saa ku maneno ya franga ku mutu anakatala kukulipe vile, unamufanya fujo, unamubrutalisé, hors ku nature yangu siko habitué kufanya yao. Parce que sikuake Yankee mais niko humble. Niko mutu mwa mwenye, naévitaka badifficultés, baconflicts na bato.

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People like to surpass me, especially in money matters. Well, I don't really like getting into trouble, even if it is about money. Someone can say that give me money, to lend eh, I will give him and at the time of refunding me, he refuses to pay me back. I avoid problems, I leave it, in that case they say that I am 'zoba.' People like someone to be a Yankee. When in money matters, if someone refuses to refund you, you have to throw things into disorder, you brutalise him, but in my nature I am not used to do that. Because I am not a Yankee, I am humble. I am a person with, I avoid difficulties and conflicts with people.

In the course of the interview, however, Jean-Claude vacillates between a positive attribute and a negative reading of the Yuma. On the one hand, as a practicing Christian, he praises peaceful nature and humbleness, attributes of the Yuma. On the other hand, when asked who are Yuma in Kisangani, he takes distance of those who are 'not informed in many domains', by othering this group, just as Pa Nico did before, in terms of *those tribes, we* and *them*.¹³⁵

Yuma, biko nani?

Nitapasha kusema zoba, mutu anaitika juu ya raison yake bamuonelee, bamuonee.

Kukuwa yuma iko muzuri au iko mubaya?

Bon,iko mubaya. Iko mubaya. [...] Ah bamoneake tu! Nn nn. [...] Mais c'est entre les deux côtés eh, ça dépend du contexte.

Quel context?

Njo ninaleta hapa par exemple, ku ngambu ya bible, iko muzuri mutu atoke yuma. Par exemple, tuko natembea na weye, weye unanipika kofi, banyingine banasema que non non répliquer! Répliquer mupike yako, mais mie ninakatala, ninasema sipike vile, bananiita nani mie, yuma.

Ku Kisangani, nani bayuma?

Bon, ku ile juu ya kucibler équipe moja, ethnies moja, tribu mwa que non ile njo ni bayuma, haikane. Mais auparavant, il y avait des tribus-là. Ilikuwa na tribu tatu mbele tulikuwa kuonaka

¹³³ E-mail correspondence with Kongo 23.03.2010: 'Pomba elobi que mutu ya makasi to mutu oyo tolo na ye eza munene.'

¹³⁴ Interview held on 09.12.09 in Swahili

¹³⁵ Interview held on 09.12.09 in Swahili

baza bayumas: ilikuwa Bambole, Bamongo na Bangando. Ile tribu tatu, saa nye balifikaka hapa ku Boyoma, tulikuwa buonaka, baza bayumas, reculés, ils ne sont pas informés dans beaucoup de choses.

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The Yuma, who are they?

I can say 'zoba,' a person who, in his reason, allows others to trick him.

Being a Yuma is good or bad?

Well, it is bad. It is bad. [...] they just trick him tt no. [...] But it is between the two sides, eh, it depends of the context.

Which context?

Well, I will give you an example, in a part of the Bible, it is good that a person brings out Yuma. For example, we are walking together, you slap me on the face, others will say hit back! Respond your slap, but I refuse, I say that I will not slap back, they will call me a Yuma.

Who are the Yumas in Kisangani?

Well, it is difficult to point out one group, one tribe that they are Yuma, there isn't such thing. But, before, there were tribes. There were three tribes before that we considered to be Yumas: the Mbole, the Mongo and the Ngando. Those three tribes, when they arrived here in Boyoma, we would consider them, they are Yumas [*in Lingala*], they are backwards, they are not informed in many domains.

Nobody wishes to be someone who does not know anything, or who is gullible. But when relating Yuma to humbleness and honesty, there are some, very few, who do not mind using the term Yuma for themselves. This is the case for FM and Jean-Claude. Coincidentally, and interestingly, they are both from a Swahili background. By referring to themselves as Yuma they are not trying to identify with the country bumpkin; but rather they reject and take a distance from the negative aspects of Kiyankee.

Reverting to the urbanity – rurality spectrum, two issues need to be mentioned. The first one is that if rurality stands for 'not being awake,' 'not knowing' and 'being in the darkness,' in other words backwardness and vulgarity; urbanity, on the other hand, becomes a synonym for civilization, elegance and sophistication. Thus, while the Yuma does not know anything about the world and is backward, the Yankee is civilized and elegant, he "distribute[s] certainty" (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009: 8) and has "access to resources and knowledge that are not readily available to ordinary people" (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 16).

Secondly, urbanity and rurality remain two relative concepts, also, within the Congolese context. While Kinis disdain everything outside Kinshasa to be *mboka*; the Boyomais, on the other hand, do not look down on Kisangani nor label their own city as rural, of course. The Boyomais might be Yuma in Kinshasa, but the Kinis is by definition Yankee in Kisangani. In the same way, within the boundaries of Kisangani, those who consider themselves to be Yankees prefer to leave the city's suburbs and settle downtown, simply

because Yankees are ought to live in the city centre.¹³⁶ This does not mean that the Boyomais replaces Kinshasa by Kisangani, quite the contrary, both the Boyomais and the Boyomais Yankee marvel at Kinshasa because in their eyes this city epitomises the ultimate form of urbanity.

2) Imaginary cities

I see his trip to Kinshasa as a voyage to the centre of Kiyankee, a way to update his knowledge of words, so, when he comes back, people think of him he is *danzé*.¹³⁷

Next to being the capital, Kinshasa is the economic, political, social and cultural heart of the country. It is the city where most of the foreigners first enter the country and an indispensable stepping-stone for those Congolese who (want to) emigrate. Because *Kin eza danzé*, literally ‘Kinshasa is danger,’ a hyperbolic way to express that Kinshasa is the place where it all happens, the proud capital assumes mythical proportions. There is on the one hand, the rest of the country inhabited by those who do not see, the *Tumas*, and, on the other, there is Kinshasa inhabited by the enlightened, the Yankees. A person who has been to or was born in Kinshasa knows, almost per definition, more about the world than those who have never set foot there. As a result, beyond being the centre of the country, Kinshasa turns, in the eyes of those living outside the city, into the centre of the world they would like to be in, but to which they do not really belong.

The following extract illustrates Kinshasa’s mythical proportions. One night, as I was walking back home accompanied by Kongo and Bijou, Kongo started to spontaneously enact Kiyankee, whether his goal was to make us laugh I don’t know, but he was on a roll and no force could stop him talking. His way of walking and speaking drastically changed. He tilted his shoulders slightly forward, lowered his chin towards his torso and would express himself with a lot of synonyms, while swallowing consonants and exaggerating the high pitches and low tones. In the following quote, the three of us are discussing whether a common friend is a Yankee or not.¹³⁸ The normal case stands for Kongo, the small capitals for BIJOU and *my questions* are typed in italics.¹³⁹

Ta mosusu terme ya Mbiaka, soki otuni nini akoyeba yango té, akoyebela yango ndenge nini? Âbougea té, ville ya monene nde Kisangani, oyo ye amoni. *Ah Mbiaka eza terme ya Kinshasa?* Omoni likambo yango nayebisa yo sikoyo que non babiloko mosusu otuna ye. *Ah, oyo ya monde, Kinshasa eza monde?* Eehh ozocomprendre. GRAND PAYS. Wana eza mondo mosusu, donc Kinshasa wana eza mondo. Le monde na terme ya biso topesaka yango ‘mondo,’ donc mondo mystique.

-- o --

¹³⁶ Notebook (111) on 22.01.2010

¹³⁷ Fieldwork notes diary (49) on 23.02.2010

¹³⁸ Notebook (103) on 16.01.2010

¹³⁹ Transcription ‘Kongo is on a roll’ recorded on 01.12.2009

Maybe the term Mbiaka, if you ask him, he will not know it, how will he know it? He has not moved [travelled], [for him] the big city is Kisangani, of those he has seen. *Ah Mbiaka is a term from Kinshasa?* You see that is the problem I am telling you about now, other things you can ask him. *Ah, that of the world, Kinshasa is the world?* Eehh, you are beginning to understand. THE BIG COUNTRY. That is another world, thus Kinshasa is the world. The world in our [Yankees'] words we call it 'mondo,' thus mystical world.

Kinshasa beyond being the capital and the centre of Congo becomes a 'country' in itself, even a 'world' in itself. Placing Kiyankée in a context where Kinshasa equals the world, uncovers its rational: Yankees are not just called Yankees arbitrarily; Yankees are called Yankees in reference to New York. In Franky's words:¹⁴⁰

Normalement les Yankees sont les habitants de New York. Mais dans le langage boyomais les Yankees sont de personnes éveillées.

-- o --

Usually the Yankees are the inhabitants of New York. But in the language of the people of Kisangani, the Yankees are enlightened people.

While there are Yankees to be found in Kisangani, Kiyankée makes allusion to the extrinsic, borrowed identity from New York. Here New York should not be literally read as New York City, rather, Kinshasa should be understood as being more than just Kinshasa. Kiyankée transforms the capital into something beyond the physical city. Just like Gondola's *mikiliste*,¹⁴¹ who "first experiences Europe, *his* Europe, in Africa" (Gondola 1999: 28 italics in original), Kiyankée does not make reference to the north-eastern shores of the United States, but to an imaginative New York, the one of the Congo-American Dream.¹⁴²

But Kiyankée is not solely restricted to Kinshasa either: not everyone who lives in Kinshasa is a Yankee and, reversely, there are many Yankees living outside the capital. Kiyankée surpasses these geographical boundaries. However, the link between Kinshasa and Kiyankée remains strong because the link between travelling and Kiyankée is strong. Kongo uncovers this relation when (in the quote before the last), immediately after saying that x *has not moved*, he talks about Kinshasa. The link lies in that Kongo equals moving, or travelling, to going to the capital. Using somebody else as an example, Kongo underlines the importance of travelling in gaining knowledge:¹⁴³

Neti Kasongo, Kasongo alingi koloba trop, mais aza Mbiaka té, âbougea té, né, grandi na Kisangani. *Ah po kozala Mbiaka il faut bouger?* Il faut kobouger po oyeba makambo ebele.

-- o --

Just like Kasongo. Kasongo likes talking too much, but he is not an Mbiaka, he has not moved

¹⁴⁰ Francky Koy, 23 years, Questionnaire on the Yankees

¹⁴¹ The expression *mikiliste* designates the young Congolese who live in Europe and, to a lesser extent, in North America (Gondola 1999: 28).

¹⁴² I am grateful to Michal Stasik for wording it this way.

¹⁴³ Transcription 'Kongo is on a roll' recorded on 01.12.2009. Real name is masked.

[travelled], born, grown in Kisangani. *Ah, in order to be a Yankee one must move?* You have to move so that you know a lot of things.

Dr Cheko, a staff member at the Humanities Faculty in UNIKIS, strengthens the statement ‘travelling amounts to knowledge.’ He compares travelling to books, a remarkable analogy in a country where written material is so scarce. Interestingly, speaking Lingala –with a Kinois accent that is– might suffice as proof that an individual has travelled. If speaking Lingala amounts to travelling and travelling amounts to knowledge, one can deduce that speaking Lingala amounts to knowledge. This seems to be confirmed by Dr Cheko, when I asked him what being ‘enlightened’ meant, he responded:¹⁴⁴

Éveillé c’est-à-dire un homme qui est clair, un homme qui est au-dessus des autres, il parle le Lingala, bref on suppose déjà qu’il a voyagé parce que le voyage constitue le livre du monde.

-- o --

Awaken refers to a person who is clear, a person who is above the others, he speaks Lingala, in short one supposes he has already travelled because travelling constitutes the world’s book.

Even though I just mentioned that having been to Kinshasa is almost a requisite of Kiyankée, someone’s physical trip to Kinshasa needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. More than ‘having been’ to the city, Kiyankée entails radiating Kinshasa, being a Kinois in the eyes of others, especially those who have never been there. Individuals who have been to Kinshasa during childhood or who were born there are, for their part, undeniably linked to the capital and have a valid argument to call themselves Yankees. Such is Kongo’s case who resides in Kisangani but was born in Kinshasa. Kongo maintains to carry Kinshasa within, or more precisely he maintains that others believe him to be Kinois because of his behaviour, or in his own words because of his *Kinois blood*.¹⁴⁵

Obotami na Kinshasa, mais Kisangani siège. Oza Kinois to oza Boyomais?

Non, soki nalobi Kisangani eza siège parce que résidence na ngai eza awa, mais normalement naza Kinois parce que na Kisangani bazoconsidérer ngai comme Kinois, mais na Kin bazoconsidérer ngai lisusu Boyomais.

Na yo moko?

Naza Boyomais. Non, Boyomais.

Soki bato balobeli yo Kinois, osepeli to osepeli té?

Namoni que aza joo amoni que non naza na makila ya Kinois.

Baparents na yo baza Kinois?

Non, baza Kinois té.

Makila ya Kinois ewuti wapi?

Non, ndenge na ngai ya kosala. Mutu amona que non té oyo aza Kinois kaka.

-- o --

You were born in Kinshasa, but Kisangani is your base. Are you Kinois or Boyomais?

¹⁴⁴ Interview held on 19.10.2009 in French

¹⁴⁵ Interview held on 12.12.2009 in Lingala

No, if I said Kisangani is the base it is because my residence is here, but obviously¹⁴⁶ I am Kinois because in Kisangani people consider me to be Kinois, but in Kinshasa I turn again Boyomais.

And how do you see yourself?
I am Boyomais, no, Boyomais.

If people tell you are a Kinois, do you like it or dislike it?
I will understand that that person in particular is someone who sees that I have Kinois blood.

Are your parents Kinois?
No, they are not Kinois.

Where does the Kinois blood come from then?
No, it is my way of acting. A person can see 'this one has to be Kinois'.

From the above dialogue one can deduce Kongo disposes over two identities: that of Kinshasa and that of Kisangani. Kongo is Kinois in Kisangani and Boyomais in Kinshasa. Being a Kinois in Kisangani turns out to be very useful because it permits Kongo to 'sell' his identity to others. In this context 'to sell' should be read as 'the ability to make believe.' Just like services in the last chapter became assets in terms of looking for an income, an individual's link to Kinshasa, while a proof of Kiyankee, becomes an asset that can be 'possessed' and 'sold'.

3. People in the know

1) Congo Palace

Going to Kinshasa, or being around people who have been to Kinshasa, becomes a way of acquiring knowledge about the world. But what does the Yankee know that the Yuma does not? Knowing more does not necessarily entail 'having the information about something,' but rather having the knowledge of how to handle in order to (a) not be, and in particular not appear to be, surprised, and (b) not have complexes nor feel inferior in relation to others. Not being astounded falls under the "urban gestures and actions" that prove someone's capacity to read and decode the city (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 13). Gaston (28) explains that those who think Congo Palace is a high building, are not Yankees –Congo Palace is one of the few standing high-store buildings in Kisangani, see Figure 19 below.¹⁴⁷ Someone who allows himself to be astonished at high-store buildings or at cars, both elements of the city, is a Yuma. A Yankee, on the contrary, is 'never astounded'¹⁴⁸ or does not permit others to detect his amazement because, at least metaphorically, he has seen it all before.

¹⁴⁶ 'Normalement' does not mean normally in Lingala, but is equivalent to 'obviously'.

¹⁴⁷ Notebook (112) on 22.01.2010

¹⁴⁸ Notebook (112) on 22.01.2010: "Comportement: akamwa té."



Figure 19. View on Congo Palace (right) – Photo by Virginia Paradinas

Next to being astounded, a Yuma is believed to lack confidence in front of those who know more than he does, for example those who speak French and thus have been in contact with the outside world. A Yankee on the other hand is cool, composed, self-confident, apparently indifferent and experienced. The following anecdote illustrates Gaston's statement that a 'Yankee doesn't have complexes, not even one'.¹⁴⁹ On an afternoon in late January, Virginia, a Spanish friend, and I visited Gaston, Sébastien and some of the children in Mangobo. As we stepped out of the back of the lorry that transported us, kids immediately surrounded us, Gaston and Sébastien, however, waited patiently for us to walk inside the straw hut and to join them where they were sitting. When we left, about an hour later, they did not budge either and stayed inside the hut. Acting Kiyankee, not showing any surprise, their facial expression oozed coolness and triviality, then again, why should our visit have been a reason for the opposite?

The following two extracts, taken from an interview with Pa Nico, exemplify the contrast between the uncomfortable and self-minimizing attitude of the Yuma (or Kumba) with the self-assurance and coolness the Yankee is supposed to radiate.¹⁵⁰

Donc eza bagarçons baza civilisés té, soki amoni neti mundele azokamwa yo, azosinquiter, azokamwa komona présence na yo, kumba wana. Mais mutu amoni yo, azosaluer yo pé aleki, donc Yankee, aza éveillé, Yankee ya ville. Kumba nde mutu soki amoni yo “eh, mundele” bazokamwa yo, complexés na yo, neti Catherine, oza mundele oza blanc, kumba aza complexé na yo. Yankee akotala kaka ah Catherine wana, ah aleki na yé. Yo pé oleki, bosaluer, nde kaka esili.

-- o --

Thus there are boys who are not civilized, if one of them sees you, a white person, he will be startled, he will not feel at ease, he will be surprised at seeing your presence, that is a kumba. But someone who sees you, greets you and then continues his way, well a Yankee, he is enlightened, a Yankee from the city. A Kumba is a person who when he sees you “ah, a white person”, they will be startled, they will feel inferior to you, like Catherine, you are a white person, you are white, a kumba will feel inferior to you. A Yankee just looks, ah there goes Catherine, ah he continues his own way. You also continue yours, you can greet one another,

¹⁴⁹ Notebook (111) on 22.01.2010. Gaston about the Yankee: “Aza na complexe ata moko té.”

¹⁵⁰ Interview held with Pa Nico in Lingala

that's it, it finishes there.

In the second extract, Pa Nico makes clear again to which side he belongs. Because Pa Nico claims to be a Yankee, according to him, artisan diamond diggers, who leave the forest to sell their stones and do not feel at ease in the city, come at his table looking for his services. He will sell their diamonds –with a commission charge of course, the stake of the bargain (cf. Chapter 3). While the diamond diggers, in this case the Yuma, who do not speak French properly, ‘have complexes’ to knock on the Lebanese counters’ door, Pa Nico asserts he does not have any complexes in front of others. When I asked him if he buys diamonds, he replied:¹⁵¹

Té, nasombaka diamants té. Mingi, batu baza na zamba nde bayaka na yango natekela bango, po naza éveillé, naza Yankee. Epai ya Balibanaïs, soit peut-être, ta mosusu bango baza bayuma ayebi koloba Français té, bambakasa wana. Akotindela ngai que Nico, tekela ngai. Po azomona kosolola na mundele, Balibanaïs balobaka kaka Français. Bon todialoguer na ye, aza na complexe, azoyeba eloko ya koloba ye té, alors atia ngai, mutu naza Yankee, naza branché, po nakende natekela ye, po ngai naza na complexe na mundele té.

-- o --

No, I don't buy diamonds. Often, people who are in the forest are the ones who come with it for me to sell it for them, because I am enlightened, I am a Yankee. At the Lebanese, maybe, they are Yumas, they do not know how to speak in French, those Mbakasas. He will send me, Nico sell it for me. Because he fears chatting with a white person, the Lebanese only speak French. Well, the two of us talk, he feels inferior, he doesn't know what to say, so he puts me, a person who is a Yankee, who is connected, so that I go and sell it in his place, because I do not feel inferior in front of a white person.

2) *Forme and griffes (clothing and labels)*

Next to not allowing oneself to be surprised, the Yankee, in contrast to the Yuma, is very aware of the latest trends and fashion. Even though, I have chosen to focus on language use rather than on dress code, the latter cannot go unmentioned because ‘eating well and dressing well’ are the two things, Jagger believes, Congolese like most.¹⁵²

In the previous chapter I argued *molato* (clothing) is important in order to look credible in the eyes of others, to make one's liability visible and hence, to increase one's chance of finding a means of survival. Like the co-operant, the Yankee too, *knows molato*. The question that poses itself is whether clothes make the man, or whether the man makes the clothes. In relation to the *sapeurs*, Gondola writes that clothes, and especially brand names or *griffes* “authenticate [the sapeur's] appearance and attest to the dream's presence” (Gondola 1999: 33). Similarly, Pa Nico, brands one of his co-operants, who happens to be a priest, a Yankee because the shoes he sold to Pa Nico are Italian:¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Interview held with Pa Nico in Lingala

¹⁵² Fieldwork notes diary (37) on 20.12.2009

¹⁵³ Interview held with Pa Nico in Lingala

Ateki yo sapato oyo?

Bon, abbé wana awutaki Italie, aza prêtre, sango, awutaki Italie, donc bilamba na ye, ye aza Yankee eh? Ayeba kolata.

Sango akoki kosala Yankee?

Aza Yankee, ayebi forme, aza prêtre. Ayebi molato. Forme eza molato. Awa na Congo forme nde bilamba. Alati forme mwa kitoko. Sikoyo forme, il faut ozala Yankee po comprendre pe mot wana, kumba akoyeba mot wana forme té. Il faut ozala branché, nde Yankee wana akoyebisa yo ah forme na yo kitoko.

-- o --

He sold you those shoes?

Well, that abbot came back from Italy, he is a priest, a clergyman, he came back from Italy, so his clothes, he is a Yankee, eh? He knows how to dress.

Can a clergyman be a Yankee?

He is a Yankee, he knows 'forme' [dress], he is a prêtre¹⁵⁴. He knows clothing. 'Forme' means clothing. Here in Congo 'forme' is clothing. He wears nice 'forme'. Now 'forme', you have to be a Yankee to also understand that word, a kumba would not know the word 'forme.' You have to be connected, so only a Yankee can tell you ah your clothes are nice.

The Italian shoes, which are already authenticated because they are Italian –that is their *griffe*– authenticate the Yankee's appearance. Authentication, however, does not end by wearing authenticated clothing. Just like "[s]apeurs resort to the griffes –clothing already authenticated- onto which they graft an egotistical discourse" (Gondola 1999: 35), the Yankee too uses authenticated elements 'to graft an egotistical discourse' onto it. The Italian shoes 'speak' the language of the Yankee, not only because they are Italian, but also because they are worn by the Yankee. More than knowing what *molato* is, the Yankee knows *how* to wear it, or as echoed by Bijou:¹⁵⁵

Est-ce que tu peux dire que les Yankees se caractérisent par leur habillement?

Oui. Le Yankee il est bien vêtu, il connaît les griffes, il connaît ce qui vient de sortir, ce qui est à la mode, il est aussi ça le Yankee. Il connaît l'association de couleurs; c'est une des caractéristiques des Yankees.

Quelqu'un qui porte une veste, est Yankee ou pas nécessairement?

Bon en fait il y a veste et veste. Donc il y a des vestes, c'est une veste parce qu'on la cousue comme une veste, mais il y a une veste aussi en la regardant seulement "mm bore oyo eza dangé" Ah c'est le Yankee eh, pour aller savoir que non il faut prendre celle-là, il faut être Yankee.

-- o --

Could you say the Yankees characterize themselves by their clothing?

Yes. The Yankee is well dressed, he knows the brands, he knows what is new on the market, what is in fashion at the moment. He knows the correlation between colours; it is one of the characteristics of the Yankees.

Somebody who wears a blazer, is a Yankee or not necessarily?

Well actually there is blazer and blazer. Thus there are blazers that are a blazer because they were sewn as a blazer, but there is also a blazer that when you take a glimpse at it "mm that thing is danger." Ah, that is the Yankee eh, to know you have to take that one, you have to be a

¹⁵⁴ Prêtre is besides 'priest' another term for Yankee

¹⁵⁵ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

Yankee.

While a Yankee knows how to dress, a Yuma, on the other hand, does not even know the terms for clothing, let alone how to combine them. Wearing a specific brand of clothing does not suffice to classify under Kiyankee, the Yankee needs to understand, to be in the know with regards to fashion. Besides clothing, language too falls under the list of authenticated elements on which to ‘graft an egotistical discourse’: it is a particular kind of Lingala that authenticates the Yankee as Yankee, but this character, once again, does not only need to be in the know of the language, he also has to be able to construct it. This discussion, however, will be continued in chapter 5. For now, I would like to turn to the Yankee’s ambivalence in terms of his positive and negative attributes.

4. Ambivalence

When asked whether he was a Yankee, Stommy responded hesitantly, with a smile:¹⁵⁶

Ngai? Narépondre naza Gentleman. Donc en soit naza Yankee, naza Yankee parce que nazozwa baresponsabilités na ngai, j’assume mes responsabilités. Naza Yankee. Mais soki natié non, c’est-à-dire terme wana na ville na biso ekozwa deux volets. (1) Yankee c’est quelqu’un qui est responsable, aassurer sécurité ya ye moko na ye, azokiper bango, responsable na famille [...] (2) Aza mutu ya makasi, mutu asalaka bamobulu, amenaçaka batu. Po na ye amoni que non un Yankee c’est mutu oyo aza makasi, akosala eloko akopekisa yo, ozomona, eza na deux volets wana. Donc, ngai naza côté wana té. Peace and Love.

-- o --

Me? I will answer that I am a Gentleman. That means that I am actually a Yankee, I am a Yankee because I take my own responsibilities, I assume my responsibilities. I am Yankee. But if I put, I mean that term consists of two parts. (1) Yankee is somebody who is responsible, he ensures his own security, he takes care of them, he is responsible for his family [...] (2) [A Yankee] is a person of force, someone who causes a lot of trouble, who threatens people. For himself he thinks that a Yankee is somebody who is [physically] strong, he will do what he forbids you to do, you see, it consists out of those two parts. So, me, I am not on that [second] side. Peace and Love.

Asked the same question, a couple of days before, Stommy had said, about himself:¹⁵⁷

Pas vraiment. Naza Yankee po naza prudent, pas dans le sens que nalingi koescroquer bato. Yankee couteau à double fil.

-- o --

Not really. I am a Yankee because I am careful, not in the sense that I want to defraud someone. It is a double-edged knife.

Stommy epitomizes the ambivalence of Kiyankee: he is a Yankee and then again, he is not a Yankee. He explains there are two sides to Kiyankee and he wishes, of course, to fall under the positive one: Stommy is responsible and does not profit from others.

¹⁵⁶ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

¹⁵⁷ Notebook (94) on 14.01.2010

The ambivalence of Kiyankee lies in that both, people who are publicly admired, as those who are disapproved of –in other words, the priest and the thief– can be Yankees. If a schematic representation of the Prototype Theory is to answer who the most salient or representative Yankee is, it needs to fit this double-categorisation. Instead of taking the Yankee as a departure point, I prefer to focus on Kiyankee and then substract the characteristics or features that make up the Yankee. It is at this point that the feature approach gains prominence within the Prototype Theory of categorisation.

The Yankee cannot embody all of the Kiyankee features at once. If Kiyankee is a dartboard, the bull's eye of the board is modernity, urbanity, knowledge and know-how. These features can be either positively or negatively embodied: a Yankee can be a responsible young adult, or he can be a crook and a thief –the question, of course, is whether petty stealing in a country characterised by political violence and state embezzlement is really a bad thing or rather justifiable. Thus, while a feature can be interpreted from two sides, embodying that feature mostly happens from one side only. In other words, using Stommy's knife analogy, a sharp-edged knife can be used to cut bread and feed people, as it can be used for murder, turning the person who uses it into either a cook or a murderer, but not both.

By discussing features within a Prototype Theory of categorisation, I hope to shed light on the following Kiyankee attributes: visibility, resourcefulness, sociability and knowledge. I will start off by looking at them from a positive angle, i.e. the Yankee as *Gentleman*. But gentlemen, too, cannot allow others to take advantage of them, turning Kiyankee into a logic of 'to trick or to be tricked' and the Yankee into a trickster. I will, then, move to the negative interpretation of the same attributes: visibility, resourcefulness, sociability and knowledge. Herein, I will deal with the meaning of the applicative verb *kolekela*, touch upon Congo's East-West dichotomy and situate the *shegue* or street kid within it.

1. Positive attributes

1) Visibility

According to Pitshou, Kiyankee is something one is either born with or not. Children who fall and laugh instead of crying are said to be Yankees. The same goes for children who do not allow their friends to hit them at school but hit back instead. Early age inquisitiveness and curiosity point towards Kiyankee.¹⁵⁸ As an adult, these childlike attributes are transformed into fearlessness and bravery, but also into a kind of intuition. Metaphors of

¹⁵⁸ Interview held on 08.12.2009 in Lingala: "Parce que nga namoni heure moko eza eloko moko obotami na yango, eza inné, baforçaka nature té." "Because I see that it is like something you are born with, it is innate, one cannot force nature."

seeing and alertness –the fact of being awake– are often used to refer to this intuition. To the question who a Yankee is, Sony (30) responded:¹⁵⁹

Eza batu oyo bazali miso makasi.

-- o --

It is those people who have strong eyes.

And Pa Nico:¹⁶⁰

Yankee na Lingala eza mutu oyo aza éveill  . Mutu afungoli miso, aza clair. [...] Mutu akokosa, akokosa na y  , mais lokuta ozomona eza ouvert, ozod  courvrir que non mutu azokosa ngai, nde Yankee wana.

-- o --

Yankee in Lingala is that person who is alert. A person who opened his eyes, he is clear. [...] If somebody lies and lies, he will see it is open [visible], he will discover that no that person is lying to me, so that is a Yankee.

And Jean-Claude talking about the Nande:¹⁶¹

Bandande vile balikuwa [bayuma] na wakati moja, hapana Bandande sasa hivi, banakuwa emancip  s eh. [...] Banafungola mecho, banaanja, ukaangalia ukaenda par exemple Butembo au Beni, utaona banaconstruire ile ville yabo muzuri sana. Banafungola mecho, banaji  panoir, banajid  velopper.

-- o --

Also the Nande were Yuma at a point in time, but not today's Nande, they are emancipated eh. [...] They have opened their eyes, they start to, if you look, if you go, for instance, to Butembo or Beni, you will see they are building their town very good. They have opened their eyes, they are blossoming, they are developing.

