

**ACQUISITION OF LINGALA TENSE/ASPECT  
BY AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS<sup>1</sup>**

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In the acquisition of tense/aspect, no study in the literature is reported on the acquisition of Lingala tense/aspect by non-African learners. This paper discusses the results of a pilot study, undertaken in 1995, on the acquisition of Lingala as a foreign language by American students. Twenty undergraduate students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) were involved. The results showed that the overall rate of accuracy was below 59% and the most difficult tense/aspect types were the remote past {-a} and the present habitual {-àkà}, regardless of the number of semesters of exposure to Lingala.

**1. Introduction**

This paper is a preliminary study of the acquisition of Lingala tense/aspect by American students learning Lingala as a foreign language at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). By acquisition, I mean the correct usage of tense/aspect in Lingala as a native speaker would in a given context. To measure this, I conducted a written translation of 36 English sentences (6 per tense/aspect type) into Lingala. The focus of the test was on tense/aspect. The score was the frequency count of correct translations. The English sentences were printed in a booklet form, one sentence on each page; the test was taken during class time, 50 minutes. There were 20 subjects and they formed two groups of 10: group 1 was in its fourth semester of Lingala and group 2 in its second semester. I used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data. The independent variables, group type and tense/aspect type, were in a nominal scale, the dependent variable, score, was in an interval scale.

There are at least six tenses<sup>2</sup> in Lingala, five of which are denoted by suffixes to the verb and one by a prefix. The immediate past,<sup>3</sup> the imperfect, and the remote past of Lingala have no correspondences in English, whereas the use of the remaining tense/aspects are the same in the two languages. The progressive aspect is similar to that of English. The Lingala tense/aspect markers (in boldface) are:

I. -i 'present': This tense is used to express an event that has just been completed before the moment of speaking, i.e., within minutes of the moment of speaking. It cannot be used for events that occurred earlier in the day. In Bantu syntax it is called the 'immediate past'. For example,

- (1) He is fine.  
Ye a-zal-**i** malamu.
- (2) I just came from the market.  
Ngai na-ut-**i** na zanda.

II. **-aki** 'past': It is very restricted in standard Lingala and is used to describe events which have happened within a day with regard to the time of the utterance. It is called the 'imperfect' in Bantu syntax. For example,

- (3) I went to Chicago this morning.  
Ngai na-kend-**aki** Chicago lelo na ntongo.

III. **-áká** 'past': This tense is used to express events that occurred anytime in the past, i.e., beyond 24 hours, but whose effect is still being felt or whose relation to a present event can still be talked about. The event may be interrupted with a subsequent past action. It is the 'simple past' in Bantu syntax. For example,

- (4) I went to Peoria yesterday.  
Ngai na-kend-**áká** Peoria lobi.

IV. **-a** 'past': This tense is used to describe completed events that occurred in the distant past and for which there is, generally, no future recourse. The event, unlike the simple past, cannot be interrupted. In Bantu syntax this tense is called the 'remote past'. For example,

- (5) Our dog has a broken leg.  
Mbwa ya biso e-bukan-**a** lokolo.

V. **-àkà** 'habitual': Used to refer to re-occurring events in the present. This suffix is called the 'present habitual' in Bantu syntax. For example,

- (6) I speak Lingala every day.  
Ngai na-lob-**àkà** Lingala mikolo minso.

VI. **-ko-** 'future': This form is the most general future tense in Lingala and is used to describe events that will take place after the moment of speaking, even if an event will occur 3 minutes later. The event to be described must be probable. In Bantu syntax, this is called the 'simple future'. For example,

- (7) I will go to Chicago.  
Ngai na-**ko-**kende Chicago.

VII. **auxiliary + infinitive of main verb** 'present progressive': The auxiliary is **ko-zala** 'to be', which must be inflected in the present tense followed by the infinitival form of the main verb. This aspect describes an event at the moment of speaking.

The results showed that the groups were not dissimilar and an effect size for tense/aspect type showed that the difference in the group scores was statistically significant. Effect size also showed that length of exposure to a language in the classroom is not statistically significant and could therefore be considered not a critical factor in foreign language acquisition.

