

Morphological and syntactic interference in the context of Franco-Congolese bilingualism

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of language contacts in the linguistic setting of the Congo, resulting in various changes. The given work stresses the idea of the relationship between hybrid languages and the role of interference on morphological and syntactic levels of two languages: French and Kikongo. The authors analyze the theoretical ground of contact linguistics formation process, reveal the degree of interference influence on the linguistic and cultural state of two languages, examine the most prominent features of noun functioning peculiarities in French and Kikongo due to the interaction of the languages in contact.

Key-words: language contact, interference, bilingualism, language interaction, French, Kikongo, noun

Introduction

In Central Africa, there are only a few countries, but among them, there is a real giant – the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is the third largest country in Africa and the largest one in the sub-Saharan region. In the 19th century, researchers mapped the inner regions of Africa. By the end of the 19th-century European countries divided the region into colonies. In the Equatorial part of Africa, they had possessions of several European countries: Belgium, Portugal, and France. This explains the existence of two countries with the title “Congo.” One of them, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) used to be a colony of Belgium and the other, The Republic of Congo, belonged to France (Baghana, Prokhorova, et al. 2018: 29).

This region is characterized by an extremely high cultural and linguistic diversity, which implies bilingualism (or multilingualism) of its population. Such diversity inevitably leads to contact between languages. The outcome of language contacts varies and depends on many parameters, including the duration and intensity of contacts between the groups of speakers, the degree of similarity between the languages in contact and the functions that their communication performs in the society (Baghana, Porkhomovskiy, 2018: 14).

Therefore, the analysis of deviations and changes in the grammatical system of the French language in the Congo is rather topical as the specific elements of the Congolese French language are often the result of its contact with local languages. This language interaction has distinguishing features from the Central French version. Otherwise, there would be a process of so-called *pidginization*, in which the grammatical structure of the language changes towards its isolation. This process is accompanied by a reduction at various levels (phonological, lexical and grammatical) as a result of fragmentary and incorrect assimilation of a language by native speakers of another language (or other languages).

Today, the identification of the main trends in the evolution of the French language in its grammatical system is quite a difficult task since the degree of deviation may vary depending on the level of use. Literary language is characterized by infrequent use of uncodified grammatical features, as it focuses on the literary norm of France. On the contrary, the spoken language has a complex of such features.

The greatest number of changes is observed in *mesolect and basilect* French. (Baghana 2017 : 55-58; Massoumou, Queffelec, 2007: 58).

Methods

This article is based on the systematic approach of cross-cultural analysis. Due to the cognitive cross-disciplinary basis of work we take into consideration the anthropocentric methodology research, linguistic and non-linguistic information, intercultural analyses, especially dealing with the problem of mentality and language correlation.

Results and discussions

In the research work, we consider the morphological and syntactic features of the Congolese version of the French language, paying special attention to the phenomena that arose as a result of the interfering influence of Kikongo on the French language. The analysis of the existing studies on the phenomena of morphology and syntax shows that, on the one hand, many researchers focus on identification of common characteristics of the Central French and African languages, on the other hand, they try to highlight those features that determine the actual Congolese specificity of the French language.

In the given research, we pay special attention to the way the noun functions in the French and Kikongo. The starting point of this analysis can be the detection and analysis of deviations in gender and number categories. To be able to explain the peculiar features of a noun in the Congolese version of the French language, it is necessary to analyze a noun in the Kikongo language first. In Kikongo, a noun can have a nominal and verbal-nominal base. The nominal base, in its turn, is divided into two types, according to the functions performed – ‘actually nominal’ and ‘adjectival.’ In order for a word to be assigned to this group, a certain prefix is required, for example, *ntu – mu-ntu – la tête – "head," yala – bu-yala – la prostitué – "prostitute."*

Verbal-nominal base involves the transfer of a verb into the noun category by substitutively adding a certain prefix, for example, *tuma – envoyer – "send" gives ki-tumi – l'expéditeur – "sender," bi-tumi – les expéditeurs – "senders."*

The gender of nouns for the Congolese learning French is quite a problem because in the French language this linguistic phenomenon is difficult to systematize, although presented by a simple opposition of male / female when the first is marked and the second is not. Feminine nouns are formed by variations of the masculine form. This categorization defines, in general terms the concept of gender. There is also a semantic categorization consisting of the double opposition of the animate / inanimate object, male / female gender. According to some researchers, the generic opposition is not quite logical and motivated, even taking into account the fact that among the animate, there are relations of opposition between sex and gender. In one category, contrary to morphological features, some female words refer to the male (*une sentinelle – "watchman" refers to the man*). Other words, belonging to the category of masculine gender, can denote a female person, for example, *une vedette – "star," une connaissance – "acquaintance"* are applied to both men and women. In other cases, the female gender is related to the semantic aspect of gender: *filles / garçon – "girl / boy," père / mère – "father / mother"*.

