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Linguistic gentrification:
The Baptist Missionary Society and Bobangi (1882-1940)

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Abstract
This is a study of how, between 1882 and roughly 1940, missionaries of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) working on the left bank of the western sections of the Congo River "engaged" and "engaged with" the Bantu language Bobangi. It traces the ways in which and the reasons why, for their missionary and school work, they decided to turn to, and later away from, Bobangi. It addresses the changes the motives and linguistic ideologies behind these choices went through, as well as the doubts, disagreements, and conflicts visible in the BMS's own ranks. In this context, I particularly zoom in on the metalinguistic representations the BMS made of the language, in publications such as John Whitehead's *Grammar and Dictionary of the Bobangi Language* of 1899. I suggest the notion of "linguistic gentrification", i.e. the missionary creation of an "embellished" and "improved" version of the language, which was imposed back onto the native speakers in missionary schools as the new, only correct way of speaking, resulting in the exclusion of these native speakers from their own language – indeed in much the same way as gentrification operates in urbanization.

Résumé
Il s'agit d'une étude sur les trajectoires par lesquelles, entre 1882 et 1940 environ, les missionnaires de la *Baptist Missionary Society* (BMS) travaillant sur la rive gauche de la section occidentale du fleuve Congo, « engagèrent » et « se mirent en relation avec » la langue bantoue bobangi. L'étude retrace les comment et les pourquoi des choix linguistiques qu'ils firent, dans le cadre de leur œuvre apostolique et scolaire, de d'abord se tourner vers le bobangi, puis de s'en éloigner. J'aborde les changements que les motifs et idéologies linguistiques étayant ces choix ont subis, ainsi que les doutes, désaccords et conflits se manifestant dans les propres rangs de la BMS. Dans ce contexte, une attention particulière est apportée aux représentations métalinguistiques qu'ont faites les missionnaires BMS de la langue, dans des publications telles que la *Grammar and Dictionary of the Bobangi Language* de John Whitehead de 1899. Je propose la notion de « gentrification linguistique », c'est-à-dire la création missionnaire d'une version « embellie » et « améliorée » de la langue, version ensuite imposée aux locuteurs natifs dans les écoles missionnaires et leur y présentée comme la seule façon correcte de parler, entraînant l'exclusion de ces mêmes locuteurs natifs de leur propre langue – un processus en effet fort semblable à la gentrification dans l'urbanisation.

Zusammenfassung
Dies ist eine Studie darüber, wie die Missionare der *Baptist Missionary Society* (BMS) zwischen 1882 und etwa 1940 am linken Ufer des westlichen Kongo-Flusses die Bantu-Sprache Bobangi „beschäftigten" und „sich mit ihr beschäftigen". Es wird nachgezeichnet, auf welche Weise und aus welchen Gründen sie sich in ihrer Missions- und Schularbeit für und später gegen Bobangi entschieden haben. Die Veränderungen, die die Motive und sprachlichen Ideologien hinter diesen Entscheidungen durchliefen, sowie die Zweifel, Unstimmigkeiten und Konflikte in den eigenen Reihen der BMS, werden thematisiert. In diesem Zusammenhang gehe ich insbesondere auf die metasprachlichen Darstellungen des Bobangi durch die BMS in Publikationen ein, wie John Whiteheads *Grammar and Dictionary of the Bobangi Language* von 1899. Ich führe den Begriff der „linguistischen Gentrifizierung" (Aufwertung) an, d.h. die missionarische Schaffung einer „verschönerten" und „verbesserten" Version der Sprache, die den Muttersprachler.innen in die missionarische Schulen als die neue, einzig richtige Art zu sprechen aufgezwungen wurde und die sie von ihrer eigenen Sprache ausschloss, in ähnlicher Weise, wie die Gentrifizierung bei Urbanisierungsprojekten funktioniert.

1. Introduction[1]

<1> A wide and diverse range of late 19th and early 20th century sources testify to the fact that modern-day Bangala, spoken in the north-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Lingala, spoken in the western and northern DRC as well as in neighbouring countries, have their origins in a process of heavy restructuration that the Bantu language Bobangi underwent in the 1880s and 1890s, very soon followed by pervasive influence from languages spoken more upstream on the Congo River around the colonial state post of Bangala-Station, later renamed Nouvelle-Anvers and nowadays Makanza (see Meeuwis 2019; 2020; in press, among others, for an overview and critical discussion of the historical sources).

<2> This ancestor language Bobangi is classified by both Maho (2009) and Hammarström (2019) under the Bantu code C.32. It is today spoken in the DRC on the left banks of the Congo River in a zone which is roughly comprised by the towns of Lukolela in the north and Bolobo in the south (see map) and in which – to be clear – other languages are spoken as well (i.a., Motingea 2010:15; Motingea & Biako 2016; Gashe 2016; Mumbanza et al. 2016:62-83; Maselli personal communication). This language is now also known as "Nunu-Bobangi" and its speakers as "Banunu-Bobangi",[2] hyphenated identifications that are the result of successive waves of assimilation of Banunu, the original speakers of Kenunu, into Bobangi populations (Harms 1987; Motingea & Biako 2016:6-10). In what follows I will use the glossonym "Bobangi", as this was the main one used in the historical epoch I cover.

<3> My purpose is to contribute, not so much to the linguistic history of the Bobangi language as such, but rather to the history of how missionaries "engaged" and "engaged with" Bobangi. By this I refer to when and why, for their missionary and school work with the local popular-tions, they "recruited" or instead let go off this language; to the degrees to which they really "engaged *with*", i.e. established a meaningful connection with, its speakers and its linguistic reality; and finally to why and how they engaged the language in the sense of "affronting it" and grappling and wresting with it, not only in effortfully attempting to acquire a knowledge of it, but also in codifying the language and thereby appropriating authority over it. As such, my contribution has its place in the well-established study of missionary and colonial linguistics (e.g. Pennycook & Makoni 2005; Errington 2001; 2008; Schmidt-Brücken et al. 2015; 2016; Zimmermann & Kellermeier-Rehbein 2015; Heller & McElhinny 2017; Weber 2019; Makoni et al. 2020). This field traces the linguistic, racial-cultural, and colonialist ideologies that informed European minds when attempting to "make sense" of African speech (and other) complexities (e.g. Gilmour 2006:12) and to "artefactualize" these complexities into objects acceptable to European science (i.a. Blommaert 2008). It also addresses the effects this had in terms of the emergence of hierarchies of prestige and ethnolinguistic categorizations. To this tradition I add the notion of "linguistic gentrification", i.e. the missionary creation of their own version of the local African language, in the literature often known as "mission varieties", "church varieties", or "missionese" (e.g. Hovdhaugen 1996:14; Makoni et al. 2007:31; Nida & Fehderau 1970:154), which they then, in their schools, imposed back onto the native speakers as the new, only correct way of speaking, but which soon resulted in the exclusion of these same native speakers from their own language, indeed in much the same way as gentrification operates in projects of urbanization.

