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# The diachronic semantics of the Dissociative Past Completive construction in the Kikongo Language Cluster (Bantu)

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**Abstract:** This article aims to give a semantic study of the reflexes of one specific tense/aspect form, namely the so-called *\*-a-B-a* construction, in a cluster of about 40-odd Kikongo language varieties spoken in a wide area around the mouth of the Congo River in Central Africa. We first present a detailed analysis of the multiple uses of these cognate constructions at sentence level, in order to arrive at a formal and semantic reconstruction for the most recent common ancestor of the Kikongo Language Cluster, namely Proto-Kikongo. The analysis departs from the overall aspectual meaning of the linguistic expression in which the tense-aspect construction is used. Therefore, we also take into consideration the contribution of different aspectual tiers, such as lexical and grammatical aspect, adverbials and taxis constructions. Through the discussion of the multiple uses of the *-a-B-a* construction, we argue that its overall meaning is complex, combining both temporal and aspectual semantics. It is furthermore shown that a lexical-aspect distinction between states-of-affairs with transitional versus non-transitional temporal structure is crucial in order to understand the various uses of the *-a-B-a* construction. Methodologically, the formal and semantic reconstruction to Proto-Kikongo are based on a thorough comparison of a multitude of existing data sources, some of which several centuries old, as well as original fieldwork. This bottom-up approach has rarely been pursued over the past half century in Bantu grammatical reconstructions.

**Keywords:** Bantu, Kikongo Language Cluster, Dissociative Past Completive, tense/aspect, lexical aspect, grammatical reconstruction

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# 1 Introduction

This article focuses on a group of cognate tense-aspect (TA) constructions in a large number of closely related Bantu language varieties belonging to the Kikongo Language Cluster (KLC). The language-specific constructions have in common that they all convey the aspectual notion of completion and have a varied range of interpretations depending mainly on the type of predicate used. The construction manifests allomorphy in its prefix slot, which has either the morpheme *-a-* or is unmarked. Both forms have the ending *-a*. The combination of the overt prefix and suffix is the more widespread of the two variants. We therefore call these TA forms the “*-a-B-a* construction”.<sup>1</sup> Constructions that are segmentally similar or identical to this construction are found across Bantu (Nurse 2008a: 82–83). However, they manifest a great deal of semantic variation (Nurse and Philippson 2006: 162; Nurse 2008a: 83; Botne 2014: 18). The *\*-a-B-a* construction has therefore been reconstructed to Proto-Bantu without a well-defined meaning (Meeussen 1967: 113; Nurse 2008a: 279). Nurse (2008a: 279) proposes a “past perfective” *\*-a-B-a* construction for “Proto- or early Bantu”. Meeussen (1967: 113) reconstructs two *\*-a-B-a* forms that are tonally distinct: a “recent imperfective” *\*-a-B-a* conjugation with low-toned prefix, and a “preterite imperfective” *\*-á-B-a* conjugation with a high-toned prefix.<sup>2</sup> Reconstructing the precise meaning of widespread Bantu TA constructions to Proto-Bantu is not only considerably complicated by the sheer vastness of the language family, consisting of more than 500 different language varieties, but also by the relative rareness of solid descriptions of synchronic TA systems, especially in terms of semantic thoroughness. One possible way of coping with this problem is to focus on a smaller subset of Bantu languages whose TA systems are relatively well described, as we do in this article. The present historical-comparative study gives a wide-scale semantic analysis of the *-a-B-a* construction in a group of genealogically closely related Bantu languages, viz. the KLC, resulting in a reconstruction for their most recent common ancestor, viz. Proto-Kikongo. The KLC is the Bantu subgroup with the oldest available documentation, i.e. since the early seventeenth century. The BantUGent research group has TA information of variable quantity and quality for about 30 of the 40-odd present-day Kikongo

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<sup>1</sup> B stands here for verb base, i.e. the verb root possibly extended with derivational suffixes but excluding the final suffix, which is commonly part of the verb’s TA marking.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on the meaning of Meeussen’s terms “recent/preterite imperfective”, see Section 5.2.

varieties, including data from several text corpora. Moreover, the first author has carried out dedicated TA fieldwork on three varieties belonging to three distinct KLC subgroups.

Recent studies on Bantu TA testify to a research agenda that is increasingly focused on examining the interplay between the semantics of grammatical TA constructions and the lexical semantics of predicates.<sup>3</sup> In many Bantu languages, a central distinction in lexical aspect exists between two types of states-of-affairs, namely those whose internal temporal structure involve a transitional point in which the situation undergoes some sort of change into a state (often called “inchoative”, “achievement”, “stative” or “change-of-state” verbs) and those that do not include such a change into a state (Kershner 2002; Botne 2008; Seidel 2008; Botne 2010; Crane 2011; Persohn 2017, Forthcoming). This lexical-aspectual distinction, discussed in more detail in Section 3.2, is also of major importance for the aspectual meaning construals of the *-a-B-a* construction in the Kikongo varieties discussed here. Combining concepts from theoretical frameworks related to both tense and aspect (see Section 3), we give a unified semantic description of the multiple uses of the *-a-B-a* construction on the basis of synchronic and diachronic data of different Kikongo varieties in Section 4. It will be argued that the different aspectual construals for which the construction can be used all involve the completion of a central phase of the temporal structure of the state-of-affairs. Depending on whether the temporal phase structure of the predicate has a resultant stative phase or not, the construction is typically used to refer to, respectively, a present-state or a remote-past situation in simple clauses. In more complex sentence structures, the addition of certain semantic types of adverbs or temporal clauses can modify those basic aspectual construals resulting in, for example, past-state or experiential readings. With respect to the analysis of the tense value of the construction, we follow the domain model of Botne and Kershner (2008) in which remoteness is not simply viewed as a linear temporal structure, but as a cognitively-based system which is organized around a contrast between contemporaneous-inclusive and dissociative-exclusive temporal domains (see Section 3.1). Combining its “core” or “basic” aspectual and temporal semantics, we label this construction “Dissociative Past Completive” (glossed as “DPC”).

From a diachronic viewpoint, the stability of its meaning in Kikongo varieties from different time periods as well as its widespread attestation in the

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<sup>3</sup> However, the interaction between lexical and grammatical aspect has been noticed in descriptions since the eighteenth century (Crane and Persohn Forthcoming).

present-day KLC allows for a plausible reconstruction of the *-a-B-a* construction to Proto-Kikongo, both formally and semantically, as discussed in Section 5. To our knowledge, this is the first study in which a single TA construction is analyzed for such a large group of interrelated Bantu language varieties and for which a semantic reconstruction is proposed for an ancestor language that is intermediate between Proto-Bantu and present-day language varieties. Conclusions and a discussion are presented in Section 6.

## 2 The Kikongo Language Cluster

### 2.1 Overview

The KLC is a cluster of closely related language varieties spoken along the west coast of Central Africa and its hinterland. The varieties are found in a geographical area that includes the southern part of Gabon, the south-western part of Congo-Brazzaville, the Kongo Central province and parts of the Kwango province of Congo-Kinshasa and the northern provinces of Angola including Cabinda. This region is home to 40-odd Kikongo varieties that form a distinct phylogenetic subclade within the larger West-Western or West-Coastal Bantu clade, which is itself one of the major branches of the Bantu family (de Schryver et al. 2015; Grollemund et al. 2015). According to the phylogenetic study of the KLC by de Schryver et al. (2015), four core genealogical subgroupings can be distinguished, labeled according to their relative geographical position to each other as East, West, North and South Kikongo. A fifth group of varieties, spoken in the Kwango province east of the core KLC, has been labeled Kikongoid. Finally, in the center of the cluster a Central Kikongo convergence zone emerged as the result of long-standing and intensive contact between varieties belonging to distinct subgroups. See Addendum 1 for a map of the KLC and its subgroups.

The first contact between the ancestors of the present-day Kikongo speech communities and Europe dates back to the late fifteenth century, i.e. 1483 when the first Portuguese sailors reached the mouth of the Congo River. Thanks to the preservation of historical language documents from the 1620s onwards (Cardoso 1624), the KLC is an interesting study area for diachronic linguistic research within Bantu (Bostoen and de Schryver 2015, Bostoen and de Schryver 2018a, 2018b).

## 2.2 Language sample, database and method for semantic reconstruction

The present study draws on the rich collection of documents, especially grammatical descriptions and dictionaries, compiled over the past 400 years – much of which has been digitized as part of the KongoKing research project (2012–2016).<sup>4</sup> However, we did not simply stick to the analysis or description provided by each author on the conjugational system of a particular variety. In theory, that would have been the fastest way of obtaining information on the meaning of the *-a-B-a* construction. In practice, however, such an approach to the documentation would have forced us to look at each doculect through the analytical lens of its author.<sup>5</sup> In order to avoid this problem, we built a database integrating all sentence examples from each document. This allowed us to evaluate a bigger amount of data points and obviously gave a much richer picture of the varied uses of the particular construction studied for this article. In addition to these sources, fieldwork data have been gathered for 16 KLC varieties.

Because the aspectual semantics of the construction under investigation appears to show little variation through time and space, data from historical doculects will be presented together with examples from recent descriptions and fieldwork data. Methodologically, we thus map meaning onto use on the level of each modern and historical variety, as described by Hanks (2002). The coherent set of uses, established through empirical observations from a diachronically and geographically mixed language sample, then forms the basis of our semantic reconstruction for Proto-Kikongo, a historical language for which no data exists and the Comparative Method must be applied.

Overall, the sample covers 33 KLC varieties from all five genealogical subgroups plus Central Kikongo, spanning up to four centuries. However, a specific group of varieties for which documentation exists is excluded. It concerns the Gabonese language varieties of the Shira-Punu group, which are, in terms of basic vocabulary, an integral part of the KLC as members of the West Kikongo subclade (de Schryver et al. 2015: 140). In terms of TA, however, these varieties have radically different systems and lack a cognate *-a-B-a* construction. An overview of the sample and sources is provided in Addendum 2.

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<sup>4</sup> More information on this research project can be found on the project's archived website at <http://kongoking.net/>.

<sup>5</sup> We consider each Kikongo variety from a secondary source – recent or old – as a “doculect” (Cysouw and Good 2013) and not as an “actual” or “natural” language variety.

