

**The non-Móngo features in languages spoken by
former hunter-gatherers of the Inner Congo Basin
A contribution to historical linguistics and the history of
migrations**

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... ce qui est noté montre que cette langue [des Pygmoïdes Jǎfě] contient des éléments qui ne se trouvent pas dans les parlers voisins, qui donc méritent d'être conservés pour les études comparatives [...], d'après mes informateurs, il y aurait d'autres populations vivant en nomades plus plus au Sud. Il est souhaitable que des études soient faites de leur physique, de leur culture et de leur langue. J'estime cette recherche hautement urgente pour la science et l'histoire. [Hulstaert, 1986: 229]

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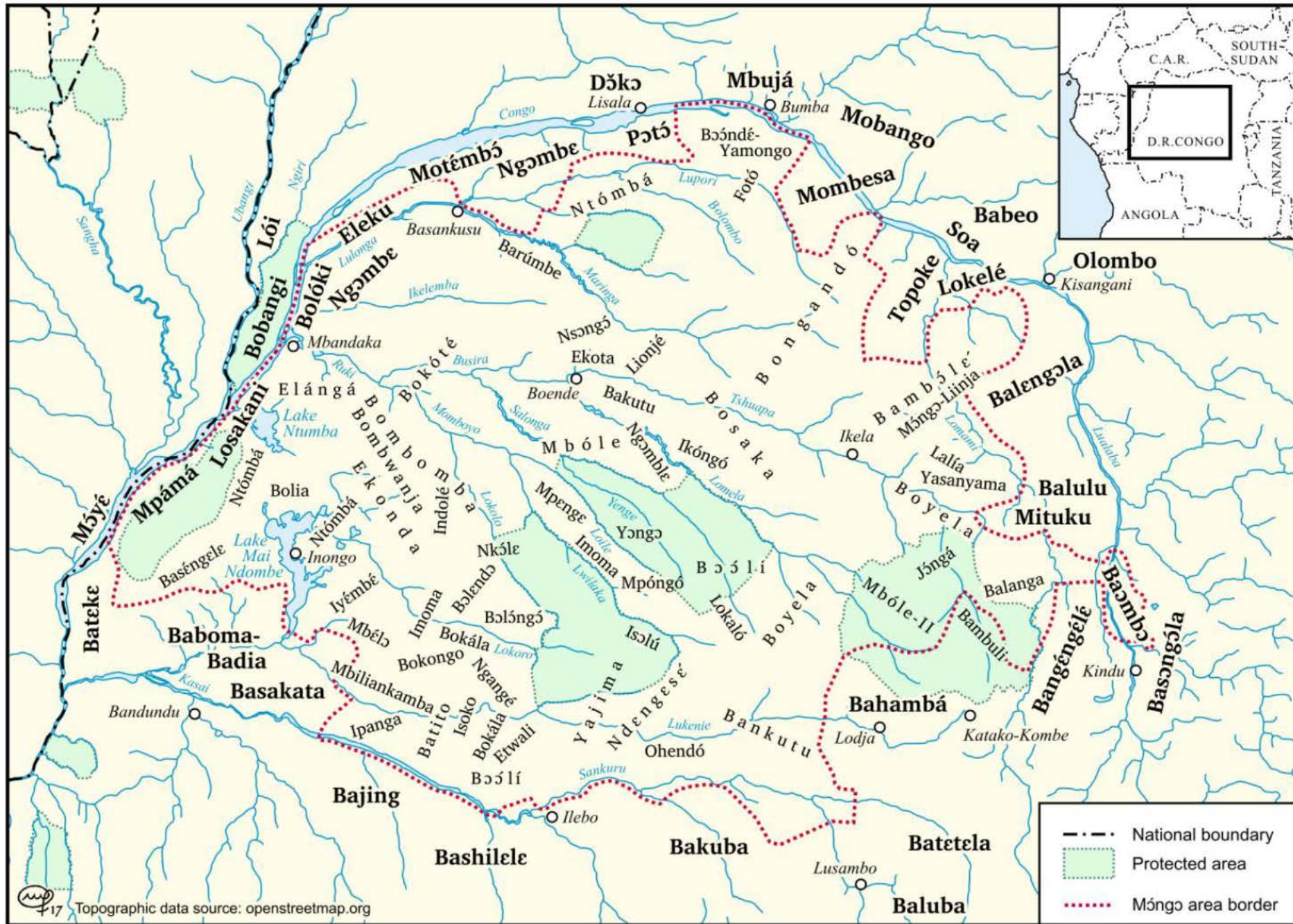
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General