<4> In Meeuwis (2009:249-250), I described how for a very short time between 1897 and 1900 Belgian Catholic missionaries of the *Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae*, better known as

[1] I wish to acknowledge the kind and greatly appreciated assistance I received from the staff of the Angus Library and Archives in Oxford, UK, during my two research stays there working in the BMS archives, in particular Emily Burgoyne and Emma Walsh.

[2] On the right bank, in the Republic of Congo, a related language is known as "Moye-Bobangi" (see Motingea & Biako 2016 for clarifications).

"the Scheutists", experimented with Bobangi around the mouth of the Kwa River. In this context, the Scheutist Camille Van Ronslé wrote a prayer book, a catechism, a Bobangi grammar, and a list of words and useful phrases, some of which were published, but were not widely spread, while others existed only in manuscript form and have remained unnoticed even until today Van Ronslé 1897; 1898; 1899; s.d.; see Meeuwis & Vinck 1999; Meeuwis 2009). Up to present times, the most well-known and in comparative linguistics most often used publication is the *Grammar and Dictionary of the Bobangi Language*, published by John Whitehead in 1899. John Whitehead was a Protestant missionary of the English Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). The Protestant missionaries, and in particular the BMS, were indeed much more significant in the colonial and missionary history of Bobangi than the Catholics ever managed to be. My study zooms in on the sociohistorical circumstances under which, from 1882 on, the BMS missionaries working on the banks of the Congo River between Malebo Pool and, roughly, the confluence of the Ubangi and Congo rivers, decided to turn to Bobangi for their vertical communication with local populations, as well as on the motives and ideologies behind their choices and metalinguistic representations of the language in publications. It also addresses the changes these motives and ideologies went through, and the doubts, disagreements, and conflicts among the BMS's own ranks. Drawing on archive research I conducted in the BMS archives in Oxford, UK, I wish to deepen and further the findings first made available on this topic in the 1980s, for instance by Samarin (1986) and Yates (1987). Their discussions pertained to all Protestant missionary societies working in Congo, and to their involvement with Congolese languages in general, and were therefore less detailed than the specific focus I wish to put on the BMS and Bobangi in particular.

<5> As I will show, the BMS missionaries made striking choices both in favour of, and later away from, Bobangi. A first privileging of Kiteke in the 1880s was, for reasons and in locales I will identify, around 1892 exchanged for a firm orientation towards Bobangi. First waves (1880s and 1890s) of learning Bobangi and of unconcerted experimentations and grapplings with it by several individual BMS missionaries, brought out in published form or otherwise, were unified, superseded, but in a way also nullified by the publication of John Whitehead's *Grammar and Dictionary* in 1899. This publication was indeed the culmination point but at the same time the testament of the BMS's engagement with Bobangi. It represented a true gentryfication of the language, i.e. a wilfully "intellectualized" version of the language that could serve as the high, scholarly, and literary prototype, but that, for that reason, resulted in being inaccessible to most of the Bobangi speakers themselves. As such, what Whitehead's *Grammar and Dictionary* effectuated was the death warrant of the BMS's engagement with Bobangi: around the turn of century, leading BMS missionaries found both the language and Whitehead's metalinguistic imagining of it so insufficiently practicable that they, and in fact all Protestant societies working in the Congo Free State, felt compelled to "disengage" Bobangi. The proposition was to shift to Bangala and Lingala instead. As these are daughter languages of Bobangi, a thorough study of the involvement of the BMS missionaries with Bobangi does not only inform us on the missionary history of this language in particular, but also allows for a more detailed appreciation of the historical contexts and conditions in which Bangala and Lingala developed.

2. The first Baptists at Malebo Pool: Engaging Kiteke (1881-1892)

<6> BMS missionaries settled for the first time permanently in the lower-Congo region from June 1879 onwards. They did so under the guidance of pioneers such as Thomas J. Comber (1852-1887) and George Grenfell (1849-1906). The first BMS station was founded at San Salvador, now Mbanza-Kongo, in present-day northern Angola (Bentley 1900a; Myers 1905; Johnston 1908; Slade 1959; Stanley 1992). Other mission stations in the lower-Congo region would

follow soon, such as at Wathen-Ngombe-Lutete and Underhill-Matadi. In this lower-Congo region, the Baptist missionaries learned and engaged varieties of the Kikongo language cluster; in particular William Holman Bentley (1855-1905) and his wife Hendrina Margo Bentley (1855-1938) became active producers of religious texts and schoolbooks in Kikongo and of a Kikongo dictionary and grammar (see Starr 1908 for an early list; see also H.M. Bentley 1907; Lacroix 1948; Samarin 1985; 2013; Yates 1987).

<7> Late 1880, the BMS began to make overland expeditions from their lower-Congo stations in northward direction with the aim of finding the banks of Malebo Pool (then called "Stanley Pool"), the widening of the Congo River of which they had much heard and read. Malebo Pool is where today the capital of the DRC, Kinshasa, is situated, "Kinshasa" being the name of an original native village on the banks of the Pool. They reached the Pool for the first time in February 1881 (Bentley 1881). After more reconnaissance trips in 1881 and 1882, they founded their first permanent mission post on the southern bank of the Pool in July 1882, calling it "Arthington Station", after the main benefactor of the BMS, Robert Arthington (1823-1900). It was built close to Leopoldville, a State post founded in December 1881 by Henry M. Stanley working in the service of the Belgian king Leopold II (Whyms 1956; Cornelis 1991:46; Toulier et al. 2010b). In June 1883, a second State post would be established on a nearby site, and both would soon merge to form the larger urban agglomeration of "Leopoldville" (de Saint Moulin 2012; Toulier et al. 2010a; b), which later became the capital of the Belgian Congo and later still Kinshasa. Remarkably, apart from some very temporary exceptions, Catholic missionaries did not establish themselves permanently around the Pool until 1900-1902 (Dieu 1946; Bontinck 1988:54-55), thus allowing the Pool to be a Protestant-dominated missionary zone for about twenty years.

<8> The first BMS missionaries at the Pool reported how they encountered several languages spoken there, often in one and the same village. Two were Kikongo and Bobangi (see following section), but the main one was what they called "Kiteke", the language of "the Bateke". Johnston (1908:77), Hambrouck (1991), Vansina (1973), and Harms (1981:31) have explained that "Bateke" was an occupational ascription given by other populations on account of their extensive trading activities, the stem *teke* meaning 'to sell' in the local languages. Also, several scholars have argued that "Batio" is a more correct appellation, especially for those living in the hinterlands of the right bank of the Congo River (Harms 1981; 2019:105; Vansina 1973:11-12), but as "Bateke" is the name by which this population has gone down in most of the writings by the BMS, I will retain it here.

<9> These first BMS missionaries at the Pool noticed that Kiteke was so different from Kikongo, of which they knew a number of varieties, that they were not able to make themselves understood Kikongo when conversing with Bateke (Bentley 1881; 1884a; b; Comber 1882a; b; c; 1883a; b; 1884; 1885; Comber & Grenfell 1885; Kund 1885:383; Grenfell 1886). To cite only one of the many accounts to this effect:

> "hitherto [during my years in the lower-Congo] I have been nowhere where I could not make myself understood by speaking Kikongo. Here [i.e., at Malebo Pool], however, is the boundary line [...]. I was hoping that there would be a certain similarity between Kikongo and Kiteke [...]; but it is not so, and we have in the Kiteke language of Kintambu, Kinshasa, Mfwa etc. an altogether different language -– in fact, differing from Kikongo as much as the Mpongwe of Gaboon or the Dualla of Cameroons. [...] So we have a great task before us to learn this new language" (Comber 1882c: 80).