### 2.3 Distribution of the *-a-B-a* construction in the KLC: Establishing cognacy relations and identifying homonymous constructions

In most Kikongo varieties of the sample, the studied TA construction consists of both an overt prefix *-a-* and a suffix *-a*. There are, however, six varieties in the sample in which this form is not attested. Three of them belong to the West Kikongo subgroup, namely Cisundi, Iwoyo and Kiyombe, and three others to the East Kikongo subgroup, namely Kimbata, Kimbeko and Kintandu. These varieties did not simply lose the *-a-B-a* construction but have all undergone a particular morphological innovation, namely the loss of the TA prefix *-a-*, and now use a segmentally prefixless construction *-Ø-B-a*. The contrast between the two cognates is illustrated in (1) with Ciwoyo having retained the *-a-B-a* form and Kimbeko having undergone the innovation of prefix loss.

- (1) Elicited sentence: *Je suis né(e) il y a longtemps* ('I was born a long time ago').
- a. Ciwoyo (KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by S. Dom) [West]<sup>6</sup>  
***Yabutuka nyaanu.***  
*i-a-but-uk-a* *nyaanu*  
SP<sub>1SG</sub>-DPC-give\_birth-SEP<sub>INTR</sub>-DPC long\_ago
- b. Kimbeko (KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by S. Dom) [East]  
***Thama ibutuka.***  
*thama i-Ø-but-uk-a*  
long\_ago SP<sub>1SG</sub>-DPC-give\_birth-SEP<sub>INTR</sub>-DPC

Although the exact (socio-)historical context of this morphological innovation has not yet been studied,<sup>7</sup> some arguments based on language-internal evidence show that the *-Ø-B-a* construction in these six varieties is indeed a cognate of the *-a-B-a* construction and not a historically independent construction. The first argument involves the fact that the change of the TA prefix *-a-* loss occurs throughout the paradigm in all these varieties. That is, other common TA

<sup>6</sup> For each example, we indicate the genealogical subgroup to which the variety illustrated belongs.

<sup>7</sup> For Kintandu, certain historical sources give a relative idea of the period in which the prefix loss was completed. For example, Polis (1938) still reports the *-a-B-a* construction. Butaye (1910: 57) mentions regiolectal variation between both reflexes and – erroneously – interprets the prefix-less reflex as the unmarked present-tense construction being used for past-time reference.

constructions which feature the prefix *-a-* also have prefixless cognates in these six varieties. This is for example the case with the common Hesternal Past Perfective *-a-B-iCi*, whose cognate in these six varieties is *-Ø-B-iCi* (for a more detailed discussion, see Dom and Bostoen 2015: 179–181).<sup>8</sup>

The second argument departs from the observation that a homonymous *-Ø-B-a* construction is more commonly attested in both the KLC (Dom and Bostoen 2015: 172–173) and Bantu (Nurse 2008a: 117–118). As is common cross-linguistically, this cross-Bantu “unmarked” TA construction typically denotes present tense. This parallel *-Ø-B-a* construction also occurs in both those KLC varieties which did not undergo the loss of the TA prefix *-a-*, as well as those six varieties which did participate in the innovation. In the latter, the prefix-less reflexes of the *\*-a-B-a* construction are thus segmentally homonyms of this common present-tense construction *-Ø-B-a*. On a suprasegmental level, though, both constructions tend to be formally disambiguated through a difference in tonal patterns. This is shown in (2) for Kintandu.

- (2) Kintandu (Daeleman 1966: 258, 285) [East]
- a. *Lutá bálúta.*<sup>9</sup> SIMPLE-PRESENT CONSTRUCTION  
*Ø-lut-a ba-Ø-lut-a*  
 CL<sub>15</sub>-pass-FV SP<sub>2</sub>-PRS-pass-PRS  
 ‘They’re (just) passing by.’  
 (Original Dutch: ‘*Ze gaan alleen maar langs.*’)<sup>10</sup>
- b. *Balúta.* DPC CONSTRUCTION  
*ba-Ø-lut-a*  
 SP<sub>2</sub>-DPC-pass-DPC  
 ‘They passed by (long ago).’  
 (Original Dutch: ‘*Ze waren [lang geleden] langsgaan.*’)

A third element pointing towards a cognacy relation between the *-Ø-B-a* and *-a-B-a* constructions is the identical function of both in the respective varieties (see e.g. Barðdal 2013: 441). That is, as will be shown by means of examples from these varieties in Section 4, the “innovative” varieties use the prefix-less DPC construction in the same contexts to construe the same kinds

<sup>8</sup> However, the complex prefix of the Future constructions *-ala-B-a* or *-ela-B-a* in Iwoyo and Kiyombe, respectively, was not targeted by this innovation (see Dom and Bostoen 2015: 185).

<sup>9</sup> The use of only a verb phrase in the present tense necessitates the use of the fronted-infinitive construction, which is a particular information-structural construction (De Kind et al. 2015). This is another difference with the homonymous DPC, which does not require such a verb doubling.

<sup>10</sup> We provide the original when the source is not written in English.

of aspectual meanings as the “conservative” varieties do with the prefix-retaining DPC construction. In the overview of the language sample in Addendum 2 the reflex of the construction is given as attested in each individual variety or doculect.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that other homonymous constructions with the same segmental form are attested throughout the KLC. The most widespread is a Subjunctive *-a-B-a* construction. It is attested in all sub-groups, although its distribution varies within each of them. The Subjunctive *-a-B-a* is furthermore attested in the oldest (South) Kikongo source, as illustrated in (3).

- (3) 17<sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Mbanza Kongo (Cardoso 1624: 13) [South]  
 ... *cutuambulaco tuabua munâ lueleco*, ...  
*ku-tu-ambul-a ko tu-a-bu-a muna lu-eleko*  
 EXPL-OP<sub>1PL</sub>-allow-FV NEG SP<sub>1PL</sub>-SBJV-fall-SBJV LOC<sub>18</sub> CL<sub>11</sub>-temptation  
 ‘... don’t let us fall into temptation, ...’  
 (Original Portuguese: ‘... & não nos deixes cair em tentação ...’)

In subordination contexts the Subjunctive *-a-B-a* is typically used in complement and purpose clauses, whereas in main clauses it expresses optative and hortative mood.

Two other *-a-B-a* constructions which are most likely homonyms denote present and future time reference. However, information on these constructions is much scarcer than on the DPC and Subjunctive *-a-B-a* constructions. For example, Atkins (1954: 154) provides just one out-of-context example for an apparent (gnomic) present-tense construction in Dihungu, namely *tu-a-sumb-a* ‘we buy’. More research is needed in order to understand the distribution, meaning and history of these constructions, as well as the possible semantic and diachronic relations between them. Because the TAM uses of these constructions are quite different from those of the DPC *-a-B-a* construction discussed in this article, we assume for now that they are homonymous.

<sup>11</sup> As can be seen from this overview, there are two varieties for which different sources give either one of the two reflexes. These are two North Kikongo varieties, namely Kidondo and Kikamba. It is currently difficult to verify whether the difference can be attributed to regiolectal (for Kidondo) or diachronic (for Kikamba) variation, because no detailed descriptions of the tense and aspect systems are available.



### 3 Theoretical frameworks and assumptions

In the following three sections we will briefly outline the main theoretical assumptions of this study and the methodology used to analyze and represent the data.

#### 3.1 Tense, remoteness and the dissociation model

In order to capture the complexities of the TA systems in many Bantu languages, Botne and Kershner (2008) propose a cognitive model that offers a multi-dimensional interpretation of tense. In their so-called domain model,

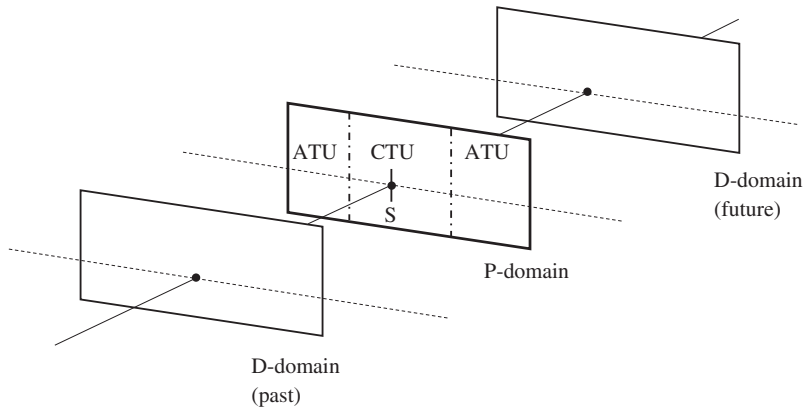
[t]ense [...] denotes that relation that holds between S (the locus of the speech event) and a cognitive temporal domain (comparable, but not identical to Bull's notion of axis and Klein's topic time), a relation that is best construed in terms of clusivity: inclusivity—i.e. the deictic center (anchored at S) occurs within the time span of the cognitive world—versus exclusivity, or dissociation—i.e. the deictic center at S is external to, or dissociated from, the cognitive world. (Botne and Kershner 2008: 152–153)

Grammatical tense can be used to mark temporal relations between S and points within the contemporaneous *P-domain*, or between S and a past or future dissociated *D-domain*.<sup>12</sup> Temporal relations pertaining to the P-domain can be further divided into *Current Time Unit* (CTU) and *Adjoining Time Unit* (ATU) (Botne 2012, 2014). The former is a temporal unit including S, the latter delineating a time region that immediately precedes (for past) or follows (for future) it; see Figure 1. The temporal value of these units (CTU and ATU) is dependent on the cognitive construal of the speaker and can represent an opposition of days (yesterday vs. today vs. tomorrow), weeks (last week vs. this week vs. next week), months, seasons or years, as Nurse (2008a: 22) also points out.

In contrast to linear analyses of remoteness systems, the domain model can account for the fact that two different TA constructions can be used to refer to the same moment in time, as illustrated in (4).

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<sup>12</sup> P stands for “performative” (Botne and Kershner 2000: 163) or “present” (Botne 2003a: 397), and D for “dissociative”.



**Figure 1:** Domain model with multiple construals of time.

(4) Late 19<sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in the vicinity of Boma (Craven and Barfield 1883: 9, 17) [South]

a. *Zona zimbwa zawoka.*

*zono*      *zi-N-bwa*      *zi-a-wok-a*  
 yesterday    AUG<sub>10</sub>-CL<sub>10</sub>-dog    SP<sub>10</sub>-DPC-bark-DPC  
 ‘Yesterday the dogs barked.’

b. *Zono tua zikidi e nvumbi.*

*zono*      *tu-a-zik-idi*      *e-N-vumbi*  
 yesterday    SP<sub>1PL</sub>-HST-bury-HST    AUG<sub>9</sub>-CL<sub>9</sub>-corpse  
 ‘Yesterday we buried the corpse.’