## 2. Literature review

To my knowledge, no study on the acquisition of tense/aspect in Lingala by Americans has not been reported in the acquisition literature. Although comparative studies of tense and aspect have been reported in the literature (Bardovi-Harlig 1992), most of these studies have compared English tense/aspect with tense/aspect in Asian and European languages, as in Andrews 1992 and Dhongade 1984. The two related to African languages are Machobane 1985 and Botne 1981, which are descriptive studies. As can be seen, nothing has been reported in the literature with regard to acquisition of tense/aspect of African languages. Some descriptive studies of tense/aspect of Bantu languages have been reported in the literature (Besha 1977, Bybee 1994, Johnson 1977, Mufwene 1978).

## 3. The study

### 3.1 Statement of purpose

In SLA studies, the focus has nearly always been on the acquisition of English or some European languages by Africans. To my knowledge, studies in the acquisition of tense/aspect in African languages, and especially in Lingala, by Americans has not yet been undertaken. Yet, Lingala and many African languages are taught in many universities in the United States, and Peace Corps personnel are taught Lingala and other African languages when they are to serve in Africa. I hope such a study can help improve teaching not only in the U.S. and Europe, but also in Africa, since it concerns classroom foreign language teaching in both cases.

### 3.2 Research questions

The main research question is: How do American students learn Lingala tense/aspect. The other questions that follow are: (a) What tense/aspect type(s) will be difficult for them? (b) What tense/aspect type(s) will be easy for them? (c) What learning strategies do they employ? My guess/hypothesis will be that they will transfer their English (L1) tense/aspect usage into Lingala (L2).

In Lingala, there are three past-tense markers as shown in table 1: one for past events within a day, {-aki}; one for past events beyond 24 hours, {-áká}; and another for past events in the distant past, {-a}. In these cases, English will use one past tense, {past}. It is the use of the appropriate tense/aspect marker in Lingala that will be difficult for the subjects, because in English we do not need to make the three distinctions in the past, as in Lingala. With regard to the structure, the three affixes are suffixed to the verb, as in most English verbs, so this will not be a problem for the subjects, e.g., walk + {past} gives "walked" and 'bin'+ {-áká} gives 'bináká', the equivalent of "dance" + {past} = "danced". The main problem for the subjects will be the semantic distinction of the Lingala tense/aspect markers and the tones, especially the past tense ones. The closest past-tense/aspect form between English and Lingala is {-a}, hence it is likely to be the source of L1 transfer.

**Table 1**  
Tense/aspect types in English and Lingala

	ENGLISH	LINGALA
PRESENT	-s, - $\emptyset$	-i -àkà
PAST	-ed/vowel change/ $\emptyset$	-a -áká
FUTURE	will, V-ing	-aki -ko-

Since Lingala is a tonal language and differs from English with regard to the use of the immediate past {-i}, imperfect {-aki}, simple past {-áká}, and remote past {-a}, the prediction is that most of the students will use these tense/aspects incorrectly in Lingala, e.g., the immediate past will be used to express English simple present and present perfect. The simple past {-áká} and the present habitual {-àkà} tense/aspect markers are distinguished by high and low tones, respectively (see Appendix 1 for Lingala sentences used in the translation and their English equivalents).

### 3.3 Research design

The research project was based on American students learning Lingala at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The research was an intact group design — one group of subjects with two semesters of Lingala and another group with four semesters of Lingala. Both groups had the same instructor in the course of their learning Lingala. This design allowed me to make between-group and within-group comparisons. I also made causal inferences with regard to length of exposure influencing the acquisition of Lingala tense/aspect. The dependent variable was the test score from the translation test and the independent variable was the group type. The independent variable was measured as a nominal scale and the dependent variable as an interval scale. The moderator variable was the Lingala tense/aspect type.

### 3.4 Subjects

There were 2 groups of learners: group 1 was in its fourth semester of Lingala, group 2 was in its second semester. The total number of learners was 20 — 10 in each group. They were all native speakers of American English; all the subjects except two in group 1 had never had exposure to Lingala prior to their taking the Lingala class. One in group 1 had had exposure to Kiswahili before taking Lingala. There were 7 male and 13 female subjects in total: group 1 had 5 males and 5 females, group 2 had 2 males and 8 females.