<10> The BMS missionaries from the start set themselves to learning Kiteke, which they did relying on interpreters (or "linguisters" as Europeans then called them, see Samarin 1989:9).

These were either some of the few Kiteke-speakers who had acquired elementary notions of Kikongo through precolonial trading activities (Bentley 1881:321-327; Bentley 1900a:344; Brown 1888:347), or Kikongo-speakers who knew some Kiteke from the same type of activities or because Bateke had enslaved them (Bentley 1884a:255; Comber 1882c:79; Coquilhat 1888:99-103; Whitehead 1948). In some exceptional and certainly more cumbersome situations, chains of interpreters were used. The BMS missionary M.R. Roger, when wanting to address some Kiteke-speakers, spoke in English to a Kikongo speaker with some knowledge of English, who then translated the message into Kikongo to a bilingual Kiteke-speaker, who would then translate it further into Kiteke to his fellow Bateke (Whitehead 1948:4).

<11> By April 1883, the BMS missionary W. Holman Bentley had the manuscript of a working vocabulary of 2,000 Kiteke words ready (Bentley 1884b; 1900b:16). For their language and other work, the BMS missionaries also collaborated closely with other Protestant missionaries at the Pool, the most important being Aaron B. Sims (1855-1922) of the Livingstone Inland Mission (LIM), who arrived at the Pool in 1883 (Hensey 1916; Slade 1959). The fruit of the collaboration between Bentley and Sims was the publication of a more expanded vocabulary in 1886 (Sims 1886b), a collection of Kiteke songs in 1888 (BMS 1888), a translation of the Gospel of John in 1889 (Sims 1889), and a primer (Sims s.d.).

<12> This material in Kiteke, which was printed on presses in the lower-Congo missions, allowed the BMS to introduce Kiteke in 1888-9 as language of instruction in the primary school for they had opened two years earlier (Bentley 1900b:140). In this school, they instructed not only Bateke children, but Bobangi and Bakongo children as well.

<13> Dramatic demographic developments, however, soon curtailed the privileging of Kiteke for interacting with the Pool populations. As early as 1884 a small pox epidemic decimated the numbers (Bentley 1884a). Later, in 1887, outbreaks of sleeping sickness aggravated the situation (Vansina 1973:429-430). A third, and more destructive demographic blow came in 1891-2. In those years, a major conflict between the Congo Free State authorities and Bateke broke out, compelling all remaining Bateke to flee to the right bank of the Pool and river (Bentley 1900b:227; Braekman 1961:94; Vansina 1973:420-430), into French Equatorial Africa (today, Congo-Brazzaville), where, as mentioned, a large Bateke ("Batio") community thrives until today.

<14> As a result of all this, by 1892 the Kiteke language had become obsolete on the Belgian side of the Pool. For the Baptists this meant that all their efforts of the previous 11 years learning, codifying, and applying the language went to waste. They were forced to altogether discontinue the use of Kiteke with the Pool populations (Grenfell 1901:196), retaining for these purposes the languages 'secondarily' spoken there, namely Kikongo and Bobangi, to which I turn now.

3. Bobangi: Whitehead's predecessors

3.1. At Malebo Pool (1882-1886)

<15> As has become clear, Malebo Pool had been a multilingual and multicultural environment since precolonial times, not only in terms of several languages being spoken side by side, oftentimes in one and the same village, but also in terms of varied patterns of individual multilingualism. In addition to Kikongo and Kiteke, another language whose presence the first Baptists noticed to be spoken there was Bobangi (Comber 1882a; b; c; 1883a; b; 1884; 1885; Comber & Grenfell 1885; Johnston 1884; Bentley 1884a). Before them, H.M. Stanley had already noticed this, namely on his downstream voyage of the Congo River in 1876-1877, reaching the Pool in March 1877. He had called the language "Kiyanzi" and its speakers "the Wa-yanzi" (Stanley 1878:320-321). European travellers who visited the Pool immediately after him but before the BMS missionaries, such as Augouard (1886; 1894), De

Beaucorps (1933), Coquilhat (1888:61-81), Costermans (1895:28), Lemaire (1895), Liebrechts (1909 [1895]:44-65), and a map of 1884 (ING 1884),[3] had uncritically taken over Stanley's term.[4] Some of the BMS missionaries at Malebo Pool, such as Johnston (1884:181-182, 205-208) and Comber (1883b; 1882c:7), at first also adopted this term, but soon argued that either Stanley had misheard the appellation or that it was a label only used by Bakongo, meaning "the people from regions beyond" in Kikongo varieties (Johnston 1908:106, 529).

<16> The label the BMS missionaries preferred was "Kibangi" or "Bobangi" for the language, and "Babangi" or, again, "Bobangi" for its speakers. The latter, however, saw themselves not as a tribe or ethnic group, but simply as a party having recently come down from a place called "Bobangi", therefore referring to themselves straightforwardly by means of a circumscription with a toponym, namely *bato ba Bobangi* 'the people of the place Bobangi', which they also did to refer to their language: *lokota lo Bobangi* 'the language of the place Bobangi'. In a letter of 18 December 1917 to Alice Werner, lecturer of Bantu languages at the School of Oriental Studies in London, John Whitehead wrote:

> "There is really no such word ["Bangi"] in existence, and no philologists has any right to invent it; he cannot derive it scientifically. The name of the tribe who speak that language is Bobangi, from the name of the place from which they came, of which the name Oubangi is a French corruption, and which Mr. Grenfell heard as Mobangi when he discovered the river which now bears that name; the natives call the river Mai ma Bobangi, the Bobangi water. They speak of their own language as Lokota lo Bobangi, the Bobangi language. The use of this name as an adjective in a pronominal way is quite adequate from a true philological point of view to denote the language to Europeans. The people were called by the Kongo (lower Kongo) people, the people from regions beyond" (Whitehead 1917:1; see also Whitehead 1899:v).

The BMS missionaries (including Whitehead) and other Europeans, re-interpreting Africa's human diversity along essentialist, ethnic frames of reference, understood this kind of circumscriptive self-identifications based on toponyms ("we are people from Bobangi") as ethnic-tribal categories (see also Lentz 1995; Lynch 2019), abbreviating them to ethnonyms-with-an-article, as in "*the* Bobangi".