Even though the two TA constructions in (4) are used for a situation which occurred “yesterday”, they nevertheless contrast with respect to the temporal specification. First, whereas the *-a-B-a* construction is also used for situations which occurred in a more remote past, such as the creation of the earth in (5), the *-a-B-idi* form is more restricted in its temporal scope, typically referring to situations that occurred the day before S as in (4b). In Craven and Barfield (1883), this analysis is further reinforced by the observation that in 14 out of 25 instances the *-a-B-idi* construction co-occurs with the adverb *zono/a* ‘yesterday’, whereas this is only the case for 3 out of 35 examples of the *-a-B-a* construction.

- (5) Late 19<sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in the vicinity of Boma  
(Craven and Barfield 1883: 25) [South]

*Nzambi wa vanga nsi.*

*N-zambi u-a-vang-a N-si*

CL<sub>1</sub>-God SP<sub>1</sub>-DPC-make-DPC CL<sub>9</sub>-earth

‘God created the earth.’

In the domain approach the use of the *-a-B-a* construction for remote past, as in (5), and recent past, as in (4), can be explained by the fact that in (4a) the speaker wishes to construe the state-of-affairs as cognitively dissociated, irrespective of whether it occurred recently with respect to S. These examples, as well as the semantic discussion in Section 4 of the construction’s uses, indicate that the core temporal function of the *-a-B-a* construction is thus to locate the central phase of the state-of-affairs denoted by the predicate in the past D-domain. This still allows for various but related aspectual construals, for which the theoretical underpinnings are outlined below.

### 3.2 Aspect construal

We believe that any theory of aspect should take into account the fact that the overall aspectual value of a linguistic expression is construed through various levels of the grammar. This has been spelled out clearly by Sasse (2002: 262), who states that “[...] the goal of a crosslinguistically adequate theory of aspect should be the investigation of aspectual phenomena on the sentence (or, rather, clause) level in connection with the investigation of the role of lexicon, conventionalized grammar, and discourse in the constitution of these phenomena.” He furthermore lists seven ‘aspectual tiers’ which should be taken into consideration:

- (i) the inherent tempo-aspectual characteristics of the (simplex or complex) situation-denoting lexical units that enter the sentence;
- (ii) the tempo-aspectual nuances of meaning brought in by overt morphological systems (“aspect operators” or “aspect grams”);
- (iii) the bounding potential of determinational and quantificational characteristics of arguments;
- (iv) the bounding potential of adverbials;
- (v) the contribution of other types of phase markers such as *begin*, *continue*, *finish*, *stop*, etc. to bounding;
- (vi) the relational structure of the sentence such as diathesis, causativity, thematic roles, etc.;
- (vii) interclausal relations between predicates in terms of “taxis”. (Sasse 2002: 263)

Following Binnick (1991: 195) and Croft (2012: 57), we call tier (i) the *aspectual potential* of a predicate, i.e. its possibility to be used to construe a

limited set of aspectual types. The combination of a predicate with a particular argument-structure construction, which includes tiers (iii) and (vi), denotes a specific *state-of-affairs*. A state-of-affairs is a subjectively construed conceptualization or depiction of a situation involving one or more participants. It has *temporal* and *causal structure*, both of which are determined by (a) the frame-semantics of the predicate and the participants and (b) the argument-structure construction chosen by the speaker (Goldberg 1995; Croft 2012). We use the term “actionality” to refer to the temporal structure (see also Johanson (2000), Tatevosov (2002), Crane and Persohn (Forthcoming), among others).

The internal temporal structure of a state-of-affairs can be described in terms of *phases*. The phasic structure of most states-of-affairs is delimited by a left and right boundary, which separate a pre- and post-time during which the state-of-affairs does not hold (Klein 1994: 84; Desclés and Guentchéva 2012: 134–136).<sup>13</sup> Although these pre- and post-times might involve preparatory and resultant situations related to the state-of-affairs, they are typically not profiled in the phasic structure. For instance, one can put on running shoes and sports clothes in order to go out for a run, but these preparatory stages cannot be referred to in English by the verb (*go out for a*) *run*. In the same vein, the resultant state of someone having eaten a five-meal dinner could be that that person is full, yet that resultant state cannot be expressed by the predicate *eat (a five-meal dinner)*.<sup>14</sup> The temporal structure profiled in these states-of-affairs is strictly limited to a (single) phase referring to the (atelic) action of running and the (telic) action of eating a five-meal dinner.

Phases can be distinguished by means of their temporal and qualitative properties (Croft 2012). With respect to its temporal property, a phase can be either durative or punctual. We define punctuality here as a situation whose duration is shorter than it takes to describe that situation by means of a simple (clausal) linguistic expression (but see Engelberg 1999). This informal definition takes into account the fact that the phase of a predicate such as ‘fall’ can be punctual when construing a state-of-affairs in which an animate participant referent stumbles on the floor, as in (6a), but durative when describing a state-of-affairs in which a participant is being pulled towards earth by gravity

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<sup>13</sup> The typical exception are permanent states whose boundaries “are rejected at infinity” (Desclés and Guentchéva 2012: 134).

<sup>14</sup> These predicates can nevertheless be used pragmatically during these preparatory or resultant situations. That is, someone can say *I’m going for a run* in order to explain *why* s/he is putting on running shoes, or utter *I’ve eaten a five-meal dinner* when another person notices the bloated stomach of the glutton.

from a considerable height, as in (6b), in which case the trajectory is extensive enough for someone to give a description of that situation (see also Croft (2012: 83–84) for a more extensive discussion on construal and aspectual potential). While the verb *fall* can be conjugated in the present progressive when it has a durative reading as in (6b), such a conjugation is felt to be infelicitous when the verb has a punctual reading as in (6a).

- (6) a. \**Look, the teacher is falling over a cobblestone!*  
 b. *Look, there's someone falling from the burning apartment.*

The qualitative property of a phase is related to notions such as dynamicity versus stativity, change pertaining to graduality, scalarity and incrementality (see, among many others, Bertinetto and Squartini 1995; Hay et al. 1999; Beavers 2012; Kennedy 2012; Rothstein 2012; Beavers 2013), and reversibility (Croft 2012: 43). The examples in (7) illustrate some of these differences.

- (7) a. *My brother is reading (a book).*  
 b. *My brother is drying in the sun.*  
 c. *My brother is lying on his bed.*  
 d. *Luxembourg lies between Belgium, France and Germany.*

The state-of-affairs in the first example is dynamic, i.e. the agent participant (*my brother*) is engaged in an activity which develops over time, namely taking in written information. The second example is less straightforward. The subject participant does not constitute the agent of the state-of-affairs, who initiated the situation. Still, the state-of-affairs denoted by the predicate *to dry* consists of a dynamic phase in which the degree or presence of some liquid on a body gradually decreases due to the heat of an energy source. We find the reverse situation in (7c), where the subject participant does constitute an agent, but the state-of-affairs is stative rather than dynamic. However, there is a clear difference between the state-of-affairs construed in (7c) and (7d), even though the same verb is used. The former is stative but temporally bounded; it is not an inherent property of *my brother* that he lies in bed always and forever.<sup>15</sup> Example (7d) denotes a truly stative state-of-affairs in that it holds, unchangeably, throughout the lifetime of the subject participant, namely the country of Luxembourg (assuming no re-drawings of Europe's center). The last two examples also highlight the influence of the semantic

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<sup>15</sup> This aspectual type has been called homogeneous activity in Michaelis (1998: 64–66) or inactive activity in Croft (2012: 39).

properties of the participant roles involved on the aspectual type of a state-of-affairs (see also Verkuyl 1996 [1993]).

In recent literature on actionality from a cross-linguistic perspective, it has been pointed out that the phase structure, i.e. the temporal profile, of a particular state-of-affairs is language-specific (Tatevosov 2002: 324; Botne 2003b; Bar-el 2015). One case in point is the so-called “bi-phasal” (Ebert 1995), “ingressive-stative” (Bickel 1997: 124–127) or “inceptive-stative” (Tatevosov 2002: 382–384) phase structure, in which a transitional “entry-into-a-state” phase is part of (or “profiled in”) the temporal structure. This means that in a language with predicates denoting a state-of-affairs with this phase structure, such as e.g. the Zambian Bantu language Totela in (8), either the transition into (ii) or the state itself (i) can be expressed by the same predicate and, in this case, the same Tense-Aspect construction. The actual reading typically depends on the context of utterance.

(8) Totela (Bantu; Crane (2011: 123–124)) (Underlining in original)

*ndákòmòkwà*

*nda-komok-w-a*

SP<sub>1SG</sub>.CMPL-surprise-PASS-FV

i. ‘I am surprised!’

ii. ‘I got surprised!’

As Ebert (1995: 189) points out: “Two phase verbs are rare in English. Usually two different verbs or compounds refer to the transformation and the resulting state or activity.” In other languages, such as the Caucasian Ingush language (Nichols 2011: 322–323), but also many Bantu languages, inceptive-states are quite common.

The above discussion of inceptive-states also illustrates that states-of-affairs can vary in the complexity of their phase structure. Whereas an atelic activity such as English *walk* (e.g. *in the park*) refers to a single situation and thus consists of one single phase, inceptive-state verbs, such as Totela *-komokwa* ‘be/get surprised’, profile at least two phases: a transitional entry-into-a-state phase and a stative phase. With respect to the phasal complexity of states-of-affairs, Bantu languages are of considerable typological interest in that they have predicates denoting states-of-affairs profiling different types of complex phase structures (Botne 1983a; Persohn Forthcoming). Using eight language-specific criteria to test the behavior of verbs, Persohn (2017: 117) identifies at least five actionality types in the Tanzanian Bantu language Nyakyusa: activity, simple accomplishment, transitional accomplishment, transitional achievement and resultative achievement. Transitional achievements are an actionality type in



particular phases, or they can be used to focus on boundaries of such phases. In addition, adverbial constructions (tier (iv)), aspectualizer constructions (tier (v)) and taxis constructions (tier (vii)) can be used to further elaborate or modify the temporal development of a state-of-affairs, and ultimately contribute to the aspect value of a linguistic expression.

The actional distinction found in multiple Bantu languages between transitional and non-transitional states-of-affairs will be shown to be of major importance for the interpretation and aspectual construal of the *-a-B-a* construction in the varieties of the KLC. We therefore argue, more specifically, that the core meaning of this TA construction is to locate the central phase of a state-of-affairs in the remote, D-domain past, and that the basic aspectual meaning is to view the central phase as completed. However, this basic meaning allows for different aspectual construals depending on whether the state-of-affairs is transitional or not, and whether adverbial and temporal clause constructions add aspectually relevant information.

