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ARTICLE DE RECHERCHE

# Enquête sur la conversion linguistique du kindibu au lingala au Kongo-Central. Cas de la commune rurale de Kwilu-Ngongo en RDCongo

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Résumé

L'enquête sur la conversion linguistique du Kindibu au Lingala au Kongo central, précisément dans la commune rurale de Kwilu- Ngongo révèle les facteurs pertinents ci-après : historiques, géographiques, économiques, religieux, culturels, éducationnels et psychologiques. Les facteurs économiques et psychologiques se dégagent comme majeurs. Les résultats obtenus en utilisant la méthode de collecte des données comprenant l'interview non structurée et l'observation révèlent que les facteurs économiques et psychologiques sont les plus importants.

Mots-clés : migration, contact intense, accessibilité, prédication, opportunités et prestige.

Abstract

After investigating on language shift in Kongo Central, mainly at the rural municipality of Kwilu Ngongo, the researcher discloses the following seven factors which account for the shift from Kindibu (a variety of Kikongo) to Lingala: historical, geographical, economic, religious, cultural, educational and psychological ones. The results obtained through a data collection methodology involving unstructured interview and observation reveal that the economic and psychological factors tend to be the major ones in the language shift.

Keywords: migration, intense contact, easy mobility, sermon. opportunities and prestige

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## Introduction

Language maintains social institutions. We use language to reveal or conceal our personal identity, our character and our ground (Chaika (1982:2), Wardhaugh, R. (2006). and Hudson, R. (1996). This statement does not seem to make sense in Kongo Central, mainly in the rural municipality of Kwilu-Ngongo. The researcher was prompted by the statement of the catholic cardinal, Fridolin Ambongo, in Kongo Central. He pointed out that although Kisantu is located at Kongo cultural space, the catholic sermons were delivered in Lingala instead of Kintandu, one of the varieties of Kikongo used in the area. This shows a behavior people of Kongo-Central uprising Lingala instead of Kintandu (Kikongo) their back ground language which also reveals their identity (Fridolin Ambongo 2021). For the sake of research, the researcher journeyed to Kongo-Central, mainly to Kwilu Ngongo, a rural municipality of Mbanza Ngungu to use one's resources and discover the reality concerning this language shift. The current paper sets out to examine language shift in the concerned area by identifying factors contributing to shift from Kindibu to Lingala. It is a case study of Kwilu-Ngongo whose results will be statistically

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generalized to other areas in Kongo Central (Nunan 1997). A qualitative method was applied to get the needed data. An unstructured interview was planned where twenty informants, all residents of Kwilu-Ngongo, met the researcher who interviewed them. During the interview, the major concern was to unveil the different factors compelling the informants to use Lingala instead of Kindibu and some follow up questions enriched the unstructured interview. The interview was held in Lingala and Kindibu. The specimen of twelve questions used in the interview are attached as appendix. They are presented in English. Apart from the unstructured interview, fifty residents were observed in the following settings: bus stops, markets, churches and barber shops, restaurants and hotels. It was both passive and participative observation as the researcher observed the informants and spoke to them in Kindibu and Lingala in order to get data.