<17> The locale "Bobangi" to which the Bobangi referred when identifying themselves was situateed much more north, on a peninsula between the confluence of the Ubangi and Congo Rivers (Bentley 1900b:228; Harms 1981:78). Since at least the 18th century, the people from that locale frequently travelled downstream to buy and sell goods along the Congo, reaching as far southward as Malebo Pool, where they traded with Bateke and Bakongo and resided temporarily (Vansina 1990:225-226; Harms 2019:148-157). Their main and more permanent settlements were upstream of Malebo Pool, such as Bolobo and Lukolela (see map), from which they controlled and monopolized all mercantile activities on this section of the river (Hanssens 1884; Kund 1885:386; Comber 1885; Whitehead 1899; Harms 1981; Vansina 1990; Petit 1996; Motingea 2010; Harms 2019:108-157).

<18> The first BMS and other Europeans noticed that the Bobangi who had temporary settlements around the Pool did not know any other language than their own, while, due to the Bobangi dominance in the trade, some Bateke and Bakongo had acquired knowledge of Bobangi as a second language (Sims 1886a:vii). The missionaries therefore soon decided to learn not only Kiteke, but Bobangi as well. Comber reports that his BMS colleague W.H. Bentley had

[3] The years of publication in this list should not lead to confusion: books were often published much later than the epoch of which their reports are testimonies.

[4] Still other Europeans called them "Furu", "Bafuru", or "Apfuru", adopting the Bateke term (Tanghe 1934; Harms 2019:106).

started learning Bobangi, in addition to Kiteke, as early as in the year of his arrival at the Pool 1883 (Comber 1883b:346; see also Bentley 1884b). Bentley later testified that the Bobangi themselves refused to teach him the language and that he had to make do with some second-language speakers (Bakongo and Bateke) who had been enslaved by them. By October 1883, Bentley had already drawn up a manuscript list of 700 words (Bentley 1900b:18), which we can safely consider to be the start of the BMS's language work on Bobangi.

<19> Much in the same way as was the case for Kiteke, Bentley's work was continued by Aaron Sims, who was able to bring out his *A Vocabulary of Kibangi* in 1886 (Sims 1886a), the first printed publication on the language. Sims was also preparing a translation of parts of the Gospel (Braekman 1961:94; Samarin 1986:145).

<20> This process of learning and engaging Bobangi allowed the BMS to switch to Bobangi in 1892, the year in which, as mentioned, Kiteke lost its usefulness. And this engagement of Bobangi would not be short-lived. The Baptist missionary John Howell wrote that by 1905 he and his missionaries around the Pool still used Bobangi alongside Kikongo during their church services (1905:249). This optimism in the serviceability and future of Bobangi for missionary work would receive a serious boost when the BMS established themselves upstream of the Pool from 1886 onwards.

3.2. Upstream of Malebo Pool: 1886 and after

<21> In 1878, one year before the start of the BMS activities in the Congo, financier Robert Arthington had already expressed the wish for his missionaries to quickly move upstream on the Congo, i.e. above Malebo Pool, towards Stanley Falls and, if possible, the sources of the Nile. He repeated this requirement with urgency in 1880 (e.g., Slade 1959:42-43). By 1883, the BMS missionaries at Malebo Pool were aware that Stanley and his agents had established State posts on the banks of the river north of the Pool, for example at the villages of Bolobo (November 1882) and Lukolela (September 1883), and they desired to succour the local populations with the Christian message. From conversations with State personnel and Bobangi people temporarily residing at the Pool, they knew that Bobangi was the main language spoken in these villages and, in fact, along that entire part of the river (Comber 1885: 366; Comber & Grenfell 1885). This information was confirmed when they made their first reconnaissance trips to these villages, as did Harry H. Johnston in February 1883 and George Grenfell in January-February and July 1884 (Johnston 1908; Slade 1959). Other short visits by BMS missionaries followed, eventually allowing the BMS missionaries to build their first permanent mission stations at Lukolela in November 1886 (after a few failed attempts) and at Bolobo in March 1888 (Darby 1888:8; Bentley 1900b:133, 206; Hawker 1909:200; BMS 1910:92).

<22> The BMS missionaries working in these two stations in the late 1880s and the 1890s included Robert D. Darby, Michael Richards, W.J. Biggs, and Robert Glennie. In view of bringing the Christian message across to the local Bobangi-speakers and translating the Bible, they all immediately set out on learning the Bobangi language, using as a basis the first linguistic information gathered by their colleagues earlier at Malebo Pool. Darby wrote from Lukolela: "of course, our main efforts are directed to the language of the people among whom we are labouring. We are making very fair progress, we think" (1888:8). Grenfell reported in November of the same year that Darby would "soon have sufficient of the grammar to be worth printing", that Darby was also preparing a vocabulary, and that Richards already had a translation of Mark's Gospel ready (1888:463). In 1891, Glennie still found his own knowledge of the language insufficient and complained that "speaking through an interpreter is sorry work", but that he nevertheless had "chapters 2 and 6 of the Gospel by Matthew finished" (1891:396; see also Samarin 1986). In 1893 he reported: "I joined Mr. Darby in the preparation of his

dictionary of Lobobangi, and when I left for England brought with me over 400 pages of that work". He also mentioned that colleagues had already translated the Epistle of John, the lives of the Apostles, and several hymns (Glennie 1893:220).

<23> An important impetus for the language work was the coming of Albert E. Scrivener and James Clark to Bolobo and Lukolela in 1888-1889. Especially Scrivener dedicated himself immediately to the study of the language and, together with fellow BMS missionaries, to the translation of religious and scriptural texts (i.a., Alex Scrivener 1992).

<24> But all these materials by Darby, Richards, Glennie, Scrivener, and Clark existed in hand-written form only. A major event, therefore, was the arrival of the first printing press machine, brought to Lukolela in 1891-2 (Yates 1987:316). The machine was known as the "Hannah Wade Press", after the name of the mother of the donor, Josiah Wade. Scrivener became its main operator. The Hannah Wade press marked the end of BMS language work above the Pool by means of manuscripts only. In 1892, their first printed materials in and on Bobangi appeared, namely a primer titled *Monkana mo Tanga Boso* ('Book for First Teaching'; BMS 1892a) and a collection of 66 hymns *Njembo* ('Hymns'; BMS 1892b), both without explicit mention of the author. The first publication bearing Scrivener's name was his booklet *Ebio e Abalayama* ('Story of Abraham') (Scrivener 1893), marking the beginning of a long series of books by him (see Alex Scrivener 1992). James Clark produced his first published works in 1895, namely translations of the Gospel by Luke (Clark 1895a) and Mark (Clark 1895b). When, due to a depopulation of the area around Lukolela caused by the oppressive regime of the colonial State, the BMS gave up this mission station in 1894-5 (Bentley 1900b:238, 249; Boelaert 1952; Slade 1959), the printing press was moved to Bolobo, where it would remain for the rest of its operation.

<25> From 1892 onwards, several BMS missionaries would bring out a total of more than 80 publications in or on Bobangi, the vast majority of which rolled from the printing press at Bolobo.[5] The press also allowed the BMS to start a local magazine in Bobangi, *Ntoto Li Meya* ('Sparkle'). In 1898, the list of printed Bobangi primers and schoolbooks allowed the BMS to open a first fully working primary school in Bolobo using Bobangi as language of instruction (Scrivener 1898:248).