### 3.3 A componential vs. constructionist approach to TA in Kikongo

It is a longstanding tradition in Bantuist approaches to verbal morphology to isolate morphemes and relate an abstract meaning to them. For example, both the DPC *-a-B-a* and Hesternal Past Perfective *-a-B-idi* construction in Kimanyanga have the TA prefix *-a-*. This contrasts with the Hodiernal Past *-Ø-B-idingi* and Contemporaneous Past Complete *-Ø-B-idi* constructions, which are both prefixless. Because the *-a-* prefix occurs in the remote and hesternal constructions one could say, in a componential approach, that the function of the prefix is to signal pre-hodiernal time reference, while the aspectual semantics would then be conveyed through the suffix, i.e. either *-a* or *-idi*. On the other hand, the *-a* suffix is often described in Bantu linguistics as a neutral or default “final vowel”, which primarily serves a phonotactic purpose, but misses a specific grammatical meaning (see Nurse 2008a: 261). To illustrate further with Kimanyanga, an *-a* suffix is also used in the infinitival form of verbs, non-indicative moods such as the imperative, and in the near-future tense constructions, all of which are categorically different from the tense-aspect-mood meaning of the overall *-a-B-a* structure. Hence, it is impossible to establish a clear semantic function for the final component of the DPC *-a-B-a* construction, or any other conjugal prefix-suffix combination ending in *-a*. Moreover, the complex and polysemous semantic character of the overall form is non-compositional, in that it is not simply the semantic sum of its individual parts.

We therefore take a constructionist approach, following the basic tenets of Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995; Croft 2001; Hoffmann and Trousdale 2013).



In this approach, the prefix-suffix combination forms a single, yet morphologically complex construction. This is reflected in our glossing. We do not gloss the verbal ending *-a* as FV (“final vowel”), as is commonly done in Bantu linguistics, but rather treat the two morphemes holistically as structural parts of an undifferentiated whole and give them both the same gloss. Although a Construction Grammar approach to Bantu verbal morphology might seem novel, the view that morphologically complex constructions lie at the basis of (TA) meaning construal has a long tradition in Bantu grammatical reconstructions. This is reflected by the fact that the Proto-Bantu reconstructions of TA forms given in Meeussen (1967: 113) and Nurse (2008a: 279) are all prefix-suffix combinations, i.e. partially schematic and morphologically complex constructions.

## 4 The *-a-B-a* construction in the Kikongo Language Cluster

### 4.1 The *-a-B-a* construction within the wider past-tense paradigms

As is the case in many Bantu languages (Nurse 2008a: 21–22), all Kikongo varieties included in the sample have multiple past-tense constructions. Such complex past-tense paradigms are typically organized according to temporal remoteness distinctions (Botne 2012). The TA paradigms of most Kikongo varieties follow a basic organization that is grounded in a hodiernal division of time. In a number of doculects, mostly the historically older ones, we find a three-way organization summarized in (10) (see, e.g. Descourvières 1776: 20; Guinness 1882b: 76–77; Bentley 1887: 650).<sup>17</sup>

- (10) P1 hodiernal            *-Ø-B-iCi*  
       Refers to any given time preceding S, on the same day of S.
- P2 pre-hodiernal        *-a-B-iCi*  
       Refers to any given time preceding the day of S, maximally up to a few weeks.
- P3 remote                *-a-B-a*  
       Refers to any given time preceding the day of S.

<sup>17</sup> This schematic summary does not do justice to the semantic richness of each construction and paradigm of the individual doculects, and does not take into account a number of important features such as the combination with imperfective morphology.

However, the most common organization of remoteness distinctions attested in the KLC has a more fine-grained division of time with respect to the day of S, which can be roughly defined as a distinction between a “near” past (P1) and a “hodiernal” past (P2), as schematized in (11). Such systems are found in doculects from the late 19th c. onwards (Carrie 1888: 87; Westlind 1888: 199–200), and in many modern South, West, Central and East Kikongo varieties.

- (11) P1 near                    *-∅-B-iCi* or *-me-B-a*  
 Refers to what is perceived as a small period of time preceding S on the same day of S.
- P2 hodiernal                *-∅-B-idingi* or *-∅-B-iCi*  
 Refers to what is perceived as a period preceding that of P1, but still on the same day of S.
- P3 pre-hodiernal        *-a-B-iCi* or *-∅-B-iCi*  
 Has the same temporal specification as in (10).
- P4 remote                    *-a-B-a* or *-∅-B-a*  
 Has the same temporal specification as in (10).

It is important to specify that different KLC varieties rather share the same organization of time than the actual paradigms of forms used to express these cognitive subdivisions. Especially for P1 and P2 in the paradigm of (11), varieties differ with respect to which actual TA construction is used, reflecting different paths of historical developments for the paradigms of individual language varieties. The loss of the TA prefix *-a-*, which has occurred in a number of KLC varieties (see Section 2.3), accounts for the formal variation in (11) for the P3 and P4 constructions.

Significant for the present study is that in the majority of the sample the *-a-B-a* construction (or its prefixless cognate *-∅-B-a*) is used for the most distant time period in the cognitive organization of time.<sup>18</sup>

## 4.2 Non-transitional predicates<sup>19</sup>

When predicates having a non-transitional phase structure take the *-a-B-a* construction, the entire state-of-affairs is viewed in its totality, i.e. as completed,

<sup>18</sup> Civili forms an exception. See the note in Addendum 2.

<sup>19</sup> The difficulty of working with examples from descriptions is that we cannot fully test each predicate in an example for its lexical-aspectual properties in that specific variety. In that sense,

and is furthermore located in a remote past, as illustrated in (12). Temporal adverbials overtly specify the remote time period at which the state-of-affairs is situated in examples (12a, b, d, e). We provide examples of six different Kikongo varieties, each of them belonging to a different KLC subgroup.

- (12) a. Late 19<sup>th</sup> c. Kisikongo (Bentley 1887: 7) [South]  
*Se lumbu kumi yavioka twamvovesa vo, ovanga edi.*  
*se Ø-lumbu kumi i-a-vyok-a tu-a-Ń-vov-is-a*  
 then CL<sub>8</sub>-day ten SP<sub>8</sub>-DPC-pass-DPC SP<sub>1PL</sub>-DPC-OP<sub>1</sub>-say-CAUS-DPC  
*vo o-Ø-vang-a edi*  
 QUOT SP<sub>1</sub>-PRS-do-PRS DEM<sub>5</sub>  
 ‘Ten days ago we told him to do so.’
- b. Ciwoyo (KongoKing 2015, fieldwork by S. Dom) [West]  
*... mu mvula 2012 [...] tadengana, ...*  
*mu N-vula 2012 tu-a-dengan-a*  
 CL<sub>18</sub> CL<sub>9</sub>-year 2012 SP<sub>1PL</sub>-DPC-meet.RECP-DPC  
 ‘... in (the year) 2012 [...] we met each other, ...’
- c. Kimanyanga (Laman 1912: 276) [Central]  
*Abalami wakota mu nsi nate ye vata dia Sikemi.*  
*Abalami u-a-kot-a mu N-si nate\_ye Ø-vata*  
 Abraham SP<sub>1</sub>-DPC-enter-DPC LOC<sub>18</sub> CL<sub>9</sub>-land unto CL<sub>5</sub>-village  
*dia Sikemi*  
 CONN<sub>5</sub> Sichem  
 ‘Abraham entered into the land unto the place of Sichem.’
- d. Kintandu (Daeleman 1966: 286) [East]  
*Kilumbú kímósi ngudí wúbuta baaná báni.*  
*ki-lumbu ki-mosi Ń-gudi u-Ø-but-a ba-ana*  
 CL<sub>7</sub>-day CL<sub>7</sub>-one CL<sub>1</sub>-woman SP<sub>1</sub>-DPC-give\_birth-DPC CL<sub>2</sub>-child  
*ba-ani*  
 CL<sub>2</sub>-POSS<sub>1</sub>  
 ‘One day, the mother gave birth to her children.’  
 (Original Dutch: ‘Op een zekere dag baarde de moeder haar kinderen.’)

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we are rather assuming the temporal phase structure of the predicates in this section. However, the interaction with grammatical aspect is typically a component of such an elaborate test, and this discussion can thus be seen as an exploration of one component of lexical aspect in the KLC varieties used here.

- e. Kibembe (Kouarata 2016: 99) [North]  
***Twaba*** *kunsa mudziingu kuholoso 1997 natee 1999.*  
*tu-a-b-a kunsa mu-dziingu kuholoso 1997 natee 1999*  
 SP<sub>1PL</sub>-DPC-be-DPC in CL<sub>3</sub>-war from 1997 until 1999  
 ‘We were at war from 1997 until 1999.’  
 (Original French: ‘*La guerre a eu lieu de 1997 à 1999.*’)
- f. Kiyaka (van den Eynde 1968: 100) [Kikongoid]  
***Ntóómbó myápfúmú twákúna.***  
*N-toombo mya Ø-pfumu tu-a-kun-a*  
 CL<sub>4</sub>-manioc CONN<sub>4</sub> CL<sub>9</sub>-chief SP<sub>1PL</sub>-DPC-plant-DPC  
 ‘It’s the chief’s manioc which we planted.’  
 (Original French: ‘*C’est le manioc du chef que nous avons planté.*’)

The *-a-B-a* construction can also be used for an experiential construal of non-transitional states-of-affairs. In this sense, the occurrence of the state-of-affairs in the past is not simply “reported” or “narrated”, but is construed as being relevant in some way or another to either one of the speech participants. Such a subjectively grounded, evaluative perspective is often construed in particular pragmatic contexts. Dahl (1985: 142), for example, notes that the experiential “is favoured by non-affirmative contexts, i.e. questions and negated sentences”, as is also reflected in the examples of the experiential use of the *-a-B-a* construction provided in (13).

- (13) a. 17<sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Mbanza Kongo (Cardoso 1624: 2) [South]  
***Uaria mungue?***  
*u-a-ri-a mu-ngu e*  
 SP<sub>2SG</sub>-DPC-eat-DPC CL<sub>3</sub>-salt Q  
 ‘Have you eaten the salt?’ (Meaning: ‘Are you Christian?’)  
 (Original Portuguese: ‘*Sois Chrifão?*’)
- b. Ciwoyo (KongoKing 2015, fieldwork by S. Dom) [West]  
***Kwálya nyoka ko.***  
*ku-a-li-a N-yoka ko*  
 NEG.SP<sub>2SG</sub>-DPC-eat-DPC CL<sub>9</sub>-snake NEG  
 ‘You have never eaten snake.’  
 (Original French: ‘*Tu n’as jamais mangé du serpent.*’)
- c. Early 20th c. Kimanyanga (Laman 1912: 291) [Central]  
***Ntamana (kala-kala) mbozi yadie?***  
*N-tamana kala-kala N-bozi i-a-di-a e*  
 CL<sub>9</sub>-beginning ever CL<sub>9</sub>-mbozi\_fruit SP<sub>1SG</sub>-DPC-eat-DPC Q  
 ‘Have I eaten the mbozi fruit from the beginning?’