And finally, Bijou:¹⁶²

Pour moi un Yankee c'est, c'est quelqu'un qui eh, en fait, qui n'a pas froid aux yeux. Quelqu'un qui n'a pas peur, qui n'est pas timide, qui devant une situation quelconque il ne peut pas paniquer, il a toujours les choses en mains quoi, pour moi c'est   a. Lui, si tu lui pose un probl  me, il a toujours une solution au bout des doigts, c'est un Yankee pour moi.

-- o --

A Yankee, in my eyes, is someone who eh, actually, whose 'eyes are not cold'. Someone who is not afraid, who is not shy, who when confronted to any situation cannot panic, he is always in control of things, for me that is a Yankee. Him, if you present a problem to him, he always has a solution at the fingertips, that is a Yankee for me.

I would like to understand the metaphor of visibility, expressed in terms of 'strong eyes,' being clear, opening one's eyes, under Vigh's metaphor of *to see one's life*, that is the need "to gain clarity about one's possibility of movement and possible trajectories" (Vigh 2006: 54).

¹⁵⁹ Sony, 30 years, Questionnaire on the Yankees

¹⁶⁰ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

¹⁶¹ Interview held on 09.12.09 in Swahili

¹⁶² Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

Those who see are able to develop, to become somebody else, or in Vigh's terms again; those who see are able "to construe and navigate a clear passage through an opaque and changeable environment [...towards] better possible futures and improved life chances" (Vigh 2006: 52-53). But in order to look for chances, one needs to take risks, to be courageous, and courage too is linked to sight.

2) Resourcefulness

'Seeing', in terms of finding solutions, is linked to creativity, resourcefulness, and inventiveness or, as Pitshou puts it, 'seeing' is linked to the Yankee's *spirit of research*.¹⁶³ This spirit resembles Hansen and Verkaaik's "charisma" which is "within the reach of those with sufficient skill and purchasing power" (Hansen Blom & Verkaaik 2009: 6-7). If on his path, a door is closed, the Yankee will do everything to open it. This is, literally, how Pitshou makes reference to Madeleine and Elvire, two girls who work with him at the theatre. I have chosen the following quote to demonstrate Yankees are not always men. Pitshou explains:¹⁶⁴

Madeleine Yankee [...] akokota ata na porte nyoso. Elvire, le caméraman, le régisseur, Yankee, parce que ataganka régie té, mais ayebisa Magloire nga nasala régie, bapesi ye poste ya régie et puis akoma régisseur, tu vois? C'est un courageux, aluki à se faire s'accaparer na poste moko boye et puis amaîtriser yango, tu vois?

-- o --

Madeleine Yankee [...] she enters even all doors. Elvire, the camera(wo)man, the stage manager, Yankee, because she did not study stage direction, but she told Magloire I am a stage manager, they hired her to do the stage direction and she became a stage manager, you see? She is brave, she was looking to monopolize such a job and then she mastered it, you see?

The Yankee must be a quick thinker. Imagine the sound of snapping fingers while visualising a hand pointing in different directions; translate this movement of hands into a movement of thoughts that connect bits and pieces to arrive as quick as possible to a solution. This image matches the body language of a Yankee explaining how he finds a solution, connecting bits and pieces of information.¹⁶⁵

This resourcefulness is best illustrated by an anecdote. At the beginning of my stay in Kisangani, Bijou was stopped on his motorbike by a police officer who, getting up on his high horse, would not allow Bijou to recuperate his motorbike before paying the adequate fine. With low salaries, the traffic police are forced to recur to other kinds of 'fines' as a means of survival.¹⁶⁶ What did Bijou do? How did he avoid paying? He called Kongo on his mobile. Kongo, being the 'man of contacts' he presents himself to be, replied ok, I will call

¹⁶³ Interview held on 08.12.2009 with Pitshou: "esprit de recherche"

¹⁶⁴ Interview held on 08.12.2009 in Lingala

¹⁶⁵ This is how Kongo used to move when looking for ideas

¹⁶⁶ See Journal Mongongo (9) 30.11.2009 "Les policiers aiment plus les conducteurs généreux qu'en ordre"

you back, thereupon he phoned an acquaintance at the traffic police office and a bit later Bijou's motorbike was on wheels again. Some time later Bijou told me about Kongo (Bijou calls Kongo Américain):¹⁶⁷

Américain c'est un Yankee. *Pourquoi?* Parce que il a toujours une solution à proposer par rapport un évènement ou un autre. Dans les circonstances difficiles, moi, il y a des fois où je recours à Américain. Dans telles situations, en tout cas "maître kendé," alors tu vois c'est ça qu'on appelle Yankee.

-- o --

Américain is a Yankee. *Why?* Because he always suggests a solution in relation to an event or another. When in difficult circumstances, me, there are times when I resort to Américain. In those situations, in any case "master go," so you see, that is what we call a Yankee.

If losing out in a conversation, the Yankee will do everything to change the direction of the argument into his own advantage. The Yankee does not accept misfortune publicly. In the eyes of others he must prove he manages, he is a master in survival techniques, he has everything always under control. Inventiveness (particularly in relationships) and being in control, then again, are the very same characteristics the co-operant disposes to strike deals and to fend for himself in a society which is not structured from above (cf. Chapter 3). This is where the Yankee and the co-operant resemble one another the most. Is being a co-operant, then, equal to being a Yankee? Not necessarily. Bijou, as we have seen before, does not strictly link Yankees to co-ops. He rather celebrates their (shared) inventive spirit, which regardless of their profession, might indeed be useful in finding co-ops (cf. Chapter 3 Conclusion).

As it has surfaced a couple of times, inventiveness does not limit itself to finding a solution, building and maintaining relationships also requires an inventive and exceptional supple personality. Creativity in terms of people and relationships was fully discussed in the last chapter. Even though I will not dig into it again, one should bear in mind that relationships, just like other vital needs, are believed to keep a person alive and that, for example, greeting and giving nicknames are methods of creatively dealing with people.

What I would like to underline regarding relationships and Kiyanké is that there exists a particular Kiyanké attribute a person can own in order to seem credible in the eyes of others. According to Pitshou, someone is a Yankee if he is spotless (*sans taches*), if he is trustworthy and does not have problems with others. Trust-worthiness can be considered as one of the features of Kiyanké. Developing this social skill can lead a Yankee out of a stressful situation, or as Pitshou explains:¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

¹⁶⁸ Interview held on 08.12.2009 in Lingala

Alors, soki olingi kiyantee mosusu, sur le plan logique, yo oza accompagné pe heure moko na barelations. Tango osali relation, bokendaka bien eza yango clair, net, sans taches et véridique. Tu as cette facilité-là, awa na Congo ya porte ezala polele, même si tu demandes quelque chose, tu peux dire mwasi na ngai awuti kobota sikoyo il faut nafuta hôpital, vraiment moyen eza té. Mais basengi nini? Non, basengi \$150. Bon zwa. Basaleli ye cesaria. Bon kende ofuta. Pourquoi? Po bayebi que non, tu es crédible. Dignité na yo elingi toujours ezala vraiment très propre. [...] Avec les relations au Congo, tu as cette facilité-là.

-- o --

So, if you want another Kiyantee, logically, you are accompanied by relationships. When you make a relationship, you two have to be clear, clean-cut, without stains and truthful. You have that facility, here in Congo doors will be open, even if you ask something, you can say my wife is giving birth now I have to pay the hospital bill, really I don't have the means. But what do they ask? No, they ask \$150. Ok here, take it. She had a caesarean. Ok, go and pay. Why? Because they know that no, you are trustworthy. You have to keep your dignity always really clean. [...] With relationships here in Congo, you have that facility.

It is interesting to note that Pitshou sees calmness and suppleness as typical features of Kiyantee. Both can, simultaneously, point towards Jean-Claude's serenity, which, from his point of view, do not fall under Kiyantee, but are rather related to the Yuma. Is calmness a characteristic of the Yankee or Yuma? Are calmness and agitation or calmness and restlessness necessarily antonyms of one another? This is an example of how ambivalence seeps through to the small details of Kiyantee. In order to find solutions one needs to keep one's head cool, otherwise one will not be able to see. However, when being too 'soft,' one gives way for others to take advantage of one's position and a Yankee cannot permit such to happen. Bijou beautifully foregrounds this ambivalence; first he claims the Yankee cannot be calm, but then, when talking about himself, and referring to himself as a Yankee – in Kinois Lingala (underlined)–, he explains that Kiyantee is not about being noisy either...¹⁶⁹

Le Yankee appelle Yuma tout celui qui est honnête, qui est calme, qui n'est pas brutale.

Mais le Yankee doit être calme aussi, il doit être 'pausé.'

Non mais, c'est pas trop ça qu'on appelle Yankee. Chez nous Yankee c'est celui qui est tout le temps agité, c'est ça qu'on appelle Yankee.

Mais c'est celui qui est souple aussi?

Pas trop, pas trop. En fait, je suis en train de définir Yuma par rapport au Yankee. Le Yankee lui appelle Yuma tout celui qui est calme; parce que si aujourd'hui moi je vais à Kinshasa, des fois ce Kinois-là qui parle "omoni ngai, nga naza dangé, nga naza..." Ils vont appeler moi Yuma "ah tala yuma oyo, mbendele. Alobi aza mbendele, aza yuma, yo oza mabe yo." Pourtant en réalité je ne suis pas Yuma, NÂ YANKEE! mais des fois ce Kinois qui parle beaucoup, qui au fond n'est pas Yankee, mais parce que lui il parle beaucoup, il croit donc qu'en parlant on a toutes les solutions, mais bon...

-- o --

The Yankee calls Yuma all those who are honest, who are calm, who are not brutal.

But the Yankee must be calm too, he has to be 'pausé.'

No but, that is not really what we call Yankee. Here Yankee is the one who is always agitated, that is what we call Yankee.

But also the one who is supple?

¹⁶⁹ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French.

Not really, not really. Actually, I am trying to define the Yuma in relation to the Yankee. The Yankee calls Yuma everyone who is calm; because if I would go to Kinshasa today, sometimes that Kinois who says “look at me, I am danger, I am...” They would call me Yuma “ah, look at that Yuma, mbendele. He says he is mbendele, he is Yuma, you you are bad.” When actually in reality I am not a Yuma, I AM A YANKEE! [*in Lingala*] But sometimes that Kinois who talks a lot, who when it comes down to it is not really a Yankee, but because he talks a lot, he thinks that by talking one can have all the solutions, but well...

3) Koyeba

Before moving on to the negative characteristics of the Yankee, I would like to round up the section on the positive characteristics by turning to knowledge once again. *Koyeba* in Lingala means to know. As I had discovered I wanted to write about the Yankee, somewhere in mid-November 2009, I would go around asking people who the Yankees were, to which people would mainly reply in terms of ‘to see’ and ‘to know’. A Yankee is somebody who knows, as opposed to somebody who does not know or knows only a little. “To know what exactly?” I then asked. Many would dismiss my question as irrelevant: “everything, to *know*, to know is to know” called the answer.

Three extracts from a focus group discussion with five university students (four linguists and one anthropologist), my assistant and myself, constitute the quote hereunder. Initially we were discussing the language use among youngsters in Kisangani, but soon enough the discussion turned to the Yankee and to knowledge:¹⁷⁰

Yankee ça veut dire quoi? Quelqu'un qui connaît beaucoup. [*Sylvain*]: Yankee selon le raisonnement des Congolais, Yankee c'est quelqu'un qui se croit un peu supérieur, donc il est attentif à certaines choses. *A quelles choses* ? N'importe quelle chose, c'est un homme des affaires.

Connaître quoi ? [*All*]: supérieure à l'autre. La connaissance, c'est comme si vous avez une connaissance plus élevée. Vous connaissez beaucoup de choses. Vous voulez vous démarquer. *C'est quoi les choses* ? [*All*]: Les termes.

[*Christophe*]: Un Yankee c'est quelqu'un qui est éveillé! Par rapport aux choses du monde, c'est ce qu'on peut dire, quelqu'un qui connaît beaucoup qui connaît presque tout! Dans le mauvais sens, du bien aussi du mal.

-- o --

What does Yankee mean? Somebody who knows a lot. [*Sylvain*]: Yankee according to the reasoning of the Congolese, Yankee is somebody who thinks he is a bit superior, thus he is attentive to certain things. *To what things?* Anything, he is a businessman.

To know what? [*All*]: superior to the other. Knowledge, it is like you have a more elevated knowledge. You know many things. You want to stand out. *What are the things?* [*All*]: The terms.

[*Christophe*]: A Yankee is somebody who is awake! In relation to the things of the world, that is what one could say, somebody who knows a lot, almost everything! In the bad sense, both good and bad.

¹⁷⁰ Focus Group discussion Group B held on 16.11.2009 in French mainly

It is interesting how 'terms' are put forward as an answer, implying the knowledge of a particular language. The metaphor of sight resurfaces in the above extract as well. One could say that seeing and knowing amount to almost the same, however, there is a nuance. While seeing is related to an intrinsic trait one is born with, knowing, on the other hand, is, as Hansen and Verkaaik write, "a desired object of self-making (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 6) and thus also, in Gondola's terms, a conscious process of authentication. It is because an individual *knows* that he is a Yankee. The Yankee is supposed to know it all. Knowledge here goes well beyond the 'scientific' knowledge of books to encompass any sort of details and know-how. For instance, knowing the street names in Brussels or Paris, or of Kinshasa in the case of Kisangani, without ever having been there.¹⁷¹

Moreover, knowledge is relative to others, thus more than just knowing, one should be able to know *more than* the other. Herein, once again, one should not only look at the content of what is being presented as knowledge, but also at how it is said, i.e. the form it takes in terms of neologisms, speech style and the like.¹⁷² But knowledge is not static; it changes continuously. To be a Yankee, one needs to be aware of these changes and be up to date by replicating them. This is especially true in the case of language and music. Somebody who knows must be up to date to the newest tunes and lyrics in order to pick words and phrases to then enrich his own vocabulary and, ultimately, impress those around him. Kiyantee contains an attitude of showing off knowledge. Even if he does not know everything, the Yankee must know at least how to speak, what words to use, and lyrics will help him herein, because the right lyrics are the ultimate prove of up-to-date Kiyantee. In Kongo's words:¹⁷³

Il peut pas connaître tout, mais aza na temps, comme l'exemple que mon frère a dit que non pour les boissons, les autres peuvent dire 'boke' mais maintenant les gens d'ici n'appellent plus 'boke' ils disent alors 'mbenda,' mais c'est la chanson qui vient de sortir maintenant, tu vois, ah 'mbenda' ezo, l'autre fois ils s'étonnaient, ah mon cher yela biso 'mbenda' tobeta!

— o —

He might not know everything, but he is up to date, like the example my friend here said that no in relation to beverages, others can say 'boke' [beer] but now people here don't say 'boke' no longer, they say 'mbenda' [beer], but it is the song that just came out now, you see, ah 'mbenda' it, the last time they were surprised, ah my friend bring us 'mbenda,' let's drink!

Proving one is a Yankee can be done, also, by means of 'I had thought about it before you' and by 'coming out Yankee'. In both cases, language often plays a prominent role. In the case of the former, Kongo explains the meaning of *koboulélé* (to think on behalf of someone else). The normal case stands for Kongo, the small capitals for BIJOU and *my questions* are

¹⁷¹ 'Koyeba ndenge ya Kinois' conversation in Lingala with Kongo recorded on 12.11.2009

¹⁷² Fieldwork notes diary (28) on 20.11.2009

¹⁷³ Focus Group discussion Group B held on 16.11.2009 in French mainly

typed in italics.¹⁷⁴

Yankee, donc akoki kolala pongi na ye alamuki, aboulélé bino na systématique mosusu. *Aboulélé?* Eh, donc koboulé, mais tango akofanda aboulélé, oôcomprendre? Koboulé po na mutu, sikoyo biso tosangisi neti koboulélé. Nde boule na yo ngai naboulé sur yango. [...] Yo oza na makanisi ya kopesa ngai mbongo, mais ngai nasi naboulélé yo déjà, donc ngai nakaniseli yo. NAKANISI NA PLACE NA YO. Na place na yo, na place na yo ngai nasi natie makanisi na ngai déjà.

-- o --

A Yankee, so he can sleep his sleep and wake up, he will think for you in a way that will impress you. *Aboulélé* [*what does it mean*]? Eh, so, 'koboulé' [to think], but when he is sitting, he will think for, do you understand? Think for somebody else, now we mix it like thinking for. So your 'boule' [thought], I have already thought about it. [...] You have the thought of giving me money, but I already thought of it in your place, so I thought for you. I THOUGHT INSTEAD OF YOU. Instead of you, in your place I have already put my thoughts.

The expression 'coming out Yankee' means that in a given situation, one is able to, intentionally or unintentionally, impress the other by showing that one's knowledge is greater than the other's. It is a kind of competition that has to be won by one of the competitors taking part and, as such, fits very well the creative and provocative nature of urban youth languages (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 332). The price to win is Kiyankée, the one who wins will be able to prove he is a (real) Yankee.

On one occasion, according to Kongo, I 'came out Yankee' at the bakery. I wanted to try out 'toast' from one Kisangani's bakeries. I did so because I had seen a sign on which 'toast' was written. After standing in line waiting for my turn to order, I ordered 'toast', but the vendor did not know what 'toast' meant. Instead of asking for clarification, he pretended to know what 'toast' was, which turned out to be quite embarrassing as I and others noticed he was going for the wrong product, he was namely about to open the fridge door. The vendor never admitted his flaw, but, instead, referred disdainfully to 'toast' as 'grilled bread' to prove he 'knows' his work at the bakery. According to Kongo, I had come out Mbiaka (another term for Yankee in this context):¹⁷⁵

Donc yo sikoyo obimi Mbiaka na ye. *Nabimi mbiaka na ye?* Eh, alinga kolakisa yo que ye aza Mbiaka ya boulangerie, hors que ye acompandre té, donc yo obimi Mbiaka.

-- o --

So now, you came out his Mbiaka. *I came out as his Mbiaka?* Eh, he wanted to show you he is a Mbiaka at the bakery, save that he doesn't understand, so you came out Mbiaka.

2. To trick or to be tricked

To know also means not to be surpassed by others in deeds and actions, in other words, not allow others to take advantage, but rather to take advantage oneself. This 'to trick or to be

¹⁷⁴ 'Kongo is on a roll' recorded on 01.12.2009

¹⁷⁵ 'Kongo is on a roll' recorded on 01.12.2009

tricked' logic is fundamental when considering the positive and the negative interpretations of Kiyanké. It is also reminiscent of the enduring and recurrent trickster archetype that serves as a model for the Yankee. Resourcefulness is one of the traits that best define the trickster in African folklore (White 1999: 166). The Yankee, like the trickster, is resourceful in adversity. He belongs to the collective imagination of the Congolese and crops up in different forms in tales and songs. From a position of powerlessness he generates solutions by using his wits and cleverness, by tricking others, rather than by relying on physical strength. In this struggle he becomes a hero or a villain. The Yankee and trickster are ambivalent characters, persons in-between who reveal the irony of a social order in which they are both a "star" –they don't allow others to trick them, they succeed– and a social pariah –they deceive others or are weak– (White 1999: 168).

The 'to trick or to be tricked' logic and know-how leans towards the semantics of the verb *kolekela*.¹⁷⁶ *Kolekela* is the applicative form of *koleka* or 'to pass.' The applicative suffix *-el* makes *koleka* transitive, *kolekela* literally signifies 'exceed for' or 'to be too strong for' someone else.¹⁷⁷ In the current use, though, *kolekela* takes on the meaning of 'surpassing' or 'taking advantage of somebody.' Jean-Claude conceptualises the Yankee as someone who does not allow others to take advantage of him. In Swahili, *kolekela* is translated as *kupitilia*.¹⁷⁸

Hapendaki bamupitilie, njo banamuitaka Yankee.

-- o --

He doesn't like that others take advantage of him, and so they will call him a Yankee.

Kongo, in the same line, refers to himself as a Yankee, a Mbiaka, i.e. somebody who cannot be surpassed by others:¹⁷⁹

Bon nani Mbiaka, pesa ngai example, yo Mbiaka? Eh, neti ngai bombiaka, donc moyen eloko moko ekolekela ngai (*eza té*). *Bijou aza Mbiaka pe?* Oh, grand Mbiaka, eh, eh, omoni Mbiaka aza nani, mutu oyo okolekela yé na makambo ya sé té. Aza na déjà na boyebi moko boye.

-- o --

Ok who is Mbiaka, give me an example, are you a Mbiaka? Yes, myself, bombiaka, thus there is no way something surpasses me. *Is Bijou also a Mbiaka?* Oh, a big Mbiaka, eh, eh, you see who is a Mbiaka, a person you cannot surpass in terms of basic [lit. from the ground] knowledge. He already has a kind [higher] knowledge.

A transitive verb implies two persons: a subject and an object. The difference in meaning

¹⁷⁶ Komonela (applicative form of the verb to see) and komatela (applicative form of the verb to go up) are also used.

¹⁷⁷ Dictionnaire Lingála – Français Français - Lingála

¹⁷⁸ Interview held on 09.12.2009 in Swahili

¹⁷⁹ 'Kongo is on a roll' recorded on 01.12.2009

between being the subject or being the object in the case of *kolekela*, symbolises the positive and negative manifestations of the Kiyanki category. In line with the discussion of the Yuma above, being the object of *kolekela* is always negative. Nobody wants to be either surpassed or taken advantage of. Being the subject, on the other hand, carries either a positive or a negative connotation. The positive one entails that the subject does not want to be surpassed, to be taken advantage of, and thus handles in such a way as to protect himself. The negative connotation entails that the subject is deliberately out to take advantage of others. Tricking is a feature of Kiyanki that can either be positively or negatively expressed. While the former –to prevent being tricked– is socially expected, the latter –to trick– is socially condemned. The paradox lies in that in order to prevent being tricked, one is often forced to trick others.

I already shed some light on the positive aspect of ‘coming out Yankee’ in the anecdote of the bakery; however when money is involved, ‘coming out Yankee’ is often related to Kiyanki’s negative side: profiting from others, making use of others and tricking others into deceitful deals, in which the profit will not be fairly shared. If an individual tries to keep the biggest part of the share for himself, he will be conceptualised as a stereotypical negative Yankee. But in order not to be tricked, one has to be a Yankee as well. In a way, one cannot help but being a Yankee. Trickerism is, as White suggests, a common idiom for expressing the contradictions of living in the ‘modernity’ of the African city (White 1999: 167). I would like to use two examples to illustrate this ambivalence, whereby one should not, but at the same time should be a Yankee. In the first example, Jean-Claude describes the Yankee in a common negative light:¹⁸⁰

Utaona kule mission ile, bakaleta franga, yeye njo anakula par exemple mingi, mwengeni anakula kidoko.

-- o --

You will see that kind of mission, if they give money, he will eat for example a lot of it, the other will eat a little.

But a couple of minutes later, Jean-Claude makes reference to Papa Bruno in a way that is hardly negative, but rather laudable:¹⁸¹

Ya Bruno iko Yankee parce que iko na bato moja balikuaka ku bamission moja ya franga, bamission ile banabapatia franga. Modèle yeye akukuaka ile siku ile banakendaki kukamata bakakulaka franga mingi, akajuaka franga kidoko. Saa yeye anaaprendre information, yeye hivi anabapressioné banamupatia franga yake, alitoka Yankee.

-- o --

Bruno is a Yankee because he was together with some people on a money mission, those

¹⁸⁰ Interview held on 09.12.2009 in Swahili

¹⁸¹ Interview held on 09.12.2009 in Swahili

missions in which they gain money. But in the way he was not there on that day that they went to take the money, they ate a lot of money and he knew [received] little money. When he heard about that, he then pressurised them to give him his money, he came out Yankee.

Leonard Moka (17) does not want to be assimilated to the behaviour of the Yankees, whom he thinks as people who:¹⁸²

confisquent les biens d'autrui par la force, ils sont aussi des personnes vantares

-- o --

confiscate other people's properties, they are also boasters

Meanwhile, one of his dancing comrades, Cheribin (17), does see himself as being a Yankee:¹⁸³

Po nalekelelaka bamasta mususu

-- o --

Because I surpass other friends

Surpassing others, and especially not allowing others to surpass you, illustrates accurately the ambivalence at the behavioural level of the Yankee. Kiyankée, as such, is not only a response to life in a precarious and unpredictable environment, it becomes a tool to protect oneself from this very environment. It is as simple as to trick or to be tricked, or in Pitshou's words:¹⁸⁴

Na Congo soki oza Yankee té, balali yo. Tu comprends au moins ça, le sens? Donc si tu n'es pas Yankee, on te prends comme des fourmis.

— o —

In Congo if you are not a Yankee, they put you asleep. You at least understand that, the meaning? So if you are not a Yankee, they take you for ants.

3. Negative attributes

For those who do not see themselves as Yankees and who understand Kiyankée under the negative side of *kolekela*, the stereotypical Yankee, beyond being somebody who deliberately profits from others, is a bandit, a thief. Those who see themselves as Yankee but do not see themselves as bandits do not deny the negative categorisation of Kiyankée either. In the case of the former, Kiyankée in its whole, is straightforwardly 'bad;' in the case of the latter, Kiyankée is good, but when *exaggerated* can turn sour.

¹⁸² Questionnaire on the Yankees

¹⁸³ Questionnaire on the Yankees

¹⁸⁴ Interview held on 08.12.2009 in Lingala

In the eyes of those who do not feel any sympathy towards the Yankees, they are:¹⁸⁵

Ce sont ces jeunes qui se droguent, qui souvent n'étudient même pas, qui ont un mental troublé.

-- o --

It is those youth who take drugs, who often don't even study, who are mentally troubled.

And:¹⁸⁶

Les Yankees sont considérés comme les barbares, les menteurs, les voleurs, les inconscients,...

-- o --

Yankees are considered to be barbarians, liars, thieves, indifferent...

And:¹⁸⁷

Ce sont des égoïstes

-- o --

They are selfish

When asked whether they were Yankees, Joël (14) and Jeannot DK (18) respectively answered:¹⁸⁸

Non, p.c.q. ces sont des personnes n'ayant pas de capacité intellectuel, etc...

-- o --

No, 'coz they are people who do not have any intellectual competence, etc...

And:

Non, parce que je ne veux pas que ma réputation soit mauvaise dans la société.

-- o --

No, because I don't want my reputation to be bad in society.

The 'negative' Yankees are those who steal, consume drugs, and, at times, murder.¹⁸⁹ They are social pariah. Think of the *shagues* or street children who in the eyes of others embody all above-mentioned characteristics. The question remains, of course, as mentioned above, whether stealing is morally accepted or not, given that political violence is a status quo in Congo. The *shagues* represent one of the stereotypical conceptualisation of the negative Yankee. These, simultaneously, victims and perpetrators master the streets and have access

¹⁸⁵ Questionnaire on the Yankees: Dorine (20)

¹⁸⁶ Questionnaire on the Yankees: Jeannot DK (18)

¹⁸⁷ Questionnaire on the Yankees: Fabien (14),

¹⁸⁸ Questionnaire on the Yankees

¹⁸⁹ Anecdote about Sébastien's uncle who was almost killed in the forest by 'Yankees.' Interview held on 14.12.2009 in Lingala

to a wealth of information, which is useful to many. But while stealing and consuming drugs are socially condemned, the negative characteristics underlying this behaviour are still understood in terms of Kiyankee, how?

Characteristics such as having strong eyes, knowing and being creative lead to actions that are socially acceptable, as well as to those that are not. To make the right decisions one cannot be afraid, similarly to steal, the thief must be fearless. To find a solution one must have 'strong eyes', in order to misuse relationships one needs to be awake. It is not a mere coincidence that those who call themselves Yankees, consider the *shegues* as being Yankees as well. Pa Nico uses the metaphor of 'strong eyes' and of 'knowing' to talk about the *shegues* in terms of Kiyankee:¹⁹⁰

Neti bashegues, bayankees ya mabe. Po bango bazoyiba, bayebi, baza miso makasi, mais batie sikoyo moyibi na kati, vol, vol eza Yankee ya mabe. Bango pe baza bayankee, po osala mosala ya moyibi il faut ozala clair.

-- o --

Just like the *shegues*, they are the bad kind of Yankees. Because they steal, they know, they have strong eyes, but now they put thief inside it, robbery, robbery is the bad kind of Yankee. They are also Yankees, because to do the job of a thief you must be clear.

Pitshou also refers to the *shegues* as Yankees. When I reproached he was confusing me, he responded:¹⁹¹

Yoka, nalobaki yango, baza Yankees. Mais, bango baextrapoler, tu vois, baexaggerer, voilà, baexaggerer, Kiyankee na bango ekomi au-delà, bakomi koprofiter na yango koyiba.

-- o --

Listen, I did say that, they are Yankees. But, they extrapolate, you see, they exaggerate, that's it, they exaggerate, their Kiyankee spilled over, they started to benefit from it, to steal.

The difference, according to Pitshou, is that while a Yankee should have a stainless reputation and benefit from Kiyankee in a 'logical' way; a *shegue* subscribes to exaggerated Kiyankee attributes, like having strong eyes, and misuses it. These attributes do not carry a negative connotation of themselves, but they do become negative when exaggerated. Exaggerating or extrapolating strong eyes, for example, turns it into a harmful tool that is used to trick others, when used illogically. In Pitshou's words:¹⁹²

Yankee aza logique, juste, droit et sans taches, asala mosala na ye normalement comme il faut. Mais faux petit, akolinga, aprofiter na mosala opesi ye, ayiba yo ata 10 francs, wana akomi illogique, aza Yankee té, aza escroc, na sense wana.

— o —

¹⁹⁰ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

¹⁹¹ Interview held on 08.12.2009 in Lingala

¹⁹² Interview held on 08.12.2009 in Lingala

The Yankee is logical, just, straight and has no stains, he does his work normally, as it has to be. But the *faux petit*, he wants to, he avails himself of the job you gave him, he will steal from you even 10 francs, that turns out to be illogical, he is not a Yankee [in the good sense], he is an crook, in that sense.