[5] To be sure, the printing press was also used to publish materials in other languages, and materials prepared by missionaries belonging to other Protestant societies than the BMS (see Starr 1908 and Yates 1987). It was also used to print *Congo Mission News*, the journal uniting nearly all Protestant missionary societies working in the Congo, with Scrivener as its main editor and publisher.

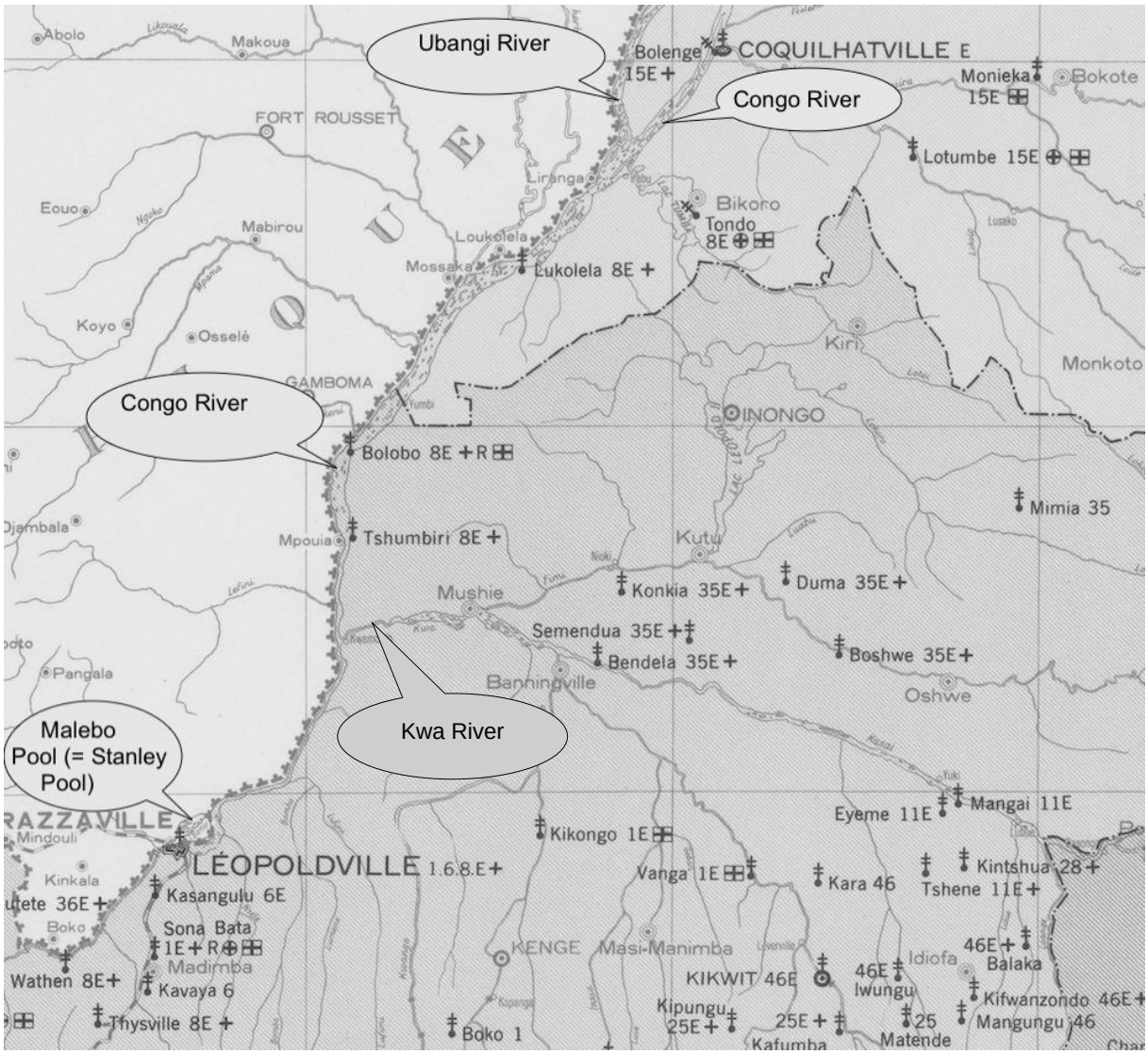

Figure *1*. Map of the western section of the Congo River, indicating Malebo Pool, where the BMS post Arthington Station was founded in 1882, the BMS stations Lukolela (1886) and Bolobo (1888), as well as the ABMU station of Tshumbiri (1889), all mentioned in this article. Information added by the author to a base-map from the Belgian Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences publicly available at http://www.kaowarsom.be/en/cartes_652. Distance from Malebo Pool to Bolobo is approximately 300 kms, to Lukelola 450 kms.

4. Gentrifying Bobangi: Rise and fall of John Whitehead

4.1. Called to create order out of chaos

<26> Around 1893, George Grenfell, the eminent pioneer, moral authority, and undeclared leader of the BMS in the Congo (e.g. Johnston 1908; Hawker 1909; Slade 1959), noted that the high number of missionaries who had been dedicating themselves to Bobangi since 1882 had its downsides (Whitehead 1899:vi, 1904b, 1948; Grenfell 1903). Different idiosyncratic opinions as to which regiolect to focus on, which grammatical forms to use, the meaning of certain words, translation principles, the way to spell the language, in sum varied manifestations of linguistic disagreements and disunity had resulted in a plethora of practices and representations. On top of this, other than BMS missionaries, too, were working on the language, often without concertation with the BMS. Aaron Sims's 1886 *Vocabulary of Kibangi*, mentioned above, had been a product of close and fruitful collaboration at Malebo Pool. But

at Wangata, a mission post founded by the Livingstone Inland Mission (LIM) in 1884 where later Coquilhatville would arise, Charles B. Banks of this LIM was preparing his own Bobangi translation of the Epistle to the Romans (Hensey 1916; Banks 1943:15; Whitehead 1948; Boelaert 1955), on the basis of his own understanding of the local variety and using his own spelling rules. Arthur Billington of the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU), who had a station at Tshumbiri-Bwemba (see map) immediately south of Bolobo, was translating, again on his own terms, F. L. Mortimer's collection of religious instructions for children *Peep of the Day* (Starr 1908:24).

<27> In 1893, Grenfell approached his BMS colleague John Whitehead (1864-1952), who had arrived in Congo in 1890 and in the Bobangi region in 1891, with the request to create order out of this chaos (Sowerby 1898:460; Grenfell 1903; 1904; Bentley 1900b 240-243; Whitehead 1904b; c; 1948). At first, Whitehead was reluctant to take the task upon him, precisely because of the existing discord (Whitehead 1904b:1). Also, he noted that Bobangi was "a dying language": in 1904 he reported that in the early 1890s he had made "an estimate of the Bobangi speakers as numbering about 12,000 and the tribes sometimes using Bobangi as a means of intercommunication and thus understanding it somewhat as about 55,000" (Whitehead 1904c:2).

<28> But in 1895 he changed his mind and accepted. In his unpublished memoirs, correspondence, and elsewhere, he gave several reasons for this. First of all, he had received promise from the general BMS committee that he would be relieved from all other missionary chores, to which he was notoriously averse (Whitehead 1899:vii; see also Hofmeyr 2004:76-83).