It should be noted that this use has very few attestations in the dataset, possibly due to the specific context needed in which this aspectual construal of the construction surfaces. In other examples the aspectual meaning of the construction could be interpreted as either a perfective or experiential past construal. These are mostly sentences with frequency adverbials where a situation-specific interpretation would induce a simple-past reading and a non-specific situation interpretation would give an experiential reading (Dahl and Hedin 2000; Mittwoch 2008). In all of these examples, such as the ones in (14), context is not sufficient to determine which construal is intended.

(14) a. Kiyombe (De Clercq 1921: 33) [West]

*Ndisala sala sala ngonda yoso.*

*ndi-Ø-sal-a                    Ø-sala            Ø-sala            N-gonda    i-oso*

SP<sub>1SG</sub>-DPC-work-DPC    CL<sub>15</sub>-work    CL<sub>15</sub>-work    CL<sub>9</sub>-month    CL<sub>9</sub>-all

‘I’ve worked, worked, worked all month.’

(Original French: ‘*J’ai travaillé, travaillé, travaillé le mois tout entier.*’)

b. Early 20<sup>th</sup> c. Kimanyanga (Laman 1912: 260) [Central]

*Luwawanu lwanietukwa<sup>20</sup> ndietukwa tatu.*

*lu-wawanu            lu-a-nyetik-u-a                    N-dietukwa tatu*

CL<sub>11</sub>-Testament    SP<sub>11</sub>-DPC-print-PASS-DPC    CL<sub>9</sub>-print    three

‘The Testament has been printed three times (in three editions).’

The two uses of the *-a-B-a* construction with non-transitional predicates are closely related, in that the experiential use is a pragmatically more elaborate aspectual construal which builds on the “basic” remote-past semantics. However, given the limited number of examples of the experiential use in the dataset, clearly more research is needed to have a better understanding of the semantic details.

### 4.3 Transitional predicates

Transitional states-of-affairs, also referred to as change-of-states or inchoatives, involve a punctual transition into a state, with a possible preceding onset phase. The most basic aspectual construal of the *-a-B-a* construction with such transitional predicates is that of a present state. This is illustrated in (15) for Kikongo varieties from five different KLC subgroups.

<sup>20</sup> The verb *-nyetika* ‘print’ has an impositive suffix *-ik-* which undergoes positional vowel harmony (front to back) triggered by the passive suffix *-u-*.

- (15) a. Kizombo (Carter 1974: 35) [South]  
*Enanaāzi kedyabwáaka kó ...*  
*e-Ø-nanaazi ke-di-a-bwak-a ko*  
 AUG<sub>5</sub>-CL<sub>5</sub>-pineapple NEG-SP<sub>5</sub>-DPC-become\_ripe-DPC NEG  
 ‘A pineapple which is not ripe ...’
- b. Kiyombe (De Clercq 1921: 64) [West]  
*Dizina diandi dikuáma te Tsundi te Ngoyo te Mboma.*  
*di-zina di-andi di-Ø-kwám-a te Tsundi*  
 CL<sub>5</sub>-name CL<sub>5</sub>-POSS<sub>1</sub> SP<sub>5</sub>-DPC-be(come)\_known-DPC in Sundi  
*te Ngoyo te Mboma*  
 in Ngoyo in Boma  
 ‘His name is known all the way up to Nsundi, Ngoyo and Boma.’  
 (Original French: ‘*Son nom est connu jusque chez les Sundis, jusqu’au Cabinda, jusqu’à Boma.*’)
- c. Early 20<sup>th</sup> c. Kimanyanga (Laman 1912: 256) [Central]  
*Mfumu wakala (ye) mbongo zazingi.*  
*N-fumu u-a-kal-a ye N-bongo za zi-ingi*  
 CL<sub>1</sub>-chief SP<sub>1</sub>-DPC-be-DPC with CL<sub>10</sub>-money CONN<sub>10</sub> PP<sub>10</sub>-much  
 ‘The chieftain has much property.’
- d. Kinkanu (KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by S. Dom) [East]  
*Kooku kwánda kwafutama.*  
*ku-oku ku-andi ku-a-fut-am-a*  
 CL<sub>15</sub>-arm PP<sub>15</sub>-POSS<sub>1</sub> SP<sub>15</sub>-DPC-bend-MID-DPC  
 ‘His arm is bent.’  
 (Original French: ‘*Son bras est plié.*’)
- e. Kikunyi (Kongoking 2016, fieldwork by G. Kouarata) [North]  
*Háhá Maswaamu wakuma.*  
*haha Ø-Maswaamu u-a-kum-a*  
 DEM<sub>16</sub> CL<sub>1a</sub>-Maswaamu SP<sub>1</sub>-DPC-get\_better-DPC  
 ‘Right now Maswaamu is in good health.’  
 (Original French: ‘*Maintenant Maswaamu est en bonne santé.*’)

Different argument-structure constructions are involved in the present-state construal of transitional states-of-affairs. These largely correspond to three of Nedjalkov and Jaxontov’s (1988: 8–11) resultative diathesis types: (i) active-intransitive argument-structure constructions (or subjective resultative) (15a, b, e); (ii) passive-intransitive argument-structure constructions (or objective resultative) (15d); and (iii) possessive-transitive argument-structure constructions (or possessive resultative) (15c).

The *-a-B-a* construction is not only used to convey present states that follow from a past transition, but by extension also for referring to natural states that denote defining properties of the subject referent, as in (16).

- (16) a. Late 19<sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Mbanza Kongo (Bentley 1887: 634) [South]  
*Lekwa kiaka ke **kianatakana** ko.*  
 Ø-lekwa kyaka ke-ki-a-nat-akan-a ko  
 CL<sub>7</sub>-thing DEM<sub>7</sub> NEG-SP<sub>7</sub>-DPC-carry-NT-DPC NEG  
 ‘This thing is not portable.’
- b. Late 18<sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Kakongo (Descourvières 1773: 203) [West]  
*I nsi ai **ia kala** nuni béné ko.*  
 i-N-si ayi i-a-kal-a Ø-nuni bene ko  
 AUG<sub>9</sub>-CL<sub>9</sub>-country DEM<sub>9</sub> SP<sub>9</sub>-DPC-be-DPC CL<sub>10</sub>-bird many NEG  
 ‘This country does not have many birds.’  
 (Original French: ‘*Le pays est dépeuplé d’oiseaus.*’)
- c. Early 20<sup>th</sup> c. Kimanyanga (Laman 1912: 209) [Central]  
*Ndimba wau **wayalumuka** beni.*  
 N-dimba wawu u-a-yalumuk-a beni  
 CL<sub>3</sub>-valley DEM<sub>3</sub> SP<sub>3</sub>-DPC-be(come)-extensive.SEP<sub>INTR</sub>-DPC much  
 ‘This valley is very extensive.’
- d. Kiyaka (van den Eynde 1968: 98) [Kikongoid]  
*Yisi ndzila **yáfwa**.*  
 yi-si N-dzila i-a-fu-a  
 PP<sub>9</sub>-any CL<sub>9</sub>-road SP<sub>9</sub>-DPC-die-DPC  
 ‘Any road is in a bad state.’  
 (Original French: ‘*N’importe quel chemin est en mauvais état.*’)

Depending on the context, the *-a-B-a* construction can also be used to refer to a moment in the past during which a specific state held. For example, in (17a) the main events of a narrative in Kizombo are located by the speaker in a remote time using the *-a-B-a* construction, i.e. *watala* and *wamona*. Within that time-frame the protagonist finds an animal in a state of having one of its legs broken, for which the *-a-B-a* construction is used as well.

- (17) a. Kizombo (Carter 1973: 18) [South]  
*Watala yǒ, wǎmona vó **yǎtolok**’ ekúulu.<sup>21</sup>*

<sup>21</sup> Note that a quirky combination of derivational morphology and argument-structure construction is used for possessor raising. The base verb *toloka* has a separative *intransitive* suffix *-uk-* (having undergone progressive vowel height harmony) but the argument-structure

- u-a-tal-a*                 *yo*         *u-a-mon-a*                 *vo*  
 SP<sub>9</sub>-DPC-look-DPC PRON<sub>9</sub> SP<sub>1</sub>-DPC-see-DPC that  
*i-a-tolok-a*   *e-ku-ulu*  
 SP<sub>9</sub>-DPC-be(come)\_broken.SEP<sub>INTR</sub>-DPC AUG<sub>15</sub>-CL<sub>15</sub>-leg  
 ‘He looked at it, he saw it had a broken leg. [lit. ‘he saw that it had broken a leg’]’
- b. Late 18<sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Kakongo (Descourvières 1773: 132) [West]  
*Kina i lombu ki têlemé i gonda ki a ba ki k’botté.*  
*kina i-∅-lombu ki-∅-telam-idi i-∅-gonda*  
 DEM<sub>7</sub> AUG<sub>7</sub>-CL<sub>7</sub>-day SP<sub>7</sub>-CPC-wake\_up-CPC AUG<sub>7</sub>-CL<sub>7</sub>-month  
*ki-a-b-a ki k’-bote*  
 SP<sub>7</sub>-DPC-be-DPC CONN<sub>7</sub> CL<sub>7</sub>-goodness  
 ‘At the beginning of this month it (the weather) was nice. [lit. (‘the day this month woke up ...’)]  
 (Original French: ‘*Au commencement de ce mois il a fait beau.*’)’
- c. Early 20<sup>th</sup> c. Kimanyanga (Laman 1912: 51) [Central]  
*Mampa matwasumba, makala mampembe ye mambote.*  
*ma-mpa ma-tu-a-sumb-a ma-a-kal-a ma-mpembe*  
 CL<sub>6</sub>-bread REL<sub>6</sub>-SP<sub>1PL</sub>-DPC-buy-DPC SP<sub>6</sub>-DPC-be-DPC CL<sub>6</sub>-white  
*ye ma-mbote*  
 and CL<sub>6</sub>-good  
 ‘The loaves of bread which we bought were white and good.’
- d. Kintandu (Daeleman 1966: 286) [East]  
*Kilũmbú kímósi munágata mukála bambuta bátátu ...*  
*ki-lumbu ki-mosi muna ∅-gata mu-∅-kal-a ba-mbuta*  
 CL<sub>7</sub>-day CL<sub>7</sub>-one LOC<sub>18</sub> CL<sub>5</sub>-village SP<sub>18</sub>-DPC-be-DPC CL<sub>2</sub>-elder  
*ba-tatu*  
 CL<sub>2</sub>-three  
 ‘One day in the village there were three elders ...’  
 (Original Dutch: ‘*Er waren eens in het dorp drie ouden ...*’)’

Another perspective on the coda phase that can be obtained is to focus on a stretch of time of the ensuing state. This is similar to the experiential construal of non-transitional predicates, in that an evaluative viewpoint is imposed over an extended period of time from a remote-past moment up to the present. The

construction is a *transitive* one. Thus, the subject is rather a maleficiary possessor, and the direct object *ekuulu* is the underlying patient-like subject of *toloka* ‘be(come) broken’ as well as the possessee referent denoting a body part of the surface subject.



difference with transitional predicates is that the evaluative frame coincides here with the stative coda phase, which also started at a certain moment in a remote past and continues up to S. This construal typically requires a more elaborate context in which the specific starting point of the evaluative frame is overtly specified, illustrated in the examples in (18). For example, in (18a), the start of the evaluation time is specified by means of a temporal subordinate construction headed by the adverb *tuka* ‘since’ and the timeframe construed by the temporal construction is set in a remote past through the use of the *-a-B-a* construction with the predicate, i.e. *yatukila* ‘I came from (there)’.