Bijou connects the bad side of the Yankee to the consumption of drugs. There are those who think they prove Kiyankée by acting agitatedly and consuming hemp.¹⁹³

Tu vois ce sont les gens qui fument de chamvre. *Toi tu ne fumes pas de chamvre.* Je ne fumes pas de chamvre effectivement, Américain il ne fume pas de chamvre, il y a ça aussi. Parce que en principe ces Kinois qui sont plus agités, qui parlent beaucoup, vont dire bon Yankee, on peut arriver quelque part “masta tambusa bore, masta tambusa plat.” ‘Tambusa plat’ ça veut dire que tout le monde doit fumer la chamvre, tu fumes un peu, tu donnes à un autre qui fume qui donne à un autre.

– o –

You see it is the people who smoke weed. *You don't smoke weed.* Precisely, I don't smoke weed, Américain doesn't smoke weed, there is also that. Because those Kinois who are more agitated, who talk a lot, they will say, ok Yankee, we can arrive somewhere “my friend, pass on the spliff, pass on the pot.” ‘Tambusa plat’ means that everyone has to smoke weed, you smoke a bit, you will pass it to someone else, who will pass it to someone else.

It all seems to come down to a matter of perspective. Does the person in question consider himself a Yankee or not? How does his position influence his opinion on Kiyankée? Stommy explains that Kiyankée is defined either negatively or positively, depending on which aspect is emphasised:¹⁹⁴

Neti naexpliquer yo eza na deux volets: responsabilité na irresponsabilité. Mais sikoyo bango bazovaloriser irresponsabilité ya Kiyankée.

-- o --

Like I was explaining you, it has two sides: responsibility and irresponsibility. But now they give worth to the Kiyankée irresponsibility.

Who does Stommy mean by ‘they’? Who is looking at the Yankee? In what light? Even though, I have tried to argue that everybody can be a Yankee, no matter the social background nor education level, there was, along my fieldwork, an emerging distinction, aside the urban – rural dichotomy, worth mentioning. While it is true that the wealthier, the better-educated and the pious are the first ones to take a distance from Kiyankée, I dismiss this stereotypification because of its countless exceptions: During my fieldwork, I encountered the Yankee lawyer, the Yankee doctor, the Yankee student and the Yankee priest. The emerging distinction, then, is not of socio-economic order, but involves language. If a hypothesis were to be established, it would be formulated as follows: the Lingala-phone looks at Kiyankée more often from a positive angle than the Swahili-phone does, who accuses Yankees of banditry. Is this so because Kiyankée presumes the uses of

¹⁹³ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

¹⁹⁴ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

Lingala? Partly. Is an East-West cleft valid or rather stretched, simplistic and old fashioned? This is food for another, more comparative work.

For now, I would like to stress once again that the conceptualisation of Kiyankée oscillates depending on who is looking at it. Kiyankée is not a fixed concept ‘out there,’ but rather one constructed by individuals within a particular context. There is, consequently, not one type of Yankee, but clearer and less clear examples of Kiyankée. Beyond the manifestation of the characteristics, I have tried to argue that the Kiyankée’s attributes remain the same. They can just be read from two almost opposite angles: a positive and a negative one.

5. An attempt to conclude: *Le vrai Yankee*

By means of rounding up, I will (re)turn to a positive interpretation of Kiyankée, as put forward by musicians. Congolese musicians have a special status in Congo. In the eyes of the educated elite and the pious, they are *voyous* (rascals), but for many others, they represent the ultimate embodiment of success. Even though many complain their lyrics to be contentless and uninformative,¹⁹⁵ musicians move more people than any other public figure in Congo, turning into opinion leaders who easily influence the population’s eating habits, dress codes and language use. In this context, it is not a coincidence the Yankee persona regained some of its positive attributes, partly thanks to a song entitled ‘Vrai Yankee’ by one of Congo’s biggest artists.

Just as *Billism*, Kiyankée dances between the negative and positive poles. At first, the population of Leopoldville applauded the *Bills* because of their collaboration in ending the Belgian colonization. However, as the post-colonial horizon soon turned gloomy and unpromising, the once acclaimed *Bills*, seeing themselves excluded from adulthood, turned towards, sometimes, violent means, means over which they *did* have access, to express their frustration. The initial independence hunter turned to petty stealing and gang formation. The term *Bill* followed suit, from carrying a good to carrying a bad connotation.

Meanwhile, the *Bills* have made place for new personifications of the underlying character, De Boeck’s Mutant Hero: The *Kuluna* (gang) member, the *shegue* and the Yankee, all personify the Mutant Hero. I have chosen not to discuss the *kuluna* in my thesis for the simple reason that the *kuluna phenomenon*, as it is called, is presently less relevant in Kisangani than it is in Kinshasa.¹⁹⁶ The latter two, the *shegue* and the Yankee, fall under the

¹⁹⁵ In his Book *Rumba Rules*, White (2009) analyses love lyrics beyond the established criticism, see his chapter 6 entitled ‘Live Texts’.

¹⁹⁶ This does not seem to have always been the case. There have been many cases of gang formation in Kisangani’s history, starting with the Simba rebels in the sixties, to the latest gang groupings in Mangobo: États-

one category: where the *shegue* is always a Yankee, but not all Yankees are necessarily *shegues*. In both cases, *shegues* and Yankees rely on urbanity, visibility, knowledge and resourcefulness in order to survive in precariousness and to be identified as people in the know. The difference between both is a matter of perspective. The *shegues* are exaggerated Yankees, i.e. they use the attributes of the Yankee in the negative sense: in order to steal and the like.

Along with the *shegues*, fighting for the most stereotypical conceptualisation of Yankee, are the musicians. Bijou sees musicians as Yankees because they are role models, opinion leaders and trendsetters in the eyes of the Congolese people. Musicians epitomize success in its purest form. In his own words:¹⁹⁷

Oui des grandes Yankees. Les artistes sont de Yankees parce que ce sont des gens qui peuvent donner un ton à la population. Ça veut dire quoi? Ça veut dire comme aujourd'hui Werrason qui dit "biso nyoso tolia mortadella," mortadella ce sont des boudoins et toute la population mange le mortadella. [...] Il dit, en fait il met des grosses lunettes, c'est tout le monde qui met. [...] En tout cas, un lider d'opinion si on n'est pas un grand Yankee, ah c'est ça.

-- o --

Yes big Yankees. Artists are Yankees because they are able to set a tone to the population. What does it mean? It means, like today, Werrason who says "let's all eat mortadella," mortadella is a sausage and the whole population eats mortadella. [...] He says, no, he wears big sunglasses, everybody starts wearing them. [...] In any case, an opinion leader if it is not a big Yankee, ah that's it.

But Bijou, as many others, reprimands the musicians too, putting them in a negative Kiyankee light, because musicians:¹⁹⁸

[C]'est eux les fumeurs de chamvre, c'est eux qui vont avec les mineurs, eux qui font les opérations 'ngulu' pour prendre les gens et les emmener en Europe. Vous voyez? Donc ce terme Yankee il se retrouve dans tous les senses.

-- o --

It is they who smoke hemp, it is them who go with [i.e. have sexual relationships] the minors, them who do 'ngulu' [literally 'pig'] operations in order to take people [illegally] to Europe. You see? Thus the term Yankee can be used in many senses.

In a country where social boundaries are easily transgressed, the distance between the *shegue* and the musician is closer than it seems. It is commonly believed that the two groups strike deals with one another. While, on the one hand, the *shegues* are believed to derive benefits from the musicians, the musicians, on the other, need the *shegues*, in the first place for inspiration. Many of the new terms musicians incorporate into their lyrics originally derive

Unis, Katamoto, Chine Populaire, Ligue Arabe and other. Sources: interview with Sébastien held on 14.12.2009, interview held with Jean-Claude Sombo on 17.12.2009 and conversation with Gaston held on 21.01.2010.

¹⁹⁷ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

¹⁹⁸ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

from the streets.¹⁹⁹ It is also said that musicians employ *shegues* for their own security, to court women and in order to sell their clothes.²⁰⁰

In the same line, the gap between the *shegues* and other public figures, such as state authorities, police and politicians is often smaller than generally thought.²⁰¹ Just as Bijou told me one day, they are always on the streets, they see everything what happens at any hour of the day, turning them into a very rich source of information. Information of who does what and passes where and when and with whom; information that becomes a sellable or exchangeable item.

Even taking all the negative criticism into account, the Congolese musicians remain stars and Yankees –in the positive sense that is– in the eyes of the people. But why is it that musicians are considered to be *crème de la crème*? Is it thanks to their opulent behaviour and their eligibility to be the biggest crooks? Or is it because they seem to know everything or at least successfully put into words the burden of the Congolese? What do they offer the people, an example of how to become successful? And if so, in what have the musicians exactly succeeded?

It is within the context of the musician as an opinion leader and as an example of success that a positive conceptualisation of Kiyankée was brought about. This time Kiyankée was not exemplified by one of the above-discussed attributes (seeing, knowing, creativity and the like), but a real Yankee was portrayed in terms of responsibility. It was during one of the focus group discussions that Jagger mentioned a song:²⁰²

Il y a un musicien Papa Wemba vous le connaissez bien, Papa Wemba a dit qu'un vrai Yankee, c'est quelqu'un qui est responsable de soi. C'est-à-dire quelqu'un qui fait nourrir sa famille c'est un Yankee. Yankee ce n'est pas quelqu'un qui se met aux routes, qui ravi les gens des choses, non.

-- o --

There is a musician Papa Wemba, you [must] know him well, Papa Wemba said that a real Yankee is somebody who is responsible of himself. That means somebody who feeds his family that is a Yankee. Yankee is not somebody who stands at the road, wrests things from others, no.

In her article on Kinshasa's fighting boys, Pype refers to the same song. According to her, it 'confirms' or 'inspires' individuals to 'dare to do things which are not accepted' (2007: 266),

¹⁹⁹ Notebook (48) on 24.11.2009 "Mais musiciens se ressourcez chez les shégués"

²⁰⁰ Notebook (64) on 02.12.2009 "Bamusiciens bautiliser bazoulou po na sécurité, makambo ya basi, po na kotekela bango bilamba."

²⁰¹ Shégués collaborate with police officers. Fieldwork notes diary (44) on 12.02.2010 and 16.02.2010. They are also set in by politicians to march for them.

²⁰² Focus Group discussion Group B held on 16.11.2009 in French mainly

that is to act as a Yankee. The song by Viva La Musica is entitled *Vrai Yankee*. In the vernacular, *vrai* means good rather than 'true.' One could say that this song more than investigating who the real Yankee is, as Pype claims [Will the real Yankee stand up?], envelops the Yankee in a positive dress and sings about the *good* Yankee, the responsible father. Whether the artist is trying to justify himself is not a dismissible argument, but it is not the point here. The song has reverted the conceptualisation of Kiyantee, as it has motivated individuals to see themselves as Yankees in terms of responsibility. In Jagger's words:²⁰³

Même si par exemple un papa qui a fait grandir ses enfants, il les fait instruire, les enfants ont eu quand même une vie, chacun d'eux, quelqu'un peut venir ah Papa en tout cas félicitations, félicitations aux parents, vous êtes des Yankees parce que vous avez donné un peu, vous avez instruit les enfants, les enfants ont gagné leur vie, en tout cas, merci beaucoup vous êtes quand même des Yankees.

-- o --

Even if for example a elderly man who raised his children, he has sent them to school, the children have had a live, each one among them, somebody can come ah Sir, really, congratulations, congratulations to the parents, you are Yankees because you have given a bit [of possibilities], you have educated your children, the children have grown to become somebody, really, thank you very much, you are actually Yankees.

Looking for examples, Jagger, then, turned around and saw a man sitting in front of the closed doors of the Orthodox church in the Hellenic compound a couple of meters away (see figure 20). Laughingly he said, this man too is a Yankee: He sits quietly by himself reading a book, becoming knowledgeable. He is responsible.

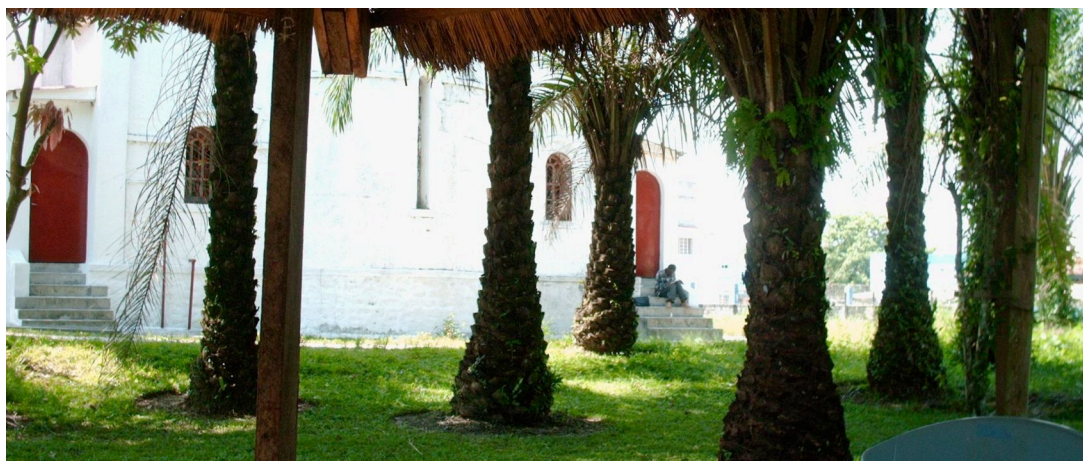


Figure 20. Man looking for a quiet place to read, Hellenique Compound

Jagger is not the only one who linked the Yankee to responsibility; other respondents did too. Viva la Musica's song did have an effect in reverting Kiyantee to its positive meaning. By linking this persona to that of a responsible father, Kiyantee fits within the framework of

²⁰³ Focus Group discussion Group B held on 16.11.2009 in French mainly

parenthood, hence adulthood. Kiyankée, and in particular the creative power of language that is attached to it—another feature of the trickster—, provides a tool, a key of access, as we will see in chapter 6, to those who, by lack of other, often economic, means, are denied access to adulthood.

V. Mangala – sg. Lingala

1. Introduction

Et puis Lingala eyaka mingi koapporter mwa tonus. *Mwa nini?* Mwa tonus, mwa punch, mwa force.

-- o --

And then Lingala comes in to bring a bit of pitch. *A bit of what?* A bit of pitch, a bit of punch, a bit of force.

- Stommy²⁰⁴

In chapter 2 I discussed the relation between Lingala and Swahili in Kisangani. I rounded it off arguing for Lingala's dominance over Swahili. In chapter 4 I explained how individuals choose to speak Lingala to prove they are in the know and to present themselves as Yankees. Setting Swahili aside, I will turn in this chapter only to Lingala, which I will dissect in more than one Lingala. The title of this chapter refers to this plurality: Mangala, the plural form of Lingala, is to be understood in terms of *types of* Lingala. Starting out from a general Lingala, I will slowly decorticate the idea of one Lingala until I arrive at the very language that inspired this thesis in the first place, urban Lingala, and more in particular *Kindoubil*.

Kindoubil falls under Kiessling & Mous' Urban Youth Languages because it is characterised by a conscious language manipulation, rapid change, creativity, secretiveness and prestige. Besides analysing form and meaning, I hope to uncover where, why and how *Kindoubil* originates and who are the driving motors behind its creation and its dissemination. Even though I will touch upon issues of identity in this chapter, I will discuss the *raison d'être* of *Kindoubil* in chapter 6, where I hope to elucidate how the Yankee uses *Kindoubil* as a tool to gain advantage out of every possible situation, and how this shapes him as an individual in city. But before arriving at *Kindoubil*, I suggest we turn again to Lingala.

To what extent is Lingala one language? The list of adjectives and attributes that those who speak Lingala –in varying degrees of fluency– assign to it, is inexhaustible: theirs, ours, heavy, with a bass tone, of the missionaries, difficult, enhanced, urban, of the Yankees, easy, commonplace, from Kin, dry, jerky, from Makanza, hard, rural, of the inhabitants of the Equator Province, limited, deprived, from the streets, mixed, of the shegues, *Kindoubil* ... Trying to make sense of this list, I offer, hereunder, a division into 'types'. The boundaries separating the different types are all but clear-cut, they expand and contract, and I invite the reader to contest them. This does not need to mean, however, an overview is either

²⁰⁴ Interview held on 23.10.2009 in Lingala.

irrelevant or superfluous. My intention in doing so is, first, to underline Lingala's wide array of sociolects and regiolects; secondly, and more relevantly, to underline the different symbolic values that each variant carries and which can be manipulated by the witty speaker to his advantage.

Figure 21 illustrates the division I will use all along this chapter. The first partition takes place along the lines of urbanity versus rurality. Under the rural variants I will discuss *Lingala ya mboka* (countryside Lingala) and *Lingala ya basango* (missionaries Lingala). As will be elucidated in the paragraphs to come, these two types are intimately intertwined; hence, the double headed arrows. The urban variants are divided into three types along a vehicularity – in-group identity axis. Closer to the vehicularity end I will discuss *Lingala Facile* (Easy Lingala). On the opposite end, that of in-group identity, stands *Kindoubil ya kozongela*, literally *inverted Kindoubil*. Between these two types lies *Kindoubil*.

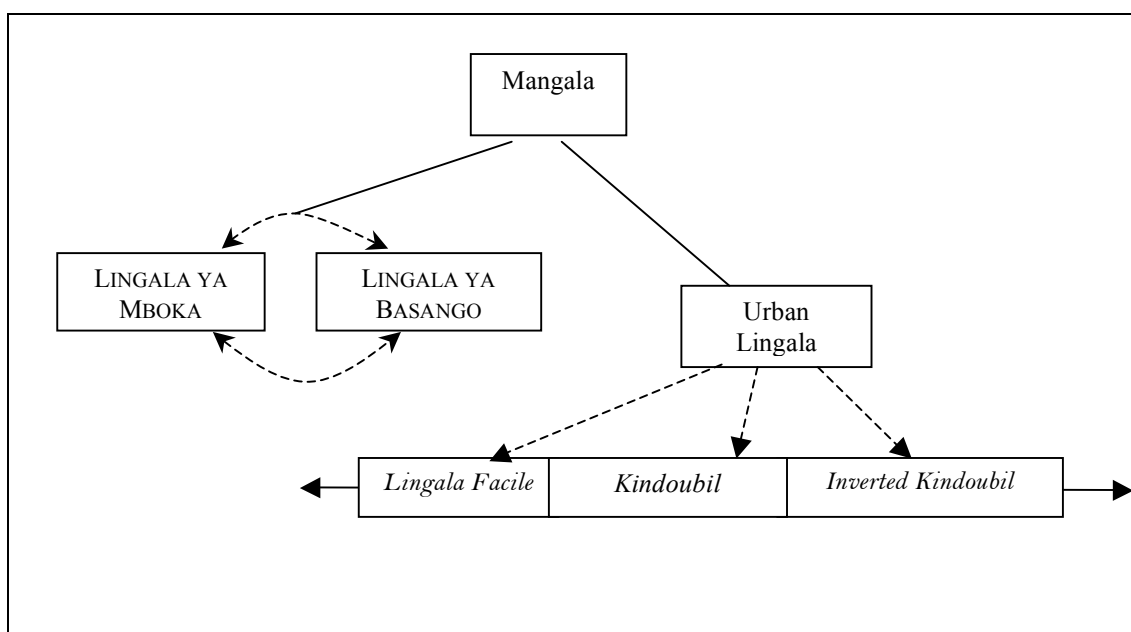


Figure 21. Types of Lingala

2. Lingala ya mboka (rural Lingala)

Lingala makasi, literally strong Lingala, is the Lingala that is spoken in the Equator Province. It is also known as *Lingala ya Makanza*. Makanza is a territory located East of Mbandaka, along the Congo River shores, an area that is commonly referred to as the cradle of the Bangala and their language. This Lingala is ‘strong’ (*makasi*) because of its elaborated grammar –for instance the concordance between nouns, adjectives and verbs; and the absence of French forms. Derogatorily, this type is commonly referred to as *Lingala ya mboka* or countryside Lingala. In comparison to the urban Lingala, *Lingala ya mboka* is ‘sung’. On the prestige barometer it scores very low and it is proof that someone is new to

the city, does not know how to meander in it yet and is, hence, an easy prey and even backward.

Closely linked to rural Lingala is *Lingala ya basango*. As its name suggests, *Lingala ya basango* or literally “missionaries’ Lingala,” is spoken by expatriates and, at a first glance, does not share anything with its rural counterpart. However, when looking at the history of the language, I came to realise there is more to tell about *Lingala ya basango* than the whiteman’s neglect of high and low pitches, so characteristic of the Bantu tonality. The link between these two types of Lingala is startling and goes back, beyond the superficiality of *how* they are spoken, to the roots of the language.

The roots of Lingala are eclectic, disputed and have been manipulated. To make sense of them, I have chosen, in this work, to base myself on Meeuwis’ analysis (1997 & 2004). Meeuwis claims that all the Lingala variants derive from the pidginisation of Bobangi (Meeuwis 2004a). In his scheme (Figure 22) he proposes different paths in the evolution of Bobangi. The scheme should not be interpreted literally, but alludes to possible factors that can lead to language change, the variety of paths along which a language can evolve, as well as to how these varieties co-exist. The rectangles stand for the (parallel) language variants. The vertical arrows are the linguistic and non-linguistic factors that influence a variant – think of language contact or language planning–, and the horizontal arrows represent the evolution (in terms of evolving to something else) of the variant.

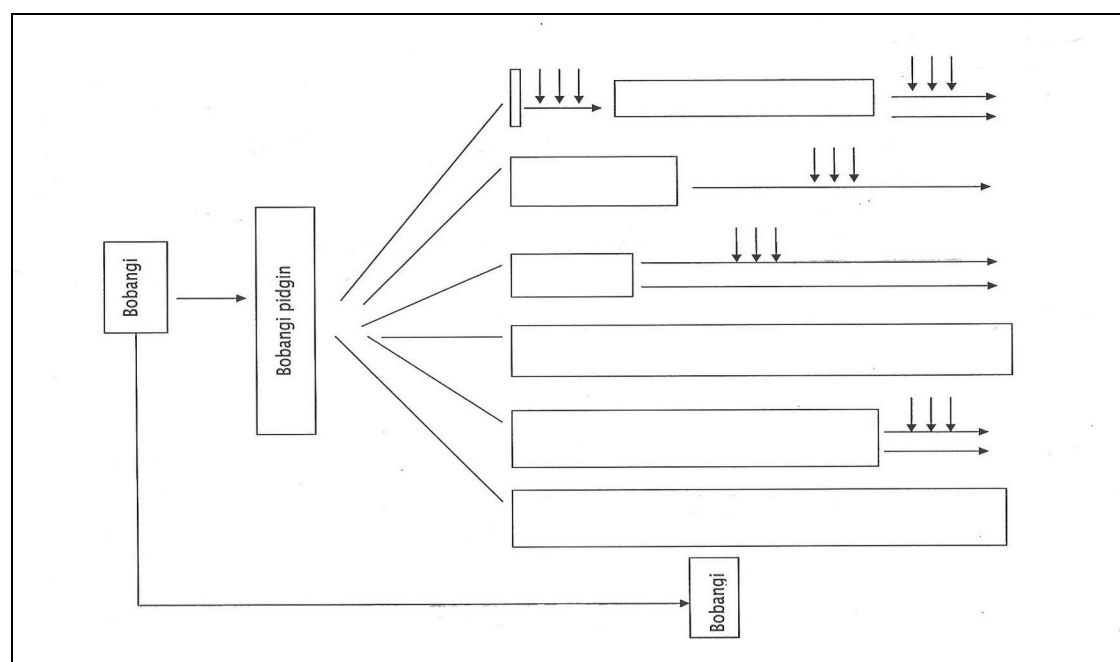


Figure 22. The Pidginisation of Bobangi (Meeuwis 2004a: 9)

Already before the arrival of the Europeans, Bobangi served as a trade language among

different groups of people on the shores of the Congo River. Used by non-mother tongue speakers, trade languages and pidgins are characterised by functional confinement, resulting in linguistic simplification: the vocabulary is reduced, the morphology and grammar simplified; such was the case for Bobangi (Meeuwis 2004a: 5). When the Europeans, accompanied by their African helpers, penetrated the Equatorial rainforest, they came in contact with an already simplified form of Bobangi pidgin, which they ended up employing in order to communicate with the locals. The pidgin was used among riverine communities, on the one hand, but also between these communities and Europeans, on the other.

The gap between the Bobangi pidgin and Lingala is wide and it would be misleading to contend Lingala and its respective area of distribution, as Meeuwis points out, were existing realities the Europeans happened upon. While it is true that the Bobangi pidgin existed, it was the European penetration that co-shaped the spread of Lingala (Meeuwis 1997: 105). In their yet more urgent need to communicate, missionaries and other colonial linguists made a set of crucial decisions about which dialect to privilege, what orthography to employ, and what vocabulary to regard as 'pure' (Ranger 1993: 74). "They set out to artificially '(re)bantuize'" and enhance Bobangi (Meeuwis 1997: 107-108), as it were, along 'more correct' standards. Their scientific endeavours resulted in the creation of a new language variant: Lingala.²⁰⁵

Bobangi became Lingala when the linguistic expansion of the pidgin was 'guided from above' (Meeuwis 2004a: 6).²⁰⁶ This guidance was not uncontroversial. Ideological disagreements soon arose (Meeuwis 1997: 110), Bobangi, but also Mongo, Lonkondo and Mbenga, were claimed to be Lingala's ascendants.²⁰⁷ In any case, Lingala became a 'new' language in many ways; new both in its idiomatic limitations and its unprecedented classificatory and descriptive power; new in its expansion and adoption by many people who had hitherto spoken other dialects or languages; new in the way the language thus created came to be associated with the supposed intellectual, moral and even physical qualities of its speakers, thus giving a powerful impulse to the invention of ethnicity and to the idea of its rootedness in cultural and intellectual basic realities (Fabian in Ranger 1993: 74).

The purified variant started to be used in church and, to a limited degree, in education. In their urge to stand closer to the locals, missionaries taught locals the purified language and

²⁰⁵ Even the prefix *li-* instead of the more common *ki-* or *lo-* in the name of the language points towards its artificiality.

²⁰⁶ See also Gondola (1997: 57 footnote 47): le colonisateur forgea également le terme *lingala* qui est un avatar du *mangala* et qui, utilisé d'abord par les premiers éléments '*bangala*' de la Force Publique, devint par la suite la première langue en usage dans les deux Congo.

²⁰⁷ For further reading see, among others Motingea & Bonzoi 2008, Meeuwis 2004b, 2001, Meeuwis and Vinck 2003 and Briffaerts 2007.

Lingala ya Basango became, as it were, *Lingala ya mboka*. The two, at first, different types of Lingala, coincide. Like the language itself, Lingala's cradle was created and later appropriated, *de facto* giving birth to a new ethnicity, the Bangala: an amalgam of people with a common geographic denominator (Gondola 1997: 57 footnote 47).²⁰⁸ A consensus for one standard Lingala, however, was never reached. Beyond the countryside, *Lingala ya basango* was doomed to the confinements of the Church, the Bible, various religious publications, some news reports and sensitization campaigns, but never became the language of the streets.

During colonial times Lingala was, then, brought to Leopoldville by the soldiers of the Force Publique, who were mainly Bangala from the Equateur. First looked down upon, "[i]t was mainly these soldiers who became the driving force behind the development of Lingala as the city's major *lingua franca*" (De Boeck 2004: 31). Lingala slowly but surely spread through the lower ranks of the army, the central government and, more importantly, through the streets of the capital. The –already transformed– Bobangi Pidgin grew offshoots in the city. Some of these continued to serve the function of pidgins, while others outgrew their functional confinements, turning into the mother tongue of generations of urban youngsters to come.

Digging into the roots of Lingala touches upon two important subjects: (1) it is a reminder that people have never lived in isolation from one another, on the one hand, (2) while, on the other, it points towards the invention of tradition, where language, was, and still is, manipulated, re-appropriated and disposed of. Just as the existing Bobangi was re-invented by expatriates into a 'new' language in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the inhabitants of Leopoldville would, in the years preceding independence, appropriate the 'new,' albeit pidginised, Lingala, mix it with French and other vernaculars and make it fit for reflecting the realities of their city.

This is how, in line with Ranger and up to this day, the uprooted Congolese city dweller, drawing on invented European traditions –and languages–, discovers new ways of making a new society (Ranger 1983: 237). He alters, re-appropriates and re-discovers Lingala to create this new society. The loosely defined and infinitely flexible Lingala, to use Ranger's wording (1983: 247), helps the urban dweller –and Lingala speaker–, reminiscent of Ranger's nineteenth-century pre-colonial 'African', to move in and out of multiple identities (Ranger 1983: 248) while tapping the continued vitality of the mingled continuity and

²⁰⁸ "Cette appellation générique pour caractériser les populations du Haut-Fleuve est une invention du colonisateur." I also came across the 'Bangala' language, a trade language spoken North of Kisangani, intelligible with Lingala. Interview with Pa Nico's father held on 10.12.2009 and corroborated by the ethnologue.org: http://www.ethnologue.org/show_language.asp?code=bxg viewed on 10.01.2011

innovation which resides within, in this case, not tradition but language (Ranger 1983: 262). Change is the only constant.

3. Lingala ya ville (urban Lingala)

Nowadays, the cradle of Lingala has been (partially) transposed from the countryside to the city. Even if not a mother tongue in theory, Lingala has become a mother tongue *de facto* to a growing number of urban youngsters. Urban Lingala, with all its regional variations, is spoken in a growing number of Congolese cities, and, since long, also in Kisangani.

Boyomais urban Lingala mirrors itself to *the* urban Lingala par excellence, *the* archetype of the urban variants in Congo: the Kinois Lingala. The Boyomais youth define their Lingala by the standards of Kinshasa. Here “the proliferating fantasmic and mythical qualities of cities and urban spaces”, in this case of Kinshasa, “are effective realities that shape the behaviour, cosmologies and desires of people in cities, or of those who visit them, imagine them, or describe them in narrative or imagery” (Blom Hansen and Verkaaik 2009: 5).

