Loba Lingala!
An English guide to the language of Kinshasa

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALBAN LOW
To my friend and teacher, Matthew Kabeya
Acknowledgements

This book happened by accident. I didn’t imagine that I would be writing it when I first arrived in Kinshasa, nor did I think that I would be putting something like this together during the initial months of study. But as what began as a collection of notes on piles of scrap pieces of A4 gradually became more organised, and I found myself interpreting and explaining various things about Lingala to friends, the project soon started to develop a momentum of its own.

Needless to say, none of this would have been even remotely possible without the help, support, humour, patience and wisdom of Professor Matthew Kabeya, or without the technical expertise of Jose Molenge, one of the British Embassy Kinshasa’s resident Lingala authorities. I am deeply indebted to both of them.

The book would also not have been possible without the kind support and very excellent contributions of Alban Low. Alban’s illustrations bring the pages alive, conveying a picture of daily life and the nature of Kinshasa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo that are rarely captured.

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Contents

Acknowledgments........................................................................................................4
Foreword.....................................................................................................................7
Preface.......................................................................................................................11

1. Kobanda – to start.................................................................................................13
   1.1 Exchanging greetings....................................................................................13
   1.2 Introducing yourself....................................................................................15
   1.3 Basic pronunciation......................................................................................15
   1.4 Getting started – The first verbs and words..............................................18
   1.5 The first 10 verbs.......................................................................................18
   1.6 The first 10 words......................................................................................20
   1.7 And a few other important bits....................................................................21
   1.8 Subject pronouns.......................................................................................21
   1.9 Personal pronouns......................................................................................23
   1.10 Prepositions..............................................................................................23
   1.11 ‘No’s, ‘if’s, ‘and’s and ‘but’s – indispensable helper words...................24

2. Koyeba – to know ................................................................................................26
   2.1 The basic tenses – present, past, future and imperative............................27
      2.1.1 The present tense................................................................................27
      2.1.2 The past tense.....................................................................................28
      2.1.3 The future tense................................................................................28
      2.1.4 The imperative tense.........................................................................29
   2.2 Conjugating the first 10 verbs.....................................................................31
   2.3 Creating simple sentences..........................................................................41
      2.3.1 Simple sentences in the affirmative..................................................41
      2.3.2 Simple sentences in the negative.......................................................47
      2.3.3 Using infinitive verb forms.................................................................51
   2.4 More verbs and words..................................................................................51
      2.4.1 10 more verbs......................................................................................51
      2.4.2 And some more words.........................................................................55
   2.5 Irregular verbs – kokende, koya and kolia...................................................57

3. Kosila – to finish................................................................................................62
   3.1 Action tenses................................................................................................62
      3.1.1 Simple present tense..........................................................................63
      3.1.2 Present progressive tense.................................................................63
      3.1.3 Past progressive tense........................................................................63
   3.2 The subjunctive .............................................................................................65
   3.3 Lingala nouns and verbs.............................................................................69
   3.4 Colours and numbers...................................................................................70
      3.4.1 Colours.................................................................................................71
      3.4.2 Numbers...............................................................................................71
Foreword

For most of us, language preparation in advance of a posting to Kinshasa focuses on French. We dust off our school days knowledge, brush up on our tenses and *le, la* and *les*, add a few more pertinent words for war, conflict, aid, and good music and bad driving and expect to be ready to go when we arrive.

Once here, however, it quickly becomes apparent that being able to communicate in French is just part of the picture. Listen carefully to what’s going on around you and you’ll soon discover that the real language of Kinshasa is Lingala.

Lingala is the first language of many of the residents of the city. It’s spoken at work, in shops and in restaurants. It’s used in the songs played on the radio and in the clubs. It’s on the signs and the graffiti. Taxi and *esprit de mort* drivers use it to curse at you. Children use it to ask you for things. Lingala is the real language of the people. And it is the window to the real Kinshasa.

Lingala is a Bantu language spoken by millions of people throughout north western Democratic Republic of the Congo, a large part of the Republic of Congo and some parts of Angola and the Central African Republic.

Although there are different explanations of how the language evolved, it is usually agreed that Lingala evolved from Bobangi, the trade language of the Bangala, a cultural group living along the Congo River upstream from what is now Kinshasa in the mid-19th century.

Lingala is a fairly simple and straightforward language. It is reassuringly
regular with a limited vocabulary. Most estimates say that there are between 800-900 words in Lingala. In developing this book I was able to gather just about that many, but I’m constantly finding new (and old) ones to add to my list.

I first became interested in learning Lingala soon after my arrival in Kinshasa when I realised that a lot of the Kinois I was interacting with did not speak much, or any, French. I approached Professor Matthew Kabeya, the very excellent language instructor and interpreter for the British Embassy here, and asked if it would be possible to learn a few words. Matthew very kindly agreed to help.

Over the ensuing months, Matthew and I met once or twice a week. He would ask me about my activities since the last class and then listen patiently as I tried to explain, stumbling and straining to string together my slowly growing Lingala vocabulary.

There were no formal homework assignments. Instead, during each class Matthew would introduce me to some new verbs and vocabulary and I would do my best to commit them to memory and then to use them in my daily interactions and routines around the city. Along with Matthew, the people of Kinshasa became my teachers. And almost without exception, they proved to be helpful, patient and delighted that someone was taking the time to learn their language.

There are only a limited amount of resources for people who want to learn Lingala these days, especially for English speakers. There is a dusty Lingala-English dictionary from the mid-1960s that is some help. And some dodgy grammar books that you can occasionally buy from the vendors on some of the city streets. There are also a few online courses and vocabulary lists that are usually better than nothing at all.

But for the most part, there isn’t really an up-to-date manual about Lingala grammar and vocabulary for English speakers, which is why I’ve compiled this book. With the help of Matthew, and the technical expertise of Jose Molenge, the Deputy Corporate Services Manager at the British Embassy and a native of Equateur Province, where the most pure form of Lingala is still spoken, I’ve worked to assemble as much information as I could and to present it in what I hope is a simple and approachable way.

This book is not designed to be a formal language course – far from it. There
are no exercises, no worksheets, no self-testing to see how you’re getting on. Instead, like me, I hope that you will learn a few words and phrases and start to let the city be your teacher.

If your experience is like mine was, you’ll likely notice a few things as you begin. First, people will stare at you. Even when you’re pretty sure you’ve said things correctly, they will often regard you with a mix of shock and disbelief, as if the family dog suddenly started rattling on about the latest sports scores or something in the news.

When this first happened to me, I would return to my next class with Matthew and dejectedly ask what grammatical error I might have made or whether my pronunciation was correct. He would just smile and gently explain that hearing a white person speaking Lingala leaves a lot Kinois initially stunned. Say a few words and then wait for them to sink in before continuing, he would helpfully suggest. It seems to work.

The second thing you will likely notice is that the words and pronunciation that people use varies greatly. You will no doubt have people tell you that the words listed in this book are wrong, or old, or not even Lingala but instead are something else. They might even be right.

Lingala in Kinshasa is often a blend of traditional Lingala, French and some bastardized English. Lingala in other parts of the DRC is different. It is most pure in Equateur, but there are often multiple Lingala words for the same things depending on where you are in the country. And younger people tend to use a slightly different vocabulary than older people.

Lingala is growing, developing and changing. It is a dynamic and vibrant language and people speak it differently depending on who they are and where they are. Ask a group of Lingala speakers and they often won’t agree about a particular word or phrase or expression.

And since it is a growing, developing and changing language, some people won’t agree with some of the contents of this book. In response, I can only point out a few things in my defence.

First, pretty much everything has been checked and tested with Matthew and Jose, my team of resident experts. This is the best I can do. Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good.
Second, it doesn’t purport to be a definitive guide and language course. Pedants and linguists will no doubt be disappointed. But then they are often are.

And finally, it’s a free book. And you didn’t have to fight your way through traffic and past puppies, knock-off luggage and strange and unsettling anatomy posters of small children in their underwear to buy it. Be happy with what you have and don’t bother me with minor corrections. I’ve moved on. Better to be polite and buy me a beer sometime, particularly if you can order it in Lingala.

Thomas Yocum
Kinshasa, May 2014
Preface

Approaching any new language can be daunting. It invariably involves study and memorisation and trial and error. And at the beginning there are usually a lot more errors during the trials.

Lingala is no different. It will most likely seem very strange starting out. For me, it was a mix of the sameness with some things – for example, nearly all of the verbs having the same basic structure, which had the effect of them starting to blur together when presented in a list – along with the newness of trying to get used to pronouncing words beginning with double consonants, such as mb- and ng-. And there are a few things – such as the Lingala words for colours and numbers – that are, to be honest, just a bit difficult at first.

This book tries to make sense of it all and to present things in a logical and useful order.

The first section presents the things you’ll need to get going – some common verbs and vocabulary and the essential other bits to construct basic sentences to get you on your way.

The second section looks at how to put these basic building blocks into use. It reviews the basic verb tenses and introduces a few more verbs and vocabulary, along with examples of how they are used.

The third section introduces a few of the more advanced verb tenses. It also looks at the relationship between some Lingala nouns and verbs that might help you to anticipate what correct forms might be, along with those pesky colours and numbers.

The fourth section introduces a range of everyday topics and activities – restaurants, markets, food, shopping, the natural environment, along with some of the more serious aspects of life in the DRC, such as war, witchcraft and street life – and the associated verbs, vocabulary, common phrases and expressions that you might come across.

The fifth section presents a collection of what I call ‘binomials’ – two related words, such as ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ or ‘question’ and ‘answer’, which I found really helpful for memorising.

Finally, at the end there is a list of verbs and a dictionary – in both Lingala-
English and English-Lingala – to help you answer the inevitable questions that will arise as you progress and become more fluent.

In addition to this book, there are a few other resources that you might useful. As I've already noted, the Kinois themselves are probably the best teachers you'll find. I also found listening to the some of the local radio stations and Lingala music to be a big help. And I also made a set of flashcards with English and Lingala on either side to help memorise some of the trickier words and verbs and verb tenses. That last bit came very close to seeming like work, but it did make a big difference when I was first starting out.
1. *Kobanda – to start*

This section introduces the basics that you’ll need to speak and understand Lingala. It addresses things like pronunciation and basic sentence structure. It also introduces 10 of the more common verbs and 10 words that you’ll use when you’re first starting.

And since one of the first things you’ll likely want to do is to be able to greet people that you meet in your community and around the city, we’ll begin with how to make the small talk that is the glue of most social interactions.

Granted, this will only be a superficial start to the learning process, since you’ll be learning a few words and phrases in isolation. But it’s a good way to start to get the feel for speaking Lingala, and for getting used to the reaction you’ll likely get from Kinois once you do.

1.1 Exchanging greetings

The word you will probably hear most as you begin to speak Lingala is *mbote* (m-BOH-teh), which means ‘hello’. It can be used at any time of day or night and is most properly followed by the person’s name, such as ‘*Mbote Jenny*’ or ‘*Mbote Helena*’, although it just as often stands alone as a greeting.

Once you’ve mastered *mbote*, you can then move on to other parts of a standard greeting, such as asking how things are going or how the person is.

The most common question to ask how things are is ‘*Sango nini?’* (SANG-go NEE-nee). *Sango* means ‘news’ and *nini* means ‘what’. So you’re basically asking the equivalent of ‘what’s new?’

There are a few standard replies. The most common one is ‘*Sango te*’ (SANG-go teh). Again, *sango* means ‘news’. And *te*, as you will come to see, means ‘no’ (or a negative). So the reply is essentially ‘nothing new’ or ‘not much’. This is a good thing, not someone with a problem.
Another common reply is ‘Sango malamu’ (SANG-go mah-LAH-moo). 

_Malamu_, meaning ‘good’, is a very common and useful Lingala word that you will encounter often. So, the reply is ‘news good’ or ‘things are good’.

Once you’ve broken the ice with _mbote_, and maybe a _sango_ or two, you might be asked how you are. Without getting into too much verb work too soon, this can be handled pretty easily if you know the Lingala forms for ‘you are’, which is _ozali_ (oh-ZAH-lee), and ‘I am’, which is _nazali_ (nah-ZAH-lee).

Most commonly, you will be asked: ‘Ozali malamu?’ (oh-ZAH-lee mah-LAH-moo?), which means, ‘are you good?’ or ‘are you well?’

Provided you are, in fact, good and/or well, the reply is simply: ‘Nazali malamu’ (nah-ZAH-lee mah-LAH-moo), which means ‘I am good.’ If you are not good and/or well, you can be brave and say ‘Nazali malamu te’ (nah-ZAH-lee mah-LAH-moo teh), which means ‘I am not good’ (literally ‘I am good not’), but you can probably see that it will inevitably lead to a host of follow-on questions in Lingala about you being not good and/or well that you might not want to tackle yet. Probably best to stay positive at this point.

Finally, it’s always polite to return the favour and ask how the other person is. You can, of course, ask ‘Ozali malamu?’ (oh-ZAH-lee mah-LAH-moo), which means, ‘are you good?’ or ‘are you well?’ But you can also streamline things and simply ask ‘Na yo?’ (nah yoh), which means ‘and you?’ or ‘Boni yo?’ (BOH-nee yoh), which means ‘how are you?’ You will probably hear ‘Nazali malamu’ (nah-ZAH-lee mah-LAH-moo) as a reply.
Greetings

Kinois typically use a standard set of questions and responses when meeting and greeting people:

*Mbote!* – (m-BOH-teh) – Hello!
*Mbote na yo!* – (m-BOH-teh nah yoh) – Hello to you! (when saying hello to just one person)
*Mbote na bino!* – (m-BOH-teh nah BEE-noh) – Hello to you! (when saying hello to more than one person)
*Ozali malamu?* – (oh-ZAH-lee mah-LAH-moo) – Are you well?
*Nazali malamu* – (nah-ZAH-lee mah-LAH-moo) – I am well
*Sango nini?* – (SANG-go NEE-nee) – What’s new?
*Sango te* – (SANG-go teh) – Nothing new
*Sango malamu* – (SANG-go mah-LAH-moo) – Things are good
*Na yo?* – (nah yoh) – And you?
*Boni yo?* – (BOH-nee yoh) – How are you?

1.2 Introducing yourself

After the pleasantries are exchanged, you’ll often be asked about your name. Most commonly, you’ll hear ‘*Kombo na yo?’* (KOM-boh nah yoh?) – which literally means ‘name have you?’ The appropriate response is ‘*Kombo na ngai’* (KOM-boh na n-GUY) and then your name. So, the appropriate reply will be ‘*Kombo na ngai Marge’* or ‘*Kombo na ngai Ted Allen’*.

Introductions

‘*Kombo*’ is the key to speaking about names:

*Kombo na yo?* – (KOM-boh nah yoh) – What is your name?
*Kombo na ngai ...* – (KOM-boh na n-GUY) and then your name – My name is ...

1.3 Basic pronunciation

Lingala pronunciation is fairly straightforward and consistent. Although there tends to be a slight stress on the second syllable of verbs, there are no overly strong accents at the beginning or end of most words.

But for the most part, it’s not necessary to worry too much about stressing or
emphasising one part of a word or another. I’ve included stresses on the second syllables of a lot of words in the pronunciation examples because it can often be difficult to approach new and strange multi-syllable words, and because people starting out often tend to place too much stress at the beginning or end of words, which isn’t really appropriate for Lingala.

Similarly, the vowel and consonant pronunciations also tend to be straightforward and consistent.

Vowels are typically ‘short’:

- **a** – ‘ah’, as in ‘mama’
- **e** – ‘eh’, as in ‘egg’
- **i** – ‘ih’, as in ‘it’
- **o** – ‘oh’, as in ‘boat’
- **u** – ‘oo’, as in ‘chute’

And the consonants are typically ‘hard’:

- **c** – as in ‘cap’
- **g** – as in ‘girl’

Double consonants – **mb**-, **ng**-, etc. – require a slightly more acquired touch. In each case, you’ll want to pronounce the first letter, but this needs to be done very quickly and softly. The second consonant is the dominant partner in the pair. It looks harder than it is. Have a few tries and listen to others and you’ll soon pick it up.
Name game 1

If you’re using this book, chances are you’re a *mundele* (mun-DEL-ee). And you and a collection of your ex-pat friends are *mindele* (min-DEL-ee), the plural form. Although different Kinois – and different Congolese – ascribe different meanings to the word, the term *mundele* generally refers to a person viewed as being foreign, white, and wealthier, better-educated, better-travelled and having better chances in life than most Kinois. Obviously, depending on individual circumstances, this may or may not be the case.

I’ve always been a bit intrigued by the term. I’ve had many discussions about it with Congolese friends and colleagues from a variety of backgrounds. Almost without exception, they maintain that *mundele* is neither pejorative nor racist. It’s a word that doesn’t really translate, they explain. Don’t be offended.

But it still never fails to jar me a bit when I’m called one. And, despite the reassurances, it certainly sounds unpleasant and racist when someone spits the word out at you when you’ve done something that they don’t like. Still, I try to take my friends’ and colleagues’ explanations to heart and to learn to embrace life as the *mundele* that I will apparently always be to most Kinois. It’s just the way it is.

Name game 2

In addition to *mundele* and *mindele*, there are also other terms to describe individual subsets of foreigners living in Kinshasa. Lebanese and Chinese expats are commonly referred to by their cultural group names – ‘*Lebanois*’ and ‘*Chinois*’. And Belgians are often referred to as *les nokos* (lay NO-kos) – or ‘the uncles’.

A Kinois friend once explained the *nokos*-Belgian reference when I was asking about how modern Congolese view Belgians in light of the many of the brutal aspects of the colonial period. ‘We call them uncles because they are like family that you might not really care for that much, but who have always seemed to be around,’ he said with a wry smile. ‘Like it or not, we’re sort of attached to them. We’ll sometimes even root for them if they’re playing football on the television.’
1.4 Getting started – The first verbs and words

Now that you’ve mastered the pleasantries and have a sense of how to pronounce some of the words you’ll be encountering, it’s time to start looking at the basic building blocks necessary to actually start speaking Lingala.

Unlike a lot of languages, Lingala uses a fairly simple and direct approach. The verbs are wonderfully regular, the conjugations approachable and the vocabulary often fairly predictable. And there are no articles – no ‘le’, ‘la’ and ‘les’ – to gum up sentences and frustrate speakers. To my ear, Lingala sentences often sound a bit like Russian ones: ‘I take car’ or ‘You eat meal now.’

1.5 The first 10 verbs

You can go a long way in speaking Lingala simply by learning 10 of the most common (and in my experience, some of the most useful) verbs.

Every Lingala verbs begins with ‘ko-’, which indicates that it’s the infinitive form. And almost every verb in Lingala ends with ‘-a’, which also indicates that it’s the infinitive form.

This will probably look and seem a bit unsettling at first, since the beginning and end of all of the verbs will obviously be the same when you begin practicing. But you will soon come to appreciate this reassuring regularity when you start to conjugate, particularly with using the future and past tenses.
So, the first 10 Lingala verbs to learn are:

- **kozala** – (koh-ZAH-lah) – to be
- **kozala na** – (koh-ZAH-lah nah) – to have
- **kolinga** – (koh-LING-gah) – to want, to like
- **kosala** – (koh-SAHLah) – to work, to make
- **kosomba** – (koh-SOM-bah) – to buy
- **kokanisa** – (koh-kan-NEE-sah) – to think, to hope
- **koloba** – (koh-LOH-bah) – to speak
- **koyeba** – (koh-YEH-bah) – to know
- **kokoka** – (koh-KOK-kah) – to be able to
- **kosengela** – (koh-sen-GEH-lah) – to have to

You may find it helpful to look past the initial ‘ko-’ and to instead concentrate on the second syllable of each of the verbs (which will form the root, as you’ll see in a minute) and the rest of the verb as you start to become familiar with them.
1.6 The first 10 words

And just as with the verbs, knowing a few of the more commonly used words can get you a long way when you start speaking Lingala. Initial conversations often seem to revolve around work, family, what you’ve done, are doing or are going to do, or what you want. Accordingly, this list looks at some of those areas and introduces a few key words.

So the 10 words you’ll want to know from the beginning are:

- mwasi – (MWAH-see) – wife/woman
- mobali – (moh-BAL-ee) – husband/man
- ndeko – (n-DEK-oh) – brother/sister
- ndako – (n-DAK-oh) – house
- mosala – (moh-SAH-lah) – work
- mbuma – (m-BOO-mah) – fruit
- ndunda – (n-DOON-dah) – vegetables
- mayi – (MY-ee) – water
- malamu – (mah-LAH-moo) – good
- mabe – (MAH-beh) – bad

Please and thank you

Draw from it what you may, but there isn’t really a commonly used word for ‘please’ in Lingala. Happily, there is one for ‘thank you’, although the exact pronunciation and spelling seems to depend on who you ask.

The word I’ve learned for ‘thank you’ is botondi (boh-TON-dee), although you’ll frequently see and hear it presented as natondi (nah-TON-dee) or natondi yo (nah-TON-dee yoh). Either variant seems to work.
For ‘please’, the form is more closely aligned with the French ‘s’il vous plait’ – ‘if you please’. In Lingala it’s soki okosepela (SOH-kee oh-KOH-she-peh-lah) – soki (if) and okosepela (you will be content). I use it when it’s appropriate, but it’s not really that common. It’s actually a bit formal and most Kinois seem a bit bemused when they hear it. If you do get a reply, it will almost always include ‘nakosepela’, or ‘I will be content’.

1.7 And a few other important bits

As you’ve begun to see, all of the verbs in the infinitive form in Lingala begin with ‘ko-’. And for the most part they often seem to share a special sort of sound and rhythm that makes Lingala such a lovely language, especially in song lyrics.

Once you understand the basics of conjugation and how to combine the right pronouns, prefixes and suffixes, along with a few common ‘helper words’, the same approach can be used over and over for just about any situation.

So, with the first 10 verbs and words introduced, we’ll next look at pronouns. There are two types of pronouns in Lingala: subject pronouns and personal pronouns.