### 3.5 Test design

I collected my data through a translation task; subjects translated 36 English sentences into Lingala. These sentences were printed in a booklet with one sentence on each page. Subjects worked at their own pace, but they had one class period (50-60 minutes) to translate all 36 sentences. Since subjects were bound by a time

constraint (50 minutes), I chose six short sentences of each tense/aspect type, using verbs and other vocabulary items they were familiar with. This was to avoid their concentrating on vocabulary instead of tense/aspect. The English sentences and their Lingala translations are given in Appendix 1; the tense/aspect markers in Lingala are in boldface. The test was scored by the class instructor and this experimenter.

### 3.6 Stimuli/materials

The sentences subjects saw were in English (the source language) and they had to translate them into Lingala (the target language). The sentences were printed in a booklet with various randomization orders for each subject. Each page had an English sentence and a line below it for the Lingala translation, as shown in Appendix 2.

### 3.7 Method/procedure

Subjects were given printed instructions on the cover page of the booklet. Sentences were randomly ordered for each subject and the booklets randomly presented to the subjects. The randomizing was to prevent subjects from trying to guess what the test was about and to eliminate their having to translate all the sentences in the same order. Presenting the sentences one at a time prevented subjects from seeing all the sentences at one time; this procedure also prevented subjects from making use of previous sentences, and the shuffling avoided imposing the same order of translation on all the subjects.

### 3.8 Data analysis<sup>4</sup>

To grade the translations, I coded a correct translation of verb usage as 1 and a wrong one as 0. The score for each subject was the total frequency count of 1s and each subject could score between 0 and 36 points. The group score was the sum of the total of 1s for each subject in the group. With {-aka}, I considered a translation as correct when the appropriate tone for the tense/aspect type was marked but with the others, tone was not considered because it is not phonemic.

I used SPSS statistics software program for the descriptive and inferential statistics. I compared the translation scores of the two groups to see if length of exposure to a language in the classroom is a critical factor in acquisition. I calculated effect size for gender, group, and tense/aspect type. I also calculated the reliability coefficients for various variables under consideration as well as the rate of accuracy of tense/aspect usage. The dependent variable was the score on the translation test and the major independent variable was group type.

## 3.9 Results

The results are summarized below in Tables 2-7.

**Table 2**  
Distribution of scores for all subjects

TENSE/ASPECT TYPE	M	SD	RANGE	k <sup>1</sup>	SKEW-NESS	KURTOSIS	RATE CORRECT	RELIABILITY
OVERALL	17.45	6.79	8-30	36	.10	-1.12	48.5%	.87
TA1 {-i}	4.15	1.04	2-6	6	-.02	-.18	75.0%	.26
TA2 {-aki}	3.55	2.06	0-6	6	-.32	-1.12	59.2%	.79
TA3 {-áká}	3.70	1.53	0-6	6	-.92	.51	61.7%	.57
TA4 {-a}	.90	1.25	0-4	6	1.28	.63	15.0%	.65
TA5 {-àkà}	1.90	1.97	0-6	6	.70	-.73	31.7%	.80
TA6 {-ko-}	3.25	1.83	0-6	6	-.58	-.34	54.2%	.71

<sup>1</sup> k is the maximum number of points that an individual can obtain on the test.  
N = 20.