1. Aim and purpose of the talk

The talk aims to examine specific features of the M'ongɔ languages (Bantu C60-70) as spoken by former hunter-gatherers of the Inner Congo Basin – known in the ethnographic literature under various names, mainly “Batóá”. These have already been found in the Batóá varieties of the Ingende Territory (Picavet 1947, Hulstaert 1948), the Tumba Lake (Sulzmann 1980, Motingea 2010: 203-218), and the Inongo Lake (Motingea 1993, 1994, 2010: 218-222), as well as in those of the Bofotó of Basankusu (Hulstaert 1978) and of the Jǒfɛ and Lokaló of Ikɛla and Bokungu Territories (Hulstaert 1986, 1988, Motingea 1997).

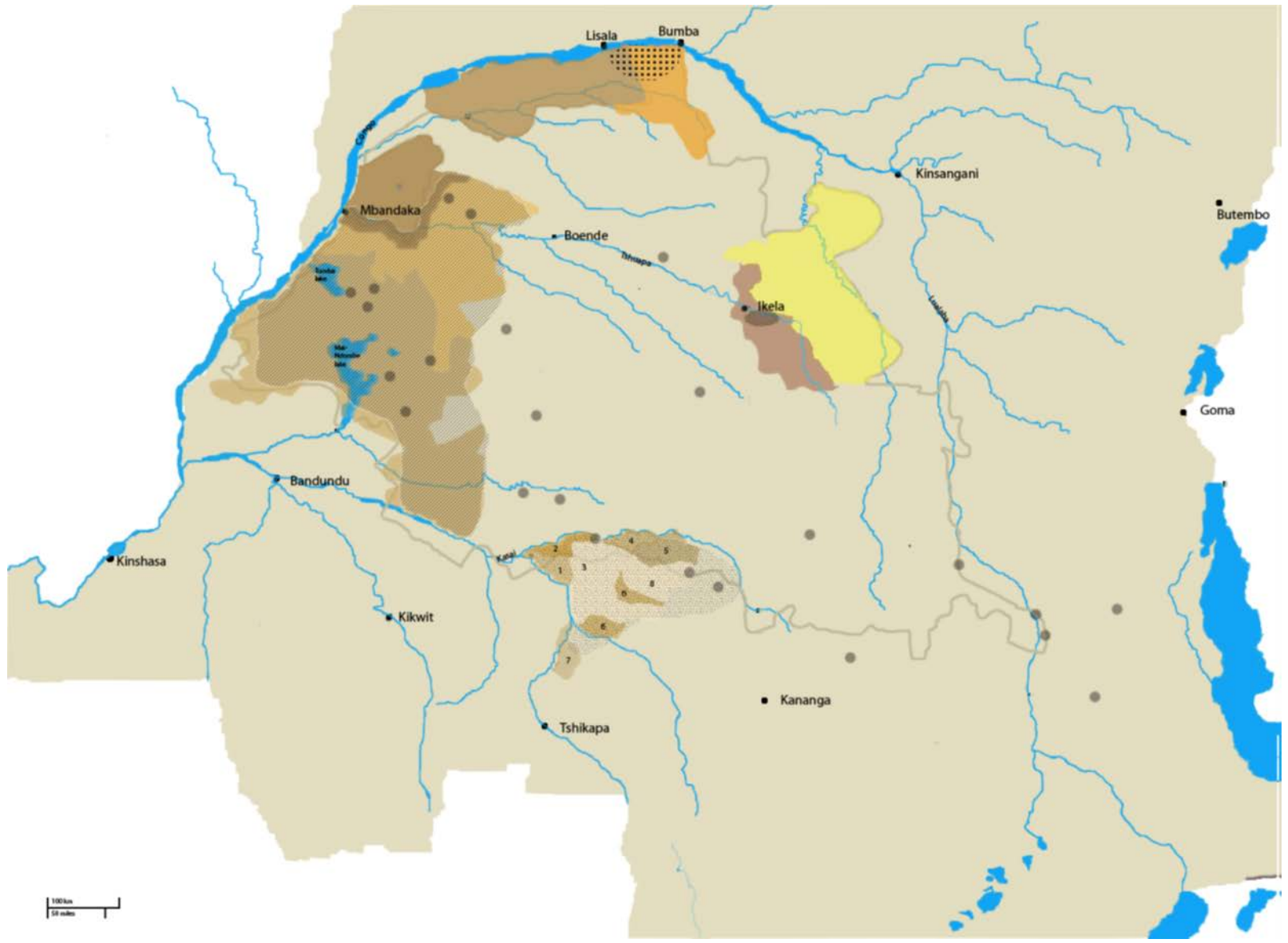
This research would be yet more fruitful if it included groups that have remained safe from the enslavement of villagers, notably the Baaká-Bangolu of Yahuma Territory and the Batóá of Lokolama-Oswhe (Inongo Lake) for whose language(s) we do not even have a simple list of words. Due to such missing data, we unfortunately face great challenges in this fascinating research topic. The goal of the talk is to **motivate research**, not only in the field of **historical linguistics** but also in the **history** of settlement in this area.



