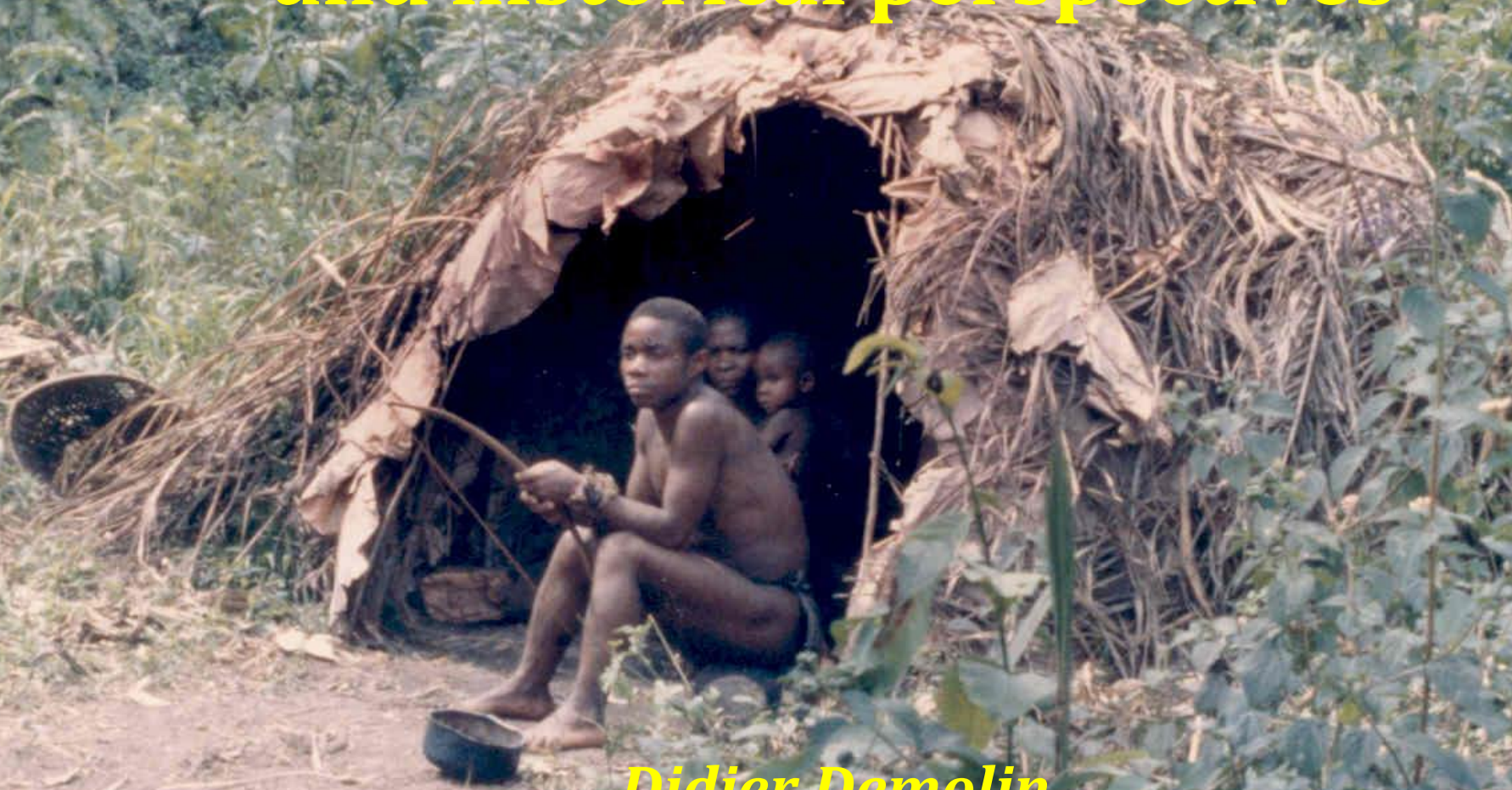


# The languages of the Ituri forest Pygmies: contact and historical perspectives



*Didier Demolin*

LPP, CNRS-UMR 7018, Sorbonne nouvelle, Labex EFL  
Westerman Workshop, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 4-6/11/2021