Because youth look up to Kinshasa, they allow the capital to partly shape Kisangani. Yet the opposite is not less true: while Kisangani’s youth interpret and consume Kinshasa and Kinois Lingala in emic terms, they simultaneously give new meaning to Kinshasa and Kinois Lingala, as they know it in their minds. Parallel to Gondola’s mikiliste “who first experiences Europe, *his* Europe, in Africa”, by using what they regard as being Kinois Lingala the Boyomais youth, too, first experience Kinshasa, *their* Kinshasa, in Kisangani (Gondola 1999: 28 original emphasis).

From afar, the capital irradiates worldliness and success. Lingala, in particular the Kinois variant, is the best vehicle to demonstrate this worldliness and success. Individuals look for ways to speak Kinois Lingala in order to embody worldliness and emanate success. But where does (Kinois) Lingala derive its success? I believe the answer lies in music. During my fieldwork, I was impressed by how people used lyrics to express themselves in daily situations. Kongo did too. When I enquired about it, he responded:²⁰⁹

Soki mutu ayebisi ngai que non mm yo oza Kinois, nayebisi yo que nakocomprendre que mutu ayebi que naza na makila ya Kinois.

Oyo eza ndenge ya Bakinois?

Oui, parce que ndule nyoso ewutaka kaka kuna.

Ndule elobi nini? Na langue nini?

Musique. Non, Kindoubil na biso wana ndule. Nduleman, moyembi.

-- o --

If someone tells me that no mm you are Kinois, I told you that I will understand that person

²⁰⁹ Interview held on 12.12.2009 in Lingala

knows that I have Kinois blood.

That is the Kinois way?

Yes, because all the ndule originates only there.

What does ndule mean?

Music. No, that is our Kindoubil: ndule. Nduleman [means] singer.

Because music originates in Kinshasa, speaking as the musicians sing, i.e. using neologisms (newly coined words) and verses as opposed to sentences makes one Kinois, at least outside Kinshasa. Youngsters all around the country copy -what they believe to be- the Kinois Lingala by carefully listening to lyrics.²¹⁰ White describes this as “the way in which popular song texts play into different aspects of oral culture and sociability outside the confines of the local music scene” (White 2008: 25). Following the latest hype is making lyrics viable in daily speech: Ordering beer in terms of *mbenda* (beer) instead of the more viable *masanga* or *boke*,²¹¹ because Werrason sings “nano nalangwe té, eza na yango mbenda té” (“I’m not drunk yet, it isn’t beer”) and greeting girls with “your buttocks grew,” not because they have gained weight, but because “sima ekoli” (literally your buttocks grew) is the hit of the moment. Expressing oneself in terms of the newest lyrics proves one’s knowledge and one’s Kiyankee, both closely linked to the Kinois identity (cf. Chapter 4 Positive attributes: Koyeba).

Music is one of the few products Congo (overtly) exports. The musical production in Congo is noteworthy and its local consumption is wide. For a Congolese music ‘says’ everything,²¹² it accompanies any festivity or event;²¹³ it seems to be omnipresent. Because Kinshasa is the place where most of the music is produced, starting musicians see themselves in the obligation to move to the capital and to sing in Lingala if they want to succeed in their career as artists.²¹⁴ Congolese Rumba, Ndombolo, but also religious music, as Cosmas remarked, is sung in Lingala:²¹⁵

Ninaonaka musique yetu ya Congo, ya Lingala inakoleaka kupita ya Swahili, ata religieuse. Ata hii ya baprofanes, Lingala inapika muzuri sana kupita Swahili, sijui juu ya nini.

-- o --

I see that our Lingala music in Congo surpasses that in Swahili, even religious [*music*]. Even that of the secularists, Lingala plays better than Swahili, I don’t know why.

²¹⁰ Notebook (47- 48) informal interview with Kongo and Likilo on 24.11.2009: youngsters in Kisangani are inspired by the language use of the musicians, speaking Kinois Lingala amounts to copying the latter as soon as they bring out new songs and albums

²¹¹ Focus Group discussion Group B held on 16.11.2009 in French mainly

²¹² Interview held on 23.10.2009 with Stommy in Lingala: “Musique epai ya un Congolais ezolobama nyoso.” – o – “Music for a Congolese says everything.”

²¹³ Interview held 22.10.2009 on with Pépé in Lingala

²¹⁴ Interview held on 30.01.2010 with Dorine in French

²¹⁵ Interview held on 04.12.2009 in Swahili

Maybe there is a reason why music in Lingala ‘plays better’ than the one in Swahili. Being symbolically intertwined with the capital, music – just like the language spoken in Kinshasa– is endowed with worldliness and knowledge. In what follows, I will discuss how Leopoldville, and later Kinshasa, became the cradle of Congolese music and Lingala its favourite medium for lyrics. I will then look at how the city, the music and the language helped shape, while simultaneously being shaped by, the autocratic political culture of the Mobutu years.

1. Rumba, Politics and Language

The roots of modern Congolese music, *soukous*²¹⁶ or Congolese Rumba, are indivisibly entangled with the history of Congo’s urban centres and politics. Characterised by a heterogeneous population, these cities-to-be underwent a process of ‘detrribalization and homogenization’ (Kazadi wa Mukuna 1979/80: 32) that gave birth to a new urban life style. It was out of the emergence of this new life style that, around the economic crisis of the 1930s, the modern Congolese music first began making its appearance in Leopoldville, but also in Lubumbashi, Kananga and Kisangani (Kazadi wa Mukuna 1979/80: 38).

Leopoldville, being the new centre of power and, maybe also, thanks to its geographical closeness to the Atlantic Ocean, was a special case. Frequent and intensive musical encounters took place. In the 1950s, more and more people from the hinterland moved to the cities, bringing along their musical traditions; rhythms that had yet to metamorphose into what became the Congolese Rumba. These local rhythms met and fused with musical styles and new technologies from abroad: West African, European and Cuban.

The introduction of *Highlife* in Central Africa, for instance, encouraged Congolese to take up foreign instruments (Gondola 1993: 159 - 160). The guitar, reminiscent of the *likembe* (thumb piano or idiophone), was embraced. Then again, the use of technological facilities brought from Europe, such as the first local recording company (Olympia Editions) and the Radio Congo Belge aided the diffusion of music. Rhythms crossing the Atlantic Ocean in the form of 10-inch 78 r.p.m. discs were taken up too. The Cuban Son, and other African-influenced music from Latin America, sounded, both in terms of rhythm and vocals, recognizable to many ears (Stewart 2003: 13).

Congolese musicians started, at first, to mimic the Cuban style. “The melodic, rolling vowels

²¹⁶ “*Soukous* the word evolved from the French verb *secouer*, to shake. It was originally written as the noun from *secousse*; one who moved *par secousses* moved jerkily. *Secousse* became *soucousses* and then *soucou* on the street and in the press until the *c* fell into disfavour and gave way to a *k*” (Stewart 2003: 135). Today in the West *soukous* is used as a covering term for Congolese music.

of Spanish,” writes Stewart, “especially at the ends of words, sounded like many of the languages on both banks of the Congo River, including the emerging Lingala” (Stewart 2003: 13). Congolese singers sang and incorporated Spanish lyrics into their own songs, but as “the Congolese rumba matured, its language began to change” (Stewart 2003: 77). More than just mimicking the latest songs, Congolese musicians started to fuse the foreign with the familiar to produce their own Congolese sound” (Stewart 2003: 77).

“A song or two in Spanish still came out from time to time, but singers of Kikongo, Ciluba, and Swahili turned increasingly to the emerging vernacular, Lingala. [...] Musicians composed more and more songs in Lingala, contributing their own additions, often slang expressions or changes in connotation, to the growing lexicon” (Stewart 2003: 77). Lingala, at first, and then Hindoubill,²¹⁷ “a hip new dialect [that] emerged among Leopoldville’s alienated youth, a hodgepodge of slang derived from French and Lingala, [...] enriched the repertoires of Congolese bands. Composers injected their songs with slang expressions, and, Hindoubill sometimes helped to fit a line of verse to a troublesome melody where the use of standard Lingala would not work” (Stewart 2003: 78).

The Congolese music – and its language – matured concurrently with the growth of the city and the approaching Independence. Several Congolese musicians “supported independence and unity but refrained from taking sides in the [1960] elections” (Stewart 2003: 90). It is around this time that Kabasele brought out his most famous song: “As colonial dominoes began to topple,” Stewart writes, “Africans across the continent celebrated their freedom to the tune of ‘Indépendance Cha Cha’” (Stewart 2003: 86).

The re-baptised Kinshasa grew rapidly and chaotically and for many the prospect of a better life soon turned sour. Excluded from adulthood, youngsters found in music, just as Bills had found in Westerns, tools that would allow them to cope with the economic malaise and social frustrations of the *mal ville*. By the mid-1970s, Congolese music had evolved into “a key means by which Congolese urban society reflected on itself, on its own identity, and on the modes of representation it adopted” (Mbembe 2005/06: 78). It “enabled the Congolese to sing what could not be spoken about in any other kind of speech” (Mbembe 2005/06: 78).

Ironically, because of this ability, Congolese modern music soon became an important constituent of Mobutu’s cultural policy. According to White the term cultural policy

²¹⁷ There are different spellings of Hindoubill. In his article ‘Borderland Breccia’ (2000), De Boeck utilises Hindoubill, so does Stewart in his book ‘Rumba on the River’ (2003). Goyvaerts, on the one hand, and Kiessling & Mous, on the other, use Indoubil in, respectively ‘Indoubil: A Swahili Hybrid in Bukavu’ (1988) and ‘Urban Youth Languages in Africa’ (2004). I opted, in agreement with my fieldwork, for the Kindoubil spelling, with the initial ki- prefix.

encompasses “governmental practices” that, on the one hand, pertain to the “legislation” that affects the production and consumption of culture, while, on the other, they focus “on the promotion or protection of culture with an eye toward making more explicit the link between cultural and national identity” (White 2008: 68). An analysis of modern Congolese music and the cultural policy behind it is useful because it reveals, as we will see, the underlying political climate.

The propaganda machinery that served to mobilize support for the state, legitimize the big man-type of leadership and consolidate power, epitomizes Mobutu’s cultural policy. It was supported by the philosophy of *authenticité*. In the belief that “real progress and development could only be achieved by mobilising a vast repertoire of traditional cultural practices and knowledge” (White 2008: 65) *authenticité* placed authentic African values at the centre of its political ideology. Non-Western traditional dress and authentic political models based on kinship, among others, were imposed (White 2008: 69). And thus “the Zairian state began committing resources to various types of authentic theatre, music, and visual arts” (White 2008: 65). Ironically, “the architects of Zairian *authenticité* were most likely influenced by Placide Tempels’s *La philosophie bantoue* (1949), which in turn echoed a long tradition of Western”, and thus unauthentic, “thinking about the relationship between culture and the self” (White 2008: 70). Being a tool of power and rooted in the political culture, *authenticité* informs us about “the way that power is sought after, yielded and understood” (White 2008: 15).

Privileging folklore and authentic popular culture had a real impact on the local music industry. Thanks to governmental incentives, traditional music flourished and musicians of modern Congolese music gladly included traditional elements into their own work in order to please those in power. Traditional shouts, or *libanga*, for instance, were soon incorporated to flatter the political class. Cultural policy under *authenticité* did not only privilege music, but also other forms of folklore performances. “The most visible manifestation of cultural policy under Mobutu was the *Animation politique et culturelle*, the system of state-sponsored singing and dancing that came to be synonymous with the image of the regime and the idea of one-party rule” (White 2008: 73).

Animation politique et culturelle dominated state-run media and much of its content came directly from Mobutu’s widely distributed speeches (White 2008: 75). These were often given in Lingala, the only African language Mobutu used in public, even when addressing Kiswahili-speaking crowds in the East of the country. The speeches left a footprint and played an important role in Lingala’s spread and consolidation. Lingala came to be “promoted by the former president Mobutu and his single-party regime” (de Swaan 2000:

111). Speaking Lingala “marked one as an activist in the Mobutu movement, a distinction that became dubious after Kabila took over and civil war broke out” (de Swaan 2000: 111). Music in Lingala was privileged because it was sung in the language of the *animation politique et culturelle*.

In the 1980s, the weight of all the disasters that shook the country (rebellions, state embezzlement, economic and infrastructural dilapidation, political violence) steeped the daily suffering of its inhabitants and the “music scene registered this new onslaught” (Mbembe 2005/06: 79). The once “languid melodies characteristic of ‘classic’ Congolese rumba (1950s – 1970s) gave way to tremendous pace, its swaying rhythms and steps to increasingly stereotypical choreography and a sense of emotional intoxication” (Mbembe 2005/06: 79). One of the most characteristic changes was the appearance of systematic screams or shouts in the Congolese modern music.

Shouts have always existed in Congolese popular music. From way back, musicians have shouted out the names of fellow musicians and the name of new dance steps on-stage; but it was only in the eighties that these “series of short percussive phrases” started to be used systematically (White 2008: 58-59). In 1982 Zaiko Langa Langa, one of the most successful groups at the moment, approached the traditional music group Bana Odeon and invited two of its members to join Zaiko to perform their shouts (White 2008: 60-61). Bana Odeon came originally from the Kintambo district, which in Kinshasa carries “the image of a village within the city and is often referred to as the cradle of urban traditional music and the birthplace of the *atalaku*” (or the one who performs shouts in music).²¹⁸ The group became known under Mobutu’s *animation politique* because they performed “a brand of modernized folklore” (White 2008: 60).

The two Bana Odeon members became permanent members of Zaiko and “their folklore-inspired shouts and dances soon became Zaiko’s trademarks” (White 2008: 61). From here on “shouts, melodies and various vocal pyrotechnics” intended to attract fans and “to drive those in the audience and on-stage to dance and lose themselves in the music” turned into an integral part of the modern dance band phenomenon (White 2008: 58-59). Shouts became necessary ingredients in every song, “indispensable, if not unavoidable [...], hysterical shouts without which there would be no true *ambiance* in a song, on the dance floor ... in our hearts” (Tchebwa in White 2008: 58).

As time passed, the form and the meaning of shouts, too, began to change. Many are those,

²¹⁸ For a very interesting and detailed description of the *atalaku*, his link to politics and society, I would like to refer to White’s section entitled “The emergence of the *atalaku*” (2008: 59-64).

who, contrarily to Mbembe and White, do not see these shouts as a change of style or an evolution in modern Congolese music, but consider them a sign of degeneration. It is not by coincidence that Stewart, for instance, entitles the last chapter of his book *Rumba on the River*, ‘*The gray nineties*.’ Despite having suffered from emigration and the passing away of older generations (many artists died of HIV), egotism, distrust and big-man politics, the proliferation of illicit cassettes and a limited freedom of expression, the Congolese music scene in Kinshasa, shouts included, is still, to put it in White’s words, “on fire” (White 2008: 21).

Just as the music evolved, so did the shouts. For once they were more and more sung than shouted; lead singers crooning their shouts with “care” or “charm” (White 2008: 59).²¹⁹ For other, shouts changed also in content. Next to attracting fans, musicians started to use the notorious screaming in order to cite the names of friends or sponsors either on recordings or in live performance (White 2008: 170). This practice came to be known as name-dropping and *kobwaka libanga*, which in Lingala means to ‘throw a stone’. The expression *kobwaka libanga* “is also used to describe young children who throw pebbles at parents in an attempt to attract their attention or provoke a response. Throwing pebbles, both literally and figuratively, can be a way of getting attention, affection, or material support” (White 2008: 170). Similarly, musicians started attracting the attention of politicians and other figures of prestige. Through *libanga*, musicians could benefit from political protection and financial support but they were also limited in their choice of words (White 2008: 5).²²⁰ Flattery, a remainder of the mass-mediated idiom of Mobutu’s *animation politique*, “in which traditional forms of praise became fused with the imperative of naming politicians” (White 2008: 176-177), was soon commercialised and became a survival strategy for bands.

Beyond advertising, White explains, musicians use *libanga*, and thus language, “to secure knots in relationships of reciprocity from which they have benefited and on which they will probably need to call in the future” (White 2008: 174). *Libanga* activates patron-client relations because those who are praised are simultaneously urged “to act in socially responsible ways” (White 2008: 10). This practice is somewhat reminiscent of Pa Nico’s nick name giving in chapter 3. Thus “the dialogue between the lyrics and the *libanga* [...] enables the musician to mediate between two completely different social worlds” (White 2008: 185). *Libanga* enables the musicians to mediate between the wealthy and the poor, and to remind the former of their duties in relation to the latter.

²¹⁹ White attributes this transition or evolution of shouts mainly to Wenge Musica (White 2008: 51)

²²⁰ Musicians who did not sing Mobutu’s son Kongolo (alias Saddam Hussein) “would be threatened with physical violence and would often face serious obstacles in their professional activities” (White 2008: 175).

Even if musicians do not advocate social change, the notorious screaming, the frenetic rhythm and the, for some, vulgar dance steps do not reflect the dilapidation of Congolese music.²²¹ “On the contrary, through “[s]creaming, howling, throughout the last quarter of the 20th century and into the new millennium, part noise-bounded, part musical scream, Congolese music has endeavoured to account for the terror, the cruelty and the dark abyss – for the ugly and the abject – that is its country” (Mbembe 2005/06: 81).

“[A]t each stage of its development since independence, popular music in Kinshasa has acted as a mediating force between the city’s rapidly growing population of youths, who try to navigate their way through a complex political economy of clientage [...], and a state-based class of political elites who rely on music as a mechanism of political legitimacy” (White 2008: 24). Because music and politics share the same universe, they for together “a complex field of action in which popular culture and politics prop each other up and fix each other into place” (White 2008: 250).

Even when limited to themes of love and abandonment –maybe partly because speaking about, or rather being outspoken in, politics could cost one’s life–, music “became a vehicle for commenting on morals and an engine for social satire, a repository for discourse on virtues, vices and passions – pride, hate, envy, and idleness, ugliness, deformities, greed and sexual predation” (Mbembe 2005/06: 78). Lyrics about love, thus, do not necessarily stand for lack of creativity, but can also articulate social conditions: heartbreak suggests economic breakdown (White 2008: 179) and abandonment hints at hunger, uncertainty and isolation (White 2008: 180).

Furthermore, it was the group Wenge Musica who sang “Louis de Funès! I saw Fantomas! He was running away! Running away!” linking the villain of popular French cinema to Mobutu as he was fleeing the country (White 2008: 2). Likewise, “the well-known 1995 shout *kibinda nkoy*”, the dance of a limping leopard, makes reference, as we saw in chapter 2, to Mobutu’s fall and “evokes the existential questions of life in the postcolonial city” (White 1999: 163). Wenge Musica, too, splintered in 1997 at the same time the country was ‘splintering’ and in a state of increasing political instability (White 2008: 5). Is this only a coincidence? Today for the Boyomais, Congolese modern music continues to be a big constituent of their lives as they dance to it on birthday parties, funerals, weddings and more. Music is simply an important constitute of the ever present street cacophony (see Figure 23). “And so the scream, like melody, rhythm and percussion, [has become] a bridge between pain and its expression as language” (Mbembe 2005/06: 87).

²²¹ Little Notebook on 21.03.2010



Figure 23. *Cacophony in the streets of Kisangani (by Roger Bamungu)*²²²

Mikolo nyoso kaka boye...? Bambonda, banzembo, bamakelele...!!!
 Ndenge ya kopemisa matoi ezali té! Tozali pe na posa ya komipemisa...!

-- o --

Every day like this...? The drums the songs, the noise
 There is no way to rest the ears! We need to make us rest...!

2. Music and the Congolese *habitus*: a first approach to the origin of words

The evolution and maturation of Congolese music reflects the evolution of language. Until today, Lingala and its variants derive prestige from music, while simultaneously being spread by it. Under Mobutu, Lingala, too, derived prestige from its advantageous political position. Its status within *animation politique*, further contributed to its spread and consolidation.

Music also plays a crucial role in the definition of taste and sensibilities and in the invention of formal codes of “good manners” and civility (Mbembe 2005/06: 78). Through music, Congo’s dominant manifestation of popular culture, both, the form and the message are defined. By form I understand the language in which the lyrics are sung, thus Lingala. By message I understand (1) norms of good and bad taste, (2) the expression of social experience through themes of love and abandonment (White 2008: 183), (3) the articulation of national identities (White 2008: 8) and (4) the assimilation of the political culture of the Mobutu years in terms of “tangible relations of clientelism”, “praise” and a “common idiom of big man-style leadership” (White 2008: 10).

If right and wrong, good and bad, are divulged through music, then music –sung in

²²² Taken from the article entitled “Stop au tapage incessant!” in Journal Mongongo (5) 30.09.2009

Lingala– has a propensity for prioritising specific issues and developing a Congolese sensibility. One might even claim music and its ‘crucial role in the definition of taste and sensibilities,’ but also the expression of nationalities, social experience and leadership, fall under Bourdieu’s *habitus* with its underlying generative schemes of perceptions and value judgements (Thompson’s preface to Bourdieu’s *Pouvoir Symbolique* 2001: 26).

Blommaert, based on Bourdieu, defines *habitus* as “the naturalised adoption of features of social structure that becomes a ‘normal’ (‘habitual’ and ‘embodied’) pattern of behaviour” (Blommaert 2005: 252).²²³ This naturalised adoption is spoon-fed by the omnipresent music. Heard in songs, bad leadership is embellished and even justified. Heard in songs, the *libanga* phenomenon has “become part of a formulaic reproduction of sound already invested with power, a *kind of rumba habitus*” (White 2008: 193). Heard in songs, new words become part of the daily speech and are then widely disseminated. These neologisms, which express the daily realities in Congo, become carriers of Congolese identity. Such is the case of JB Mpiana’s *Kipeyayo*. The term *Kipeyayo* can be translated as ‘mind your own business.’ Pa Nico, who uses the term fairly often, explains how, and to which scale it is disseminated:²²⁴

“Mot wana ewuti epai na, eza répandue na république à travers musicien ya JB Mpiana. *Mais eza mot na ye té?* Ye nde asali que eyebana, eza mot moko même kumba aye comprendre yango, même villageois, mbakasa, à travers musique.”

-- o --

“That word comes from, it is spread in the country through the musician JB Mpiana. *But isn’t it his word?* He is the one who made it known, it is a word that even a kumba [country bumpkin] understands by now, even a villager, a mbakasa [country bumpkin], through music.”

By spreading new words or expressions, music spreads both the form and the meaning these words carry and contributes in the creation of what is and what is not Congolese. Because it is, more often than not, sung in Lingala, it turns Lingala into a recognisable instrument of national identity too. This idea seems to be corroborated by Hyppolite, who suggests that Swahili speakers, who are not able to understand lyrics sung in Lingala, alienate themselves from Congolese music, and hence from an unequivocal expression of national identity.²²⁵

A song is drained in neologisms. Careful and less careful listeners can chose whether to pick out only one word or a lot more. The more words that are picked out and the more they

²²³ Even though Blommaert’s definition of *habitus*, is sufficient for this purpose, I would like to refer to a more comprehensive definition of *habitus* in Thompson’s preface to Bourdieu’s *Pouvoir Symbolique* (2001: 24-25), with my own words between square brackets: “Ensemble de *dispositions* qui portent les agents à agir et à réagir d’une certaine manière. Les dispositions engendrent des pratiques, des perceptions et des comportements [, et des jugements de valeur] qui sont « réguliers » sans être consciemment coordonnés et régis par aucune « règle ». Les dispositions qui constituent les *habitus* sont (1) inculquées [à partir de l’enfance, comme une seconde nature] (2) structurées [socially embedded], (3) durables [tout au long de la vie] ; elles sont également génératives et transposables.

²²⁴ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

²²⁵ Fieldwork notes diary (33) on 13.12.2009

filter into an individual's diction, the stronger the proof of his knowledge of Kinois Lingala – a sign of both refinement²²⁶ and of being a Yankee. But where do musicians find these neologisms?

In search for the source of new words, musicians are often pointed by the finger. Even though music plays an important role in the spreading of new words, it cannot claim absolute ownership over their creation.²²⁷ Erik Yakuza, a Boyomais rap artist, explains that he finds inspiration among youngsters in the streets of the cité. While his language use differs from theirs, he uses their terms to make himself understood, which in turn spreads these even further:²²⁸

Du moins expérience ndambu nga naza na yango, eza que biloko, langue oyo toyembela, ou bien babiloko mosusu toloba, nayokaka yango epai ya bato, nayoka yango epai bajeunes, bazoloba makambo oyo toloba na musique ou bien, baargots, babiloko mwa bongo, bacrérations moko boye, nayoka yango epai batu. [...] Soki naemploya ekozala mpenza mingi té. Je crois que soki naemploya eza peut-être bamots moko etoucha ou bien nayoka mpenza que non bajeunes balobaka mot oyo mingi, ekoma neti mot moko boye que ekoma neti universel po na bajeunes. Nde nakokende kozwa yango, natié pe yango po peut-être bango pe bacomprendre eloko que je voulais dire.

-- o --

From the experience I have, it is that the language we sing in, or the other things we say, I hear it from people, I hear it from the youngsters, they say what we say in our music or rather, the slangs, things like that, certain creations, I hear them from people. [...] If I employ them it isn't that frequent. I think that if I use them it is because some of those words touch upon or I hear that no youngsters use that particular word a lot, it becomes kind of a universal word for the youngsters. So I will take it, I will put it because maybe they will understand what I am trying to say.

New words emerge from the streets and not in musical laboratories. They are part of the daily speech because that to which they refer is recognisable to many, especially to youngsters. Neologisms become widespread because they are useful in the first place. However, it is thanks to music that these words spread beyond the boundaries of one social group or one city, and among a large audience countrywide.

Musicians are “a visible part of the urban landscape” (White 2008: 20), they cannot and should not be abstracted from their background but need to be rooted in the city. The streets, the suburbs, the youngsters, the *shagues*, all form part of the city. The city and its ailments, Gondola's *mal ville*, despite its vagueness, turns out to be the most precise locus from where new words arise. As such, all inhabitants become potential creators *and* consumers of new words (cf. infra WOooo: a second approach to the origin of words). This

²²⁶ Interview held on 26.01.2010 with Pa Nico in Lingala and interview held on 25.11.2009 with Roger in Lingala.

²²⁷ Notebook (47 and following) on 24.11.2009: According to Likilo (R.I.P) and Kongo, musicians have research bureaus that specialise in finding new words. They even gave me the name of a word creator, Lambi-Olambi mukonzi du terrain, whether he exists or not, is another question.

²²⁸ Interview held on 01.12.2009 in Lingala

proves how deeply rooted the *habitus* is; it generates practices and perceptions with and within the conditions of which it is itself a product (Thompson's preface to Bourdieu's *Pouvoir Symbolique* 2001: 25 – my own translation).²²⁹

Does, then, language use influence music or, conversely, does music influence language use? Does music influence the language use of the inhabitants of Congolese cities or is it merely a reflection thereof? I am afraid I cannot provide a clear-cut answer to these questions. But I can still dig deeper into the origin and dissemination of words. In order to do so, I will have to analyse how 'the city' speaks. In chapter 2, I illustrated Kisangani as a bilingual city. In what follows I will dig deeper into the language that dominates the Congolese music scene and the world of youth: urban Lingala and its different types, as they are spoken and understood in Kisangani. But before discussing the different types, I need to make a note on *Urban Lingala* in the light of code-switching and Urban Youth Languages.

3. Monolectal code-switching and Urban Youth Languages

As mentioned before, *Urban Lingala* amounts to *Kinois Lingala*, or an interpretation thereof.²³⁰ Kinois Lingala is spoken in a rapid staccato-form, with a notorious deep bass and is characterised by French residuals. The latter does not hint at code-switching in the strict sense, but French, as it were, has become part and parcel of this variant. The Lingala from Kinshasa falls under Blommaert & Meeuwis' definition of the *monolectal view of code-switching*: i.e. an overall code-switched variant that is not the product of the blending between two or more languages –with its implication of full knowledge of and proficiency in those languages–, but that acts as one code in its own right (Blommaert & Meeuwis 1998: 77). Just as non-mixed languages, monolectal code-switching does not necessarily infer a 'marked' or 'special' way of speaking, nor does every switch require a functional explanation (Blommaert & Meeuwis 1998: 81–82). Not every speech event in which people perform code-switching should, for that reason, be seen as a negotiation of identities (Blommaert & Meeuwis 1998: 81–82).

Monolectal code-switching invites the observer to move away from an exclusive focus on languages and to develop an ear for differences, not between languages, but between *varieties of languages* such as dialects, sociolects, speech styles, specific lexical choices, syntactic patterns, accents, and so on (Blommaert & Meeuwis 1998: 80). Accordingly, by speaking a variety of Lingala, rather than by using code-switching, identities are negotiated. It is to

²²⁹ *Habitus* engendre des pratiques et des perceptions avec les conditions d'existence dont l'*habitus* est lui-même le produit.

²³⁰ Notebook (48) on 24.11.2009: Likilo and Kongo equate the initial Kin- prefix of the name Kindoubil (which is loosely translated as slang) to Kinshasa. Even if this is an incorrect and inaccurate deduction, it does say something about their view on the origins of Kindoubil, i.e. just as for music, they are in Kinshasa.

these varieties of *Urban Lingala* to which I will now turn.

In order to better make sense of the urban variants of Lingala, I will make use of Kiessling and Mous' *Urban Youth Languages* (2004). Urban Youth Languages (here forth UYLs) tend to have their basis in another urban language that is spoken in the same city by the same youth. Urban languages and UYLs share connotations of modernity and of being non-traditional. However, in contrast to urban languages, UYLs are characterised by rapid change and conscious language manipulation. These manipulation strategies are not just the result of, say, code-switching or the borrowing of urban lifestyle vocabulary, but involve far-reaching morphological, phonotactic and semantic manipulations. The outcome is a language that is incomprehensible for the uninitiated. Beyond the form, speakers of UYL "use the emblematic nature of their new code to 'build a new identity that redefines their position in society and [that seeks] the transformation of overall social structure' (Castells 1997: 8)" (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 313). It is exactly in the UYL's potential to project (new) identities that lays the main argument of this thesis.

