

The Dynamics of Morphotactic Change in Sango

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The Dynamics of Morphotactic Change in Sango

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1. The Argument

Social factors, no less than biological ones, play a role in determining the nature of language at one level or another.

While this verity is not presented here for the first time, it remains to be documented in a comprehensive manner. Moreover, while social factors have been invoked in works of a sociolinguistic nature to *explain*, as writers have been wont to say, the distribution of linguistic variables, there are still far too few attempts to really explain why certain languages are what they are in what might be called socio-psychological terms.¹ And whereas it is sometimes possible to arrive at satisfying *post hoc* explanations, only infrequently—if not rarely—do we have the privilege of being witnesses to substantive linguistic change. This work is the report of one such witness about one change that has taken place in Sango, the lingua franca of the Central African Republic.

I propose, in the following order of probability, that Sango, has, as *langage pratique*, acquired number agreement in about thirty years, that this innovation was made familiar to the inhabitants of Bangui by radio broadcasters and was adopted by other speakers because it was stylish or fashionable, and that it is more likely based on French than on any other language. Now in the pool of linguistic patterns in Bangui, the nation's capital, and other urban centers, it is being adopted by the young, a practice apparently reinforced by some subconscious notion of what constitutes a noun phrase.

If this proposition can be argued convincingly, one would have contributed to understanding something about the dynamics of language change through language contact. Some light will also have been shed on the alleged role that so-called creolization has in the evolution of a pidgin to what is considered a creole.

2. The Language

Creolization is relevant to the present discussion, because the language has a pidgin in its ancestry. This pidgin arose in the context of colonization, when the Ubangi River basin was invaded by representatives of the Congo Free State in 1887, followed very quickly by military personnel acting on behalf of the French government and those interested in trade, not only French and Belgian but also Dutch. As Belgian and French nationals competed with each other for the occupation of the territory, they penetrated to the headwaters of the Ubangi River. This was the home of the people whose language, in a pidginized form, came to be used as a medium of communication by the foreigners.

There, where the Mbomu and Uele rivers join to make the Ubangi, are found a large population speaking mutually intelligible dialects of a language having no single name: these are Dendi, Yakoma, Ngbandi (or Mongwandi), and Sango (the latter not to be confused with the pidgin that emerged). Because of their riverine habits, and being involved even before Europeans arrived in regional trade, they played an important role in colonization, providing, for example, canoes and canoers.

The Ngbandi, as they might be called collectively, speak a Ubangian language, to which family most of the other languages of the Central African Republic belong. Only a few other non-Ngbandi languages were found along the banks of the Ubangi at that time. Starting from Bangui, going eastward, they were Ngbaka (also known as Ngbaka-Ma'bo), Gbanziri, and a few Banda dialects in between these. Typologically the same, these languages, with the possible exception of Banda (for which see below), could not have contributed number agreement to the pidgin, because their grammars are without it.²

However, some of the other languages brought by the expatriate African workers and militia of the Europeans do have number agreement. These were Bantu languages spoken in the lower Congo area and along the Congo (now Zaire) River as well as Swahili. But Bantu languages were not the only ones that were spoken by the multilingual work force, because African personnel came also from what have become Senegal, Liberia, and Nigeria. It was these expatriate Africans, not the Europeans, who played the most important role in creating Sango.³

3. The Evidence

There was no evidence when I began to learn Sango in June of 1952—nor during the eight following years as I used the language, along with Gbeya, which I began to learn in 1954—that number agreement occurred in anybody's speech.⁴ Nor was there any evidence in 1962, when I travelled throughout the country to make tape-recordings of Sango in preparation for writing a grammar. There was none, that is to say, except for what I found in a few radio broadcasts. That was noted in my grammar (1967a:136), but its significance was not perceived.⁵

In 1988, however, its significance could not be missed for two reasons. First, it had become common in the speech of children and young people. Second, the plural prefix was found to occur three times and, in one instance, example (5), four times in a noun phrase, evidence that the rule was becoming stronger. In other words, the prefix (highlighted in boldface in this chapter), rather than moving to the left, so to speak, was distributed to each word that could carry it: not only the head noun but all its preposed attributives. In the following examples (1-4) only those in the left-hand column would have been used in the pidgin stage:⁶