- (18) a. Late 19<sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Mbanza Kongo (Bentley 1887: 194) [South]  
*Tuka yatukila ko yela kwambaka.*  
*tuka i-a-tuk-il-a ko Ø-yel-a*  
 since SP<sub>1SG</sub>-DPC-come\_from-APPL-DPC PRON<sub>17</sub> CL<sub>15</sub>-become\_sick-FV  
*ku-a-Ń-bak-a*  
 SP<sub>15</sub>-DPC-OP<sub>1SG</sub>-catch-DPC  
 ‘Ever since I came from there I have been ill (lit. ‘being sick has caught me’).’
- b. Kihangala (KongoKing 2016, fieldwork by G. Kouarata) [North]  
*Mapeyi wasiimba kiseengu kya tómbilú ntáma.*  
*Ø-Mapeyi u-a-simb-a ki-sengo kya Ø-tomabilu*  
 CL<sub>1a</sub>-Mapeyi SP<sub>1</sub>-DPC-obtain-DPC CL<sub>7</sub>-piece CONN<sub>7</sub> CL<sub>9</sub>-truck  
*ntama*  
 long\_ago  
 ‘Mapeyi has (got) the piece of the truck for a long time.’  
 (Original French: ‘Mapeyi tient la pièce du véhicule depuis longtemps.’)

The *-a-B-a* construction also allows an aspectual construal of transitional states-of-affairs in which the speaker refers to the punctual, entry-into-the-state phase rather than to the ensuing stative coda phase. In the examples in (19), the aspectual perspective is drawn on the transition phase, located in a remote past, by means of a subordinate-purpose construction, as in (19a), or a temporal adverb, as in (19c). In (19b) the change-of-state interpretation is obtained through the use of the TA construction with a transitional predicate in a relative construction headed by the noun denoting the location where the change-of-state took place.

- (19) a. Late 19<sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Mbanza Kongo (Bentley 1887: 532) [South]  
*Wafwa muna kutuvuluza.*  
*u-a-fu-a muna ku-tu-vuluz-a*  
 SP<sub>1</sub>-DPC-die-DPC LOC<sub>18</sub> CL<sub>15</sub>-OP<sub>1PL</sub>-save-FV  
 ‘He died to save us.’

- b. Kiyombe (De Clercq 1921: 31) [West]

*Diba difuila k'omb'ama.*

*di-ba di-Ø-Ø-fu-il-a*<sup>22</sup> Ø-komba ama  
 CL<sub>5</sub>-palm\_tree PP<sub>5</sub>-SP<sub>1</sub>-DPC-die-APPL-DPC CL<sub>1</sub>-brother POSS<sub>1SG</sub>

‘The palm tree where my brother died.’

(Original French: ‘*Le palmier où est mort mon frère.*’)

- c. Early 20<sup>th</sup> c. Kimanyanga (Laman 1912: 198) [Central]

*Twakwelana mvu wakedi.*

*tu-a-kwel-an-a N-vu*  
 SP<sub>1PL</sub>-DPC-marry/be(come)\_married-RECP-DPC CL<sub>3</sub>-year  
*u-a-kal-idi*  
 SP<sub>3</sub>-HST-be-HST<sup>23</sup>

‘We married (each other) last year.’

A final aspectual construal of transitional predicates for which the *-a-B-a* construction is used involves a completed viewpoint, in which the entire state-of-affairs is located in a remote past and the state phase does not coincide with S. This is illustrated in (20). These aspectual construals arise through the use of the *-a-B-a* construction in combination with temporal clauses and adverbials of which clear examples are unfortunately scarce in the dataset.

- (20) a. Late 19<sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Mbanza Kongo (Bentley 1887: 268) [South]

*Muna Ekongo twakadila ekulu.*

*muna Ekongo tu-a-kal-il-a ekulu*  
 LOC<sub>18</sub> Kongo SP<sub>1PL</sub>-DPC-live-APPL-DPC previously

‘We lived in Kongo previously.’

<sup>22</sup> From the surface form given in the original source the actual morphological structure of the verb is unclear. Although the author discusses this example as a relative-object construction, he does not analyze its morphological make-up. Thus, our own analysis with a null SP<sub>1</sub> Ø- is only tentative, and it is possible that the verb in this relative-object construction has the (at that point odd) structure SP-DPC-B-DPC in which the subject prefix concords with the antecedent (*diba*) and not with the actual subject of the relative clause.

<sup>23</sup> Note that we gloss the Kimanyanga *-a-B-idi* construction as HST, i.e. Hesternal Past Perfective, even though it is not used here for a hodiernally-based temporal distinction (yesterday vs. today). Rather, the construction is also typically used to construe the anterior time unit in temporal adverbial constructions referring to *last* X (week, year, etc.) with the verb *vyoka* ‘pass’ (see Botne 2012: 543–545).

- b. Early 20<sup>th</sup> c. Kimanyanga (Laman 1912: 146) [Central]

*Wazaya diambu diodio, fwidi.*

*u-a-zay-a*

*di-ambu dyodyo Ø-Ø-fu-idi*

SP<sub>1</sub>-DPC-(come\_to\_)know-DPC CL<sub>5</sub>-matter DEM<sub>5</sub> SP<sub>1</sub>-CPC-die-CPC

‘The one (he, she), who knew about the matter, is dead.’

In summary, the five tempo-aspectual construals for which the *-a-B-a* construction is used with transitional predicates all involve the completion of the entry-into-the-state phase before the moment of speech (S). For the present-state and continuous-state readings, the ensuing state phase, which follows the entry-into-the-state phase, coincides with S. The difference between the two readings lies in the scope of the evaluation time: for the present-state interpretation the stative phase is evaluated at the moment of speech, whereas with the continuous-state reading the evaluation time consists of a stretch of time which begins at a certain moment in the remote past and goes up to S. The other three uses require different types of viewpoint changes. The past-state reading is obtained through an adverbial shifting of the time at which the ensuing state is evaluated from the present (S) to a moment in the past. In the change-of-state reading a shift occurs in which the speaker refers to the entry-into-the-state moment rather than to the ensuing stative phase. And finally, in the completed construal the entire transitional state-of-affairs is described without reference to any of its internal temporal phases.

## 5 *\*-a-B-a* in Proto-Kikongo

### 5.1 Formal reconstruction

In the varieties of the KLC with a reflex of the *\*-a-B-a* construction, the dissociative past completive is expressed by either one of two morphologically different cognate TA constructions: *-a-B-a* or *-Ø-B-a*. Of the two constructions, *-a-B-a* is not only the most widely attested form in the KLC, but it can also easily be retraced to the reconstructed Proto-Bantu conjugation *\*-a-B-a* given in Nurse (2008a: 279). With respect to its morphology, it is rather straightforward to reconstruct the construction’s form as *\*-a-B-a* in Proto-Kikongo. However, as discussed in the introduction, Meeussen (1967: 113) proposes two *-a-B-a* forms for Proto-Bantu which are tonally distinguished by either a high tone on the prefix *\*-â-B-a*, which he labels the preterite imperfective, or the lack thereof *\*-a-B-a*, which he calls the recent imperfective. Unfortunately,

despite the relatively decent amount of documentation of KLC varieties, the absence of tonal information in most of the available descriptions hampers the reconstruction of a tone pattern(s) for the Proto-Kikongo *\*-a-B-a* construction. Nevertheless, in the section below, we argue from a semantic point of view that if Proto-Bantu indeed had two such TA constructions, the *-a-B-a* construction in (Proto-)Kikongo is most likely a retention of what Meeussen (1967) reconstructs as the high-toned preterite imperfective *-á-B-a*.

## 5.2 Semantic reconstruction

In Section 4 we have shown that the central grammatical function of the *-a-B-a* construction in KLC varieties is i) with relation to aspect, to construe the central (nucleus) phase as completed, and ii) with relation to tense, to locate the completed, central phase in a remote past dissociated from the locus of the speech event. Furthermore, this core meaning is found in all modern varieties and historical doculects that have retained this TA construction. Given the widespread attestation of the construction in both synchronic and diachronic varieties, we can propose this central meaning with relative certainty as a semantic reconstruction for the Proto-Kikongo *\*-a-B-a* construction. This would mean that the function of the *-a-B-a* construction has remained more or less stable for a timespan of about two millennia, as Proto-Kikongo is assumed to have a time depth of approximately 1,800 to 2,000 years (de Schryver et al. 2015: 144; Bostoen and de Schryver 2018b: 55). From a wider Bantu perspective, the retention of a TA form with a stable function over such a massive period of time is noteworthy, given that Bantu languages tend to be considered as highly innovative when it comes to the expression of TAM. Following Bybee et al. (1994: 115–121), Nurse (2008a: 25) links the speed and frequency of grammaticalization in the domain of TAM morphology with the agglutinative typology of Bantu languages: “Across Bantu, structures, categories, morphology, and morphemes have all changed since Proto-Bantu [...] Absorption of auxiliaries, fusion, and thus morphological change will occur more often and rapidly in agglutinating languages such as Bantu than in isolating languages such as Chinese”. However, this is not to say that KLC varieties in general have stable and archaic grammars and TA paradigms. Other TA forms, such as the CPC *-Ø-B-iCi* construction, demonstrate variation in form and function across the KLC, which is the result of diachronic changes that occurred in different genealogical subgroups and might have spread through language contact (Dom and Bostoen 2015).