**Table 3**  
Distribution of scores by group and tense/aspect type

TENSE/ASPECT TYPE	M	SD	RANGE	k <sup>1</sup>	SKEW-NESS	KURTOSIS	RATE CORRECT	RELIABILITY
GROUP 1 (4th semester; n = 10)								
OVERALL	17.70	7.76	8-30	36	.03	-1.35	49.2%	.90
TA1 {-i}	4.00	.82	3-5	6	.00	-1.39	66.7%	.04
TA2 {-aki}	3.30	2.45	0-6	6	-.21	-1.71	55.0%	.89
TA3 {-áká}	3.90	1.91	0-6	6	-1.37	1.01	65.0%	.74
TA4 {-a}	1.30	1.49	0-4	6	.86	-.78	21.7%	.68
TA5 {-àkà}	1.90	2.42	0-6	6	.96	-1.05	31.7%	.92
TA6 {-ko-}	3.30	2.00	0-6	6	-.83	-.23	55.0%	.78
GROUP 2 (2nd semester; n = 10)								
OVERALL	17.20	6.07	8-27	36	.19	-.95	47.8%	.85
TA1 {-i}	4.30	1.25	2-4	6	-.28	-.07	71.7%	.48
TA2 {-aki}	3.80	1.69	1-6	6	-.13	-.99	63.3%	.59
TA3 {-áká}	3.50	1.08	2-5	6	.00	-1.03	58.3%	.37
TA4 {-a}	.50	.85	0-26	6	1.36	.11	8.3%	.44
TA5 {-àkà}	1.90	1.52	0-4	6	-.26	-1.71	31.7%	.52
TA6 {-ko-}	3.20	1.75	0-6	6	-.38	.33	53.3%	.68

<sup>1</sup> k is the maximum number of points that an individual can obtain on the test.

**Table 4**  
Distribution of scores by sex and tense/aspect type

TENSE/ASPECT TYPE	M	SD	RANGE	k <sup>a</sup>	SKEW-NESS	KURTOSIS	RATE CORRECT	RELIABILITY
MALES (n = 7)								
OVERALL	17.29	6.16	10-24	36	-.12	-2.34	48.0%	.82
TA1 {-i}	3.86	.90	3-5	6	.35	-1.82	64.3%	-.07
TA2 {-aki}	3.29	2.29	0-6	6	-.14	-1.10	54.8%	.84
TA3 {-áká}	4.00	1.00	2-5	6	-1.40	3.00	66.7%	-.51
TA4 {-a}	1.29	1.60	0-4	6	1.05	-.38	21.5%	.78
TA5 {àkà}	1.86	1.95	0-5	6	.84	-.79	31.0%	.77
TA6 {-ko-}	3.00	2.38	0-6	6	-.31	-1.59	50.0%	.86
FEMALES (n = 13)								
OVERALL	17.54	7.34	8-30	36	.15	-1.03	48.7%	.90
TA1 {-i}	4.31	1.11	2-6	6	-.29	.48	71.8%	.35
TA2 {-aki}	3.69	2.02	0-6	6	-.44	-1.01	61.5%	.76
TA3 {-áká}	3.54	1.76	0-6	6	-.67	-.22	59.0%	.76
TA4 {-a}	.69	1.03	0-3	6	1.27	.46	11.5%	.52
TA5 {àkà}	1.92	2.06	0-6	6	.73	-.55	32.0%	.82
TA6 {-ko-}	3.38	1.56	0-6	6	-.77	1.19	56.3%	.56

<sup>a</sup> k is the maximum number of points that an individual can obtain on the test.

**Table 5**  
Effect size for tense/aspect type

	-i	-aki	-áká	-a	-àkà	-ko-
-i		.39	.37	1.15*	1.49*	.64
-aki			.08	1.60*	.82*	.15
-áká				2.01*	1.03*	.27
-a					.62*	1.53*
-àkà						.71*
-ko-						

\* The effect size difference is at least half a standard deviation, hence of practical significance.

**Table 6**  
Effect size for group and sex

		GROUP	
		GROUP 1	GROUP 2
GROUP 1		.07	
GROUP 2			
		SEX	
		MALE	FEMALE
MALE		.04	
FEMALE			

**Table 7**  
Correlations between tense/aspect types

	-i	-aki	-áká	-a	-àkà	-ko-
-i		.57**	.40	-.23	.26	.45*
-aki			.52*	.12	.45*	.63**
-áká				.12	.36	.39
-a					.40	.47*
-àkà						.33
-ko-						

\* Correlation is significant at .05 (2-tailed)

\*\* Correlation is significant at .01 (2-tailed)

