The B30 language group

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1. INTRODUCTION

For a long time B30 has been one of the least studied and documented language groups of Gabon. Although Guthrie (1953 and 1969-71) provided scholars with a first approximation of its main characteristics, his account was necessarily incomplete. As a matter of fact his research was based on rather limited personal field notes and on data taken from Raponda-Walker (RW) (1950) concerning only two out of seven languages (see below).

More recent investigation has allowed us to elaborate a much more accurate picture of the group as a whole and of its individual languages. In order to draw up the present state of affairs, this chapter will present a summary of the main results of linguistic research on this hardly known but nonetheless very interesting language group. These results not only concern sociolinguistic aspects such as the internal composition of the group and its relationships with other language groups, but most obviously also descriptive linguistics. The (predominantly) sociolinguistic aspects will be set out hereafter, whereas the main phonological and morphological features of the individual varieties as well as the common structural features will be discussed in some detail in the sections following this introduction. Syntax, for which only limited data are available, will be discussed as a subsidiary (see Conclusion).

1.1. The inventory

The B30 group comprises seven language varieties, all of which are spoken in the central, rainforest, part of Gabon. The group as a whole doesn't have one distinct and generally accepted (ethnic) name. According to some of its members it ought to be called "*Okani*" (meaning "Let's go!" in most of the B30 languages), others prefer "*Mbembe*" or do not name it at all. The generally accepted names of the individual varieties are Tsogo, Vove, Viya, Pinzi(pinzi), Kande, Himba(ka) and Bongwe. Each of these varieties will be presented briefly. (See also map below, for their approximate location.)

TSOGO

(ɣe-tsɔɣɔ; <u>T</u> hereafter; speakers: Mitsogo)

Classification: B31 (Guthrie 1953).

Location: a rather elongated area situated to the north-east of Mouila on the right bank of River Ngounié, having as upper limit the village of Sindara, north of Fougamou.

Estimated number of speakers: 9000.

Neighboring languages: B30, B40 and B50 languages.

Main publications: RW (1950). Guthrie (1969-71) (T's reflexes). Marchal-Nasse (1979) (outline of T's phonology and morphology). Jacquot (1983) focussing mainly on noun class morphology. Van der Veen (<u>VdV</u>) (1991a). A non-published dictionary (about 6000 entries) elaborated by RW.

Other: being the privileged means of communication of the local Bwiti cult which has initiates all over the country, T has considerable social and cultural prestige.

VOVE (POVE)

(ɣè-βòβè; <u>Vo</u> hereafter; speakers: Bavove)

Classification: not mentioned as a B30 language by Guthrie. B22c according to Bryan (1959). However, Jacquot (1978, 1983) has shown Vo to be a typical B30 language from a morphological perspective. VdV's work (1986, 1987, 1991a) on the phonology, the morphology, the lexicon and the syntax of one of the southern varieties of Vo has corroborated this conclusion.

Location: area to the south-west of Koulamoutou defined by the town of Koulamoutou (east side), a village called Mouila (west side) and the village of Bagnati (north side; bordering an uninhabited region).

Estimated number of speakers: 4000.

Neighboring languages: Sangu (B40) and Nzebi (B50) (southern region).

Main publications: Jacquot (1978, 1983), VdV (1986, 1987, 1991), Mickala-Manfoumbi (1994).

Other: Vo is a cluster of language varieties. Their exact number is unknown. The southern dialects seem to have been considerably influenced by the neighboring languages. The more conservative Pove varieties are situated in the northern region.

VIYA

(ɣè-βíyà; <u>Vi</u> hereafter; speakers: Eviya (also Evia or Avias))

Classification: not mentioned by Guthrie (1953), Bastin (1978) or Jacquot (1978, 1983). RW (1967) considers Vi to be a mixture of T and Sira (B41). As VdV has shown, Vi fundamentally is a B30 language variety but its lexicon has indeed been rather strongly influenced by the Sira language. This conclusion corroborates and refines Blanchon's (1988) earlier findings.

Location: the village of Mavono, on the right bank of River Ngounié, facing the town of Fougamou.

Estimated number of speakers: 300-400. Real fluency for 50 speakers at the most.

Neighboring languages: T (same village), Sira (Fougamou) and other B40 languages.

Main publications: Blanchon (1988), VdV (1991a, 1999a/b), Bodinga & VdV (1995), VdV & Bodinga (in press) (ie a dictionary containing more than 6300 entries).

Other: due to epidemics, rural depopulation, bilingualism, etc., Vi is nearly extinct.

PINZI(PINZI)

(ɣe-pinzi(pinzi) or ɣe-pipinzi; <u>P</u> hereafter; speakers: Apindji/Gapindji)

Classification: mere dialectal form of T according to Guthrie (1953:64). Jacquot (1983) and VdV (1991a), both based on more or less extensive field work, have shown P to be clearly distinct from T. The Gapindjii themselves consider their language to be very closely related to the B30 varieties Kande (below) and Himba(ka) (below).

Location: seven villages situated on the right bank River Ngounié, between Mouila and River Waka.

Estimated number of speakers: 200-300 (?).

Neighboring languages: Punu (B43) and Sira (B41) (opposite side of River Ngounié).

Main publications: Jacquot (1978, 1983), VdV (1991a).

Other: nearly extinct minority group. Dialectal differences exist. The data examined by VdV correspond to a somewhat different variety from the one described by Jacquot (1983). The latter is slightly closer to T and this may explain why Guthrie assumed it to be a dialect of T.

KANDE

(o-kande; <u>K</u> further on; speakers: Okande)

Classification: B32 (Guthrie 1953). Confirmed by more recent investigation.

Location: three villages situated on the left bank of River (Moyen-)Ogooué, between the confluence of River Boleko and River Aschouka.

Estimated number of speakers: a few dozen at the most.

Neighboring languages: B10, B20, A70 (Fang).

Main publications: Guthrie (1953, 1969-71), VdV (1991a) (basic outline based on some 300 lexical items).

Other: the Okande were once a culturally significant and rather well-known ethnic group. Reliable historical documents refer to intensive trading with the Nenga of Lambaréné (B10), the Galoa (B10), the Sake and the Kota (B20). At present, they are near to extinction.

HIMBA(KA)

(ɣe-himba(ka); <u>H</u> below; speakers: Simba or Himba)

Classification: H's main phonological and morphological characteristics (see VdV 1991a: 233-241) unambiguously show that it is to be reckoned among the B30 languages. According to the Simba themselves, H is closely related to P and K, and only slightly less to Vo and T.

Location: a limited number of villages of which three are situated in the Booué area and one in the area situated to the north of Mimongo in the Ngounié district, ie. Massima Camp.

Estimated number of speakers: a few hundred. Complete fluency is rare.

Neighboring languages: B10, B20, A70 (Fang).

Main publications: VdV (1991a) (basic outline of phonology and morphology).

Other: nearly extinct group. Very poorly documented B30 variety.

BONGWE

((ɣ)e-bɔŋgwɛ; B below; speakers: Babongo)

Classification: variety considered to be a mere amalgam of various Gabonese idioms by RW (1937). VdV (1991a) has shown it to be very closely related to T.