## Geographical aspects

From Hutereau to Vörbichler

## Historical aspects

Archives (Hutereau data & wax rolls)

Genetics, archeology, anthropology & linguistics

**Data** Hackett (ms), Van Bülck (1952), Schebesta & Burssens [ms 1954-1955], Vörbichler (1965, 1971, 1979), Brison (1968), Stocks (1988) [Vörbichler], Carpaneto & Germi (1989), Ichikawa & Terashima (2003), Ichikawa (ms), Kilian-Hatz (2019) [Schebesta ms], personal field notes (1987, 1988, 1990, 1992).

**Questions** Mbuti who are they?

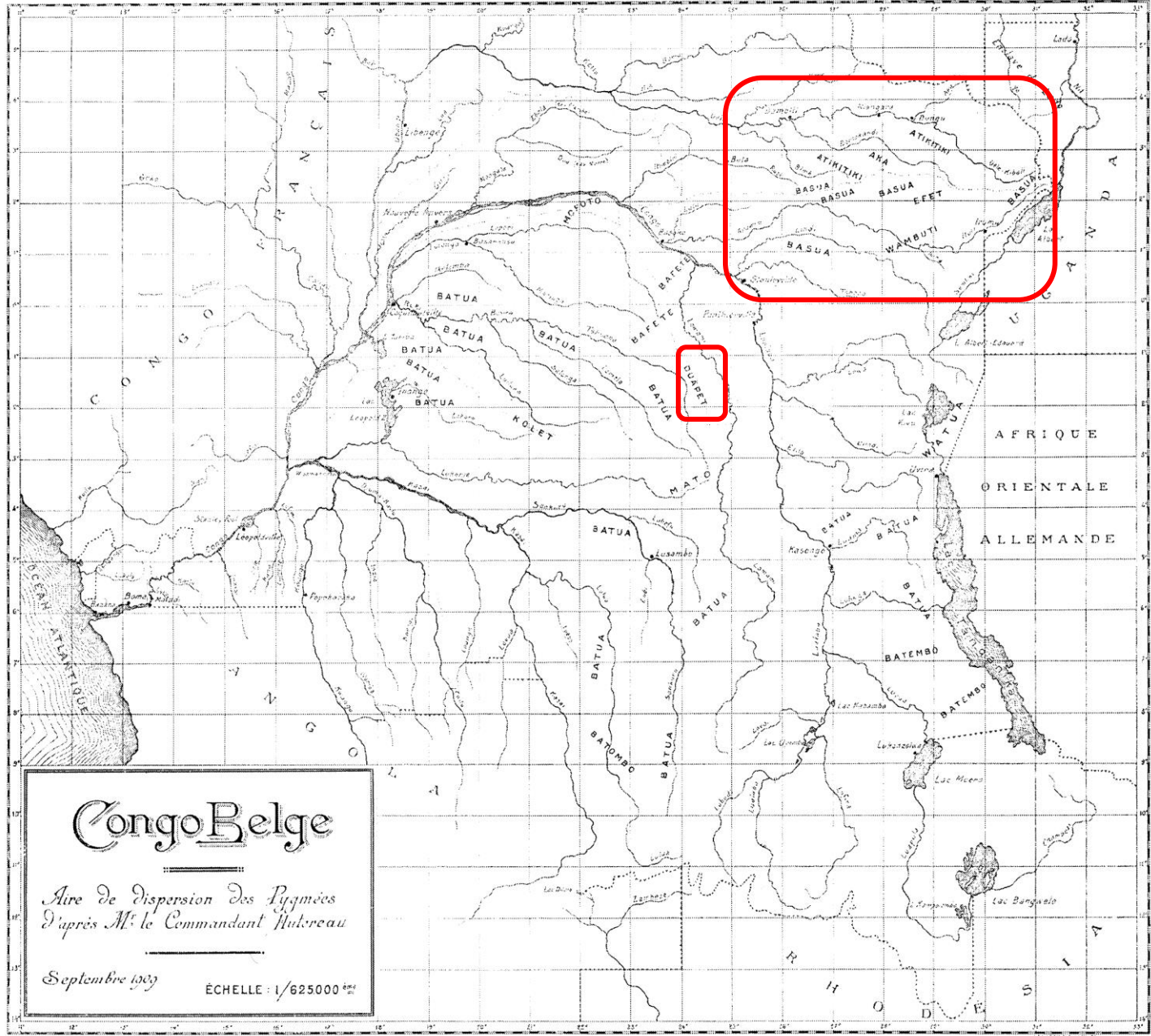
Asua & Efe > Central Sudanic

Sua, Kango, Tshwa > Bantu

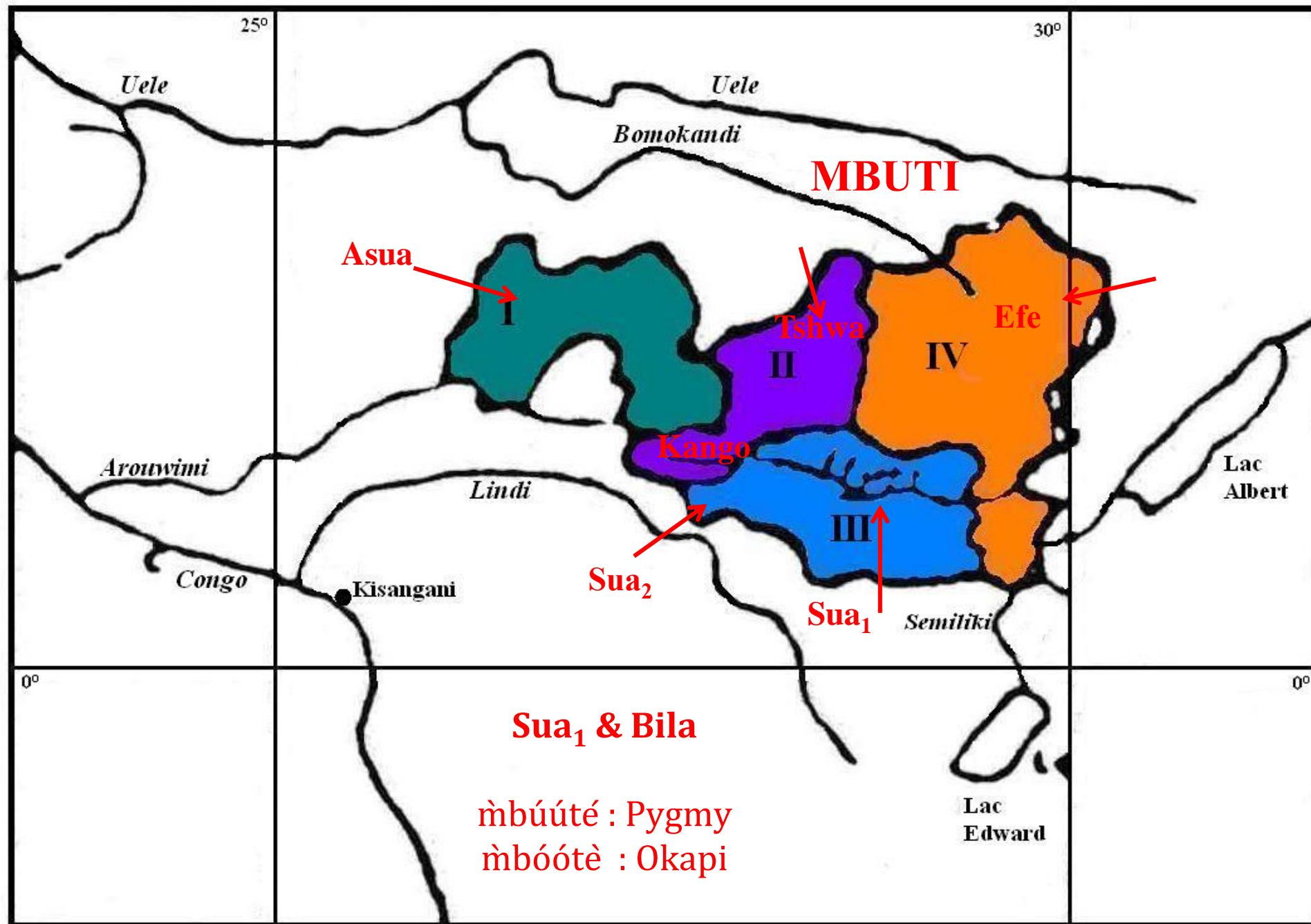