I. On Kwilu-Ngongo

During the colonial era, Kwilu Ngongo was inhabited by the Ndibu who settled in different villages. In 1925, the Belgian sugar municipality 'Moerobeke' in Belgium decided to establish a branch of the company in their colony. It was the only sugar company in Belgian Congo. After independence, the Congolese state took the command of the company and the area was named (Kwilu) and (Ngongo) which are respectively the names of the two streams of the area. As many historians mentioned for Egypt: without the Nil, Egypt is useless. The same thing can be reported for Kwilu-Ngongo which is useless without the sugar company. The sugar company has contributed a lot to the development of the rural-municipality. It built houses for workers by providing water from Kwilu stream, also called 'Maza ma Mbote' (pure water) which attracts many tourists to visit the area. PADEK, an organization of the sugar company provides the population with water and the national company of Energy (SNEL) also helps with energy in the rural municipality. The sugar company also built schools and hospitals by employing the local people. Since the man power was not enough, the company recruiters had recourse to workers from other areas of the province of Kongo-Central and others came from different provinces of the country. Workers who massively came to work in the company from other provinces were from Equateur and Bandundu provinces. Those of Equateur and Kinshasa spoke Lingala. This may be the earliest contact of the local language (Kindibu) with (Lingala). Recruiters continuously brought workers to the company in every sugar cutting activity done yearly. Another fact to mention is the arrival of soldiers of the first republic at Kwilu Ngongo. As Lingala was the language of the Congolese army, different military camps trained soldiers in Lingala sent them throughout the country. Those who came to the rural municipality of Kwilu Ngongo also favored the spread of Lingala in the area (www moncongo. com).

II. On Language Shift

In this section, different views of a few scholars who worked on language shift are provided. For Fishman (1991), the concept language shift emerged in the 1960s the period when Sociolinguistics was first gaining prominence as a field of study in applied linguistics. Despite its popularity and prominence in sociolinguistics literature, there exists, as yet, no fixed definition of the term language shift. Many sociolinguists believe that language shift is a process by which a speech community is in contact situation and gradually stops using one of its languages in favor of the other. Fishman (1964) considers language shift as a social phenomenon whereby one language replaces another in a society due to underlying changes of aspirations of the society. Bodomo et al (2009) view language shift as a process in which successive generations of speakers, both at individual and community levels, gradually lose proficiency in their mother tongues or the language of their speech community in favour of other languages. This process leads to language loss among individuals and for the whole community in general. Windford (2003) notes that language shift is the result of extensive language contact with the dominant language. Lingala in Kwilu Ngongo may be taken as a dominant language on the grounds. The contact of Lingala with the people of Kwilu Ngongo may be extensive language contact given that everyday there are cars and buses from Kinshasa to Kwilu Ngongo and vice versa. Federico de Gallo et al (2019) mention that language shift is an important aspect of language loss. They refer the former to a sociolinguistic aspect of usage while the latter result from changes occurring at cognitive and psycho-sociolinguistic level. Language shift and loss are related phenomena since a continuous language shift eventually leads to language loss. What retained the author's attention are the factors examined by Nawaz et al (2012) in language shift from Punjabi into English. They
revealed the following four factors: historic –cultural, socio cultural, economic and psychological. The historic – cultural factors are related to the imperative impact of colonization. The language of the colonizers carried weight in the administration of the colony. Colonizers emphasized their own language, English, instead of Punjabi. The socio cultural factors can be explained by taking the way the British constructed a social structure of the country. The English speakers in the country enjoyed a privileged position. It was a kind of compulsion for Punjabi speakers to venerate English and enjoy the privileged position. This phenomenon is reminiscent of what Myers Scotton (1993) referred to as the 'the elite closure', whereby educated people enjoyed protecting the advantages gained from the colonial 'superior 'language, which is English, in this context. Economic factors may be illustrated with the English language as a language promising financial security. People speaking English got high level jobs. They became financially powerful. Psychological factors are related to the way English is thought to be a language of the rulers while Punjabi is taken as slave language. The four mentioned factors compelled Punjabi speakers to shift to English. Some of the four factors are also identified in the shift from Kindibu to Lingala, not in the context of colonization, but intense language contact.

III. On The Results of The Investigation

Before analyzing the collected data, it is necessary to recall that two sources of data made this study. The first one was based on interview sheets and the second one was related to observation which was both passive and participative.

III.1 The Interview Results

The interview results were made of gender and age variables and research interest ones which are related to the factors related to language shift.

III.1.1 Gender and age variables

The twenty participants interviewed by the researcher were both males and females of the different age groups. The following tables provide more clarification.