Location: (Ngounié) districts of Sindara-Fougamou and Mimongo-Gendjambwe, south to the Apindji.

Estimated number of speakers: unknown.

Neighboring languages: unknown.

Main publications: RW (1937), VdV (1991a:410-411).

Other: dialectal B30 variety spoken by the Babongo pygmies (-bɔ̀ŋgɔ́ 1/2). Although diachronically very interesting as it corresponds in many ways to an earlier stage of T, B is the least known variety of B30.

As no recent and reliable data are available for the time being, B will only incidentally be taken into account below.

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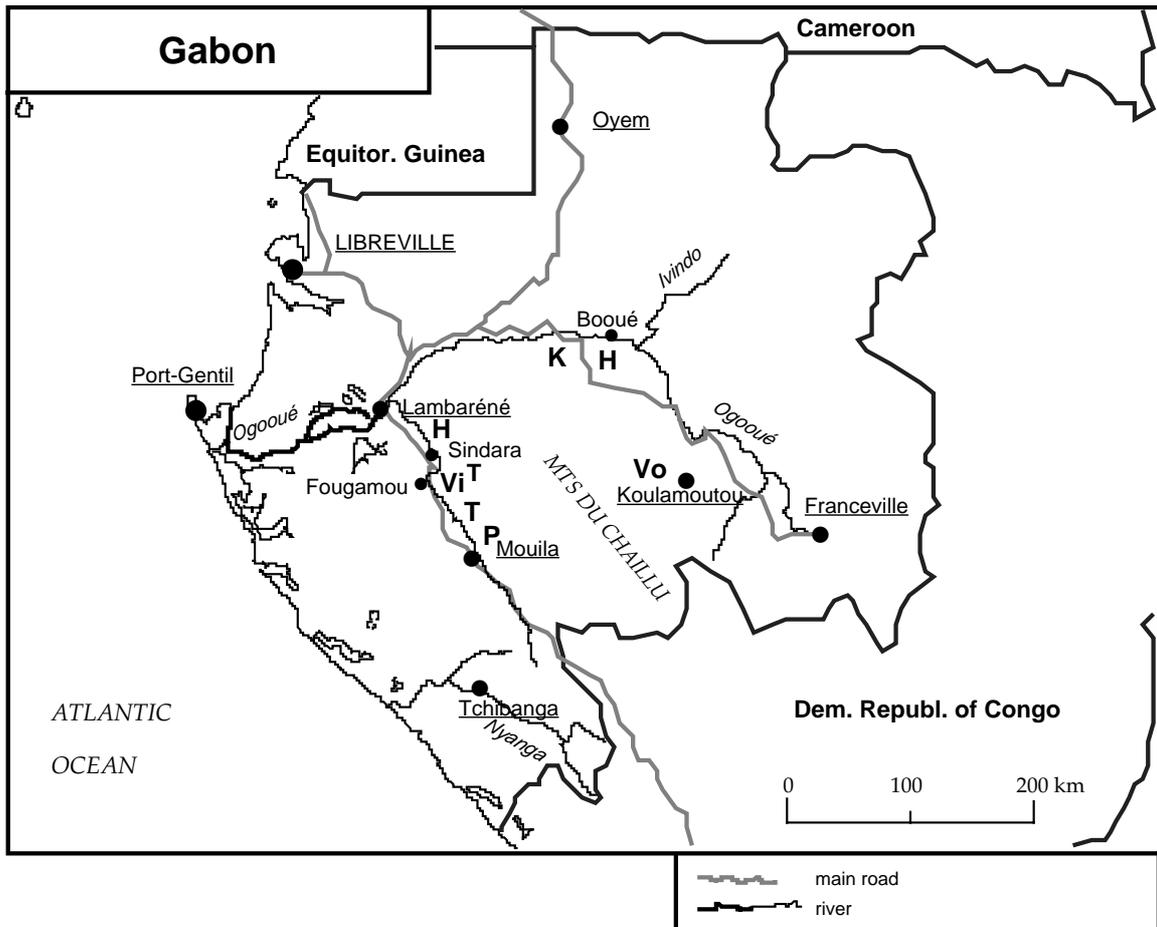
**Map of Gabon showing the approximate location
of each of the B30 languages (except for Bongwe).**
(T = Tsogo, Vo = Vove, Vi = Viya, P = Pinzi(pinzi), K = Kande and H = Himba(ka).)

1.2. B30's internal structure

A rather accurate picture of B30's internal organization has been obtained from VdV's dialectometrical and lexicostatistical study (VdV 1991a:353-368). The main conclusions of this study clearly corroborate the results of the study of the phonology and the morphology of the B30 languages (see below). Fundamentally, two subgroups need to be distinguished: one being the closely united P/K/H cluster, the other being the considerably less solidly knitted "agglomerate" T/Vo/Vi. The former will henceforth be referred to as **Northern B30** (N-B30) and the latter as **Southern B30** (S-B30). P, K and H can be regarded as three dialectal varieties of one language (cluster) but the varieties of S-B30 can not. As shown on the map above, the N-B30 varieties are not geographically close nowadays. One must therefore conclude that this group has come to split up only quite recently. Within the group as a whole T holds a rather central position.

1.3. The group's lexical identity

The outcome of another detailed comparative study bearing on B30's lexical stock (VdV (1991a:368-402)) allows us to define common lexical forms on different levels: group level, subgroup level, etc. Taking into account both Guthrie's CS. and data from the highest possible number of Gabonese languages, this study has also pointed out potential lexical innovations, on various levels. An adequate picture of B30's lexical identity is now available. For reasons of conciseness, only the main results will be presented here.

One of the most important findings has turned out to be the difficulty or even the impossibility in quite a number of cases to reconstruct just one lexeme for the group as a whole. Divergences between N-B30 and S-B30 are rather numerous. Nevertheless, it has proved to be possible to set up a list of diachronically interesting lexical items.

The following lexemes are possible candidates for common-B30 lexical innovations. Not all of these items can be put forward with the same degree of certainty. Further research, taking also into account non-Gabonese languages, will allow to constrain their number.

Item	Gloss	Gender	Distribution
*-bɛnd-	"(to) say", "(to) tell"	-	
*-bolongo	"egg"	5/6	(borrowed from B40?)
*-bumba	"liver"	5/6	
*-buni	"belly"	5/6	
*-dɛkɔ	"chin"	7/8	
*-dyale	"seed"	3/4	
*-dyɔ	"hair", "fur"	3/4	
*-eko	"bark"	11/10	
*-ɣunz-	"(to) hit", "(to) strike"	-	
*-its-	"(to) give"	-	
*-kondo	"buttock"	9/10	(?)
*-mboma	"chest"	9/10	
*-mɛnɔ	"neck"	7/8	(elsewhere only B44)
*-ngina	"louse"	9/10	
*-nzima	"ten"	9/10	
*-saɣo	"iron"	3/4	
*-sakɔ	"firewood"	7/8	
*-tanda	"leg"	3/4	
*-tseba	"horn"	9/10	
*-tsuma	"knife"	9/10	
*-βɛl-	"(to) fly"	-	(elsewhere only B42)
*-βumbe-	"(to) blow"	-	(S-B30/H/(P))