<29> Second, by now he had studied the work of his predecessors more thoroughly, noting the high degree of variance, but also utterly finding most of them lacking in quality. In the introduction to his 1899 *Grammar and Dictionary* (1899:v-viii), he remained diplomatically polite, but in his unpublished correspondence and memoirs the tone was unqualifiedly disparaging (Whitehead 1904b; c; 1917; 1948; 1949b). There was, for instance, his dissatisfaction with his predecessors' use of the Authorized King James Version of the Bible instead of the Oxford Greek Testament (Whitehead 1904c:2). He was also convinced that his brethren did not know the language well enough, particularly with respect to matters such as tone, adjectives, the pronouns, affricate versus fricative consonants, voiced versus unvoiced consonants, and others. In his view, this had led to horrendous mistakes in their translations, such as "being wished in Christ's plate (instead of blood)", "bringing the moon (instead of a piece of iron)", and "Jesus in a snail shell instead of Jesus in heaven" (Whitehead 1904c:1-2). The non-religious texts produced by his fellow BMS missionaries, too, he found unusable: he observed, for instance, that in one of the Bobangi primers made before him, Congolese children were told "don't take a fee for adultery" instead of "don't commit adultery" (Whitehead 1948:2). On top of all this, he had learned that Grenfell was considering publishing the above-mentioned handwritten wordlist Darby and Glennie were preparing, a plan he by all means wanted to pre-empt (Whitehead 1948:15).

<30> Thirdly, he had grown pronouncedly hostile to the strongly restructured variety that since the early 1880s had emerged out of Bobangi as a result of its imperfect acquisition by white state personnel and their African, non-indigenous, helpers and soldiers (for this history, see Meeuwis 2013; 2019; 2020). This restructured variety was now widely used as a lingua franca in western and northern Congo. In his own words, Bobangi was

> "the basis of the eclectic 'trade' language used by the officers of the Congo Independent State, by traders and other travellers, and further copied from them by the [Congolese] strangers from other parts of the Congo brought to the various posts and stations to act as servants and labourers" (1899:vi).

At the time, this "eclectic trade language" was commonly known as *"la langue du fleuve", "la langue commerciale",* "bad Bobangi", "the State language", "the State Polyglot", "the State jargon", and others. In the late 1890s it would receive the names "Bangala" and "Mangala", and in the first decades of the twentieth century it would become known as "Lingala" (e.g. Meeuwis 2019; 2020). Whitehead was not only disgusted by this "mongrel language", as he called it (1904c:3), and its rapid spread, but also seriously feared the devastating influence it was having, as a form of what one could call "linguistic matricide", on its predecessor, original Bobangi (1949b:6, see also 1899; 1904b; 1904c:2). It "was a continual menace" to Bobangi (1948:12), which had to be stopped by all means necessary.

<31> This combat could only be won by developing for Bobangi what he called "the standard for future literary work" (1899:vii). Whitehead indeed belonged to a generation of missionary-linguists for whom the standard language ideology (i.a. Errington 2008:108-109; Makoni 2016:226; Heller & McElhinny 2017; Abdelhay et al. 2020; Torquato 2020) was self-evident, i.e. the implicit conceptualization of language as something in need of an abstracted and preferably written representation, detached from actual language use, that can count as a unique and normative paragon against which correctness can be distinguished from incorrectness. Linguistics was not the descriptive endeavour it is today, but was a prescriptive and language-intervening enterprise, aimed at designing a new, unified, and fixed ideal which was to neutralize the variability and fluidity of speech. In this prescriptive language ideology, "a grammar" and "a dictionary" did not mean what they mean today, i.e. reflections of actual language use, but instead denoted normative sets of prescriptive rules, codified in a book as a "doculect" (Cysouw & Good 2013; Lüpke & Storch 2013:3; Deumert & Storch 2020:16), and meant to refashion rather than analyse the reality of language.

<32> It is exactly in his well-known *Grammar and Dictionary of the Bobangi language* of 1899 that Whitehead actualized and "artefactualized" (Blommaert 2008) his new and "gentrified" version for Bobangi – gentrified both in the sense of an upgrading and in that of the effects of exclusion of the original inhabitants/speakers.

4.2. The *Grammar and Dictionary of the Bobangi language* (1899)

<33> Already while Whitehead was preparing his book, i.e. between 1895 and 1899, the other BMS missionaries had bad presentiments about the new version of Bobangi he was manufacturing. They were aware of the plans he had to steer away from the actually spoken reality and come up with an unapplicable prototype of his own. Whitehead later reported, in a number of texts (Whitehead 1948; 1949a; 1949b), that the frustrations among his BMS colleagues "happened in the first months of 1896" (1949b:2), in other words only a year after he had embarked on his task. The frustrations were in fact so pronounced that the BMS leadership in 1896 already wanted Whitehead to altogether discontinue his work. He was no less than ordered to "bring my Bobangi studies to an end" and even to leave the Bobangi area and move to the remote BMS station of Yakusu, far away in eastern Congo near Stanley Falls (1949b:2).

<34> Had it not been for Whitehead's stubborn and unwavering defiance of authority, the *Grammar and Dictionary* would never have seen the light. Whitehead refused any removal, remained in Bolobo, persevered, and proceeded with his work, against the tides and against the wishes of the BMS leadership. In 1898-1899 he went on furlough in England, but used this vacation to finalize his manuscript (Bentley 1900b:249). His book was then finally printed, not, as was customary, on the BMS own printing press in Bolobo, but "in exile", namely in London with Kegan Paul publishers. Its appearance was unwanted by the rest of the BMS missionaries in the Congo, and would continue to be a thorn in their side.

<35> Not only was Whitehead's arcane spelling invention, with its unusual and unproducible diacritics, "laughed at", as he himself recalled (Whitehead 1948:6). The language prototype he

engineered and wished to be imposed on the native speakers was found to be too contrived, too artificial, and therefore too divorced from the linguistic reality. In letters to Alfred H. Baynes, secretary of the BMS committee in London, George Grenfell, speaking on behalf of his BMS brethren, counted Whitehead among "such sticklers for the sanctity of the literary form of the language they happen to be engaged upon" that the schoolbooks Whitehead was producing in it "are not so acceptable" as class materials for the Bobangi-speakers (Grenfell 1903:3). Grenfell observed that Whitehead's literary standard was not accessible to the majority of the native speakers: "this is the language as is spoken by the minority and its field is comparatively restricted" (1903:3). This minority were those Bobangi "who have any claim to a literary style" (1903:3), in other words exactly those few Bobangi who had had formal education in the very BMS schools in which Whitehead's standard model was being used and "fed back" to them as the new norm to which they were to adjust their own speech.

<36> Grenfell added that not only the BMS missionaries, but other Protestant societies working among Bobangi as well, found that "his ideal is no more acceptable to the Brethren of the ABMU & CBM [Congo Balolo Mission] who work among Bobangi speaking peoples, than it is to the Bolobo Brethren", because "Mr Whitehead persists in departing from the common speech of the people" (Grenfell 1904:1). The conclusion was that Whitehead's ideal exemplar of the language "is no doubt scholarly, but it is certainly obscure to the great majority of those [Bobangi] who read or hear it read [in schools]" (1904:1).