Table 1: Gender of the respondents

Gender Frequency Percent Valid Percent Cumulative Percent male 8 40,0 40,0 40,0 female 12 60,0 60,0 100,0 Total 20 100,0 100,0

Table 2: Age of the respondents

Age Frequency Percent Valid Percent Cumulative Percent

young adults 15 75,0 75,0 75,0 teenagers 3 15,0 15,0 90,0 senior citizens 2 10,0 10,0 100,0 Total 20 100,0 100,0

Table 3: Gender + Age cross tabulation

Gender Age Total Young adults teenager senior citizens Male 8 0 0 8 Female 7 3 2 12 Total 15 3 2 20

With the light of the above three tables, it is observed that the number of females dominates with twelve (60 percent) respondents while the one of males (40 percent) is not to be neglected. Most of the respondents are young adults and they are dominated by females.

III.1.2 Factors of language shift variables

As the interview was unstructured, there was not a fixed number of questions. One question was asked and others followed up to determine some factors contributing to the shift from Kindibu to Lingala.

After piloting the interview sheets, the results were synthesized in the following table.

Table 4: Factors contributing to shift as mentioned by the respondents

Respondents Percent Responses from interviewees 3 15 We usually speak Lingala at home. We are not in the village. 3 15 We live both in Kwilu and Kinshasa. Lingala helps us when we are in Kinshasa. 2 10 We are more in contact with Kinshasa residents who speak Lingala. We go to Kinshasa every one week for business. 2 10 Today, it is easy to trip to Kinshasa. It takes five hours to get to Kinshasa when you are in Kwilu. 2 10 The market place is where Lingala is used. Women selling at the market addresses people in Lingala. We watch movies in Lingala and TV in Lingala, too. 2 10 In our times, we learned recitals in Kindibu, but today everything is taught in Lingala and French 1 5 I do not speak Kindibu. 1 5 My children pick up Lingala on the street that they speak at home. I do not teach them Kindibu 1 5 I prefer to sing in Lingala in the church 1 5 I address senior citizens in Kindibu but young people in Lingala 1 5 When you speak Lingala, you feel modern 1 5 The setting where Lingala is mostly spoken is at the market. I learned some Lingala from Lufu market.

III.2 Interpretation

The write-up of the current study is based on the responses provided by the interviewees and the results from the passive and participative observations. The stress is put on factors contributing to language shift.

Historically, the sugar company recruitment agency favored workers speaking Lingala to get into contact with the local population speaking Kindibu. The recruited people from Equateur and Kinshasa arrived yearly for work and some of them established themselves in the area and integrated with the local population, unfortunately, by keeping Lingala, their native language. Another fact is the migration of the local population to Kinshasa either for studies or business purposes. In their way back home, they brought Lingala and neglected Kindibu. Two female young adults (10 percent) revealed that they do business trip every one week from Kwilu Ngongo to Kinshasa where they speak Lingala to Kinshasa business people. One female adult (5 percent) said that she learned Lingala through exposition in a Lufu market where they buy products. Lufu is market place in Kongo Central where business is done in Lingala. Economic reasons also compel the residents to communicate in Lingala. Two young adults (10 percent) who were drivers stated that the fact of moving easily from Kwilu Ngongo to Kinshasa allows to get into contact with Lingala speakers. He provided the information that today, a journey from Kwilu Ngongo to Kinshasa and vice-versa takes five hours. The contact with Lingala speakers is facilitated by the easy access from Kwilu Ngongo to Kinshasa. As a matter of fact, drivers who regularly move to Kinshasa generally address their passengers in Lingala even if they are in Kwilu-Ngongo. They talk to each other in Lingala even if they can speak Kindibu. Responses provided by the interviewees lead to mention migration of the non-native speakers, speaking Lingala, to Kwilu Ngongo, intense contact with Lingala and easy mobility from Kwilu Ngongo to Kinshasa and vice versa as factors. Another interviewed woman mentioned the saying that ' Kwilu Ngongo ka vata ko kansi Kinsasa' implying that Kwilu Ngongo is an urban setting like Kinshasa where Lingala is spoken. It is a pity to notice that the population blindly prefers Lingala on the detriment of their local language, their linguistic asset. This is corroborated by the statement of Fridolin Ambongo in Kisantu (2021).