No matter how useful as an analytical tool, the concept of UYL also places impediments that, in the case of Lingala, need to be mentioned. To begin with the simplicity of its name can be misleading. The terms 'youth' and 'language', as we have seen before, are broad and all-encompassing. UYLs are, moreover, and especially, characterised by permeable boundaries. The boundary between the more vehicular (urban) Lingala, for instance, and its 'youth' variant, is contestable; the two types cannot but influence one another –they both emerge from one and the same city! Furthermore, in the case of Kisangani, I did not stumble upon *one type* of UYL, but upon several.

Rather than thinking in terms of boundaries between types, I invite the reader to think in terms of a spectrum wherein the boundaries of the different urban variants of Lingala overlap, as illustrated in Figure 24. At the one end of the spectrum stands the vehicular role of the language to which urban languages respond, while at the other end stands the language's role to serve as an icon for in-group identity, to which UYLs respond.

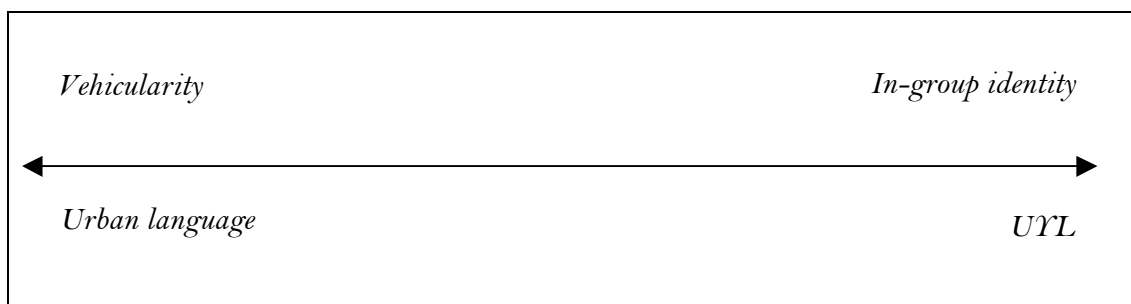


Figure 24. The Vehicularity – In-group identity spectrum

In their article, Kiessling & Mous bring about four language cases, one of which is “Indoubil and its successor Lingala ya Bayankee” (2004: 303). Counter to them, I will refrain from referring to this UYL in terms of “Lingala ya Bayankee” simply because I rarely came across this name. Based on my fieldwork in Kisangani, I prefer to use the terms *Lingala Facile* and *Kindoubil* instead.

Lingala Facile, literally easy Lingala, is the medium of wide communication for the Kinois. Its name is drawn from a popular television news broadcasting. *Kindoubil* is, due to its wide applicability, somewhat ambiguous. Even if nowadays there is not just one *Kindoubil*, most sources agree that it was first created and spoken among town dwellers in Leopoldville. In the last decennia, *Kindoubil* has spread beyond the capital, multiplied into different variants and is nowadays spoken in several Congolese cities: there is, among others, a Bukavu variant (Goyvaerts 1988), a Lubumbashi variant (Mulumbwa Mutambwa 2009) and, of course, a Kisangani variant.

Many of my informants translate *Kindoubil* in terms of ‘slang’ or ‘argot.’²³¹ Even though *Kindoubil* incorporates slang words (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 313), it deviates from the base language far more than slangs do (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 303). Moreover, while the latter is not necessarily characteristic of youth (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 304), *Kindoubil* is –where youth, well understood, includes older growing young adults. Based on this, in line with Kiessling & Mous I will use the more precise term UYL instead, as I believe *Kindoubil* falls (partly) under the definition of UYL.

In Kisangani I did not find just one variant of *Kindoubil*, I found several. Based on Sébastien’s explanation,²³² I will speak of two types: (1) on the one hand, there is the *Downtown Kindoubil*, also simply *Kindoubil*, spoken by those who link themselves to Kinshasa and call themselves Yankees; (2) on the other hand, there is *Inverted Kindoubil*, which refers to a very particular type of language spoken in the Lugbuara neighbourhood in the Western Mangobo district.

But before discussing each type in more detail, I would like to place all three (*Lingala Facile*, *Kindoubil* and *Inverted Kindoubil*) on the vehicularity – identity spectrum. Once again, the lines that separate the three types are permeable and the terminology is colloquially

²³¹ Interview held on 17.12.2009 with Papa Bruno in Swahili and Fieldwork notes diary (8) on 24.09.2009

²³² Interview held on 14.12.2009. Sébastien divides the *Kindoubil* into three kinds: one kind where the syllables are inverted (what I have branded here *Inverted Kindoubil*), another where speakers mix words of their own language with, say, Lingala, and finally, ‘dry’ *Kindoubil*, a kind where no (obvious) mixing nor inverting is applied, thus leaning towards *Downtown Kindoubil*.

interchanged. *Kindoubil* and *Inverted Kindoubil* are both known under *Kindoubil* – sometimes it is even not clear where the boundary between the two *Kindoubil* and *Lingala Facile* runs, as the latter is also referred to, by some sources, as *Kindoubil* as well. This all brings a lot of confusion. Ignoring the subtleties and due to the overlapping terminology, I ignored, at first, that *Kindoubil* consisted out of more than just one type. I could not make, for instance, sense of individuals who asserted to speak *Kindoubil*, but who were unable to understand the inverted code. I hope to create through my analysis some clarity in this matter.

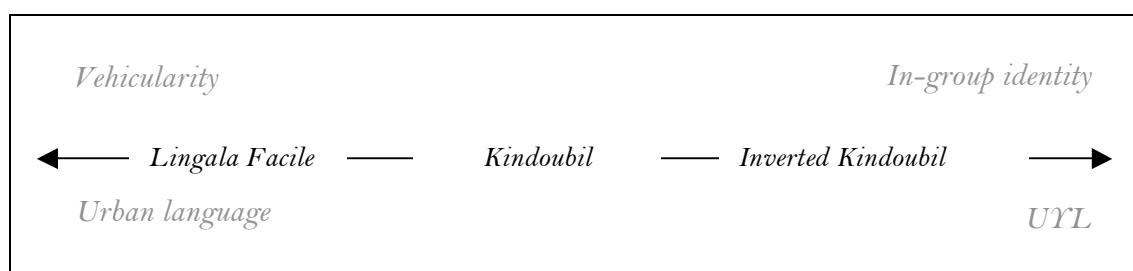


Figure 25. Placing urban Lingala on the spectrum

4. Lingala Facile

The variant closest to the vehicularity end is *Lingala Facile*. The term itself, *Lingala Facile*, is drawn from and spread through the televised news broadcasting with the same name: *journal télévisé en lingala facile* (JTLF). This controversial, yet very popular, programme saw the light in March 2008 in Kinshasa. Since that date it literally astonishes and invades the Congolese media.²³³ Because of its humour and its unusual coverage, it has been accused of going against the deontology of journalism.²³⁴ However, it is exactly in the infringement of journalistic norms that *Lingala Facile* finds its success and is even branded, by Matumweni Makwala, as vanguardist.²³⁵

In contrast to the highly grammatised (and for many quaint) Lingala of other media, the language used in JTLF is one of the streets, accessible to all; hence the term *easy* Lingala.²³⁶ While the programme's main target is the Kinois audience, JTLF has fallen into flavour among the inhabitants of other cities as well. In Kisangani, for instance, viewers stay awake until midnight to watch JTLF.²³⁷ Spectators are fond of the programme's 'proximity', i.e. the coverage of events that are "close to the life-worlds of the viewers" (Pype 2011: 632).

²³³ <http://www.grouperlavenir.cd/spip.php?article31140> "Cette production qui littéralement étonne et envahit l'espace médiatique congolais" Viewed on 05.05.2011

²³⁴ <http://radiookapi.net/actualite/2010/03/18/la-ham-suspend-le-journal-televise-en-lingala-facile/> "L'instance de régulation des médias congolais reproche à ce journal atypique de s'écarter des normes éthiques et de déontologie du journalisme." Viewed on 05.05.2011

²³⁵ http://www.brazzaville-adiac.com/index.php?action=depeche&dep_id=39075&cat_id=5&oldaction=home®pay_id=0 Viewed on 05.05.2011

²³⁶ Conversation with Guy: Fieldwork notes diary (3) on 17.09.2009

²³⁷ Interview held with Pitshou on 26.10.2009 in Lingala

JTLF raises day-to-day subjects (problems of electricity, running water, security and hygiene) to which everyone can relate and on which everyone can comment; people are encouraged to speak into the microphone – which in turn promotes the creation of a ‘community of action.’²³⁸ Pype claims that JTLF offers the Kinois “a chance to speak about politics and everyday struggles, and to be heard (Pype 2011: 634); it is even “the easiest way to communicate with the president” (Pype 2011: 633).²³⁹

The position of this journal, and in particular of its use of language, is linguistically ambiguous. While *Lingala Facile* has “a clear name by which [it] is known to their speakers” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 305), I will not view *Lingala Facile* in terms of UYLs because it is no longer solely spoken by the youth, but in other circles as well. In addition, even if it carries, the connotations of modernity, being urban, and being non-traditional (Spitulnik 1999 in Kiessling & Mous 2004: 304), it lacks inherent, far-reaching linguistic manipulations that make it unintelligible to those who are not initiated (Spitulnik 1999 in Kiessling & Mous 2004: 304). Furthermore, because *Lingala Facile* acts as an interethnic bridge, designed to be understood by all – the maker of JTLF even makes a point out of this –, its vocabulary changes at a slower rate than that of other UYLs. The paradox lies in that the wider the application of an UYL, the less it belongs to the group of UYLs. A wide application hampers rapid change, a characteristic of UYLs. This reinforces the idea that words cannot originate in *Lingala Facile*, but that they are merely spread by it. *Lingala Facile*’s form and wide application, thus, amount to its inability to project (new) identities. Both, its vocabulary and its neutral identity, impede *Lingala Facile* to be a full member of the UYL.

Yet, even if I will not view *Lingala Facile* as an UYL, it does lean towards *Kindoubil* far more than the average urban language does towards its respective Urban Youth Language. This double nature of *Lingala Facile*, not being an UYL, but spreading words that belong to UYLs, can be best understood in “qualities of simultaneity in the language use itself” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 315). The language use in the televised news broadcasting is bivalent. Bivalency entails that there are words or segments that in their usage could belong equally to more than one linguistic system (Woolard 1999). This is often the case in Creole situations or between cognate languages (Woolard 1999: 9), such as between *Lingala Facile* and *Kindoubil*, as we will see hereunder (cf. malewa).

²³⁸ http://www.brazzaville-adiac.com/index.php?action=depeche&dep_id=39075&cat_id=5&oldaction=home®pay_id=0 Viewed on 05.05.2011

²³⁹ I would like to refer the reader to Pype’s article “Visual media and political communication: reporting about suffering in Kinshasa” (2011) for more information on JTLF, its link to Kabila and, particularly, its articulation of suffering and its potential to bring about political action.

Moreover, because the two languages are spoken in the same city, youngsters who make use of the UYL are also fluent in the vehicular *Lingala Facile*. As such “[u]rban youths operate in two different speech communities: the community of youth language, and that of the base language and the dominant surroundings” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 314). To use Silverstein’s terms, as Kiessling & Mous do, urban youths operate in a speech community, that of *Kindoubil*, and in a language community, that of *Lingala Facile*. Distinguishing between the two communities “has the advantage that we can deal with an intricately complex situation in which speakers use different norms at different moments in time, and, in doing so, are able to mark their position in society as they see fit to express it in the circumstances obtaining at the moments of speaking” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 314).

If I would abide to the linear logic of the spectrum, I would proceed by the analysis of the (*Downtown*) *Kindoubil*. The unclear boundaries between the types, however, impede me to do so; instead, I will jump to the other end, that of in-group identity and expound, in what follows, *Inverted Kindoubil*.

5. Kindoubil ya kozongela or Inverted Kindoubil



Figure 26. Children in Bahema, Mangobo – Photo by Virginia Paradinas

On the other end, opposing vehicularity, stands *Inverted Kindoubil*. If because of its vehicular role, *Lingala Facile* locates itself in the centre of town, *Inverted Kindoubil* is spoken at its very outskirts, in the problematic Mangobo district. This district is characterised by a high rate of unemployment, a young population (Figure 26), a high degree of rural immigration and by a lack of infrastructure (no electricity, mud house, no pavement and so forth, Figure 27). Add up unemployed youngsters to a deficient infrastructure and it will result in gang formation and violence;²⁴⁰ but also in new creations such as *Inverted Kindoubil*.

²⁴⁰ Until today many people see the inhabitants of Mangobo as problem makers. During my stay, the situation was deemed to have quiet down. Fieldwork notes diary (39) on 24.01.10 Vendredi à Ngobart : The gangs, even if in a less aggressive form, still exist, there are five: États-Unis, Ligue Arabe, Chine Populaire, Katamoto et Bourgeois.



Figure 27. Maman Esther in her backyard at the outskirts of Kisangani

The main characteristic of *Inverted Kindoubil* is, as its name suggests, inversion. Inversion or metathesis of syllables amounts to the “well-known process of syllable swopping” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 324). This is not atypical in urban Africa and Kiessling & Mous illustrate metathesis by means of some examples in Camfranglais, an UYL spoken in Cameroon. Sami (29) an inhabitant of Lugbuara neighbourhood in Mangobo and a fluent *Inverted Kindoubil* speaker, defines it as follows:²⁴¹

Kindoubil eza kozongela biloko oyo tolobaka nde sikoyo na Lingala. “Nakei,” bon sikoyo nakei, neti eza kaka deux mots, moyen ya kozongela yango eza té, epesa nde “nakei.” Biso sikoyo soki tolingi toloba “nakei,” toloba yango soki na Français: “Najebu.” Donc –jebu wana eza nakei. Mais soki olingi oloba eloko moko mosusu neti Kindoubil que non “ndenge nini?” Biso tolobaka sikoyo “ngende nini?” Sikoyo ozozongela, tozongela makambo ozoloba.

-- o --

Kindoubil is to invert the things we say in Lingala. “Nakei” [‘I’m gone’], well, “nakei,” for instance consists only of two words [read: syllables]²⁴², it cannot be inverted, it gives “Nakei”. Now, if we want to say “nakei,” we will say it in French: “Najebu.” Thus the –jebu is nakei. But if you want to say something else in Kindoubil, like “ndenge nini?” [‘how are you?’] We say “ngende nini?” There is where you invert, we invert the things we say.

As can be already deduced from this first example, *Inverted Kindoubil* involves a lot more than just automatic inversion; it is the result of continuous, conscious and far-reaching linguistic manipulations. To better understand it, I have chosen to analyse Inverted Kindoubil according to the number of syllables in the roots of its words. Following this division, three categories arise: (1) monosyllabic roots, (2) disyllabic roots and (3) polysyllabic or longer roots. I will discuss the categories from the most to the least

²⁴¹ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

²⁴² Nakei consist out of two syllables, but its root is monosyllabic. This is important for the discussion hereunder.

recurrent, starting off with disyllabic roots, as they are the least problematic and the most common.

1) Disyllabic roots

Lingala	Kombo na ngai Sami
Inverted Kindoubil	Mbo-ko na yi-nga Mi-sa ²⁴³

This sentence is translated as ‘my name is Sami’. Every word in it is neatly inverted, that is the first and the second syllable swop places. Metathesis respects the Lingala (and more generally, the Bantu) syllable structure (N)CV, whereby the nasal precedes the consonant, instead of following the vowel, giving mbo-ko instead than the more intuitive, for speakers of European languages at least, *bo-kom. Hereunder another example:²⁴⁴

Lingala	Ofandaka wapi?
Inverted Kindoubil	O-ndiv-aka pi-wa?
	2SG-inverted –fanda-HAB inverted wa-pi

Ondivaka piwa? is translated as ‘where do you (usually) live?’ While the pronominal prefix *o-* and tense suffix *-aka* of the verb remain in place, the root of the verb is inverted. It consists out of two syllables: *fa-* and *-nd(a)*. The root *-vanda*, with the voiced labio-dental fricative, is an alternative to *-fanda*.²⁴⁵ In the inverted form this alternative is preferred. The *-i-*, I believe, uncovers the underlying thinking procedure: the speakers inverse the present perfect form *ofandi* into *o-ndiva* and only then add the habitualis (recurrent present) suffix *-aka*. The *-i-* also aids the pronunciation in a row of consonants. The syllables of *wapi* are swopped to give *piwa*.

2) Monosyllabic roots

Words of which the roots consist out of only one syllable, and, hence, which cannot be inverted, such as ‘*nakei*’ in the first example, are obscured by using other forms, often derived from interference. In line with monolectal code-switching, these terms are not ‘foreign’ and, thus, follow the same logic, and are divided according to the same syllable structure, as their Lingala counterparts: They too are inverted. Such is the case with the above-mentioned ‘*nakei* - *najebu*’:²⁴⁶

Lingala	Nakei
Inverted Kindoubil	Na-jebu
	1SG-inverted root: bou-ger

²⁴³ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala with Sami

²⁴⁴ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala with Sami and Notebook (126) on 03.02.2010 Kindoubil vocabulary by Cele Kaniki.

²⁴⁵ I am grateful to Constance Kutsch Lojenga for pointing this out.

²⁴⁶ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala with Sami

Najebu, Kindoubil for *nakei* is translated as ‘I am gone’, or even ‘I am going’.²⁴⁷ *Na-* is the Lingala pronominal prefix of the first person singular. *-jebu* is the inverted form of *bujé*, which is derived from the French verb *bouger* (to move). Metathesis is not the only linguistic manipulation here. The meaning of *bouger* shifts from ‘to move’ to ‘to go’. As the language evolves, more than one phonotactic manipulation is applied to the ‘original’ form. The already inverted root *-jebu* is, consequently, truncated (Stommy uses the word ‘diminutive’ instead of truncation) to *-je*. The result is quite different from the original, the manipulation knows multiple stages and is far reaching. Sami and Stommy comment (utterances in Kindoubil are typed in SMALL CAPITALS, their translation in Lingala by Sami is in *italics*):²⁴⁸

“*Okei wapi?*” Sikoyo biso tolobaka pe “OJE PIWA?” [...] “OJE PIWA?” Donc diminutif ya bouger.
-- o --

“*Okei wapi?*” (Where are you going?) Now we also say “OJE PIWA?” (Where are you going?)
[...] “OJE PIWA?” (Where are you going?) Thus, the diminutive of bouger (to move).

Thus:

Lingala	Okei wapi?
Inverted Kindoubil	Oje piwa?
	2SG-truncated inverted root: bou-ger inverted wa-pi

Other examples are: ²⁴⁹

Lingala	Yaka nano!
Inverted Kindoubil	Névé nona!
	inverted imperative Ve-nez inverted na-no

Névé nona! means ‘Come now!’ or ‘Come here!’ *Koya* is the Lingala infinitive of the verb to come, the root of which consists only of one syllable, *-ya*. In the imperative form, monosyllabic verbs in Lingala take *-ka*. The inverted form **kaya* is deemed too transparent and therefore the French *venez*, which is the plural or polite imperative of *venir* and consists of two syllables, is preferred as a base. *Venez* is inverted to give *névé* and the syllables of *nano* are swopped to give *nona*. Extended verbal forms, for instance when the root takes an suffix, reveal that Inverted Kindoubil has its basis in Lingala (Facile). In the following example the applicative suffix *-el-* is added to the already inverted root *névé*. *Yela ngai* or *Nevele inga* are translated into ‘bring (to) me’:²⁵⁰

Lingala	Yela ngai!
Inverted Kindoubil	Neve-l-e inga!

²⁴⁷ Meeuwis names this tense the *Antérieur 1*, which more or less overlaps (in the case of ‘dynamic’ verbs such as ‘to go’) with the present perfect tense.

²⁴⁸ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

²⁴⁹ Notebook (108) on 22.01.2010 – informant Gaston

²⁵⁰ Interview held on 18.01.2010 with Sami in Lingala

Inverted root-applicative-final

3) Too obvious disyllabic roots

The same strategy that is applied to monosyllabic roots, also applies to other words, which, if inverted, are still too transparent and easily understood. These, often, disyllabic roots, need to be ‘obscured’ too. Sami and Stommy comment (utterances in Kindoubil are typed in SMALL CAPITALS, their translation in Lingala by Sami is in *italics*):²⁵¹

Eza pe na biloko mosusu totia yango na kati. Neti olingi kolobela mutu “tala,” biso sikoyo tolobaka “RÉ.” C’est que “RÉ” wana nde elobi “tala.” Soki azongelaka mutu ayoka, po bayebi. Totia pe bamots mosusu oyo mpenza mutu acomprendre té. Okoki kolobela mutu “RÉ NONA,” eza kaka bamots moko ekokota na kati: “RÉ NONA” “tala nano.”

-- o --

There are also things we put inside. Like if you want to say to someone “tala” (look), well we will say “RÉ” (look). That “RÉ” means “tala.” Because if you invert it they will understand it, because they know. We add other words, those that others won’t understand at all. You can say to someone “RÉ NONA” (look now), those are just words that will become part of it, “RÉ NONA,” [in stead of] “tala nano” (look now).

Re nona! means ‘look here!’ or ‘look now!’ and replaces the too-straightforward inversion of the Lingala imperative *tala!* (look!) which would come down to **lata!* Instead, the form *re* is used, of which I could not trace its etymology, presumably a truncation of the French verb *regardez* (look!). Another example is:²⁵²

Lingala	Ndenge nini?
Inverted Kindoubil	Ngen-de ni-ka?
	inverted nde-nge ni- ~~ni~~ + ka

Ngende nika?, Kindoubil for *Ndenge nini?*, literally ‘which way’ and is used to ask ‘how are you?’ Once again the main manipulation is metathesis. The metathesis respects the Bantu syllable structure, the nasal precedes the consonant, instead of following the vowel. *Nde-nge* is transformed into *nge-nde*. The inversion of *ni-ni* results in *ni-ni*. In order to obscure it, it is first truncated, *ni-*, and then attached to an empty suffixation *-ka*, the result is *ni-ka*. Yet another example resulting from far reaching linguistic manipulation is:²⁵³

Lingala	Ozosala nini?
Inverted Kindoubil	O-ref-eki nini?
	2SG-root inverted faire-PAST1

Orefiki nini is translated as ‘What are you doing?’ Instead of the more straightforward *Olasaka nini?*, where *-sala* is inverted to give *-lasa*, Kindoubil speakers recur to the inverted from of the French verb *faire*, i.e. *ref-*. Once again, the underlying form here is not the

²⁵¹ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

²⁵² Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala with Sami and Notebook (126) on 03.02.2010 Kindoubil vocabulary by Cele Kaniki.

²⁵³ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

present continuous **ozofaire* nor the habitualis *osalaka*, but something between the present perfect and the simple past tense.²⁵⁴ Once again, the underlying thinking procedure seems to take place in the present perfect form (as in *ondivaka*), resulting *-eki* instead of *-aka*. The translation, though, corresponds to the present continuous tense. The tenses in *Inverted Kindoubil* seem to overlap more often than their Lingala counterparts. Not only verbal forms, but also substantives are obscured, if too transparent:²⁵⁵

Lingala	Nazali malade na ndako
Inverted Kindoubil	na-liza-ki delema na lepa
	1SG-inverted root to be-PAST1 inverted malade inverted palais

Nalizaki delema na lepa means ‘I was sick at home’. *Nalizaki* is, again, an inverted verbal form based on the underlying anterior 1 form *nazali*—hence the *li*.²⁵⁶ In agreement with the suffix *-aki*, the totality is translated by the simple past tense. *Delema* is a polysyllabic word and will be discussed further on. *Lepa* is the inverted form of the French *palais* (palace) and is used to replace *ndako* (house), or in its inverted form **konda*. *Lepa* is not only the result of metathesis, but is also a hyperbole, another manipulation that is frequently found in UYLs (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 325–326).

The disyllabic root of the verb ‘to be’, *ko-zala*, is made unintelligible by truncation too. *Ezali* (there is) inverted gives *eliza*, which truncated amounts to *eli*. In its negative form, the result of *ezali té* (there is not) is the garbled *eligwé*. Take, for instance, the following example:²⁵⁷

Lingala	Masta, moyen ya kokende kuna eza té, nalembí.
Inverted Kindoubil	Stama, yemwa ya kozega naku eligwé, nambilé.

The translation of this sentence reads as follows: ‘My friend, there is no way I’ll go there, I’m tired’ or ‘My friend, I cannot go there, I’m tired’. *Masta*, derived from the English *Master*, in the meaning of friend, is inverted following the Bantu syllable logic to give *Stama*. *Yemwa* is the inverted *moyen*, and follows here not only the Lingala syllable structure, but also the Lingala phonology. *Ko-zega* is a synonym of *ko-jebu* or to go (*kokende* in Lingala). It is the inverted form of *ko-gazé*, which belongs to the vocabulary of the other *Kindoubil*. The syllables of *kuna* are swopped to give *naku*. *Eligwé* is the unrecognisable form of *ezali té*, ‘there is not’. And *nambilé* is the inverted form of the dysyllabic *nalembí*. Note how, in the case of *nambilé-nalembí*, even if the syllables are inverted, the tonality, at the suprasegmental level, seems to remain unchanged.

²⁵⁴ Meeuwis names the simple past tense ‘Past 1’.

²⁵⁵ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

²⁵⁶ The anterior 1 form of static verbs, such as ‘to be’ is translated by the simple present tense.

²⁵⁷ Notebook (109) on 22.01.2010 – informant Gaston

4) Polysyllabic words

Words that consist of roots that have more than two syllables are seen to be problematic:²⁵⁸

Ezalaka sikoyo na bamots mosusu, ezalaka neti mwa molai, moyen ya kozongela yango mingi mpenza eza té.

-- o --

There are also other words, they are a bit long, there isn't really a way to invert them.

There is not one correct way to invert long words. Just like in Kilungunya, a secret language spoken in and around Bunia, some 800 kms Northeast of Kisangani, the syllable reversal process in polysyllabic words is not uniform (Kutsch Lojenga 2009: 3). In fact, at times they are even not inverted at all. As we were sitting under a hut, discussing the different forms in *Kindoubil*, while waiting for the rain to stop in order to continue our walk, Gaston said:²⁵⁹

Lingala
Inverted Kindoubil

Matope eza makasi
Topema elí kasima

'There is too much mud.' Then he added that *matope*, originally a Swahili word, can be inverted to give *topema*, but also *mapeto*.²⁶⁰ The same goes for *makasi*, which is inverted to give *kasima* and also *masika*. In the same logic, Sami inverts *malewa* (rice and beans) in terms of *lewama* and *Mangobo* in terms of *Ngobama*.

The first mode of inverting polysyllabic words is by pushing the first syllable, which in many cases coincides with the noun class-prefix, to the end. Were every syllable to receive a number, the sequel 1-2-3 would become 2-3-1. This kind of metathesis is applied in *tope-ma*, *kasi-ma*, *lewa-ma* and *Ngoba-ma*. A second way of inverting syllables is done by keeping the noun class-prefix in the first position and then to swop, similar to what is done in verbs, the syllables of the root, i.e. the second and the third syllables, the sequel 1-2-3 becomes 1-3-2. *Masika* and *mapeto* are examples hereof.

When I further inquired whether **walema* was a possible metathesis of *malewa*, Sami replied reluctantly that it was possible,²⁶¹ but the examples he would provide me would not follow this 'full' inversion, that is when the 1-2-3 becomes 3-2-1. Likewise, Gaston did not come up with the fully inverted **sikama* or **petoma*. A full inversion seemed out of order. Then again, a couple of weeks later, I met up in front of Salon Victoire, a prestigious hairdresser's

²⁵⁸ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala with Sami

²⁵⁹ Notebook (109) on 22.01.2010

²⁶⁰ Mapeto is Swahili and not Lingala for mud. Mud in Lingala is potopoto. This proves Kisangani's bilingualism, where mapeto here is considered as Lingala, or at least as a bivalent word.

²⁶¹ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

downtown, with a young man named Cele Kanika.²⁶² Cele Kanika grew up in Mangobo, but lives nowadays in the centre of town. He speaks *Inverted Kindoubil*. In contrast to Sami and to Gaston, Cele does seem to use the ‘full’ inversion for polysyllabic words, such as *malamu* (good), which he inverts to *mulama*, or in the following sentence:²⁶³

Lingala	Ozali na masoko munene
Inverted Kindoubil	Oli na ko-so-ma ne-ne-mu

In this sentence, translated as ‘you have big buttocks,’ the polysyllabic words, and not only their roots, are inverted syllable by syllable. Beautiful, in Lingala *kitoko*, is the last example. When, playfully I tried to invert it, I said **kotoki*, but was immediately corrected by Sami, *Tokiko*, he said. In *tokiko*, the sequel 1-2-3 becomes 2-1-3 and does not respond to any of the potential metatheses put forward above... In the table hereunder, I present the possible sequels of inversion for polysyllabic words:

	2-3-1	1-3-2	3-2-1	2-1-3
matope	to-pe-ma	ma-pe-to		
makasi	ka-si-ma	ma-si-ka		
malewa	le-wa-ma		wa-le-ma	
masoko			ko-so-ma	
kitoko				to-ki-ko

Figure 28. Possible inverted sequels for polysyllabic words

With regard to *malewa*, Sami explains (utterances in Kindoubil are typed in SMALL CAPITALS):²⁶⁴

Eza na bamots mosusu ya trois, neti ‘malewa’ [...] donc soki olingi kozongela, okobanda na WALEMA, mais bamots mosusu ya trois tokoloba kaka LEWAMA, écomplicaka pé wana. Mais ata soki olobi kaka bongo, mutu akoyeba, ayebi déjà que non alobi ‘malewa’.

-- o --

There are words of three, like ‘malewa’ [...] thus if you want to invert, you will begin with WALEMA, but other words we will just say LEWAMA, it complicates it also. But even if you just say so [WALEMA], the person will understand, s/he will understand that you have said ‘malewa’.

While I did find a logic behind the disyllabic and monosyllabic roots, I failed to do so with polysyllabic words. Maybe there is no strict logic needed for these words, except for giving

²⁶² Many of the youngster who work at Salon Victoire come from Mangobo, it is said that Kindoubil is often heard there.

²⁶³ Notebook (126) on 03.02.2010

²⁶⁴ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

preference to the least intelligible form. For the time being, my hypothesis reads as follows: long words are inverted according to a less strict logic, hence the variations. Because they only represent a minority, it does not seem the lack of a clear rule is a major concern. The ultimate goal is always unintelligibility to the outsiders. Misunderstandings among *Kindoubil* speakers, in this case, seem out of order.