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Other potential candidates, common on some inferior level, are:

Item	Gloss	Gender	Level
-buka	"nine"	-	N-B30
-bwan-	"(to) sit down"	-	N-B30
-dyɔ-	"(to) go away", "(to) leave"	-	Vi/Vo
-ɣab-	"(to) grow (vegetables)"	-	S-B30
-ɣam-	"(to) want"	-	P/H
-ikedy-	"(to) show"	-	N-B30
-kaka	"tortoise	7/8	N-B30
-kɔkɔ	"bed"	9/10	T/Vi
-kɔβɛ	"hair", "fur"	11/10a	P/H
-meneto	"male"	1/2	N-B30
-naŋga	"star"	3/4	T/Vi
-nenele	"tongue"	11/10a	N-B30
-nɔŋgɔn-	"(to) know"	-	P/H
-odi	"river"	3/4, 11/10	Vi/Vo
-sanzedy-	"(to) swell"	-	N-B30
-tol-	"(to) sing"	-	T/Vi/K
-tomb-	"(to) push"	-	T/Vo
-tsidi	"louse"	9/10	Vi/Vo
-tsind-	"(to) grow (vegetables)"	-	N-B30
-βinz-	"(to) push"	-	N-B30

For other potential innovations and also for outstanding features (as formal properties, content or exclusive use in Gabon) concerning common-B30 words which have a corresponding reconstructed CB form, see VdV (1991a:399-400).

1.4. Relationship with other language groups

VdV (1991a) has pointed out that substantial and probably rather ancient morphological and lexical affinities exist between B30 as a whole and B10 (Myene) as well as some quite ancient but less obvious lexical affinities between B30 and certain B20 languages. (Cf Bastin & Piron (1999).)

Lexical ties are strongest between N-B30 and B10. These links are reinforced by some morphological affinities (see Noun Morphology, below). Since syntax doesn't seem to be affected, the most probable scenario for their origin is that of B30 having acquired these features by borrowing during a period of intensive (trade) contact (see below).

At S-B30 level, lexical affinities are less easy to define. Altogether, this subgroup predominantly presents lexical similarities with the neighboring B40 and B50 languages. It is not always easy to determine whether the latter influenced S-B30 or vice versa. For historical and sociolinguistic reasons (eg B30's fragility), it is reasonable to think that the

neighboring languages have been exerting considerable pressure on this subgroup for quite a long time. (For a more detailed specification, see VdV (1991a; 1999a).)

1.5. The historical and geographical origin of the group

The available (oral) literature almost unanimously refers to the Ivindo Distinct (situated in the northeastern part of the country) as the geographical origin of the B30-speaking ethnic groups. This may be correct, but in that case the region referred to is more probably to be regarded as a place of transit. Most of the oral texts furthermore mention a subsequent migration into the coastal region as well as a rather long stay in this area, intensive trade contacts with members of the Myene group (B10) during that period, a return to the inner parts of the country (most probably due to slave-trade), and finally, social and cultural interaction with several other ethnic groups (especially B40, B50) after settling down in this central area.

Although information of this type should be treated with caution, the presently available linguistic evidence tends to confirm the oral documents. It furthermore suggests Guthrie's claim (1953) about lexical similarities between T and zone C to be erroneous (cf VdV 1991a:407). Instead, more or less important lexical resemblances have shown up with languages that have once come from the North or the North East (zone A). According to VdV (1991a:444-451), B30 possesses a vast majority of lexical items reconstructed (by Guthrie) for the following zones: N., W., N. & C. West., NW. and CW.

1.6. Its chances for survival

Most B30 languages are doomed to disappear in the near future. The splitting up of the group is nowadays being accelerated by several extralinguistic and (socio)linguistic factors, such as the unegalitarian plurilingualism, the growing pressure exerted by the surrounding groups, the loss of prestige, the gradual loss of linguistic competence, the very low birthrate, diseases, exogamy and rural depopulation.

The most seriously threatened varieties are K and Vi. T, because of its special cultural and religious prestige (see above), appears to be more resistant.

This disastrous state of affairs, however, raises important theoretical questions, especially concerning language death and the linguistic processes that accompany this worldwide phenomenon. B30 languages offer the extraordinary opportunity to observe changes while working in the field and explore simultaneously different hypotheses about

the presumed relationship between language change, language acquisition and language death.

2. PHONOLOGY

This section will highlight the main phonological features encountered in B30. Both segmental and suprasegmental characteristics will be briefly discussed. Emphasis will be placed on common features, but specific diverging features will also be pointed out. The B variety will only occasionally be taken into account.

2.1. SEGMENTAL PHONOLOGY

2.1.1. Phoneme inventories

VOWEL SYSTEMS

All B30 languages have a 7-vowel system in which length and nasalization do not play a distinctive role:

	Anterior	**Back**
High	i	u
Mid-high	e	o
Mid-low	ε	ɔ
Low	a	

It should be noted that the mid-high vowels of Vo are realized as particularly close ([ẹ] and [ọ] respectively). Vowels in root position are significantly longer than in any other position. See VdV (1987, 1991a) for these features.

In this language, especially in rapid speech, vowels in word-final position undergo several phonological processes:

(a) Final non-high vowels will be realized with a centralized quality in isolation (V_2##). The low vowel will also be centralized preceding consonant-initial words (a_2#C). Eg /mùŋgòŋgà/ "neck" gives [mùŋgòŋgə̀] in isolation or in front of a consonant, and /tsὲɣέ/ "mandrill" is realized [tsὲɣə́] in isolation.

(b) Final non-low vowels become phonetic glides (i, e, ε → y and u, o, ɔ → w) when they precede vowel-initial words (V_2#V). Eg /póɣò έ/ "the (specific) rat" gives [póɣwέ].

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(c) The final low vowel drops when it precedes vowel-initial words (a_2#V). Eg /mùŋgòŋgà έ/ "the (specific) neck" is realized [mùŋgòŋgέ].

(d) The intermediate degree vowels (mid-high and mid-low) become phonetically high when followed by a consonant (V_2#C). Eg /nzὲɣɔ́ ɗínέ/ "these panthers over there" is very frequently realized as [nzὲɣúɗínέ].

Moreover:

(a) All final vowels tend to become devoiced. This regressive devoicing process may also affect the preceding voiced consonants, as is shown in [ὲbὲɣɔ̥̀] "word".

(b) In prefixal position the anterior mid-high vowel is always realized as a central vowel ([ə]). Eg [ɣ̀əβòβè] for /ɣὲβòβè/ "Gevove (language)".

These processes considerably reduce the phonetic word-final vowel inventory . Instead of seven distinct vowel qualities, often only three qualities are found, ie. [i], [u] and [ə]. This change is presently taking place at the phonetic level in Vo, whereas in non-B30 languages like B52 a very similar process has already brought about important structural changes (cf Blanchon 1987:33, VdV 1991a:68). See VdV (1987, 1991a) for a more detailed account.

In prefixal position the anterior mid-high vowel is always realized as a central vowel ([ə]). Eg. [ɣ̀əβõβè] for /ɣὲβòβè/ "Gevove (language)".