Sound systems, Lexicon, Morphology

Ituri and the Western rift valley

# Geographical aspects



**Geographical aspects**



# Mbuti

Schebesta (1952, 1953)

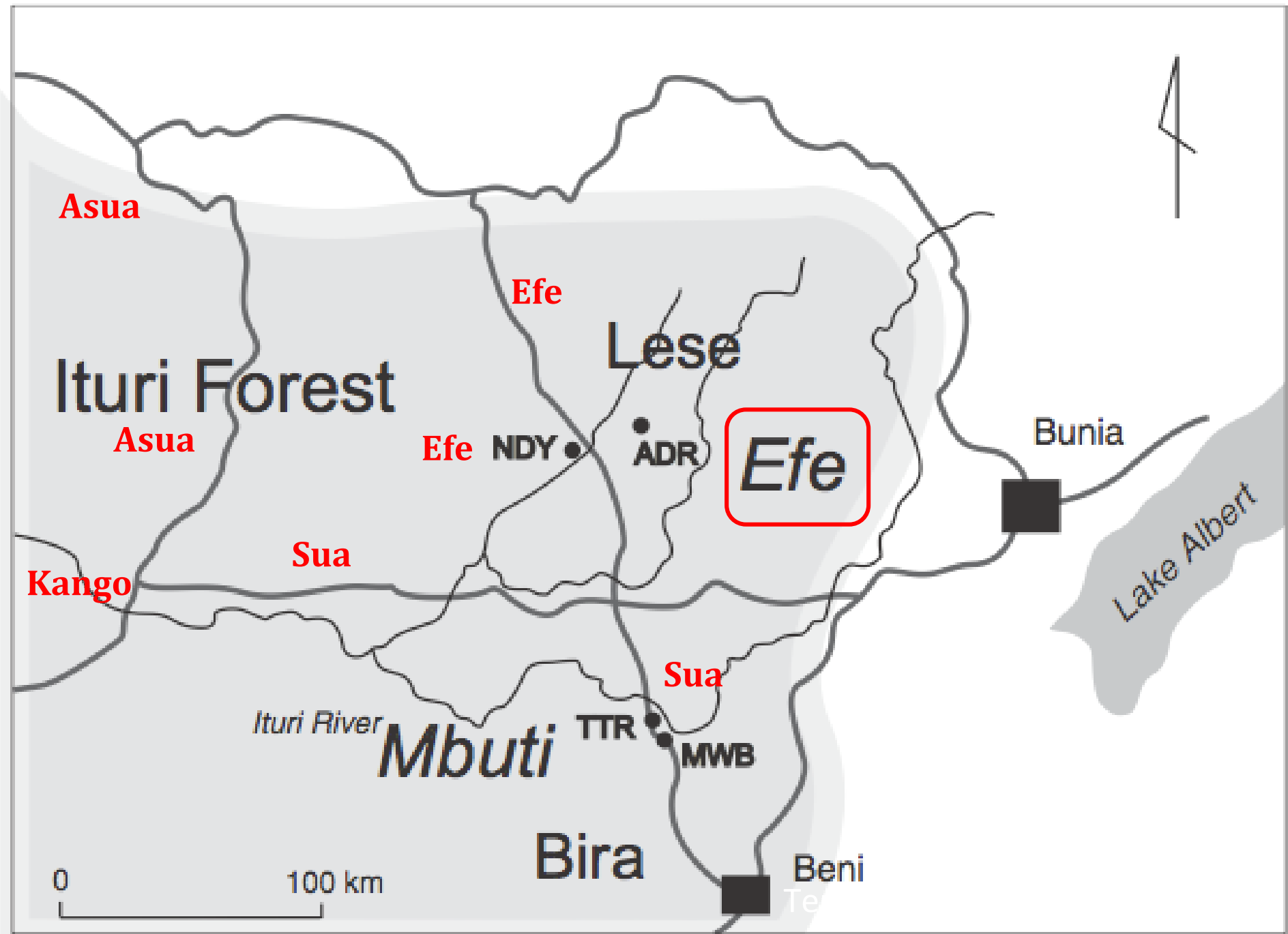
Bila > **m̀bú́tí** : Pygmy  
> **m̀bó́tè** : Okapi (Okapi or Oʔapi is the name in Lese and Efe)