1.8 Subject pronouns

There are seven subject pronouns in Lingala and they’re one of the key building blocks of the language, so it helps to memorise them as soon as possible.

na – (nah) – I
o – (oh) – you
a – (ah) – he/she
to – (toh) – we
bo – (boh) – you (plural)
ba – (bah) – they
e – (eh) – it

Unlike a lot of other languages in which the subject pronouns and the
conjugated verbs are two separate words, Lingala combines the two into a single word. Subject pronouns are never used by themselves. Instead, they are always joined with the form of the verb that you want to use at the beginning of the verb. Always.

So, ‘I am’ becomes nazali (na+zali, the first-person singular form of kozala, ‘to be’) and ‘you are’ becomes ozali (o+zali, the second-person singular form) and so on.

Here’s how it works for each of the seven subject pronoun forms for kozala:

na+zali – nazali – (nah-ZAH-lee) – I am
o+zali – ozali – (oh-ZAH-lee) – you are
a+zali – azali – (ah-ZAH-lee) – he/she is
to+zali – tozali – (toh-ZAH-lee) – we are
bo+zali – bozali – (boh-ZAH-lee) – you are (plural)
ba+zali – bazali – (bah-ZAH-lee) – they are
e+zali – ezali – (eh-ZAH-lee) – it is

We’ll look at the methods for conjugating in more detail in the next section, but you’ll likely already begin to see how reassuringly regular things can be.
1.9 Personal pronouns

There are six personal pronouns in Lingala, and they’re used very, very often, so it also helps to learn them.

*ngai* – (n-GUY) – me, mine
*yo* – (yoh) – you, yours
*ye* – (yeah) – him, her, his, hers
*biso* – (BEE-sew) – we, ours
*bino* – (BEE-noh) – you, yours (plural)
*bango* – (BANG-oh) – them, their

The personal pronouns are an important part of most conversations in Lingala, particularly with its streamlined, article-free construction. Unlike subject pronouns, personal pronouns are often used by themselves and you will hear them in almost every sentence.

Personal pronouns usually appear after the subject they refer to. For example, 'our house' is *ndako na biso* – *ndako* (house) and *biso* (our). And 'my fruit' is *mbuma na ngai* – *mbuma* (fruit) and *ngai* (mine).

You'll no doubt notice that there is a ‘*na*’ in each of these sentences. Be patient. We’ll get to that next. For the moment, focus on the order and the rhythm of each of the sentences. It’s a very common construction, and one that you’ll hear over and over.

Here are a few more examples:

*mwasi na ngai* – *mwasi* (wife) *na ngai* (mine) – my wife
*mobali na yo* – *mobali* (husband) *na yo* (you) – your husband
*ndeko na ye* – *ndeko* (brother or sister) *na ye* (his/her) – his or her brother or sister
*mosala na biso* – *mosala* (work) *na biso* (ours) – our work
*ndako na bino* – *ndako* (house) *na bino* (you – plural) – your house
*ndunda na bango* – *ndunda* (vegetables) *na bango* (their) – their vegetables

1.10 Prepositions

As you’ll have noticed above, Lingala uses one or two key prepositions – *na* (nah) and *ya* (yah) – in almost every sentence. These two little words are often indispensable in connecting the various parts and you’ll often see more than one in any given sentence, although at first it might not be entirely
apparent why.

It can also be a little confusing, because *na* can sometimes seem to have the same meaning as *ya*, but it doesn’t really seem to work the other way around.

The definitions of these two important little binders are:

*na* – and, on, in, of  
*ya* – of

In Kinshasa, they are basically interchangeable, but in other parts of the country there is a clear distinction between the two. Most of the people you will likely hear talking in Kinshasa will be using *na* a lot more than *ya*, so don’t let it throw you. And don’t get too hung up about which one to use, especially when you’re just starting out. Plenty of time to practice the finer points later on. When you’re first starting, if in doubt, add a *na* and you probably won’t be far off the mark.

1.11 ‘No’s, ‘if’s, ‘and’s and ‘but’s – indispensable helper words

Finally, as with any language, there are a handful of words that you simply can’t do without. Words like ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘maybe’, and ‘and’, ‘but’ and ‘or’. These little words are often crucial for getting your meaning across.

As with the other bits presented so far, it’s helpful to commit this short list to memory. You’ll find yourself using them just about every time you speak.

*boye* – *(BOY-eh)* – so, thus
So that’s it – about 50 words. Pretty much everything you need to start speaking a reasonable amount of Lingala. In the next section, we’ll start to put them together.

**Chegey or Shegey?**

It’s impossible to spend much time in Kinshasa without meeting members of one of the city's best-known groups, the *chegeys* or *shegeys*. While people may differ on the preferred spelling, few would argue that they generally fail to bring much in the way of positive contributions to interpersonal interactions. Or that they can be a bit dangerous. But personal shortcomings aside, the origin of the term for these street corner gangs is a bit of a mystery.

One theory is that the word *chegey* was coined after Laurent Kabila’s child soldiers – the *kadago* – marched into Kinshasa, reminding people of mini-Che Gueveras. Hence the ‘chegey’ version. It’s probably worth noting here that although Che did spend time in eastern DRC in 1965, things did not go well between him and his Congolese counterparts. He left describing his time as an ‘unmitigated disaster’ and few of the Congolese involved would have disagreed. Pairing his tarnished reputation with young thugs is certainly in keeping with the wonderful irony that many Kinois are so adept at drawing upon. The problem, however, is that the term was apparently in use before Kabila and his *kadago* arrived.

A second theory is that *shegey* is an ironic reference to the 1985 Schengen Agreement relaxing border controls and allowing free movement across 26 European member-countries, similar to the way that the gangs seem to move about Kinshasa with impunity.
2. Koyeba – to know

As with just about any other language, Lingala uses a regular system of conjugations and constructions that begin to become pretty routine once you get used to them.

As you saw in the first section, every Lingala verb begins with ko- and almost every one ends in –a.

To review, here are the 10 verbs that you’ve already been introduced to:

- **kozala** – (koh-ZAH-lah) – to be
- **kozala na** – (koh-ZAH-lah nah) – to have
- **kolinga** – (koh-LING-gah) – to want, to like
- **kosala** – (koh-SA-lah) – to work, to make
- **kosomba** – (koh-SOM-bah) – to buy
- **kokanisa** – (koh-kan-NEE-sah) – to think, to hope
- **koloba** – (koh-LOH-bah) – to speak
- **koyeba** – (koh-YEH-bah) – to know
- **kokoka** – (koh-KOH-kah) – to be able to
- **kosengela** – (koh-sen-GEH-lah) – to have to

We’ll take each one in turn and look at how it’s conjugated in the four basic tenses – present, past, future and imperative.

First a quick overview of how each of these tenses are generated.
2.1 The basic tenses – present, past, future and imperative

2.1.1 The present tense

To conjugate Lingala verbs in the present tense (I am, you are, he/she is, etc.), first drop the ‘ko-’ at the front of the infinitive form.

For kozala (to be), this leaves ‘-zala’.

Next, drop the ‘-a’ at the end.

With kozala, now without the ‘ko’ or ‘-a’, this leaves ‘-zal’

Now add the appropriate pronoun – na-, o-, a-, to-, bo-, ba-, e- – for what you are trying to say. And then add an ‘i’ at the end.

na+zal +i – nazali – (nah-ZAH-lee) – I am
o+zal +i – ozali – (oh-ZAH-lee) – you are
a+zal+i – azali – (ah-ZAH-lee) – he/she is
to+zal+i – tozali – (toh-ZAH-lee) – we are
bo+zal+i – bozali – (boh-ZAH-lee) – you are (plural)
ba+zal+i – bazali – (bah-ZAH-lee) – they are
e+zal+i – ezali – (eh-ZAH-lee) – it is
2.1.2 The past tense

As with all the other tense formations, the past tense is formed with a combination of the subject pronoun, the root stem and a consistent ending that signals that it’s a past tense form.

To create the past tense of kozala, first drop the ‘ko-’ from the infinitive form and replace it with the appropriate subject pronoun – again, na-, o-, a-, to-, bo-, ba-, e- – and then add ‘-ki’ to the end of the infinitive root.

na+zala+ki – nazalaki – (nah-ZAH-lah-kee) – I was
o+zala+ki – ozalaki – (oh-ZAH-lah-kee) – you were
a+zala+ki – azalaki – (ah-ZAH-lah-kee) – he/she was
to+zala+ki – tozalaki – (toh-ZAH-lah-kee) – we were
bo+zala+ki – bozalaki – (boh-ZAH-lah-kee) – you were (plural)
ba+zala+ki – bazalaki – (bah-ZAH-lah-kee) – they were
e+zala+ki – ezalaki – (eh-ZAH-lah-kee) – it was

Somewhat confusingly, Lingala uses the same word for yesterday and tomorrow – lobi (LOH-bee) – so it is important to listen for (or look for, if you’re reading) the distinctive ‘kee’ sound at the end of every past tense verb form.

2.1.3 The future tense

Conjugating verbs in the future tense in Lingala is easy, provided you remember your pronouns and your verb infinitives.

It still involves a combination of the subject pronoun and the infinitive of the verb, but there is no letter dropping. The infinitive root stays intact and the appropriate subject pronoun is simply placed at the front.
So for kozala, this becomes:

\[\begin{align*}
na+kozala & \rightarrow \text{nakozala} \quad \text{(nah-koh-ZAH-lah)} \quad \text{I will be} \\
o+kozala & \rightarrow \text{okazala} \quad \text{(oh-koh-ZAH-lah)} \quad \text{you will be} \\
a+kozala & \rightarrow \text{akozala} \quad \text{(ah-koh-ZAH-lah)} \quad \text{he/she will be} \\
to+kozala & \rightarrow \text{tokozala} \quad \text{(toh-koh-ZAH-lah)} \quad \text{we will be} \\
bo+kozala & \rightarrow \text{bokozala} \quad \text{(boh-koh-ZAH-lah)} \quad \text{you will be (plural)} \\
ba+kozala & \rightarrow \text{bakozala} \quad \text{(boh-koh-ZAH-lah)} \quad \text{they will be} \\
e+kozala & \rightarrow \text{ekozala} \quad \text{(eh-koh-ZAH-lah)} \quad \text{it will be}
\end{align*}\]

As with the distinctive ‘kee’ sound at the end of every past tense verb form, you’ll soon be able to recognise the subject pronoun and ‘ko’ at the beginning and the much different ‘ah’ sound at the end of the verb to help make sense of the lobi yesterday-tomorrow conundrum.

2.1.4 The imperative tense

Probably the easiest of all the Lingala verb conjugations is the imperative, or command form, although the construction of the positive and negative versions differ slightly.

To create the positive imperative form of any verb, simply drop the ‘ko-’ at the beginning. That’s it.

So koloba (to speak) is ko-loba – loba! (LOH-bah) – as in the title of this book. And the positive imperative form of koyeba (to know) is ko-yeba – yebal! (YEH-bah) – know!
The negative form of the imperative tense is slightly different, however. And, if it’s possible, it’s even easier to construct. The negative form simply uses the entire infinitive followed by *te*.

So ‘Don’t speak!’ is *koloba + te* – **koloba te!**

And ‘Don’t know!’ is *koyeba te* – **koyeba te!**

**Repeat after me**

Some Kinois have a habit of repeating things that are said to them to the person that’s just said it. This happens with everyone and isn’t restricted to strangers or foreigners. It’s actually a nice gesture that shows the person has been listening to you, but it can be confusing when you first start speaking Lingala.

Since the subject pronouns change between what you’ve just said and what the person is repeating, what they say back to you will change, as well.

For example, if you say, ‘*Nalingi ndunda*’ – ‘I like vegetables’ – when it’s repeated back to you, you’ll hear, ‘*Olingi ndunda*’ – ‘You like vegetables’ – which is, of course, perfectly correct.

But for beginners, it’s easy to think that you’ve made a mistake and that the person is gently correcting you. With practice and a bit of confidence you’ll soon be able to tell the difference.

If the person has heard you correctly and you want to confirm that, you say ‘*Ya solo*’ (yah SOH-loh), which means ‘That’s correct.’
2.2 Conjugating the first 10 verbs

So, using these four conjugation approaches, the corresponding forms for each of the first 10 verbs are:

1. **kozala** – (koh-ZAH-lah) – to be

**Present tense:**

- **na+zal +i – nazali** – (nah-ZAH-lee) – I am
- **o+zal +i – ozali** – (oh-ZAH-lee) – you are
- **a+zal+i – azali** – (ah-ZAH-lee) – he/she is
- **to+zal+i – tozali** – (toh-ZAH-lee) – we are
- **bo+zal+i – bozali** – (boh-ZAH-lee) – you are (plural)
- **ba+zal+i – bazali** – (bah-ZAH-lee) – they are
- **e+zal+i – ezali** – (eh-ZAH-lee) – it is

**Past tense:**

- **na+zala+ki – nazalaki** – (nah-ZAH-lah-kee) – I was
- **o+zala+ki – ozalaki** – (oh-ZAH-lah-kee) – you were
- **a+zala+ki – azalaki** – (ah-ZAH-lah-kee) – he/she was
- **to+zala+ki – tozalaki** – (toh-ZAH-lah-kee) – we were
- **bo+zala+ki – bozalaki** – (boh-ZAH-lah-kee) – you were (plural)
- **ba+zala+ki – bazalaki** – (bah-ZAH-lah-kee) – they were
- **e+zala+ki – ezalaki** – (eh-ZAH-lah-kee) – it was

**Future tense:**

- **na+kozala – nakozala** – (nah-koh-ZAH-lah) – I will be
- **o+kozala – okozala** – (oh-koh-ZAH-lah) – you will be
- **a+kozala – akozala** – (ah-koh-ZAH-lah) – he/she will be
- **to+kozala – tokozala** – (toh-koh-ZAH-lah) – we will be
- **bo+kozala – bokozala** – (boh-koh-ZAH-lah) – you will be (plural)
- **ba+kozala – bakozala** – (bah-koh-ZAH-lah) – they will be
- **e+kozala – ekozala** – (eh-koh-ZAH-lah) – it will be

**Imperative tense:**

- **ko-zala – zala!** – (ZAH-lah) – be!
2. **kozala na** – (koh-ZAH-lah nah) – to have

**Present tense:**

\( n prez + i n a – nazali na \) – (nah-ZAH-lee nah) – I have
\( oz + i n a – ozali na \) – (oh-ZAH-lee nah) – you have
\( az + i n a – azali na \) – (ah-ZAH-lee nah) – he/she has
\( to + prez + i n a – tozali na \) – (toh-ZAH-lee nah) – we have
\( bo + prez + i n a – bozali na \) – (boh-ZAH-lee nah) – you have (plural)
\( ba + prez + i n a – bazali na \) – (bah-ZAH-lee nah) – they have
\( e + prez + i n a – ezali na \) – (eh-ZAH-lee nah) – it has

**Past tense:**

\( n prez + al + ki n a – nazalaki na \) – (nah-ZAH-lee-kee nah) – I had
\( oz + al + ki n a – ozalaki na \) – (oh-ZAH-lee-kee nah) – you had
\( az + al + ki n a – azalaki na \) – (ah-ZAH-lee-kee nah) – he/she had
\( to + prez + al + ki n a – tozalaki na \) – (toh-ZAH-lee-kee nah) – we had
\( bo + prez + al + ki n a – bozalaki na \) – (boh-ZAH-lee-kee nah) – you had (plural)
\( ba + prez + al + ki n a – bazalaki na \) – (bah-ZAH-lee-kee nah) – they had
\( e + prez + al + ki n a – ezalaki na \) – (eh-ZAH-lee-kee nah) – it had

**Future tense:**

\( n prez + kozala n a – nakozala na \) – (nah-koh-ZAH-lah nah) – I will have
\( oz + kozala n a – okozala na \) – (oh-koh-ZAH-lah nah) – you will have
\( az + kozala n a – akozala na \) – (ah-koh-ZAH-lah nah) – he/she will have
\( to + kozala n a – tokozala na \) – (toh-koh-ZAH-lah nah) – we will have
\( bo + kozala n a – bokozala na \) – (boh-koh-ZAH-lah nah) – you will have
\( ba + kozala n a – bakozala na \) – (bah-koh-ZAH-lah nah) – they will have
\( e + kozala n a – ekozala na \) – (eh-koh-ZAH-lah nah) – it will be

**Imperative tense:**

\( ko + prez + la n a – zala n a ! \) – (ZAH-lah nah) – have!
3. **kolinga** – (koh-LING-ah) – to want, to like

**Present tense:**

na+ling+i – **nalingi** – (nah-LING-ee) – I want or I like  
o+ling+i – **olingi** – (oh-LING-ee) – you want or you like  
a+ling+i – **alingi** – (ah-LING-ee) – he/she wants or he/she likes  
to+ling+i – **tolingi** – (toh-LING-ee) – we want or we like  
bo+ling+i – **bolingi** – (boh-LING-ee) – you want or you like (plural)  
ba+ling+i – **balingi** – (bah-LING-ee) – they want or they like  
e+ling+i – **elingi** – (eh-LING-ee) – it wants or it likes

**Past tense:**

na+linga+ki – **nalingaki** – (nah-LIN-gah-kee) – I wanted or I liked  
o+linga+ki – **olingaki** – (oh-LIN-gah-kee) – you wanted or you liked  
a+linga+ki – **alingaki** – (ah-LIN-gah-kee) – he/she wanted or he/she liked  
to+linga+ki – **tolingaki** – (toh-LIN-gah-kee) – we wanted or we liked  
bo+linga+ki – **bolingaki** – (boh-LIN-gah-kee) – you wanted or you liked (plural)  
ba+linga+ki – **balingaki** – (bah-LIN-gah-kee) – they wanted or they liked  
e+linga+ki – **elingaki** – (eh-LIN-gah-kee) – it wanted or it liked

**Future tense:**

na+kolinga – **nakolinga** – (nah-koh-LING-ah) – I will want or I will like  
o+kolinga – **okolinga** – (oh-koh-LING-ah) – you will want or you will like  
a+kolinga – **akolinga** – (ah-koh-LING-ah) – he/she will want or he/she will like  
to+kolinga – **tokolinga** – (toh-koh-LING-ah) – we will want or we will like  
bo+kolinga – **bokolinga** – (boh-koh-LING-ah) – you will want or you will like (plural)  
ba+kolinga – **bakolinga** – (bah-koh-LING-ah) – they will want or they will like  
e+kolinga – **ekolinga** – (eh-koh-LING-ah) – it will like

**Imperative tense:**

ko-linga – **linga!** – (LING-ah) – like!
4. **kosala** – (koh-SAH-lah) – to work, to make

**Present tense:**

- **na+sal+i** – **nasali** – (nah-SAL-ee) – I work or I make
- **o+sal+i** – **osali** – (oh-SAL-ee) – you work or you make
- **a+sal+i** – **asali** – (ah-SAL-ee) – he/she works or he/she makes
- **to+sal+i** – **tosali** – (toh-SAL-ee) – we work or we make
- **bo+sal+i** – **bosali** – (boh-SAL-ee) – you work or you make (plural)
- **ba+sal+i** – **basali** – (bah-SAL-ee) – they work or they make
- **e+sal+i** – **esali** – (eh-SAL-ee) – it works or it makes

**Past tense:**

- **na+sala+ki** – **nasalaki** – (nah-SAL-ah-kee) – I worked or I made
- **o+sala+ki** – **osalaki** – (oh-SAL-ah-kee) – you worked or you made
- **a+sala+ki** – **asalaki** – (ah-SAL-ah-kee) – he/she worked or he/she made
- **to+sala+ki** – **tosalaki** – (toh-SAL-ah-kee) – we worked or we made
- **bo+sala+ki** – **bosalaki** – (boh-SAL-ah-kee) – you worked or you made (plural)
- **ba+sala+ki** – **basalaki** – (bah-SAL-ah-kee) – they worked or they made
- **e+sala+ki** – **esakaki** – (eh-SAL-ah-kee) – it worked or it made

**Future tense:**

- **na+kosala** – **nakosala** – (nah-koh-SAL-ah) – I will work or I will make
- **o+kosala** – **okosala** – (oh-koh-SAL-ah) – you will work or you will make
- **a+kosala** – **akosala** – (ah-koh-SAL-ah) – he/she will work or he/she will make
- **to+kosala** – **tokosala** – (toh-koh-SAL-ah) – we will work or we will make
- **bo+kosala** – **bokosala** – (boh-koh-SAL-ah) – you will work or you will make (plural)
- **ba+kosala** – **bakosala** – (bah-koh-SAL-ah) – they will work or they will make
- **e+kosala** – **ekosala** – (eh-koh-SAL-ah) – it will work or it will make

**Imperative tense:**

- **ko-sala** – **sala!** – (SAL-ah) – work!, make!
5. **kosomba** – (koh-SOM-bah) – to buy

Present tense:

- **nasombi** – (nah-SOM-bee) – I buy
- **osombi** – (oh-SOM-bee) – you buy
- **asombi** – (ah-SOM-bee) – he/she buys
- **tosombi** – (toh-SOM-bee) – we buy
- **bosombi** – (boh-SOM-bee) – you buy (plural)
- **basombi** – (bah-SOM-bee) – they buy
- **esombi** – (eh-SOM-bee) – it buys

Past tense:

- **nasombaki** – (nah-SOM-bah-kee) – I bought
- **osombaki** – (oh-SOM-bah-kee) – you bought
- **asombaki** – (ah-SOM-bah-kee) – he/she bought
- **tosombaki** – (toh-SOM-bah-kee) – we bought
- **bosombaki** – (boh-SOM-bah-kee) – you bought (plural)
- **basombaki** – (bah-SOM-bah-kee) – they bought
- **esombaki** – (eh-SOM-bah-kee) – it bought

Future tense:

