

Loba Lingala!

An English guide to the language of Kinshasa

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALBAN LOW

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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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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 at 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 of Kinshasans 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 find useful. As I've already noted, the Kinois themselves are probably the best teachers you'll find. I also found listening to 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 Kinshasa 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 malam*' (SANG-go mah-LAH-moo). *Malam*, 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 malam*?' (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 malam*' (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 malam 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 malam*?' (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 malam*' (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 malamū? – (oh-ZAH-lee mah-LAH-moo) – Are you well?

Nazali malamū – (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 malamū – (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 Kinnois – 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 Kinnois. 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 embrace life as the *mundele* that I will apparently always be to most Kinnois. 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 Kinnois 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 'es' – 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 verb 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-SAH-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-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

ebele – (eh-BEL-eh) – many, a lot

eh – (eh) – yes

kasi – (KAH-see) – but

moke – (moh-KAY) – few, little

pe – (peh) – and

po – (poh) – because

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

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 Kinshasans 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-SAH-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:

na+kozala – ***nakozala*** – (nah-koh-ZAH-lah) – I will be
o+kozala – ***okazala*** – (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*** – (boh-koh-ZAH-lah) – they will be
e+kozala – ***ekozala*** – (eh-koh-ZAH-lah) – it will be

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* – ***yeba!*** (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:

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

Past tense:

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

Future tense:

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

Imperative tense:

ko-zala na – **zala na!** – (ZAH-lah nah) – have!

3. **kolina** – (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+kolina – **nakolina** – (nah-koh-LING-ah) – I will want or I will like
o+kolina – **okolina** – (oh-koh-LING-ah) – you will want or you will like
a+kolina – **akolina** – (ah-koh-LING-ah) – he/she will want or he/she will
like
to+kolina – **tokolina** – (toh-koh-LING-ah) – we will want or we will like
bo+kolina – **bokolina** – (boh-koh-LING-ah) – you will want or you will like
(plural)
ba+kolina – **bakolina** – (bah-koh-LING-ah) – they will want or they will like
e+kolina – **ekolina** – (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:

na+somb+i – **nasombi** – (nah-SOM-bee) – I buy
o+somb+i – **osombi** – (oh-SOM-bee) – you buy
a+somb+i – **asombi** – (ah-SOM-bee) – he/she buys
to+somb+i – **tosombi** – (toh-SOM-bee) – we buy
bo+somb+i – **bosombi** – (boh-SOM-bee) – you buy (plural)
ba+somb+i – **basombi** – (bah-SOM-bee) – they buy
e+somb+i – **esombi** – (eh-SOM-bee) – it buys

Past tense:

na+somba+ki – **nasombaki** – (nah-SOM-bah-kee) – I bought
o+somba+ki – **osombaki** – (oh-SOM-bah-kee) – you bought
a+somba+ki – **asombaki** – (ah-SOM-bah-kee) – he/she bought
to+somba+ki – **tosombaki** – (toh-SOM-bah-kee) – we bought
bo+somba+ki – **bosombaki** – (boh-SOM-bah-kee) – you bought (plural)
ba+somba+ki – **basombaki** – (bah-SOM-bah-kee) – they bought
e+somba+ki – **esombaki** – (eh-SOM-bah-kee) – it bought

Future tense:

na+kosomba – **nakosomba** – (nah-koh-SOM-bah) – I will buy
o+kosomba – **okosomba** – (oh-koh-SOM-bah) – you will buy
a+kosomba – **akosomba** – (ah-koh-SOM-bah) – he/she will buy
to+kosomba – **tokosomba** – (toh-koh-SOM-bah) – we will buy
bo+kosomba – **bokosomba** – (boh-koh-SOM-bah) – you will buy (plural)
ba+kosomba – **bokosomba** – (bah-koh-SOM-bah) – they will buy
e+kosomba – **ekosomba** – (eh-koh-SOM-bah) – it will buy

Imperative tense:

ko-somba – **somba!** – (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 – **eyebaki** – (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:

na+sengel+i – ***nasengeli*** – (nah-SEN-geh-lee) – I have to
o+sengel+i – ***osengeli*** – (oh-SEN-geh-lee) – you have to
a+sengel+i – ***asengeli*** – (ah-SEN-geh-lee) – he/she has to
to+sengel+i – ***tosengeli*** – (toh-SEN-geh-lee) – we have to
bo+sengel+i – ***bosengeli*** – (boh-SEN-geh-lee) – you have to (plural)
ba+sengel+i – ***basengeli*** – (bah-SEN-geh-lee) – they have to
e+sengel+i – ***esengeli*** – (eh-SEN-geh-lee) – it has to

Past tense:

na+sengela+ki – ***nasengelaki*** – (nah-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – I had to
o+sengela+ki – ***osengelaki*** – (oh-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – you had to
a+sengela+ki – ***asengelaki*** – (ah-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – he/she had to
to+sengela+ki – ***tosengelaki*** – (toh-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – we had to
bo+sengela+ki – ***bosengelaki*** – (boh-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – you had to (plural)
ba+sengela+ki – ***basengelaki*** – (bah-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – they had to
e+sengela+ki – ***esengelaki*** – (eh-SEN-geh-lah-kee) – it had to