2. A classification of languages spoken by former Hunters-Gatherers of the Inner Congo Basin

In a note on P. Schebesta's *Les Pygmées du Congo* (1952), De Rop (1953) reviewed the local denominations of the Batóá, which might correspond to the Lɔ-tóá dialects. These names were actually considered in the list of Mɔngɔ dialects. They appear at the end of this one with a number preceded by the letter A: A1. Bafotó, A2. Batswá, A3. Balúmbɛ, A4. [empty], A5. Boné, A6. Bilangi, A7. Iyɛki and A8. Jɔ̃fɛ (Hulstaert 1999: 33).

Source of map: Chabiron (2012-13: 18–19)



A. Lokaló-Ilómbó

- a. Jǒfě
- b. Lokaló orientaux
Bongandó
- c. Lokaló méridionaux
- d. Lokaló-Ngombε
- e. Elεmbε
- f. Yasanyama
- g. Ahambá
- h. Indangá
- i. Bambuli
- j. x
- k. x

B. Batóá

- a. Baaká of the Mobango
- b. Baaká-Bongolu of the Mombesa-
- c. Bafotó-Waawa
- d. Bařúmbε (« Batóá of swamp areas »)
- e. Batóá of Nkundó and des Ekonda
- f. Batóá-Booné of the Ntómbá (Wafanya)
- g. Batóá-Bilángi of Injóló
- h. Bilángi of Imbóngá
- i. Batóá-Iyéki of the Iyémbé
- j. Batóá of Inongó
- k. Otó of Sankuru