- **nakosomba** – (nah-koh-SOM-bah) – I will buy
- **okosomba** – (oh-koh-SOM-bah) – you will buy
- **akosomba** – (ah-koh-SOM-bah) – he/she will buy
- **tokosomba** – (toh-koh-SOM-bah) – we will buy
- **bokosomba** – (boh-koh-SOM-bah) – you will buy (plural)
- **bokosomba** – (bah-koh-SOM-bah) – they will buy
- **ekosomba** – (eh-koh-SOM-bah) – it will buy

Imperative tense:

- **sombal** – (SOM-bah) – buy!
6. **kokanisa** – (koh-kan-NEE-sah) – to think, to hope

**Present tense:**

*na+kanis+i* – **nakanisi** – (nah-KAN-ee-see) – I think or I hope

*o+kanis+i* – **okanisi** – (oh-KAN-ee-see) – you think or you hope

*a+kanis+i* – **akanisi** – (ah-KAN-ee-see) – he/she thinks or he/she hopes

*to+kanis+i* – **tokanisi** – (toh-KAN-ee-see) – we think or we hope

*bo+kanis+i* – **bokanisi** – (boh-KAN-ee-see) – you think or you hope (plural)

*ba+kanis+i* – **bakanisi** – (bah-KAN-ee-see) – they think or they hope

*e+kanis+i* – **ekanisi** – (eh-KAN-ee-see) – it thinks or it hopes

**Past tense:**

*na+kanisa+ki* – **nakanisaki** – (nah-KAN-ee-sah-kee) – I thought or I hoped

*o+kanisa+ki* – **okanisaki** – (oh-KAN-ee-sah-kee) – you thought or you hoped

*a+kanisa+ki* – **akanisaki** – (ah-KAN-ee-sah-kee) – he/she thought or he/she hoped

*to+kanisa+ki* – **tokanisaki** – (toh-KAN-ee-sah-kee) – we thought or we hoped

*bo+kanisa+ki* – **bokanisaki** – (boh-KAN-ee-sah-kee) – you thought or you hoped (plural)

*ba+kanisa+ki* – **bakanisaki** – (bah-KAN-ee-sah-kee) – they thought or they hoped

*e+kanisa+ki* – **ekanisaki** – (eh-KAN-ee-sah-kee) – it thought or it hoped

**Future tense:**

*na+kokanisa* – **nakokanisa** – (nah-koh-KAN-ee-sah) – I will think or I will hope

*o+kokanisa* – **okokanisa** – (oh-koh-KAN-ee-sah) – you will think or you will hope

*a+kokanisa* – **akokanisa** – (ah-koh-KAN-ee-sah) – he/she will think or he/she will hope

*to+kokanisa* – **tokokanisa** – (toh-koh-KAN-ee-sah) – we will think or we will hope

*bo+kokanisa* – **bokokanisa** – (boh-koh-KAN-ee-sah) – you will think or you will hope (plural)

*ba+kokanisa* – **bakokanisa** – (bah-koh-KAN-ee-sah) – they will think or they hope

*e+kokanisa* – **ekokanisa** – (eh-koh-KAN-ee-sah) – it will think or it will hope

**Imperative tense:**

*ko-kanisa* – **kanisa!** – (KAN-ee-sah) – think!, hope!
7. **koloba** – (koh-LOH-bah) – to speak

**Present tense:**

- **na+lob+i** – **nalobi** – (nah-LOH-bee) – I speak
- **o+lob+i** – **olobi** – (oh-LOH-bee) – you speak
- **a+lob+i** – **alobi** – (ah-LOH-bee) – he/she speaks
- **to+lob+i** – **tolobi** – (toh-LOH-bee) – we speak
- **bo+lob+i** – **bolobi** – (boh-LOH-bee) – you speak (plural)
- **ba+lob+i** – **balobi** – (bah-LOH-bee) – they speak
- **e+lob+i** – **elobi** – (eh-LOH-bee) – it speaks

**Past tense:**

- **na+loba+ki** – **nalobaki** – (nah-LOH-bah-kee) – I spoke
- **o+loba+ki** – **olobaki** – (oh-LOH-bah-kee) – you spoke
- **a+loba+ki** – **alobaki** – (ah-LOH-bah-kee) – he/she spoke
- **to+loba+ki** – **tolobaki** – (toh-LOH-bah-kee) – we spoke
- **bo+loba+ki** – **bolobaki** – (boh-LOH-bah-kee) – you spoke (plural)
- **ba+loba+ki** – **balobaki** – (bah-LOH-bah-kee) – they spoke
- **e+loba+ki** – **elobaki** – (eh-LOH-bah-kee) – it spoke

**Future tense:**

- **na+kosamba** – **nakoloba** – (nah-koh-LOH-bah) – I will speak
- **o+kosamba** – **okoloba** – (oh-koh-LOH-bah) – you will speak
- **a+kosamba** – **akoloba** – (ah-koh-LOH-bah) – he/she will speak
- **to+kosamba** – **tokoloba** – (toh-koh-LOH-bah) – we will speak
- **bo+kosamba** – **bokoloba** – (boh-koh-LOH-bah) – you will speak (plural)
- **ba+kosamba** – **bakoloba** – (bah-koh-LOH-bah) – they will speak
- **e+kosamba** – **ekoloba** – (eh-koh-LOH-bah) – it will speak

**Imperative tense:**

- **ko-loba** – **loba!** – (LOH-bah) – speak!
8. **koyeba** – (koh-YEH-bah) – to know

**Present tense:**

- **na+yeb+i** – **nayebi** – (nah-YEH-bee) – I know
- **o+yeb+i** – **oyebi** – (oh-YEH-bee) – you know
- **a+yeb+i** – **ayebi** – (ah-YEH-bee) – he/she knows
- **to+yeb+i** – **toyebi** – (toh-YEH-bee) – we know
- **bo+yeb+i** – **boyebi** – (boh-YEH-bee) – you know (plural)
- **ba+yeb+i** – **bayebi** – (bah-YEH-bee) – they know
- **e+yeb+i** – **eyebi** – (eh-YEH-bee) – it knows

**Past tense:**

- **na+yeba+ki** – **nayebaki** – (nah-YEH-bah-kee) – I knew
- **o+yeba+ki** – **oyebaki** – (oh-YEH-bah-kee) – you knew
- **a+yeba+ki** – **ayebaki** – (ah-YEH-bah-kee) – he/she knew
- **to+yeba+ki** – **toyebaki** – (toh-YEH-bah-kee) – we knew
- **bo+yeba+ki** – **boyebaki** – (boh-YEH-bah-kee) – you knew (plural)
- **ba+yeba+ki** – **bayebaki** – (bah-YEH-bah-kee) – they knew
- **e+yeba+ki** – **eyabaki** – (eh-YEH-bah-kee) – it knew

**Future tense:**

- **na+koyeba** – **nakoyeba** – (nah-koh-YEH-bah) – I will know
- **o+koyeba** – **okoyeba** – (oh-koh-YEH-bah) – you will know
- **a+koyeba** – **akoyeba** – (ah-koh-YEH-bah) – he/she will know
- **to+koyeba** – **tokoyeba** – (toh-koh-YEH-bah) – we will know
- **bo+koyeba** – **bokoyeba** – (boh-koh-YEH-bah) – you will know (plural)
- **ba+koyeba** – **bakoyeba** – (bah-koh-YEH-bah) – they will know
- **e+koyeba** – **ekoyeba** – (eh-koh-YEH-bah) – it will know

**Imperative tense:**

- **ko-yeba** – **yeba!** – (YEH-bah) – know!
9. **kokoka** – (kok-KOH-kah) – to be able to

**Present tense:**

- na+kok+i – **nakoki** – (nah-KOK-kee) – I am able to
- o+kok+i – **okoki** – (oh-KOH-kee) – you are able to
- a+kok+i – **akoki** – (ah-KOK-kee) – he/she is able to
- to+kok+i – **tokoki** – (toh-KOH-kee) – we are able to
- bo+kok+i – **bokoki** – (boh-KOH-kee) – you are able to (plural)
- ba+kok+i – **bakoki** – (bah-KOH-kee) – they are able to
- e+kok+i – **ekoki** – (eh-KOH-kee) – it is able to

**Past tense:**

- na+koka+ki – **nakokaki** – (nah-koh-KAH-kee) – I was able to
- o+koka+ki – **okokaki** – (oh-koh-KAH-kee) – you were able to
- a+koka+ki – **akokaki** – (ah-koh-KAH-kee) – he/she was able to
- to+koka+ki – **tokokaki** – (toh-koh-KAH-kee) – we were able to
- bo+koka+ki – **bokokaki** – (boh-koh-KAH-kee) – you were able to (plural)
- ba+koka+ki – **bakokaki** – (bah-koh-KAH-kee) – they were able to
- e+koka+ki – **ekokaki** – (eh-koh-KAH-kee) – it was able to

**Future tense:**

- na+kokoka – **nakokoka** – (nah-KOH-kah) – I will be able to
- o+kokoka – **okokoka** – (oh-KOH-kah) – you will be able to
- a+kokoka – **akokoka** – (ah-KOH-kah) – he/she will be able to
- to+kokoka – **tokokoka** – (toh-KOH-kah) – we will be able to
- bo+kokoka – **bokokoka** – (boh-KOH-kah) – you will be able to (plural)
- ba+kokoka – **bakokoka** – (bah-KOH-kah) – they will be able to
- e+kokoka – **ekokoka** – (eh-KOH-kah) – it will be able to

**Imperative tense:**

- ko-koka – **koka!** – (KOH-kah) – be able to!
10. **kosengela** – (koh-sen-GEH-lah) – to have to

**Present tense:**

- **nasengeli** – (nah-SEN-geh-lee) – I have to
- **osengeli** – (oh-SEN-geh-lee) – you have to
- **asengeli** – (ah-SEN-geh-lee) – he/she has to
- **tosengeli** – (toh-SEN-geh-lee) – we have to
- **bosengeli** – (boh-SEN-geh-lee) – you have to (plural)
- **basengeli** – (bah-SEN-geh-lee) – they have to
- **esengeli** – (eh-SEN-geh-lee) – it has to

**Past tense:**

- **nasengelaki** – (nah-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – I had to
- **osengelaki** – (oh-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – you had to
- **asengelaki** – (ah-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – he/she had to
- **tosengelaki** – (toh-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – we had to
- **bosengelaki** – (boh-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – you had to (plural)
- **basengelaki** – (bah-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – they had to
- **esengelaki** – (eh-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – it had to

**Future tense:**

- **nakosengela** – (nah-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – I will have to
- **okosengela** – (oh-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – you will have to
- **akosengela** – (ah-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – he/she will have to
- **tokosengela** – (toh-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – we will have to
- **bokosengela** – (boh-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – you will have to
- **bakosengela** – (bah-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – they will have to
- **ekosengela** – (eh-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – it will have to

**Imperative tense:**

- **sengela!** – (SEN-geh-lah) – have to!
Contractions

As with most languages, Lingala speakers often use contractions. The most common verbs for these verbal shortcuts are kozala and kozala na.

People often shorten kozala by dropping the ‘-la’ at the end. So you’ll hear naza instead of nazali, oza instead of ozali, aza instead of azali and so on. The same holds for the kozala part of kozala na, although the na remains. So you’re likely to hear naza na or oza na or aza na, etc.

I started using the contraction forms of kozala and kozala na soon after I started to learn Lingala but came to regret it and it took me a while to break what became a bad slang habit. I would suggest sticking with the correct forms when you’re learning and then using contractions later on.

2.3 Creating simple sentences

2.3.1 Simple sentences in the affirmative

By now you should be starting to see and feel a rhythm to basic conjugation patterns. As you continue to practice, and to add more verbs and vocabulary as we'll do later in this section, you'll become increasingly comfortable with creating the simple sentences necessary to start speaking Lingala in more and more situations.
Using the verb structures of the 10 starter verbs outlined above, we'll now combine them with the 10 starter words from the first section.

Again, by way of review, here are the 10 starter verbs:

kozala – to be  
kozala na – to have  
kolinga – to want, to like  
kosala – to work, to make  
kosomba – to buy  
kokanisa – to think, to hope  
koloba – to speak  
koyeba – to know  
kokoka – to be able to  
kosengela – to have to

And here are the 10 starter words:

mwasi – wife/woman  
mbali – husband/man  
ndeko – brother/sister  
ndako – house  
mosala – work  
mbuma – fruit  
ndunda – vegetables  
mayi – water  
malamu – good  
mabe – bad
And, because you’ll need to use the subject and personal pronouns and prepositions to tie everything together, here they are again:

The subject pronouns:

-na – (nah) – I
-o – (oh) – you
-a – (ah) – he/she
-to – (toh) – we
-bo – (boh) – you (plural)
-ba – (bah) – they
-e – (eh) – it

The personal pronouns:

-ngai – me, mine
-yo – you, yours
-ye – him/her, his/hers
-biso – we, ours
-bino – you, yours (plural)
-bango – them, their

And the prepositions:

-na – and, on, in, of
-ya – of

And, finally, the helper words:

-boye – (BOY-eh) – so, thus
-ebele – (eh-BEL-eh) – many, a lot
-eh – (eh) – yes
-kasi – (KAH-see) – but
-moke – (moh-KAY) – few, little
-pe – (peh) – and
-po na nini – (poh nah NEE-nee) – why
-soki – (SOH-kee) – if
-tango mosusu – (TANG-goh moh-SOO-soo) – maybe
-te – (teh) – no
-to – (toh) – or
-po – (poh) – because
Let’s start putting things together.

To say ‘I speak Lingala’, you’ll need ‘I speak’ from the correctly conjugated form of the verb *koloba* – which is *nalobi*. And, of course, the word ‘Lingala’. In this case, the sentence structure is very straightforward and the same as the English construction:

*Nalobi Lingala.* – I speak Lingala.

To say ‘I spoke Lingala’, simply change the present form of *koloba* for the past tense:

*Nalobaki Lingala.* – I spoke Lingala.

To say ‘I will speak Lingala,’ switch from the past to the future tense:

*Nakoloba Lingala.* – I will speak Lingala.

And, for the imperative:

*Loba Lingala!* – Speak Lingala!

Let’s try another. To say ‘I buy vegetables’, you’ll need ‘I buy’ from the conjugated form of the verb *kosomba*, in this case *nasombi*. And the word for vegetables, which is *ndunda*. Again, the sentence structure is very straightforward and the same as the English construction:
Nasombi ndunda. – I buy vegetables.

To say, ‘I bought vegetables’, you simply change the present for the past tense of kosomba:

Nasombaki ndunda. – I bought vegetables.

And similarly, to say that you are going to buy vegetables, switch the past for the future tense:

Nakosomba ndunda. – I will buy vegetables.

If you want to be really pushy about, you can use the imperative to demand that someone buy vegetables:

Somba ndunda! – Buy vegetables!
Now let’s try one that’s a bit more complex.

To say ‘My work is good’, you’ll need ngai – ‘my’, mosala – ‘work’, and the correct form of kozala – ‘to be’ – which in this case is ezali since the sentence is referring to an ‘it’, which will need to use the ‘e-’ subject pronoun. You’ll also need a preposition to link it all together. In this case, the ever-popular ‘na’. Together this creates:

**Mosala na ngai ezali malamu.** – My work is good.

As you can see in this example, the sentence construction in Lingala is slightly different than it would be in English. The structure is somewhat inverted; it literally reads ‘Work of mine is good’. However, this is a typical Lingala sentence, and with a bit of practice and patience, you’ll quickly get used to it.

Following on from this example, if you wanted to say ‘Your work is good’, simply change the ‘ngai’ for ‘yo’, the personal pronoun for ‘you’ or ‘yours’:

**Mosala na yo ezali malamu.** – Your work is good.

Similarly, if you wanted to say ‘Her work is good,’ again change the personal pronoun, this time from ‘yo’ to ‘ye’, for ‘her’.

**Mosala na ye ezali malamu.** – Her work is good.

Now that you have the pattern, here are a few more examples to help illustrate how it all works:

**Nazali na mwasi.** – I have a wife.
**Osombaki ndunda mabe.** – You bought bad vegetables.
**Tolingi mbuma.** – We like fruit.
**Akosala na ndako na biso.** – He is going to work at our house.
**Balobi Lingala malamu.** – They speak Lingala well.
**Ozali malamu.** – You are good.
2.3.2 Simple sentences in the negative

No one likes to be negative, but it happens. And in Lingala, it couldn’t be much easier. As you already know from the helper word list, that brief bit at the very beginning and the imperative conjugation examples, the Lingala word for ‘no’ or ‘not’ is ‘te’.

To say something isn’t happening, simply add ‘te’ after the verb. The same will apply to longer sentences, which will come later.

Here are the first person singular forms of each of the 10 starter verbs, first with in the affirmative, and then in the negative.

nazali – I am
nazali te – I am not

nazali na… – I have…
nazali na… te – I do not have…

nalingi – I want or I like
nalingi te – I do not want or I do not like

nasali – I work or I make
nasali te – I do not work or I do not make

nasombi – I buy
nasombi te – I do not buy

nakanisi – I think or I hope
nakanisi te – I do not think or I do not hope

nalobi – I speak
nalobi te – I do not speak

nayebi – I know
nayebi te – I do not know

nakoki – I am able to
nakoki te – I am not able to

nasengeli – I have to
nasengeli te – I do not have to
As you can see, in each of these very short, two-word examples, *te* comes at the end of the sentence.

But the same holds true for longer and more complex sentences: again, *te* almost always comes at the end of whatever you’re trying to say.

Using the examples from above, for *koloba*, it will be:

*Nalobi Lingala.* – I speak Lingala.
*Nalobi Lingala te.* – I do not speak Lingala.

*Nalobaki Lingala.* – I spoke Lingala.
*Nalobaki Lingala te.* – I did not speak Lingala.

*Nakoloba Lingala.* – I will speak Lingala.
*Nakoloba Lingala te.* – I will not speak Lingala.

*Loba Lingala!* – Speak Lingala!
*Koloba Lingala te!* – Do not speak Lingala!
(Remember that for the negative imperative, the infinitive is used.)

*Nasombi ndunda.* – I buy vegetables.
*Nasombi ndunda te.* – I do not buy vegetables.

*Nasombaki ndunda.* – I bought vegetables.
*Nasombaki ndunda te.* – I did not buy vegetables.

*Nakosomba ndunda.* – I will buy vegetables.
*Nakosomba ndunda te.* – I will not buy vegetables.

And again, the infinitive is used for the negative imperative:

*Somba ndunda!* – Buy vegetables!
*Kosomba ndunda te!* – Do not buy vegetables!
Mosala na ngai ezali malamu. – My work is good.
Mosala na ngai ezali malamu te. – My work is not good.

Mosala na yo ezali malamu. – Your work is good.
Mosala na yo ezali malamu te. – Your work is not good.

Mosala na ye ezali malamu. – Her work is good.
Mosala na ye ezali malamu te. – Her work is not good.

And for some of the additional examples:

Nazali na mwasi. – I have a wife.
Nazali na mwasi te. – I do not have a wife.

Osombaki ndunda mabe. – You bought bad vegetables.
Osombaki ndunda mabe te. – You did not buy bad vegetables.

Tolingi mbuma. – We like fruit.
Tolingi mbuma te. – We do not like fruit.

Akosala na ndako na biso. – He is going to work at our house.
Akosala na ndako na biso te. – He is not going to work at our house.

Balobi Lingala malamu. – They speak Lingala well.
Balobi Lingala malamu te. – They do not speak Lingala well.

Ozali malamu. – You are good.
Ozali malamu te. – You are not good.
Now let’s add a few of the helper words and make some longer sentences using the words and verbs from the first section.

Remember, *pe* means ‘and’, *kasi* means ‘but’, *soki* means ‘if’, *tango mosusu* means ‘maybe’, and *ebele* means ‘many’ or ‘a lot’. And just to note, the ‘*ba*’ in the third example is a prefix indicating the plural form of ‘*Anglais*’. This is a common construction used to indicate various groups, including nationalities. For example, more than one Congolese would be ‘*ba Congolese*’.

*Nazali na mwasi pe alingi mbuma*. – I have a wife and she likes fruit.
*Tozali ba Anglais, kasi tolobi Lingala, pe*. – We are English, but we speak Lingala, too.
*Soki ayebi yo, alingi yo*. – If she knows you, she likes you.
*Nakosomba mbuma na yo tango mosusu*. – Maybe I will buy your fruit.
*Bazali na ndunda ebele*. – They have a lot of vegetables.

And here are a few examples using the negative construction. Remember that *po* means ‘because’, *to* means ‘or ‘and *boye* means ‘so’ or ‘thus’, or in this case ‘then’.

*Balobi Lingala te po bayebi te*. – They cannot speak Lingala because they do not know.
*Bazali na mayi ebele te*. – They do not have a lot of water.
*Nasali te kasi osali*. – I do not work but you work.
*Olingi mbuma to ndunda te*. – You do not like fruit or vegetables.
*Soki alobi te, boye ayebi te*. – If he does not speak, then she does not know.
2.3.3 Using infinitive verb forms

It’s also possible to construct sentences in Lingala using the infinitive form of any verb. As with most other languages, the infinitive form brings along its natural ‘to’ structure, as in ‘to be’, ‘to have’, ‘to like’, ‘to work’ and so on.

So the English, ‘It is necessary to work’, translates into essentially an identical construction in Lingala – ‘Esengeli kosala’ – esengeli (it is necessary) and kosala (to work). And ‘She is able to speak’ translates to ‘Akoki koloba’ – akoki (she is able to) and koloba (to speak).

With the small caveat that a few of these construction patterns will change slightly if you become more advanced and decide to start using the subjective tense later on, you’ll generally be fine starting to put together combinations of conjugated and infinitive forms of verbs. And you’ll be able to say quite a few things, hopefully without too much trouble.

*Nasengeli kosala.* – I have to work.
*Olingi koloba malamu.* – You want to speak well.
*Ndeko na nagi alingi koyeba.* – My brother wants to know.
*Bayebi kosomba.* – They know to buy.
*Tolingi kosomba ndunda.* – We want to buy vegetables.