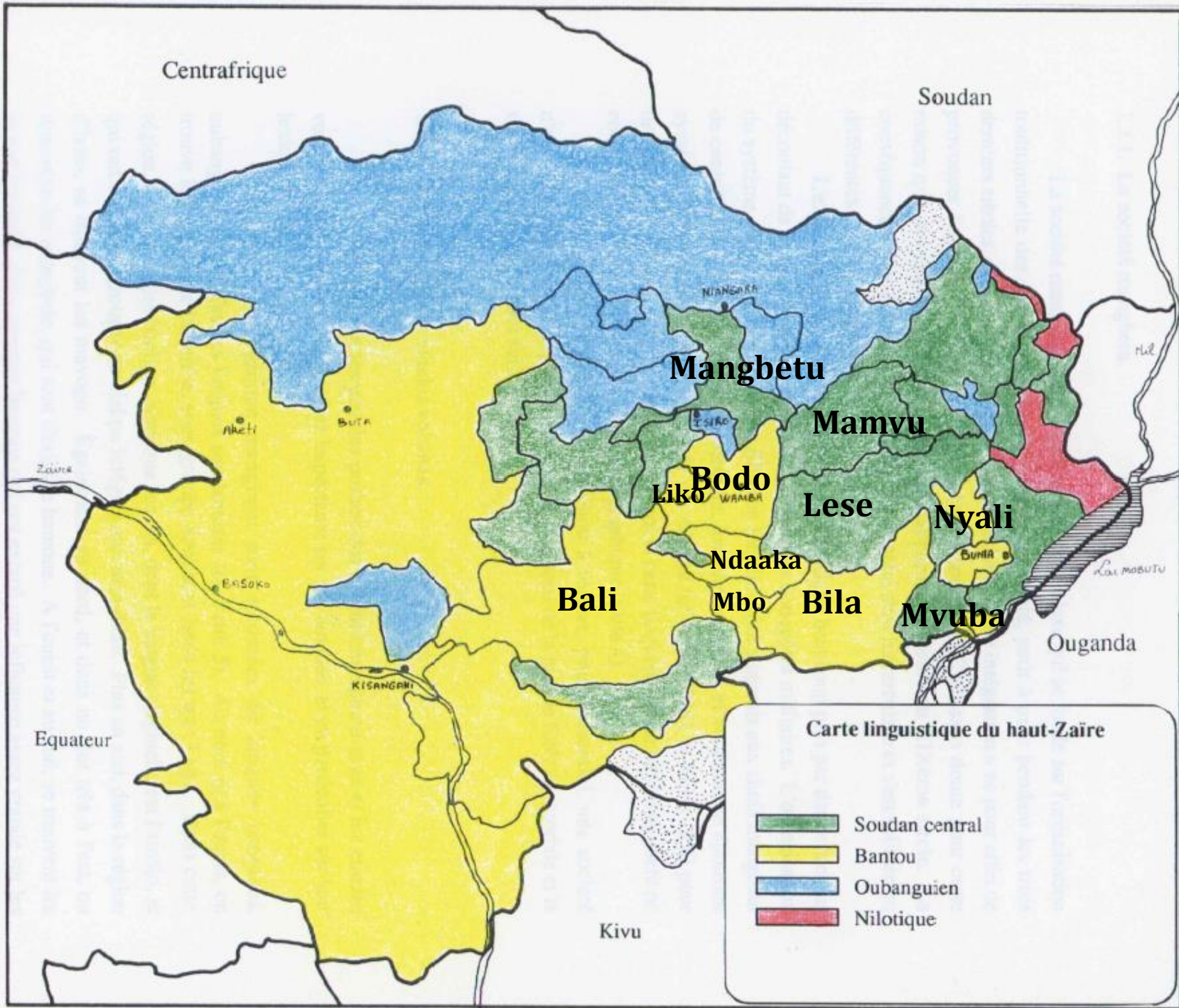
Burssens (1954)