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (1) zò 'person' | ázò 'people' |
| (2) mbéni zò 'someone' | ámbéni ázò 'some people' |
| (3) kótá zò (big person) 'adult' | ákótá ázò 'adults' |
| (4) mbéni kótá zò 'an adult' | ámbéni ákótá ázò 'some adults' |

The following phrase, used by an eight-year-old girl (a capital letter indicates gender; the figure, age), is special, because it has four prefixes, because it is the only example of its kind, and because the noun phrase itself is different in structure:⁷

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----|-------|----------|----|-------------|
| (5) ágbá | tí | ákété | ámérenyé | tí | ákóndò (F8) |
| bundles of | | small | children | of | chickens |
| 'a lot of little chicks' | | | | | |

However, a few others are similar to it:

(6) *áíta* *tí* *áwáli* *nà* *ákóli* (M12)
 siblings of females and males
 'sisters and brothers'

(7) *íta* *tí* *mbi* *tí* *kóli* *nà* *tí* *áwáli* (F12)
 sibling of me of male and of females
 'my brother and sisters' (?)

(8) *à-kè* *sàrà* *òsìì* *ávìì* *tí* *ádèbòòf* (M23)
 subj.prfx.-be do also lives of debaucheries
 '(the girls) also lead lives of debauchery'

In these last four examples (5-8) we see that speakers seem inclined to use the prefix to mark a whole phrase as plural. Years ago (6) and (7), for example, would have been ungrammatical, because the nouns *wáli* and *kóli* are used in constructions such as these to mark gender in a generic sense. For this reason (7) is ambiguous. Was the speaker trying to say 'my brothers and sisters'? That could have been done by saying *áíta* ... 'siblings of ...'. Or was the speaker indeed trying to say 'my brother and [my] sisters'? In that case, one could have said *íta tí mbi tí kóli* *nà áíta tí wáli* (sibling of me of male and siblings of female). It is not clear what is happening in (8), from a twenty-three-year-old male, where the French words *vie* and *débauche* are being used, unless each noun was intended as plural. (Native speakers of English have been observed using the plural in ways that reveal some similarity to what is happening in Sango.)⁸ Most of their peers, however, remain behind, using phrases constructed like (4) or, in my opinion, haphazardly like (9):

(9) *mbéni ákótá ázò*
 'some adults'

It would appear that they are applying a rule that they do not yet fully understand.

The last statement is supported by the fact that variation occurs between one and the same utterance in the same discourse of a single speaker with no difference in meaning.⁹

Nonetheless, there are enough examples from a sizeable corpus to conclude that something is indeed going on in Sango and has been since at least the beginning of the sixth decade of this century. From a total corpus of transcribed texts of about 150,000 words a sample of about 89,000 words was examined for the use of this prefix. This corpus comes from 254 texts and as many different speakers of both genders, ranging from three to twenty years in age. In this corpus were found eighty-three examples of phrases in which two or more instances of the prefix occurred. They come from speakers of both genders, one of whom was three years old, the others six to sixteen in age, each age being represented.¹⁰ (Only from ages eleven to sixteen do we find noun phrases with three words pluralized.) Another corpus of about 10,000 words from radio broadcasts is discussed below.

This number is impressive partly because about a decade earlier (in the fifties or sixties) there were no such phrases at all and also because number is not an obligatory category in Sango or, it would appear, in any of the other Ubangian languages except some dialects of Banda. In the Gbaya dialect of Bossangoa called

Gbeya by its speakers), for example, it is used parsimoniously and mostly with animate nouns (Samarin 1967b). This seems to have been the case with Sango too. Although inanimate nouns are now frequently marked for plurality in Sango, possibly under the influence of French, its use is neither general nor consistent.¹¹

Among the many features that distinguish twenty Banda languages in the Central African Republic are the following: (1) some mark only animate nouns for plural, others both animate and inanimate; (2) in noun phrases some prefix the noun, others the attributive, and in five languages both the attributive and noun. The latter are found in two groups: the Central Group, which includes Gbaga-sud (Southern Gbaga) and Hai (found near Bocaranga in the northwest corner of the country), and the Peripheral Group, which includes Gbaga-nord (Northern Gbaga), Wojo, and Ngbugu. Whereas three options occur for Hai with respect to agreement, it is obligatory in Wojo and Ngbugu.¹² We return to these languages after another explanation is proposed.