<37> In other words, Whitehead's *Grammar and Dictionary* and all the religious and educational materials he produced according to it represented an aggressive gentrification of Bobangi: an embellished, unnatural, hardly approachable literary effigy of the language was created over and beyond the heads and speech of the Bobangi themselves, excluding them from their own language.

<38> Part and parcel of this gentrification is what Rachael Gilmour (2006:100-111) aptly called the "reversal of authority", i.e. first, the missionaries' reliance on the goodwill and authoritative grammatical judgments of the native speakers to learn the language from them; then, the missionaries' appropriation of this language by codifying it on their own terms, setting new rules for it, and creating their own metalinguistic representations of it; and finally their taking possession of the linguistic authority over the language by "casting" these new rules, norms, and representations "back" onto the original speakers as the new criterion for correct language use, creating hierarchies of few correct speakers trained by the missionaries themselves and masses of defenestrated speakers of "incorrect" language, even if it is their mother tongue (see also Sanneh 2009:196; Peterson 2018:169-170).

<39> Whitehead's gentrified Bobangi was a self-standing missionary version, a "missionese" (e.g. Hovdhaugen 1996:14; Makoni et al. 2007:31). Indicative of the discrepancy that existed between these "high" missionary "doculects" and the speech reality of the native speakers was an observation made by the renowned international specialist of Bible translations Eugene Nida.[6] After a fieldwork trip across African colonies to assess the state of Bible translations in African languages, and in the Belgian Congo in particular, where he also saw Whitehead's work, Nida was compelled to conclude:

> "Earlier missionaries have in some instances decided to 'improve' on the language of the natives by introducing some of their own ideas about how its grammar should be changed [...]. [I]n many cases the sentence structure is artificial to the native language. And it is not infrequent to find natives who say when they are challenged about some idiom, 'Oh, that is the way it is in the Bible, but no one says it that way'." (Nida 1949:14-15)

[6] See Hrušková (2019) for biographical information.

<40> The conclusion drawn by Grenfell and his fellow BMS'ers in Congo was that the BMS committee in London should firmly and formally prohibit Whitehead from further producing any translations or other work in Bobangi, for "if we are to reach more than a mere fraction of the Bobangi speaking people something much more colloquial than Mr Whitehead's version will have to be adopted" (Grenfell 1904:2).

<41> With this last suggestion of "something much more colloquial", Grenfell was alluding to the BMS's conviction that Whitehead's *Grammar and Dictionary* was as soon as possible to be rewritten by someone else, who would adhere more closely to the spoken reality. Alfred Baynes, secretary of the BMS in London, notified Whitehead of these decisions in a series of letters, which resulted in steaming reactions from the latter (e.g. Whitehead 1904b; c). Whitehead fulminated against the accusations of having created an "obscure" language, adding that his BMS colleagues who accused him of this "do not count in the matter as they do not know sufficient of the vernacular to express an opinion" (Whitehead 1904c:1-2). At a conference of Protestant missionaries held earlier that year in Leopoldville he had recognized his linguistic work to be "insular" (1904a:48), but he now defended his prescriptive and language-upgrading efforts, stressing that he always aimed to work towards "a definite language with a fixed base and standard" (1904c:3).

<42> The plan to have his *Grammar and Dictionary* redone by others provoked the most furious of his angers:

> "If while I am still connected with our Mission my brethren at Bolobo take upon themselves to issue another edition of my work (they cannot make one better) by reducing it to the level of their knowledge I should regard it as an act unwarrantable, underhand and unchristian, and so would you if anyone did similarly with your work" (Whitehead 1904a:2).

No new edition of the *Grammar and Dictionary*, either by Whitehead himself or by any other BMS missionary, ever saw the light.[7]

<43> Whitehead was not thrown off balance. In the 1900s, he continued to produce readers, schoolbooks, hymns, Gospels, Old Testament stories, Christian instructions, and even a translation of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, all in "his" version of Bobangi (e.g., Whitehead 1904d; 1906; see also the lists in Starr 1908:90-91 and Scrivener 1916).

4.3. Whitehead banished, Andrew MacBeath a ponderous successor

<44> Because of all this linguistic turmoil, and because of Whitehead's stubbornness and individualistic fractiousness in other than linguistic matters as well – in his obituary Reynolds called him "a lone figure unable to work easily with colleagues" (Reynolds 1953:iv-v; see also Hofmeyr 2004:76-83) –, the BMS leadership repeated, this time with more vigour, their intention to remove Whitehead from the mission stations in the Bobangi-speaking area. At this moment in time he was no longer able to refuse: in 1911, in a true banishment to the outskirts of BMS activity in the Belgian Congo, he was moved to the river Lualaba, no less than 1500 kms to the east, where he was to start a new BMS mission station at Wayika (Whitehead 1912; 1916; Slade 1959:362). Wayika was situated in a zone where Kiswahili had become the main lingua franca since the late 1870s (i.a., Meeuwis 2006; Nassenstein in press 2023), far away from Bobangi and its descendant Bangala/Lingala.

<45> At Wayika, he immediately set out to learn the locally used variety of Kiswahili, at that time called "Kingwana". Again, he could not resist the temptation to gentrify the language, i.e. to

[7] A facsimile reprint was produced by Gregg Press in New Jersey in 1964 (Whitehead 1964), and a scan is available at https://glottolog.org/resource/reference/id/106053.

design an enhanced remodelling of it, which was to become the unified "standard" for use in the entire eastern Congo: "[we] developed [the lingua franca] into a strong literary language of real Bantu beauty, which is not possessed by the mother source which is spoilt by many artificial and foreign elements" (Whitehead 1927:2). He worked on this gentrification of Kingwana together with his wife Lilian, the fruit of their work seeing the light in 1928 under the title *Manuel de Kingwana*, which they wrote in both English and French and published at their own expense (Whitehead & Whitehead 1928; see also Fabian 1986:135-162). In the preface, they were quite explicit as to the language-manufacturing nature of their work, explaining that they came to the new language form "*transforming* the disagreeable foreign elements into the indicated agreeable forms [...] so *making* Kingwana a worthy medium for all forms of instruction and translation" (1928:iii, my emphasis).

<46> Whitehead's work on Kingwana, as well as the increasingly venomous conflicts between him and the BMS direction, leading to his eviction from the Society in 1925 and his forced but belated return to England in 1946, are beyond the scope of my present contribution (for more information see Hofmeyr 2004:76-83 and BMS 1930). Suffice it to mention that, again, missionaries in the eastern regions of the Congo found the Whitehead spouses' work on Kingwana not implementable, and the work was soon entirely redone by others (see Ennals 1934 and Deans 1953).