Bila > **m̀búú́té** : Pygmy  
> **m̀bóó́tè** : Okapi

**Aka** by speakers of the Mangbetu and Ubanguian (Mayogo) languages. **Basa** by the Mangbetu

**Tiki Tiki** by the Zande





Centrafrique

Soudan

**Mangbetu**

**Mamvu**

**Bodo**

**Liko**

**Lese**

**Nyali**

**Ndaaka**

**Mbo**

**Bila**

**Bali**

**Mvuba**

Ouganda

Equateur

Kivu

Carte linguistique du haut-Zaïre

- Soudan central
- Bantou
- Oubanguien
- Nilotique

## Historical aspects

Archeological records demonstrate that the Congo basin has been densely and continuously inhabited by human population for at least 45,000 years (Mercader 2003, Hewlett 2014).

Knowing whether Pygmy populations, have a common or independent origin is essential to understanding whether biological features specific to several Pygmy populations evolved recently and separately in each population or whether these features were inherited from a common ancient ancestral population (Hewlett 2014).

- *What was the language of this ancestral population?*

The peopling of Central Africa and the origins of Pygmy and non-Pygmy populations remain widely unknown (Hewlett 2014).



### The genetic diversity and origins of Pygmies

Using a reduced number of genetic markers underlying the various blood groups present in western genetic markers and eastern Pygmy groups, Cavalli-Sforza et al. (1969) found that Pygmy populations were highly differentiated from other central African non-Pygmy populations.

Cavalli-Sforza et al. (1969) also identified major genetic differences between the various eastern and western Pygmy populations as well as among western Pygmy groups.

- *When did pygmy populations diverge from non-Pygmy populations?*
- *When did eastern and western Pygmy populations split?*

## Historical aspects

Destro-Bisol et al. (2004) simulated genetic data and found that the ancestral maternal lineage split roughly 70,000 years ago into two lineages respectively giving birth to Pygmy and non-Pygmy populations.

They also estimated that eastern and western Pygmy groups of populations diverged from the ancestral, Pygmy population between 3,000 and 18,000 years ago.

Eastern and western groups of Pygmy populations exhibit major genetic differentiation, followed by high levels of pairwise population differentiation respectively among western and eastern Pygmy groups.

Verdu et al. (2009) estimated that the ancestral Pygmy population diverged from the ancestral, non-Pygmy population roughly between 50,000 and 90,000 years ago.