2.4 More verbs and words

By now you should be starting to feel fairly comfortable with some of the basics. Let’s expand your repertoire by adding some components to your Lingala toolkit.

2.4.1 10 more verbs

You’ll likely find yourself using each of these next 10 verbs on a regular basis.

*kojoka* – (koh-YOH-kah) – to hear
*komona* – (koh-MOH-nah) – to see
*kolamba* – (koh-LAM-bah) – to cook
*komela* – (koh-MEL-ah) – to drink, to smoke or to swallow
**kosepela** – (koh-SEH-pel-ah) – to be happy or to be content
**kozua** – (koh-ZOO-ah) – to take (an object, such as a pencil or a book or a car)
**kopesa** – (koh-PEH-sah) – to give (an object, such as a pencil or a book or a car)
**kokeba** – (koh-KEH-bah) – to pay attention
**kobanga** – (koh-BAN-gah) – to be afraid
**kozela** – (koh-ZEL-ah) – to wait

All of these verbs are regular and so are conjugated in exactly the same way as the first 10 verbs that you've learned. Accordingly, I've only included the first-person singular form – ‘na-‘ – for each of the four basic tenses – present, past, future and imperative – to show how each is constructed. For the remaining forms of each verb tense, substitute the appropriate subject pronoun – *na-, o-, a-, to-, bo-, ba-, e-* – to generate the meaning you want.

11. **koyoka** – (koh-YOH-kah) – to hear

*nayoki* – I hear
*nayokaki* – I heard
*nakoyoka* – I will hear
*yoka!* – hear!

12. **komona** – (koh-MOH-nah) – to see

*namoni* – I see
*namonaki* – I saw
*nakomona* – I will see
*mona!* – see!

13. **kolamba** – (koh-LAM-bah) – to cook

*nalambi* – I cook
*nalambaki* – I cooked
*nakolamba* – I will cook
*lamba!* – cook!
14. **komela** – (koh-MEL-ah) – to drink, to smoke or to swallow

*nameli* – I eat or I drink or I smoke  
*namelaki* – I ate or I drank or I smoked  
*nakomela* – I will eat or I will drink or I will smoke  
*mela!* – drink! or eat! or smoke!

15. **kosepela** – (koh-SEH-pel-ah) – to be happy or to be content

*nasepeli* – I am happy or I am content  
*nasepelaki* – I was happy or I was content  
*nakosepela* – I will be happy or I will be content  
*sepela!* – be happy! or be content!

16. **kozua** – (koh-ZOO-ah) – to take (an object, such as a pencil or a book or a car)

*nazui* – I take (an object)  
*nazuaki* – I took (an object)  
*nakozua* – I will take (an object)  
*zua!* – take! (an object)

17. **kopesa** – (koh-PEH-sah) – to give (an object, such as a pencil or a book or a car)

*napesi* – I give (an object)  
*napesaki* – I gave (an object)  
*nakopesa* – I will give (an object)  
*pesa!* – give! (an object)
18. **kokeba** – (koh-KEH-bah) – to pay attention

- *nakebi* – I pay attention
- *nakebaki* – I paid attention
- *nakokeba* – I will pay attention
- *keba!* – attention!

19. **kobanga** – (koh-BAN-gah) – to be afraid

- *nabangi* – I am afraid
- *nabangaki* – I was afraid
- *nakobanga* – I will be afraid
- *banga!* – be afraid!

20. **kozela** – (koh-ZEL-ah) – to wait

- *nazeli* – I wait
- *nazelaki* – I waited
- *nakozela* – I will wait
- *zela!* – wait!

You can find a full list of Lingala verbs and their English counterparts in section 6.

**Plural forms**

Unlike English, where the plural form of most words is indicated with a final ‘s’, the plural form in Lingala most commonly involves a change at the beginning of the word. For the most part, there are four main prefixes that denote more than one of something – *ma-, mi-, ba-*, and *bi*. And for the most part, which prefix is used depends on the first two letters of the singular form of the word. So, for words beginning with ‘mo-’ like *motukah* (car), the plural form usually starts with ‘mi-’, or in this case, *mitukah* (cars). Similarly, for words beginning with a double consonant, like *ndeke* (bird), the plural form almost always begins with ‘ba-’, in this case *bandeke* (birds).

Although the system doesn’t apply for absolutely every singular to plural conversion, a rule of thumb for the majority of the common word groups is that for words beginning with:
li-, the plural form usually begins with ma- or mi-
mo-, the plural form usually begins with mi- or ba-
ma-, the plural form usually begins with ba-
u-, the plural form usually begins with mi-
i-, the plural form usually begins with ba-
e-, the plural form usually begins with bi-

2.2.2 And some more words

Now that you’ve expanded your verb base, you can also start building up your vocabulary. Here are 50 more words that you’ll likely encounter or want to learn:

awa – (AH-wah) – here
bitabe – (bee-TAH-beh) – banana
bolingo – (boh-LING-oh) – love
ekoya – (eh-KOY-ah) – next, in front of
eleki – (eh-LEH-kee) – past, behind
fololo – (foh-LOH-loh) – flower
fungola – (fun-GOH-lah) – key
ke – (kay) – that
kimia – (KIM-yah) – peace, peaceful
kisi – (KEE-see) – medicine
kiti – (KEE-tee) – chair
kitoko – (kee-TOH-koh) – beautiful, pretty, nice
kuna – (KOO-nah) – there
likambo – (lee-KAM-boh) – problem, dispute
likamwisii – (lee-KAM-wee-see) – wonderful, miraculous
lipa – (LEE-pah) – bread
loso – (LOH-soh) – rice
makasi – (mah-KAH-see) – strong
malembé – (mah-LEM-beh) – slow, slowly
malili – (mah-LEE-lee) – cold, fresh, cool
masanga – (mah-SAN-gah) – alcoholic drink
masanga ya sukali – (mah-SAN-gah yah soo-KAH-lee) – non-alcoholic drink
mawa – (MAH-wah) – sad
mbala – (m-BAH-lah) – potato
mbango – (m-BANG-oh) – quick, fast
mbisi – (m-BEE-see) – fish
mbongo – (m-BONG-oh) – money
You can find a full list of Lingala vocabulary words and their English counterparts in section 7.

It’s a miracle!

One of my favourite Lingala words is likamwisi (lee-KAM-wee-see) meaning ‘wonderful’ or ‘miraculous’. It’s suitable for so many Kinshasa occasions, like when the power or water or satellite television finally comes back on, or that document eventually downloads, or it turns out the market vendor actually does have change for that $10 bill.

Ezali likamwisi!
2.3 Irregular verbs – *kokende, koya and kolia*

Many of you will have no doubt noted the use of the very handy weasel word – ‘almost’ – that’s been employed when highlighting how just about every Lingala verb is reassuringly regular. And probably an equal number of you will know that weasel words like this will sooner or later lead to some important exception somewhere down the line.

And so now we come to that place, and the first irregular verb that you will need to know. And that verb is *kokende* (to go). Learn it and learn to love it. You'll use it often.

*kokende – to go*

To conjugate *kokende*, it all seems to start off easily enough. For the present tense, drop the ‘*ko-*’ at the beginning as usual. But in this case, you’ll also need to drop a few more letters – the ‘*nde*’ – at the end. This will leave just – ‘*ke*’. Not much, I know.

Use the appropriate subject pronoun – *na-, o-, a-, to-, bo-, ba-, e-* – at the beginning as usual.

And then add the final ‘*i*’.

So for the present tense, this becomes:

- **na+ke+i** – *nakei* – (nah-KAY-ee) – I go
- **o+ke+i** – *okei* – (oh-KAY-ee) – you go
- **a+ke+i** – *akei* – (ak-KAY-ee) – he/she goes
- **to+ke+i** – *tokei* – (toh-KAY-ee) – we go
- **bo+ke+i** – *bokei* – (boh-KAY-ee) – you go (plural)
- **ba+ke+i** – *bakei* – (bah-KAY-ee) – they go
- **e+ke+i** – *ekei* – (eh-KAY-ee) – it goes
Right, so here’s where it gets a bit tricky. For the remaining three basic tenses, things generally revert back to the same pattern as the regular verbs.

For the past tense, first drop the ‘ko-’, leaving ‘-kende’. Since there isn’t a final ‘-a’ to drop, keep the root as it is and then add ‘-ki’ as normal.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{na+kende+ki} & \rightarrow \text{nakendeki} \rightarrow \text{(nah-KEN-deh-kee)} \rightarrow \text{I went} \\
o+kende+ki & \rightarrow \text{okendeki} \rightarrow \text{(oh-KEN-deh-kee)} \rightarrow \text{you went} \\
a+kende+ki & \rightarrow \text{akendeki} \rightarrow \text{(ah-KEN-deh-kee)} \rightarrow \text{he/she went} \\
to+kende+ki & \rightarrow \text{tokendeki} \rightarrow \text{(toh-KEN-deh-kee)} \rightarrow \text{we went} \\
bo+kende+ki & \rightarrow \text{bokendeki} \rightarrow \text{(boh-KEN-deh-kee)} \rightarrow \text{you went (plural)} \\
ba+kende+ki & \rightarrow \text{bakendeki} \rightarrow \text{(bah-KEN-deh-kee)} \rightarrow \text{they went} \\
e+kende+ki & \rightarrow \text{ekendeki} \rightarrow \text{(eh-KEN-deh-kee)} \rightarrow \text{it went}
\end{align*}
\]

The future tense form goes back the system for regular verbs, with the subject pronoun added to the infinitive:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{na+kokende} & \rightarrow \text{nakokende} \rightarrow \text{(nah-koh-KEN-deh)} \rightarrow \text{I will go} \\
o+kokende & \rightarrow \text{okokende} \rightarrow \text{(oh-koh-KEN-deh)} \rightarrow \text{you will go} \\
a+kokende & \rightarrow \text{akokende} \rightarrow \text{(ah-koh-KEN-deh)} \rightarrow \text{he/she will go} \\
to+kokende & \rightarrow \text{tokokende} \rightarrow \text{(toh-koh-KEN-deh)} \rightarrow \text{we will go} \\
bo+kokende & \rightarrow \text{bokokende} \rightarrow \text{(boh-koh-KEN-deh)} \rightarrow \text{you will go (plural)} \\
ba+kokende & \rightarrow \text{bakokende} \rightarrow \text{(bah-koh-KEN-deh)} \rightarrow \text{they will go} \\
e+kokende & \rightarrow \text{ekokende} \rightarrow \text{(eh-koh-KEN-deh)} \rightarrow \text{it will go}
\end{align*}
\]

And the imperative also follows the regular verb format. Simply drop the ‘ko-’ at the beginning: \text{ko-kende} \rightarrow \text{kende! (KEN-deh)} \rightarrow \text{go!}

\text{koya – to come}

And, just like London buses, when one irregular verb arrives, so do several more. Only in this case, you’ll need them all. And they’ll be more reliable. And it won’t involve a jobsworth driver who doesn’t care that you didn’t have time to buy a ticket or that you really can’t move any further down the bus.

Anyway, the next irregular verb you’ll need to know is \text{koya} (to come). This is where it gets really minimalist.

For the present tense form of \text{koya}, drop the ‘ko-’ at the beginning as normal. And then drop the ‘-a’ at the end. This leaves just ‘-y-’, which isn’t much. Now
add the appropriate subject pronoun – na-, o-, a-, etc. – at the beginning as usual. And then, and here’s the tricky part for koya, you add an ‘-e’ at the end. Crazy, I know.

\[ \text{na+y+e – naye} – \text{(nah-YEH-ee) – I come} \]
\[ \text{o+y+e – oye} – \text{(oh-YEH-ee) – you come} \]
\[ \text{a+y+e – aye} – \text{(ah-YEH-ee) – he/she comes} \]
\[ \text{to+y+e – toye} – \text{(toh-YEH-ee) – we come} \]
\[ \text{bo+y+e – boye} – \text{(boh-YEH-ee) – you come (plural)} \]
\[ \text{ba+y+e – baye} – \text{(bah-YEH-ee) – they come} \]
\[ \text{e+y+e – eye} – \text{(eh-YEH-ee) – it comes} \]

Fortunately, the conjugations for the past and future tenses revert back to the regular verb system.

For the past tense, follow the regular approach, dropping the ‘ko-‘ as usual, leaving a root of ‘-ya’. Now add the appropriate subject pronoun and ‘-ki’ at the end.

\[ \text{na+ya+ki – nayaki} – \text{(nah-YAH-kee) – I came} \]
\[ \text{o+ya+ki – oyaki} – \text{(oh-YAH-kee) – you came} \]
\[ \text{a+ya+ki – ayaki} – \text{(ah-YAH-kee) – he/she came} \]
\[ \text{to+ya+ki – toyaki} – \text{(toh-YAH-kee) – we came} \]
\[ \text{bo+ya-ki – boyaki} – \text{(boh-YAH-kee) – you came (plural)} \]
\[ \text{ba+ya+ki – bayaki} – \text{(bah-YAH-kee) – they came} \]
**e+ya+ki – eyaki** – (eh-YAH-kee) – it came

For the future, simply add the appropriate subject pronoun to the infinitive.

* na+koya – nakoya – I will come
* o+koya – okoya – you will come
* a+koya – akoya – he/she will come
* to+koya – tokoya – we will come
* bo+koya – bokoya – you will come (plural)
* ba+koya – bakoya – they will come
* e+koya – ekoya – it will come

But *koya* refuses to come quietly, and it’s the only verb I’ve come across in which the imperative doesn’t follow the usual model.

Unlike every other verb, *koya* receives an ending – ‘-ka’ – that sets it apart. No one has really ever been able to explain it to me, but I suspect it’s to avoid having *ya*, the imperative, getting mixed up with *ya*, the conjunction.

So, the imperative form of *koya* is *ko-ya+ka – yaka!* (YAH-kah) – come!

---

**kolia – to eat**

Finally, the third irregular verb that you’ll need to know is *kolia* (to eat). And again, the biggest part of irregular bit occurs in the ending of the present tense.
To conjugate present tense form of *kolia*, drop the ‘ko-’ at the beginning as usual. Next drop the ‘-ia’ at the end. This leaves a solitary ‘-l’. Now add the appropriate subject pronoun and then – wait for it – add an ‘-ei’ at the end. More craziness, I know.

So the present tense form of *kolia* becomes:

- **I eat**: na+l+ei – *na-lei* – (nah-LEH-ee) – *nalei* – (nah-LEH-ee) – I eat
- **You eat**: o+l+ei – *olei* – (oh-LEH-ee) – you eat
- **He/she eats**: a+l+ei – *alei* – (ah-LEH-ee) – he/she eats
- **We eat**: to+l+ei – *tolei* – (toh-LEH-ee) – we eat
- **You eat (plural)**: bo+l+ei – *bolei* – (boh-LEH-ee) – you eat (plural)
- **They eat**: ba+l+ei – *balei* – (bah-LEH-ee) – they eat
- **It eats**: e+l+ei – *elei* – (eh-LEH-ee) – it eats

That’s the worst of it. All three of the other basic tense forms of *kolia* mercifully revert back to the regular verb system.

For the past tense, drop the ‘ko-’, leaving ‘-lia’ and then add ‘-ki’ at the end.

- **I ate**: na+lia+ki – *naliaki* – (nah-lee-AH-kee) – I ate
- **You ate**: o+lia+ki – *oliaki* – (oh-lee-AH-kee) – you ate
- **He/she ate**: a+lia+ki – *aliaki* – (ah-lee-AH-kee) – he/she ate
- **We ate**: to+lia+ki – *toliaki* – (toh-lee-AH-kee) – we ate
- **You ate (plural)**: bo+lia+ki – *boliaki* – (boh-lee-AH-kee) – you ate (plural)
- **They ate**: ba+lia+ki – *baliaki* – (bah-lee-AH-kee) – they ate
- **It ate**: e+lia+ki – *eliaki* – (eh-lee-AH-kee) – it ate

For the future, add the appropriate subject pronoun to the infinitive.

- **I will eat**: na+kolia – *nakolia* – (nah-koh-LEE-ah) – I will eat
- **You will eat**: o+kolia – *okolia* – (oh-koh-LEE-ah) – you will eat
- **He/she will eat**: a+kolia – *akolia* – (ah-koh-LEE-ah) – he/she will eat
- **We will eat**: to+kolia – *tokolia* – (toh-koh-LEE-ah) – we will eat
- **You will eat (plural)**: bo+kolia – *bokolia* – (boh-koh-LEE-ah) – you will eat (plural)
- **They will eat**: ba+kolia – *bakolia* – (bah-koh-LEE-ah) – they will eat
- **It will eat**: e+kolia – *ekolia* – (eh-koh-LEE-ah) – it will eat

And for the imperative, simply drop the ‘ko-’ as usual – *ko-lio* – **lia!** (LEE-ah) – eat!
3. *Kosila* – to finish

By now you're well on your way to speaking Lingala. Using the conjugations patterns presented for of the first 20 verbs, the three key irregular verbs and your growing vocabulary list – along with the full verb and vocabulary lists at the back of this book – you should be able to make yourself understood in a variety of situations.

But there are a few more aspects of Lingala that are helpful to understand and that you'll no doubt encounter as you become increasingly proficient.

3.1 Action tenses

Up to this point, we’ve concentrated on the four basic tenses – present, past, future and imperative – for each of the verbs that we’ve looked at, which will get you a long way down the Lingala-speaking road. But if you’ve made it this far, then it’s time to add some action to the mix.

There are a few ways to convey action in Lingala. The simple present tense allows you to talk about things that you do on a routine basis. The present progressive tense presents things that are underway. And the past progressive presents things that were underway in the past.
3.1.1 Simple present tense

The simple present tense is used to talk about things that you do all the time, such as ‘I usually buy’ or ‘I usually pay attention’.

The construction of this tense is pretty simple and straightforward. For kosomba (to buy), first, drop the ‘ko-’, which leaves ‘-somba’. Add the appropriate subject pronoun at the beginning and then ‘-ka’ at the end. That’s it.

So for kosomba, the simple present tense becomes:

na+somba+ka – nasombaka – I usually buy
o+somba+ka – osombaka – you usually buy
a+somba+ka – asombaka – he/she usually buys
to+somba+ka – tosombaka – we usually buy
bo+somba+ka – bosombaka – you usually buy (plural)
ba+somba+ka – basombaka – they usually buy
e+somba+ka – esombaka – it usually buys

And for kokeba (to pay attention), it becomes:

na+keba+ka – nakebaka – I usually pay attention
o+keba+ka – okebaka – you usually pay attention
a+keba+ka – akebaka – he/she usually pays attention
to+keba+ka – tokebaka – we usually pay attention
bo+keba+ka – bokebaka – you usually pay attention (plural)
ba+keba+ka – bakebaka – they usually pay attention
e+keba+ka – ekebaka – it usually pays attention

3.1.2 Present progressive tense

The present progressive tense is used to say things like ‘I am speaking’ or ‘We are hearing’.

As with all of the other tenses, the construction of the present progressive starts with infinitives and subject pronouns. But this one might seem a bit tricky at first.

The present progressive requires the use of two verbs: kozala (to be) and the infinitive of the verb that matches what you’re doing or want to talk about.
So to be able to say that you, or someone else, or a group is speaking, you first need to conjugate the present tense forms of *kozala*, which you should already be familiar with:

- **nazali** – I am
- **ozali** – you are
- **azali** – he/she is
- **tozali** – we are
- **bozali** – you are (plural)
- **bazali** – they are
- **ezali** – it is

Next, drop everything after the ‘z’ and add an ‘o’, which makes:

- **nazo-**
- **ozo-**
- **azo-**
- **tozo-**
- **bozo-**
- **bazo-**
- **ezo-**

This prefix is used in every single present progressive conjugation and you’ll soon become familiar with its use as well as starting to be able to recognise the distinctive ‘-zo-’ sound of the tense.

Next, drop the ‘ko-’ from the infinitive form of *koloba* (to speak), leaving just ‘-loba’.

Then combine with appropriate prefix with the –*loba* suffix to make the correct form of the verb for what you want to say:
nazo+loba – nazoloba – I am speaking
ozo+loba – ozoloba – you are speaking
azo+loba – azoloba – he/she is speaking
tozo+loba – tozoloba – we are speaking
bozo+loba – bozoloba – you are speaking (plural)
bazo+loba – bazoloba – they are speaking
ezo+loba – ezoloba – it is speaking

And it will be the same for any other verb. For kosomba (to buy):

nazo+somba – nazosomba – I am buying
ozo+somba – ozosomba – you are buying
azo+somba – azosomba – he/she is buying
tozo+somba – tozosomba – we are buying
bozo+somba – bozosomba – you are buying (plural)
bazo+somba – bazosomba – they are buying
ezo+somba – ezosomba – it is buying

And for koyoka (to hear):

nazo+yoka – nazoyoka – I am hearing
ozo+yoka – ozoyoka – you are hearing
azo+yoka – azoyoka – he/she is hearing
tozo+yoka – tozoyoka – we are hearing
bozo+yoka – bozoyoka – you are hearing (plural)
bazo+yoka – bazoyoka – they are hearing
ezo+yoka – ezoyoka – it is hearing

3.1.3 Past progressive tense

The past progressive form is used to describe things that were done in the past or that happen a lot.

This is the tense that you’ll want to use if you want to say something like ‘I was cooking’ or ‘We were giving’.

It is formed through the combination of the past tense of kozala and the infinitive you want to use.

So for kolamba (to cook), again start with kosala, only this time make the complete version of the past tense, which will be:
nazalaki – I was
ozalaki – you were
azalaki – he/she was
tozalaki – we were
bozolaki – you were (plural)
bazolaki – they were
ezolaki – it was

Next, simply add the infinitive form of the verb.

