

(Some) Dialectal Variation in Nominal System in Kimbundu

Olga Kharytonava
Western University
vkharyt@uwo.ca

1. Background.

- Kimbundu (H20) - Angola
- spoken mainly in Bengo, Kuanza Norte, and Malanje provinces; also in adjacent areas in Kuanza Sul, Luanda, and Uíge provinces (Ethnologue, 2021)
- includes many varieties, debate about them being variants vs. languages (Jordan & Manuel, 2016; Jordan, 2015)
- Speakers: born outside Luanda
- L2: Portuguese
- Fieldwork trips: 2018 and 2020

This talk: five varieties

Mbaka:

- standard Kimbundu
- appears in Biblical texts
- referred to as 'correct Kimbundu' (speakers)
- preferred and spoken by literate speakers
- different provinces (e.g. Malanje, Kwanza Norte)
- 3 speakers

Kwanza Norte:

- believed to be the origin of the Mbaka variety
- 1 speaker

Other varieties:

Ngoya:

- Malanje
- 1 speaker

Kissama:

- Kwanza Sul
- 1 speaker

Libolo:

- Kwanza Sul
- 1 speaker



General Information

- Kimbundu is not a homogenous language and has many varieties
- Speakers believe all varieties belong to the same language, but little research has been done to document them
- Previous work (Châtelain 1888), Pedro (1993), Xavier (2012), de Nascimento (1903) document them as one variety (possibly Mbaka)
- Due to population displacement, speakers of varieties often no longer live in their area of the origin of their varieties
- Possible influences from neighbouring languages

This talk:

- attempt to document different varieties (here, only five)
- describe current shifts and patterns of undergoing change in the noun class system and agreement in five varieties
- ongoing research (more data to be collected)

2. Overview of the Noun Class System.

Previously described noun class system:

Châtelain (1888)	SG	PL
1	mu-	a-
2	mu-	mi-
3	ki-	i-
4	di-	ma-
5	u-	mau-
6	lu-	malu-
7	tu-	matu-
8	ku-	maku-
9	zero	ji-
10	ka-	tu-

Pedro (1993)	SG	PL	
1	mu-	a-	humans
2	mu-	mi-	plants, objects
3	ki-	i-	artifacts, inanimate beings
4	di-	ma-	plants, objects, body parts, liquids
5	u-	mau-	abstract terms
6	lu-	malu-	objects
7	doesn't appear		natural phenomena
8	ku-	maku-	natural processes (food, drink, death)
9	i-/zero	ji-	animals, natural phenomena
10	ka-	tu-	diminutive

*Classes do not appear in the same order in Pedro's classification

Table 1: Noun Class System in Châtelain (1888)

Table 2: Noun Class System in Pedro (1993)

Patterns in Noun Class Reassignment:

- Kimbundu nominal class system is not as stable and systematic as previously described: different varieties seem to shift the noun class assignment for some nouns
- Mbaka & Kwanza Norte: the most conservative varieties
- Emergence of new genders: singular and/or plural is/are reassigned in three varieties
- Hypothesis:
 - 9sg/9pl is the first default class singular and plural
 - 4pl is the second default class for plural
- Kissama variety has a new default class for 9pl (possibly influence from other languages)
- Libolo: different phonetic forms for several classes, several classes merge