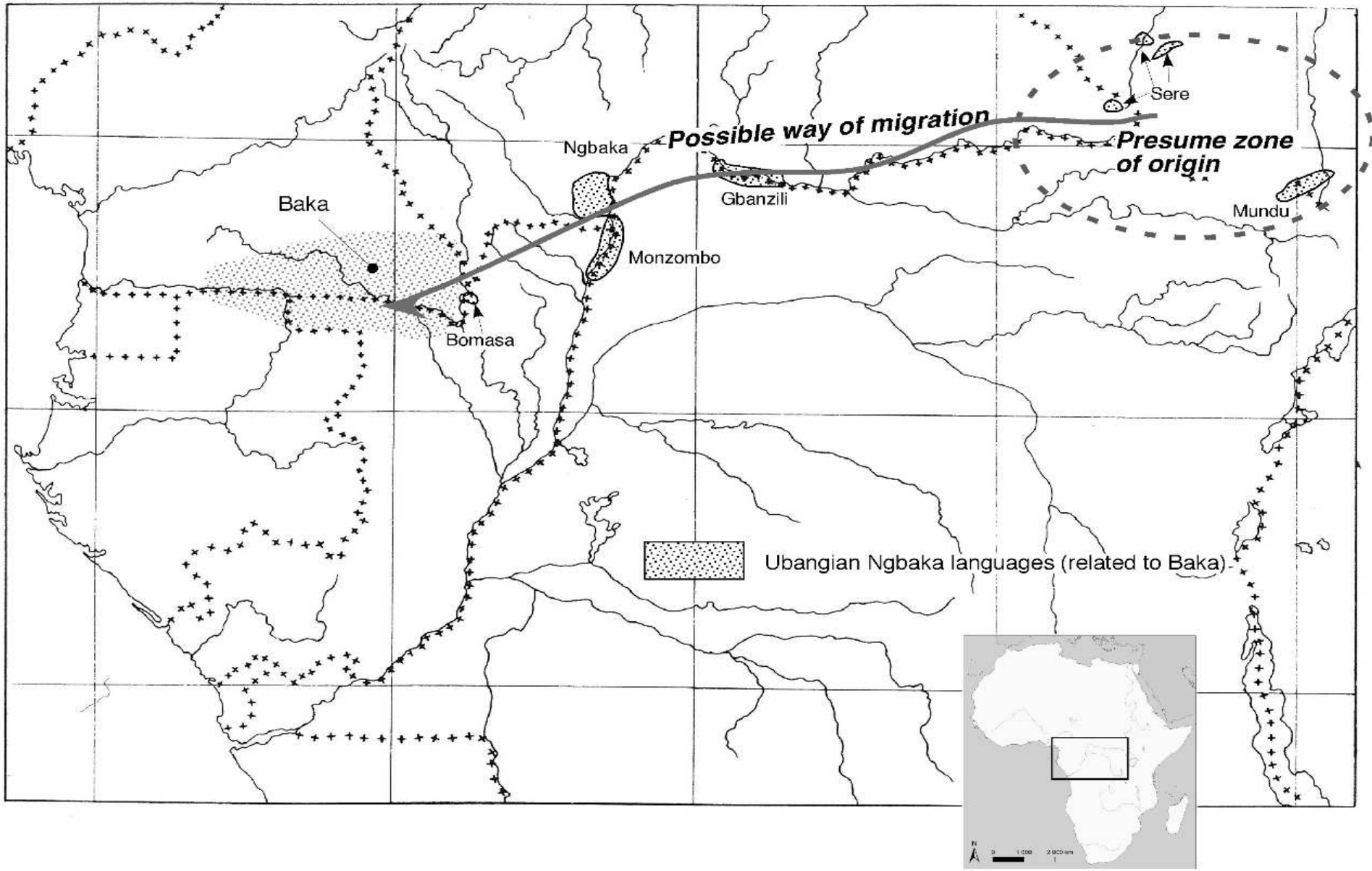
Table 1: *A Sub-classification of the Batóá-Baaká*

3. The historical and geographical origin of the Hunters-Gatherers of the Inner Congo Basin

The distant origins of the Bantu populations living in the Inner Congo Basin are poorly known as well as those of former Hunters-Gatherers with whom they came into contact.

Van der Kerken (1944: 384) places the starting point of Pygmy migration in a "country beyond Maringa-Lopori, probably much further North or North-East, in the lower or upper basin of Aruwimi, or perhaps even in Upper Nile or Inter-Albert-Victoria-Nyanza, long before the Mongo crossed the Congo River. "

This migration line is thus linked to that traced by (Duke 2001: 8) and Buhuchet (2012: 65) for the Aka and Baka of the Central African-Congo-Cameroon borders. The hypothesis is also supported by Khalin's recent study (2019), which includes the Bambenga.



The first branch is that of the avant-garde of the Lömela-Tshuapa highlands and the second is that of latecomers whose clans still live among the Mobango-Mombesa-Mongandó in the Tshopo province.