So for kolamba, the past progressive is:

nazalaki kolamba – I was cooking
ozalaki kolamba – you were cooking
azalaki kolamba – he/she was cooking
tozalaki kolamba – we were cooking
bozolaki kolamba – you were cooking (plural)
bazolaki kolamba – they were cooking
ezolaki kolamba – it was cooking

And for kopesa (to give), the past progressive is:

nazalaki kopesa – I was giving
ozalaki kopesa – you were giving
azalaki kopesa – he/she was giving
tozalaki kopesa – we were giving
bozolaki kopesa – you were giving (plural)
bazolaki kopesa – they were giving
ezolaki kopesa – it was giving
3.2 The subjunctive

Yes, Lingala has a subjunctive form, but it’s a bit limited compared with a lot of other languages.

The subjunctive is commonly restricted to just three main verbs – *kolinga* (to want or to like or love), *kozela* (to wait for), and *kosengela* (to need). And then it is used in conjunction with a second verb whose conjugation is slightly modified.

In many ways, the construction is similar to the future tense construction, with a conjugated first verb and the infinitive form of a second. For example, ‘I am going to buy’. Using the standard form, this would be *nakei* (I am going) + *kosomba* (to buy).

But with the subjunctive form, this changes slightly to ‘I want to buy’. To construct this, first conjugate the verb *kolinga* (to want):

- *nalingi* – I want
- *olingi* – you want
- *alingi* – he/she wants
- *tolingi* – we want
- *bolingi* – you want (plural)
- *balingi* – they want
- *elingi* – it wants

Next, create the subjunctive form you want to use, in this case, *kosomba*.

To create the subjunctive form, drop the ‘*ko-*’ at the beginning, but keep the ‘*a*’ at the end. Then add the appropriate subject pronoun. So this becomes:

- *na+somba* – *nasomba*
- *o+somba* – *osomba*
- *a+somba* – *asomba*
- *to+somba* – *tosomba*
- *bo+somba* – *bosomba*
- *ba+somba* – *basomba*
Now combine the two to make the complete form:

**nalingi nasomba** – I would like to buy
**olingi osomba** – you would like to buy
**alingi asomba** – he/she would like to buy
**tolingi tosomba** – we would like to buy
**bolingi bosomba** – you would like to buy (plural)
**balingi basomba** – they would like to buy
**elingi esomba** – it would like to buy

And it will be the same for the other verbs. Here’s another example using **komona** (to see):

**nalingi namona** – I would like to see
**olingi omona** – you would like to see
**alingi amona** – he/she would like to see
**tolingi tomona** – we would like to see
**bolingi bomona** – you would like to see (plural)
**baling bamona** – they would like to see
**elingi emona** – it would like to see

The same approach is used when using **kozela** (to take) as the primary verb, in this case paired with **kozua** (to take)

**nazeli nazua** – I wait to take
**ozeli ozua** – you wait to take
**azeli azua** – he/she waits to take
**tozeli tozua** – we wait to take
**bozeli bozua** – you wait to take (plural)
**bazeli bazua** – they wait to take
**ezeli ezua** – it waits to take

And for **kosengela** (to need) as the primary verb, here paired with **kosala** (to work):

**nasengeli nasala** – I need to work
**osengeli osala** – you need to work
**asengeli asala** – he/she needs to work
**tosengeli tosala** – we need to work
**bosengeli bosala** – you need to work (plural)
**basengeli basala** – they need to work
**esengeli esala** – it needs to work
3.3 Lingala nouns and verbs

Many of you will have no doubt noticed that there is often a relationship between the formation of Lingala verbs and nouns. For example, *kosala* – to work – and *mosala* – work. This happens fairly regularly and you can use it to both help decipher one or the other, or to make an educated guess about what a verb or noun might be.

Here’s a list to get you started, but you’ll most likely find that you find more and more as you continue to learn:

* kobala – to marry  
  * libala – marriage

* kobota – to give birth  
  * libota – family;  
  * moboti (baboti) – parent(s)

* kakanisa – to think  
  * likanisi – idea, thought

* kokima – to run  
  * mokima (bakima) – runner(s)

* kokomba – to sweep  
  * komba – broom

* kolemba – to be tired  
  * malembe – slow, slowly

* koponama – to elect  
  * maponami – elections

* kosana – to play  
  * lisano (masano) – sport(s)

* kosolola – to chat, to talk  
  * lisoto (masoto) – chat(s), talk(s)

* kotambuisa – to drive  
  * motambuisi (batambuisi) – driver(s)

* koteya – to preach  
  * liteya (mateya) – lesson(s);  
  * moteyi (bateyi) – pastor(s)

* koyekola – to learn  
  * moyekeli (bayekeli) – school boy(s)/school girl(s)

* koyemba – to sing  
  * moyembi (bayembi) – singer(s)

* koyiba – to steal  
  * moyibi (bayibi) – thief (thieves)
M-words

Alfred Mosher Butts, the inventor of Scrabble, would have had a difficult time designing a Lingala edition. Nearly a third of all Lingala words begin with the letter M, with N and L comprising a fair number, as well. A, D, F, G, O, U, V and W barely get a look in. And no Lingala words start with H, I, J, Q, R or X.

Head fire man

By now you’ll have realised that Lingala often uses the same word for different things.

Nowhere is that more apparent than with the word moto, which can mean ‘man’, ‘head’ or ‘fire’.

So in Lingala, ‘The man’s head is on fire’ is ‘Moto moto eza moto’.

3.4 Colours and numbers

Finally, it’s probably worthwhile to take a look at two aspects of Lingala that I found to be a bit hard when I first started out: colours and numbers.
3.4.1 Colours

I've always found the words for Lingala colours to be particularly hard to remember. And in my experience Kinois who use the Lingala words for colours tend to be pretty orthodox in their approach: no shortcuts – no ‘pondu’ or ‘mwindu’ on their own. Nope, it has to the whole langi ya mayi ya pondu or langi ya mwindu. Go figure.

These are the only ones that I've been able to document so far, and you'll most likely be able to find others if you try hard enough. Personally, like a lot of Kinois, I tend to revert to French colour words.

*ba langi* – the colours
*langi ya mayi ya pondu* – green
*langi ya motane* – red
*langi ya mwindu* – black
*langi ya pembe* – white

3.4.2 Numbers

As with colours, a lot of Kinois prefer to use the French words numbers, but it's still useful to know the Lingala numbering system.

Lingala numbers will probably seem a bit complex at first, but once you learn the basics, you'll quickly come up to speed.

As with a lot of numbering systems, the most common, useful and important numbers to learn are from one to 10. These are then incorporated and combined to form all of the larger numbers.

So, from one to 10, the Lingala numbers are:

1 – *moko*
2 – *mibale*
3 – *misato*
4 – *minei*
5 – *mitano*
6 – *motoba*
7 – *nsambo*
8 – *mwambi*
9 – *libwa*
10 – *zomi*
For the ‘teens’, simply add **zomi** (10) and **na** (and) and then the appropriate number.

So, from 11 to 19, the Lingala numbers are:

11 – **zomi na moko**
12 – **zomi na mibale**
13 – **zomi na misato**
14 – **zomi na minei**
15 – **zomi na mitano**
16 – **zomi na motoba**
17 – **zomi na nsambo**
18 – **zomi na mwambi**
19 – **zomi na libwa**

For the ‘-ties’ – 20 through 90 – it seems a little more complicated, but if you approach it with an open mind, it starts to make sense. In English, the ‘-ty’ in the ‘-ties’ – twen-ty, thir-ty, for-ty, etc. comes at the end of the word. Lingala simply puts that numerical reference point at the beginning of the number instead of the end.

And in Lingala, the ‘-ty’ is replaced word **ntuku**. As you’ll see, **ntuku** is used at the beginning of every number from 20 through 99 (and then again for every number between 120 and 199, 220 and 299 and so forth).

So, for numbers between 20 and 20, begin with **ntuku** and then **mibale** (which denotes ‘two’ and is used to indicate that it is a 20 value) and then add the appropriate other numbers as needed.

20 – **ntuku mibale**
21 – **ntuku mibale na moko**
22 – **ntuku mibale na mibale**

and so on…
For 30 to 39, start with *ntuku* and then *misato* (‘three’, so as to indicate that it is a 30 value) and then the appropriate number:

30 – *ntuku misato*
31 – *ntuku misato na moko*
32 – *ntuku misato na mibale*

and so on…

And the same system is used for the rest of the numbers from 40-99:

40 – *ntuku minei*
50 – *ntuku mitano*
60 – *ntuku motoba*
70 – *ntuku nsambo*
80 – *ntuku mwambi*
90 – *ntuku libwa*

Once you get to 100, a new prefix is added to indicate that the number is in the hundreds. Like the ‘-ties’ prefix, the Lingala prefix for ‘hundred’ – *nkama* – comes at the beginning.

So for 100 to 110, start with *nkama* and then add the other appropriate number:

100 – *nkama*
101 – *nkama na moko*
102 – *nkama na mibale*

For 111-119, begin with *nkama* and *zomi* and then add the other numbers:

110 – *nkama na zomi*
111 – *nkama na zomi na moko*
112 – *nkama na zomi na mibale*

Follow the same system for 120 to 199, starting with *nkama*, then *ntuku*, and then the other numbers.

And continue to same approach for the rest of the hundreds:

200 – *nkama mibale*
300 – *nkama misato*
400 – *nkama minei*
500 – *nkama mitano*
600 – nkama motoba
700 – nkama nsambo
800 – nkama mwambi
900 – nkama libwa

Once you get to 1,000, a new prefix – nkoto – is used, again at the beginning of the number, and ahead of any other prefixes and numbers that follow.

Nkoto follows the same pattern as nkama:

1,000 – nkoto moko
1,001 – nkoto moko na moko
1,002 – nkoto moko na mibale
1,011 – nkoto moko na zomi na moko
1,012 – nkoto moko na zomi na mibale
1,020 – nkoto moko na nkutu mibale
1,021 – nkoto moko na nkutu na moko
1,022 – nkoto moko na nkutu na mibale
1,100 – nkoto moko na nkama moko
1,101 – nkoto moko na nkama moko na moko
1,200 – nkoto moko na nkama mibale
2,000 – nkoto mibale
2,001 – nkoto mibale na moko
2,100 – nkoto mibale na nkama moko
4. **Molongo – the world**

This section introduces a range of everyday situations, topics and activities – restaurants, markets, food, shopping, the natural environment, along with some of the more serious aspects of life in the DRC, such as war, witchcraft and street life – and the associated verbs, vocabulary and common phrases and expressions that you might come across as you go out into the world.

4.1 Everyday conversations

**New gifts**

Kinois have an interesting tradition when it comes to noticing if someone has wearing something new, for example, a new shirt or new shoes. The observer says ‘*putulu*’, which essentially means ‘congratulations’. But then that same person is expected to give the person with the new object a small gift, such as a soft drink.

**Common phrases and examples**

- *ekosimba* – it will hold, it will work
- *Esengeli nakende.* – I need to go.
- *ezali kotambola* – it goes (as in *ça marche*)
- *Nakanisi bongo*... – I hope that...
- *Naloba nini?* – What can I say?
- *Nanu te.* – Not again.
- *Nayebi te.* – I do not know.
- *Nayebi yango.* – I know that.
- *Nayebi.* – I know.
- *Nazalaki koloba.* – I was saying.
- *Nazali na bosenga ya*... – I have need of...
- *Nazali presse.* – I am in a hurry.
- *ndembo na nse* – ‘ball on the ground’ (as in ‘relax’, ‘take it easy’)
- *ndenge moko* – the same
- *ndenge nini* – same question
- *ngai pe* – me, too
- *Oyebi?* – Do you understand?
- *oyo nde* – that is that
- *soki moyen ezali* – if it is possible
- *ya so lo* – it is correct
- *ye kuna* – he/she is there
- *ye pe* – him/her, too
- *ye yo* – he/she is here
4.2 Friends and family

Verbs
- *kobala* – to marry
- *kofanda* – to live (somewhere)
- *kokabwana* – to separate or to divorce
- *kolinga* – to like or to want
- *kolingana* – to be in love
- *kowuta* – to be from (somewhere)

Vocabulary
- *bokilo* – brother-in-law
- *bokilo* – in-law
- *bokilo mobali* – father-in-law
- *bokilo mwasi* – mother-in-law
- *cadet* – little brother, little sister
- *eboto* – descendant, parent
- *leki* – younger brother, younger sister
- *libala* – marriage
- *libota* – family
- *mama nkoko* – grandmother
- *moboti (baboti)* – parent(s)
- *moninga (baninga)* – friend(s)
- *mosolo* – dowry
- *mwana (bana)* – child (children)
- *mwana mobali* – son
- *mwana mwasi* – daughter
- *mwana ya bango* – their children
- *mwasi (basi)* – wife, woman (women)
- *mwasi ya mokuya* – widow
- *ndeko (bandeko)* – brother(s), sister(s)
- *noko* – uncle
- *tata nkoko* – grandfather
- *yaya* – older brother, older sister

Common phrases and examples
- *Azali na mbula boni?* – How old is she?
- *Azali na mbula mitano.* – She is five years old.
- *bandeko ba bolingo* – dear brothers (used as a greeting)
- *baninga na ngai* – my friends
- *Nawuti Springfield.* – I am from Springfield.
- *kombo mosusu* – family name
- *Kombo na ngai…* – My name is…
- *Tofandi Kinshasa.* – We live in Kinshasa.
- *Kombo na yo nani lisusu?* – What is your name again?
Kombo na yo? – What is your name?
mwana ya bango – their children
Oyo mama na ngai. – This is my mother.

4.3 Around the house

Verbs
kobamba – to repair
kokobombola – to clean
kokomba/kokombola – to sweep
kofutela – to rent
kopangusa – to polish (K)
kotana – to polish
kotoboka – to have a hole (in a pipe)

Vocabulary
bopeto – clean
bosoto – dirty
ebuteli – ladder
ekolo – basket
ekuke – door
epimolo ya sa – clock
esaleleli – tool
esika ya masolo – sitting room
etanda – bench
fulu, zau – dustbin, trash can
fungola – key
kabine, wese, zongo – toilet
kalati – card
kiti – chair
kombo – broom
koni – firewood
kuku – kitchen
libulu ya mayi – water well
lidusu – ruptured pipe
lininisi (maninisi) – window(s)
lititi (matiti) – grass (lawn)
lopango – plot (land)
makasi – scissors
mbeto – bed
mesa – table
mokulu – rope
molangi (milangi) – bottle(s)
monili – electricity
mpau – shovel  
mwana ya mosala – housekeeper  
nakati – interior  
ndako – house  
nkongo – hoe  
plafond – ceiling  
pompe, tiyo – pipe (plumbing)  
sabuni – soap  
salite – dirty  
singa – string  
soka – axe  
suku – room  
talatala – spectacles, mirror  
yadi – yard

Common phrases and examples
Azokomba nse. – He is sweeping the floor.  
Azopangusa mesa. – She is polishing the table.  
Bakobamba ndako na biso. – They will repair our house.  
Nasengeli kokombola ndako. – I need to clean the house.  
Pompe ezali na ya kotoboka. – The pipe has a hole.  
Tozofutela ndako. – We rent our house.

(K) denotes Kinshasa Lingala word variant

4.4 Daily routines

Verbs
kosokola – to wash  
kosuba – to pee  
kolamuka – to wake up  
kolala – to sleep  
kokolola – to shave

Vocabulary
botte – boot  
brush – toothbrush  
ekoti (bikoti) – hat(s)  
gillette – razor  
kisi ya mino – toothpaste  
lino (mino) – teeth  
lisanola – hairbrush, comb  
mandefu – beard  
malasi – perfume
mokoto – shoe
nzoto – body
sabuni – soap
simisi – shirt
suki – hair
talatala – mirror, spectacles
zongo, kabine, wese – toilet

Common phrases and examples
Azokata mandefu na ye. – He is shaving his beard.
Azosokola mino na ye. – She is brushing her teeth.
Bazolala. – They are sleeping.
Lamuka! – Wake up!
Lamuka, tango esi etami, goigoi! – Wake up, it is already late, lazy!
Nalingi bakata ngai suki. – I would like to have my hair cut.
Nazosokola nzoto. – I am washing myself.
Osengeli kokolola. – You need to shave.

4.5 Around town

Verbs
kokuta – to find
koluka – to search for
komona – to see
kosomba – to buy
kotala – to look
kotambola – to walk
kotambuisa – to drive
koteka – to sell
koyoka – to hear

Vocabulary
balabala – street
bank – bank
boloko – jail, prison
ekoko – statue
engumba – city, town
etalaka – bridge
eteyelo – school
ki malu malu – pick-up truck
likita – crowd
liliita – cemetery, graveyard
litumu – corner
maboma – factory
mazini – a shop, a store
mazini ya kisi – pharmacy
malewa – restaurant
mboka – village
mbongo – money
mombongo – a business
motuka (mituka) – car(s)
motuka ya munene – truck
ndako nzambe – a church
ndako ya ntoki – museum
nzela ya makolo – footpath
otele – hotel
sinema – cinema
wenze – small market
zando – big market

Common phrases and examples
Azoluka wenze. – She is searching for the market.
Bakutaki ndako nzambe. – They found the church.
Natambolaki na balabaIa. – I walked down the street.
Tomonaki lilita. – We saw the cemetery.
Totambolaka nikolo nionso. – We walk every day.

4.6 At school

Verbs
kobakisa – to add
kobunga – to be mistaken
kokoma – to write
kokundola – to remember
kosala – to work
kotanga – to read or to count
kotuna – to ask a question
koyanola – to answer
koyeba – to know
koyekola – to learn

Vocabulary
buuku – book
ekomeli – pen
eteyelo – school
eyano – answer
kelasi – classroom
kelasi likolo – university
likambo – problem
likanisi – idea, thought
liteya – lesson
lokota (nkota) – language(s)
mayele – intelligent
miko – incorrect
mokolo – history
molakisi – teacher, professor (formal setting)
moteyi – teacher, pastor (informal setting)
motuna (mituna) – question(s)
moyekoli, mwana ya kelasi – school boy/school girl
ndenge elongobani – correct, appropriate
ntina – reason
zebi – science
zebi ya mabanga – geology
zebi ya mokili – geography

Common phrases and examples
Molakisi azotuna motuna. – The teacher is asking a question.
Eyano na ngai ezalaki miko. – My answer was incorrect.
Esengeli koyekola. – It is necessary to learn.
Mwana ya kelasi ezali mayele. – The school girl is intelligent.
Alingi zebi ya mokili. – He likes geography.

4.7 In the kitchen

Verbs
kobela – to be cooked
kobonga – to pour (liquid)
kokalinga – to roast
kokata – to cut
kolamba – to cook
koleisa – to feed
kolia – to eat
komela – to drink
kopola – to rot (meat)

Vocabulary
ananas – pineapple
bilei – food
bitabe – banana
bokenzu – spicy
bololo – sour
cafe – coffee
chicwangue – cassava loaf
chocolat – chocolate
cossettes – cassava chips
dongodongo – okra
ekutu – pumpkin
fufu – cassava flour
kanya – fork
kimpuka (bimpuka) – cassava paste(s)
kopo – cup
kuku – kitchen
kunde – peas
libazi – lemon
libenge (mabenge) – potato(es)
liboke (maboke) – fish(es) wrapped in leaves
likei (makei) – egg(s)
likemba (makemba) – plantain(s)
lilala – orange (K)
lipa – bread
lipela – guava
lisango (masango) – corn, maize
lititi – herb
litungulu – onion
litungulu ngenge – garlic
liyebu – mushroom
losolo – rice
lutu – spoon
madesu – beans
mafuta – oil
mafuta ya mbila – clear cooking oil
mafuta ya nzoi – honey
mateka – butter
mayi – water
mbala – potato (K), sweet potato
mbeli – knife
mbisi – fish
mboloko – antelope
mboma – yam
mboto – maize
mbuma – fruit
mia – hungry (K)
miliki – milk
molangi (milangi) – bottle(s)
omoska mwamba – less refined cooking oil
mosuni (misuni) – flesh, meat(s)
moye – heat
mpiodi – a cheap, imported fish, also called Thompson
mpondu – manioc
mukuwa (mikuwa) – bone(s)
mungwa, monana – salt
mwamba – palm oil
mwamba nguba – peanut butter
ndimo – orange
ndunda – vegetables
ndunda mobesu – salad lettuce
ngombe mobali – bull
ngombe mwasi – cow
nguba – peanuts (K)
ngungutu – aubergine
nsimbiliki na ndako – rabbit
nsongo – cassava
ntaba – goat
ntaba mobali – billy goat
ntaba mwasi – nanny goat
nyama – meat
nyama ya mpate – mutton
nyama ya ngombe – beef
nzala – hungry
pamplemousse – grapefruit
pilipili – pepper
samba – commercially processed cooking oil
sani (basani) – plate(s)
soso – chicken
sukali – sugar
supu – soup
tangawisi – ginger
tomati – tomato
vere – glass

(K) denotes Kinshasa Lingala word variant

Oil me!

Kinois utilise a wide variety of cooking oils that vary both in source and price.

mafuta – oil
mafuta ya mabila – clear cooking oil
mosaka mwamba – less-refined cooking oil
mwamba – palm oil
samba – commercially processed cooking oil
Common phrases and examples
Abongaki cafe na kopo. – He poured the coffee in the cup.
Alambaki bilei. – She cooked the meal.
Bokokalinga soso. – They are going to roast chicken.
Nazali na nzala. – I am hungry.
Tolingi kolia. – We want to eat.

