

KIKONGO

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Kikongo is a Bantu language of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family. There are many dialects, among them South Congo, Central Kongo, West Kongo (Fiole, Fioti), Bwende (Buende), East Kongo, Southeast Kongo, and Nzamba (Dzamba). Kikongo is related to some of the most well-known languages of Africa: Bambara, Bemba, Ganda, Gikuyu, Igbo, Lingala, Mandinka, Ndebele, Nyanja, Rundi, Shona, Sotho, Swahili, Tswana, Wolof, Xhosa, Yoruba, and Zulu - to name just a few. In Kikongo, the perfective aspect has different allomorphs whose phonetic realization depends on the number of syllables that the stem has and whether the stem ends with a nasal or a liquid. The perfective aspect of monosyllabic stems is -idi. (E.g. to eat - dia/diidi). Bisyllabic verb stems which end with a liquid also take -idi, but the stem liquid becomes d, too, a case of regressive assimilation(e.g. to go to bed - tula/tudidi) Polysyllabic verb stems which end with a liquid have it changed to d and the final vowel is i.(E.g. To put/push/pull - balula/baludi).

The Kongo generally subsist from day to day on agricultural production, fishing, and hunting. Their most prolific art form is the nkisi figures which come in all shapes, mediums, and sizes. They generally represent happy events in a person's life. Because of the stratification of Kongo society, most art work is geared toward those of high status, but the nkisi figures are available to everyone. Much of the material available to students who are interested in studying Kikongo is in English. Two important internet links are:

<http://www.kimenyi.com/kikongo-perfective.php>
<http://www.indiana.edu/~librcsd/afrlg/data/0291.html>

STUDYING KIKONGO IN THE U.S.

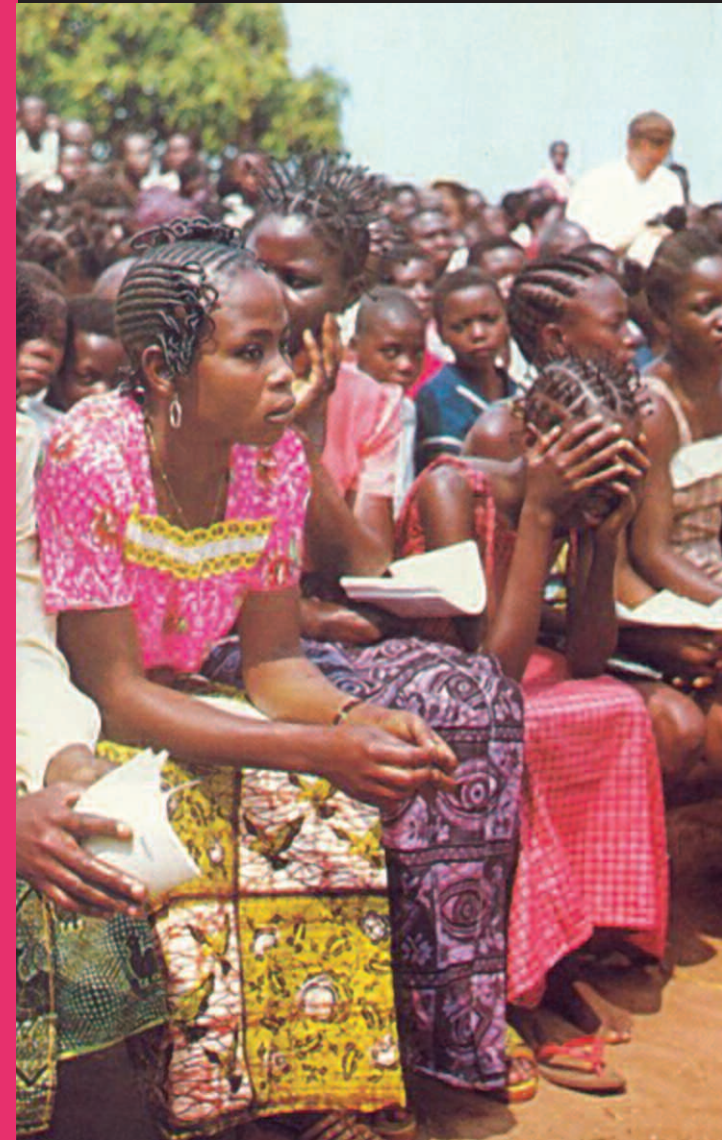
Below is a partial list of some of the universities in the United States that currently offer Kikongo. For more information, please contact the National African Language Resource Center or visit the NALRC website at: <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu>