	Mbaka		Kwanza Norte		Ngoya (Malanje)		Kissama (Kwanza Sul)		Libolo (Kwanza Sul)	
stable w/ additions	1sg	1pl	1sg	1pl	1sg	1pl	1sg	1pl	1sg	1pl
									1sg	4pl
stable	2sg	2pl	2sg	2pl	2sg	2pl	2sg	2pl	2sg	2pl
									2sg	3pl
									2sg	4pl
	3sg	3pl	3sg	3pl	3sg	3pl	3sg	3pl	3sg	3pl
			3sg	9pl	3sg	2pl			3sg	4pl
	4sg	4pl	4sg	4pl	4sg	4pl	4sg	4pl	4sg	4pl
fairly stable, not frequent	5sg	5pl	5sg	5pl	5sg	5pl	5sg	5pl	not observed	
					5sg	1pl				
					5sg	2pl				
	6sg	6pl	6sg	6pl	6sg	6pl	6sg	6pl	6sg	6pl
	6sg	9pl			6sg	9pl			6sg	9pl
stable, not frequent	7sg	7pl	7sg	7pl	7sg	7pl	7sg	7pl	7sg	7pl
	8sg	8pl	8sg	8pl	8sg	8pl	8sg	8pl	8sg	8pl
most producti ve	9sg	9pl	9sg	9pl	9sg	9pl	9sg	9pl	9sg	9pl
	9sg	4pl			9sg	1pl	9sg	4pl	9sg	1pl
							9sg	e- pl	9sg	2pl
									9sg	4pl
	10sg	10pl	10sg	9pl	10sg	10pl			10sg	10pl

Table 3: Noun Classes in five Kimbundu varieties. Grey: new pairings

2.1. Mbaka Kimbundu Noun Class Changes

- very conservative (aligns with previous literature)
- two shifts: to 4pl (ma-) and 9pl (ji-) – most common classes

(1) Gender: 6sg – 9pl

Mbaka		vs	Kwanza Norte (loss of prefix)
(a) lu-ndemba	6sg-hair		Ø-ndemba 9sg-hair
ji-ndemba	9pl-hair		ji-ndemba 9pl-hair
(b) lu-mbanji	6sg-rib	vs	Ø-mbanji 9sg-rib
ji-mbanji	9pl-rib		ji-mbanji 9pl-rib

Reason: 6pl is no longer stable, loss of prefix

(2) Gender: 9sg – 4pl

Mbaka		vs	Kwanza Norte (preserved)
(a) Ø-dimi	9sg-tongue		di-dimi 4sg-tongue
ma-dimi	4pl-tongue		ma-dimi 4pl-tongue

Reason: possibly phonological (class 4sg prefix is *di-*), loss of prefix in Mbaka

(3) Borrowings: 9sg-9pl

(a) Ø-fololo 9sg-flower (b) Ø-njanena 9sg-window
ji-fololo 9pl-flower ji-njanena 9pl-window

2.2. Kwanza Norte Kimbundu Noun Class Changes

- very conservative: possibly b/c this is where Mbaka originated

(4) Gender: 10sg-9pl

(a) ka-polepole 10sg-ankle
ji-polepole 9pl-ankle

Reason: not significant (loss of diminutive meaning, reassignment to the default class)

(5) Borrowings: 9sg-9pl

(a) waist (b) tree (c) fruit (d) road (e) teacher
Ø-sintura Ø-arvore Ø-fruta Ø-xterada Ø-profesore
ji-sintura ji-arvore ji-fruta ji-xterada ji-profesore

(6) Cases of double number marking: adding '-s' (influence from Portuguese)

(a) mi-xi-s (b) i-alu-s (c) ma-tui-s (d) Ø-inzo-s (e) tu-ana-s
2pl-stick-pl 3pl-chair-pl 4pl-ear-pl 9pl-house-pl 10pl-child-pl

	Mbaka	Kwanza Norte
1	humans	
	Ex: person, woman, child, son, daughter, cook, teacher	Ex: person, woman, child, boy
2	humans & body parts (small size & density), plants, objects	
	Ex: boy, girl, finger, lip, beard, finger, head, eyebrow, tree, mountain, stick	Ex: finger, lip, finger, head, eyebrow, mountain, stick <i>Shift: beard (9), tree (9)</i>
3	body parts, artifacts, inanimate beings	
	Ex: leg, foot, shoulder, skin, lung, skeleton, animal, eyelash, fruit, basket	Ex: leg, shoulder, skin, animal, eyelash <i>Shift: lung (9), fruit (9)</i>
4	plants, objects, body parts, natural elements, human (masc)	
	Ex: forehead, eye, throat, door, stone, leaf, man, hunter	Ex: forehead, eye, throat, door, stone, leaf, man, hunter
5	objects (start with u-) Ex: canoe, net, gun	
6	objects, body parts Ex: hand	
7	natural phenomena Ex: fire	
8	natural processes (food, drink, death) Ex: food	
9	animals, natural phenomena, kinship, body parts Ex: neck, face, kidney, knee, liver, (grand)parents, siblings, lion, fish, dog, window, water	
10	diminutive	
	Ex: ankle, heel, birdie, little child	Ex: little child ankle (9pl), heel (9pl)