<47> After his displacement to Wayika in 1911, Whitehead did not lose his passion for Bobangi completely, although he was entirely secluded from its speaking zone. During a short visit to Bolobo in 1920, he noted down some corrections to his translation of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (Whitehead 1948:20), a second edition of which indeed appeared in 1923. He also took notes of minor adjustments to his *Grammar and Dictionary of the Bobangi language*. These notes he later handed over to the younger BMS missionary Andrew MacBeath, who arrived in Bolobo in 1924 (MacBeath 1938; Talbot 2015:160).

<48> After a few years in Bolobo, MacBeath acquainted himself with Bobangi as well as with Whitehead's earlier work, of which he gradually became an ardent admirer and follower. This in particular did not earn him the appreciation of his fellow BMS'ers, resulting in him having to work in relative isolation. A solace-seeking correspondence with Whitehead in faraway Wayika ensued, marked by dissident connivance, not only in language matters. In a letter of 8 January 1935, MacBeath wrote:

> "my name 'rots' in the minds of the deacons. I've been hitting with all my might at some of the prevalent sins of Church members, such as pride, fear of public opinion, and fleshly lusts. Apparently I've got a very sharp tongue when it comes to dealing with sins of those 'inside the fold' and last night it all came out at a meeting; I am the stumbling block because I have wounded them. Ah me" (MacBeath 1935:1).

MacBeath was heavily burdened with teaching assignments in Bolobo, and, as he himself admitted, not a very systematic worker. This, in spite of their friendship, seems to have frustrated Whitehead a bit, who from Wayika was hoping that MacBeath would become a prolific continuator and publisher of his earlier Bobangi principles. MacBeath admitted: "more than any reproach you have expressed is merited by my unmethodicalness" (MacBeath 1934:1). He nevertheless produced, in defiance of his colleagues in Bolobo, texts on the life of Jesus Christ and important religious figures according to Whitehead's Bobangi (1931; 1933; 1941). In 1940, then, he published his *Bobangi in Twenty-One Lessons*, a practical, 103-page guide to learn Whitehead's Bobangi (MacBeath 1940).

<49> In the introduction to this booklet, MacBeath spoke elegiacally of Whitehead's *Grammar and Dictionary* of 1899, regretting the fact that copies were now exhausted – an implicit sneer to the BMS management's refusal to make reprints – and commenting that the book was so

indispensable for learning Bobangi that whoever came across a remaining copy, should no less than steal it:

> "[My] book was drafted and wrought out after it was learned that Mr. Whitehead's Grammar and Dictionary of Bobangi was exhausted. [...] However scarce copies of Mr. Whitehead's Dictionary may become, in the later stages of study at least it is quite indispensable, and should be begged, borrowed or stolen! That quite inexhaustible treasure house must be always at the student's elbow" (MacBeath 1940:ii-iii).

He also made reference to his communication with Whitehead, clarifying that his booklet included some of the additional and corrective notes to the *Grammar and Dictionary* Whitehead had been keeping and had sent to MacBeath: "By the kindness of Mr. Whitehead I have been able to include, here and there amid grammar but especially in the select vocabulary of indeclinables and on page 100, some additional notes that he had prepared, to cover some omissions from his Dictionary" (1940:iii).

<50> Apart from MacBeath's rather scanty continuation of Whitehead's Bobangi work, other BMS missionaries in Bolobo and neighbouring mission stations continued publishing religious literature in Bobangi until the late 1940s, but without taking Whitehead's standard for Bobangi into account. The most important among them remained Albert E. Scrivener (see also above, and see the biography and list in Alex Scrivener 1992), who produced parts and then the entirety of the New Testament according to his own linguistic convictions, as well as books with Church rules and teachings, primers and reading books, and several hymnbooks.

5. Aftermath: Towards Bangala and Lingala

<51> In addition to their particular frustration with Whitehead's gentrified form of Bobangi, the BMS leadership gradually, in the 1890s and early 1900s, came to the conclusion that the very choice to promote Bobangi as the working language for their missionization and school work was probably no longer the most felicitous one. The language in fact appeared not very useful in the newer mission stations the BMS were founding more upstream on the Congo River, i.e. in its northern bend as far east as Stanley Falls, such as Monsembe near Bangala Station in 1890, Upoto in 1891, Yakusu in 1896, and Yalemba in 1905 (Johnston 1908; Slade 1959; Braekman 1961). Although individual members of the local populations there knew some Bobangi as a second language from precolonial trade activities, these posts were situated far away from Bobangi's original area of diffusion. For their missionary work, the BMS missionaries in these posts had therefore been engaging local languages, such as Bopoto, Boloki, Lingombe, Lokele, Topeke, and Heso (see also Yates 1980), if not the rapidly spreading trade language, Bobangi's descendant Bangala.

<52> From 1900-1901 onwards, some BMS'ers therefore cautiously decided that it was time to change tack. The failed attempts to engage Bobangi, the frustration with Whitehead's gentryfication of it, the apparently larger fragmentation of languages across BMS stations than initially expected, and the ongoing proliferation of Bangala led some to the conviction that it was this latter language that had to be capitalized on.

<53> Those in favour of this new strategy, and there were certainly many others who resisted, agreed, however, that due to its history as a heavy restructured variety of Bobangi, Bangala's grammatical and lexical features were "too deficient" for it to be implementable in its then manifestation. The BMS missionary Walter H. Stapleton (1864-1906) was therefore appointed, on the authoritative recommendation of George Grenfell, to "give" Bangala a "proper grammar", which led to his book with the telling title *Suggestions for a Grammar of 'Bangala'* (Stapleton 1903b). A bolder paradox was hardly imaginable: BMS'ers such as Grenfell, who had fiercely dismissed Whitehead's remodelling of Bobangi as resulting in a

language form that was too elitist and too remote from actual language use for it to be accessible to its own native speakers, now decided to prepare nothing short of a heavily gentrified adaptation of Bangala, aimed at "giving" the language a grammar it supposedly did not have. In a follow-up study I wish to explore the historical circumstances of this paradox and the details of the gentrification of Bangala. I will also show how, for a number of reasons, Stapleton's suggestions were never put into practice, to the satisfaction of some and to the frustration of others, a discordance that surfaced not only within the BMS itself but also among other Protestant societies working in the Congo and united in the Congo Missionary Conference (CMC, becoming the Congo Protestant Council, CPC, in 1928). The many discussions in the CMC-CPC, well documented in archives, led to the establishment of a Protestant "Lingala Committee" in the early 1920s and to the organization of a Lingala unification conference in Yalemba in 1931. Importantly, they also led to the appointment of the famous Baptist missionary and SOAS professor Malcolm Guthrie (1903-1972) to come to the Congo and revive Stapleton's earlier attempt to steer the future of Bangala/Lingala (i.a., Guthrie 1935; 1943; 1951). Interestingly, Guthrie's better-known comparative work on the Bantu languages (Guthrie 1948; 1967; 1970) was also a continuation of an earlier attempt by Walter Stapleton, namely his 1903 *Comparative Handbook of Congo Languages* (Stapleton 1903a). But, as mentioned, all this will be explored in a separate study on the history of how, after their experiences and experiments with Bobangi, the BMS and other Protestant missionaries in the Congo, engaged, engaged with, and impacted on Bangala/Lingala.

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