4. The Explanation

Having established (a) that number agreement was not in the language that provided Sango with its lexical base, (b) that it cannot be attributed to any of the substrate Ubangian languages other than a Banda one, and (c) that it could have been introduced by speakers of Bantu languages but was not, we are left with trying to explain where it did come from. Who was responsible? And what was their language?

The most reasonable explanation is that Sango-French bilinguals incorporated number agreement in their Sango on the pattern of French. If this is true, the calque would have arisen in response to written French, not spoken, because the phonetic realization of the plural suffix occurs only in *liaison*. Although French borrowings in Sango have not yet been studied with respect to their oral or written sources, we can observe that *wànyòdn* (final *n* indicating nasalization) is a common pronunciation of the French word *oignon* 'onion;' in the pidgin stage it was *zònyòdn* from *des oignons*.

One might suppose that it would take an impressive number of bilinguals to introduce a new rule, but it is clear that a small number of bilingual people, for reasons we do not yet fully understand, had more importance than their numbers would have justified. Indeed, their influence has already been demonstrated for Sango: in the adoption of the word for money (Samarin 1989c), of the copula (Samarin 1986), and probably also of the negative (Samarin 1984/1985). Moreover, a small number of bilinguals inclined to marking plurality more than once would have great influence if they played important roles in their society. In the broadcasters for Radio Bangui we have exactly such a number of speakers. It is reasonable to argue that they are the ones who introduced number agreement to the people of Bangui.¹³ The argument is supported by the positioning of the adverb *ngá* 'also' (see below). As for numbers of Sango-French bilinguals at independence, there could not have been very many. I certainly encountered very few in my early years in the country. My own impressions are supported by figures on the number of students in schools where French was the medium of instruction. At the end of the 1961-1962 school year, there were only fifty in the final year of secondary school (called *première*), including Europeans. Moreover, only six Central Africans (or those who were not considered Europeans) in the whole country took the *baccalauréat* examination in 1962.¹⁴

If the number of Sango-French bilinguals was small, the number of those who were inclined to use number agreement was presumably even smaller. That can be taken as axiomatic on the grounds that no innovation is started by all speakers of a language at the same time. The fact can also be demonstrated. First, the nation's first president, Barthélémy Boganda, was a well-educated person, one whom in the colonial period the French would have considered an *évolué*. Once a priest, a school teacher, then a territorial deputy to the French parliament and leader of the MESAN (Mouvement d'Evolution de l'Afrique Noire) political party, in his radio address in March 1959 urging the inhabitants of Bangui to vote he did not once use number agreement even though he had three opportunities to do so.¹⁵

By contrast, out of the seven persons who broadcast in Sango at that time, one of them a Central African priest (*abbé*), all but one used number agreement in my sample of about 10,000 words, in which there were fifteen instances of number agreement. For example:

- (10) *ámbení wáli òta*
 some woman three
 'three women'
- (11) *ákétékété ámikroòb*
 'tiny microbes'
- (12) *ákótá ázò tí sésè*
 big people of earth
 'important people of the country'

Three of these speakers varied between patterns, sometimes in the same phrase. The one broadcaster who did not use plural agreement used the older construction eight times; another case is problematic. This speaker, still broadcasting today, remains 'conservative' or old-fashioned in his use of Sango—at least in my opinion.