Future tense:

na+kosengela – ***nakosengela*** – (nah-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – I will have to
o+kosengela – ***okosengela*** – (oh-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – you will have to
a+kosengela – ***akosengela*** – (ah-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – he/she will have to
to+kosengela – ***tokosengela*** – (toh-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – we will have to
bo+kosengela – ***bokosengela*** – (boh-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – you will have to
(plural)
ba+kosengela – ***bakosengela*** – (bah-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – they will have to
e+kosengela – ***ekosengela*** – (eh-koh-SEN-geh-lah) – it will have to

Imperative tense:

ko-sengela – ***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

mobali – 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 malamumu. – 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 malamumu. – 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 malamumu. – 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 malamumu. – They speak Lingala well.

Ozali malamumu. – 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.

Naksomba 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 malamumu. – My work is good.
Mosala na ngai ezali malamumu te. – My work is not good.

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

Mosala na ye ezali malamumu. – Her work is good.
Mosala na ye ezali malamumu 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 malamumu. – They speak Lingala well.
Balobi Lingala malamumu te. – They do not speak Lingala well.

Ozali malamumu. – You are good.
Ozali malamumu 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.

koyoka – (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-*
mu-, the plural form usually begins with *mi-*
ni-, the plural form usually begins with *ba-*
e-, the plural form usually begins with *bi-*
double consonants – *nd-*, *ng-*, *mw-*, etc. – the plural form usually begins
with *ba-*

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
likamwisi – (lee-KAM-wee-see) – wonderful, miraculous
lipa – (LEE-pah) – bread
loso – (LOH-soh) – rice
makasi – (mah-KAH-see) – strong
malembe – (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

mbula – (m-BOO-lah) – rain
mesa – (MEH-sah) – table
mingi – (MING-gee) – very
moi – (MOY-eh) – sun
moke – (moh-KEH) – small, little, a bit, few
mokolo – (moh-KOH-loh) – day
molunge – (moh-LUN-geh) – hot
monganga – (mon-GAHN-gah) – doctor
moninga – (mon-NING-gah) – friend
motuka – (moh-TOO-kah) – car
mposa – (m-POH-sah) – thirst
mutuya – (moo-TOO-yah) – important, expensive, number
ndeke – (n-DEK-eh) – bird
nionso – (nee-ON-soh) – each, every
nyama – (nee-YAH-mah) – meat
nzala – (n-ZAH-lah) – hunger
nzete – (n-ZET-eh) – tree
oyo – (OI-yoh) – this, these
pasi – (PAS-ee) – difficult
pete – (PEH-teh) – easy
sik'oyo – (SEEK-oi-yoh) – now
soso – (SO-so) – chicken
wapi – (wah-PEE) – where

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.

na+kende+ki – nakendeki – (nah-KEN-deh-kee) – I went
o+kende+ki – okendeki – (oh-KEN-deh-kee) – you went
a+kende+ki – akendeki – (ah-KEN-deh-kee) – he/she went
to+kende+ki – tokendeki – (toh-KEN-deh-kee) – we went
bo+kende+ki – bokendeki – (boh-KEN-deh-kee) – you went (plural)
ba+kende+ki – bakendeki – (bah-KEN-deh-kee) – they went
e+kende+ki – ekendeki – (eh-KEN-deh-kee) – it went

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

na+kokende – nakokende – (nah-koh-KEN-deh) – I will go
o+kokende – okokende – (oh-koh-KEN-deh) – you will go
a+kokende – akokende – (ah-koh-KEN-deh) – he/she will go
to+kokende – tokokende – (toh-koh-KEN-deh) – we will go
bo+kokende – bokokende – (boh-koh-KEN-deh) – you will go (plural)
ba+kokende – bakokende – (bah-koh-KEN-deh) – they will go
e+kokende – ekokende – (eh-koh-KEN-deh) – it will go

And the imperative also follows the regular verb format. Simply drop the 'ko-' at the beginning: *ko-kende* – **kende!** (KEN-deh) – go!

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 *koya* (to come). This is where it gets really minimalist.