See the following picture by Vansina (1990: 111):

*“To the south adventurous leaders used their spearmen to dominate the local people west of the Lower Lomami, and then, south and west, carried the new political system with them and incorporated local big men in it. But the movement southward changed in character beyond 1° south. Population densities were very low. **Most of the area was still inhabited by nomadic hunters and gatherers.** Some were of pygmy stock (the **Jofo**), and some apparently the descendants of immigrant farmers or fishermen who had abandoned farming (**Lokalo**). The new leaders brought with them immigrants and their languages, such as Yela and Ngando. They moved as far as the lakes Lonkonya in the Lukenie basin, a district blessed with good iron ore resources.”*

4. Controversies about the concept of "Indigenous Peoples"

In the oral traditions of forest-living Bantu peoples, the Pygmy People are considered the earliest inhabitants of the Congo basin.

« Une opinion fort répandue considère les Pygmoïdes comme les plus anciens occupants de la forêt équatoriale. Donc les envahisseurs (Mongo, Ngombɛ) les auraient trouvés sur place. Cette affirmation se trouve non seulement dans des ouvrages de vulgarisation, tels que les manuels classiques officiels du Zaïre, mais encore chez des spécialistes jouissant d'une autorité incontestable. Ainsi Vansina: « Avant les Mongo, il y eut dans cette cuvette ... des pygmées Batwa » (1965, p. 80, cf. aussi p. 54) » [Hulstaert 1984: 39].

“The new constitution for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), adopted in 2005, guarantees the protection of fundamental rights and equality for all its citizens, including minority indigenous peoples, no reference has been made on a particular group, or Pygmies, who are indigenous to this vast and verdant Central African country.” (IRIN[xxx], 2006)

Regarding the status of former inhabitants of the Inner Congo Basin and the balance of power between them and the newcomers, Vansina (1990: 57) has been able to imagine the following scenario.

*“Meanwhile the compelling western Bantu stereotype imagery about the earlier inhabitants has led scholars astray by picturing all autochthons as “pygmies.” Whatever the raisons that collective memory held this image, **there probably were other aborigines, especially fisher folk.***

The Bantu newcomers, already familiar with fishing and therefore competing for the ecological niches exploited by fishermen, must have clashed more with them. In the end their ceramics, which provided for cooked food and hence better nutrition, more than their agricultural technology itself, may have given the Bantu speakers a demographic edge. They certainly did absorb the first fishermen.” (Vansina 1990: 57)

A synthesis by the French-British archaeologist Bernard Clist (n. d., pp. 6, 9, 17), based on the study by Wotzka (1995) allows retaining the following:

- These are the hunter-gatherers – tool makers of Recent Stone Age – who, from 3,000 BC, encountered the first villagers settled on the tributaries of the Congo River near Mbandaka;
- This characteristic set of a village production system is found around 2,600 BC with the Imbonga Tradition installed on the banks of rivers Ruki, Ikelemba, Lulonga and Lake Tumba;
- The continuity of occupation of these banks of the tributaries of the Congo River towards Mbandaka from the Imbonga horizon reflects a slow but steady evolution of a material production until the nineteenth century.


Sociolinguistic aspects of the Pygmies of the Inner Congo Basin

1. Status

The dialects of the former hunter-gatherers - like those of other regions in Africa (Mgr Le Roy 1905: 114, Jacquot 1959, Duke 2001) - can only be considered as "mixed languages".

Vansina (1990: 47) argued that the Pygmy populations should have spoken very different languages because of their marked biological differences and their isolation.

“The archaeological finds should not delude us about population density. It is clear that pygmy populations were isolated, because the biological differences between surviving groups are so marked. They therefore probably spoke languages that were quite different from each other, so that the search for “the pygmy language” will remain fruitless.”



2. Absence of language policy in favor of Pygmies

The narrowness of the documentation concerning the languages of the former hunter-gatherers would find its justification both in the policy of territorial territorial organization as well as in the linguistic unification and Mongo nationalism advocated by Hulstaert and his colleagues that in the clichés of the colonial ethnology: denial of the ability to self-manage (Van der Kerken 1944: 397); widespread deconsideration (Vangroenweghe 1988: xii), popularized even in textbooks (Vinck 1998a, 1998b: 104-114). These same facts would be the basis of the sometimes contradictory and pessimistic conclusions about the possibilities of success for a research on the language of the Pygmies to which Hulstaert succeeded (1948: 21, 1978: 115, 1988: 172).