The category of gender in African languages is a phenomenon that is fundamentally different from gender in French. This issue was mentioned by many foreign scientists and was the object of linguistic analysis. The grammatical category of gender theoretically assumes the division of nouns into nominal classes, in accordance with the characteristic features that appear in agreement with adjectives and affixes (prefixes, suffixes).

Among the Russian linguists, this problem was studied by such scholars as V. A. Vinogradov, A. D. Lutskov, N. In. Okhotina, I. N. Toporova, and others. So, according to I. N. Toporova, the gender-to-class ratio in Bantu languages is an important theoretical problem, and the existence of differences between gender and class cannot be underestimated. For generic systems of the Indo-European languages, a sign of correlation with sex (masculine – feminine), animation – inanimation, personality – impersonality is a marked one. Bantu gender is irrelevant, while there are such characteristics as the assessment and locations which do not have any relation to ancestral systems (Toporova, 1997: 29-30). The Bantu languages are well known for their rich noun class systems; nouns are divided into classes that exclude the concept of gender. (Bostoen, Van del Velde, 2018: 6). It is more useful to define a class as one of the different models of matching, with the real prefix of an independent noun used as a formal sign for the whole matching model (Baghana 2017: 46-52). The distribution of words of foreign origin by nominal classes of Bantu languages is still quite a disputable process in which there is no complete clarity. The fact is that the semantics that once served as the basis for the formation of nominal classes, to date, has been so blurred that when a new word enters its vocabulary, the determining factor of its group identification, as a rule, is its prefix marking, while the absence of a nominal prefix is also considered an indicator of the class. However, despite the weakening of the semantic criterion, in several nominal classes, semantics is clearly expressed. As stressed by A.D. Lutskov, formerly nominal classes used to retain semantic uniformity and proof of this is the existence of several nouns whose meaning can guarantee in advance which class they will enter in a particular Bantu language, even if the forms of the words vary a lot (Lutskov, 1997 : 15-17). We will not describe in detail all the nominal classes of Bantu since this is not the point of our study, but only note that in Kikongo there are 17 of them. The system of nominal classes in Kikongo is represented in Table 1 (Makouta-Mboukou 1973).

Table 1

Nominal classes in Bantu languages (Kikongo)

1. <i>mu-longi</i>	2. <i>ba-longi</i>	<i>le pasteur / les pasteurs – «a priest - priests»</i>
3. <i>mi-ti</i>	-	<i>les arbres– «trees»</i>
4. <i>di-passa</i>	5. <i>ma-passa</i>	<i>la jumeau / les jumeaux– «a twin / twins»</i>
6. <i>ki-zengi</i>	7. <i>bi-zengi</i>	<i>un fou / les fous – «a fool / fools»</i>
8. <i>n-dilu</i>	9. <i>n-dilu</i>	<i>façon(s) de manger– «manner to eat»</i>
10. <i>lu-se</i>	11. <i>tu-se</i>	<i>le visage / les visages– «a face / faces»</i>
12. <i>bu-zolo</i>	-	<i>l'amour – «love»</i>
13. <i>ku-vumbuka</i>	-	<i>le fait de se réveiller- «get up in the morning.»</i>

14. <i>fi</i> -(mwa) <i>fi</i> -muana	-	<i>un petit homme</i> – «little person»
15. <i>gu</i> - uma	-	<i>endroit plat</i> – «enclosed space »
16. <i>mu</i> -uma	-	<i>endroit fermé</i> – «confined space»
17. <i>ku</i> -uma	-	<i>endroit éloigné</i> – «remote location»

Thus, the five named classes in Kikongo have one kind of prefix, and the rest correspond to the singular and plural. As we have mentioned before, there is no concept of gender in the designation of classes in Kikongo. If the word means a living being, male or female, it refers to a particular class, not to gender. Both words (masculine and feminine) have the same prefix, while in French, each definition receives a different article.