Table 4: Mbaka and Kwanza Norte Noun Class System

2.3. Ngoya Kimbundu Noun Class Changes

- stigmatised variety (literacy, economic status, way of living)
- much less conservative

(7) Gender: 1sg-10pl

	Ngoya, Mbaka, Kuanza Norte	vs.	Kissama	
(a)	mona (from <i>mu-ana</i>)	1sg-child	mona	1sg-child
	tu-ana	10pl-child	a-na (from <i>a-ana</i>)	1pl-child
	Reason: diminutive			

(8) Gender: 9pl as alternative to 4pl

(a)	di-kanda	4sg	'foot, palm'
	ma-kanda	4pl	
	ji-kanda	9pl	

(9) Gender: 3sg-2pl

(a)	ki-koka	3sg-road
	mi-koka	2pl-road
	Reason: length (by analogy with <i>mountain, tree, stick</i>)	

(10) Gender: 5sg-1pl

(a)	u-anete	5sg-muscle	(b)	u-ahele	5sg-skeleton
	a-nete	1pl-muscle		a-ele	1pl-skeleton
	Reason: animacy?				

(11) Gender: 5sg-2pl

(a)	u-koto	5sg-ankle
	mi-koto	2pl-ankle
	Reason: body parts (size?)	

(12) Gender: 6sg – 9pl (similar to Mbaka)

(a)	lu-ndemba	6sg-hair	(b)	lu-ngandula	6sg-jaw
	ji-ndemba	9pl-hair		ji-ngandula	9pl-jaw
	Reason: loss of prefix (default)				

(13) Gender: 9sg-1pl

(a)	tat-etu	9sg-dad-poss.1pl	'our dad'
	a-tat-etu	1pl-dad-poss.1pl	'our dads'
(b)	may-etu	9sg-mother-poss.1pl	'our mom
	a-may-etu	1pl-mother-poss.1pl	'our moms'
(c)	kuku-etu	9sg-grandparent-poss.1pl	'our grandparent
	a-kuku-etu	1pl-grandparent-poss.1pl	'our grandparents'
	Reason: animacy		

2.4. Kissama Kimbundu Noun Class System

- less conservative, more innovative
- (14) Gender: 9pl as alternative to 4pl (similar to Ngoya)
including borrowings
- | | | | |
|--------------|------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| (a) Ø-janena | 9sg-window | (b) Ø-divulu | 9sg-book |
| ma-janena | 9pl-window | ji-divulu | 9pl-book |
| | | ma-divulu | 4pl-book* (preferred) |
- * also used in MB, KZ, NG (phonological)
- (15) Innovation: 'e-' prefix (borrowed?)
- seems to be default
- often interchangeable with 9pl (*ji-*), but e- is preferred
- | | | | | |
|---------------|---------|------------|---------|-------------|
| (a) from 9sg: | Ø-soba | 9sg-king | e-soba | e.pl-king |
| | Ø-mbudi | 9sg-monkey | e-mbudi | e.pl-monkey |
| | Ø-neka | 9sg-glass | e-neka | e.pl-glass |
| | Ø-polo | 9sg-face | e-polo | e.pl-face |
- from 3sg (ki > i)
- | | | | | |
|-----|----------|------------|----------|-------------|
| (b) | i-kumba | 3sg-basket | e-kumba | e.pl-basket |
| | i-ndemba | 3sg-hair | e-ndemba | e.pl-hair |
| | i-tadi | 3sg-money | e-tadi | e.pl-money |
| | i-nama | 3sg-leg | e-nama | e.pl-leg |
- prefix 'e-' coexists with 'ji-':
- (16) (a) mbudi-yami 'my monkey' e-mbudi-jami 'my monkeys'
(b) mbudi-ye 'your sg monkey' e-mbudi-je 'your sg monkeys'
- vs. Mbaka
- | | | | | |
|-----|-----------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| (a) | hima-yami | 'my monkey' | ji-hima-jami | 'my monkeys' |
| (b) | hima-ye | 'your sg monkey' | ji-hima-je | 'your sg monkeys' |
- (17) Borrowings also take 'e-':
- | | | | | |
|-----|-----------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| (a) | meza | 'table' | e-meza | 'tables' |
| (b) | meza-yami | 'my table' | e-meza-jami | 'my tables' |