CONSONANT SYSTEMS

The B30 consonant systems have in common the following structural features and characteristics:

- a high degree of resemblance;
- very regular synchronic correspondances;
- the presence of two prenasalized series (plosives and fricatives);
- the very marginal status of the phonemes /w/, /r/ (Vi only) /f/ (Vi and N-B30) and /mf/ (Vi and K) or by the absence of these segments of which the last three cannot be reconstructed at the proto-B30 level;
- the absence of a velar nasal phoneme and a velar plosive phoneme.

It should be noticed that in all languages the /^{n}z/ phoneme is realized as a prenasalized affricate [^{n}dz]. The voiced plosives are all realized as implosives. T has the least complex system (18 segments), and Vi the most complex one (23 segments). For that reason, the latter will be given here for reference. The other systems will be succinctly compared to it.

	Labial	Coronal	Dorsal
Affricate		ts	
Palatalized		d^y	
Vless plosives	p	t	k
Vd plosives	b	d	

Vless fricatives	f	s	
Vd fricatives	β	ɣ	
Prenasal. plosives	^{m}b	^{n}d	^{ŋ}g
Prenasal. fricatives	(^{m}f)	^{n}z	
Nasals	m	n	ɲ
Lateral liquid	l		
Non lateral liquid	r		
Approximants	w	y	

In Vi the /w/ phoneme is realized [ɥ] in front of high front vowels. The coronal nasal has a strong tendency to palatalize before /i/. Vi is the only language that has a /r/ phoneme, most probably obtained by borrowing from neighboring B40 languages.

T doesn't have the following phonemes: /dy/ (having merged with /y/; earlier varieties of T however possessed this phoneme, cf RW (1950)!), /f/, /^{m}f/, /l/ and /r/. B has /l/ and /dy/ where T has ∅ and /y/ respectively. Furthermore, it has ∅ where all the other varieties have /ɣ/.

Vo doesn't have /f/, /^{m}f/, /l/ and /r/. In this language, the /w/ phoneme is realized [ɥ] in front of high front vowels, like in Vi and in H (*infra*).

P, K and H (N-B30) have very similar systems. All of them have a marginal /f/ phoneme. None of them have a /r/ phoneme. The only difference between P and H is that H has /h/ instead of /s/. In both varieties the coronal nasal is not found in the C_2 and C_3 positions before /i/. K is the only variety of these three that has a (very marginal) /^{m}f/ phoneme. Its /ts/ phoneme is realized as a post-aveolar affricate [tʃ] and its /w/ phoneme as [ɥ] before high front vowels.

A detailed study of regular sound correspondances (VdV 1991a: 259-285) leads to positing the following common-B30 vowel and consonant systems:

Vowels: *i, *e, *ɛ, *u, *o, *ɔ, *a.

Consonants: *ts, *dy; *p, *t, *k; *b, *d, *g ??; *^{m}b, *^{n}d, *^{ŋ}g; *^{n}z; *m, *n, *ɲ; *β, *s, *ɣ; *l, *w and *y. The *g is highly hypothetical. Its existence has been assumed in order to account for certain specific sound correspondances (see VdV 1991a:284-5). Evidence from Janssens (1991) has nevertheless pointed out that these correspondances can best be interpreted as the result of morphophonological alternations of which the conditioning environments have become opaque. (See also below.)

2.1.2. Syllable types

No closed syllables are found. Prenasalized consonants having been interpreted as units, it can be stated that the only possible syllable types, occurring in all seven languages, are (C)V and (C)AV (where A = approximant).

2.2. SUPRASEGMENTAL PHONOLOGY

2.2.1. Vowel harmony in B30

All languages examined in VdV (1991a) possess a (progressive) vowel harmony system (within the noun stem or the verb stem) which has as its main feature the mutually exclusiveness of the second and third degree of vowel height. This can be shown from the following data:

	P	T	Vi	Vo
"skin"	/moɣɔbɔ/	/mòɣɔ́bɔ̀/	/mòɣɔ́bɔ̀/	/mùɣɔ́bɔ̀/
"woman"	-	/mòɣétɔ̀/	/mòɣétɔ̀/	/mùɣétɔ̀/
"husband"	/monome/	/mómè/	/mómè/	/mómè/
"buttock"	/kondo/	/kóndó/	/kóndó/	-

Some differences exist, however. T and N-B30 (at least P and H) share an important feature: they are less restrictive than Vo and Vi which possess additional constraints. These constraints may schematically be described as the incompatibility between high or low vowels (in root position) and mid-low vowels (in non-root position). The following items exemplify these differences.

	P	T	Vi	Vo
"eye"	/itsɔ/	/isɔ̀/	/isò/	/isò/
"tooth"	/inɔ/	/inɔ̀/	/inò/	/inò/
"sand"	/mosiɣɛ/	/mòsíɣè/	-	/mùsíɣè/

2.2.2. Tone systems

T, Vo and Vi have in common a tone system with basically four underlying melodies for the nouns (ie H, L, HL and LH) and two for the verbs (ie H and L). Tonal correspondances are about regular. No reliable tonal data are available for N-B30 so far.

	T/Vi/Vo	Gloss		T/Vi/Vo	Gloss
H	/tsósó/	"chicken"	H	/-bénd-/	"say"
L	/tàbà/	"goat"	L	/-dùt-/	"draw"
HL	/mò-témà/	"heart"			
LH	/mò-bɔ̀ngɔ́/	"pygmy"			

Within S-B30, two basic types of tone systems can be distinguished: one characterized by the absence of tone spreading and the other by the presence of such a parameter.

Tones don't spread in Vo. Some simple (mostly vertical) assimilation rules suffice to account for its system. Eg. /ɣwátà dyá wàbɔ̀ŋgɔ́ é/ "fingernails of the Pygmies" will be realized [ɣwátádyáwàbɔ̀ŋgwὲ] in rapid speech. These processes are the result of the particular weakness of the final syllable (above).

The absence of the LH pattern in monosyllabic stems should be noticed. The noun prefixes are all underlyingly L. Word games have shown that the stem is the domain of tone, not the syllable. Downdrift occurs in HLH sequences: the second H is phonetically lower than the first. It also appears in a series of L-tones.

One other interesting feature is neutralization that results in lowering in utterance-final position. The only tone that can occur in this position is a low (falling) tone. See example above.

Rightward Tone Spreading occurs in T and Vi. In T they spread freely within a certain number of well-defined domains. For a rather detailed but nevertheless tentative description, see Marchal-Nasse (1979).

As far as Vi is concerned, not the syllable but the phonological word has proved to be the domain of tone. Tones associate in a one-to-one fashion, from left to right, after which spreading may occur. This process is entirely conditioned by the nature of the underlying tone situated immediately at the right. If the following structural tone is low or if the subsequent morpheme is tonally unspecified spreading takes place. In case a H-tone follows the tone(s) remain linked to their initial skeletal position.

Moving tones undergo automatical delinking if a major pause, a tonally unspecified segment or a structural L-tone precedes. Only the final reassociation link will be maintained. This results in tone lowering on the surface. No delinking will occur if a H-tone precedes. In the latter case, a plateau of H-tones will appear, as shown in the following example.