However, we must return to those Banda languages that are characterized by number agreement. Although some might consider a substratal explanation rather than the one proposed here, it does not appear to have much in its favor. First, if speakers of these languages introduced number agreement into Sango, it would have to be demonstrated that they did this in their own regions. No such evidence is available. Second, it would have to be demonstrated, assuming that in Sango they used plural agreement as in their ethnic languages, that they were in the position to influence other speakers. Here also no evidence is available. What is very attractive is the role that Ngbugu might have played, because it is located immediately north of Mobaye, the center for the speakers of vernacular Sango, one of the dialects that make up the cluster that served as the basis of the pidgin. There is no evidence that the Pidgin Sango of this area was ever any different with respect to marking than any other form of the *lingua franca*. One could, of course, hypothesize that it was a native speaker of one of these few Banda dialects whose tendency to use plural agreement on radio broadcasts, and possibly elsewhere, was adopted by his colleagues. If such was the case, we are still left with radio broadcasters as being responsible for disseminating the innovation to the general public.

Having found reasons for believing that number agreement was introduced by Sango-French bilinguals thirty-some years ago and that it was introduced to the

population of Bangui over the air, in the case of some people perhaps only reinforcing what they were already doing, the argument could be left there. It might be too bold to attempt an explanation as to what motivated the innovators, apart from bilingual competence. However, a study of the radio archives would probably demonstrate that they had created a certain 'radio style' of Sango. Today certainly, there is a 'radio Sango' that is, in my opinion, quite different from the vernacular (that is, what one hears in ordinary usage).¹⁶

It is not, however, too bold to suggest that people are influenced by the variety of Sango they hear on the radio, because the broadcasters make up part of the society's élite. In support of this argument one would like various kinds of information about radio broadcasting in the country. This, unfortunately, is not available. Only the following can be given at this time. (1) In 1974 85 percent of broadcasting time was in French, not Sango. (2) In 1975 of 500 persons interviewed in the *quartier* of Boy-Arabe 50.6 percent said that they listened to the radio frequently (*souvent*); these appear to have been younger persons, because the 28.2 percent who said that they listened to the radio rarely or never, were persons of age 45 or more; 45.5 percent said that they preferred listening to broadcasts in Sango to those in French (Déchamps-Wenezoui 1981:111).¹⁷ (3) In a sociolinguistic study of 113 students in Bangui in 1987 (Gerbault, ms) it was found that the second highest score for positive attitudes with respect to the Sango of various categories of persons (e.g., journalists, missionaries, teachers, nurses) was found with radio broadcasters (*journalistes*): i.e., 78.76 percent of the subjects. (The slightly higher percentage was for judges: i.e., 79.64 percent).¹⁸ (4) Two persons of high status whom I have worked with have used a radio style, one a male catechist of St. Paul's Cathedral. After I had recorded something from him, I remarked on the similarity of his manner of speaking with the radio's. The explanation, he told me, was that he had a friend who was a broadcaster. The other was a forty-year-old man with a B.A. from an American university and a certificate in translating from a French university whom I employed to translate extemporaneously a sermon from French into Sango. He had never been a broadcaster.

In assessing the influence of radio Sango one will have to take into consideration the radio's history. In the present study we are attempting to go back as far as possible.¹⁹ Before 1983 there was, as far as I know, no attempt to use the radio to effect changes in Sango. In that year, however, and again in 1985 the Central African linguist, Marcel Diki-Kidiri, had workshops in Bangui to train broadcasters to 'improve' their Sango. He reported that they had succeeded both in vocabulary and in syntax (personal communication, Cologne, September 1992). It is not known what syntactic changes were recommended; in vocabulary there were proposed many neologisms to replace French loans, like *tonda* (tones unknown) for *commencer* 'to begin', and *pàkàrà* for *monsieur*.²⁰ (On the introduction of neologisms see also Samarin 1980.) In the last ten years these changes have been deliberately and systematically taught on the radio. It is no wonder, then, that Central Africans might be convinced that, as Diki-Kidiri reported (1992), 'la radio-télévision centrafricaine est considérée aujourd'hui comme l'un des lieux où le sango est le meilleur et le plus moderne.'²¹

5. Supporting Evidence

To demonstrate further the influence of the speech of radio broadcasters one can

bring evidence about what has happened to the distribution of *ngá* 'also'. Whereas it used to be found at the end of the clause, except for other uses not relevant here, it has been found immediately following the verb in speech heard or recorded in Bangui. It was at first assumed that the new position was semantically motivated: some sentences could, it seemed to me, be translated with 'even', as in (14). For example:

(13) *mbi báà lò ngá apè*
 I see he/she also not
 'I also didn't see him/her'

(14) *mbi báà ngá lò apè*
 'I didn't even see her'

But there were too many problematic sentences. Besides, there were sentences like (15) in which *ngá* is repeated, as if the speaker were using the adverb haphazardly:

(15) *lò mu ngá wáli ngá nà ngú só à-lingbì*
 he take also woman also at water this subj.pfx. be-able
 'he marries the girl at the proper age'

In order to see if the positioning and the repetition of *ngá* might be due to the influence of broadcasters, I checked the broadcast recordings. The hypothesis was confirmed: the same kind of correlation was found as with number agreement. Out of seventeen examples of sentences in which the adverb could have preceded a complement, it did appear there fifteen times. Moreover, one female broadcaster is responsible for eight of these, all of them of the marked pattern. In other words, at the time when tape-recordings of extemporaneous speech in Sango from throughout the country revealed one pattern, radio broadcasts revealed an additional one.

French competence might here also be the causative or disposing factor. If so, it would be reinforced by a substratal or adstratal one, because Nbandi allows a post-verb position (Lekens 1958[2]:651). Its equivalent in Sango would be as follows, where final *n* represents a nasalized vowel:

(16) *lò kè kèn ngá mbi*
 he is refuse also me
 'he's refusing me also'

It is not surprising therefore that the speaker who produced (14) is also Yakoma, a twenty-four-year-old male. Indeed, the 'new' position is preferred by him.²² The ethnicity of the female broadcaster mentioned in the preceding paragraph is not known; only that she was from Cameroun.

6. Conclusion

This study appears to be one of the few on the actual process of creolization: that is, change in progress (Mühlhäusler 1986:205-206). There have been, of course, many such studies for 'natural' languages in the last thirty years, falsifying this statement about change in African languages: 'changes will be almost imperceptible within one generation' (Welmers 1970:2). Let us note the following.

• From this study of the history of the use of the ‘plural’ prefix in Sango we learn that a few bilingual speakers can contribute to language change when they are considered models of language use. Fashion or style plays a role in language change, since all change assumes that some people are adopting an innovation by others for one reason or another. What the present study contributes, however, is evidence of morphotactic and syntactic change motivated by wanting to be fashionable.²³

• We must recognize that number agreement is not necessarily an established rule in the grammar of Sango.²⁴ It seems safe, however, to assume that its use will become more and more prominent and that it will spread to rural areas (as can already be demonstrated). For some time, however, it will probably remain a spoken phenomenon. Indeed, it may for a long time be one of the many features that will distinguish spoken and written Sango.²⁵

• This study ought to lead linguists to be cautious about claiming that when a pidgin becomes a creole it becomes more ‘complicated,’ somehow meeting the ‘needs’ of the people for whom it is now the first language. The emergence of number agreement in Sango is not—or not necessarily—an instance of the linguistic consequences of creolization (especially not when this is teleologically or functionally conceived). The following generalization, therefore, does not wholly apply to Sango: ‘As the usefulness of a pidgin grows and as its functions extend the lexicon increases and the syntactic properties are refined’ (Todd 1974:58; see also Valdman 1977:155-157, and the word of caution in Mühlhäusler 1986:204). The change discussed in this study of Sango is just another case of what can happen when languages are in contact.

• Finally, if radio broadcasters have indeed introduced changes in Sango, we have evidence that has been lacking on this modality of change. Up until now it has been denied that the media could have any effect. Thus: ‘It appears that relatively few speakers are directly influenced by the speech patterns heard on radio and television’ (Labov 1967:74fn).