4.8 At the market

Verbs
kobunola – to reduce (a price)
kokakola – to bargain
kolinga – to want
komema – to carry
kopona – to choose
kosimba – to hold
kosomba – to buy
kotala – to look at
koteka – to sell

Vocabulary
bile bya ekolo – homemade
bilei – food
biloko – goods
boponi – choice
botte – boot
buuku – book
ebele – many, a lot
ekolo – basket
ekoti (bikoti) – hat(s)
lifuta – payment
likita – crowd
magazini (bamagazini) – shop(s), store(s)
malasi – perfume
mbuma – fruit
mobimba – whole
mokoto – shoe
mutuya – expensive
mutuya – expensive
ndunda – vegetables
ngundeurs – small-scale rural traders
simisi – shirt
wenze – small market
zando – large market
Common phrases and examples

*banso* – all
*ebele* – many, a lot
*eloko* – something
*eloko te* – nothing
*Kakola!* – Bargain! (as in ‘lower your price!’)
*kati* – half
*mobimba* – whole
*moke* – small, bit, few
*mutuya mingi* – very expensive
*mutuya te* – not expensive
*Nalingi kosomba te.* – I do not want to buy.
*Nalingi…* – I want...
*ndenge moko* – the same
*Olingi nini?* – What do you want?
*Ozakosa to ya solo?* – Are you lying or is that the truth? (as in ‘is that really the price?’)
*talo boni* – how much?
*ya kala* – old
*ya minei* – a quarter
*ya misato* – a third
*ya sika* – new

4.9 At the restaurant

**Verbs**
kofuta – to pay
kokuntana – to meet
kolia – to eat
komela – to drink
kopona – to choose
kosila – to finish (actions, objects)
kozela – to wait

**Vocabulary**
bilei na moyi – lunch
bilei na pokwa – dinner
bilei na tongo – breakfast
bokenzu – spicy
bololo – sour
cuisinair – chef
kalati ya bilei – menu
komela – drink (beverage)
lisusu – another
malewa – restaurant
masanga – alcoholic drink
masanga ya sukali – non-alcoholic drink
matabisi, mive – tip
molangi (milangi) – bottle(s)
motuya, addition – bill
mungwa – salt
pilipili – pepper
sukali – sugar

Common phrases and examples
bilei malamu – good meal
Bolambi nini lelo? – What is on the menu today?
bomomasano – as usual
Botondi mingi. – Thank you very much.
cafe ya miliki – coffee with milk
cafe ya pamba – black coffee
eloko te – nothing
epoli – it (food) is rotten
Esi ebeli? – What has already been prepared?
Esili? – Finished?
Ezali na…? – Does it have…?
eziki – burned to the point of being inedible
Mwası na ngai aliaki tomate te. – My wife never eats tomatoes.
nanu te – not again
Nazali na mposa. – I am thirsty.
Nazali na nzala. – I am hungry.
Nyama elambi makasi – The meat is overdone.
Nyama mwa elambi – The meat is underdone.
Okosenga nini? – What do you recommend?
Olingi nini? – What do you want?
Osi olei? – Have you already eaten?
Otondi? – Have you had enough?
Pesa ngai l’addition. – Give me the bill.

4.10 Sports and recreation

Verbs
kobeta – to hit
kobete – to swim
kobwaka – to throw
kokeba – to pay attention
kokima – to run
kolonga – to win
komata – to ride or to climb
kopimbwa – to jump
kopola – to lose
kopota – to run
kosana – to play
kotambola – to walk
kozua – to wait

Vocabulary
bale – ball
ema – tent
likita – crowd
lisanga – team
lisano (misano) – game(s), sport(s)
lisano ya motope – football game
lupemba – good luck
mokima – runner
molako – camping
motambola – walker
motope – football
pike – ticket

Common phrases and examples
lisanga ya yango – the first team
komata mpunda – to ride a horse
kosana golf – to play golf
kosana tennis – to play tennis
Libanda ya masano? – Where is the stadium?
Nani akolonga? – Who will win?
Nani akosana? – Who is playing?
Okoki kobete mai – Can you swim?
Tike ezali talo boni? – How much are tickets?

4.11 On the road

Verbs
kobanda – to start
kobima – to leave
kokende – to go
kokende mobembo – to take a trip, holiday
kokoma – to arrive
kokomela – to reach (a place)
kokumba – to transport
kolanda – to follow
koleka – to pass, to go past
koluka – to look for
kosila – to finish (actions, objects)
koteme – to stop
kotikala – to stay, to remain
kowuta – to come (from)
koya – to come (to)
kozonga – to return, to come back

Vocabulary
biloko – goods, luggage
bokei – departure
capo – bonnet, hood (car)
epesa nzela – passport
esika esusu – elsewhere
essence – petrol
eyenga – festival
ki malu malu – pick-up truck
libanda ya mpepo – airport
malembe – slow, slowly
malewa – restaurant
mazuti – diesel
mbango – fast, quick
mobembo (mibembo) – trip(s), holiday(s)
mokima – runner
mokolo ya kopema – holiday
motambola – walker
motambuisi (batambuisi) – driver(s)
motuka (mituka) – car(s)
motuka ya munene – truck
otele – hotel
polisi – police
solda (basolda) – soldier(s)
tike – ticket
uta – from, since
yika – wheel
Common phrases and examples
Akotikala poso moko. – She will stay one week.
Azowuta na libanda ya mpepo. – I am coming from the airport.
Esengeli kozala na epesa nzela. – It is necessary to have a passport.
Landa ngai. – Follow me.
Mobembo na bango ezalaki malamu. – Their holiday was good.
Tokobima lelo. – We are leaving today.

4.12 God and country

Religion

Verbs
kokumisa – to glorify
kolimbisa – to forgive
komima – to repent
kosambela – to pray
koteya – to preach

Vocabulary
eklezya – the Church
lola – paradise
losambo – prayer
mambi ya nzambe – religion
moteyi – preacher
moyangeli – deacon
ndako nzambe – a church
Nzambe – God
sumuki – sin
Yesu – Jesus
zabolo – the devil

Government

Verbs
kokuntana – to meet
kolingisa – to allow
kopesika – to forbid, to prohibit, to ban
kopona – to choose
koponama – to elect
koswanna – to argue, to quarrel
koyanola – to reply, to answer
kozua mokamo – to take a decision
Vocabulary
bendele – flag
ekolo – state
ekolo ya moto – nationality
etuka – department
kpoponama, maponami – elections
leta – state, government
lokota (nkota) – language(s)
mboka – country
mobeko (mibeko) – law(s)
mopaya (bapaya) – foreigner(s), stranger(s)
ndako ya bakonzi – palace
nsuka – limit

4.13 Life, love and death

Verbs
koboma – to kill
kobota – to give birth
kobotoma – to be born
kofanda – to live
kokufa – to die
kokunda – to bury
kolinga – to like
kolingana – to be in love
kosiba – to make love

Vocabulary
batisimu – baptism
bolimbisi – sorry
bolingo – love
ebembe – corpse
elongo – together
esengo (bisengo) – joy(s)
kitoko – beautiful, pretty, nice
matanga – mourning, funeral
mbotama – birth
mobotisi – midwife
zemi – pregnant
zuwa – jealousy

Common phrases and examples
Nalingi ozala mobali ngai. – I want you to be my boyfriend.
Nalingi ozala mwasi ngai. – I want you to be my girlfriend.
"Nalingi yo. – I love you.
Nalingi yo mingi. – I love you so much.

4.14 Sorcery and witchcraft

Vocabulary
kindoki – sorcery
liloki – magic
ndoki – sorcerer
nganga nkisi – fetish priest
mami wata – a siren, femme fatale or water spirit who promises access to
t material wealth in return for human lives
nganga – a ritual specialist
nkisi – charms
sheta/chor – witch children – from the French ‘sorcière’
ntoto – dream
zabolo – the devil

4.15 Body parts

Vocabulary
libele (mabele) – breast(s)
libolo – vagina
libumu – stomach
likata – penis
lino (mino) – tooth (teeth)
lipeka (mapeka) – shoulder(s)
liso (miso) – eye(s)
litama (matama) – cheek(s)
litoi (matoi) – ear(s)
lobebu (mbebu) – lip(s)
loboko (maboko) – hand(s)
lokolo – foot
lolemo – tongue
loposo – skin
maboko – finger(s)
makata – penis and testicles
makila – blood
makolo – toe(s)
mendefu – beard
mbanga – jaw
mokongo (mikongo) – back(s)
mokuwa (mikuwa) – bone(s)
monoko – mouth
mosapi (misapi) – finger(s), toe(s)
mosisa (misisa) – vein(s)
misopo (misopo) – intestine(s)
mosuni – flesh
motema (mitema) – heart(s)
moto (mitu) – head(s)
moto (mitu) – head(s)
nkingo – neck
nzoto – body
suki – hair
zolo – nose

4.16 In sickness and in health

Verbs
kobela – to be sick
kobika – to cure (K)
kobowa – to cure
kokosola – to cough
kolenge – to shiver
kopangana – to worry
kopema – to breath, to rest
kosanza – to vomit
kotuba tonga – to inject (medicine)
koyoka – to feel
kozoka – to hurt

Vocabulary
bokolongono – health
bokono bwa sukali – diabetes
bolozi – sore, blemish
bukabuka – polio
esensgo – happiness
kisi – medicine(s)
libumu likangani – constipation
loko – deaf
magazini ya kisi – pharmacy
mingai – rheumatism
minya – urine
mobotisi – midwife
mokolo – old
mokongeli mokoni – nurse
mokoni – disabled
mokoni – patient (hospital)
molanda – blind
mulunge mabe mpe ketuketu – influenza
monganga (minganga) – doctor(s)
monzuba – insect sting
mpota – cut, wound
mukosa – itch
ngenge – poison
nzoto – body
pulupulu ya makila – dysentery
pulupulu ya nsomo – cholera
sante – health

Common phrases and examples
Nayoki malamu. – I feel well.
Nayoki malamu te. – I do not feel well.
Benga monganga. – Call a doctor.

(K) denotes Kinshasa Lingala word variant

4.17 Street life

Verbs
kobanga – to be afraid
kofinga – to insult
kokeba – to pay attention
kokosa – to deceive
kokuntana – to meet
kolinga – to like, to want
komela – to drink, to smoke
koseka – to laugh
koseka moke – to smile
kosengela – to be happy, to be content
kosomba – to buy
koteka – to sell
koyemba – to sing
koyiba – to steal
koyoka – to listen
kozoka – to hurt

Vocabulary
ba travailleurs – workers
balabala – street
batu na maboma – crazy men
bondoki – gun
elema – mad, foolish
etumba – fight
goigoi – lazy
kuluna – criminal
kwiti – drunk
likambo (makambo) – problem(s), dispute(s)
likaya – cigarette, tobacco
likita – crowd
lupemba – good luck
makasi – hard
makelele – noise
makila – blood
mbakasa – someone who is timid, afraid or doesn’t know how to find money
mbeli – knife
mbokatier/mowuta – derogatory term for people for people living in rural Congo or new arrivals without street smarts
mbongo – money
mia – hungry (K)
molangi – drunkard
moyembali (bayembali) – singer(s)
moyibi – thief
mukukule – a girl’s special street boyfriend
mwana Kin – a son of Kinshasa
mwana mboka – son of the country
mwana quartier – neighbourhood kid
mwana ya kilo – a child with ‘clout’
ndumba – sex worker
nganda – bar
nzala – hungry
nzembo – song
polisi – police
pomba – a strong, physically aggressive person
sanse – luck
solda (basolda) – soldier(s)
yanke – a strong, courageous or fearless person, from the American ‘Yankee’
yuma – foolish
zembe – someone who does not fear police or soldiers
zoba – stupid

Common phrases and examples
Esengeli. – It is necessary.
Eza te. – It is nothing.
Ezali na mutuya. – It is important.
Likambo nini? – What is going on?
Likambo te. – No problem.
**Limbisa ngai.** – Pardon me.
**Mopaya zoba!** – Stupid stranger!
**Nalingi te.** – I do not want.
**Nayebi te.** – I do not know.
**Nayebi yango.** – I know that.
**Olingi nini?** – What do you want?
**Pesa ngai.** – Give me.

(K) denotes Kinshasa Lingala word variant

### 4.18 War and peace

**Verbs**
- **kobanga** – to be afraid of
- **kobebisa** – to ruin
- **kobikisa** – to rescue
- **kobotola** – to confiscate
- **kobunda** – to make war
- **kokamata** – to take
- **kokufa** – to die
- ** koboma** – to kill
- ** kokunda** – to bury
- **kolanda** – to follow
- ** kolimbisa** – to forgive
- **kolonga** – to win
- **koluka** – to search for
- **kosilika** – to be angry
- **koswanna** – to argue
- **kotumba** – to burn
- ** kovioler** – to rape
- ** koyina** – to hate
- ** kozoka** – to hurt

**Vocabulary**
- **bendele** – flag
- **bitumba** – war
- **boboto** – peace
- **bokamwi** – surprise
- **bolumbu** – naked
- **bondoki** – gun
- **ebembe (bibembe)** – corpse(s)
- **elikya** – hope
- **elongo** – together
- **etumba** – fight
kadago – child soldier
kimia – peace, peaceful
lingisi – interpreter
lisasi – cartridge
lolendo – proud
makila – blood
mbeli – knife
mboka – country
mibali – men
mokambi – leader
mokimeli – refugee
monguna – enemy
mopaya (bapaya) – foreigner(s), stranger(s)
sefu – chief
solda (basolda) – soldier(s)

Common phrases and examples
Sango nini? – What is the news?
Sango ya bitumba? – What is the war news?
Sango te. – There is no news.
Sango malamu. – The news is good.
Sango mabe. – The news is bad.

4.19 Time

Vocabulary
butu – night
ekoya – next
eleki – past
epimelo ya sa – clock
esi – already
kino – until
lelo – today
lobi – yesterday, tomorrow
mbala – time (frequency)
mokolo (mikolo) – day(s)
mobu (mibu) – year(s)
monuti – minute
mpokwa – evening
ngonga – hour
nionso – each, every
noki – immediately
ntongo – dawn, morning
nzanga – midday, noon
poso – week
sa – wristwatch
sanza – month
segonde – second
sik’oyo – now
sika – now
simai – after, behind
simazanga – afternoon
tango – time
tongo – morning
zomi – decade

Common phrases and examples
lobi kuna – the day before yesterday
mokolo elandi – next day
tongo makasi – very early
tongo nionso – each morning
tango nini? – what time?
ti sik’oyo – until now
ti lobi – until tomorrow
tongo nionso – each morning
posomobimba – every week

4.20 Directions

Verbs
kokomela – to reach (a place)
kolanda – to follow
koluka – to search for

Vocabulary
awa – here
elozi – west
kati kati – middle
kuna – there
libanda – out
liboso – front, in front of
likolo – up
monyele – east
mosika – far
na – in
na likolo – on
na loboko ya mobali – on the right
na loboko ya mwasi – on the left
na nse – under
nakati – in
nse – down
pembendi – next to
penepene – very near to
wana – there (a specific place)
wapi – where

Common phrases and examples
Landa ngai – Follow me.
Nabungi nzela. – I am lost.
na ebandeli – at the start
na suka – at the end
Nasuki awa – I stop here
esika esusu – elsewhere
yaka – come here
ya liboso, ya yambo – the first
ya mibale – the second
ya misato – the third
yango kuna – it is there
yango’yo – it is here

Left and right

Indicating ‘left’ and ‘right’ uses an interesting combination of common words. 
4.21 The natural world

Sky

Vocabulary
likolo – sky
moi – sun
monama – rainbow
monzoto – star
mopepe – wind, air
mpata – cloud(s)
mwese – sun
mwinda – light
sanza – moon

Earth

Vocabulary
elanga (bilanga) – meadow(s), field(s)
esanga – island
etando – plain
libanga (mabanga) – pebble(s), stone(s)
libongo – beach
lisobe, eliki – desert
lobwaku – valley
mabele – earth
Mokili – Earth
molongo – the world
mopanzi – coast
ngomba – mountain
ngomba moke – small hill
nse – soil
zeolo – sand

Fire

Vocabulary
koni – firewood
milinga – fire, steam (K)
molinga – fire, steam
moto – fire, bonfire
Water

Vocabulary

ebale – river
etima – lake
etima moke – pond
mbonge – wave
mbu – sea, ocean
meta – waterfall
moluka – stream
mongala – large stream, small river
pela – flood

Weather

Vocabulary

bobandu – humidity
ekumbaki – storm
lo pembe, londende – fog
malili – cold, fresh, cool
mbula – rain
mikili – climate
molunge – hot
monama – rainbow
monkalali – lightning
mpio – cold
ngembu – umbrella
nkaki – thunder

Common phrases and examples

mulunge ezeli – it is hot
malili ezeli – it is cold
mbula ezonoka – it is raining
mbula ezonoka makisi – it is raining hard
mbula ezoya – rain is coming

In the forest

Vocabulary

elili – shadow
fololo – flower
likasa (makasa) – leaf (leaves)
lititi (matiti) – grass, lawn
mbanzi – bamboo
mbe – flower (formal)
mbila – palm tree
mwete (banzete) – tree(s)
mwinda – light
ndeke (bandeke) – bird (birds)
nzete (banzete) – tree(s) (K)
nzoi – bees
zamba – forest

**Mining, minerals and natural resources**

**Vocabulary**

ebende – iron
diaman – diamond
libulu ya mayi – water well
motako – copper
ndembo – rubber
nduka – dam
pawuni – ore
pitolo – petroleum
potopoto – clay, mud
putulu – ash
wolo – gold

(K) denotes Kinshasa Lingala word variant

**4.22 Animals**

**Wild animals**

**Vocabulary**

banyama na zamba – wild animals
ekange – hyena
esende – squirrel
gambala – fox
kukulu – parrot
libelekete – snail
likako (makako) – monkey(s)
mboloko – antelope
mbwa na zamba – wolf, fox
mokangi – fly
mokomboso – gorilla, chimp
mombemba – frog
mondonga – giraffe
monkungi – mosquito
muselekete (miselekete) – lizard (lizards)
mpoko – mouse
mpuku, mpu – rat
ngando (bangando) – crocodile(s)
ngembo – bat
ngubu – hippopotamus
ngulu – wild boar
nkoi – leopard, panther
nkoba – tortoise
nkosi (bankosi) – lion(s)
nsimbiliki na zamba – porcupine
nzoi – bees
nzoko – elephant (K)
nzoku – elephant
sombo, ngulu – wild boar
tchaku – parrot (K)

Domestic animals

Vocabulary
ebuele (bibuele) – domesticated animal(s)
mbwa – dog
meme mobali – ram
meme mwasi – ewe
meme ya mwana – lamb
mpunda – donkey, horse
ngombe mobali – bull
ngombe mwasi – cow
niao, pusi – cat
nsimbiliki na ndako – rabbit
nsoso mwasi – hen
ntaba mobali – billy goat
ntaba mwasi – goat
nzale, mpakasa – buffalo
nzoi – bees

(K) denotes Kinshasa Lingala
word variant
5. Binomials

It can sometimes be helpful to think of pairs of related words – I call them 'binomials' – when trying to master or memorise vocabulary. Here are some to get you going, although you'll no doubt find many more to add and use as you become more proficient.