... $\longrightarrow$ à tòmèà mókwélé móβéɣà

"he sends a servant to the widow"
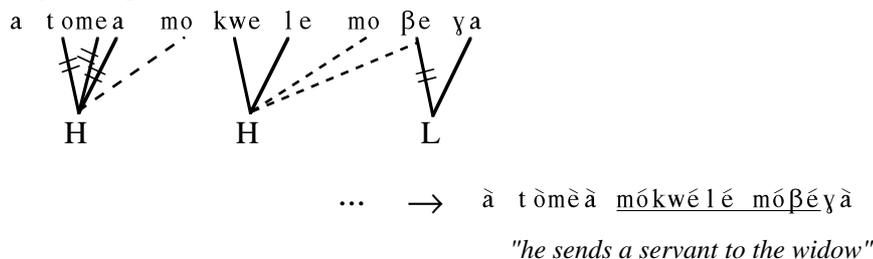
Spreading ceases when the moving tone reaches a H-tone. (Cf preceding example: spreading of first H-tone.) Besides, a tone on the move will never go beyond the root

vowel of the following lexeme (cf preceding example: spreading of second H-tone) nor cross a second word boundary. Eg <u>tòmà ɣó</u> pìndì á Pùɣàmù "send him into the forest of Fougamou" where the underlying H-tone of the verb (e-toma H "to send") spreads to the clitic on its right without going beyond.

Vi avoids contour tones and downstep. Only one tone at a time can be associated to a skeletal position. If for some reason this Well-formedness Condition is violated, a repair strategy will apply. It won't however apply in utterance-penultimate position, which is the only (prosodically marked) position where a falling HL-tone may appear. Eg nà ŋgámòp<u>ê</u>kà "I'll send him" (e-pɛka L "to seize"; H-tone originating from the Object Marker).

In order to explain a certain number of Vi's tonal phenomena, the existence of floating tones has been claimed. Their behavior is governed by specific constraints which will not be be commented on here, due to limitations of space.

For more detailed descriptions concerning T, Vo and Vi, see VdV (1991a, 1992 and 1999a/b).

2.3. SOME DIACHRONIC ASPECTS

Only a few remarks on reflexes and sound changes can be made here. For a detailed discussion of especially the main hypotheses proposed to account for the "multiple reflexes dilemma", ie. the fortis/lenis hypothesis and the derivation hypothesis, refer to VdV (1991a), Stewart (1989), Van Leynseele & Stewart (1980) and Janssens (1991). The group as a whole has double or sometimes even triple (apparently) non-conditioned reflexes for *p, *c, *k, *d, and *g.

B30 vowel reflexes are extremely conservative. In the large majority of cases the B30 vowels match perfectly with the ones found in the CB reconstructed forms. The two subgroups can also be distinguished by means of the following diachronic features:

N-B30

- double reflexes for *g in C_2 position and triple reflexes for *d (in particular the n reflex).
- the sound "change" *d > d/___*i̧.
- the change *c > ts/no-___ (noun class 11 marker).
- isolated cases of consonant alternations, stem-initially, for the 5/6 pairing, with, in parallel, a tendency towards reanalysis by analogy.

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S-B30

- the absence of double reflexes for *g in C_2 position.
- triple reflexes for *d (the most interesting features being the non-segmental reflex $\emptyset$ and the absence of the n reflex).

The T/B/P/H cluster shares the conditioned sound change $*n > \emptyset/\_\_\_*\underset{\centerdot}{\imath}$.

3. NOUN MORPHOLOGY

This second main section will sketch a brief outline of the most important facts the study of B30 noun morphology has revealed so far.

Noun stems in B30 are predominantly bisyllabic. Although less common, plurisyllabic stems are rather well represented too. Most of them have either three or four syllables. Eg (Vi) ɣe-sɛta+miso B+HB "dizziness". Monosyllabic stems are rare. Eg (Vo) mu-ɲa L "mouth", (P) e-fa "dog".

A considerable set of reduplicated stems exists in S-B30, most of which are reduplicated bisyllabic stems. Eg (Vi) pɛdi+vɛdi HB+HB "lightning". Semantically, reduplication often denotes intensiveness, large size or repetition. Eg (Vi) ɣe-ɣɛtɔ+ɣɛtɔ HB+HB "a real woman" (from mo-ɣɛtɔ HB "woman").

Other frequent morphologically complex nouns are either compounds (having generally a V+N or N_1+N_2 structure) or associative structures (N_1+Associative Marker+N_2). Cf ɣe-sɛta+miso (*supra*) which has a V+N structure.

An important number of nouns stems have been derived from verbs. They often bear a derivational suffix. Some of these suffixes are still highly productive (cf the very common agentive suffixe /-ì/).

3. 1. Noun Class Markers

The following table (table 1) presents the B30 noun class markers (<u>NCM</u>). In most cases, two allomorphs exist for each marker, one occurring before consonant-initial stems and the other before vowel-initial stems. A few cases of (apparently) free variation have been recorded. All markers are underlyingly L, at least in S-B30.

Some of the NCM have played or still play a role in derivation. (For more details, see VdV 1999a:20-27 on Vi's noun morphology.)

cl.	T	Vo	Vi	P	K	H
1	mo-/ mw-/m-	mu-/ mw-/m-	mo-/ mw-/m-	mo-/ om-	mo-/ omw-	mo-/ omw-/om-
2	a-	wa-/ w-	wa-/ w-	a-	a-	a-
3	mo-/ mw-/m-	mu-/ mw-/m-	mo-/ mw-/m-	mo-/ omw-/ow-	mo-/ omw-	mo-/ omw-/om-
3a				o-	o-/om-/ow-	o-
4	mi-/ my-	mi-/ my-	mi-/ my-	mi-/ my-/mim-	mi-/ mim-	mi-/ mim-
5	e-/ ∅-, (e-)	e-/ ∅-, (e-)	e-/ ∅-/e-	∅-	ṇ-	i-
5a		di-/ dy-	di-/ dy-			
6	ma-/ m-	ma-/ m-	ma-/ m-	ma-/ mam-/m-	ma-/ mam-	ma-/ mam-
7	ɣe-/s-		ɣe-/s-			
7a	ɣe-/ ɣy-	ɣə-/ ɣy-/ɣ-	ɣe-/ ɣy-	ɣe-/ ɣes-	ɣe-/ ɣes- ?	ɣe-/ ɣeh-
8	e-	bi-	e-	e-/ ey-	e-	e-
9	(N)-, ∅-	(N)-, ∅-	(N)-, ∅-/ ny-	((N)-, ∅-)		((N)-, ∅-)
9a				e(N)-/ e-	e(N)-/ e-	e(N)-/ e-
10	(N)-, ∅-	(N)-, ∅-	(N)-, ∅-	((N)-, ∅-)	((N)-, ∅-)	((N)-, ∅-)
10a	di-/ dy-	di-/ dy-	i-/ dy-	di(N)-/ din-	di(N)-/ din-	di(N)-/ din-
11	o-/ w-, ∅-	o-/ w-, ∅-	o-/ w-	no(N)-/ non-	no(N)-/ non-	no(N)-/ n-
13	to-/ tw-	tu- ?	to-/ tw-	to-/ tot-	to-/ tot-	to-/ tot-
14	bo-/ bw-	bu-/ bw-	bo-/ bw-	??	??	??
16	βa-/ β-		βa-/ β-	?	?	?
17	ɣo-/ ɣw-	ɣu-/ ɣw-	ɣo-/ ɣw-	?	?	?
19	βi-/ βy-	βi-/ βy-	βi-/ βy-	βi-/ βiβ-	βi-/ βiβ-	βi-/ βiβ-

Table 1. B30 Noun Class Markers.