Cameron University
Michigan State University



NATIONAL AFRICAN
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Website: <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu>



KIKONGO WOMEN AT A MEETING

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE
RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

WHY STUDY KIKONGO?

Kikongo - also known as Kongo, Koongo, Kikoongo, and Congo - is spoken by almost six million people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), the Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville), Angola, and Gabon. Some newspapers and magazines are published in Kikongo in the DRC, the Republic of the Congo, and Angola. There are also radio broadcasts and a few television programs in the language.

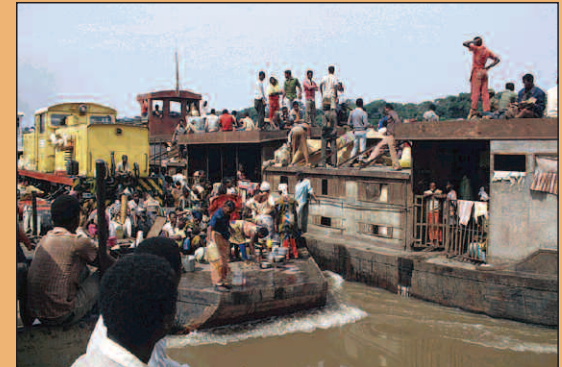
Although French is the official language in the DRC, the Republic of the Congo, and Gabon and Portuguese is in Angola, Kikongo has the status of a national language in all four countries and is an essential tool for anyone in linguistics, anthropology, history, and folklore who wants to study in this region of Central Africa. Individuals working for international organizations will also find that they can accomplish their day-to-day tasks more easily if they speak Kikongo. Tourist, too, will soon discover that knowledge of Kikongo will allow them to enjoy their holidays more if they can communicate directly with the Kongo people of the region.

WHO SPEAKS KIKONGO?

PEOPLE AND HISTORY

The Kongo Empire was located in what is today northern Angola, the Republic of the Congo, and the western part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire). At its greatest extent, it reached from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Kwango River in the east, and from the Congo River in the north to the Loje River in the south. The empire consisted of six provinces ruled by a king, the Manikongo of the Bakongo (Kongo peoples), but its sphere of influence extended to the neighboring states as well. Before the arrival of the Europeans, the Kongo Empire was a highly developed state at the center of an extensive trading network which benefited from the area's abundance of natural resources as well as locally manufactured goods. In 1483, the Portuguese navigator Diogo Cao visited Manikongo in his capital, Mbanza, and persuaded the king to open his country to the Portuguese. Catholic missionaries arrived in 1490, and ten years later the king himself was baptized and assumed the name Afonso. The capital city was renamed Sao Salvador.

In the following decades, the Kongo Empire became a major source of slaves for traders from Portugal and other European countries. Soon, though, this began to destroy the social strata, and in 1526, the Manikongo wrote to the king of Portugal, asking him to stop the practice, but his plea went unanswered. Relations with Portugal soured. As the Kongo Empire went into decline, because of the loss of population and the incursions by neighboring states, the Portuguese saw an opportunity to increase the number of slaves taken from the area. The once-great Kongo Empire continued its decline over the next two centuries. At the Conference of Berlin in 1885, it was divided among Portugal, Belgium, and France. In the latter half of the 20th century, the Kongo people of the region played an important role in helping the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Congo, Angola, and Gabon to achieve independence from their European colonial rulers.



Barges and boats on the Congo river



Congolese dwarf



Congo women pose for a picture during womens day