Vs. Christa Kilian-Hatz (2019)

“The currently about 20 pygmy forager populations seem to be closely related molecular genetically. However, the pygmy populations speak different languages. An early explanation for this fact assumes that the pygmies are the autochthonous population of the equatorial rain forest and as such spoke once their uniform indigenous 'pygmy' language, a kind of **common pygmy proto-language**. The present study provides for the first time missing linguistic data of three baMbuti languages: Efe, Atsoa and iButi. The oral literature shows interesting, unexpected parallels suggesting **a substratum of a common proto-language.**”

In the current sociolinguistic context of the Congolese Central Basin, it can be seen that all the Baaká or Batóá seem to have actually spoken the same language with only regiolects.

The Batóá linguistic unit of the Inner Congo Basin is justified by the fact that their settlement in this biotope, coming with their overlords, presumably from the Aruwimi-Ituri and Uele basins, only dates back about 300 years (Van der Kerken 1944: 394-399).

The Batóá-Baaká dialects should be typologically arranged in the **Kelé C.50**, or in both **Lega-Kalanga D.20** and **Bira-Huku D.20** groups of Guthrie's referential classification; although some have already been abusively integrated into Mõngõ-Nkundó C.60: Bastin has classified Lotswá under C.61 (1978: 141) and various dialects of Ilómbo-Lokaló have been integrated by Hulstaert in his list of Mõngõ dialects (1999: 33).

The fact that the Batóá show a lack of control over the Bantu agreement system and fluctuations in their phonetics may be an indication for the hypothesis of an **earlier cohabitation with Sudanese-speaking tribes**, or perhaps they themselves spoke a very degraded Bantu language of the Komo-Nyali type (Harries 1958, 1959). Their **language genius is clearly "foreign to Bantu"**, to quote Schebesta (1952: 378), referring to the Bira-Sua Pygmies of Ituri.

3. Linguistic attitudes

Hulstaert (1982a: 43) pointed out that despite homonymy with the Pygmy group living towards the high Tshuapa, the **Lokaló** of Mondombe categorically deny any pygmy origin, while their neighbors **Jǎǎ** are proud of it. This could be easily understood because the Lokaló and **Ilombo** were formerly a **non-Mongo population enslaved by the conquerors Boyela** and others (Hulstaert 1982a: 17). It must also be emphasized that the younger generation does not believe in ancient history and does not accept the reality of the genealogy told by the old (Hulstaert 1986: 216). In fact, it shows no interest in the history of ancestors (Hulstaert 1972: 5).

Common linguistic features of pygmy languages

- **1. Status of the documentation**

In order to examine the characteristics of pygmy dialects, it is worthwhile to begin by pointing out that, in addition to the poverty referred to above, the grammatical notes available are not - for the most part - results of a systematic field survey, but **short analyzes based either on archival materials**, case of our notes on the Bosabola dialect (Motingea 1993), or data **obtained from third parties**. Our sketch dialect of Pygmies of Lake Maindombe (Motingea 2010) was written thanks to notes compiled by Prof. Matangila (University of Kinshasa). In the same way Hulstaert had studied the Bafotó and Jǒfɛ dialects using the notes provided by instructors, and his confreres or other missionaries. Hulstaert recognized that this approach involves the **risk of processing / interpreting materials that are unreliable**.

Although based on the syntheses previously elaborated by Picavet (1947), Hulstaert (1948) and Motingea (2015, 2019), the picture that is painted in the following lines must be regarded as very incomplete and thus provisional, because of not only the narrowness of the available data but also the **lack of representativity** of several groups: the Bafotó-Waawa of the Sector Boso-Símbá, the Bařúmbe of Basănkoso, the Biláangi of Imbonga, the Batóá of Oswhe, the Lokaló of upper Lomela and Salonga, the Oto of the Atetela in the Sankuru basin, etc.

The only authentic documents are texts by Sulzmann for the Batóá of Ebungu, and our own notes on Lotóá of Itendo (Motingea 1994); one could also retain the comparative vocabulary of animal names Lonkundó-Lotóá-Lolúβε provided by Lootens (1980).