Distribution of allomorphs (separated by a slash): the first form appears before consonant-initial stems, the other(s) before vowel-initial stems. The nasal consonant of classes 9, 10 and 10a (as well as perhaps the P/K/H cluster's class 11), put in brackets, doesn't synchronically belong to the prefix but to the stem. All markers are underlyingly L.

The following features deserve special attention:

(a) The group as a whole shares some specific features:

- the absence of noun class (NC) 15, rather frequent in surrounding languages. All B30 varieties however, preserve one or two traces of this NC: eg. T/Vi/Vo o-ɣɔɣɔ/m-ɔɣɔ (11/6+), P o-ɣɔɣɔ/mi-ɣɔɣɔ (3a/4), K ṇ-gɔɣɔ/mam-ɔɣɔ (5/6) and H

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o-ɣɔɣɔ/m-ɔɣɔ (3a/6+) "arm"; T/Vi/Vo o-ɣodo/m-odo (11/6+) "foot". The plural forms (except the one of P) show that both items have a vowel-initial stem, ie. respectively -ɔɣɔ and -odo. These lexemes have undergone one or more class changes.

- the existence of a NC 10a (plural) (except for Vo), also found in B10.
- the e- shape of NCM 8 (opposed to ∅- or y- in B10, bi- or be- in B20 and bi- in B40 and B50).

(b) The northern subgroup differs from S-B30 by the following features:

- the existence of a distinct NC 3a and of some (isolated) cases of consonant alternations (stem-initially).
- the absence of the traditional NCs 9 and 10 (replaced by classes 9a and 10a), well represented in S-B30.
- the shape of NCM 9a and 11: e(N)- and no(N)- respectively.
- the ((C)VC(G)-) shape NCM take when they precede vowel-initial stems. Having a more elaborated structure than the more traditional NCM found in S-B30, this shape most probably results from the addition of an *augment* to the NCM. In this respect, VdV (1991a:344) demonstrates that B10 shares this particular structural feature and has argued that N-B30 may even reflect an anterior stage of what is found in the languages of this group where the augment still seems to be partly functional.
- the absence (or extreme rarity) of NC 14. This NC may have undergone morphological reanalysis. It may also be that this NC initially did not occur in B30 at all and that S-B30 has acquired it by borrowing from surrounding languages where it appears to be rather common.

(c) As far as NC 5 is concerned, some kind of free variation exists in T, Vo and Vi (e- ~ ∅-). The zero prefix seems to be the generally preferred allomorph, especially before vowel-initial stems. Only Vo and Vi have a (rare) NC 5a (plural: 6), borrowed from surrounding B40 or B50 languages.

3.2. Noun Class Pairings

Table 2 shows the main B30 noun class pairings (NCP) as well as their occurrence in the individual languages:

	T	V o	V i	P	K	H
1/2	√	√	√	√	√	√
3/4	√	√	√	√	√	√
3a/4	-	-	-	√	√	√
5/6	√	√	√	√	√	√
5a/6(a)	-	√	√	-	-	-
7/8	√	-	√	-	-	-
7a/8	√	√	√	√	√	√
9/10	√	√	√	√	√	√
11/10	√	√	√	-	-	-
11/10a	√	?	√	√	√	-
11/6	√	√	√	-	-	√?
19/13	√	√	√	√	√	√

Table 2. B30 Noun Class Pairings.
(A tick indicates that the pairing in question exists. A hyphen indicates its absence.)

The following important features can be isolated:

(a) For the group as a whole (B included), the NCP 19/13 and 11/10a (except for Vo!). The former still functions as a diminutive marker in most B30 languages, but its productivity is rather low and not always semantically transparent. In Gabon, this gender is only found in some of the B20 languages (Seki, Kele, Ngom and perhaps also Sake).

The astonishing 11/10a gender, which has almost completely replaced the more traditional 11/10 pairing, could possibly be a B30 innovation, but as VdV (1991a:341-2) has shown, it also exists in B10 where it has erroneously been interpreted as a (highly unusual) 11/19 pairing, (cf Guthrie (1953) and Jacquot (1983)). Its origin, however, remains obscure.

(b) N-B30 differs from S-B30 by a 3a/4 pairing, the absence of genders 11/10 and 11/6 (still sporadically found in S-B30).

The items belonging to the (not very frequent) NCP 3a/4 correspond in S-B30 to items that predominantly occur as part of 11/10a (or 11/10, see below). NCM 3a (N-B30) and 11 (S-B30) are homophones. Considering its rather uncommon nature, the preceding statements and the strong lexical links with B10, borrowing from this group is the most plausible hypothesis concerning its origin (VdV, 1991a342-343).

The gender 11/10a is found instead of 11/10. The latter occasionally occurs in S-B30 (T, Vi) but the lexical items that belong to it are more and more used with the 11/10a pairing. (Cf (Vi) "hair" can be ɩsôɣè or tsôɣè (the latter form judges more archaic)).

3.3. Noun Modifiers

The noun modifiers presented here, mainly concern S-B30. In some cases however, data are available for P and allow a broader comparison. It should be noticed that whereas in S-B30 all modifiers generally follow the head of the NP, P makes some of them precede it (see below).

Although not shown here, some qualifiers have been found in T and Vi. Their number however, does not exceed three or four. The same is true for P.

Demonstrative Markers

Two types of demonstratives occur in S-B30: a close demonstrative and a distant one. In Vi, and probably also elsewhere, prosodic features add a third degree (ie extremely distant). The close demonstrative systematically has the rather curious structure: concord marker$_i$+/⁻V⁻/+concord marker$_i$. Eg. (Vo) ɣèbótò ɣéèɣé "this old man over here". (In T, its central part corresponds to the weak demonstrative (below).) The distant demonstrative is /-nɛ́/ (/-nɛ̀/ for Vi). Eg (Vo) wàɣɛ́tɔ̀ dyɔ́tsɔ̀ wáné "all these women over there". The latter also exists in P.

In N-B30 the structure of the near demonstrative, however, is far less complex than in S-B30 and corresponds often to nothing else than the (appropriate) concord marker, as mostly is the case in the surrounding B10 and B20 languages.

Referential Marker (or Weak Demonstrative)

S-B30 has the rather common marker /-ɛ́/ (See the Vo example in section 2.1.1 Vowels systems.). A different form has been found for P, which is the only language that places this marker before the head it determines. Eg àŋgátómídyá àsɛ́ <u>ó</u> mwánà "he'll make us send the child".

Associative Marker (<u>AM</u>)

All S-B30 languages (including B!) as well as P, have the (for Gabon) more conservative form /-à/. Many surrounding languages have /-∅/. The concord markers, which precede the AM, are underlyingly H, except for classes 1 and 9 (S-B30).