With regard to Meeussen's (1967) terms "preterite" and "imperfective", Nurse (2008a) provides some explanation. For preterite, Nurse (2008a: 315) gives the definition "(past: tense): for languages with two degrees of past, some authors, mainly francophone, refer to the nearer one as the recent (also hodiernal, *d'aujourd'hui*) and the further one as the preterite (also hesternal, remote, *d'hier*)".<sup>24</sup> For imperfective, two senses are provided, one general theoretical definition following authors such as Comrie (1976) and Bybee et al. (1994), and a second stating "to contrast with perfective (e.g. see Meeussen's (1971) analysis of D25)" (Nurse 2008a: 312). Thus, in Meeussen's (1967) Proto-Bantu reconstructions, "preterite" refers to a distal past and "imperfective" is used in a paradigmatic rather than a (theoretical) semantic sense, i.e. to oppose past-tense forms with the ending *-a* against "perfective" past-tense forms with the ending *-ide*.<sup>25</sup> Meeussen's *\*-a/á-B-a* reconstructions not only seem to reflect the difference found in Bantu between languages with a contemporal past *-a-B-a* versus those with a dissociative past *-a-B-a*, but is most likely also motivated by those languages, such as Kirundi, where two such constructions occur in the same language (Meeussen 1959: 105; Nshemezimana and Bostoen 2017: 397). Therefore, with respect to the *-a-B-a* construction in the KLC (Section 4) and our semantic reconstruction of Proto-Kikongo *\*-a-B-a* as a Dissociative Past Complete (this Section), these are semantically more related to Meeussen's Proto-Bantu high-toned preterite imperfective *\*-á-B-a* construction than to his Proto-Bantu low-toned recent imperfective *\*-a-B-a*.

## 6 Conclusion and discussion

Bantu languages are well-known for their complex TA systems, mainly with respect to the grammatical marking of multiple temporal distinctions (Comrie 1985: Ch. 4; Dahl 1985: 120–122; Nurse 2008a: Ch. 3; Botne 2012). Grammatical descriptions of KLC varieties traditionally arrange the multiple past forms from "remote" to "hesternal" and "hodiernal" up to "recent". In such a linear conceptualization of time, most (if not all) grammars of KLC varieties that have a

<sup>24</sup> Meeussen also uses the term preterite (French *prétérit* or Dutch *preteritum*) in descriptions of individual Bantu languages, such as Ombo, Bangubangu and Kirundi (see among others Meeussen 1952, 1954, 1959).


<sup>25</sup> See also in his Kirundi grammar (Meeussen 1959: 105–106): "*La finale -ye caractérise l'aspect perfective. La finale -a figure à toutes les autres formes, y compris les imperfectifs s'opposant aux perfectifs [...].*" ["The final *-ye* expresses perfective aspect. The final *-a* occurs in all other forms, including the imperfectives which are opposed to the perfectives [...]"; our own translation].

DPC *-a-B-a* construction report its function as expressing remote-past time reference. Such analyses do not account for the basic present-stative reading the construction can receive with transitional states-of-affairs, or the different aspectual construals that build on the remote-past or present-state meanings. In this article, we have presented a unified semantic analysis of the core function of the *-a-B-a* construction in the KLC varieties, which includes both lexical and grammatical aspect, the contribution of the type of referent of the argument-structure construction used, and other levels of aspect construal such as adverbial constructions and taxis. It has been shown in different Kikongo varieties that multiple readings can be construed through the use of the *-a-B-a* construction, both for states-of-affairs that have a transitional phase structure and those that do not. We argued furthermore that all these readings are outcomes of the construction's core function, which is to locate the complete(d) nucleus phase of a state-of-affairs in a remote past. Table 1 gives a detailed overview of the various sentence-level interpretations and core function, which can furthermore be reconstructed as the meaning of the *\*-a-B-a* construction in Proto-Kikongo.

In their comparative Bantu study on TA, Nurse and Philippson (2006: 163) observe that “what seems to emerge is that 75 % of **-a- -a** (whatever the tones) refer to P<sub>1</sub>/ANT [near past/anterior; bold in original].” The semantic analysis of the *-a-B-a* construction in the varieties of the KLC in Section 4 shows that they clearly do not belong to the group of Bantu languages where this TA form denotes a contemporaneous past. Nurse and Philippson (2006: 163) and Botne (2014: 18) both propose semantic reconstructions that are similar to one another, for either early or Proto-Bantu *\*-a-B-a*, in their terminology, respectively, near past/anterior and perfect. Nurse (2008a: 237) reconstructs the verbal prefix *\*-a-* to Proto-Bantu as a past marker which could be combined with the final *\*-a* (Nurse 2008a: 261), and suggests that the overall *\*-a-B-a* construction denoted a past perfective (Nurse 2008a: 279).

The different Proto-Bantu proposals, all of which vary (sometimes only slightly so) in their semantic reconstructions, are hard to compare due to the use of different terminology and varying language samples and datasets, or because the methodology and/or sample is not presented. Meeussen's (1967) seminal ‘Bantu grammatical reconstructions’ was part of the output of the research program “Lolemi” at the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, which aimed at collecting all Bantu grammars and, based on that collection, put forth comparative and diachronic studies (Bynon-Polak 1964). A bibliographical overview of the collection can be found in Doneux (1965) and Bastin (1975). Nurse (2008a) based his study on two language samples, i.e. a “core” dataset of 100 Bantu languages and a larger set of 201+ Bantu languages (Nurse 2008b, 2008c). Finally, Botne (2014: 18) summarily discusses an early

**Table 1:** Schematic overview of the various sentence-level meanings of the reflexes of the Proto-Kikongo *-a-B-a* construction and its semantic reconstruction.

	Kikongo Language Cluster	Proto-Kikongo
	<b>SEGMENTAL STRUCTURE</b>	
	-Ø-B-a [part of West] -a-B-a [KLC] -Ø-B-a [part of East]	*á-B-a
	<b>CORE MEANING</b>	
Gramm. Aspect	Completion + Remote Past	Completion + Remote Past
	<b>USAGES</b>	
Lexical Aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-transitional</li> </ul> Remote Past (+ adverb) <i>... mu mvula 2012 [...] tadengana, ...</i> ‘... in the year 2012 [...] we met each other, ...’ (12b) Experiential Past (+ Negation, question, ...) <i>Uaria mungue?</i> ‘Have you eaten the salt?’ (Meaning: ‘Are you Christian?’) (13a)	
Lexical Aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitional</li> </ul> Present State <i>Mfumu wakala (ye) mbongo zazingi.</i> ‘The chieftain has much property.’ (15c) Past State (+ taxis) <i>Watala yö, wāmona yö yātoloĸ’ ekūulu.</i> ‘He looked at it, he saw it had a broken leg.’ (17a) Continuous State (+ adverb) <i>Tuka yatukila ko yela kwambaka.</i> ‘Ever since I came from there I have been ill (lit. ‘being sick has caught me’).’ (18a) Past Change-of-State <i>Twakwelana mvu wakedi.</i> ‘We married (each other) last year.’ (19c) Perfective State <i>Muna Ekongo twakadila ekulu.</i> ‘We lived in Kongo previously.’ (20a)	

Bantu opposition between resultative *\*-Ø-B-ile* and perfect *\*-a-B-a*, but does not present the methodology or language sample(s) underlying that reconstruction, nor does he elaborate for which ancestral node in-between Proto-Bantu and the languages he describes the reconstruction holds.

Although it is widely accepted that Proto-Bantu had an *\*-a-B-a* construction, it is clear from the multiple semantic reconstructions proposed by different authors that we do not yet have a good understanding of its original function, despite the significant progress made in the half century since Meeussen (1967).

The reconstruction of Proto-Bantu grammar, based on the comparison of present-day languages, typically seems to result in broad, general proposals which are subsequently recycled in grammars using a top-down approach. In contrast, we argue that a bottom-up approach is a much more useful methodology in order to ultimately arrive at a semantic reconstruction for Proto-Bantu. With this study we demonstrated how an in-depth investigation of the semantics of one TA construction in a cluster of genealogically related language varieties could result in a robust and, more importantly, relatively exact and detailed reconstruction in the most recent common ancestor of such a genetic unity.<sup>26</sup> We are also convinced that such an approach could furthermore advance our knowledge about the present-day variation in both form and function of *-a-B-a* constructions in Bantu in general and how that variation came about.

## Abbreviations

1, 2, 3, ...	number of noun class (i.e. x below)
APPL	applicative
AUG <sub>x</sub>	augment of class x
B	verb base
C	consonant / coda phase
CAUS	causative
CL <sub>x</sub>	noun class prefix of class x
CMPL	completive
CONN	connective of class x
CPC	Contemporal Past Completive
DEM <sub>x</sub>	demonstrative of class x
DPC	Dissociative Past Completive
EXPL	expletive marker
FV	final vowel
HST	Hesternal Past Perfective
INTENS	intensifier
KLC	Kikongo Language Cluster
LOC <sub>x</sub>	locative of class x
MID	middle
N	homorganic nasal / nucleus phase
ŋ	syllabic homorganic nasal
NEG	negative
NT	neuter
∅	zero morph

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<sup>26</sup> There are only a few other works in which a similar goal is pursued, e.g. Muzale (1998) for the Rutara languages and Proto-Rutara, Nurse and Muzale (1999) for Great Lakes Bantu, and Crane (2012) for the TA suffix *-ile* in Bantu Botatwe.