2.5. Libolo Kimbundu Noun Class System

- least conservative
 - merge of classes
- (16) Gender: 1sg-4pl (second most productive after 9pl)
- | | | | | | |
|-----------|------------|---------------|----------|-------------|-----------|
| (a) mu-tu | 1sg-person | (b) mu-teliki | 1sg-cook | (c) mu-hatu | 1sg-woman |
| ma-tu | 4pl-person | ma-teliki | 4pl-cook | ma-hatu | 4pl-woman |
- Reason: 1pl is reserved for kinship (Gender: 9sg-1pl)
- | | | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|------------|------------|
| (d) Ø-pangie | 9sg-brother | (e) Ø-kuku | 9sg-grandparent | (f) Ø-mama | 9sg-mother |
| a-pangie | 1pl-brother | a-kuku | 1pl-grandparent | a-mama | 1pl-mother |

	Mbaka		Libolo Changes	
	SG	PL		
1	mu-	a-	mu-	ma- a-
2	mu-	mi-	mu-	mi-
3	ki-	i-	ki-	i-
4	di-	ma-	di-	ma-
5	u-	mau-	u-	mau-
6	lu-	malu-	lu-	malu-
7	tu-	matu-	tu-	matu-
8	ku-	maku-	ku-	maku-
9	zero	ji-	zero	ni-
10	ka-	tu-	ka-	tu-

Table 5: Class System in Libolo Kimbundu

(17) Gender: 2sg-4pl

(a) mu-tue 2sg-head (b) mu-sosu 1sg-stick
ma-tue 4pl-head ma-sosu 4pl-stick

(18) Phonological change : 9pl (ji- > ni-)

(a) Ø-pela 9sg-window (b) Ø-mbiji 9sg-fish (c) Ø-taku 9sg-hair
ni-pela 9pl-window ni-mbiji 9pl-fish ni-taku 9pl-hair

Borrowings :

(d) Ø-ngarfu 9sg-fork
ni-ngarfu 9pl-fork

(19) Gender : 6sg-9pl

(a) lu-fati 6sg-rib (b) lu-soke 6sg-kidney
ni-fati 9pl-rib ni-soke 9pl-kidney

(20) Gender : 9sg-2pl

(a) Ø-ten 9sg-flower (b) Ø-honga 9sg-river
mi-ten 2pl-flower mi-honga 2pl-river

(21) Gender: 9sg-4pl

(a) Ø-kualu 9sg-basket (b) Ø-peto 9sg-chest (c) Ø-iaki 9sg-egg
ma-kualu 4pl-basket ma-peto 9pl-chest ma-iaki 4pl-egg

3. Other Patterns in Noun Class Reassignment

(22) Nouns may take different prefixes based on their semantics: diminutive

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| (a) canoe (5) | (b) bird (9) | (c) girl (1/2) |
| kalungu (10sg) LBL | njila (9sg) kanjila (10sg) MB | kafeka (10sg) LBL |
| maulungu (5pl) | jinjila (9sg) tunjila (10pl) | mafeka (5pl) |