Possessive Determiners

Table 3 presents the Possessive Determiners found in S-B30 and in P.

		T	V o	V i	P
sg.	*1.*	-àmí	-àmé	-àmé	-ayi
	2.	-ɔ́	-ɔ̀ɔ́	-ɔ̀ɔ́	?
	3.	-èɗí	-èɗí	ˋènɗí	-aŋgo
pl.	*1.*	-àsó	-àtó	ˋàtó	-aso
	2.	-àɲó	-ànó	ˋènú	-aɲo
	3.	-àó	-àá	ˋàó	-aŋgo

Table 3. Possessive Determiners.

No clear tendencies emerge from these data. T shares features with Vo and Vi on the one
hand, but on the other also with P. T's forms (and to a lesser extent the ones that occur in
P) look very similar to those described for B11a (ie -ami, -ɔ, -ɛ, -azo, -ani, -ao).

Indefinite Determiners (ID)

S-B30 Indefinite Determiners (table 4) all follow the head of the NP. In case the noun is
followed by the Referential or by a Demonstrative, the ID follow this modifier.

	T	V o	V i
"all"	-étsɔ̀	-ɔ́tsɔ̀	-étsɔ̀
"only", "self"	-ènɛ́	-ɛ́nɛ́	-ɛ́nɛ́
"other"	-βɔ́	-íŋgé	-mɔ̀sí

Table 4. Indefinite Determiners.

Examples: for "all", see the example given in the section on the Demonstrative Markers
(*supra*). "Only"/"self": (Vi) nà dyɔ́ mɛ́ mwɛ́nɛ́ gó mbòkà "I go to the village
myself". "Other": (Vo) ɣèmɔ́nì ɣéèɣé ɣíŋgé "this other lemon".

Some Interrogative Markers

	T	V o	V i	P
"who"	ndá	(í)nzá náà	(ní) nzá	ndêndè
"what"	ndé	7/8-áà	ndé	ɣé
"where"	ɣòní βàní	ɣóó βáá	ɣó ɣé βá ɣé	?
"why"	ɣòndé	náà	ɣé ndè	?
"how many"	-ké	-ké	-ké	?

Table 5. Some Interrogative Markers.

(Cardinal) Numeral Determiners

	T	V o	V i	P
"one"	-βɔ́/-pɔ́	-mwétá	-mwàtátá	-pɔkɔ -mɔtsi
"two"	-bàé	-bà	-báè	-bale
"three"	-tátó	-tátò	-tátò	-tatu
"four"	-nàé -nai (RW, J)	-nàì	-nà	-nai
"five"	-tàé -tai (RW, J)	-tánè	-tànì	-tane
"six"	mòtòbá	mùtóbá	motóbá	motoba
"seven"	tsàmbwé	nátátò	-nà na -tátò	napɔ
"eight"	ɣénàná	nánàì	ɣenáàná	ɣenana
"nine"	-tàé nà -nàé	tánánàì	kámbú mwàtátá	buka
"ten"	nzímá	nzímá	eɣómì	nzima
"hundred"	kàmá (MN) mokama (RW, J)	mùkámá	mokámá	kama

Table 6. Numeral Determiners.

4. VERB MORPHOLOGY

Only the main lines of B30 verb morphology have been studied so far. This section will present in a systematic way the most importants facts that have emerged.

The syllable structure of the verb stem and more generally of the verbal constituent obviously depends on the morphological complexity. The verb has the following overall morphological structure in (S-?)B30:

Subject Marker (Negation M.) Tense/Aspect M. (Object M. if any) Verb Stem.

(Eg. (Vi) tò sà+ŋgá+mó+tómá ɣó pìnđì "we will not send him into the forest". For more examples, see section 4.3 (Predicative Markers) below.) The verb stem is typically composed of a root, one or more extensions and a final vowel. With rarely more than 4 syllables, it is the domain of Vowel Harmony processes that have been extensively described in VdV (1991a:Part I). (See section on Phonology.) One specific constraint concerns the final -a suffix: immediately following a mid-low back vowel in root position, this suffix fully harmonizes. Eg. (Vi) /e-sɔ̀mb-á/ "borrow" becomes [èsɔ̀mbɔ́]. This constraint also applies to some extensions.

The canonical morphological structure of the root is -C(A)VC-. It may also be less complex: -VC-, -C(A)V- or even -V-, -(C)A-. For the extensions, the most common shapes are -VC- and -V-.

Infinitives bear the NC 5 marker in S-B30 (though ∅- in Vo) and the NC 3 marker in N-B30. Examples: /è-tùmbà/ "burn (tr.)" (Vi) (cf /tùmbàkà/ (Vo)) vs /mo-ɣɛndaɣa/ "go" (P).

4.1. Subject Marking

All examined languages have both Subject Markers (<u>SM</u>) and Subject Pronouns (<u>SP</u>). The latter function as strong forms in independent clauses. Only the SM are part of the verb's morphology.

Subject Markers

SM are attached to the verb as prefixes. For Vi however, VdV (1999b) has seriously questioned this prefixal status. Vi's SM tonally behave as proclitics!

Table 7 only presents the SM that formally differ from the corresponding NCM. Tone is underlyingly high except for classes 1 and 9 and for first and second person markers.

P's forms have been taken from Jacquot (1983) but match with my data. Should also be noticed the class 5 SM: ɲi-. No data available for classes 3, 3a, 4, 7, 8, 10a.

	T	**V o**	**V i**	**P**
1 p.sing.	nà-	mè-	nà	na-
1 p.plur.	tò-	tù-	tò	to-
2 p.sing.	ò-	ò-	ò	o-
2 p.plur.	nò-	nù-	nò	no-
3 p./cl.1	à-	à-	à	a-
3 p./cl.2	á-	wá-	wá	wa-
-/cl.9	è-	è-	è	e-
-/cl.10	dí-	dí-	dí	-

Table 7. Subject Markers that formally differ from the corresponding Noun Class Markers.

A homogeneous picture arises here. The nà- marker (1st p. sing.) certainly is the most interesting form, for it doesn't occur anywhere else in Gabon. Vo has mè-, a form most probably borrowed from B52 which has mè-, just as many other neighboring languages. Altogether, the SM present similarities with markers found in at least some of the B40 languages.

Subject Pronouns

		T	V o	V i	P
s g .	*1 .*	mɛ́	mè(ní)	mè(ní)	ímè
	2 .	èwè	wè(ní)	èwè	ɛ́wè
	3 .	àŋgó	ɛ́ɗì	ɛ̀nɗì	áŋgò
p l .	*1 .*	wɛ́	ìtú	ìtó	àsɛ́
	2 .	àɲɛ́	ìnú	ìnó	àɲɛ́
	3 .	àŋgó	wâ	(è)àò	àŋgó

Table 8. Subject Pronouns.

In independent clauses, the SP generally precede the SM. Eg (Vi) <u>mè(ǹ)</u>, tsáβàndàkà "me, I never practice witchcraft". In relative clauses, they immediately follow the verb. Eg. (Vi) à bàŋgí mòɣètɔ́ à síŋgìkì <u>mênì</u> "he has killed the woman I loved". T and P share the highest number of forms. Vo and Vi also have several forms in common. Of these two, Vo diverges most from T and P.