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Notes

1. Without attempting to be anywhere near exhaustive in citing works on this topic, one might include Dozier's explanation for the differences between the Tewa and Yaqui response to Spanish relations (1956) and the role of ideology in shift to Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea (Kulick 1992).
2. This statement is endorsed by the linguist F. K. Erhard Voeltz, who spent

several years in the Central African Republic. Having 'worked quite a bit on the noun phrases of Ubangian languages,' he found that 'generally, especially if a discussion [presumably with language consultants] regarding the data is allowed, only one sign for the plural is accepted in nearly all of the languages, including Sango.' However, he reports that whereas in Gbaya (Kpatiri) one pluralizes the noun phrase only once, there are instances of other patterns: e.g., the title of a fable is *á-ngbo nà délí* 'snake and toad', not 'snakes and toads' or 'snakes and toad' (personal communication, 25 February 1994, used with permission). Gbaya is a language related to the Ngbandi dialect-cluster, spoken along the Kotto River at and south of the village of Mingala (Boyeldieu and Diki-Kidiri 1982).

3. The first possible reference to Sango may be the one made by a missionary in 1896: he wrote about a *volapuck* that was spoken by the workers. The first published linguistic data appeared in 1906-1907 (Gaudefroy-Demombynes, a book I have not yet succeeded in finding). Grammatical notes accompanied a glossary in 1911 (Calloc'h), followed by one in 1950 (Tisserant). There is no single work on the history of Sango. My research on this topic has resulted, however, in the following works: 1982a, 1982b, 1984, 1984/1985, 1989a, 1989b. On the basis of very little information it has been suggested that Dendi was a nonpidginized lingua franca before Europeans arrived. I have argued against this position in Samarin 1985, supported by Eric de Dampierre (personal communications), who has written about this area (1967). There may have been other nascent jargons before Sango was adopted along the length of the upper Ubangi. One possibly based on Banda is mentioned in Samarin 1985.

4. By this time, of course, there was a considerable amount of literature in Sango that was prepared by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. The former had established a mission just outside the military post of Bangui in 1894; the latter did not enter the country until the 1920s. Among Protestants, the first to use Sango were those serving with Baptist Mid-Missions (an organization supported by cooperating churches of the General Association of Regular Baptists). Their stations were distributed from the middle of the territory and eastward, and they used Sango exclusively. To the west were found missionaries with the Mission Evangélique de l'Oubangui-Chari (M.E.F., of the Grace Brethren Church in the United States) and the Swedish Baptists. Until just after the Second World War these used indigenous vernaculars in their work. The New Testament had been published in the 1930s; the manuscript of the Old Testament was nearly finished in the late 1950s and was subsequently published.

5. Copies of that grammar, produced by photo-offset, were sent to Africanists and libraries of universities where there were African studies programs in 1963.

6. The orthography being used here, like the orthography endorsed by Marcel Diki-Kidiri, does not distinguish between upper and lower mid and back vowels. In any case, there is so much variation between speakers that in the absence of a sociolinguistic study of the matter writing one or the other phonemically would be arbitrary. Diki-Kidiri's comments on variation (1982), although more thorough than my own of 1967a, are based, like my own, on personal experience, not careful research. See Bouquiaux et al. 1978 for another orthography. There are three register tones: high, mid, and low, indicated as in Bouquiaux et al., but not as endorsed by Diki-Kidiri. The examples are written in their uncontracted forms. Both assimilation and contraction characterize the phonological change that is found in urban and urban-influenced Sango (see Samarin in press, Walker and Samarin, in press): e.g., *ám Bén á zò* (the two words pronounced without hiatus, *n* representing here the consonant) 'some people' (see [2] above).

7. One wonders if the child is not using a superlative here, when she shoots all her cannons, so to speak. In the following sentence she correctly notes that there are ten chicks with the hen (not hens). The context of the recording is having her comment on pictures in a French-language book for children. She was describing a picture 5.5" x 4" (13.97 cm x 10.16 cm). This would be a large number for most if not all Central African children. I certainly never saw a brood of ten, rarely over five, and usually just two or three. Hens have a difficult time bringing chicks into the world. To add another touch to this girl's portrait, we might note that she also says *kétá kétá méyengé tí ákóndò*, in which there is no plural on the word for 'child' and assimilation produces something resembling affixation in the word for 'small' (unless, of course, one prefers *két ákét áméyengé*). However, F. K. Erhard Voeltz (see fn. 2) reports that with noun phrases like (5) he generally got from his consultants more than one plural marking, the case depending on the meaning: e.g., 'child of chicken', 'children of chicken', 'child of chicken (pl.)', 'children of chicken (pl.)', adding that 'All four cases were generally possible in the Ubangian languages of the CAR with four different sort of plural/singular markings.' While respecting my colleague's competence as a linguist and expertise in Ubangian languages, I must demur by saying that I have found that educated native speakers of Ubangian languages, which his consultants for the most part were, I believe, allow Sango to influence their native languages.