Patin et al. (2009) found a common origin between western and eastern Pygmy groups 20,000 years ago.

## Hutereau (1909-1912)

Mission Ethnographique  
de l'Uele

Rouleaux pour Gramophone.

254 wax rolls recordings from the Ubangi and Uele regions (music and language).

Efe pygmy recordings which are the first ever made on their language & music.

# Linguistic data

## No: 59. Énumération des Efe.

1.	<u>I</u> eni	20.	mototo	<u>I</u> eni	
2.	<u>E</u> kwe	21.	w	w	Azu itene
3.	<u>E</u> toena	20.	w	w	w adibosi
4.	<u>E</u> tseto	31.	w	w	w w
5.	<u>E</u> tseto				itzu eteni
6.	<u>M</u> adia	40.	mototo	bi <u>k</u> we	
7.	Laro	50.	w	w	itzu adibosi
8.	<u>E</u> tseto <u>e</u> tseto	60.	w	bi <u>t</u> oena	
9.	adibosi <u>s</u> ikii	70.	w	w	itzu adibosi
10.	adibosi	80.	w	bi <u>t</u> seto	
11.	adibosi itzu eteni	90.	w	w	itzu adibosi
12.	w w <u>e</u> kwe	100.	w	w	
13.		200.	w	w	mototo bi <u>t</u> seto.

## Hackett, Northern Bantu borderland survey (1952)

Lese / Efe (CS)

Bira / Bila (Bt) Lese (CS)

Lese / Mvuba (CS) Bila (Bt) Pygmée Nyari (Bt)

Mamvu / Lese (CS)

Aka Pygmées (Mangbetu) (CS)

Aka (compared) (CS)

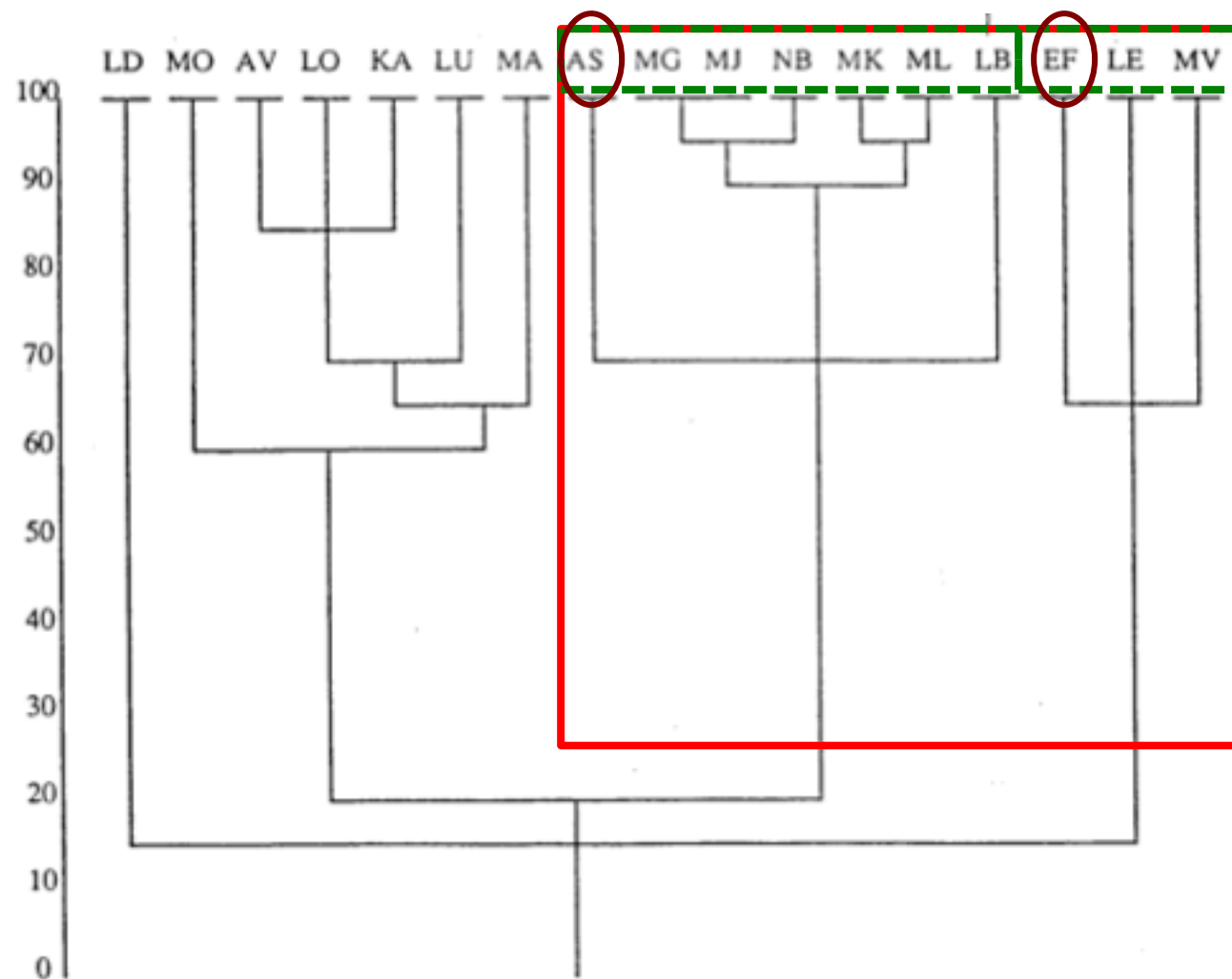
Mamvu (CS)