#### 4. Summary and discussion

The results of this study show that length of exposure to a language in the classroom is not necessarily a critical factor in foreign language acquisition. The results in Table 2 show that the overall rate of accuracy for all the subjects was below average and also that the scores were distributed normally (skewness of .10), the negative kurtosis indicates that there were fewer extremely high or low scores than the normal distribution (flat peak), while the positive skewness indicates that the mean was higher than if the distribution were normal. Table 3 shows that the rate of accuracy for the fourth semester students, group 1, was 49% and that of the second semester students was 48%. The accuracy rate ranges from 21% to 66% in group 1 and from 8.3% to 71% in group 2. The reliability estimate of the two groups was acceptable, .90 and .85 for groups 1 and 2 respectively. The scores in groups 1 and 2 were normally distributed except for {-áká} and {-a} in

groups 1 and 2, respectively (normal distribution assumes skewness values of less than +/-1). Table 4 shows that the rate of accuracy for males was 48% and that of females was 49% with scores for both not normally distributed. However, the reliability estimates were acceptable, .82 and .90 for males and females, respectively. Table 5 shows the effect size for the different tense/aspect types while Table 6 shows that there was no significant difference between the two groups or between males and females. Table 7 shows the correlation between the tense/aspect types, the statistically significant correlations were between **-i** and **-aki**; **-i** and **-ko**; **-aki** and **-áká**, **-aki** and **-àkà**; **-aki** and **-ko**; and then between **-a** and **-ko**.

With individual sentences, group 1 had more correct translations (15 sentences) than group 2 (12 sentences); both groups did equally well in the remaining 9 sentences. This result shows that there are great individual differences among the subjects. But when the results are conflated showing group score for tense/aspect type, group 2 outcores group 1 in 3 out of the 6 tense/aspect types used in the translation test (Table 3) and performed equally well in one {-àkà}. The second semester students did better than the fourth semester ones in the 'present tense' or technically the immediate past. This result gives partial support to the assumption that length of exposure to a language favors acquisition. Group 2 subjects did better than group 1 subjects on the immediate past marker, {-i}, maybe because they have retained set phrases in Lingala, since three of the six sentences (1, 4, 5) can be memorized as set phrases. They may have used the syntactic cues better than the group 1 students in the case of the imperfect, {-aki}. With the remote past, {-a}, subjects in group 2 had not studied this tense/aspect type, but all the same they were able to get some correct translations, whereas we would have expected them to get no translation correct. This could be due to the two students who were exposed to Lingala prior to taking this class and the one who had had a class in Kiswahili (a Bantu language, like Lingala). Maybe it is those students who read ahead of the class. We can say that group 1 outperformed group 2 in all tense/aspect types except for the immediate past, {-i} and the imperfect, {-aki}. But overall, the mean for group 1 and group 2 was not statistically significant and this raises serious concerns as to why this was so. This result could be due to the teaching style, presentation of the material in the textbook, or a combination of both. Do the students know English grammar well enough to take advantage of the similarities between the two languages? These are areas that need to be researched.

Subjects could have done better if they had taken advantage of some syntactic cues in translating the past tenses and the present habitual from English into Lingala. For the past tense, we have the time adverbials 'this morning', 'earlier today', 'a while ago', which indicate that the time of the event is within the day, hence the use of {-aki} in Lingala. The time adverbials 'yesterday' and 'last year' in the English sentences indicate that the the time of event was beyond 24 hours, hence expressed by {-áká} in Lingala. The time adverbials 'every day', 'daily', 'weekly' in the English sentences indicated a repeated action, hence expressed by {-àkà} in Lingala. Why did most of the learners not use this important strategy? Perhaps they do not knowhow to make use of them because they

have not been taught by their instructor or because it is not mentioned in the textbook. With the future, some subjects used two tense/aspects: {-ko-} and the present progressive in translating sentences 33 and 35. Since the present progressive can express future time in English, they transferred this idea into Lingala, where unfortunately there is a single future tense/aspect marker, {-ko-}.