5) Encoded language

While based on Lingala, *Inverted Kindoubil* deviates to such an extent that “the outcome is incomprehensible for the uninitiated” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 303). When I asked Sami why he speaks it, he responded:²⁶⁵

Donc, eza neti langue moko oyo tolobaka pourquoi? Eza neti tolongwe awa Kisangani, tokende koseretrouver na mboka mosusu, ndenge bango balobaka neti Swahili, ou bien Français, Anglais, tokoloba bongo té. Biso ta mosusu tokoloba na Kindoubil, eza neti mwa maloba moko codé. Toloba kaka biso mibale nde toyoka. Mais mutu mosusu [ya pembeni] ayoka yango té.

-- o --

Thus, why do we speak this language? For example, if we leave Kisangani and we find ourselves in another place, just like they [the locals] will speak Swahili, or French, or English, we will not speak like that. We will speak in Kindoubil, it is a encoded language. We will speak and only the two of us will understand. Another person will not understand it.

Inverted Kindoubil reflects the desire to have a secret code that excludes outsiders (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 306), on the one hand, while on the other it creates group identity and marks difference from a dominant group (Hodge and Kress in Kiessling & Mous 2004: 313). That dominant group can be the older generations, the rural population that tends to live a more traditional way of life, the upper social classes or, generally speaking, the rest of society (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 313).

On a more concrete level, *Inverted Kindoubil* is used at the market to gain a price advantage or to signal a cover lie that pups up in a conversation, or to give a good impression to someone, etc... The wittiest and most amusing examples I came across involved flirting and women. Sami explains it with such grace that the anecdote bellow does not need any further explanation. Utterances in Kindoubil are typed in SMALL CAPITALS, their translation in Lingala by Sami is in *italics*. I hope in this way to translate Sami's words as vivid as possible. Picture three subjects, Sami, his friend Stommy and a girl, in the following situation: Stommy is talking with the girl when suddenly Sami arrives: ²⁶⁶

Sikoyo soki ayokaka té, ngai nalobelaka nde Stommy ta mosusu na Kindoubil. Neti yo boye, Stommy ayebaka Kindoubil, namoni kaka bino na baStommy, bon naye na ngai, par exemple place Stommy asalaka na ye na momy, nalobi na Stommy “AH MWA FILLE OYO ATAKO YINGA,”

²⁶⁵ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

²⁶⁶ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

donc moyen ya kolobela ye “*akoti ngai*,” “SAPE INGA MBOKO NA YÉ,” “*pesa ngai kombo na yé*.”
 Donc yo wana okofanda, ozoyoka tozolibana mais ozoyoka té, mais ye akopesa ngai “MBOKO NA
 YE TIKA,” donc “*Kati*” “TIKA” yo pe okokamwa nakoya na Kati comment? Mutu oyo ayebi
 kombo na ngai ndenge nini? Nakotuna “ANDIVAKA PIWA?” Wana sikoyo natuni “*afandaki
 wapi?*” Wana tokopesa coordonnées na yo 100% “ANDIVAKA NA POTSHO AWA” “*Tshopo*.” ...
 Heure moko nakolobela Stommy “yo tika nano,” nakosignalé na Kindoubil “*bima nano, tikela biso
 temps*.” Omona que heure moko Stommy alobi “nazoya”, oyo akoloba kaka nazoya c’est que
 nalobelaki ye déjà “MABI NANO KEMU KATI INGA, INGA NA ENA” wana nakobetela “*yo bima nano
 muke, tika ngai na ye tosolola*.” Omona kaka Stommy heure moko alobaki “Nazoya, nasomba nano
 eloko” Atiki mwana.

-- o --

Now if she doesn’t understand [Kindoubil], then I will talk to Stommy in Kindoubil. Just like
 you here, Stommy understands Kindoubil, I see both of you, well I come and, for instance,
 Stommy is with the girl, I will tell Stommy: “THAT GIRL PLEASES ME.” There is no way I can
 tell him “*I like her*,” “GIVE ME HER NAME,” “*give me her name*.” Thus you will sit in between, you
 hear us speak, but you don’t understand what we are saying, but he will give me “HER NAME IS
 TIKA” thus “*Kati*” “TIKA,” you will be astonished, “how can he know Katy?” I will ask “WHERE
 DOES SHE LIVE?” I asked “*where does she live?*” Stommy will give me your [full] address 100%
 “SHE LIVES HERE IN POTSHO,” “*Tshopo*” ... Then I will tell Stommy to leave us alone, I will tell
 him in Kindoubil to go, “*just go, leave us some time*”. You will see that Stommy will say suddenly
 “I’ll be back,” he says I’ll be back just because I already told him “GO FOR A BIT, LEAVE HER AND
 ME” there I told him “*you go for a while, leave the two of us alone so we can talk*.” You will just see
 that Stommy suddenly says “I’m coming, I have to buy something” and he will leave the girl
 behind.

Does this entail women do not speak *Inverted Kindoubil* at all? Not necessarily. A girl who
 grows up in Lugbuara, will pick up and understand *Inverted Kindoubil*, just like her male
 siblings and friends do. However, it cannot be denied that in UYLs “the role of boys is
 clearly more prominent than that of girls,” supposedly because girls “are more inclined to
 keep to the societal norm” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 317).

Just as other African UYLs, *Inverted Kindoubil* is characterised by rapid change, new
 additions and shifting meanings in order to keep its secretiveness. Rapidity does not only
 relate to change, but is also found in the language use itself and, even, the thinking process
 preceding the words. Sami explains, once again:²⁶⁷

Sikoyo tomona pé na rapidité ata eloko oyo ôloba nano té, mais ozozongela yango, donc na
 rapidité moko boye [...] Automatisation moko ekota na kati, ozozongela kaka mots.

-- o --

Now there is also speed even when you haven’t spoken yet, but you are inverting [in your
 head], thus so quickly [...] Automatism becomes part of it, you are just inverting words.

Linguistic manipulations, like the ones above, are “attractive because they add an element of
 competition, when used productively. One can gain extra prestige if one can produce them
 quickly” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 324). Competition and play are, as we will see later on,
 important characteristics in human behaviour and in line with Rojek’s view on leisure, they
 are “something that human beings need just as they need food, shelter, warmth, security and

²⁶⁷ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

production” (Rojek 1995: 175).

6. Kindoubil

Kindoubil ya mosusu sikoyo, ezosala yango kaka, c'est-à-dire sec ya Kindoubil. Ezosala té ya renversements, ezosala pe té ya kosangisa balangues, mais ezosala vraiment kaka Kindoubil ya kaka, neti vraiment une langue. Wana sikoyo, ezosala soki bino bodécouvrir yango, na bato moko balobaka yango boyekoli yango boyebi, neti toute une langue ya Kindoubil. Eza ni ya korenverser, eza ni ya kosala munoko ya mboka, mais eza seulement Kindoubil seulement, comme une langue.

-- o --

The other Kindoubil, it just does that, I mean, dry Kindoubil. It doesn't do inversions, it doesn't mix languages, but it is just really just Kindoubil, really like a language. There, if you discover it, there are people who speak it, you learn it, you know it, like a whole language of Kindoubil. It is not inverted, it doesn't use other Congolese languages, but it is just Kindoubil on its own, like a language.

- Sébastien²⁶⁸

After defining the two ends of the spectrum, *Lingala Facile* on the vehicularity end and *Inverted Kindoubil* on the in-group identity end, I will now turn to the remaining *Downtown Kindoubil*, or *Kindoubil* tout court. The position of *Kindoubil* is somewhat ambiguous. It shares characteristics with both, *Lingala Facile* and *Inverted Kindoubil*. Unlike other UYLs though, *Kindoubil* does not have one name, but many, and especially many attributes:

Lingala ya mbalabala (street Lingala), *Lingala ya kilo* (heavy Lingala), *sec ya Kindoubil* (dry Kindoubil), *Lingala ya Bakinois* (Lingala spoken by the Kinois or inhabitants of Kinshasa), *Lingala ya bashegues* (Street children Lingala) *Lingala ya bajeunes* (youngsters Lingala) and even *Lingala amélioré* (enhanced Lingala)

As I discussed above (cf. *Lingala Facile*), the line that separates *Kindoubil* from *Lingala Facile* is permeable. As such, there are words and expressions that originate in *Kindoubil* circles, but are then picked up and spread by musicians or the media and, consequently, start to be used by a bigger chunk of the population. At a certain moment in time, these words and expressions belong to both languages, *Kindoubil* and *Lingala Facile*, making them bivalent. Such is the case for *Malewa*. *Malewa* is bivalent because while being widespread, it was born out of linguistic manipulations that are typical for UYLs.

1) Dissemination: Malewa and Lingala Facile

²⁶⁸ Interview held on 14.12.2009 in Lingala



Figure 29. Caricaturising Malewa (by Roger Bamungu)²⁶⁹

Biliyaliya oyo ekomemela biso bapasi na sima té Nzambe! Biloko Ezangi esthétique!
Uhm solo mabe pembeni ya malewa boye...? Wapi service ya hygiène?

Masta ngai nalingaka malewa po eza na talo muke!
...Biso basali ya service ya hygiène tozali na makoki té! Makambo ya boye ekokaki kozala té!

-- o --

Hopefully this food won't bring us pain afterwards God! It lacks aesthetics!
Uhm such a bad smell that close to the malewa...? Where is the hygiene service?

My friend, I like malewa because it is cheap!
... We the workers of the hygiene services don't have any means! Things like this shouldn't be possible!

When Werrason brought out his album *Techno Malewa* in 2009, the song carrying the same title became one of the year's biggest hits, if not the biggest. *Malewa's* visceral lyrics best exemplify the vices and passions of the Congolese society today: pride, hate, envy, and idleness, ugliness, deformities, greed and sexual predation (Mbembe 2005/06: 78). Literally rice and beans, *Malewa* has come to designate any canteen on the roadside (Figure 29). Translated in Lingala to *loso na madesu* (rice and beans) and in Swahili to *wali na maharage* (rice and beans), it is from the latter that *malewa* is, supposedly, derived.²⁷⁰

By a combination of various processes of linguistic manipulation, that are typical to UYLs, *wali* and *maharage* add up to *malewa*. The starting point is *wali na maharage* collocated in that particular order. A collocation is any habitually linked group of words, a kind of lexical

²⁶⁹ Taken from the article entitled "Ruée sur les malewa au mépris de l'hygiène" in Journal Mongongo (12) 31.01.2010

²⁷⁰ Notebook (47) on 24.11.2009

partnership, which is specific to a given language.²⁷¹ The manipulations, applied in the following example, are of phonotactic nature. To begin with, the first and second syllables are inverted transforming *wali* into *li-wa* (as in *Inverted Kindoubil*); this process is linguistically referred to as syllabic metathesis (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 324). Consequently, *maharage* is truncated – by *truncation* the number of syllables of a word is cut down– to give the syllable *ma*.²⁷² A second metathesis then takes place, *wali* + *ma* is reverted to *ma* + *liwa*. Finally, the position of the vowel in the second syllable is lowered to *e*, presumably for an easier pronunciation.

wa <-> li metathesis	+	ma-harage truncation
li-wa	<-> metathesis	ma
ma	+	liwa i → e
ma	+	lewa

Linguistic strategies do not only include the form but also the meaning (Kiessling and Mous 2004: 325-326). By shifting from ‘beans and rice’ to ‘a canteen on the roadside’ or even just ‘eating outdoors,’²⁷³ *malewa* undergoes a semantic manipulation, that of metonymy, whereby a part or attribute of something, in this case a specific dish, refers to the bigger totality, in this case to a canteen, to which the part, i.e. the dish, belongs.

Most of the terms sung in lyrics remain within the boundaries of *Kindoubil*. However, there are some, like *malewa* that trespass the limits of in-group speech and are diffused among a large section of the population, transgressing social classes, generations and even the city – *mboka* dichotomy (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 313). Before Werrason brought out his song, the term *malewa* was not in use, the song diffused this term to such an extent that nowadays I dare to say that every Boyomais uses *malewa* in his vocabulary, or at least understands what is meant by it.

Since long, music has been a carrier and disseminator of new linguistic forms. Musicians have the tradition to inject their songs with slang expressions derived from what Mbembe calls, ‘words invented and adapted from different languages, local and foreign’ (2005/06: 80).

²⁷¹ In English, for instance, one would say ‘salt and pepper’ rather than *‘pepper and salt’. Similarly, in Swahili, one says ‘wali na maharage’ instead of *‘maharage na wali’.

²⁷² I am fully aware that *ma-* is also the class 6 prefix in both Lingala and Swahili. However, my respondents related *ma-* to *maharage* and not to class 6, therefore I have deliberately chosen to do the same.

²⁷³ Fieldwork notes diary (48) on 22.02.2010: When I arrived in Kinshasa, I remarked that the use of *Malewa* did not only correspond to a street restaurant, but, more generally, to eating outside the house. Guy and JC explained, however, that eating at a friend’s house is not considered as eating at a *malewa*, because one is not paying for one’s food.

Such was the case of Franco who in the 1950s, ‘through his repeated use of *ndumba* – Lingala for unmarried woman – to suggest a woman of loose moral character or a prostitute, rendered the word’s original meaning obsolete’ (Stewart 2003: 77). And such is the case of Werrason, today, who introduced the term *malewa* to the Congolese vocabulary.

Next to music, the media, too, plays the role of disseminator. In the case of *Kindoubil*, the last years, this role has been taken up, as we saw above, by the news broadcasting *Journal télévisé en lingala facile* (JTLF). JTLF reaches most of its spectators through television, but it also has its own website with links to Youtube videos of its broadcasts.²⁷⁴ This points towards a “stylization in the media and the creation of new genres, such as “dictionaries” of emblematic neologisms published on the Internet,” which in the eyes of Kiessling & Mous demonstrates “the self-awareness (consciousness) of users about their code” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 317) and is typical for UYLs.

The position of JTLF is somewhat ambiguous. It leans towards *Kindoubil* far more than the average urban language does towards its respective UYL. As such, this broadcasting is bivalent and, in my view, the makers of JTLF and its spectators are to be found on two different levels. By consciously pumping new expressions into the Kinshasa vocabulary, the makers of JTLF project a conscious identity and utilize *Lingala Facile* in terms of an UYL. On the other hand, the spectators become implicit disseminators of some of the neologisms, which become part of the day-to-day vocabulary of the city; in this case, *Lingala Facile* leans towards its urban language nature, in which communication is the principle goal. The boundaries between the different urban variants of Lingala, and in particular between *Lingala Facile* and *Kindoubil*, are, yet again, not crystal clear.

In this way, it is not contradictory that I found *match eza WOooo*, as we will see hereunder, an expression I first heard from Bijou’s mouth, on the website of *Lingala Facile*. The following table (Figure 30) was taken from JTLF website. Note that *match eza WOooo* is the seventh subtitle top downwards:²⁷⁵

JOURNAL TV LF THEMATIQUE
• Impact na Ideologie
• Ba vrai Boules
• Trophée Kitendi - la Sape
• Kokamwa - Insolite
• Zacle contre Zacle
• Piolo Pio Piooo

²⁷⁴ <http://www.lingalafacile.com/>

²⁷⁵ <http://www.lingalafacile.com/> on 15.05.2011. I later found an African/ American hip hop song by Hugo Million with the same title: <http://hugomillion-online.bandcamp.com/track/match-eza-wo-victory> on 15.06.2011

• Match eza WOooo
• Match eza Mabe
• Ekoyinda
• Bondimela Ngayi - 5 Chantiers
• Actualites - Lokole Elela
• Masese - Nakobimela Wapi ?
• Decouvrez notre Album Photos
• Historique du JTLF
• Lokole Elela
• Telechargements

Figure 30. Theme Menu on the website of *Lingala Facile*

While I cannot permit myself to dig into the details of every subtitle, I would like to point towards the fact that most of them are the result of linguistic manipulations characteristic of UYLs. By employing these expressions, the makers of *Lingala Facile* turn them into the potential lexicon of a wider public –the city; and through the Internet, into the potential lexicon of, beyond the borders of Congo, the Congolese Diaspora worldwide.

2) WOooo: a second approach to the origin of words

I will now (re)turn to the origin of *Kindoubil*. In historical terms, one would have to find the roots of *Kindoubil* among the Bills in the Leopoldville of the 1950s. But *Kindoubil* is a rapid changing language, making an historical analysis somewhat unavailing. In this section, I will try to find, then, an answer to the following two questions: (1) Where do words originate? (2) Who are the innovators of new linguistic structures?

Pinpointing where a new word was first heard, is like trying to answer the question of the chicken or the egg. In an interview with Bijou, I came across the term *WOooo*,²⁷⁶ when I further enquired about it, Bijou responded:²⁷⁷

‘WOooo’ ça veut dire quand, tu vois, au match quand on a marqué, les gens crient ‘Wóóóóóóóó!!!’ Alors c’est ça. Ça se crée toujours et on ne sait pas qui crée quoi. C’est vrai que les stars, les artistes musiciens ils y sont pour beaucoup. Mais bon, il y a les shegues qui inventent, il y a tout le monde qui invente.

Toi, tu peux aussi inventer? Oui. Est-ce que les personnes vont commencer à utiliser tes mots?
Oui, oui ça va commencer dans ma clic, avec mes amis et et et c’est comme ça que ça va se répandre et ça peut prendre ampleur dans toute la cité, mais bon, on ne sait pas que c’est moi qui aie commencé ça, peut-être, alors que peut-être c’est toi.

-- o --

‘WOooo’ it means when, you see, in a [*soccer*] game when someone scores, people scream ‘Wóóóóóóóó!!!’ So that’s it. It is always created and one doesn’t know who creates what. It is

²⁷⁶ According to Pype, *Kindoubil* is characterised by, among others, football metaphors (2011: 643 note 5). The phrase *Match eza mabe*, as in the menu above for instance, literally ‘this is a bad game’, means: this is bad, things should change.

²⁷⁷ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

true that stars, musicians play a big role. But well, *shegues* invent, everybody invents.

Can you also invent? Yes. So, people will start using your words? Yes, yes, it will start within my click, among my friends and and and that is how it will spread and grow all over the suburbs, but well, people will not know it was me who started it, maybe, well maybe it was you.

According to Bijou, anyone can ‘invent’ new words. It is not an individual process but one that takes place among a group of people. Erik Yakuza seems to corroborate this vision.

When I enquired what he understood under *Kindoubil* he responded:²⁷⁸

C'est un Lingala ya bajeunes misusu eza na argot na kati, baargots yango pe ekoki kozala fixé té que non à partir lelo eloko tel nde ekomi tel. Non, ekoki kozala fixé té. Mais bato bakoki kocréer, ils peuvent créer, mutu na mutu acréer na ndenge na ye, mais tango bokokutana, tango que ozoyoka oyo azoloba okoki ocomprendre que ah il a voulu dire ça, alingaka koloba boye, mais ekoti déjà na ndenge ya argot.

-- o --

It is a Lingala of youngsters, it has slang within it, that slang is not static, say from today onwards this thing means that. No, it cannot be fixed. But people can create, they can create, everyone creates in his own way, but when you meet, when you hear what he says, you can understand that ah he wanted to say this, he wanted to say that, but it already entered in the fashion of slang.

The question, then, is not so much who invented a word, as it happens in a group, but rather in what circumstances it was invented and, especially, whether it will be able to gain impetus or not. When I asked Sami, in relation to *Inverted Kindoubil*, how he learned it, he responded:²⁷⁹

Bon nayekoli kaka neti tozalaka kaka bacôte oyo, bato ebele kaka balobaka na bango kaka Kindoubil wana. Heure koseka koyekolana neti nyoso [...] Côté oyo biso bajeunes tolobaka kaka mingi mingi na Kindoubil. Bana basi pe balobaka. *Katikati na ndako?* Eh, bayebi mais na ndako tolobaka té, tolobaka nde mwa libanda.

-- o --

Well, I just learned it, just as we are in this side of the city, many people speak Kindoubil among themselves. We teach one another when we're joking around [...] In this side of the city, we youngsters speak a lot a lot in Kindoubil. Women also speak it. *At home?* Eh, they know, but we don't speak it at home really, we speak it more outdoors.

Even though Sami refers to *Inverted Kindoubil*, this question and subsequent answer apply to our discussion as well. Being both UYs, *Inverted Kindoubil* and *Kindoubil* share the characteristic of rapid change and ascertain youth's creativity. The innovators are not so much one person, but rather a group of people, mainly youngsters. The location of innovation lies outside, in the streets. Play and fun are both important components. In addition, in line with Bijou and according to Stommy, there seems to be an element of, perhaps, luck, expressed in terms of impetus:²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Interview held on 01.12.2009 in Lingala

²⁷⁹ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

²⁸⁰ Interview held on 18.01.2010 in Lingala

Mais eza na bato mosusu bameka ko, kocréer style ya Kindoubil na bango, mais en fait ezwa mpenza élan té.

-- o --

But there are others who try to, to create their style of Kindoubil, but actually it doesn't really gain impetus.

Words that gain this impulse become part of the *Kindoubil* vocabulary; the ones that do not, remain within the boundary of a group of friends. One could say it is a story of success. The closest I came to innovators of *Kindoubil*, was while strolling around the streets of Bahema, in Mangobo, with Gaston and Sébastien (both inhabitants of Mangobo, Gaston of the Bahema neighbourhood and Sébastien of Matete). After spending the whole morning together, talking about the weather and about *Kindoubil*, Gaston and Sébastien started to continuously express themselves in terms of “12” douze (pronounced /duz/ as twelve in French):²⁸¹

Douze, ngai namoni boye
My friend I see it like this.

Douze na bino adouzaki awa
Our friend passed here.

Ozodouzé?
Do you understand?

Badouzes wana balingi badouze biso
Those guys want to mess with us

Soki mwasi adouze yo, comme ça bodouze na bino
If a girl flirts with you, then the two of you can leave alone

“12”, on that morning, January 22 2010, on our way back from a promenade, expressed at least six different meanings: “12” translated into ‘friend’, ‘to pass’, ‘to understand’, ‘to mess with’, ‘to flirt’ and ‘to leave.’ When I inquired why “12” could be applied in so many contexts, Gaston explained:²⁸²

Ata ya chiffres, ata ya lettres, toutilisé yango kaka.

-- o --

Even numbers, even letters, we just use it.

And Sébastien added:²⁸³

12 douze elobi nyoso tolingi
-- o --

12 means anything we want

²⁸¹ Notebook (110-113) on 22.01.2010

²⁸² Notebook (110) on 22.01.2010

²⁸³ Notebook (113) on 22.01.2010

“12” is one of the many examples of how new linguistic forms are created on the spot, spontaneously and playfully. It is used to exchange information that bystanders are not ought to understand. This is exactly what Chia and Gerbault mean by the *raison d’être* of UYLs: “the desire to have a secret code that excludes outsiders, and at the same time the desire to laugh and have some fun” (Chia and Gerbault in Kiessling and Mous 2004: 306).

But not only “12” can carry a meaning, according to Gaston and Sébastien, the French cardinal numbers “13” and “19” do too; they respectively mean girl or and sir, mister or father. In like manner, the Kindoubil verb *kotreizer*, plausibly deduced from “13” (*treize*), means to trick someone. When I told Pa Nico about the bill I had to pay at the hospital, he commented teasingly:²⁸⁴

Omoni bavillageois bayaka na marché, ta mususu bazwi eloko, bakumba wana, tokanga bango, totreizé bango lar. Omoni ta mosusu bakangi bango, batieli bango infraction. Totrézé bakumba, bapolicier bakomona villageois balobi: “totrezé bakumba”. Kotreizé eza neti tokanga bango, tobimisa bango mbongo. Neti batreizé yo na hôpital générale.

-- o --

You see the villagers come to the market, they might buy something, those country bumpkins, we get them, we trick them their money. You see they can catch them and give them a fine. Let’s trick the country bumpkins, if the police see the villagers they say [to themselves]: “let’s trick country bumpkins”. *Kotreizer* means to trick someone, to catch them, to get out their money. Just like they tricked you at the hospital.

I encounter “13” in two different contexts. Yet these were not the only two times I heard the use of numbers in encoded speech. In one of his ‘descentes sur le terrain’ (descents into the field) to a military camp, Mutuya, a third year anthropology student, came across, among others, a dozen synonyms to code cannabis and expressions in the semantic field of smoking, but also across the use of numbers, in French, as a metaphor for something else, he writes:²⁸⁵

* 43 c-à-d bonjour!
 * 42 c-à-d twende ou partons masta
 * 10 sef etambola c-à-d il ordonne la circulation de la cigarette
 * Masta 10,25 ekomi c-à-d l’argent est arrivée
 * Masta to zui 12,22 c-à-d quand il y a l’infraction au sein de cet endroit; soit l’allumette se termine

-- o --

* 43 i.e. hello!
 * 42 i.e. let’s go [Swahili] or let’s go my friends [French]
 * let the 10 sef go around i.e. he commands the cigaret’s circulation
 * My friend 10,25 arrived i.e. the money arrived
 * My friend we got 12,22 i.e. when a transgression occurred at that place; or the lucifer dies out

Whether “12” will stick around, be picked up by others and, eventually will expand beyond

²⁸⁴ Interview held on 26.01.2010 in Lingala

²⁸⁵ Focus group - Cahier de la recherche – Quel rôle la Langue et le langage joue-t-il dans la construction d’une identité parmi les jeunes à Kisangani? – Réalisé par le chercheur: J.P.S. Mutuya Kabilengo

the conversations of Gaston and Sébastien, is still to be seen. It needs, to begin with, to be picked up by others too. Erik Yakuza, the rap musician, illustrates the ‘picking up’ in terms of *Ngobart*, a nickname for *Mangobo*:²⁸⁶

Je donne un exemple: Ngobart wana. C’est juste un création, esprit moko eye, non Ngobart, Mangobo, ozwi partie wana ya ma- otie pembeni, otiki Ngobo, obakisi –art na suka, Ngobart. Au fur et à mesure que ozoyebisa mutu “nakei Ngobart, nakei Ngobart,” mutu mosusu nde akotuna eza Kisangani ? Olobi té, Ngobart nde Mangobo té ? Ye pe akokanga yango, allez akomi pe kolobaka yango. Mutu mosusu pe soki atuni ye “oh mon cher owutaki wapi?” “té, nawutaki Ngobart.” Tu vois, il explique aussi à une autre personne à tel point que non mot wana ewuti koserépandre et puis etikali.

-- o --

I’ll give you an example: Ngobart. It is just a creation, inspiration comes, Ngobart, Mangobo, you drop the ma-, you leave the Ngobo, you add –art at the end, Ngobart. As and when you say to someone “I will go to Ngobart, I will go to Ngobart,” the other will ask is it Kisangani? You say it isn’t, Ngobart is Mangobo you see? He will also remember that, allez he starts to say it too. Another person if he asks him: “My friend where did you come from?” “I came from Ngobart.” You see, he explains to someone else too, until that word starts to expand and then it remains.

Music might take up the role of disseminator across geographic and social boundaries. However, before that, new forms need to arrive to musicians. The latter search in the streets, where lyrics arise. Lyrics echo the language that is being spoken outdoors, among friends who, in the need to play and laugh and to keep their message secret from bystanders create new forms, new words and new meanings. But lyrics also mirror the reality that is being lived outdoors, the reality of the *mal ville*, one of economic malaise and social frustrations, difficult living conditions of deprivation, unemployment, boredom, hunger, heat and illness (Gondola 1999: 44: note 2).

3) Form

Expressions that are taken from *Kindoubil* at first, then spread and finally integrated into a means of wider communication, leave the realm, even if not completely and only gradually, of *Kindoubil*. Along these lines, Pitshou, who sometimes follows the JTLF, differentiates between *Lingala Facile* and ‘our’ Lingala or ‘street’ Lingala, referring to *Kindoubil*.²⁸⁷

Lingala ya biso ya rue eza na différence ya oyo journal wâna.

-- o --

Our Lingala from the streets is different to the one in that news programme.

Even if constituted by a grey area, the boundary between *Lingala Facile* and *Kindoubil*, as claimed by Pitshou, exists. *Kindoubil*, in contrast to *Lingala Facile*, is not designed to bridge differences, nor is its main goal to transcend ethnicity. This is rather a side effect due to its

²⁸⁶ Interview held on 01.12.2009 in Lingala

²⁸⁷ Interview held on 26.10.2009 in Lingala.

link to modernity and urban status that dissociates *Kindoubil* from ethnic associations (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 316). *Kindoubil* is actually designed to create differences, i.e. to make its speakers stand out above the rest and create another identity. This is achieved by a “conscious effort of the speakers to manipulate their language use in order to create a new variety and thus to be different” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 318) and involves, first and foremost, the form, i.e. the various manipulations the lexicon undergoes.

Both *Kindoubil* share this creative aspect; examples of metathesis (or syllable inversion) and truncation (cutting down the number of syllables) have already been discussed extensively. Other examples are presented in the table hereunder:

	Kindoubil	Translation	Manipulation	Explanation
1.	Tshombo	Cell phone	Synecdoche (general for specific)	Tshombo is derived from the Swahili Chombo–Vyombo (cl.7/8) that means ‘device’ or ‘utensil’.
2.	Lar	Money	Truncation	<u>L’argent</u> : the French article and noun are viewed as one unit.
3.	Palais	House	Hyperbole	Palais means palace in French
4.	Ngobart	Mangobo	Truncation + affixation	The prefix (reminiscent of the class 6 prefix) is truncated. The same applies to the final -o. Instead, the dummy French suffix -art is added.
5.	Cadre	(sun)glasses	Metonymy	The shape of the glasses is associated with the object as a whole.
6.	Kodamé	To eat	Metaphor	Said to be derived from the game of checkers (‘jeu de dames’ in French). If you win, it entails you have ‘checked’ the opponent you have eaten him. The meaning is extended to ‘to eat’.
7.	Kobulé	To think	Metaphor	‘Ball,’ (boule in French) inside your head, stands for a thought. It then becomes the root of the verb to think.