Another driver (5 percent) recognized the importance of Kindibu saying that he uses two languages, (Kindibu) and (Lingala), to communicate both to Kwilu residents and people from Kinshasa. Generally, he addresses senior citizens in Kindibu not young people, who are stuck to Lingala. This shows a diglossic use of language based on the age group. Two workers of the sugar company (10 percent) revealed that if you want to buy foods, address in Kikongo, women as generally selling at the markets increase the prices if you address them in Lingala. This implies that people from Kinshasa are believed to be financially stronger. In Kwilu, people from Kinshasa are easily identified with Lingala. This fact is related to the function of a language as clue baring, ie serving for the personal identification (Trudgill et al 2001). The researcher observed that even megaphones used for commercials sounded Lingala in Kwilu Ngongo.

Table 5: Commercials in Lingala

Contents of the Commercials Translated into English - Toza na mbisi ya mayi: Nzombo - We have different Fresh fishes ngolo. - The price is accessible - Na talo malamu

The responses examined above show that Lingala is a language of opportunities. Speaking Lingala allows to get into contact with business people, who generally speak Lingala. This situation is similar to what (Nawaz et al 2012) found concerning the shift from Punjabi to English. People speaking English got high level jobs. They related the situation to economic factors. The researcher observed that churches, mainly revival ones, preach in Lingala. One of the pastors of a revival church preached as if he were in Kinshasa. During his sermon, he did not code-switch or borrow words from Kindibu, and this pleased the audience made of mostly of youth who are accustomed to speaking Lingala.

A pastor interviewed (5 percent) confessed that he did not speak Kindibu, so he does everything in Lingala, praying for the sick and preaching in the church. This behavior is on the detriment of Kindibu which must be perpetuated to future generation as it makes part of personality (Chaika 1982). Sociolinguists have attested that one of the assets of Lingala allowing it to spread throughout the country is music, and Kongo Central does not make an exception. As observed, in hotels and restaurants, most of the songs played are in Lingala. The two interviewed teenagers said that although they had never been to Kinshasa, they listen to it in music and watch TV in Lingala. Most of the youth listen to the radio and watch TV channels such Ralik and Kimvuka, which broadcast in Lingala. However, Radio Bangu channel tries to sensitize Kindibu programs, unfortunately, it is mostly followed by senior citizens. Lingala songs are mostly heard in churches, too. A young adult said that all Kindibu songs are no more on fashion, but Lingala ones help more in prayer. She mentioned the song by Moise Mbiye (Alokotaka na se, atomboli

likolo), (God uprises the poor) helps her in meditation. This point is corroborated by Fishman (1964) who attributes language shift to underlying changes of aspirations of the society. Songs sung in Lingala serve for spiritual purpose. Thus, music and mass media also contribute to the language shift. Two senior citizens (10 percent) complained that many schools, in the area of education, do not teach any more Kindibu in primary schools. They said during their times, they even learned recitals in Kindibu. A parent (5 percent) confessed not to teach Kindibu to their children at home. The children picked up in Lingala that they hear along the street and sing in the revival churches. A teenager (10 percent) encountered at the market overtly confessed that she did not speak Kindibu. This could justify as there are parents who do not teach Kindibu to their children at home. The researcher got lost in a neighborhood. He asked for directions to three women sitting at their home in Kindibu. It was a surprise to notice that they replied in Lingala instead of Kindibu. He interviewed them (15 percent) and disclosed that there are residents of Kwilu-Ngongo who are native of Kinshasa. Fortunately, they have kept their Lingala in Kwilu- Ngongo instead of learning Kindibu, the local language. It is observed that many natives of Kwilu-Ngongo assimilate themselves to Kinshasa residents. Their Lingala speech is slanted and differs from Kinshasa residents who use the rapid Lingala speech (Nsimambote (2021a) and (2021b). Lingala is a language of prestige in Kwilu Ngongo. It is related to psychological factors in this situation (Nawaz et al 2012). Basing on different responses provided by the respondents, the results of the investigation revealed the following facts: - Migration of the nonnative speakers, speaking Lingala to Kwilu, - Intense contact with Lingala and easy mobility from Kwilu to Kinshasa - Lingala is a language of opportunities - Sermons in Lingala - Music, mass media in Lingala - Less emphasis of Kindibu in primary school - Lingala is a language of prestige