Examples:

mu-kento-la femme - "woman", *mu-bakala* – *l'homme* – "man", *ki-buti* – *la procréatrice*–" parent", *ki-nuani* – *le combattant*–" warrior", *mu* – *kazi* – *la femme*–"wife", *mu* - *lumi* – *le mari*–"husband".

In general, it is possible to say that the Congolese is in a situation of a dual system, the French system, containing the morphological and semantic features of the gender, and the system of Congolese languages, devoid of all the morphological features of the gender, where its every concept is expressed by means of categorical alternation (*Lingala mobali / mwasi* – "man/woman", *Swahili bwana/ bibi* – "man / woman"), and for inanimate objects by attaching these nouns to what is meant. Thus, the opposition of *boeuf / vache* - "beef / cow" in the French language and the Bantu languages is expressed in different ways, which is represented in Table 2 (Makouta-Mboukou).

Table 2

Opposition cock / chicken in French and in Congolese

French	<i>boeuf</i>	<i>vache</i>
Lingala	<i>ngombe ya</i>	<i>ngombe ya mwasi</i>
	<i>mobali</i>	
Kikong	<i>ngombi ya</i>	<i>ngombi ya nkento</i>
o	<i>bakala</i>	
	↑ <i>vache (de)</i> <i>mâle</i> – «male cow »	↑ <i>vache (de) femelle</i> – « <i>female cow.</i> »

In the speech of a French-speaking Congolese, the system is subject to two trends: compliance with the norms of the standard French and their audit. The former manifests in the speech of those who have a good command of French; the latter is in the speech of the rest of the population. More precisely, the latter implies the replacement of standard morphological signs by new ones and restructuring of the rules of negotiation. On the one hand, such nouns as *rédacteur* – *editor*, *inventeur* – "inventor" *pêcheur* "sinner," *the auteur* – *author*, *loup* – *wolf*, *professeur* – "teacher", *mineur*, "the miner" are often used in the form of the feminine – *rédacteuse* is *rédactrice*, *inventeuse* is *inventrice*, *pêcheuse* is *pêcheresse*, *autrice* is *auteur*, *loupe* instead of *the louve*, *professeur* – *professeure* instead, *mineuse* is *mineur*. On the other

hand, the defining elements of a noun (adjective, article, pronoun) are not subject to the matching rules of the standard French. The difference between the French and Kikongo systems explains the uncertainty experienced by the Congolese, moving to the French language, where there is a clear opposition of the male / female gender. This distinction is not peculiar to the speakers of the Kikongo language also because their linguistic mentality is based on the concept of a 'fictitious gender'. It is possible to emphasize that one of the main difficulties faced by the Congolese in the implementation of French speech is the designation of the gender of nouns. Speakers of French origin do not realize the effort Africans have to take to speak their language. They do not understand why Africans say: *on achète un robe* – "buy a dress"; *je regarde la télé allemande* – "I watch German TV programs"; *je veux du banane* – "I want a banana", *la petite frère de Papa* – "younger brother of the father," *j'ai vu cette mari* – "I saw this man", *pas correctement toutes les mots* – "all right" (Makouta-Mboukou).

G. Sankoff underlines that "in discussing lexical aspects of languages in contact, it is overwhelmingly clear that the major process involved is borrowing" (Sankoff, 2001: 11). Lexical borrowing is inevitably accompanied with morphological adaptation in the recipient language (Baghana, Khapilina, et al. 2014: 9). Thus, when Kikongo words enter the Congolese French, nouns usually take the form (gender) of the corresponding French equivalent. At the same time, the vocabulary is often marked twice – with a French article and a Congolese prefix. Perhaps this is a consequence of the influence of the Kikongo system, as like all Bantu languages, it is characterized by reduplication, for example: *lu-tambi lu – fioti – le pied le petit* – "a small foot." This pattern is deeply rooted in the minds of Africans, and therefore, using borrowings from the Kikongo, the Congolese use native patterns in their French speech.

Examples:

- *un ki-sansi* – "instrument" – *un instrument - un* – French indefinite article masculine noun panier, and *ki* – prefix with the corresponding word from the kikongo;
- *Une di-kondi* – "banana" – *une banane une* – is a feminine article with the French word *banane*, and *di* is the prefix of the noun Kikongo.