5.1 Verb binomials

*kobanda* – to start
*kosila* – to finish

*kokoma* – to arrive
*kobima* – to leave

*kofungola* – to open
*kokanga* – to close

*kosiba* – to make love
*kobunda* – to make war

*koya* – to come
*kokende* – to go

*kolala* – to sleep
*kolamuka* – to wake

*kokundola* – to remember
*kobasana* – to forget

*kotanga* – to read
*kokoma* – to write

*kobotoma* – to be born
*kokunda* – to bury

*kopusa* – to push
*kobenda* – to pull

*kotambola* – to walk
*kokima* – to run
kolamba – to cook
colia – to eat

koseka – to laugh
colela – to cry

kofanda – to live
kokufa – to die

kopesa – to give
kozua – to take

kobakisa – to add
kolongola – to remove

komata – to climb
kokita – to descend

koluka – to search
kokuta – to find

kotelema – to stand
kofanda – to sit

kosepela – to be happy
kosilika – to be angry

kotuna – to ask a question
koyanola – to answer

kotumbula – to joke
koseka moke – to smile

kosokola – to wash
kopangusa – to dry

kosomba – to buy
koteka – to sell

koteya – to preach
komina – to repent

koyemba – to sing
koyoka – to listen
kobala – to marry  
kokabwana – to separate

kobeta – to hit  
kozoka – to hurt

koyekola – to learn  
koyeba – to know

kofinga – to insult  
kolimbisa – to forgive

kopasola – to break  
kokamba – to repair

kolonga – to win  
kopola – to lose

kosala – to work  
kosana – to play

kobanda – to start  
kosuka – to stop

kotinda – to send  
kozua – to receive

kolingisa – to allow  
kopesika – to forbid

kobela – to be sick  
kobika – to be cured

5.2 Noun and adjective binomials

mbango – fast  
malembe – slow

likolo – up  
nse – down

nakati – in  
libanda – out
molunge – hot
malili – cold

mobali – man
mwasi – woman

pete – easy
pasi – difficult

penza – true
lokuta – false

bopeto – clean
bosoto – dirty

moyi – day
butu – night

mayele – intelligent
zoba – stupid

bitumba – war
kimia – peace

mulayi – tall
mukuse – short

loboko – hand
lokolo – foot

ngomba – mountain
lobwaku – valley

sika – new
kala – old

likambo – question
eyano – answer

moninga – friend
mopaya – stranger

mwinda – light
elili – shadow
ndeke – bird
nzi – bee

likolo – sky
mabele – earth

niao – cat
mbwa – dog

mwindu – black
pembe – white

esango – happy
mawa – sad

makila – blood
mayi – water

mwana mobali – boy
mwana mwasi – girl

mesa – table
kiti – chair

molakisi – teacher
moyekoli – student

mungwa – salt
pilipili – pepper

ngomba – mountain
lobwaku – valley

moi – sun
sanza – moon

mopepe – wind
mbula – rain

moninga – friend
monguna – enemy
6. Verbs

6.1 English-Lingala verbs

to accuse – kofunda

to add - kobakisa

to allow – kolingisa

to answer – koyanola

to argue – koswanna

to arrive – kokoma

to ask – kosenga

to ask a question – kotuna

to ban – kopesika

to bargain – kokakola

to be – kozala

to be able – kokoka

to be afraid of – kobanga

to be angry – kosilika

to be born – kobotoma

to be content – kosepela

to be cooked – kobela

to be from – kowuta

to be happy – kosepela

to be in love – kolingana

to be mistaken – kobunga

to be sick – kobela

to be tired – kolemba

to beat – kobeta

to begin – kobanda

to bite – koswa

to borrow – kodefa

to break – kobuka, kopasola

to breathe – kopema

to burn (controlled) – kotumba

to burn (uncontrolled) – kozikisa

to bury – kokunda

to buy – kosomba

to call – kobenga

to carry – kobumba, komema

to chat – kosolola

to choose – kopona

to clean – kokobombola

to climb – komata, kotalisa

to close – kokanga

to come (to) – koya
to come (back) – kozonga

to come (from) – kowuta

to confiscate – kobotola

to cough – kokosola

to count – kotanga

to cry – kolela

to cure – kobowa

to cut – kokata

to deceive – kokosa

to descend – kokita

to die – kokufa

to drink – komela

to dry – kopangusa

to eat – kolia

to elect – koponama

to employ (an object) – koselela

to enter – kokota

to exchange – kosombitinya

to fall – kokueya

to feed – koleisa

to feel – koyoka

to fill – kotondisa

to find – kokuta

to finish – kosiliisa, kosuka

to finish (actions, objects) – kosila

to fit – kobonga

to fly – kopumbwa

to follow – kolanda

to forbid – kopesiika

to forget – kobasana

to forgive – kolimbisa

to get well – kobika

to give – kopesa

to give back (an object) – kozongisa

to give birth – kobota

to glorify – kokumisa

to go – kokende

to go down – kokita

to go out – kobima

to go past – koleka

to hate – koyina

to have – kozala na

to have a hole (in a pipe) – kotoboka

to have fear – kobanga

to hide – kobomba
to hire – kofotela
to hit – kobeta
to hold – kosimba
to holiday – kokende mobembo
to hope – kolikia
to hurt – kozoka
to import – komema
to inject (medicine) – kotuba tonga
to insult – kofinga
to joke – kotumbula
to jump – kopimbwa, kopumbwa
to kill – koboma
to knock – kobola
to know – koyeba
to laugh – koseka
to lead – kokamba
to learn – koyekola
to leave (an object) – kotika
to leave (people, actions) – kobima
to like – kolinga
to listen – koyoka
to live – kofanda
to look at – kotala
to look for – koluka
to lose (an object) – kobungisa
to lose (in sport) – kopola
to make – kosala
to make love – kosiba
to make war – kobunda
to marry – kobala
to meet – kokuntana
to miss – kozanga
to need – kosengela
to open – kofungola
to pack – kokanga
to pass – koleka
to pay – kofuta
to pay attention – kokeba
to pee – kosuba
to play – kosana
to polish – kotana
to polish – kopangusa (K)
to pour (liquid) – kobonga
to pray – kosambela
to preach – koteya
to prohibit – kopesika

to promise – kolaka

to pull – kobenda

to punch – kobeta

to push – kopusa

to put – kotia

to put down – kokitisa

to put something inside – kokotisa

to put something out – kobimbisa

to quarrel – koswanna

to rain – konoka

to rape – kovioler

to reach (a place) – kokomela

to read – kotanga

to receive (a person, etc.) – koyamba

to receive (an object) – kozua

to reduce (a price) – kobunola

to refuse – koboya

to reject – koboya

to remain – kotikala

to remember – kokundola

to remove – kolongola

to rent – kofutela

to repair – kobamba

to repent – komina

to reply – koyanola

to rescue – kobikisa

to rest – kopema

to return – kozonga

to return (an object) – kozongisa

to ride – komata, kopusa

to roast – kokalinga

to rot (meat) – kopola

to ruin – kobebisa

to run – kokima, kopota

to say – koyebisa

to search – koluka

to see – komona

to sell – koteka

to send – kotinda

to sew – kotinda

to share – kokaba

to shave – kokolola

to shiver – kolenge

to shout – konganga
to sing – *koyemba*

to sit – *kofanda*

to sleep – *kolala*

to smile – *koseka moke*

to smoke – *komela*

to speak – *koloba*

to stand up – *kotelema*

to start – *kobanda*

to stay – *kotikala*

to steal – *koyiba*

to stop – *kosuka, koteme*

to study – *kotanga*

to swallow – *komela*

to sweep – *kokomba, kokombola*

to swim – *kobete*

to take – *kokamata, komema*

to take (an object) – *kozua*

to take a decision – *kozua mokamo*

to take a trip – *kokende mobembo*

to talk – *kosolola*

to think – *kobouler, kokanisa*

to throw – *kobwaka*

to transform – *kobongola*

to transport – *kokumba, komema*

to try – *komeka*

to turn – *kobalusa*

to twist – *kokamola*

to use (an object) – *koselela*

to vomit – *kosanza*

to wait – *kozela*

to wake up – *kolamuka*

to walk – *kotambola*

to want – *kolinga*

to wash – *kosokola*

to watch – *kotala*

to win – *kolonga*

to wipe – *kopangusa*

to wish – *kotombela*

to work – *kosalala*

to worry – *kopangana*

to wrap – *koziba*

to write – *kokoma*
6.2 Lingala-English verbs

kobakisa – to add
kobala – to marry
kobalusa – to turn
kobamba – to repair
kobanda – to start, to begin
kobanga – to be afraid of, to have fear
kobasana – to forget
kobebisa – to ruin
kobela – to be sick, to be cooked
kobenda – to pull
kobenga – to call
kobeta – to hit, to beat, to punch
kobete – to swim
kobika – to get well
kobikisa – to rescue
kobima – to leave (people, actions), to go out
kobimbisa – to put something out
kobola – to knock
koboma – to kill
kobomba – to hide
kobonga – to fit, to pour (liquid)
kobongola – to transform
kobotula – to give birth
kobotola – to confiscate
kobotoma – to be born
kobouler – to think
kobowa – to cure
koboya – to refuse, to reject
kobuka – to break
kobunda – to make war
kobunga – to be mistaken
kobungisa – to lose (an object)
kobunola – to reduce (a price)
kobwaka – to throw
kodefa – to borrow
kofanda – to live, to sit
kofinga – to insult
kofotela – to hire
kofunda – to accuse
kofungola – to open
kofuta – to pay
kofutela – to rent
kokaba – to share
kokakola – to bargain
kokalinga – to roast
kokamata – to take
kokamba – to lead
kokamola – to twist
kokanga – to close, to pack
kokanisa – to think
kokata – to cut
kokeba – to pay attention
kokende – to go
kokende mobembo – to take a trip, to holiday
kokima – to run
kokita – to descend, to go down
kokitisa – to put down
kokobombola – to clean
kokoka – to be able
kokolola – to shave
kokoma – to arrive
kokoma – to write
kokomba – to sweep
kokombola – to sweep
kokomela – to reach (a place)
kokosa – to deceive
kokosola – to cough
kokota – to enter
kokotisa – to put something inside
kokueya – to fall
kokufa – to die
kokumba – to carry, to transport
kokumisa – to glorify
kokunda – to bury
kokundola – to remember
kokuntana – to meet
kokuta – to find
kolaka – to promise
kolala – to sleep
kolamuka – to wake up
kolanda – to follow
koleisa – to feed
koleka – to pass, to go past
kolela – to cry
kolemba – to be tired
kolenge – to shiver
kolia – to eat
kolikia – to hope
kolimbisa – to forgive
kolinga – to like, to want
kolingana – to love each other
kolingisa – to allow
koloba – to speak
kalonga – to win
kalongola – to remove
koluka – to look for, to search
komata – to climb
komata – to ride
komeka – to try
komela – to drink, to smoke, to swallow
komema – to carry
komema – to take, to transport, to import
komina – to repent
komona – to see
konganga – to shout
konoka – to rain
kopangana – to worry
kopangusa – to wipe, to dry, to polish (K)
kopasola – to break
kopema – to breathe, to rest
kopesa – to give
kopesika – to forbid, to prohibit, to ban
kopimbwa – to jump
kopola – to lose (in sport)
kopola – to rot (meat)
kopona – to choose
koponama – to elect
kopota – to run
kopumbwa – to jump, to fly
kopusa – to push, to ride
kosala – to work, to make
kosambela – to pray
kosana – to play
kosanza – to vomit
koseka – to laugh
koseka moke – to smile
koselela – to use, to employ (an object)
kosenga – to ask
kosengela – to need
kosepela – to be happy, to be content
kosiba – to make love
kosila – to finish (actions, objects)
kosilika – to be angry
kosilisa – to finish
kosimba – to hold
kosokola – to wash
kosolola – to talk, to chat
kosomba – to buy
kosombitinya – to exchange
kosono – to sew
kosuba – to pee
kosuka – to stop, to finish
koswa – to bite
koswanna – to argue, to quarrel
kotala – to look at, to watch
kotalisa – to climb
kotambola – to walk
kotambuisa – to drive
kotana – to polish
kotanga – to study, to read, to count
koteka – to sell
kotelema – to stand up
koteme – to stop
koteya – to preach
kotia – to put
kotika – to leave (an object)
kotikala – to stay, to remain
kotinda – to send
kotoboka – to have a hole (in a pipe)
kotombela – to wish
kotondisa – to fill
kotuba tonga – to inject (medicine)
kotumba – to burn (controlled)
kotumbula – to joke
kotuna – to ask a question
kovioler – to rape
kowuta – to come (from), to be from
koya – to come (to)
koyamba – to receive (a person, etc.)
koyanola – to reply, to answer
koyeba – to know
koyebisa – to say
koyekola – to learn
koyemba – to sing
koyiba – to steal
koyina – to hate
koyoka – to feel
koyoka – to listen
kozala – to be
kozala na – to have
kozanga – to miss
kozela – to wait
koziba – to wrap
kozikisa – to burn (uncontrolled)
kozoka – to hurt
kozonga – to return (from), to come back
kozongisa – to return, to give back
kozua – to take, to receive (an object)
kozua mokamo – to take a decision
7. Vocabulary

7.1 English- Lingala vocabulary

A

about – ba
affair – mpo
after – sima
afternoon – sima nzanga
air – mopepe
alcoholic drink – masanga
all – banso
alone – ngai moko
already – esi, osi
and – na, pe
animal(s) – niama (baniama)
answer – eyano
appropriate – ndenge elongobani
antelope – mboloko
ash – putulu
aubergine – ngungutu
axe – soka

B

back pain – mpasi ya mukongo
back(s) (animal, person) – mokongo (mikongo)
bad – mabe
bald-headed – libandi
ball – bale
bamboo – mbanzi
banana – bitabe
bank – bank
baptism – batisimu
bar (drinking) – nganda
basket – ekolo
bat – ngembo
beach – libongo
beans – madesu
beard – mandefu
beautiful – kitoko
because – po
bed – mbeto
beef – nyama ya ngombe
behind – eleki, sima
bench – etanda
bill (restaurant) – motuya
billy goat – ntaba mobali
bird(s) – ndeke (bandeke)
birth – mbotama
bit – ndambo
black – langi ya mwindu
blind (vision) – mololanda
blood – makila
body (person) – nzoto
boil (cooking) – matungana
bone(s) – mokuwa (mikuwa), mukuwa (mikuwa)
bonnet (car) – capo
book – buuku
boot – botte
bottle(s) – molangi (milangi)
brain – bongo
bread – lipa
breast milk – mabele
breast(s) – mabele (libele)
bridge – etalaka
broad – monene
broom – komba
brother(s) – ndeko (bandeko)
brother-in-law – bokilo
buffalo – mpakasa, nzale
bull – ngombe mobali
business (firm) – mombongo
but – kasi
butter – mateka

C

car(s) – motuka (mituka)
card – kalati
carpenter – kabinda
cartridge – lisasi
cassava – nsongo
cassava chips – cossettes
cassava flour – fufu
cassava loaf – chicwangue
cassava paste – kimpuka (bimpuka)
cat – niao, pusi
ceiling – plafond
cemetery – lilita
chair – kiti
charcoal – makala
charms – nkisi
chat(s) – lisolo (masolo)
cheap, imported fish – mpiodi
cheek(s) – litama (matama)
chef – cuisinair
chemist – magazini ya kisi
chicken – soso
chief – sefu
child (children) – mwana (bana)
child soldier – kadago
chimp – mokomboso
chocolate – chocolat
choice – boponi
cholera – pulupulu ya nsomo
church – ndako nzambe
cigarette – likaya
cinema – sinema
city – engumba
classroom – kelasi
clay – potopoto
clean – bopeto
clear cooking oil – mafuta ya mabila
climate – mikili
clock – epimolo ya sa
cloud(s) – mpata
coast (geography) – mopanzi
coffee – cafe
cold – malili, mpio
colours (the) – ba langi
comb – lisanola
commercially processed cooking oil – samba
constipation – libumu likangani
cool – malili
copper (metal) – motako
corn – lisango (masango)
corner – litumu
corpse(s) – ebembe (bibembe)
correct (affirmative) – ndenge elongobani
country – mboka
country bumpkin – yuma
cow – ngombe mwasi
crazy men – batu na maboma
criminal (person) – kuluna
crocodile(s) – ngando (bangando)
crowd – likita
cup – kopo
cut (medical) – mpota

dam – nduka
daughter – mwana mwası
dawn – ntongo
day(s) – mokolo (mikolo)
deacon – moyangeli
defaf – loko
dear – dii
decade – zomi
department – etuka
departure – bokei
descendant – eboto
desert – eliki, lisobe
devil – zabolo
diabetes – bokono bwa sukali
diamond – diaman
diesel – mazuti
difference – bokeseni
different – ekesani
difficult – pasi
dirt – mabele
dirty – bosoto, salite
disabled person – mokoni
dispute(s) – likambo (makambo)
dock workers (informal sector) – drogadeurs
doctor(s) – monganga (minganga)
dog – mbwa
domestic animal(s) – ebuele (bibuele)
donkey – mpunda
doors – ekuke
down – nse
dowry – mosolo
dream – ndoto
drink (beverage) – komela
driver(s) – motambuisi (batambuisi)
drunk – kwiti
dustbin – fulu, zau
dysentery – pulupulu ya makila

E

each – moko, nionso
ear(s) – litoi (matoi)
earth – mabele
Earth – Mokili
east – monyele
easy – pete
egg(s) – likei (makei)
election – koponama
elections – maponami
electricity – monili
elephant – nzoku
elephant (K) – nzoko
elsewhere – esika esusu
enemy – monguna
especially – mingi mingi
Europe – poto
evening – mpokwa
every – nionso
ewe – meme ya mwasi
expensive – mutuya
eye(s) – liso (miso)

F

factory – maboma
falsehood – lokuta
family – libota
far – mosika
fast – mbango
father-in-law – bokilo mobali
female water spirit – mami wata
festival – eyenga
fetish priest – ngana nkisi
few – moke, mwaa
field(s) – elanga (bilanga)
fight – etumba
finger(s) – mosapi (misapi)
fire – milinga, molinga, moto
firewood – koni
fish – mbisi
fish (cheap, imported) – mpiodi
fish(es) wrapped in leaves – liboke (maboke)
flag – bendele
flesh – mosuni (misuni)
flood – pela
flower – fololo
flower – mbe
fly (insect) – makongi
fog – londende, lopembe
foolish – elema
foolish, fearful person – mbakasa
foot – lokolo
football – motope
football game – lisano ya motope
footpath – nzela ya makolo
for – po, na
forceful person – pomba
foreign person – mundele (mindele)
foreigner(s) – mopaya (bapaya)
forest – zamba, esobe (bisobe)
fork – kanya
fox – gambala, mbwa na nzamba
fresh – malili
friend(s) – moninga (baninga)
frog – mombemba
from – uta
front – liboso
fruit – mbuma
funeral – matanga

G

garlic – litungulu ngenge
gasoline – esanzi
geography – zebi za mokili
geology – zebi za mabanga
ginger – tangawisi
giraffe – mondonga
glass – vere
goat – ntaba
God – Nzambe
gold – wolo
good – malamu
good luck – lupemba
goods – biloko
gorilla – mokomboso
government – *leta*
grand – *monene*
grandfather – *tata nkoko*
grandmother – *mama nkoko*
grapefruit – *pamplemousse*
green (lawn) – *lititi* (*matiti*)
grass (lawn) – *lititi* (*matiti*)
grass (lawn) – *lititi* (*matiti*)
grass (lawn) – *lititi* (*matiti*)
grass (lawn) – *lititi* (*matiti*)
grass (lawn) – *lititi* (*matiti*)
graveyard – *lilita*
guava – *lipela*
gun – *bondoki*

**H**

haemorrhoids – *mputa ya libumu*

hair – *suki*

hairbrush – *lisanola*

hairbrush – *lisanola*

half – *kati*

hand(s) – *loboko* (*maboko*)

hat(s) – *ekoti* (*bikoti*)

head(s) – *moto* (*mitu*)

health – *bokolongono, sante*

heart(s) – *motema* (*mitema*)

heartburn – *motema moto*

heat – *moye*

heaven – *lola*

hello – *mbote*

hen – *nsoso mwasi*

herb – *lititi*

herb – *lititi*

here – *awa*

high – *likola*

hill – *ngomba moke*

hippopotamus – *ngubu*

history – *mokolo*

hoe – *nkongo*

hole (in a ruptured pipe) – *lidusu*

holiday(s) – *mobembo* (*mibembo*)

homemade – *bile bya ekolo*

honey – *mafuta ya nzoi*

hood (car) – *capo*

hope – *elikya*

horn(s) (animal) – *liseke* (*maseke*)

horse – *mpunda*

hot – *molunge*

hotel – *otele*

hour – *ngonga*
house – *ndako*
housekeeper – *mwana ya mosala*
how – *boni*
human(s) – *moto (batu)*
hunger – *nzala, mia (K)*
hyena – *ekange*

**I**

idea – *likanisi*
if – *soki*
immediately – *noki*
impatient person – *motema moto*
important – *mutuya*
in – *na, nakati*
in front of – *ekoya, liboso*
incorrect – *miku*
influenza – *mullunge mabe mpe ketuketu*
insect sting – *monzuba*
intelligent – *mayele*
interior – *nakati*
interpreter – *lingisi*
intestine(s) – *mosopo (misopo)*
iron (metal) – *ebende*
island – *esanga*
it – *yango*
itch – *mukosa*

**J**

jail – *boloko*
jaw – *mbanga*
jealousy – *zuwa*
joy(s) – *esengo (bisengo)*

**K**

kerosene – *pitolo*
key (lock) – *fungola*
kitchen – *kuku*
knife – *mbeli*

**L**

ladder – *ebuteli*
lake – etima
lamb – meme ya mwana
language – ndinga
language(s) – lokota (nkota), monoko (minoko)
large boats – baleinieres
large stream – mongala
law(s) – mobeko (mibeko)
lazy – goigoi
leader – mokambi
leaf (leaves) – likasa (makasa)
leave! (confrontational) – longwa!
left – loboko ya mwasi
lemon – libazi
leopard – nkoi
lesson – liteya
less-refined cooking oil – mosaka mwamba
lie (untruth) – lokuta
light – mwinda
lightning – monkalali
limit – nsuka
lion(s) – nkosi (bankosi)
little – mwaa
little brother – cadet
little sister – cadet
lizard(s) – muselekete (miselekete)
love – bolingo
low – nse
luck – sanse
luggage – biloko
lyric – liloba

M

mad (insane) – elema
magic – liloki
maize – lisango (masango), mboto
man (men) – moto (batu)
manioc – mpondu
manner – lolonge
many – ebele
market – zando
marriage – libala
meadow(s) – elanga (bilanga)
meal – bilei
meat(s) – nyama, mosuni (misuni)
medicine(s) – kisi
men – mibali
midday – nzanga
middle – kati kati
midwife – mobotisi
milk – miliki
minute (time) – monuti
miraculous – likamwisi
mirror – talatala
money – mbongo
monkey(s) – likako (makako)
month – sanza
morning – ntongo, tongo
mosquito – monkungi
mother-in-law – bokilo mwasi
mountain – ngomba
mourning – matanga
mouse – mpoko
mouth(s) – monoko (minoko)
mud – potopoto
mushroom – liyebu
mutton – nyama ya mpate

N

naked – bolumbu
name – kombo
nanny goat – ntaba mwasi
nationality – ekolo ya moto
neck – nkingo
new, naïve Kinshasa resident – mbokatier, mowuta
news – sango
next – ekoya, na nsima
next to – pembeni
nice – kitoko
night – butu
no – te
noise – makelele
non-alcoholic drink – masanga ya sukali
nose – zolo
not – te
nothing – eloko te
now – sik’oyo, sika
number – motango, mutuya
nurse – mokongeli mokoni
O

ocean – mbu
of – na, ya
oil – mafuta
okra – dongodongo
old – kala, mokolo
older brother – yaya
older sister – yaya
on – na, na likolo
on the left – na loboko ya mwasi
on the right – na loboko ya mobali
onion – litungulu
opening(s) – monoko (minoko)
or – to
orange (fruit) – ndimo
orange (fruit) (K) – lilala
ore – pawuni
other – mosusu, susu
others (the) – ba mosusu
out – libanda
owner – nkolo