Phonetic form vs. Class Assignment

- (23) basket
- | | | | | |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Mbaka | KN | NG | KS | LB |
| kinda (5sg) | sexto (9sg) | ngalo (9sg) | kwalu (9sg) | kwalu (9sg) |
| yinda (5pl) | jisexto (pl) | jingalo (9pl) | jikwalu (9pl) | makwalu (4pl) |
- (24) hair
- | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| MB | KN | NG | KS | LB |
| lundemba (6sg) | ndemba (9sg) | lundemba (4sg) | indemba (9sg) | taku (9sg) |
| jindemba (9pl) | jindemba (9pl) | jindemba (9pl) | endemba (9pl) | mataku (4pl) |
- (25) cook
- | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| MB | KN | NG | KS | LB |
| mulambe (1sg) | kozinhoiro (9sg) | nkarakadi (1sg) | umlambi (1sg) | muteliki (1sg) |
| alambe (1sg) | jikozihoiro (9pl) | akarakadi (1pl) | alambi (1pl) | mateliki (4pl) |

Some Phonological Processes:

- *Vowel deletion* in Class 1sg prefix and consonant place assimilation (mu-):

- (26) (a) mutue > mtue 'head' (NG)
mitue 'heads'
- (b) mixi > nxi 'stick' (NG)
mixi 'sticks'
- (c) mukarakadi > nkarakadi 'cook' (NG)
akarakadi 'cooks'

- (27) *C-V metathesis* in Class 1sg prefix:
mutue > umtue 'person' (KS)
mulambi > umlambi 'cook'

- (28) *Weakening*:
dibitu > divitu 'door' (KN)

4. Possessive Suffixes

Person	SG					PL				
	MB	KN	KS	NG	LB	MB	KN	KS	NG	LB
1	-ami					-etu				
2	-é			-ayi	-â -aye	-enu				
3	-ê	-amuene	-ayo	-ayi	-ê -eye	-â	-aene	-akayo	-au	-ou

Table 5: Pronominal Suffixes

Patterns:

- Same lexical forms are consistently found in 1sg, 1pl and 2pl (29)
- Different lexical forms are found in 2sg, 3sg and 3pl (30)
- Sometimes, speakers may use two forms (standard – Mbaka, and their own interchangeably) – which might be a sign of change in progress
- Influence of Portuguese pronoun system, where 3sg is used for both 2sg and 3sg.
- When asked, speakers are able to discriminate -é ‘your sg’ and -ê ‘his’, and the tone.
- When replacing 2sg with 3sg, the 3sg contour tone is used.
- *amuene* vs. *a + muene* (of him), *aene* vs. *a+ene* (of them), *-ayi* vs. *a+eye* (of you).

(29)	(a)	mu-kanda-wami	‘my letter’	MB, KN, QS, NG, LB
		mu-kanda-wetu	‘our letter’	
		mu-kanda-wenu	‘your pl letter’	
	(b)	ki-ialo-kiami	‘my chair’	MB, KN, QS, NG, LB
		ki-ialo-k(i)etu	‘our chair’	
		ki-ialo-k(i)enu	‘your pl chair’	
(30)	(a)	mu-kanda-wé	‘your sg letter’	MB, KN, QS NG LB
		mu-kanda-wayi	‘your sg letter’	
		mu-kanda-wa	‘your sg letter’	
	(b)	di-honjo-diê	‘his banana’	MB
		di-honjo-diamuene	‘his banana’	KN
		di-honjo-diayo	‘his banana’	KS
		di-honjo-diayi	‘his banana’	NG
		di-honjo-dieye	‘his banana’	LB
	(c)	mi-mbu-yâ	‘their songs’	MB
		mi-mbo-jaene	‘their songs’	KN
		mi-mbo-yakayo	‘their songs’	KS
		mi-mbo-yau	‘their songs’	NG
		mi-mbo-you	‘their songs’	LB

5. Conclusion

- Selected comparison of noun classes to the standard variety suggests that the previously documented Kimbundu variety may be Mbaka and/or Kwanza Norte.
- Kissama, Ngoya and Libolo present differences in class assignment that:
 - sometimes pattern with the standard variety;
 - sometimes demonstrate different changes/shifts.
- Libolo Kimbundu seems to be the most distinct with more drastic changes.
- Kissama and Ngoya Kimbundu may have been influenced by other languages.

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