For the present tense form of *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.

na+y+e – ***naye*** – (nah-YEH-ee) – I come
o+y+e – ***oye*** – (oh-YEH-ee) – you come
a+y+e – ***aye*** – (ah-YEH-ee) – he/she comes
to+y+e – ***toye*** – (toh-YEH-ee) – we come
bo+y+e – ***boye*** – (boh-YEH-ee) – you come (plural)
ba+y+e – ***baye*** – (bah-YEH-ee) – they come
e+y+e – ***eye*** – (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.

na+ya+ki – ***nayaki*** – (nah-YAH-kee) – I came
o+ya+ki – ***oyaki*** – (oh-YAH-kee) – you came
a+ya+ki – ***ayaki*** – (ah-YAH-kee) – he/she came
to+ya+ki – ***toyaki*** – (toh-YAH-kee) – we came
bo+ya+ki – ***boyaki*** – (boh-YAH-kee) – you came (plural)
ba+ya+ki – ***bayaki*** – (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:

na+l+ei – nalei – (nah-LEH-ee) – I eat
o+l+ei – olei – (oh-LEH-ee) – you eat
a+l+ei – alei – (ah-LEH-ee) – he/she eats
to+l+ei – tolei – (toh-LEH-ee) – we eat
bo+l+ei – bolei – (boh-LEH-ee) – you eat (plural)
ba+l+ei – balei – (bah-LEH-ee) – they eat
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.

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

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

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

And for the imperative, simply drop the 'ko-' as usual – *ko-lia – 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-

bazoz-

ezoz-

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 *koza/a* 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 – *kolina* (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 *kolina* (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)
balingi 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)

kokanisa – 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 be 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 (banninga) – 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)

banninga 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
esaleli – 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
ekeko – statue
engumba – city, town
etalaka – bridge
eteyelo – school
ki malu malu – pick-up truck
likita – crowd
lilita – cemetery, graveyard
litumu – corner
maboma – factory

magazini – a shop, a store
magazini 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 balabala. – I walked down the street.
Tomonaki liilita. – We saw the cemetery.
Totambolaka mikolo 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

ananasi – pineapple
bilei – food
bitabe – banana
bokenzu – spicy
bololo – sour
cafe – coffee

chicwangu – 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
loso – 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)
mosaka 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 malamumu – 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
Mwasi 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
tike – 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 malamumu. – 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

eklezuya – 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

koponama, 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 material wealth in return for human lives

nganga – a ritual specialist

nkisi – charms

sheta/chor – witch children – from the French ‘*sorcier*’

ndoto – 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 (mato) – 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)

mandefu – beard

mbanga – jaw

mokongo (mikongo) – back(s)

mokuwa (mikuwa) – bone(s)

monoko – mouth

mosapi (misapi) – finger(s), toe(s)
mosisa (misisa) – vein(s)
mosopo (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
moyembi (bayembi) – 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 malam. – 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
sima – after, behind
sima nzanga – 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
poso mobimba – 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
pembeni – 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. *Loboko*, used for both, means 'hand'. *Mobali* means 'man'. And *mwasi* means 'woman'. So 'on the right' – *na loboko ya mobali* – literally means 'on the hand of the man', and 'on the left' – *na loboko ya mwasi* – translates to 'on the hand of the woman'.

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

zelo – 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

lopembe, 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

kolia – to eat

koseka – to laugh

kolela – 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
nzoi – 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 – *kokumba, 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 – *kosilisa, kosuka*
to finish (actions, objects) – *kosila*
to fit – *kobonga*
to fly – *kopumbwa*
to follow – *kolanda*
to forbid – *kopesika*
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 – *kosono*
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 – *kosala*
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
kobota – 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
kolonga – to win
kolongola – 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) – *ndeke (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 – *chicwangu*
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*
chimpanzee – *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*

D

dam – *nduka*
daughter – *mwana mwasi*
dawn – *ntongo*
day(s) – *mokolo (mikolo)*
deacon – *moyangeli*
deaf – *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*
door – *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 (mato)*

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*
grass (lawn) – *lititi (matiti)*
graveyard – *lilita*
green – *langi ya mayi ya pondu*
guava – *lipela*
gun – *bondoki*

H

haemorrhoids – *mputa ya libumu*
hair – *suki*
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*
here – *awa*
high – *likola*
hill – *ngomba make*
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) – *bolozu*
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*
pride – *enzombo*
problem(s) – *likambo (makambo)*
professor (formal setting) – *molakisi*
proud – *lolendo*
pumpkin – *ekutu*
pygmy(ies) – *mukuse (mikuse)*

Q

question(s) – *motuna (mituna)*
quick – *mbango, na mbango*
quickly – *na mbango*

R

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

yam – *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

bokolongono – 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)
chicwangu – 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)
lilita – cemetery, graveyard
liloba – lyrics
liloki – magic
lingisi – interpreter
lininisi (maninisi) – window(s)
lino (mino) – tooth (teeth)
lipa – bread
lipeka (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 (mato) – 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
longwa! – leave! (confrontational)
lopango – plot (land)
lopele – tail (animal)
lopembe – fog
loposo (mposo) – 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 – 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
mbe – 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)
molinga – fire, steam
mololanda – blind (vision)
molongo – the world
moluka – 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

na loboko ya mobali – on the right

na 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 mobesu – salad lettuce

ngai moko – alone

ngana nkisi – fetish priest

nganda – bar (drinking)

ngando (bangando) – crocodile(s)

ngembo – 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

W

wana – there (a specific place)

wapi – where

wese – toilet

wolo – gold

X

Y

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

Z

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