On the whole, it is the remote past {-a} that was the most difficult tense/aspect type to translate. This is not surprising because there are no syntactic cues to be used as strategies for this tense/aspect type. {-aki}, which is supposed to be the easiest of the three past forms (always used with a time adverbial indicating that the event is within the day), did not get the best translation, but rather {-áká}, which has some time adverbials that indicate that the time of event is beyond 24 hours, got the most correct translations. The wrong translations in the past tense mainly used {-a} instead of the other two forms. This is also evidence of L1 transfer, since in English the use of time adverbials in a past tense sentence is not very significant, whereas in Lingala it is very significant.

The prediction that subjects will find the past tense/aspect difficult is borne out because most of them knew that the Lingala sentences should be in the past, but determining which tense/aspect type they should be in was a problem for them. So most of them seemed to be guessing, by suffixing one of the three markers they knew to the verbs. Some subjects did not take advantage of syntactic cues in the English sentences. This is either because they did not know their significance, or because the subjects' motivation for learning Lingala was low, or even because they did not understand the sentences in English. The results show that it is the remote past {-a} and the present habitual {-àkà} that are the most difficult tense/aspect types to acquire, the easiest is the immediate past {-i}. The general hierarchy of tense/aspect in a descending order of difficulty is: {-a}, {-àkà}, {-ko-}, {-aki}, {-áká}, {-i}. This order corresponds to the mean score of the tense/aspect types in Table 2 in an ascending order. However, the hierarchy of difficulty by group is: {-a}, {-àkà}, {-ko-}/{-aki}, {-áká}, {-i} for group 1 and {-a}, {-àkà}, {-ko-}, {-áká}, {-aki}, {-i} for group 2. This progression could be followed in teaching, implying that for the 'present' and 'past' tenses, the ones with the higher or highest rate of accuracy should be introduced first. Table 5 shows that the effect size of the mean difference for {-i} and {-àkà}, the present tense markers, is of practical importance, as is that of the past tense markers, {-a}, {-áká}, and {-aki} and these need to be addressed. However, a 2-tailed Pearson correlation (Table 7) shows no statistically significant relationship between the different 'present tenses' ({-i} and {-àkà}), but a significant correlation between the 'past tenses' {-áká} and {-aki}. There is rather a statistically significant relationship between the 'immediate past' {-i} and the 'past' form {-aki}, and also between {-i} and the future {-ko-}. There is also a statistically significant correlation between the 'future' {-ko-} and the 'past' {-aki} and {-a}. The significant correlation between the 'present tense' and the 'past tense' is with {-àkà} and {-aki}. Although it is difficult to say why there is a significant correlation between the tenses, a tentative explanation for the correlation within tenses may be that in the

past tense, some students were making use of the syntactic cues, hence the relationship between their performance with {-aki} and {-áká}.

## 5. Conclusion

The results of the study have shown that (a) in L2 learning L1 transfer is part of the learner's strategy; (b) the rate of accuracy of tense/aspect usage is below average even after three semesters of exposure; (c) the length of exposure to the foreign language is not a crucial factor in proficiency; (d) the level of difficulty is similar for both groups in this study.

## 6. Implications for future research

In the future, it will be good to go through the textbook to see how tense/aspects are presented, audit the classes to see how the instructor teaches tense/aspect and then have a questionnaire and/or interview with learners to see how motivated they are and what they have understood in the class. The same translation test can be given to the Kiswahili classes with the same amount of language exposure to see if the results will be similar, since they are both Bantu languages. For future research, teaching materials could be based on the proposed hierarchy of difficulty, the instructors should be trained to use learning strategies like syntactic cues in their teaching, especially those who are not in linguistics or language-pedagogy programs. Equal sample sizes for males and females for both groups should be used to see if there is any gender effect. Similarly, it would be interesting to see if there is an age effect. The division of the past tense markers into three should be maintained, but the explanation with regard to the meaning should change, especially for {-áká} and {-a}. We could say that {-a} is used to express the result of a past event and {-áká} is used to express the time of an event (when there is a cue) or the result of an event (when there is no cue) beyond 24 hours. This may not solve the problems mentioned above, but could be the beginning of a solution. The term 'imperfect' should not be used for {-aki} because it can confuse the students. It should be called a 'past' tense, and students should be taught to recognize it with the syntactic cues that signal it. As for the 'present', technically called the 'immediate past', it should be presented in two parts: (a) a 'present' tense and (b) 'present perfect', which has a close counterpart in English. If this is done, students could be told that {-i} is used with 'present' tense and with actions that in English are preceded by 'just'. For teaching purposes, it is better to structure the tense/aspects as much as possible to correspond to the L1 categories: present, past, future. This will enable the learners to make use of their previous knowledge in the new learning situation.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the first ALTA Conference held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in April 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Information concerning tense/aspect is taken from Bokamba 1981.