P

pain (medical) – bolozi
palace – ndako ya bakonzi
palm oil – mwamba
palm tree – mbila
panther – nkoi
paper – mokanda
paradise – lola
parent(s) – moboti (baboti)
parrot – kukulu
parrot (K) – tchaku
part (object) – eteni
passport – epesa nzela
past – eleki
pastor (informal setting) – moteyi
patient (hospital) – mokoni
payment – lifuta
peace – kimia
peaceful – kimia
peanut butter – mwamba nguba
peanuts (K) – nguba  
peas – kunde  
pebble(s) – libanga (mabanga)  
penis – likata  
penis and scrotum – makata  
pepper – pilipili  
perfume – malasi  
perhaps – tango mosusu  
permanent – libela  
petrol – essence  
petroleum – pitolo  
pharmacy – magazini ya kisi  
pick-up truck – ki malu malu  
piece – ndambo  
pineapple – ananasi  
pipe (plumbing) – pompe, tiyo  
place(s) – esika (bisika)  
plain – etando  
plantain(s) – likemba (makemba)  
plantation(s) – elanga (bilanga)  
plate(s) – sani (basani)  
plot (land) – lopango  
poison – ngenge  
police – polisi, soldat  
polio – bukabuka  
pond – etima moke  
poor (person) – mobola  
porcupine – nsimbilikil na zamba  
potato (K) – mbala  
potato(es) – libenge (mabenge)  
prayer – losambo  
pregnant – zemi  
proud – lolendo  
pumpkin – ekutu  
pygmy(ies) – mukuse (mikuse)  

Q

question(s) – motuna (mituna)  
quick – mbango, na mbango  
quickly – na mbango
Rabbit – nsimbiliki na ndako
Rain – mbula
Rainbow – monama
Ram – meme mobali
Rat – mpu, mpuku
Razor – gillette
Really – penza
Reason – ntina
Red – langi ya motane
Refugee – mokimeli
Religion – mambi ya nzambe
Remain – tikala
Restaurant – malewa
Rheumatism – mingai
Rice – loso
Right – loboko ya mobali
Ripe – eteli
River(s) – ebale (bibale)
Room – suku
Rope – mokulu
Rubber – ndembo
Runner(s) – mokima (bakima)
Rusty – egugi

S
Sad – mawa
Salad lettuce – ndunda mobesu
Salt – mungwa
Same – ndenge
Sand – zelo
Savings – likelemba
School – eteyelo
School boy/school girl – moyekeli, mwana ya kelasi
Science – zebi
Scissors – makasi
Sea – mbu
Second (time) – segonde
Sex worker – ndumba
Shadow – elili
Shirt – simisi
Shoe – mokoto
Shop(s) – magazini (bamagazini)
short – kuse, mukuse
shoulder(s) – lipeka (mapeka)
shovel – mpau
sin – sumuki
since – uta
singer(s) – moyembi (baymebi)
sister(s) – ndeko (bandeko)
sitting room – esika ya masolo
skin – loposo (mposo)
sky – likolo
slow – malembe
slowly – malembe
small – moke, mwaa
small river – mongala
small-scale rural traders – ngundeurs
snail – libelekete
so – boye
so far – bongo
soap – sabuni
soil – nse
soldier (soldiers) – solda (basolda)
something – eloko
song – nzembo
sorcerer – ndoki
sorcery – kindoki
sore (medical) – bolozi
sorry – bolimbisi
soup – supu
sour – bololo
spectacles – talatala
spicy – bokenzu
spoon – lutu
sport(s) – lisano (masano)
squirrel – esende
star(s) – monzoto (minzoto)
state – ekolo, leta
statue – ekeko
steam – molinga
steam (K) – milinga
still – nainu
stomach – libumu
stone(s) – libanga (mabanga)
store(s) – magazini (bamagazini)
storm – ekumbaki
stranger(s) – mopaya (bapaya)
stream (water) – moluka
street – balabala
string – singa
strong – makasi
strong, courageous person – yanke
stupid – zoba
sugar – sukali
sun – moi
sun – mwese
surprise – bokamwi
sweet potato – mbala

T

table – mesa
tail (animal) – lopele
talk(s) – lisolo (masolo)
tall – mulayi
teacher – molakisi, moteyi
team – lisanga
tent – ema
that – ke
the Church – eklezya
the world – molongo mobima
them – yango
then – na nsima
there – kuna
there (a specific place) – wana
these – oyo
they – yango
thief – moyibi
thing – mpo
thirst – mposa
this – oyo
thought – likanisi
thunder – nkake
thus – bongo, boye
ticket – tike
time – tango
time (frequency) – mbala
tip (restaurant) – matabisi, mive
tobacco – likaya
today – lelo
toe(s) – mosapi (misapi)
together – elongo
toilet – kabine, wese, zongo
tomato – tomati
tomorrow – lobi
tongue – lolemo
tools – esaleli
tooth (teeth) – lino (mino)
toothbrush – brush
toothpaste – kisi ya mino
tortoise – nkoba
town – engumba
trash can – fulu, zau
tree(s) – mwete (banzete)
tree(s) (K) – nzete (banzete)
trip(s) – mobembo (mibembo)
truck – motuka ya munene

U
umbrella – ngembu
uncle – noko
under – na nse
university – kelasi likolo
until – kino, ti
up – likolo
urine – minya

V
vagina – libolo
valley – lobwaku
vegetables – ndunda
vein(s) – mosisa (misisa)
very – mingi
very near to – penepene
veterinarian – monganga ya banyama
village – mboka
voice – mongingo, ndinga

W
walker – motambola
war – bitumba
water – mayi
water well – libulu ya mayi
waterfall – meta
wave – mbonge
week – poso
well – libulu
west – elozi
wheel – yika
where – wapi
white – langi ya pembe
white-collar criminal – kuluna en cravate
who – nani
whole – mobimba
whose – ya nani
why – po na nini
wide – monene
widow – mwasi ya mokuya
wife (wives) – mwasi (basi)
wild boar – ngulu, sombo
wind – mopepe
window(s) – lininisi (maninisi)
witch children – sheta, tsor
wolf – mbwa na nzamba
woman (women) – mwasi (basi)
wonderful – likamwisi
work colleague – moto ya mosala
work(s) – mosala (misala)
workers – ba travailleurs
world – molongo
wound (medical) – mpota
wristwatch – sa

X

Y

eyam – mboma
yard – yadi
year – mbula
yesterday – lobi
yet – nainu
younger brother – leki
younger sister – leki
yourself – yo moko

Z
7.2 Lingala-English vocabulary

A

ananasi – pineapple
awa – here

B

ba – about
ba langi – the colours
ba mosusu – the others
ba travailleurs – the workers
baboti – parents
balabala – street
bale – ball
baleinieres – large boats
bank – bank
banso – all
batisimu – baptism
batu na maboma – crazy men
bendele – flag
bile bya ekolo – homemade
bilei – meal
biloko – goods, luggage
bitabe – banana
bitumba – war
boboto – peace
bokamwi – surprise
bokei – departure
bokenzu – spicy
bokeseni – difference
bokilo – brother-in-law
bokilo mobali – father-in-law
bokilo mwasi – mother-in-law
bokolongo – health
bokono bwa sukali – diabetes
bolimbisi – sorry
bolingo – love
boloko – jail
bololo – sour
bolozi – pain, sore (medical)
bolumbu – naked
bondoki – gun
bongo – brain
bongo – so far, thus
boni – how
bopeto – clean
boponi – choice
bosoto – dirty
botte – boot
boye – so, thus
brush – toothbrush
bukabuka – polio
butu – night
buuku – book

C
cadet – little brother, little sister
cafe – coffee
capo – bonnet (car), hood (car)
chicwangue – cassava loaf
chocolat – chocolate
cossettes – cassava chips
cuisinair – chef

D
diaman – diamond
dii – dear
dongodongo – okra
drogadeurs – informal sector dock workers

E
ebale (bibale) – river(s)
ebele – a lot, many
ebembe (bibembe) – corpse(s)
ebende – iron (metal)
eboto – descendant, parent
ebuele (bibuele) – domestic animal(s)
ebuteli – ladder
egugi – rusty
ekange – hyena
ekeko – statue
ekesani – different
eklezya – the Church
ekolo – basket, state
ekolo ya moto – nationality
ekomeli – pen
ekoti (bikoti) – hat(s)
ekoya – in front of, next
ekuke – door
ekumbaki – storm
ekutu – pumpkin
elanga (bilanga) – field(s), meadow(s), plantation(s)
eleki – behind, past
elema – foolish, mad (insane)
eliki – desert
elikya – hope
elili – shadow
eloko – something
eloko te – nothing
elongo – together
elozi – west
ema – tent
engumba – city, town
enzombo – pride
epesa nzela – passport
epimolo ya sa – clock
esaleli – tools
esanga – island
esende – squirrel
esengo (bisengo) – joy(s)
esi – already
esika (bisika) – place(s)
esika esusu – elsewhere
esika ya masolo – sitting room
esobe (bisobe) – forest(s)
essence – petrol
etalaka – bridge
etanda – bench
etando – plain
eteli – ripe
eteni – part (object)
eteyelo – school
etima – lake
etima moke – pond
etuka – department
etumba – fight
eyano – answer
eyenga – festival
F

fololo – flower
fufu – cassava flour
fulu – dustbin, trash can
fungola – key

G

gambala – fox
gillette – razor
goigoi – lazy

H

I

J

K

kabinda – carpenter
kabine – toilet
kadago – child soldier
kala – old
kalati – card
kanya – fork
kasi – but
kati – half
kati kati – middle
ke – that
kelasi – classroom
kelasi likolo – university
ki malu malu – pick-up truck
kimia – peace, peaceful
kimpuka (bimpuka) – cassava paste(s)
kindoki – sorcery
kino – until
kisi – medicine
kisi ya mino – toothpaste
kiti – chair
kitoko – beautiful, nice, pretty
komba – broom
kombo – name
komela – drink (beverage)
koni – firewood
kopo – cup
koponama – election
kuku – kitchen
kukulu – parrot
kuluna – criminal
kuluna en cravate – white-collar criminal
kuna – there
kunde – peas
kuse – short
kwiti – drunk

L

langi ya mayi ya pondu – green
langi ya motane – red
langi ya mwindu – black
langi ya pembe – white
leki – younger brother, younger sister
lelo – today
leta – government, state
libala – marriage
libanda – out
libandi – bald-headed
libanga (mabanga) – pebble(s), stone(s)
libazi – lemon
libela – permanent
libelekete – snail
libenge (mabenge) – potato(es)
liboke (maboke) – fish(es) wrapped in leaves
libolo – vagina
libongo – beach
liboso – front, in front of
libota – family
libulu – well
libulu ya mayi – water well
libumu – stomach
libumu likangani – constipation
lidusu – hole (in a ruptured pipe)
lifuta – payment
likako (makako) – monkey(s)
likambo (makambo) – dispute(s), problem(s)
likamwisi – miraculous, wonderful
likanisi – idea, thought
likasa (makasa) – leaf (leaves)
likata – penis
likaya – cigarette, tobacco
likei (makei) – egg(s)
likelemba – savings
likemba (makemba) – plantain(s)
likita – crowd
likola – high
likolo – sky, up
 lilala – orange (K)
liliita – cemetery, graveyard
liloba – lyrics
liloki – magic
lingisi – interpreter
lininisi (maninisi) – window(s)
lino (mino) – tooth (teeth)
lipa – bread
lipika (mapeka) – shoulder(s)
lipela – guava
lisanga – team
lisango (masango) – sweet corn, maize
lisano (masano) – sport(s)
lisano ya motope – football game
lisanola – comb, hairbrush
lisasi – cartridge
liseke (maseke) – horn(s) (animal)
liso (miso) – eye(s)
lisobe – desert
lisolo (masolo) – chat(s), talk(s)
litama (matama) – cheek(s)
liteya – lesson
lititi – herb
lititi (matiti) – grass (lawn)
litoi (matoi) – ear(s)
litumu – corner
litungulu – onion
litungulu ngenge – garlic
liyebu – mushroom
lobi – tomorrow, yesterday
loboko (maboko) – hand(s)
loboko ya mobali – right
loboko ya mwasi – left
lobwaku – valley
loko – deaf
lokolo – foot
lokota (nkota) – language(s)
lokuta – falsehood, lie
lola – heaven, paradise
lolemo – tongue
lolendo – proud
lolonge – manner
londende – fog
longwai – leave! (confrontational)
lopango – plot (land)
lopele – tail (animal)
lopembe – fog
lopeso (mpeso) – skin(s)
losambo – prayer
loso – rice
lupemba – good luck
lutu – spoon

M
mabe – bad
mabele – earth, soil
mabele (libele) – breast(s), breast milk
maboko – finger(s)
maboma – factory
madesu – beans
mafuta – oil
mafuta ya mabila – clear, cooking oil
mafuta ya nzoi – honey
magazini (bamagazini) – shop(s), store(s)
magazini ya kisi – pharmacy
makala – charcoal
makasi – scissors, strong
makata – penis and scrotum
makelele – noise
makila – blood
makolo – toe(s)
makongi – fly (insect)
malamu – fly (insect)
malasi – good
malasi – perfume
malembe – slow, slowly
malewa – restaurant
malili – cold, cool, fresh
mama nkoko – grandmother
mambi ya nzambe – religion
mami wata – a female water spirit
mandefu – beard
maponami – elections
masanga – alcoholic drink
masanga ya sukali – non-alcoholic drink
matabisi – a tip (restaurant)
matanga – funeral, mourning
mateka – butter
matungana – boil (cooking)
mawa – sad
mayele – intelligent
mayi – water
mazuti – diesel
mbakasa – a foolish, fearful person
mbala – potato (K), sweet potato
mbala – time (frequency)
mbanga – jaw
mbango – fast, quick
mbanzi – bamboo
mbel – flower
mbeli – knife
mbeto – bed
mbila – palm tree
mbisi – fish
mboka – country, village
mbokatier – a new, naïve Kinshasa resident
mboloko – antelope
mboma – yam
mbonge – wave
mbongo – money
mbotama – birth
mbote – hello
mboto – maize
mbu – ocean, sea
mbula – rain, year
mbuma – fruit
mbwa – dog
mbwa na nzamba – fox, wolf
meme mobali – ram
meme ya mwasi – ewe
meme ya mwana – lamb
mesa – table
meta – waterfall
mia – hungry (K)
mibali – men
mikili – climate
miku – incorrect
miliki – milk
milinga – fire, steam (K)
mingai – rheumatism
mingi – very
mingi mingi – especially
minya – urine
mive – tip (restaurant)
mobeko (mibeko) – law(s)
mobembo (mibembo) – holiday(s), trip(s)
mobimba – whole
mobola – poor (person)
moboti (baboti) – parent(s)
mobotisi – midwife
moi – sun
mokambi – leader
mokanda – paper
moke – few, small
Mokili – Earth
mokima (bakima) – runner(s)
mokimeli – refugee
moko – each
mokolo – history, old
mokolo (mikolo) – day(s)
mokomboso – chimp, gorilla
mokongeli mokoni – nurse
mokongo (mikongo) – back(s) (animal, person)
mokoni – disabled person, patient (hospital)
mokoto – shoe
mokulu – rope
mokuse (mikuse) – pygmy(ies)
mokuwa (mikuwa) – bone(s)
molakisi – professor (formal setting), teacher
molangi (milangi) – bottle(s)
molanga – fire, steam
mololanda – blind (vision)
molongo – the world
moloka – stream
molunge – hot
mombemba – frog
mombongo – a business
monama – rainbow
mondonga – giraffe
monene – broad, grand, wide
mongala – large stream, small river
monganga (minganga) – doctor(s)
monganga ya banyama – veterinarian
mongingo – voice
monguna – enemy
monili – electricity
moninga (baninga) – friend(s)
monkalali – lightning
monkungi – mosquito
monoko (minoko) – language(s), mouth(s), opening(s)
monona – salt
monuti – minute (time)
monyele – east
monzoto (minzoto) – star(s)
monzuba – insect sting
mopanzi – coast (geology)
mopaya (bapaya) – foreigner(s), stranger(s)
mopepe – wind, air
mosaka mwamba – less-refined cooking oil
mosala (misala) – work(s)
mosapi (misapi) – finger(s), toe(s)
mosika – far
mosisa (misisa) – vein(s)
mosolo – dowry
mosopo (misopo) – intestine(s)
mosuni (misuni) – flesh, meat(s)
mosusu – other
motako – copper (metal)
motambola – walker
motambuisi (batambuisi) – driver(s)
motango – number
motema (mitema) – heart(s)
motema moto – an impatient person, heartburn
moteyi – pastor (informal setting), teacher
moto – fire
moto (batu) – human(s), man (men)
moto (mitu) – head(s)
moto ya mosala – work colleague
motope – football
motuka (mituka) – car(s)
motuka ya munene – truck
motuna (mituna) – question(s)
motuya – bill (restaurant)
mowuta – a new, naïve Kinshasa resident
moyangeli – deacon
moye – heat
moyekeli – school boy
moyembi (bayembi) – singer(s)
moyi – day
moyibi – thief
mpakasa – buffalo
mpasi ya mukongo – back pain
mpata – cloud(s)
mpau – shovel
mpio – cold
mpiodi – a type of cheap, imported fish, also called Thompson
mpo – affair, thing
mpoko – mouse
mpokwa – evening
mpondu – manioc
mposa – thirst
mpota – cut, wound (medical)
mpu – rat
mpuku – rat
mpunda – donkey, horse
mputa ya libumu – haemorrhoids
mukosa – itch
mukuse – pygmy, short
mukuwa (mikuwa) – bone(s)
mulayi – tall
mulunge mabe mpe ketuketu – influenza
mulunge – hot
mundele (mindele) – a foreign person, usually white, and usually from Europe or North America
mungwa – salt
muselekete (miselekete) – lizard(s)
mutuya – expensive, important, number
mwaa – few, little, small
mwamba – palm oil
mwamba nguba – peanut butter
mwana (bana) – child (children)
mwana mwasi – daughter
mwana ya kelasi – school boy/school girl
mwana ya mosala – housekeeper
mwasi (basi) – wife (wives), woman (women)
mwasi ya mokuya – widow
mwese – sun
mwete (banzete) – tree(s)
mwinda – light
N

na – and, in, of, on
na likolo – on
da loboko ya mobali – on the right
da loboko ya mwasi – on the left
na mbango – quick, quickly
na nse – under
na nsima – next, then
nainu – still, yet
nakati – in, interior
nani – who
ndako – house
ndako nzambe – a church
ndako ya bakonzi – palace
ndambo – bit, piece
ndeke (bandeke) – bird(s)
ndeko (bandeko) – brother(s), sister(s)
ndembo – rubber
ndenge – same
ndenge elongobani – correct, appropriate
ndimo – orange
ndinga – language, voice
ndoki – sorcerer
ndoto – dream
nduka – dam
ndumba – sex worker
ndunda – vegetables
ndunda mobesi – salad lettuce
ngai moko – alone
ngana nkisi – fetish priest
nganda – bar (drinking)
ngado (bangando) – crocodile(s)
ngeombo – bat
ngembu – umbrella
ngenge – poison
ngomba – mountain
ngomba moke – hill
ngombe mobali – bull
ngombe mwasi – cow
ngonga – hour
nguba – peanuts (K)
ngubu – hippopotamus
ngulu – wild boar
ngundeurs – small-scale rural traders
ngungutu – aubergine
niama (baniama) – animal(s)
niao – cat
nionso – each, every
nkake – thunder
nkingo – neck
nkisi – charms
nkoba – tortoise
nkoi – leopard, panther
nkolo – owner
nkongo – hoe
nkosi (bankosi) – lion(s)
noki – immediately
noko – uncle
nse – down, low, soil
nsimbiliki na ndako – rabbit
nsimbilikil na zamba – porcupine
nsongo – cassava
nsoso mwasi – hen
nsuka – limit
ntaba – goat
ntaba mobali – billy goat
ntaba mwasi – nanny goat
ntina – reason
ntongo – dawn, morning
nyama – meat
nyama ya mpate – mutton
nyama ya ngombe – beef
nzala – hunger
nzale – buffalo
Nzambe – God
nzanga – midday
nzela ya makolo – footpath
nzembo – song
nzete (banzete) – tree(s) (K)
nzoko – elephant (K)
nzoku – elephant
nzoto – body (person)

O

osi – already
otele – hotel
oyo – these, this
P

**pamplemousse** – grapefruit
**pasi** – difficult
**pawuni** – ore
**pe** – and
**pela** – flood
**pembeni** – next to
**penepene** – very near to
**penza** – really
**pete** – easy
**pilipili** – pepper
**pitolo** – kerosene, petroleum
**plafond** – ceiling
**po** – because
**po na** – for
**po na nini** – why
**polisi** – police
**pompe** – pipe (plumbing)
**poso** – week
**poto** – Europe
**potopoto** – clay, mud
**pulupulu ya makila** – dysentery
**pulupulu ya nsomo** – cholera
**pusi** – cat
**putulu** – ash

Q

R

S

**sa** – wristwatch
**sabuni** – soap
**salite** – dirty
**samba** – commercially processed cooking oil
**sango** – news
**sani (basani)** – plate(s)
**sanse** – luck
**sante** – health
**sanza** – month
**sefu** – chief
**segonde** – second (time)
**sheta** – witch children
sik’oyo – now
sika – now
sima – after, behind
sima nzanga – afternoon
simisi – shirt
sinema – cinema
singa – string
soka – axe
soki – if
solda (basolda) – soldier(s)
solo – small
sombo – wild boar
soso – chicken
sukali – sugar
suki – hair
suku – room
sumuki – sin
supu – soup
susu – other

T

talatala – mirror, spectacles
tangawisi – ginger
tango – time
tango mosusu – perhaps
tata nkoko – grandfather
tchaku – parrot (K)
te – no, not
ti – until
tikala – remain
tike – ticket
tiyo – pipe (plumbing)
to – or
tomati – tomato
tongo – morning
tsor – witch children

U

uta – from, since

V

vere – glass
wana – there (a specific place)
wapi – where
wese – toilet
wolo – gold

ya – of
ya nani – whose
yadi – yard
yango – it, them, they
yanke – a strong, courageous person
yaya – older brother, older sister
Yesu – Jesus
yika – wheel
yo moko – yourself
yuma – foolish

zabolo – the devil
zamba – forest
zando – market
zau – dustbin, trashcan
zebi – science
zebi za mabanga – geology
zebi za mokili – geography
zelo – sand
zemi – pregnant
zoba – stupid
zolo – nose
zomi – decade
zongo – toilet
zuwa – jealousy