Reflexive Marker

T and Vi have /-á-/ (tone uncertain for T), not found in Vo so far. Eg. (Vi) à má<u>á</u>bàŋgà "he has killed himself (recently)".

4.2. Object Marking

At least two out of the four languages examined so far have two formally distinct series: (infixed) Object Markers (<u>OM</u>) and (independent) Object Pronouns (<u>OP</u>). They are found in T, Vi, and also in some dialects of P (cf Jacquot 1983). Only the OM are part of the verb's morphology. Vo and other dialects of P possess only one series.

Object Markers

The (infixed) OM are placed between the predicative marker (*infra*) and the verb stem. Eg (Vi) nà mà<u>mó</u>tòmà "I've just sent him". Table 9 only presents the OM that are not identical to the corresponding NCM.

person	T	V i
1 p.sing.	-má-	-ní-
1 p. plur.	-tó-	-tó-
2 p. sing.	-ɣó-	-ɣó-
2 p.plur.	-nó-	-nó-
-/cl.3	-ó-	-ó-
-/cl.9	-mí-	-é-
-/cl.10	-ɗí-	-ɗí-

Table 9. Object Markers that formally differ from the corresponding Noun Class Markers.

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T and Vi have many identical forms.

Object Pronouns

(Independent) OP either precede or follow the verb. Eg (Vo) mèkàdyànzá <u>mè</u> mwɛ́nɛ́ "I alone am working", <u>mèní</u>, mèkàtɔ́ndɔ́ ɣínáká "Me, I like dancing". They are formally identical with the SP presented above (table 8). Eg (P (no-OM varieties)) àŋgátómídyá <u>àsɛ́</u> ó mwánà "he'll make us send the child". Specific markers have been found for classes 3 to 19, ie. -àŋgó (T), -è-(Concord Marker)-óó (Vo) and -ɔ́ɔ́ (Vi). Eg (T) nènà ɣésàmbí, nàbɔ̀ŋgɔ̀ <u>sáŋgó</u> ɣó píndí "I see a basket. I take it into the forest".

OP adopt the same order as noun phrases in complement position (dative - accusative). Eg (Vo) àkàbíkí <u>mèní èɣɣóó</u> "he gave it (the lemon) to me".

4.3. Predicative Markers (<u>PM</u>)

Table 10 shows the main Tense/Aspect Markers and also some Negation Markers. A blank square points out that no particular PM has been encountered.

value	T	Vo	Vi	P
IMM PAST	-má-		-má-	-fate-
HOD PAST	-ì	-ì	-ì	?
Distant PAST	-mà-	-mà-	-mà-	-ma-
IMM FUT		-mí-		?
FUT (MID ?)	´-ŋgà-	´-ŋgà-	´-ŋgà-	-ŋga-
FAR FUT	-kɛ́-?		-kí-	?
PROG		-ka-	-kó-	?
Repetitious	-ɣé-		-ɣé-	-e
NEG	-sá-	-sá-	-sá-	-sa-mbé-
NEG (HOD PAST)	-sí-	-sí-	-sí-	-si-

Table 10. Predicative Markers.

All the examples that follow except one have been taken from Vi: (e-pɛka L "to seize", e-puma H "to go out") nà <u>màmópèkà</u> "I've just seized him", nà mòpêkì "I sent him (recently)", nà <u>màmòpêkà</u> "I've sent him (a long time ago)", nà <u>ŋgámòpêkà</u> "I'll send him", tò <u>kìpékànà</u> "we'll seize each other (once, in the future)", nà <u>kópúmá</u> ɣó òbwà "I'm going out into the courtyard", nà <u>ɣèmópèkà</u> "I seize him once more", tsàmópèkà "I don't seize him" (N.B. t 1st p sg is an allomorph of na), tsìmópèkà "I didn't seize him (recently). (Vo) mè<u>míbòmá</u> wè "I'm going to beat you (now)".

In spite of several differences and uncertainties, a common stock emerges. The latter comprises among others the Future Tense Marker <u>´-ŋgà-</u> and the Negation Markers <u>-sá-</u>

and -sí-. The FTM has not been found in any other Gabonese languages. T and Vi share the largest number of forms. Vo often uses periphrastic constructions to express the Tense/Aspect values examined here.

A broad comparison, taking into account the PM found in neighboring languages, has revealed some similarities between S-B30 and B40/B50. It should be kept in mind though that these domains are still to be studied much more extensively. Very few resemblances with B10's PM have come up so far.

4.4. Verbal extensions

Compared to the verbal extensions found in the other neighboring languages, the following suffixes have shown to be the most productive in T, Vi and Vo. (Insufficient data available for N-B30.)

-ed(y)-	*CAUS*	(P: -idy-)
-e-	*APPLIC*	(less clear for Vo)
-an-	*RECIPR*	(also in K)
-am-	*STAT*	
-ak-	*HAB*	
-oɣ-/-uɣ-	*INTRANS*	
-o-/-u-	*TRANS*	

The extensions can be exemplified by data from Vi: nà mótòmèdyà "I make him send" (e-toma H "to send"), nà mótòmèà "I send on his behalf", wà pékànà "they seize each other" (e-pɛka L "to seize"), e-bebama H "to be closed in" (e-beba H "to close in"), nà mòpékàkà "I seize him habitually" (e-pɛka L "to seize"), nà kùndùyà " I rise", nà kùndùà "I raise".

From a comparative perspective, the shape of the Causative Marker is the most intriguing. It has not been found as such in any of the surrounding languages and is probably a specific B30 feature, at least within the Gabonese context.

The Passive Marker is -u in S-B30. Example: (Vi) e-pɛku L "to be seized". In Vi one encounters the suffix /-eo/ too. Other interesting facts emerge from the study of copulas and subjunctive structure(s). Because of lack of space, these aspects can not be commented on.

5. CONCLUSION

Recent linguistic research on B30 has furnished a much more accurate picture of a typologically interesting group. Several structural features define its identity. T's central position within this group stands out clearly. Although the available syntactic data show a somewhat less homogeneous picture, the same subdivisions appear.

The homogeneous northern subgroup presents noteworthy lexical and morphological similarities with B10. From a syntactic perspective however, similarities appear to be much rarer.

Within S-B30, T and Vi are closest. Vo stands out as the most innovative of all three in its syntax (eg. subordinating conjunctions, /-na-/ morpheme following the concord marker in relatives (cf. tsóβà dínàkàéná mèní "the calebashes I see") and in some parts of its (verb) morphology (periphrastic constructions). From a tonal perspective though, it is more conservative than T/Vi. It should furthermore be kept in mind that more conservative varieties of Vo exist.

Unfortunately B30 is in the process of splitting up and is not far from total disintegration. Scientific investigation should therefore speed up in order to refine our knowledge of this group. The forthcoming Viya-French dictionary is one important contribution to this cause.

References

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Further reading

Bodinga-bwa-Bodinga & Van der Veen 1995, Van der Veen 1991a, 1999b, Van der Veen & Bodinga-bwa-Bodinga in press.