8. Here are a few examples collected only recently, offered without analysis and interpretation, italics added: 'They all have terrific *senses* of humor' (Bill Maher, 'Larry King Live,' January 26, 1994); '*these types of players*' (head coach, Syracuse University, New York, television interview, September 18, 1993); 'And after the claymores, the *sounds* of the *enemy's* dying—the cries' (Wentz and Jurus 1992:252); 'Someone put them [junk-mail flyers] in everybody's *boxes*' [one mailbox per house] (WJS); 'Most *creoles* do not even have *pidgins* in their *ancestries*' (WJS); 'Have you got our *various kinds of waters*?' (with reference to drinking water and water for painting, said probably in exaggeration or irony, July 20, 1993, WJS); 'The construction trucks left all *kinds* of oil' (Ruth Samarin); 'Where's the popcorn?' — 'It's up there with the chips *and stuff like that*' (where in Sango the plural prefix on the preceding noun can have this meaning).

9. During a period of language change, of course, speakers can be pushed into a corner by an aggressive foreigner into thinking up an explanation. Such seems to have been the case when Peace Corps volunteers were informed in Bangui that with the placement of *á-* one emphasizes ('*insiste*') either the adjective (*big houses*) or the noun (*big houses*). The Central African assistant's examples suggest that only one modifier occurs with a noun.

10. The three-year-old girl used these pluralized phrases: *áméni áfàmi* 'some relatives', *ágbá tí áíta tí i* (bundles of siblings of 3p.pn.) 'a lot of our siblings (or, friends)'. For the latter, compare in English *a lot of* vs. *lots of*.

11. A more comprehensive study of the prefix is now under way. See also Samarin 1994.

12. I am grateful to France Cloarec-Heiss for providing me with this information, based on her forthcoming work on Banda dialects. See also Cloarec-Heiss 1986.

13. Although a Lingala radio style in Kinshasa is well recognized (*Lingala ya ba-je-le-connaiss*), it is considered amusing and is used only jocularly; moreover, it has not influenced the spoken language (Salikoko Mufwene, personal communication, 21 January 1994, used with permission).

14. The information was provided on July 12, 1962 by a Msr. Dartois, attached to the Ministry of Education. It can be assumed that at independence there were

secondary schools only in Bangui. In 1962 only about 450 in the whole country, including Europeans, passed the *examen d'entrer à sixième*, thereby qualifying for entrance into secondary school. In any case, in the 1950s neither the Brethren nor the Mid-Missions missionaries had French schools. At that time in the District (now Sous-Préfecture) of Bossangoa, with about 80,000 inhabitants, there was one 'official' school and one at the Catholic mission in the town of Bossangoa and a primary school at a cotton experimental station about thirty kms away.

15. This was just seventy years after the French had established their post at Bangui.

16. Most striking is the intonational patterns. What is curious is that the most salient one of dragging pitch upward at the end of some kind of a unit is one that I have never heard in France. But other features could be cited. Radio Sango deserves a study of its own. With respect to people's attitudes, I might mention that while riding in taxi-busses, in which the radio is usually played, I have imitated and commented on something that is characteristic of radio Sango in an attempt to elicit criticism or approval. The response has always been silence. I explain this by the unwillingness of the others to criticize their compatriots. One might suppose that they might have been willing to express an opinion in private; even in this setting I have not had success. One should not conclude from these observations that Central Africans do not have opinions; only that one must be skilful and patient in eliciting them.

