

## Words for two intimate parts in the Bantu languages

*Jacky Maniacky<sup>1</sup>, Michela Araujo Ribeiro<sup>2</sup> and Rosa Maria de Lima Ribeiro<sup>2</sup>*

Body parts are said to be part of the basic vocabulary of a language, although particularly propitious for semantic shifts (Andersen 1978, Bastin 1985). Nevertheless, the vocabulary for body parts in Bantu is far from being well studied, in spite of old attempts (Homburger 1929).

In the present communication, we propose to analyse the Bantu words for two intimate parts, those for “foreskin” and those for “clitoris”. Indeed, the BLR (Bastin & al. 2002) contains only one stem (\*-còé, said to be confined to zone C) for the former meaning and (\*-gùmá, \*-tòmbo, \*-kòngò, each of them being confined to only one or two zones) for the latter.

The idea behind this study is not only to contribute to a reconstruction of the corresponding stems in the Proto-Language, but also to start a contribution to the vocabulary linked to circumcision (operation, ritual camp, circumciser, circumcised person...). Indeed, little linguistic research (Vansina 1990) has been done until now on what is generally considered an old tradition in the Bantu-speaking area, at least as far as male circumcision is concerned (Marck 1997).

Our research seeks to remedy this lack by:

- Providing more candidates for a reconstruction of ‘foreskin’ and ‘clitoris’ in Proto-Bantu.
- Understanding the semantic processes behind the variety of terms for those two intimate parts.
- Broaden the scope of the study to part of the vocabulary of circumcision in the Bantu languages.

---

<sup>1</sup> Royal Museum for Central Africa (Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> Universiteit te Leiden (Netherlands), Universidade Federal de Rondônia (Brazil) & Royal Museum for Central Africa (Belgium)

## References

- Andersen, E.S. 1978. Lexical universals of body-part terminology. In Greenberg, J.H. (Ed.), *Universals of Human Language*. Stanford University Press, 335-368.
- Bastin, Y. 1985. *Les relations sémantiques dans les langues bantoues*. Bruxelles: ARSO.
- Bastin, Y., A. Coupez, E. Mumba and T.C. Schadeberg (eds) 2002. *Bantu lexical reconstructions 3*. Tervuren: Royal Museum for Central Africa, online database: <http://linguistics.africamuseum.be/BLR3.html>
- Homburger, L. 1929. *Noms des parties du corps dans les langues négro-africaines*. Paris: Ed. Champion.
- Marck, J. 1997. Aspects of male circumcision in subequatorial African culture history. *Health Transition Review*, Supplement to Volume 7, 337-359
- Vansina, J. 1990. *Paths in the Rainforest*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.