It should be noted that such a doubling of markings is inherent in the speech of all segments of the population. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the article cannot match all the meanings of the word. For example, *moukanda* takes the form of a feminine article, as it corresponds to the French word *une lettre* – "letter." However, *moukanda* can also have the meaning of the words *un livre* – "book," *un ouvrage* – "work," which, as we see, are masculine. In this case, a question arises: "How to determine whose gender of the two corresponding equivalents the borrowed noun will acquire?" (Makouta-Mboukou, 1973:179).

Some problems also arise in the use of designations of professions.

Often the French themselves make mistakes specifying the kind of this category of words; no wonder Africans make the same mistakes too. Such words as *professeur* – "teacher," *écrivain* – "writer," *pasteur* – "pastor", in the Congo in the designation of the female profession are used with the female form of the article, possessive or demonstrative pronoun. In the French language, these words can only be masculine, but the Congolese label them according to whom they mean – a man or a woman, for example:

Ma professeur enseigne bien – "my teacher (she) teaches well";

C'est une bonne pasteur qui est arrivée dans notre église – "the woman pastor who came to our Church is very good",

- *Malanda est une écrivain congolaise* – "Malanda is a Congolese writer (she)" (Baghana 2004 : 297-298).

In the speech of the Congolese the gender of the French noun is marked twice because the word itself and the determinant are perceived as a whole unit. For example, in the case of *le Larousse*, the article in the understanding of Africans is inseparable from the word, in connection with which you can find the following implementation: *voici votre le Larousse* – “here is your Larousse.” Or *ce l’abbé réside à l’église Sainte-Anne* – “this Abbot is in the Church of St. Anne.” For most Congolese these words are an indivisible whole, requiring an additional defining token. They are partly right, since words are syntactically indivisible and, according to linguists, represent a single syntactic formation, that is, a nominative form that performs a syntactic function in a sentence. The Congolese certainly add the defining word by mistake, because from the syntactical point of view, this formation already has it. Thus, in terms of morphology, we observe the process of agglutination, in which the French determinants and predeterminants become part of the noun in the recipient language, for example, *l’* in the word *lamulu* – (*Lingala*) – “love”, or *du* in the words *ducafé* – “coffee”, *duthé* – “tea” (Baghana 2004 : 298).

With regard to the concept of plurality, the category of number in the French language is based on the semantic opposition of singularity and plurality. The singular number denotes one object or set of objects, and the plural number denotes several objects or several sets. The plural of nouns in French is formed synthetically by adding endings - *s*, - *x* to the noun in the singular form, and analytically using different forms of articles *le, la / les; un, une / des*, and also by means of coordination with verbs and adjectives.

In Bantu languages, as a rule, the numerical characteristic at the formal level is marked in the prefix of the name and in the negotiators. In the vast majority of languages, a prefix is the formal means of expression. V. A. Vinogradov notes that “the brightest feature of class systems of all types is the conjugation of nominal classes with the category of number, and it is not accidental that the presence of paired indicators forming a complex sign of the nominal class is interpreted by many linguists, studying African languages, as one of the diagnostic signs of the class system. It is the category of number that can be considered as an inflectional grammatical component of semantics along with lexical and classification systems” (Vinogradov 1997:16).

The category of number in French is always associated with the category of gender. The Congolese situation is a triple opposition: masculine / feminine, masculine / plural, feminine / plural. Moreover, every time speakers have to choose between *le/la, un/une* on the one hand, and between *le / les, la / les* or *un / des, une / des* on the other. This choice is always difficult, as it is necessary to move to the triple opposition. The transition from one system to another is accompanied by changes in the beginning and ending of the word.

At the beginning of the word replacement of the indicators and the multiplicity of Bantu language to the French indicators occurs. Thus, the word *bambangui* – “brothers” in the Congo can take the form of *les mpangui* and *les bambangui*.

When forming a plural form, the end of the word in the Bantu languages remains unchanged – *mapassa* – “twins,” while in French the endings -*s* or -*x*: *les mapassas* are added to it. But in the Congolese context, these endings are not always added.

Thus, it is possible to distinguish three types of plural formation in the Congolese version of the French language:

- the Congolese type, when the French words form the plural with the help of the Bantu class indicator: *ba - soucis* – “troubles”;

- the French type, involving the addition of the plural ending and the corresponding article to the Congolese word: *les tékés* – “representatives of the Northern tribes”;
- a mixed type that combines the features of both systems – prefixes of kikongo and French article – *les batéké(s)*.