O	onset phase
OP <sub>x</sub>	object prefix of class x
PASS	passive
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS <sub>x</sub>	possessive of class x
PP <sub>x</sub>	pronominal prefix of class x
PRON <sub>x</sub>	pronoun of class x
PRS	present
Q	question particle
QUOT	quotative
RECP	reciprocal
REL <sub>x</sub>	relative of class x
SBJV	subjunctive
SEP <sub>INTR</sub>	separative intransitive
SG	singular
SP <sub>x</sub>	subject prefix of class x
TA	tense/aspect

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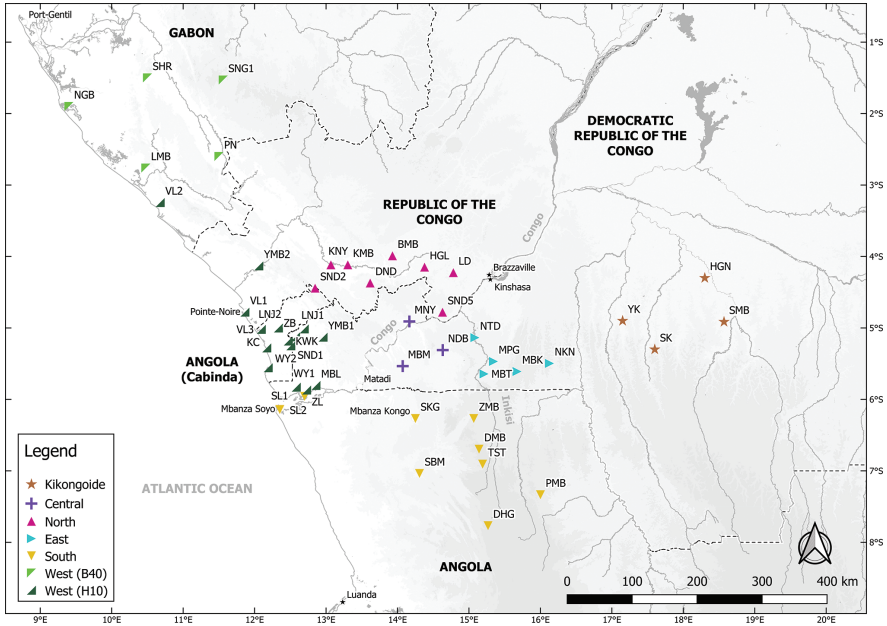
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# Addenda

## 1 Map of the KLC and its subgroups



Legend: **BMB** Kibembe; **DHG** Dihungu; **DMD** Kindamba; **DND** Kidondo; **HGL** Kihangala; **HGN** Kihungan; **KC** Ikoci; **KMB** Kikamba; **KNY** Kikunyi; **KWK** Ikwakongo; **LD** Cilaadi; **LMB** Yilumbu; **LNJ1** Cilinji (DRC); **LNJ2** Ilinji (Cabinda); **MBK** Kimbeko; **MBL** Kimbala; **MBM** Kimboma; **MBT** Kimbata; **MNY** Kimanyanga; **MPG** Kimpangu; **NDB** Kindibu; **NGB** Yingubi; **NKN** Kinkanu; **NTD** Kintandu; **PMB** Kipombo; **PN** Yipunu; **SBM** Kisibemba; **SHR** Yishira; **SK** Kisuku; **SKG** Kisikongo; **SL1** Kisolongo (DRC); **SL2** Kisolongo (Angola); **SMB** Kisamba; **SND1** Cisundi (Cabinda); **SND2** Kisundi (Kimongo); **SND5** Kisundi (Boko); **SNG1** Yisangu; **TST** Kitsootso; **VL1** Civili (Congo); **VL2** Civili (Gabon); **VL3** Civili (Cabinda); **WY1** Ciwoyo (DRC); **WY2** Iwoyo (Cabinda); **YK** Kiyaka; **YMB1** Kiyombe; **YMB2** Kiyombi; **ZB** Kizobe; **ZL** Cizali; **ZMB** Kizombo

## 2 Overview of the language sample, data sources and reflexes of Proto-Kikongo \*-a-B-a

The order of the core subgroups is based on the time depth of the historical records: South Kikongo first with the 17<sup>th</sup> c. catechism of Cardoso, then West Kikongo with Descourvières' late 18<sup>th</sup> c. descriptions, etc. Varieties within each subgroup are arranged alphabetically, that is, disregarding the class 7 prefix ki-/ci-/di-/i-. Historical varieties up to the twentieth century, however, always appear first. Multiple sources for one variety go from the oldest to the most recent. The data in this article are based on what is seen in all these sources, but for reasons of space not all varieties/doculects are always illustrated.

South Kikongo		
– 17 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Mbanza Kongo	– Cardoso (1624)	-a-B-a
	– Brusciotto à Vetralla (1659), translated into English by Guinness (1882a)	-a-B-a
– Late 19 <sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in the Cataract region	– Bentley (1887, 1895)	-a-B-a
	– Guinness (1882b)	-a-B-a
– Late 19 <sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in the vicinity of Boma	– Craven and Barfield (1883)	-a-B-a
– Late 19 <sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in the area south of the mouth of the Congo river	– Visseq (1889)	-a-B-a
– Dihungu	– Atkins (1954)	NA
– Kisikongo	– Ndonga Mfuwa (1995)	-a-B-a
– Kisolongo (Angola)	– Tavares (1915)	-a-B-a
– Kisolongo (DRC)	– KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by S. Dom	-a-B-a
– Kitsootso	– Baka (1992)	-a-B-a
	– Panda (2017)	-a-B-a
– Kizombo	– Carter (1970, 1973, 1974)	-a-B-a
	– Del Fabbro and Petterlini (1977)	-a-B-a
	– Carter and Makoondekwa (1987)	-a-B-a
	– Mpanzu (1994)	-a-B-a
	– Fernando (2008)	-a-B-a
	– Matsinhe and Fernando (2008)	-a-B-a
West Kikongo		
– 18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Kakongo (present-day Cabinda)	– Descourvières (1773) [transcribed by S. Drieghe (2014)]	-a-B-a
	– Descourvières (1776) [transcribed by E. Nshemezimana]	-a-B-a
	– Carrie (1888)	-a-B-a
	– Le Louët (1890)	NA

(continued)

– 19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> c. Kikongo as spoken in Loango (present-day southern Republic of the Congo)	– Ussel (1888)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Derouet (1896)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
– Cisundi	– Marichelle (1907, 1912)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
– Civili <sup>a</sup>	– Futi (2012)	– <i>∅-B-a</i>
	– Ndamba (1977)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Blanchon and Nsuka Nkutsi (1984)	– <i>a-B-ə</i>
	– Loëmbe (2005)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– I.LA.LOK (2008)	– <i>a-B(-a)</i>
	– Mavoungou and Ndinga-Koumba-Binza (2010)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– N'Douli (2012)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Humber and Tchimbakala (2013)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
– Ciwoyo	– KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by J. De Kind	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by S. Dom	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– KongoKing 2015, fieldwork by S. Dom	– <i>a-B-a</i>
– Iwoyo	– Mingas (1994)	– <i>∅-B-a</i>
– Kiyombe	– De Clercq (1921)	– <i>∅-B-a</i>
	– Bittremieux (1927)	– <i>∅-B-a</i>
– Cizali	– KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by S. Dom	– <i>a-B-a</i>

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**Central Kikongo**

– Kimanyanga	– Westlind (1888)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Laman (1912)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Laman and Meinhof (1928–1929)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Nakutukeba (1980)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Odden (1991)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Makaya Lutumba (1999)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Makokila Nanzanza (2012)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– KongoKing 2015, fieldwork by S. Dom	– <i>a-B-a</i>
– Kimboma	– Kisilu Meso (2001)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Wabelua (2006)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
– Kindibu	– Coene (1960)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
	– Wanginavo Ntendo (2001)	– <i>a-B-a</i>

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**East Kikongo**

– Kimbata	– KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by S. Dom	– <i>∅-B-a</i>
– Kimbeko	– KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by S. Dom	– <i>∅-B-a</i>
– Kinkanu	– KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by S. Dom	– <i>a-B-a</i>
– Kintandu	– Butaye (1909)	– <i>∅-B-a</i>
	– Butaye (1910)	– <i>a-B-a</i>
		– <i>∅-B-a</i>
	– Daeleman (1966)	– <i>∅-B-a</i>

(continued)

	– KongoKing 2012, fieldwork by S. Dom	-Ø-B-a
	– KongoKing 2015, fieldwork by S. Dom	-Ø-B-a
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<b>North Kikongo</b>		
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– Kibembe	– Jacquot (1981)	NA
	– Nsayi (1984)	-a-B-a
	– Philippson and Boungou (1999)	NA
	– Kouarata (2015, 2016)	-a-B-a
	– KongoKing 2016, fieldwork by G. Kouarata	-a-B-a
– Kidondo	– Williams-Ngumbu et al. (2015)	-Ø-B-a
	– KongoKing 2016, fieldwork by G. Kouarata	-a-B-a
– Kihangala	– Nkouanda (1997)	NA
	– KongoKing 2016, fieldwork by G. Kouarata	-a-B-a
– Kikamba	– Bouka (1989)	-a-B-a
	– KongoKing 2016, fieldwork by G. Kouarata	-Ø-B-a
– Cilaadi	– Jacquot (1974, 1982)	-a-B-a
	– Samba (1989)	-a-B-a
	– KongoKing 2016, fieldwork by G. Kouarata	-a-B-a
– Kisundi	– N'Landu Kitambika (1994)	-a-B-a
	– Baka (1998, 1999)	-a-B-a
	– KongoKing 2016, fieldwork by G. Kouarata	-a-B-a
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<b>Kikongoid</b>		
<hr/>		
– Kisuku	– Nsangu (1972)	-a-B-a
	– Piper (1977)	NA
	– Kifindi (1997)	-a-B-a
– Kiyaka	– van den Eynde (1968)	-a-B-a
	– Kidima (1987, 1990)	NA
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<sup>a</sup>Most Civili sources used for this study do not focus on tense and aspect (Ndamba 1977; Blanchon and Nsuka Nkutsi 1984; I.LA.LOK 2008; Mavoungou and Ndinga-Koumba-Binza 2010; Humber and Tchimbakala 2013), and the examples including an *-a-B-a* construction are scarce and do not provide enough context to understand its specific tempo-aspectual semantics. In the sole grammar sketch which does provide an overview of the TA paradigm, Loembe (2005: 71–75) defines an *-a-B-a* construction as a present completive (*‘le présent de l’action accomplie’*) and translates it with the French Passé Récent. In contrast to the Subjunctive, Future or Present *-a-B-a* constructions found throughout the KLC (see Section 2.3), we do not exclude the possibility that the Civili ‘near past’ *-a-B-a* is historically related to the common “remote” *-a-B-a*. The aspectual semantics of completion which the latter construction has, could have allowed a reinterpretation of its temporal specification. Such semantic changes have been shown to underlie paradigmatic innovations in other Bantu languages as well (Botne 2014). However, in this article we focus only on those cognates of the *-a-B-a* construction that have clear remoteness semantics and which contrast with hodiernal and pre-hodiernal constructions in the wider past-tense paradigm. We leave it to future research to investigate the semantics of the Civili *-a-B-a* construction and its position in the variety’s TA paradigm, and to provide a better understanding of its relation to the *-a-B-a* construction discussed in this article. Despite this, we have still chosen to indicate here that the *-a-B-a* construction is attested in Civili.