17. The author's name has elsewhere appeared as Wenezoui-Dechamps.

18. Although one can learn something by interviewing subjects—otherwise, I would not be using this method myself—one must be critical of the methodology and the results. I find, for example, this appreciation of the speech of judges fanciful. Whereas all of the 113 persons can be expected to have heard the radio many times in their lives, how many would have had occasion to hear a judge speak? I would say, agreeing with Gerbault, that the answers of the subjects depended on their expectations: whatever it was that they considered 'good Sango,' it was spoken by persons who would have a high competence in French. I hold this view in spite of the fact that in this study Gerbault found that negative opinions were expressed concerning *Fransango*, i.e., speech characterized by an admixture of French and Sango. For example, when three kinds of language are compared—French, *Fransango*, and Sango—with respect to amount of education (*degré d'instruction*) the percentages are 44.35 percent, 38.53 percent, and 32.51 percent respectively; for residence in Bangui, 38.91 percent, 45.75 percent, and 42.27 percent respectively; for success, 33.44 percent, 28.62 percent, 34.51 percent respectively.

19. It has been reported, for example, that in the early history of Radio Rural the most popular broadcasters were Lucien Dambalet and Passy Wilibyro, possibly only because they dealt with topics of greatest interest to listeners (Nzapayeké 1987:124). One of these is the telling of Central African traditional tales.

20. In Ngbandi *pàkàrà* is used to refer to someone whose name one does not know or wants to avoid using for one reason or another (Lekens 1958).

21. Informed by occasional visits to the Central African Republic, Diki-Kidiri however has not, as far as I know, made a controlled study of people's attitudes towards the Sango spoken by all or different radio broadcasters. One study undertaken in 1986 by Radio Bangui in the rural areas found that most villagers had difficulty in following the Sango spoken on the radio ('la plupart de ceux-ci [villagers in group discussions] n'ont pas manqué d'insister sur les difficultés qu'ils éprouvent à suivre le sango parlé à la radio' [Nzapayéké 1987:142]).

22. The recording, obtained by my assistant Lamine Ndocko, is an animated conversation on the topic of marriage between this young man and another. However, the speaker also used the adverb in this position once.
23. One would like to say much more about style and linguistic fashions in Sango, but the topic has not yet been sufficiently studied. Here are a couple of examples that illustrate the way linguistic usage can change over time: (1) the virtual disappearance of the connective *sí* as a topicalizer (Samarin 1967a:104ff) in the speech of Bangui's youth, possibly linked to the next change; (2) an increase in the use of the topicalizer *làá* (now simply *lá* or *la*) to the point where its function seems weakened (Samarin 1967a:104ff); (3) the use of *gbá* 'bundle' for 'a lot', replacing *míngì*. The following mean 'a lot of people' or 'many people': *ázò míngì* (old), *gbá tí ázò* (new).
24. Since this study focusses on the origin of number agreement in Sango, not its distribution, and since a thorough study of its use by a sample of the population has not yet been pursued, it seems premature to talk about a so-called variable rule in the language (*langue*). However, in interviewing 150 persons in Bangui and ninety-eight in and around Nzoro, a rural village in the northwest corner of the CAR, about 550 km from Bangui, it was found in 1992 that 59.33 percent of the former and only 9.18 percent of the latter preferred the sentence with agreement in the sentence *ámbení (á)màma àhíngà tí bàtà ámérengé tí àlà nzoní* 'some mothers know how to care for their children well'. The optional prefix is parenthesized. Only two of the subjects were female (aged eleven and twenty-six); the ages of the males ranged from twelve to forty-five. None of the rural subjects had ever been to Bangui. Some of the villagers had radios, of course.
25. Two pieces of literature published by L'Assemblée Spirituelle Nationale des Bahá'ís de la République Centrafricaine were examined for instances of number agreement: *A Tene ti Nzapa* (1989) and *Vingö lö tí Nzapá* (1990). They are of approximately equal size, having about 9,500 words in them. Only the first is characterized by number agreement, but it has only one instance (p. 47): *a sengue azo aga a kota azo* (pl. ordinary people subj.pref-come pl. big people) 'ordinary people become important people'. It is interesting that the word 'people', *azo*, is written solid, but that the prefix with the words *sengue* and *kota* is separated. One assumes the operation of some folklinguistic justification. See note 9. (The diacritics in the second publication indicate tone.)

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