The results of our research allow us to confirm the existence of Afro-French version of gender and number of nouns. The Afro-French gender is a system that includes a double exponent of the gender, a combination of a French article and an African prefix. So, *un dikulu (munukutuba)* – “leg” includes the French definite article masculine *un* and the African masculine prefix *di-*; *un mobébisi* – “waster” contains the French masculine article *un* and the African prefix masculine *mo*; *un musumbi (Kikongo)* – “buyer” – in French the article *un* and the African prefix *mu*.

The number category is also characterized by the Afro-French double designation, for example:

- *des makulu(s)* – French article and African prefix *ma-*;
- *des babébisi(s)* – French article *des* and African prefix *ba-*,
- *des basumbi(s)* – French article *des* and African prefix *ba-*.

Words beginning with *n-* do not change in the plural, but are only preceded by French articles, for example:

- *un ngembo – des ngembo-(lari, kikongo)* – “music lovers”;
- *un ngoki – des ngoki – (Lingala)* – “Cayman”;
- *un ngola – des ngola – (munukutuba)* – “soma,”
- *un ntsambi – des ntsambi – (kikongo, Larry)* – “musical instruments.”

One of the most common means of plural formation in the Congo among young people is the prefix *ba-*. It is noteworthy that the founder of this tool is the famous Congolese singer Coffey Olomide. This prefix is often used in areas where the predominant language is English – Henze, Talangai. Often you can hear phrases like *ba filles (bafille) sont arrivées* – “the girls came”; *ba petits (bapetit) ont pleuré* – “the kids were crying.” *Ba*, in this case, is used instead of the French articles *les / des*.

The group of French nouns, forming the plural by adding *-s*, does not constitute a special problem. The situation turns difficult when there is a change in the endings, for example:

- French words ending in *-al* can change plural form in their ending to *aux* or *-als* (if the speaker wants so), as in *– bocal → bocals/bocaux* – “banks,” *cheval → chevaux/chevaux* – “horses”;
- words in *-ail* in the area of central part of Africa ending in the plural-form *-ails* (in addition to the nine exceptions which end in *-aux*), the Congolese version of the optional *fy* can be as *-ails*, and in *-aux – corail → corails/coraux* – “coral”, *travail → travaux/travaux* – “works”, *'éventail → éventails/éventaux* – “fan”;
- the words in *-ou*, in the Central French version, ending in *-s* (except for the seven words ending in *-aux*), in the Congo language, can either take the ending *-s* or *-x*, depending on the habit of the speaker: *pou → pous/poux* – “louse”, *clou → clous/cloux* – “nails”;
- the words denoting abstract concepts are usually used in the plural by the Congolese: *des bonnes ententes* – “good understanding, the agreement,” *des imprudences* – “negligence,” *des patiences* – “patience.”

Conclusion

To sum up, Bantu languages, in particular, Kikongo, exert interfering influence on morphological, syntactic, lexical and phonetic levels of the French

language in the Congo. It is not possible to detect and analyze all cases of interference, but the grammatical features allow us to relate the existing deviations both to the problem of interference when speakers treat certain features of L2 by analogy with structures of their L1 and to the problem of acquisition and mastering of the French language by Africans. Grammatical differences are often not only associated with linguistic interference but are the result of a low level of language proficiency.

We can also confirm the formation of the Congolese version of the French language. The most frequent and visible influence of African languages can be seen at the lexical level. Lexical interference occurs primarily due to the literal translation of words related to Congolese realia.

The interfering influence of local languages on French largely depends on the particular linguistic area the speaker lives in. The degree of influence of Congolese languages is also related to various social factors, such as property status, level of education, etc. A very significant factor leading to interference is that many Africans initially learn the European language in its African interpretation; that is, they do not have access to the European language norm. The causes of interference are based on the key specific statements: a phenomenon existing in French is inexistent in African languages; a phenomenon in African languages are absent in French; French and African languages have similar but not equal phenomena. It is these differences in the systems of the French and African languages that underlie many cases of interference.

It should be noted that the consequences of interference occur, as a rule, in speech and violate the speech norm of the French language of France, but they are not reflected in the literary version of the French language of the Congo. On the other hand, at the level of the Congolese vernacular, there have been some changes in the language system itself, as the corresponding transformations become regular and within this vernacular are not considered incorrect. Thus, the formation of a special Congolese vernacular is undergoing in contact situation and under the interference of contacting languages. In the absence of a more or less adequate policy for the teaching of French in the Congo, the gap between the standard and the local norm continues to widen.

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