Figure 31. *Linguistic Manipulations of Kindoubil*

Many of the above examples involve semantic manipulations. Kiessling & Mous define semantic manipulation as: “the farfetched extension or change of the meaning of words with the function of insult, ridicule, exaggeration, or simple enjoyment and play” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 324). These normal semantic processes such as the above synecdoche, hyperbole, metonymy and metaphor are often applied to “the extreme” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 324). Thus in example 1, for instance, *chombo* (device, utensil), a class of thing in Swahili, is used to refer to a smaller, more specific class, that of communication devices, and refers in *Kindoubil* to cell phone, *tshombo*.²⁸⁸ This manipulation is known as synecdoche.

²⁸⁸ The difference in spelling is purposeful. Chombo is the spelling according to the standard Swahili. Tshombo is the way how it would be spelled in Congo. Different transcriptions codes are used here, I have kept them to enhance the change in language, from Swahili to *Kindoubil*. Ch- or Tsh- refer to /tʃ/, i.e. the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate.

All the examples above incorporate and combine elements from different languages: Swahili, French with a Lingala base. Next to these languages, *Kindoubil*, just like other UYLs, finds its “way into the dominant language of the outside world” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 314), i.e. to English, as is attested below:

	Kindoubil	Translation	Explanation
8.	Nalové	I love	The verb ‘to love’ is turned into the root of the verb in <i>Kindoubil</i> with the same meaning: ko-lové. Its conjugation follows the Lingala norms.
9.	Nadayé	I die	The verb ‘to die’ is turned into the root of the verb in <i>Kindoubil</i> with the same meaning: ko-dayé. Its phonology and conjugation follows the Lingala norms.

Figure 32. English and Kindoubil

“In Africa,” Kiessling & Mous argue “a common feature of style of the youth culture is preoccupation with international culture and, in particular, American culture; hence, Ndou-Bill, Lingala ya ba-Yankee, and more generally, the incorporation of English words, even in Francophone countries” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 317). *Kindoubil* completes the list. The African youth, in contrast to the resistance-based cultural communities in Europe, do not take a defensive stance towards globalization, but rather towards tradition and rurality (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 332–333). In their process of identity building, African urban youth embrace globalization. This “reaction *towards* globalization,” implies according to Kiessling & Mous that African urban youth is “seeking access to and partaking in the possibilities and prospects of globalization and utilizing and incorporating elements, such as rap music and American English, that have become increasingly accessible in the course of developments caused by globalization” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 333).

The manipulation in meaning and form are subject to rapid change and constant renewal. “To speak the youth language well”, Kiessling & Mous write, “means to be aware of the latest norms” (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 314). This is why *Kindoubil* speakers need to know the latest songs. The rapid change and constant renewal account for the mounting secretiveness and, also, difficulty of *Kindoubil*. This language is branded as ‘hard’ or ‘difficult’ by many of its speakers,²⁸⁹ where difficulty needs to be understood in terms of ‘difficult to keep track with and of it.’

4. Unintelligible yet not unrecognisable?

Intricately linked to form, is the need for identification, the second big bastion that differentiates UYL from urban languages, and *Kindoubil* from *Lingala Facile*. The constant change and play that characterise the changes in form are mirrored in the need to be

²⁸⁹ Fieldwork notes diary (2) on 15.09.2009: Lingala makasi

different to others; i.e. to have another identity, one that stands out from the rest. Play and creativity are herein not only a basic human need, as we have seen before, but act as “a vital channel for expressing sociality and identity” (Rojek 1995: 187).

Under another identity, I do not necessarily mean one that stands in stark opposition to older generations, the rural population and the upper classes, but something along the lines of Castells’ ‘project identity’. In the context of power relationships, Castells defines ‘project identity’ as an identity form that allows social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural material available to them, to build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, to seek the transformation of overall social structure (Castells 1997 in Kiessling & Mous 2004: 313).

Together with other “metasigns” such as clothing, hairstyle, way of walking and other characteristic movements, and way of life (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 316), *Kindoubil* is an important constituent in the process of identity-building of its speakers. By constructing urban identities *Kindoubil* responds to the social need of survival in the city: it helps the town dweller to build his personality, to transcend boundaries and serves him as a stepping stone towards becoming someone by embodying civilisation, prestige and success.

Because *Kindoubil* is not a neutral language, but is immersed in covert prestige, it acts not only as a tool to build identities, but as a channel for expressing sociality as well. The use of *Kindoubil* places its speakers in their society. Those who speak it, do so, partly, to impress others, to gain prestige in the eyes of others. The prestige of *Kindoubil* is, thus, not only recognised –and used– by those who speak it, but also, even if reluctantly, by those who do not speak it. While the former are sometimes over-conscious about their language use (it is often a topic of conversation), the latter cannot pretend to not recognise its prestige. In this sense, the recognition of the prestige inherent to *Kindoubil* acts similarly to Bourdieu’s symbolic power: it can be only applied if recognised, i.e. unrecognised as arbitrary (Bourdieu 2001: 210).²⁹⁰

Many of the characteristics I have discussed in the last paragraphs are shared by both types of *Kindoubil*. Just as *Kindoubil*, *Inverted Kindoubil* is characterised by rapid changing linguistic manipulations, play, competition, self-awareness of the code and identification. Because there are individuals who speak the two types of *Kindoubil*, I could suggest that some words are bivalent, and if not, that *Kindoubil* often forms the base, rather than Lingala, out of which *Inverted Kindoubil* fishes and inverts. This bivalency partly accounts for their confusingly

²⁹⁰ My own translation from French: “Le pouvoir symbolique [...] ne s’exerce que s’il est reconnu, c’est-à-dire méconnu comme arbitraire.”

overlapping names. However, (*Downtown*) *Kindoubil* and *Inverted Kindoubil*, both UYLs, are not interchangeable, and their difference does not only concern their form, the latter being more extreme than the former, but also their degree of prestige, of secretiveness and in-groupness. These three elements, even though they touch upon different aspects, are intertwined.

Because *Inverted Kindoubil* is the language of the youth in a very specific location, i.e. in the Mangobo district in Kisangani, its scope, compared to that of the other *Kindoubil*, is restricted. In Bourdieu's terms, the former simply fails to be unrecognised as arbitrary, which implies that it is not recognised at all, or simply not understood by the uninitiated. Being not understood, the degree of secretiveness of *Inverted Kindoubil* is far higher than that of *Kindoubil*. Thus even if speakers of the latter are able to talk in code about something so that not everybody understands them, those who cannot partake in the conversation will at least recognise that *Kindoubil* is being spoken. This recognition grants *Kindoubil* prestige and more symbolic power, i.e. the "invisible" power that is "unrecognised" as such [as being invisible] and therefore "recognised" as being legitimate (Thompson's preface to Bourdieu's *Pouvoir Symbolique* 2001: 39-40).²⁹¹

Even though both *Kindoubil* are used to talk in code so as to exclude outsiders, secretiveness solely cannot account for the use of (*Downtown*) *Kindoubil*. This is because speakers of *Kindoubil*, who purposefully choose to differentiate themselves from others by speech, cannot afford to make themselves completely unintelligible, inasmuch as their status does only exist in contrast to non-*Kindoubil* speakers, but depends on the acknowledgement of these outsiders. It is a delicate balance between the degree of differentiation needed to gain as much prestige as possible, on the one hand, and the deadly eradication of the self in society by too much secretiveness, on the other. Here is where, I believe, *Kindoubil* differs from *Inverted Kindoubil* and distances itself from the in-group identity end of the spectrum: *Kindoubil* is not (only) about secretiveness, nor gang membership; but plays an important role in the building of prestigious urban identities that need to be recognised by others in society. What the purpose of these identities are, will be further discussed in chapter 6.

The main line separating the two types of *Kindoubil* is their degree of secretiveness and, accordingly, in-group identity. Even though both are closely linked to processes of identification and identity-building, the identity they want to embody is different. While *Inverted Kindoubil* embodies the identity of a concrete, well-defined group, that of the youngsters in Mangobo, the group to which *Kindoubil* refers is far less clear. The speakers of

²⁹¹ My own translation from French, quotation marks in the original: pouvoir « invisible » qui est « méconnu » en tant que tel et dès lors « reconnu » comme légitime.

Kindoubil have a common and shared identity because they speak *Kindoubil*, they do not, however, constitute a clear and unified group.

While the speakers of *Inverted Kindoubil* form a group, the speakers of *Kindoubil*, similarly to MacGaffey's traders and sapeurs, "do not constitute a 'class *for* itself. They are rather part of the unorganised broader category of a 'class *in* itself" (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 170, my highlight). Speakers of *Kindoubil*, unlike those in Mangobo, do not speak a secretive language that only they can understand, but speak a language that is partly understood, partly misunderstood by others and that "further[s] the interests of individuals who are in competition with one another" (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 170).

The class of *Kindoubil* speakers is an imaginary class of city dwellers over which there is no consensus. The meaning of this group is filled in by individual interpretations. What these individuals do share is a certain language usage and, with it, an "awareness of their class position and common class situation" (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 170). Anyone who believes to speak *Kindoubil* can subscribe to the tools available to the *Kindoubil* speakers. These tools allow the city dweller to transcend boundaries and to project himself on the desired, or dreamed, path of social becoming.

VI. The Sociology of Words

“In the Central African cultural universe which brackets the urban world, words have always had a tremendous power. In these autochthonous realities, one has to be able to manipulate the word, to know “what speaking means,” as Bourdieu would say, in order to exist socially.”

— De Boeck in *Kinshasa Tales of the Invisible City* 2004: 258

I. Introduction

In his pivotal monograph *How to do things with words* (1962), Austin observes “that every normal utterance has *both* a descriptive and effective aspect: that saying something is also doing something” (Sadock 2004: 54). In this chapter, I will be looking into the ‘effective’ rather than into the ‘descriptive’ aspect of speech, that is, how speech sets off actions that are loaded with symbolic power. I will focus on language as a tool and on its speakers who manipulate it in order to set off actions and to attain specific goals. What the language is and who the speakers are, should be of no surprise by now. In chapter 5 I extensively discussed Lingala and Kindoubil, in chapter 4 I presented the *Yankee*, and now it is time to link the one to the other, the persona to the language, and to analyse how and why the Yankee uses Kindoubil.

The starting point of this chapter is the condition of stagnation from which youngsters want to escape. In a first instance, I will provide a definition of adulthood in relation to the stagnation, or the *social moratorium* in Vigh’s words. If the *social moratorium* is the point of departure, the point from which youngsters want to escape, adulthood, on the other end, represents the point of arrival, “the realisation of the being” (Vigh 2006: 47) to which youngsters aim to belong.

The path to follow between the departure and arrival point is traced by language. Looking at language as an asset with an economic value will help elucidate how Kindoubil carries symbolic power and can be an effective tool. It is important to understand here that a language cannot be separated from its speakers. Kindoubil’s symbolic power, conversely, is not detached from its speakers, it is rather recreated and intensified because it is being spoken and recognised as valuable, or in Bourdieu’s words, misrecognised as arbitrary. By this logic, youngsters do not only use Kindoubil in order to present themselves as Yankees, but Kindoubil also changes and gains more value because it is used by Yankees.

The alternative path of social becoming and its endpoint –an attainable adulthood– run along the boundaries of the imaginary. In this context, the imaginary translates that which the Yankee is not, but desires to be – an adult. Through language the Yankee imagines himself being something he is not quite yet, but aspires to be, or at least pretends to be. The

imaginary, thus, needs to be understood in terms of aspirations, dreams and the accompanying ‘showing off’ games, as a kind of first, even though superficial, concretization of those dreams and aspirations. By projecting himself as someone who manages, the Yankee manages. By playing out the role of someone who has access to different spheres, the Yankee enters several of these spheres. Embodied in a sort of dream, the imaginary becomes part of reality, because the dream is part of reality, and consequently, “crosses into the visible” (De Boeck 2004: 157).

The boundaries between what is ‘real’ and what is ‘imaginary’ have blurred, even faded away, just as the boundaries between the ‘formal’ and the ‘informal’ have disappeared (cf. chapter 3). “The urban reality has gradually turned into a world in which fact and fiction are interchangeable” (De Boeck 2004: 59). One of the topos, or “localized urban niches” where African youth is offered a stage “to author identities and make themselves heard and seen” (Honwana and De Boeck 2005: 9), i.e. where interchangeability is most discernible, is the *nganda* or bar.

In an atmosphere of *ambiance* (music, women, alcohol), the state of being that inhabits the *nganda*, dance is able to transcend boundaries; Mbembe writes that dancers are no longer what they are in ‘real’ life (Mbembe 2005/06: 89). In other words, “[d]ance enables youth to break through the grasp and control of the postcolonial state and its accompanying ideology of colonialist modernity” (Honwana and De Boeck 2005: 11).²⁹² Next to dance, I believe that through language as well, the onstage character takes over, from his offstage counterpart, being someone who he is not in ‘real’ life. The Yankee’s projection as an adult is successfully achieved through language and sometimes succeeds to seep through ‘real’ life, where the line between appearance and reality fades away.

Meanwhile, and this is how I will round up this chapter, the identity of the Yankee, on which youngsters lay claim and utilise, is constantly (re)shaped by their actions. By acting as Yankees, youngsters do not only become Yankees, they also influence and add to the meaning of Yankee. This points towards the infinite flexibility and adaptability needed to capitalise on as much opportunities as possible, which is so characteristic of the urban specialist, and Yankee.

Before moving on, I would like to make a quick note on language. When referring to language in this chapter, I am mainly referring to a Lingala variant situated between *Lingala Facile* and *Kindoubil* (in the previous chapter’s language spectrum, that is). Throughout this chapter I will use the label ‘Lingala’ when comparing this language to

²⁹² See also Argenti in Honwana and De Boeck 2005.

other languages, for instance Swahili. Then again, I will use the term ‘Kindoubil’ when comparing this language to other types of Lingala. In both cases, ‘Lingala’ and ‘Kindoubil’ are, interchangeably, the preferred language(s) of the Yankee. As such, both labels refer to a variant that is not completely intelligible, but certainly not unintelligible either; that is sometimes understood by all, yet at other instances used to differentiate oneself from the rest. Moreover, even if I will only sporadically refer to Swahili, as a parallel to the Yankee’s sporadic use of this language, I want to emphasise that a Yankee, when needed, will not doubt to use Swahili, or any other language for that matter, in situations where he can gain advantage from it.

2. Adulthood and the social moratorium

Definitions of adulthood (and youth) are changing, relative and “intertwined with [...] social worth” (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006: 15). Even if age remains an important marker, there seems to be a “shift from *absolute* age to *relative* age (in a social logic of *grand* and *petit*) in which normal hierarchies between absolute age and gender categories become much vaguer” (De Boeck 2004: 193). Urban youth becomes ripe either before their time or after it. Youngsters can “claim for themselves the right to singularize and realize themselves as ‘authoritative elders,’” (De Boeck 2004: 193) on the one hand, or see themselves trapped in “a position of social and political immaturity” they seek to escape, on the other (Vigh 2006: 36).

In this thesis, as mentioned before, I have chosen to focus not so much on the youngsters who become ripe before their time, but rather on those who want but cannot enter adulthood. Adulthood should be understood as the collection of activities that allow young people to fend for themselves and, especially, to transcend the social category of youth. In line with Gondola and Vigh, I would like to define adulthood by two complimentary parameters: (1) professional status, which implies financial autonomy and is inevitably linked to the second parameter (2) the marital status, as money is needed to pay the dowry and to sustain wife and family. “Not being able to marry,” writes Vigh of one of his interviewees, leaves one “without the means of becoming a ‘respectable man’”(Vigh 2006: 42).

Due to a “lack of possibilities and resources” (Vigh 2006: 45), youngsters are forced to remain in a stage where they are unable “to gain the status and responsibility of adulthood” (Vigh 2006: 37). Vigh defines this stage in terms of the *social moratorium*: “a state of massive marginalisation, abject poverty, impairment of social being, and one shot of food a day – if lucky” (Vigh 2006: 45), that prevents youngsters from gaining “the status and responsibility of adulthood” (Vigh 2006: 37). “Contrary to the Western view that youth is the most

desirable station in life,” Vigh argues that, in line with Chabal and Daloz, youngsters in Bissau do not view youth as a “space or time of amusement, opportunity or freedom but one of social marginality and liminality” (Vigh 2006: 35–36). “Adolescent Africans hunger after the age, which will endow them with, an authority currently denied” (Chabal and Daloz in Vigh 2006: 35). Youth hungers after the responsibility of becoming “a man of respect, an adult” (Vigh 2006: 40).

“But young people obviously do not embrace their marginality” (Vigh 2006: 47). Quite the contrary, in the face of “apparent impossibility,” the Comaroff’s write, young people “confront the difficulties of social reproduction” (Comaroff’s 1999: 284): they make social ties and learn to cope, to be inventive and resourceful, to fend for themselves, all in order to find a way out of the social moratorium. The moratorium’s lack of possibilities and resources drive youngsters to look for alternatives and to concretize their adulthood by using “resources over which they do have control” (La Fontaine 1970: 208). In Bissau, for instance, youngsters enter armed forces for this purpose. Vigh claims that “[t]he mobilisation of the Aguentas is an example of how being young, urban male in Bissau entails having to balance between social death and violent life chances” (Vigh 2006: 56).

When transposed to Congo, the *social moratorium* is worded by Gondola’s *mal ville*, a state of stagnation from which youngsters want to escape in order to attain adulthood. In a context where education, regular employment, and sometimes even social connections fail to offer youngsters a prospect of a bright future, they cannot but search in the *mal ville* for alternative paths to attain adulthood. The *mal ville* seems to be the cause of frustration, but also the trigger that pushes youngsters to be creative. In contrast to mobilisation, Gondola places, in line with Fabian, the way out of the social moratorium in the realms of popular culture and in its ability to represent “places of dreamlike reincarnation of the self and the social group” (Gondola 1999: 24). “Popular culture,” he goes on, “also allows African urban youth to build a dreamlike order, otherwise unreachable” (Gondola 1999: 25).

Within popular culture, Gondola chooses to focus on the *sape* (fashion) and the *mikiliste*. He explains that “[t]he sapeur [the one who ‘sapes’] is an illusionist” and that he uses the *sape* in order to “conceal his social failure and to transform it into apparent victory” (Gondola 1999: 31). “Through the *sape* the *mikiliste*’s body escapes the stigma of African cities’ economic chaos [i.e. social moratorium]” (Gondola 1999: 30). “[Dressing] remains above all, a way for this ‘sacrificed’ youth to adjust to changing realities over which they have virtually no control” (Gondola 1999: 40). In line with Vigh and Gondola, I will argue that not only mobilisation and fashion (*sape*), but also language, offers youngsters the necessary tools to find a way out of the *mal ville* in their path to attain adulthood and to become

‘respectable men’.

Because Kindoubil encapsulates, as was discussed in the previous chapters, modernity and prestige, youngsters appropriate this language in order to attain this modernity and prestige and to be able to call themselves Yankees, responsible men and thus also adults. Kindoubil so becomes on the one hand, a tool, a key that can grant access to prestige, and hence also to adulthood; while on the other, by embodying Kindoubil, youth does not only embody a language, but a whole set of symbols and mannerisms that (re)shape their identity into that of a Yankee. Language is more than just the spoken word, and by using it youngsters consciously alter their identity to become Yankees.

Very conscious of the value of Kindoubil, Yankees invest a lot of time in the (re)creation of new expressions. One could say that the difference between Lingala and Kindoubil is this conscious effort to make Lingala something else, something different, something ‘better’, more valuable, or in the words of Cele and Alain:²⁹³

Bayankees bazovalorisé Lingala
-- o --

The Yankees valorise Lingala

Lingala and Kindoubil are tools used by youngsters to define themselves as Yankees, which, reputed to be (also) responsible men, bring them a step closer to adulthood. But the identity of the Yankee is not a fixed one, and while youngsters aspire to become Yankees, they (re)define and (re)valorize what Lingala is and what it means to be a Yankee.

3. Language as an economic asset

Invested with value, languages become assets that can be negotiated in the linguistic marketplace. In her article entitled *when talk isn't cheap*, Irvine suggests to view linguistic forms as part of a political economy (i.e. as part of a world of objects, economic transactions, and political interests) and not just as a vehicle for thinking about one (Irvine 1989: 262 and 263). Irvine divides linguistic phenomena into five types, all of which relate to political economy in multiple, non-excludable ways; linguistic phenomena are, as it were, multifunctional.

To begin with, linguistic phenomena can denote or label forces of production and labour organisation – Irvine names this propositionality (Irvine 1989: 250). Secondly, they can index the relations of production and act as a sign of a social identity – or indexicality (Irvine

²⁹³ Notes taken during an informal conversation just outside Salon Victoire with a group of youngsters, among whom Cele and Alain. Notebook (127) on 03.02.2010.

1989: 251-255). Thirdly, beyond denoting and indexing, linguistic phenomena can become part and parcel of economic practices and commodities, effecting social differentiation –that is their incorporative function (Irvine 1989: 255-257). Finally, linguistic phenomena “may themselves be goods and services, exchangeable against other goods and services, including material goods and cash” (Irvine 1989: 257). The latter is done either by accompanying commodities and giving them value –authentications, or by *being* the object of exchange itself.

Kindoubil, in this logic, falls under the incorporative function. In line with Irvine, I would like to view language as a part of a commodity. Even if, in contrast to Irvine’s Wolof eulogy, it is not sold for money, Kindoubil is an object of economic activity that does more than just denoting and indexing economic practices; it actually shapes them. This is what is meant by incorporation. Moreover, the use of Kindoubil also authenticates the Yankee as a Yankee, as it authenticates what the Yankee says as being ‘true’ knowledge.

Were one to combine the value linguistic phenomena gain from the combination of their functions of incorporation and authentication, it becomes impossible to exclude the verbal from the economic system. The verbal skills are a high value item in the linguistic marketplace, where even if they “are not crucial to perform some particular social role they may be crucial to gaining access to it” (Irvine 1989: 256). Verbal skills are assets with an economic value that accompany and increase the value of sellable services and goods and, more importantly, verbal skills turn out to be a key element, a gatekeeper (in Gumperz’ terms), leading to adulthood.

However, no particular code is intrinsically imbued with honour and prestige. It is the belief in the legitimacy of the words and in the one who pronounces them, that grants power, honour and prestige to these words (Bourdieu 2001: 210).²⁹⁴ This belief is not produced by the words themselves, but is socially embedded. Symbolic power, thus, can only be implemented if it is recognised as such, that is to say, if it is unrecognised as arbitrary (Bourdieu 2001: 210).²⁹⁵ More than from its link to urbanity, modernity, street wisdom, shrewdness and know-how, Kindoubil gains its symbolic power, first and foremost, because it is recognised, by those who do not speak it, as something especial, not completely intelligible but not foreign to the ear either. It is then to the speaker himself to exploit and make profit out of this compliant ‘recognition’ and so increase the value of his linguistic capital, on the one hand, and the possibility to access adulthood, on the other.

²⁹⁴ Ce qui fait le pouvoir des mots [...] c’est la croyance dans la légitimité des mots et de celui qui les prononce, croyance qu’il n’appartient pas aux mots de produire (Bourdieu 2001: 210).

²⁹⁵ Le pouvoir symbolique [...] ne s’exerce que s’il est reconnu, c’est-à-dire méconnu comme arbitraire. [...] il se définit dans et par une relation déterminée entre ceux qui exercent le pouvoir et ceux qui le subissent.

The linguistic marketplace can be understood as the conversion of a material marketplace (Bourdieu in Irvine 1989: 256). “In a class-based society,” Irvine writes, “the linguistic varieties acquire differential value that translates into economic value. Access to high position and prestigious social circles may require, or seem to require, the ability to speak or write in a prestigious language, variety, or style, whose acquisition becomes the focus of economic activity” (Irvine 1989: 256).

Adulthood is one of those prestigious social circles to which access is sought. In an economy circumscribed by the *mal ville*, where the benefits of education are jeopardised, language use becomes an alternative path to gain prestige and, through the linguistic market, access to adulthood. It is not the use of Kindoubil, for instance, that will grant access to adulthood, since Kindoubil is mainly linked to (growing) youngsters and, by definition, not with adulthood. However, Kindoubil, with its embedded value, will give the youngster a tool, which like the *sape* (fashion) “remains above all, a way for this ‘sacrificed’ youth to adjust to changing realities over which they have virtually no control” (Gondola 1999: 40) and to make an attempt to enter adulthood.

By speaking Kindoubil, and thus making use of Kindoubil’s symbolic power, the Yankee places himself in an advantageous position. Kindoubil grants the Yankee *voice*, i.e. “the capacity to make himself understood” (Blommaert 2005: 255). Voice is a source of wealth. Next to voice, Kindoubil also grants the Yankee access, i.e. in Ribot & Peluso’s words: “the *ability* [rather than the right] to derive benefit from things” (Ribot & Peluso 2003: 153). If one would extend the concept of “things” beyond “material objects, persons, institutions and symbols” (Ribot & Peluso 2003: 153) to include language, the definition of access would then read as follows: the ability to derive benefit from language use. Language is transformed into a key of gaining advantage in terms of money, material goods, women and prestige, all which are linked to the above two parameters of adulthood.

Those who are Yankees, i.e. those who are in the know and subscribe to *urban charisma*, or “the vaguely magical power of presence, style, seduction and performance” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 6), know by definition how to “‘work’ the city to make it yield benefits, magical power and eros” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 22). In order to gain the maximum advantage possible, Yankees will not force their linguistic preferences on others; neither will they needlessly nor fortuitously expose themselves to succumb to the linguistic preferences of others. While a Yankee uses Kindoubil in order to gain voice and status, he is willing to use other and less prestigious languages as well. A Yankee is aware of the context-bounded, and thus varying, symbolic loadings of language, when needed, i.e. when he sees the

possibility of making it yield benefits, the Yankee will not doubt to switch to other languages. Advantage is gained by finding a balance between *mettre à l'aise* (put at ease) and *kosesentir à l'aise* (be at ease), rather than by using any kind of urban Lingala recklessly.

4. The balance between 'mettre à l'aise' and 'kosesentir à l'aise'

As I discussed in chapter 2, people in Kisangani do not expect others to address them in an x or y language, but, as speakers, actively seek to address the interlocutor in a language he understands. Speakers make an effort to make themselves understood. However, it is not communication solely that motivates these out-of-the-way adaptations, using a particular language or switching between languages is beyond communication, as Emmanuel explains, a way to:²⁹⁶

Vous voulez me satisfaire, me mettre dans mon bain, dans Lingala la langue que je parle. Vous voulez... eh eh une autre intention qui se trouve là.

-- o --

You want to satisfy me, make me feel comfortable [literally: *put me in my bath*], in Lingala the language I speak. You want... eh eh there is another intention there.

Switching to the interlocutor's language has to do with trying to keep a balance in order to insure the maximum advantage possible. The balance to be attained involves putting someone *in his own bath* –i.e. making someone comfortable or *mettre à l'aise*, on the one hand, while feeling at ease oneself or *kosesentir à l'aise*, on the other. The balance is achieved when the speaker manages to loosen up the interlocutor, of whom he expects something in return, without losing face or placing himself in a position of disadvantage.

It is exactly in these situations that the *urban charisma* of the Yankee, “a property that cannot be permanently owned by anyone but is only made visible through performative action and exchange” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 22), is best articulated. Unpredictability is at the heart of *urban charisma*, being able to play with it, proves shrewdness as well as the Yankee's adaptability to any situation. The Yankee will not only ‘read’ a situation, i.e. recognise and understand the language (and language style) that is spoken, he will also try to ‘master’ the situation, or at least pretend to master it, i.e. speak that language if useful, and finally ‘work’ the situation, i.e. yield benefits by means of language use.

The balance between *mettre à l'aise* and *kosesentir à l'aise* involves going out of one's way to facilitate communication, the gain of trust in the eyes of others, the successful meddling in an unfamiliar environment and the search for the best deals and, ultimately, the access to adulthood. As we will see, these ‘deals’ are, more often than not, linked to money or material

²⁹⁶ Interview held on 12.10.2009 in French

goods, women and prestige; all three define adulthood.

In what follows I will present Kongo's, lecturer Cheko's, Cosmas', Pitshou's and Bijou's reply to what language they speak in what context. I will pay particular attention to the way speakers gain advantage of any situation by adapting their language use. Their answers are often linked to money, material goods, women and prestige.

Kongo rarely speaks Swahili. Actually he claims to only speak Swahili in shops that are owned by the Nande, who employ this language colloquially on a daily basis. When I asked Kongo whether the Nande did not speak Lingala, he replied:²⁹⁷

Non, baswahili bayebi koloba Lingala mais bien té. Po natransmettre sentiment na ngai epai ya bango, po bango tosolola na bango direct bien, parce que nayebi que mundande nyoso nde ayebi Lingala té, alors po tozala na conversation na ye bien, c'est bien nabanda na langue na bango, po arépondre ngai calmement. Et puis eza na avantage po na ngai, ayeba que wana mundeko na ngai, parce que bango bamona bato ya Lingala mingi baza neti babandits, soda, tout ça [...]. Aperdre confiance wana té tango ya liboso, il faut nalobela ye na Swahili.

– o –

No, the Swahili people know how to speak Lingala, but not well. In order to convey what I feel to them, in order to converse with them without misunderstandings, because I know that not every Nande knows Lingala well, so in order to have a good conversation with him, it is best I start in their language, so that he can reply to me with ease. And then, there is an advantage in it for me, he will know 'that is my brother, because they view the Lingala people as being bandits, soldiers, all of that. [...]' In order for him not to lose that trust the first time, I must speak to him in Swahili.

Kongo's intention behind speaking Swahili in a shop owned by Nande goes beyond conveying a message and making the one behind the counter feel at ease in order to communicate. His goal is to be viewed as a *brother* (if not as a Nande, at least as someone from the East) in order to gain trust, which will ultimately lead to his advantage. In other words, by speaking in Swahili and placing himself at a slightly unfavourable position –he speaks better Lingala than he does Swahili–, Kongo increases the potential advantages he can gain. In the case of a shop, advantage can be translated into better prices, better quality products or the possibility of buying on credit.