Another handicap to a happy interpretation of data relating to Pygmy dialects concerns - just as in many other regions in Africa (Jacquot 1959, Gregoire 2003, Bahuchet 2012: 7) - the **absence of studies devoted to the languages of their immediate neighbors**. If this observation is not quite valid for Westerners and Central, it remains relevant for all Pygmoid groups found in the North and Northeast (Hulstaert 1978: 115).

«Ici je pense spécialement aux Bokala-Nkole, Lokele, Tolombo, etc. ... Malheureusement ces tribus et leurs langues sont peu ou pas connues. »

2. Phonetics

A good synthesis of Lotóá (Bokatola-Ingende) phonetics was provided by Schebesta (1952) on the basis of sketches by Picavet (1947) and Hulstaert (1948). It is perfectly reflected in the dialects of Ebungu (Sulzmann 1980) and those of Tumba and Inongo Lakes (Motingea 1993, 1994, 2010: 218-222, 203-218).

The Bafotó (Hulstaert 1978), although geographically distant and not in symbiosis with the villagers, show strong similarities and therefore confirm the existence of an original common background.

The more or less complex situation observed among the Lokaló (Hulstaert 1986) and Jǒfɛ (Hulstaert 1986) is however perhaps the most authentic.

*« ... manifestement l'informateur a eu très difficile pour rendre certains sons. Ainsi un même mot est graphié de deux ou de trois façons. C'est surtout le cas avec un son qu'il écrit **ph**, **f**, **fw** et que je comprends être l'équivalent de la fricative bilabiale sourde écrite **f** en Nk[undó]. Un autre son s'y retrouve plusieurs fois comme, là où Nk[undó] a aussi **f** ou **b** (peut-être **v** bilabial ?). ...**hw***

*L'hésitation de l'informateur se voit encore dans des variantes de graphie comme **bose**, **boose**, **wose** 'jour' ; **εε** et **εhε** 'lui', ... **bohwo** et **boholo** 'aîné'. Pour autant que je puis saisir l'enregistrement sonore les caractères **hw** rendent bien **h** fortement aspiré. (Hulstaert 1988: 134)*

This system with 7 oral vowels is not obvious: it shows not only irregularities and cases of fluctuation of aperture levels (1a, b, c); but also irregularities in the application of the rules of harmony, compared to ɔmɔŋgɔ. Hulstaert (1988: 134) writes, in fact, that there are "mixtures" of i / e, u / o - which seems to recall the *Cross Height Harmony* of Ngɔmbɛ C.41 (2a) and Ipanga d Oshwe (2b) See Hulstaert (1986: 229): "The seven usual vowels in the languages of the Central Cuvette are clearly marked by the informants; but it does not miss [sic] no confusions and errors, so dubious cases. It's the same for consonants ... " It is therefore unclear whether there is an opposition [ATR] at the level of the upper vowels.

Fotó (Hulstaert 1978: 116)

- (1)a. *limembe* ~ *limembe* ‘tête’
ófɔ́í ~ *óʒɔ́í* ‘un’
mo-fó ~ *mɔ-fɔ́* ‘odeur’

Tóá-Maindombe (Motingea 2010: 219)

- b. *ε-lo:gi* / *bi-lɔ:gi* ‘front(s)’
bo-ító / *bε-ító* ‘femme(s)’

Tóá-Iténdo (Motingea 1994: 347, 348)

- c. *bɔ-ína* ~ *bo-ína mí* ‘mon frère’
bɔ-íná ‘soleil’

Ngɔmbɛ-Genza (Motingea 2001: 119–121)

- (2)a. *°e-íb-a* > *yǔba* ‘vol’
°nj-ím-a > *njúma* ‘avarice’
°m-olé / *m-elé* ‘arbre’
-óna ~ *-éna* ‘planter’
-ékoa ~ *-íkoa* ~ *-ókoa* ‘étudier’

2.2 Consonants

ɓ	ɗ					
b	d	j	g			
p	t	c	k			
p'	t'		k'			
v		ɟ	ɣ	ŋ		
f	s	ʃ	ʒ	x	h	
w	l	y				
m	n					

