

**Meeuwis, Michael. 2020. A grammatical overview of Lingála:
Revised and extended edition. Munich: Lincom.
333 p., ISBN-10: 3969390044, ISBN-13: 978-3969390047; 158,00 €**

Janika Kunzmann (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt)

Review

- <1> The present book is a grammatical description of the Bantu language Lingála (or Lingala), a lingua franca with about 45 million native and non-native speakers. It is mainly spoken in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of Congo, northwest Angola, as well as in the Diaspora. Of the many varieties of Lingála, it is the most dominant one that is covered in the grammar – the variety spoken in the DRC’s capital: Kinshasa Lingála (Meeuwis 2020:33). At around 300 pages, *A grammatical overview of Lingála: Revised and extended edition* is, to my knowledge, the largest and most detailed grammatical description of the language so far. Compared to the eponymous previous version from 2010, which comprises around 200 pages, this grammar can definitely not only be labeled as a revised, but also as an extended edition. In addition to the English version, the French translation *Grammaire descriptive du lingála: Édition revue et élargie* was published in 2021, making the grammar accessible to a wider audience, including readers from francophone countries such as the DRC.
- <2> The grammar consists of eleven chapters. With Chapter 1, the grammatical description is preceded by an introduction to the geographic and demographic situation, as well as a detailed account of the history of the contact language. The historical overview starts with the emergence of Lingála in the late 19th century and ends with the use of Kinshasa Lingála in today’s media. For those readers who only want to deal in passing with the historical background (which is particularly interesting in the case of Lingála), the first chapter contains precise and concise summaries. Chapter 2, *Phonology and Tonology*, the vowel and consonant inventory is presented, followed by sections on phonotactic constraints and tones. The findings are documented with several examples that allow the reader to retrace the analysis while providing a good insight into the Bantu language for those who are new to it. Extensions compared to the 2010 grammar took place particularly in the subchapter on tone, with paragraphs on tone spreading and tone stability being added. Observations such as the glide insertion for emphasis (see Meeuwis 2020:40) show how precisely observations were made here and how accurately the underlying data was processed. The chapter concludes with a section dealing with orthographic issues, offering interesting insights into written Lingála and the variation of spellings used by Lingála speakers. I appreciate that this part, which is often given less attention, has been included in the work. However, I would have preferred to see this section as a separate chapter at the end of the grammar rather than as a part of the phonology chapter, but that is a personal preference. Issues on phonology and tonology are followed by Chapter 3 on the noun. Here, the noun class system is discussed in detail, covering pluralization, prefix stacking, semantic shifts, etc. Besides plural formation and noun derivation, tonal profiles of nouns are taken into account. The subchapter *Some noun classes and their prefixes in detail* not only demonstrates the thoroughness behind this work, but also that Lingála, as a successor to the pidginized Bobangi, does not fail to supply researchers with morphological and semantic complexity. Chapter 4, *The noun phrase*, illustrates the negation of noun phrases, agreement and constituent order. It follows Chapter 5 on *Other parts of*

speech than nouns and verbs. Here, issues on connectives, adjectives, personal pronouns, demonstratives, relativizers, numerals and quantifiers and interrogatives are discussed. Especially the usage of the connectors *ya* and *na* is explained in detail. Aspects related to the verb in Lingála, which have not been touched upon yet, are presented in Chapter 6. The chapter contains very detailed findings on tense-aspect-modality, as well as on verb-to-verb derivation via (single or combined) root extensions. In the latter section, applicative, causative, neuter/reciprocal, etc. are discussed in their form and function. In the section on passive, reference is also made to other passivation strategies beyond the use of the verbal extension -*am-*. Thus, also “non-promotional passive” is included. Chapter 7, *The verb phrase and the single clause*, deals with questions regarding verb phrase negation, constituent order, comparative and superlatives. Again, the large number of examples give a very good impression, alongside the concise explanations. Clause combinations are presented in Chapter 8, followed by an illustration of several focus constructions (via verb duplication or the focalizer *ndé*) in Chapter 9. With Chapter 10, the 2020 grammar does justice to the importance of code-switching between Kinshasa Lingála and French, which Meeuwis (2020:283) considers an ubiquitous practice, typically involving the insertion of French elements into a Lingála matrix. The topic is made accessible by considering codeswitching in nouns (e.g. the plural formation of nouns of French origin) and in noun phrases, as well as in verbs. In particular for code switching in relation to the verb, a number of examples are given that take into account different TAM forms. Chapter 11 closes the grammar with a sample text (a transcribed and interlinearized conversation between an interviewer and a musician), which again illustrates the frequent instances of codeswitching with French.

- <3> To sum it up, I find the present grammar impressively comprehensive and detailed, without losing readability or appearing overloaded. The large number of examples makes it easy to follow and understand the analysis. Moreover, it makes the grammar vivid and, as I think, easily accessible for students or researchers who are not yet very familiar with Lingála or Bantu languages in general. Short and concise paragraphs make the grammar easy to consult, however, detailed explanations are given where appropriate. Limitations of the work are disclosed, as for example in Chapter 2.4 on the subject of tone. Here it is pointed out that a more in-depth tonal analysis is required to determine whether surface low tones are also underlyingly low in Lingála or not. Various parts of the grammar have been developed and expanded, such as plural formation (Section 3.3) or tense-aspect-modality (Section 6.8). Especially in the later chapters restructuring and expansions took place, such as the addition of Chapter 11 on codeswitching and a separate chapter on focus markers (Chapter 9), which was a subchapter in the 2010 grammar. Although the grammar primarily deals with the Kinshasa variety of Lingála, multiple references are made to other varieties, such as a comparison of Kinshasa Lingála and northwestern Lingála in terms of phonological variation (see Meeuwis 2020:46), or references to the closely related languages Bangala and Bobangi. Overall, the present grammar can be considered the most comprehensive grammatical description of Kinshasa Lingála to this date. Despite its scope and for the benefit of the reader, the grammar is just as clear and concise as the 2010 predecessor.

References

- Meeuwis, Michael 2010
A grammatical overview of Lingála. Munich: Lincom
- Meeuwis, Michael 2020
A grammatical overview of Lingála: Revised and extended edition. Munich: Lincom
- Meeuwis, Michael 2021
Grammaire descriptive du lingála: Édition revue et élargie. Munich: Lincom