

# KONGO WORDS IN SARAMACCA TONGO<sup>1</sup>

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In Saramacca Tongo, a creole tone language spoken by descendants of fugitive slaves, now living mainly along the upper reaches of the Surinam River, there are a number of words of African origin. Words traced back to kiKóongo (a Bantu language spoken in the Lower Kongo) – but not necessarily to the exclusion of other Bantu languages – are studied in detail. The results are tabulated below. Table 1 shows relationships of tone with respect to the total of 1,694 independent Saramaccan entries in Donicé and Voorhoeve (1963); the 149 items represented in the table are 8.8% of the Saramaccan total. Table 2 shows comparison with respect to attestation in two early dictionaries, one of a Bantu language (Van Geel 1651), one of Saramacca Tongo (Schumann 1778), as well as with respect to Sranan Tongo, the main creolized language of Surinam. (On Sranan, see papers by Voorhoeve and Eersel in this volume.)

Kongo nominal forms belong to one of several tone-groups, each varying according to two tone-cases (1: subject before, or object after, absolute verbal form; 2: isolated or predicative position). Kongo words of tone-groups A and D are taken in case 1 in Saramacca Tongo, words of tone-group E in case 2. It appears that in this way there is a maximal tonal agreement between Kongo originals and Saramaccan reflexes, some 65% (97 out of 149 comparisons). Of the 34 words taken from the dictionary by Laman (1936), 14 are hardly comparable in respect to tone and are consequently assembled under the heading 'tone not comparable'. Excluding the Laman data, the proportion of reflexes with identical tone rises to almost 75% (86 out of 115).

TABLE I

	Total	Identical	Different	Incomparable
Incontestable	97	73	11	13
Probable	15	7	3	5
Less probable	8	2	3	3
Possible	29	15	13	1
	149	97	30	22

The author discusses reasons why Saramaccan words which might be regarded as reflexes of Kongo are rejected or accepted. Two examples are cited here.

A Saramaccan word such as *t'òdò* 'toad, frog' could be related to Kongo *ntòdi* 'frog' (Laman: 'une petite grenouille qui coasse'). The meaning fits, but the tone does not and neither does the final vowel. What tips the scale is the fact that the English word *toad* seems closely related. Thus the word is to be rejected as African, unless the resemblance to the Kongo as well as the English word might have furthered its currency.

The Saramaccan word *tjali* 'regret, be sorry' could be connected with Sranan

*sári*, probably borrowed from English *sorry*. But as Saramaccan has other words that probably go back to the same English *sorry*, namely, *sái* 'sorrow, grief' and *sáa* 'sorrow, have pity', the comparison with Kongo *kyaadí* 'sorrow, grief, regret' seems more plausible. Both the meaning and the tone favor the supposed Kongo origin.

TABLE 2

	Geel 1651 (Bantu)	Schumann 1778 (S)	Sranan Tongo
Incontestable	31	42	23
Probable	5	5	5
Less probable	0	3	1
Possible	14	9	4
	50	59	33

Some items show only partial correspondence with Kongo words. A parallel may be drawn between Saramaccan *tótómboti* 'a large kind of woodpecker' and Kongo *thóto ñti* 'woodpecker' (Laman: 'pic'), which is a compound of the deverbative of *-tóta* 'peck' and of *ñti* 'tree'. On this hypothesis the two words would be compounds with a first element in common.

Saramaccan reflexes of Kongo vowels and consonants in different positions are discussed, and so are reflexes of Kongo prefixes. It is quite possible for the Saramaccan noun (without formal difference between singular and plural) to correspond to the plural noun in Kongo: *matutu* 'small rat' in Saramaccan corresponding to *matutu* 'mice' in Kongo (singular *tutu*); *bisaka* 'fish trap' in Saramaccan, corresponding to *bisaka* 'fish traps' in Kongo (singular *kisaka*).

Very few universal or basic items appear in the list of Kongo words in Saramaccan. Of the Swadesh lists only words for 'father', 'mother' and perhaps 'tie together' and 'vomit' have been observed among reflexes from Kongo words. Nouns for cultural items form the main body of words of Kongo origin, with ideophones and verbs. The nouns belong to the following semantic fields: kinship, community life, magic; fauna; flora; household, utensils, provisioning; body parts; diseases; atmosphere; place. (In appendices the words for 'banana', 'peanut' and 'monkey' are studied in greater detail.)

## NOTE

1 Summary of a paper of the same title to appear in the *Journal of African Languages*. The summary has been prepared by Jan Voorhoeve, and approved with revisions by Father Daeleman.

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