Table 3 : *Toa consonant sounds*

Idem Aka (Thomas & Bahuchet 1991: 32–34) :

*« Comme caractéristiques articulatoires, il faut signaler, pour les sonores ~ fortes, un renforcement de l'énergie d'émission qui se traduit par une grande tension des muscles aboutissant pour les labiale, alvéolaire et labio-vélaire à une réalisation glottalisée [b, d, gb] et pour la palatale z à une affrication [dz]. Les sourdes ~ douces au contraire ont une tendance au relâchement : p [p̥], k [χ], s [ʃ]. Quant aux spirantes, cette tendance à la faiblesse de l'articulation a pour conséquence une nette instabilité, v [β] et h étant souvent, dialectalement ou individuellement, voués à disparaître. ... la nasale ŋ connaît une distribution lacunaire n'étant pas attestée avec i et e (*ŋi, *ŋe). »*

Les changements des consonnes du proto-bantou en parlars tóá se présenteraient de la manière suivante :

- Consonnes simples $*n > n$, $*b > v$, $*g > \gamma > \text{G} > h > \emptyset$, $*k > \text{ɽ} > x > h > \emptyset$, $*s > f^c > f$, $*f > p$.

La dépalatalisation de n est générale (3a) ; elle rappelle les Ngɔmbɛ C.41 (3b) et les Tofoké C.53 (3c).

- Dans les dialectes orientaux, on constate le phénomène de l'épenthèse de la nasale ou de la consonne latérale comme stratégie pour contrer l'érosion consonantique.

Hamba

°w-adi	>	<i>w-andi</i>	'épouse'
°di-ko	>	<i>ndi-ko</i>	'le haut'
°di-kamb-o	>	<i>ndi-kambo</i>	'affaire'
°di-bonga	>	<i>ndi-mbonga</i>	'ville'
°di-yata	>	<i>ndi-yata</i>	'canard'
°di-bot-w-a	>	<i>ndi-mbot-o</i>	'parenté'
°di-mi	>	<i>ndimi</i>	'moi'

MORPHOSYNTAXE

- Un système de classes et d'accords très irrégulier, avec accord verbal ramené à l'opposition animé vs. non-animé; parfois sans distinction formelle SG vs PL à l'impératif ; PN cl.7 *le-*, PP cl.1 *lo-*, cl.9 *le-* ;
- Distinction possessif aliénable et possessif inaliénable où le lien entre possédé et possesseur est établi uniquement par la ligature *a* ;
- Marques verbales *-ka-* (présent/futur), *-ká-* (subsécutif/narratif) et *-kó-* (motionnel/futur) qui sont en réalité des auxiliaires ; puis d'origine locative *-ko-* cl.7 (récent/virtuel), *-mo-* cl.18 (passé¹) et *-(q)e-* cl.23 *-e-* (passé²) ; expression du parfait à l'aide de l'auxiliaire **-ca* C.S.239 'do' ; l'accompli par l'enclitique *(=l)i* ~ *(=n)i* ; copule négative *-ti* ;
- Absence de préfixe objet, c'est-à-dire structure de la phrase SVO ;

MORPHOSYNTAX

- A very irregular system of classes and agreements, with verbal agreement brought back to the opposition animated vs. Non-animated; sometimes without formal distinction SG vs. PL imperative; NP cl.7 *le-*, PP cl.1 *lo-*, cl.9 *le-*.
- A possessive distinction that is alienable and inalienable possessive, where the link between the possessed and the possessor is established solely by the ligature *a*;
- TAM: *-ka-* (present / future), *-ká-* (consecutive / narrative) and *-kó-* (motional / future) which are actually auxiliaries; then of locative origin *-ko-* cl.7 (recent / virtual), *-mo-* cl.18 (past1) and *-(q)e-* cl.23 *-e-* (past2); expression of the perfect using the auxiliary * *-ca* C.S.239 'do'; accomplished by the enclitic (= *l*)*i* ~ (= *n*)*i*; negative copula *-ti*;

Merci beaucoup

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