These facts are related to the following factors: - Historical factors since migration brought Lingala speakers in the area. - Geographical factors as the distance from Kwilu to Kinshasa allows easy mobility and intense contact with both Lingala and Kindibu speakers - Economic factors, speaking Lingala allows to get into contact with Lingala speakers who are mostly business people and executives of the sugar company of Kwilu Ngongo. - Religious factors as in mainly revival churches, Lingala is the language of the sermon. Christians sing in Lingala and read the Lingala bible. - Cultural factors can be justified since the mass media and music are broadcast in Lingala.

- Educational factors as schools do not emphasize Kindibu, Lingala is taught at primary schools. - Psychological factors as some youths think that speaking Lingala make them become modern.

Conclusion and suggestions

The current study took place in Kwilu-Ngongo, a rural municipality of Mbanza Ngungu. It examined language shift in the concerned area by identifying factors contributing to shift from Kindibu to Lingala. The researcher applied qualitative method whereby unstructured interview and observation were implemented. Twenty residents of Kwilu-Ngongo responded verbally to the questions and fifty of them were observed to get the needed data. It has been disclosed that there are seven pertinent factors, namely historical, geographical, economic, religious, educational, cultural and psychological contributing to the shift from Kindibu to Lingala. Among those seven factors, the economic and psychological ones are major in the language shift. The researcher provides the following suggestions to maintain the local language: First, sensitize the local population on the use of Kindibu in their social life

This sensitization may be done at the level of the provincial authorities who may organize conferences, seminars on the importance of the language. Folders, booklets focusing on the importance of the language are useful. Radio programs and TV ones may not be excluded for the sensitization of the local population.

Second, focus on Kindibu in primary education

School leaders should also be sensitized on the strict teaching of Kindibu in primary schools. They may be helped with different course books in Kindibu.

Third, promote music in Kindibu

Music is emotional. It is necessary to promote pop, gospel and folk music in Kindibu by sponsoring local artists.

Fourth, promote sermons in Kindibu

It is important to recommend pastors of different churches operating in Kwilu-Ngongo to use Kindibu in their sermons. They may also be used as agents of sensitization who will encourage their believers to use their local language.

Fifth and last, organizing a provincial language observatory

Taking into account a huge number of languages to manage, the Congolese national language observatory will be more efficient if it is divided into provincial branches. The Kongo Central branch will work on Kikongo varieties. With the help of the provincial government, the role of the branch will be to preserve and promote the Kikongo dialectal varieties. This organization will be taken as 'the language guardian'. In case of local language threat as it is noticed now in Kwilu Ngongo and generalized in other areas of Kongo Central, the organization may take some corrective measures. Linguistic protectionism may be appropriate if the situation of the language shift persists.

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Appendix

Questions used in the unstructured interview

1. Your gender?

2. Your age?

3. Do you speak Lingala?

4. What languages do you speak in the markets?

5. What languages do you listen to the radio or watch TV?

6. Why do you prefer to speak Lingala instead of Kindibu?

7. Do you enjoy song sung in Kindibu?

8. Where did you learn Lingala?

9. Do you pray in Kindibu?

10. How do you feel if someone speaks Lingala?

11. Did you learn Lingala at school?

12. In which language (s) do your parents address their children here in

Kwilu Ngongo?