Imagine for one moment the opposite case: Kongo walks into a Nande-owned shop and orders a product in Lingala (keep in mind the Nande view those who speak Lingala as bandits); will Kongo then increase the chances of gaining advantage? Lecturer Cheko states it even clearer:²⁹⁸

Devant un Lingala-phone c'est mieux de poser son problème en Lingala. Si vous parlez le Swahili, par exemple, vous le mettez mal à l'aise. Il doit s'arranger vite vite pour vous faire partir parce qu'il n'est pas à l'aise.

²⁹⁷ Interview held on 12.12.2009 in Lingala

²⁹⁸ Interview held on 19.10.2009 in French

– o –

In front of a Lingala-phone it is better to pose your problem in Lingala. If you speak in Swahili, for instance, you will place him in an uncomfortable position. He is forced to reply promptly in order to make you leave because he does not feel at ease.

When in a position of disadvantage, the interlocutor will do everything in his might to bring the conversation to an abrupt end, which does not contribute in laying any foundation for future relationships, not even a vendor-client relationship in a shop. On the other end, placing oneself in a position of too much disadvantage becomes counterproductive. If the speaker exposes himself too much, he becomes too vulnerable and can, because he acts like a Yuma, easily be tricked by others. The limit of too much exposure is best exemplified by Cosmas, who while normally talking Lingala to *tolekistes* (taxi-bike riders) switches to Swahili when:²⁹⁹

Toleka ninauliza zaidi na Lingala, juu ya batu mingi banafanya toleka banatoka ngambu ya Equateur. Kidogo na Swahili. Kama anataka ku discuter mingi njo mie ninasema Swahili. Wakati ya discussion ya bei, njo minasema Swahili juu ya Lingala sina arguments mingi.

– o –

I call a toleka more often in Lingala, because many people who do the toleka come originally from the Equateur area. Very little in Swahili. If he wants to discuss a lot then I speak in Swahili. When discussing about the price, then I speak in Swahili because in Lingala I don't have enough arguments.

If Cosmas feels the *tolekiste* overcharges him, he no longer can allow to 'put the tolekiste at ease,' and has to focus on not being overcharged instead. If Cosmas risks losing face and money, he will switch to Swahili so as to have 'enough arguments' and put himself in a more advantageous position. There is a fragile balance between making someone feel comfortable and exposing oneself needlessly. The balance will only work out if the speaker is able to keep the situation under control: taking risks, or using a language in which one feels less at ease, without losing face. Control, in this context, is translated in terms of 'feeling at ease' and 'having enough arguments'.

Enough arguments are also needed to seduce girls. Being able to care for a woman (or more) can prove one is indeed a 'respectable man'. Bijou jokingly suggests only a Yankee knows how to convince and 'administer' more than one woman at once.³⁰⁰ Besides the means, or rather, in lack thereof, language becomes a powerful tool. Pitshou explains that when flirting with girls, one of the preferred strategies of youngsters is to recur to language. In this case, the switching of language is not used to put the interlocutor, i.e. the girl, at ease,

²⁹⁹ Interview held on 04.12.2009 in Swahili

³⁰⁰ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French: "le fait même de convaincre d'abord quatre momies et de les gérer, ce n'est pas à la portée de tout le monde, c'est vraiment un grand Yankee" – o – "the act itself of firstly convincing four women and to administer them, it is not at everyone's level, it has to be really a big Yankee" (*We both laugh*).

but to deliberately provoke the opposite effect, to make her feel uneasy:³⁰¹

Sikoyo biso bajeunes tosalaka ndenge nini ? Tango okei kodraguer mwasi, kolinga mwasi, omeki na Français, omoni alobi Français makasi, omeki na Lingala, ayebi Lingala makasi té, ah obandi kolinga na Lingala, ôcomprendre ? Obandi, olingi na Lingala po apesa baarguments mingi té, akofinir akoaccepter : « oui je t'aime », « moi aussi ». [...] Donc eza na baestratégies, bajeunes mingi bakomi koutiliser système wâna.

-- o --

We youngsters, what do we do ? When you want pick up a girl, make out with a girl, you can try out French, you realise she speaks French very well, you can try out Lingala, she doesn't know Lingala that well, ah you can start to flirt in Lingala, you understand? You flirt in Lingala so that she can't give you too many [*counter*]arguments, she will end by consenting: "yes I like you", "me too". [...] Thus there are strategies, many youngsters started using that kind of system.

Instead of having enough arguments oneself, the strategy consists in leaving the other agape. Without arguments, a clumsy speaker has to give in. Here the use, or misuse, of language comes very close to play. If one considers, as Huizinga did, play as integral to language (Huizinga in Rojek 185), this kind of (seductive) language games "remain a vital channel for expressing sociality and identity" (Rojek 1995: 187). Through play forms, which "typically involve testing, chance and contest," as in the case of flirting, Huizinga's "*homo ludens* lives out emotions which are either repressed or diverted by the rest of life" (Huizinga in Rojek 1995: 185).

Instead of marginalizing "the emotional, allegorical and irrational content of everyday life," I see play, in line with Huizinga and Rojek, as a key constituent in the "development of culture and civilization" (Rojek 1995: 177 and 185 respectively). Play forms, under which language, serve to socialise, to relate to others; but language games also serve as a channel for identity –to reassert oneself as a Yankee and to knock at the doors of adulthood. In conditions of material deprivation, "[t]his might be taken to say something about the powers of human adaptability; but surely it says more about the indomitable character of play needs, thus lending support to [the] contention that play is central in understanding social life" (Rojek 1995: 187). I will now turn to how language imbues its speakers with prestige.

"The exclusion of youth from access to the means essential to engage in competition," La Fontaine rightly claims, leads youngsters to compete "in terms of resources over which they do have control" (La Fontaine 1970: 208). Glaser's subculture among the South African Tsotsis, for instance, provides such an alternative, i.e. "a real chance of acquiring prestige and fame" (Glaser 2000: 71). In the present discussion, I am trying to define La Fontaine's 'resources' and Glaser's 'subculture' in terms of language use, in particular the use of

³⁰¹ Interview on 26.10.2009 in Lingala

Kindoubil. Kindoubil derives its prestige from its link to Kinshasa and because it is an urban youth language (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 313). As such, Kindoubil provides youngsters with tools –over which they *do* have control– to “demonstrate their superiority” (La Fontaine 1970: 209) and so to embody that very prestige and gain symbolic power.

Kongo, who, as we saw above, speaks Swahili in a shop run by Nande, will not promptly do so in other contexts, even when he is surrounded by Easteners only. In this case he consciously chooses to speak Lingala instead of Swahili to remain in control, thus to:³⁰²

Po nasesentir à l'aise, nde nayeabisaki yo, Lingala nalobaka bien, po nasesentir à l'aise. Et puis soki nayebi que non Bandande baza ebele que ngai, il faut ngai nalakisa bango que non te ngai naza supérieur. Po bazwa maloba ebele té que ngai, po bazomona que mutu ya Lingala aza danzé.

-- o --

In order to feel comfortable, like I told you before, Lingala I speak it well, in order to feel comfortable. And also if I know that no there are more Nande than me, I must show them that no I am superior. For them not to take more words than I, so they see that a Lingala person is ‘danzé’.

Lingala and Kindoubil are not used here in the purpose to ‘put others at ease,’ on the contrary, by using it, Kongo deliberately tries to put his interlocutors at *unease*; he even does not give them a chance to say a word. It took me some time and more enquiry to understand the rationale behind this pursuit of superiority. Why is it that in the context of Kisangani Kongo consciously uses Lingala to feel superior? Whereto does ‘superiority’ lead him? When I posed Bijou the same problem, he explained:³⁰³

Oui, les gens qui parlent Lingala, parlent beaucoup et ceux qui parlent Swahili généralement parlent peu, ce sont des gens qui écoutent beaucoup, qui parlent vraiment peu. Alors quand ils se mettent en face de ceux-là qui parlent Lingala... Je veux te donner un exemple, je peux prendre Papy, tu prends Papy, tu le mets devant Américain, il peut même pas placer trois mots parce que Américain en a déjà placé cent. Donc c’est ça la différence. Alors pour ceux qui parlent le Swahili, ils peuvent même pas engager un débat avec ceux qui parlent le Lingala, qui sont d’ailleurs comme des Yankees, parce qu’il saura même pas s’exprimer, celui-là aura tendance à prendre tout pour lui, et c’est celui qui aura raison.

-- o --

Yes, those who speak Lingala speak a lot and those who speak Swahili usually speak little, they are people who listen a lot, who speak really just a little. So when they find themselves in front of those who speak Lingala... I’ll give you an example, take Papy for instance, you take Papy and you place him in front of Américain, before he even utters three words, Américain has already said a hundred. So that is the difference. Those who speak Swahili cannot even engage in a discussion with those who speak Lingala, who are for that matter like Yankees, because he [*the Swahili speaker*] will not even be able to express himself, the other one [*the Lingala speaker*] will tend to take everything for himself, and he will be the one who’s always right.

The ability to place the most words, that is, to prevent the other from placing any, is a symptom of superiority. Superiority is here demonstrated by tools over which the Yankee

³⁰² Interview held on 12.12.2009 in Lingala

³⁰³ Interview held on 17.01.2010 in French

has control: language. The purpose of this, once again, is to gain advantage. By speaking fast, by not leaving any room for comments, the Yankee and Lingala speaker tilts the balance fully toward the ‘feeling at ease’ end. It seems that when superiority and prestige are at play, the quest for equilibrium between languages and between ‘putting’ and ‘feeling’ at ease –which goal was to gain advantage too–, is not a preoccupation.

In these cases the witty use of Lingala and Kindoubil fails to be unrecognised as arbitrary, granting those who speak it more symbolic power, a strategic position to gain advantage, and, especially, more prestige. Prestige, however, does not just lie out there, as a tool for anyone to use, neither is it a fixed target to attain; “prestige,” writes Glaser, in relation to the South-African tsotsi, “[is] built gradually through street tradition” (Glaser 2000: 112). Very much like Hansen & Verkaaik’s instable and unpredictable *urban charisma*, prestige is “a property that cannot be permanently owned by anyone but is only made visible through performative action and exchange” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 22).

The Yankee emanates prestige by using Lingala. At the same time, when used, and thus recognised as prestigious, Lingala gains even more symbolic power and prestige thanks to the Yankee. There is a dialectic relationship between Lingala and prestige, on the one hand, and the Yankee and prestige, on the other. Yankees who, like Hansen & Verkaaik’s hustlers, “draw on the latent charismatic potentials of urban life” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 8), are, in turn, defined by the charismatic potentials of the same city, even if the city only exists in their minds. Yankees exist because and in spite of the city. Just as the language they use, exists because and in spite of them. It is here where the Yankee turns the less glamorous characteristics of the central African city, its opacity, its stagnation and its impenetrability “into a resource in [his] own self-making” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 8). By speaking Lingala, the Yankee creates instances of power for himself, where his dream of attaining adulthood, and thus turning into a man of respect, becomes real, even if only a moment.

5. Dreams and Language: I speak therefore I am

Since the beginning of this chapter I have tried to argue that the Yankee, in an attempt to escape the *mal ville* and to access adulthood, uses Kindoubil. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss how the Yankee drafts his identity in the limbo where reality and the imaginary meet.

1. Heterotopia: the boundaries between real and imagined adulthood

When language use does not grant access to adulthood, it creates and grants access to, at least, an alternative, imagined adulthood. In Kisangani, as the De Boeck suggests for

Kinshasa, “where the ordering and accumulation of things rarely works beyond the simple architectures of the heaps of charcoal, [...], words provide the city dwellers with a potent tool to create other, alternative orders” (De Boeck 2004: 259). Words might not provide direct access to adulthood, but act as the building stones in order to construct a new, temporary adulthood to which the Yankee can access.

Language creates a sort of refuge, a place of *im-possibility*, “where it is possible to live and imagine all the contradictory categories at the same time, and thereby to overcome [...] contradictions, even if just for a moment” (De Boeck 2004: 255). In Foucault’s words language leads to *heterotopia*, a place “where it is possible to think or to enact all the contradictory categories of a society simultaneously, spaces in which it becomes possible to live heterogeneity, difference, alterity and alternated ordering” (Foucault in De Boeck 2004: 254). Important to remember here, is that heterotopias even if they offer a way out of the *mal ville*, even if they “offer a glimpse of the possibility of overcoming fragmentedness,” they do not change the situation of a Yankee permanently, they never turn an individual into a full adult *really*, because they never last for long (Foucault in De Boeck 2004: 257).

Even though the dream of adulthood, understood as a heterotopia through language, does not become reality, it becomes part and parcel of the daily reality. Dreaming is part of reality. Through narratives this reality dissolves into “an oneiric dimension”, “a collective social imaginary” (De Boeck 2004: 92), a state of pretending, good-enough adulthood. In a similar way, and against the background of the *mal ville*, the Yankee’s *raison d’être*, that of being the one who knows, who sees and who manages, dissolves with the symbolic power of Kindoubil into this oneiric dimension. This dream, as it were, makes part of the social imaginary and through the word, also of reality. The boundaries between the dream and the imagined, on the one hand, and reality, on the other, become blurred and fuzzy. The imaginary becomes part of daily life and the dichotomy real-fiction, in parallel to the formal-informal dichotomy, turns out to be imprecise.

Yet it is this double, the dramatised or imagined character who, in many instances, leads the daily struggle, shapes the actions and words of the Yankee, and gives if not hope, at least a sense of something worth fighting for. Here I do not mean to understand dreams nor the imagined in terms of mysticism, witchcraft nor the paranormal, but rather in terms of that which is not, but which is desired. A second reality in which the individual, the Yankee more in particular, *is* who he aspires to be; an heterotopia where aspirations and appearance become part of reality thanks to the symbolic power of words.

In the imaginary, Lingala dominates. Lingala and Kindoubil have grown to dominate in the

minds of young Congolese in Kisangani. I believe no one can express it more concisely than Hyppolite: when I asked him why he prefers to speak Lingala to Swahili, his mother tongue, Hyppolite replied:³⁰⁴

Ninaenda wapi na adabu?

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Where will I go with politeness?

Swahili, as we saw in chapter 2, is often linked to politeness, but also to dullness. Hyppolite, a tall, elegantly dressed, eloquent and learned Swahili-phone, prefers to speak in Lingala than in Swahili. Of what use is Swahili to him? Even though, Hyppolite, like many other Swahili speaking youngsters, takes pride in his language, he is aware of the advantages he can gain from Lingala's symbolic power. Politeness just does not seem to weigh enough against successfully flirting with girls (in the eyes of Hyppolite girls do not fall for Swahili speakers) and being linked to the most emblematic expressions of Congolese identity – Congolese music.³⁰⁵ Is it a coincidence that Lingala is preferred in flirting and in music above other languages? Might it be linked to White's view that love in music articulates national identity? (White 2008: 182) In any case, individuals looking to assert themselves find, like Hyppolite, in and through Lingala a path of social becoming.

2. *Ambiance: the bar as the locus where dream becomes reality*

One of the topos where the use of Lingala is preferred is the *nganda*. A *nganda* is a bar-restaurant or pub, at the side of the road, often in the open air, sometimes fenced off, furnished with plastic chairs and tables, where people come to rest, to chat, to eat occasionally and most of all to drink cold beer and to nod and sway to the sounds of Congolese music. Viewed by many as an area of light morals, *ngandas* are, nevertheless, important centres of social and political developments in the country since before independence. It was by making publicity for beer that Lumumba, for instance, built up his social network in Kinshasa. The *nganda* is a place of encounter, “a space with different levels and multiple uses of intense sociability” (Gondola 1999: 40) where a dreamlike identity is forged and where the adventure of appearance takes place unhindered.

³⁰⁴ Fieldwork notes diary (33) on 13.12.2009

³⁰⁵ Fieldwork notes diary (33) on 13.12.2009



Figure 33. *Nganda in Mangobo, Kisangani, Jan 2010 (by Virginia Paradinas)*

LA CARTE QUI GAGNE CHEZ MAÎTRE BONAZA – “Nalingaka kobaye bière na nganda Bonaza, po ndule ya vrai, coin ya bien ya koya na nzele na yo oyo olingaka.” – “Yango penza masta.”

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THE WINNING CARD AT MAÎTRE BONAZA’S – “I like to drink beer in the Bonaza pub, because the music is good, it is a good place to come with the girl you like.” – “That’s right, my friend.”

Frequented by youngsters too, *ngandas* collaborate in the production of new urban identities. It is in establishments of this kind that, since before the independence, gangs would gather to discuss their aspirations and frustrations. Denied access to adulthood, the older growing youth in search for alternatives and prestige, find, until today, refuge in the *nganda*, just as they do in language. *Nganda*, and its accompanying language use, is the geographic epitome of the Yankee. *Ngandas* are “meaningful sites” that should be read “not only as geographical, visible and palpable urban realities but also, and primarily so, as a *mundus imaginalis*, a local mental landscape, a topography and historiography of the local Congolese imagination that is no less real than its physical counterpart” (De Boeck 2004: 56).

Next to and in addition to language, the *nganda* constitutes a heterotopia; a place where it is possible to think of, to imagine oneself as an adult, even if just for a while. It is also one of the places where language is best manifested, this is because both, the bar and language use, help the speaker to enter in *ambiance*, a state of levitating fun –rooted in reality because it escapes it– where the impossible becomes possible. In the *nganda* the needed ingredients to

attain the impossible realisation of adulthood, even if distortedly, are present: women, money and prestige.



Figure 34. Canteen by day, *nganda* by night, Bumba, Feb 2010 (by Virginia Paradinas)

Just like heterotopias, *ngandas* “move in and out of existence” (De Boeck 2004: 57), they are more than one place in one. So is the Yankee more than one person in one. In the pictures above (Figure 34, even if I have to admit they were not taken in Kisangani) one can see how the topos, a canteen at daytime, metamorphoses into a *nganda* with music, beer and the right *ambiance* after sunset. The canteen metamorphoses into a *mundus imaginalis*, a place where non-adults, those cannot access adulthood, meet up with adults to escape the *mal ville*, even if just for some hours, and become real men.

Ambiance transforms the restaurant into a bar at night. Ambiance transforms the Yankee into something he is not. But how can one grasp *ambiance*? How can one enter in the state of *ambiance*? In the section entitled *Femme, bar, alcool: la recette du succès* (Woman, bar, alcohol: the success recipe), Gondola epitomises what it means to be in *ambiance* and links it to having fun, drinking beer, lavishly spending money, women, and, of course, listening and dancing to (Congolese) music (Gondola 1993: 161).

Ambiance transforms the individual, as it transforms the atmosphere. It is one of the key elements of the *mundus imaginalis*. One of the best ways to embody *ambiance*, and by such to enter into that other world with its new possibilities, is through language use. The use of Lingala permits the speaker to be part of, while at the same time creating, a spirit of *ambiance*. Because the Congolese music scene emerged from the Lingala speaking city, Boyomais link having fun, pubs and *ambiance* to the Kinois ways and to speaking Lingala. Pitshou, who works in a group of Swahili speaking actors, invited me to go out with his colleagues, and suggested I do not drink alcoholic beverages in order ‘to find the answers

myself:³⁰⁶

Olivier, soki omoni asi ameli, soki Olivier alangwe, akomi mutu ya Lingala [...] Jour moko, nayebi té, soki [nazwi] ata mbongo moko, nakofandisa yo oye kaka observatrice, tozomela, yo olobi namela na ngai kaka Vital'o, par exemple, tika bière. Tu observes et tu vas te donner les réponses de toi-même. Au besoin, mwa dicta oyo, eza mwa na poche dictaphone. Okofanda sikoyo na butu, okoyoka, okoseka. Olivier alobaka Swahili, parce que Swahili eza langue na biso awa, alobaka yango mingi, et puis aza Luchois, aza mutu ya Lubumbashi, kuna mingi Swahili. Aloba Français soki azonégocier, marché. Alobaka Lingala na mutu akoaborder ye na Lingala, na bamosusu Lingala makasi. Soki tofandi biso nyoso, tolangwe, on est ivre, oyo nde, abimisa Lingala, Magloire abimisa baMongo, Pitshou abimisa Lingala ya Bakinois, ye abimisa Lingala ya Baluba et ezali mwa ambiance.

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Olivier [*originally from Katanga*], if you see he drank already, if Olivier is drunk, he becomes a person of Lingala. [...] One day, I don't know, if I get a bit of money, I'll invite, you come as an observer only, we drink, you say I will have only, for instance, a Vital'o [*very sweet, red soft drink that is also served in big bottles of 600ml*], abstain from beer. You observe and you'll give yourself all the answers. If needed, this voice recorder, you have it in your pocket. You'll sit at night, you'll hear, you'll laugh. Olivier normally speaks Swahili, because Swahili is our language here [*in the group*], he speaks it a lot, and also he is Luchois, he comes from Lubumbashi, a lot of Swahili there. He speaks French when he negotiates, business. He speaks Lingala to the one who approaches him in Lingala, with others in strong Lingala [*i.e. Kindoubil*]. If we are sitting together, we are drunk [*in Lingala*], we are drunk [*in French for emphasis*], then he brings out Lingala, Magloire brings out Lomongo out, Pitshou brings out Lingala of the Kinois, he brings out Lingala of the Luba and then there is *ambiance*.

Ambiance as an heterotopia, though, does not generate hope; it offers a glimpse, even if for a very short while, of the possibility of overcoming fragmentedness (De Boeck 2004: 257).

The one who 'enters in *ambiance*' is able to, temporarily, become someone else. Mbembe beautifully describes this "journeying outside the self" (Mbembe 2005/06: 86) in terms of dance: "The dancers retreat further into themselves, seeking to become one with the sound. At the same time, the dance distances them from themselves; their existence onstage takes over: they are no longer who they are in 'real' life. The dance takes place at the very centre of this alienation from the self" (Mbembe 2005/06: 89).

I invite the reader to see language use as an alternative to Mbembe's dance. Through language, the existence onstage, the one that is acted through words, takes over. *Ambiance*, dance and language in this sense, converge in another of Huizinga's characteristics of play, that of imagination. Rojek, in line with Huizinga, writes (Rojek 1995: 185):

Play mobilizes the imagination. It thrives on projection, irony, allusion and fantasy. It is distinguished by an 'only pretending' quality, as when we imagine ourselves to be different people or in swopping places and times. Through imagination we develop our sense of difference, otherness and identity.

Dance mobilizes the imagination; speech mobilizes the imagination... and through imagination a sense of difference is developed. The Yankee imagines and re-creates himself through language; he possesses and becomes the attributes carried by the language. His

³⁰⁶ Interview held on 08.12.2009 in Lingala

identity is altered. Through language the Yankee becomes someone else, someone who knows, who sees, who manages, he becomes a respectable man. The Yankee becomes an adult in his own eyes, but also, and especially, in the eyes of others, even if just for a moment.

3. Appearance

In the lines of identity, I would like to introduce the last argument in this chapter. As we have seen, in the context of the *mal ville*, youngsters utilise everything within grasp in order to attain adulthood. Despite not providing the necessary opportunities, the *mal ville* does create a context from which youngsters desperately want to escape and, therefore, in which they see themselves forced to look for other alternatives: Gang formation (La Fontaine 1970), fighting groups (Pype 2007), mobilisation into (illicit) armed forces (Vigh 2006), smuggling (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000) or the submission to strict codes of dress and appearance (Gondola 1999) are some of these alternative paths.

Language is also an alternative. Just like the *sapeur* “dresses in order to blur social lines and make class values and social status illegible,” the Yankee *speaks* “to conceal his social failure and to transform it into apparent victory” (Gondola 1999: 31). Denied access from adulthood, the Yankee utilises Kindoubil in an attempt to access adulthood. Even though, by speaking Kindoubil the Yankee might not enter real adulthood, he at least manages to become the word, and especially to become the symbolic power that is contained in the word. By speaking Kindoubil, the Yankee successfully dramatises, and becomes, a respectable man, he creates his own adulthood.

The dramatization of adulthood cannot be simply dismissed as being unreal because the dream to attain adulthood *is* real. The dramatization of adulthood is very vivid, even palpable, and it co-defines the daily reality of the Yankee, it shapes his actions and (word) choices. In the theatre of the *mal ville*, both, the Yankee and the *sapeur*, are illusionists (Gondola 1999: 31). The failure of not being an adult is, as such, transformed into apparent and temporary adulthood. The dramatization’s genuineness blurs the lines between appearance and reality.

But the Yankee is also an exhibitionist: he exhibits the illusion of adulthood in order to make it even more real, for himself and for others. The individual becomes a Yankee or an adult if he can convince others to view him that way. As such, the Yankee “discovers his existence as a being and social actor, both for himself and for the Other, through the identity that appearances obtain for him” (Gondola 1999: 32). Here is where the Yankee, like De Boeck’s

Kinois –who through his body, i.e. “the city’s most private space, which is simultaneously also its most public theatre” (De Boeck 2004: 54)– becomes an exhibitionist. The (Boyomais) Yankee, like the narcissist city he wants to symbolise, is pervaded by the logic of *faire croire* (make believe) and *faire semblant* (pretend) (De Boeck 2004: 54).

The Yankee knows that his reputation and future livelihood depends on how he performs and appears in situations of crisis. He is unique to the city because he is self-made –he is a living realisation of the possibility of the city, the act of self-creation and re-invention (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 18). The mise en scène, however, does not leave the Yankee unchanged. While in the process of creation of appearance(s) and heterotopias, the Yankee re-creates and re-invents his own identity, giving a new meaning to what being a Yankee means.

By speaking in Lingala, the Yankee appropriates the values that are intrinsically attached to Lingala: fearlessness, knowledge, bravery, among others, to become that which he says he is: an adult, a person of success, a respectable man. The dramatization by speech is, thus, not only enacted, but also incarnated, to such an extent as to become more real than reality itself. Just like Pype’s fighting boys, by consuming, acting out and creating new language forms, the Yankee becomes ‘more real’ than the images he imitates (Pype 2007: 267).

But Lingala and Kiyanki are not fixed, permanent and unchangeable entities. Just like *Urban charisma*, the two are “only made visible through performative action and exchange” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 22). This implies that they are constantly interpreted, re-interpreted, corrected and amplified by those who use it. While youngsters want to subscribe to Kiyanki in order to draw advantage from it, they do not only become Yankee, but transform the essence of Kiyanki as well.

Taking into account that dramatization and appearance are, like cultural identity “subjective and situational” (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 52), Lingala too is situational and not always the most adequate choice. Even though the Yankee recurs more often than not to Lingala, in order to boost his personal worth, he will not do so blindly in every situation. More than speaking in Lingala, it is the underlying ability to embody that which he is not, an adult, and to appear as such in the eyes of others, as an adult, that is needed to survive in the *mal ville*.

The youth excluded from adulthood do not aspire to be just the Yankee who speaks Kindoubil and comes from Kinshasa, but rather aspire to have the attributes and possibilities that many of these Yankees seem to have. It follows that in order to keep all options open,

the Yankee, just like Ranger's nineteenth-century pre-colonial Africans, far from having one single identity, moves in and out of multiple identities (Ranger 1983: 248): the Kinois, the musician, the Easterner, the 'cousin' of the president,... Similarly to Gondola's *sapeur*, the Yankee's use of language "in its protean dimensions," which is more often than not related to Lingala, "draws the cultural contours of the social group, and brings out a plurality of egotistical identities" (Gondola 1999: 40).

6. Conclusion

This thesis deals with the ways Boyomais youngsters build up a lucrative identity for themselves by adapting their use of language. I started off, in chapter 2, by presenting Kisangani in terms of the two vernaculars that are spoken in the city: Lingala and Swahili. In chapter 3, foregrounding the importance of relationships, I then sketched the socio-economic background so as to better understand the mechanism of the daily struggles of youngsters in Kisangani. Consequently, in chapter 4, I presented the Yankee, whom many youngsters aspire to be, as the ultimate city dweller; somebody who has seen it all. Placing the Yankee next to the Bills, the Yuma, the *sapeur*, the co-operant, the trickster, the *shegue*, the musician, and the responsible father, I discussed in detail the Yankee's link to Lingala, to Kinshasa, as well as his inherent ambivalence. Returning to language, I dug, in chapter 5, into the roots of urban Lingala and its various types: *Lingala Facile*, *Kindoubil* and *Inverted Kindoubil*. I concluded this chapter by suggesting that the Yankee speaks *Kindoubil*, an Urban Youth Language that is prestigious and powerful because it fails to be recognised as arbitrary.

Finally, in chapter 6, I have tried to elucidate how the Yankee uses Lingala and *Kindoubil*, in particular, and language, in general, to attain that which the *mal ville* has bereaved him of: adulthood. Without tools to compete, youngsters view language as an asset imbued with economic value that can be negotiated in a linguistic market. Even if not sold, language acts as a key towards success and adulthood, both in material and social terms. But in order to succeed in the linguistic market, the Yankee and witty speaker will have to find a balance between making the interlocutor feel at ease, that is speak in a way the interlocutor understands, without placing himself in a position of unease or disadvantage.

Claiming that adulthood is reached by just speaking in a specific way would be naïf and simplistic. Here is where, I believe, the imaginary plays a role. The imaginary is defined by cherished dreams and aspirations the Yankee is unable to achieve, at least not permanently. Therefore, instead of reaching adulthood, the Yankee, constructs, by speaking and enacting Lingala, an alternative dream-like adulthood to which he *does* have access. This alter

adulthood when successfully dramatised appears real, even if just for a moment. Dramatised and embodied by the Yankee, the meaning of the imaginary “ceaselessly creates its own level of autonomy” which leads to “a destroying of reality in its most essential structure” (De Boeck 2004: 61). The reality becomes permeated by appearance, and thus fiction, and the line between what is real and what is not real fades away.

By speaking in Lingala, the language that “can make one sound important and ‘cool’ at the same time” (de Swaan 2001: 111-112), the Yankee utilises and embodies Lingala’s attributes and symbolic power. In this endeavour, the language, the attributes it carries and the speaker do not remain unchanged, but are all redefined to fit new situations. Just as the language creates the Yankee, the Yankee too (re)creates the language. They both evolve and change. The identity of the Yankee responds to context-bounded demands. Just as his forefathers in pre-colonial Africa, the Yankee too moves in and out of multiple identities.

VII. References

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