<sup>3</sup> The technical terms used for tense/aspect, e.g. 'immediate past', are those used in Bantu syntax and grammar.

<sup>4</sup> Raw scores for subjects and groups are presented in Appendix 3.

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## APPENDIX

## The English sentences to be translated and their expected Lingala equivalents

**I. Immediate past (-i).**

1. He is fine.  
Ye a-zal-i malamu.
2. I just came from the market.  
Ngai na-ut-i na zanda.
3. Ted hit me.  
Ted a-bet-i ngai
4. Where are you?  
Yo o-zal-i wapi?
5. I love you.  
Ngai na-ling-i yo
6. They just wrote a letter.  
Bango ba-kom-i munkanda

**II. Imperfect (-aki).**

7. I went to Chicago this morning.  
Ngai na-kend-aki Chicago lelo na ntongo.
8. They ate chicken a while ago.  
Bango ba-liy-aki nsoso mwa kala.
9. We bought a car early today.  
Biso to-somb-aki muntoka na ntongo.
10. I taught this morning.  
Ngai na-lakis-aki lelo na ntongo.
11. Ted saw Tisia this morning.  
Ted a-mon-aki Tisia lelo na ntongo.
12. They talked to him earlier today.  
Bango ba-solol-aki na ye lelo na ntongo.

**III. Simple past (-aka).**

13. I went to Peoria yesterday.  
Ngai na-kend-aka Peoria lobi.
14. You taught Lingala last Monday.  
Yo o-lakis-aka Lingala moko moleki/mwa mosala.
15. Lawrence bought beer.  
Lawrence a-somb-aka masanga.
16. Biko and Eyamba wrote to Lawrence.  
Biko na Eyamba ba-komel-aka Lawrence.
17. Moses called home yesterday.  
Moses a-beng-aka mboka lobi.
18. They danced to African music.  
Ba-bin-aka misiki ya afrika.

**IV. Remote past (-a).**

19. Our dog has a broken leg.  
Mbwa ya biso e-bukan-**a** lokolo.
20. Many people went to Chicago.  
Bato mingi ba-kend-**a** Chicago.
21. Who did Lee marry?  
Lee a-bal-**a** nani?
22. Martin Luther King is dead.  
Martin Luther King a-kuf-**a**.
23. Mary divorced Paul.  
Mary a-boy-**a** Paul.
24. The war is finished.  
Bitumba e-sil-**a**.

**V. Present habitual (-aka).**

25. I speak Lingala every day.  
Ngai na-lob-**aka** Lingala mikolo minso.
26. She goes to school every morning.  
Ye a-kend-**aka** sukulu/kelasi ntongo inso.
27. He passes here every day.  
Ye a-lek-**aka** awa mikolo minso.
28. Catrese reads weekly.  
Catrese a-tang-**aka** poso inso.
29. She cooks every day.  
Ye a-lamb-**aka** mikolo minso.
30. You drive your car daily.  
Yo o-kumb-**aka** muntuka mwa yo mikolo minso.

**VI. Simple future (-ko-).**

31. I will go to Chicago.  
Ngai na-**ko**-kende Chicago.
32. She will eat chicken.  
Ye a-**ko**-liya nsoso.
33. I am going to buy a car.  
Ngai na-**ko**-somba muntuka.
34. Will it rain tomorrow?  
Mbula e-**ko**-beta lobi?
35. Is she coming the day after tomorrow?  
Ye a-**ko**-yaa ndele?
36. He will graduate in May.  
Ye a-**ko**-silisa na sanza ya mitano.