Mbo (Bt) Pygmées

## Burssens-Schebetsa (1954-1955) Linguistic and Ethnographic mission

Lese	/	Efe	Apawanza	(Central Sudanic)
Bira (Bila) (restricted number of prefixes)	/	Mbute (Sua)	Bahaaha	(Bantu)
Mvuba Kikianzi (Bantu)	/	Efe	Mutwanga; Mwenda	(Central Sudanic)
Ndaaka Beke (Bantu)	/	Efe; Kango	Bafwaka	(Central Sudanic & Bantu)
Babelu	/	Kango; Asua; Aka	Bafwasamoa	(Central Sudanic)
Budu Medje	/ /	Pygmées?	Wamba (Tibi); Bafwakuka; Maboma	(Bantu) (Central Sudanic)

# Comparison of the basic lexicon of Eastern Central Sudanic languages



## Comparative questions

Efe > Nyali, Bodo Ndaaka, Mbo, Bila (Bantu D)

Efe > Lese Dese, Lese Karo, Lese Obi, Mamvu, Mvuba  
Mangbutu-Efe, (Central Sudanic)

Mangbetu-Asua (Central Sudanic)

Is Asua an old form of the Mangbetu-Asua language group?

3/4 different Bantu groups: C (Liko, Bali); D (Bila, Kango); D (Ndaaka, Mbo), D (Bodo, Nyali).

All these languages are in contact with Pygmies.



**Bantu C** : Liko has class prefixes & suffixes (Asua?)

Is Bali a kind mixed language (Bantu grammar and Central Sudanic lexicon)? (Asua?)

**Bantu D** : Bila & Kango have only 2 prefixes (sg. & pl.), Mixed languages?

Ndaaka, Mbo are close to Sua & Efe.

Bodo & Nyali come from the interlacustrine area. They are separated by the Lese & Efe territory.

The differences between the Ituri Bantu languages is obviously the consequence of phases of contact between them and the Pygmies. Can we infer things about borrowing mechanisms and the history of the area?

## Mangbetu-Asua languages comparative lexicon

	Asua	Mangbetu	Nabulu	Lombi	Makere	Malele
Bee	ángiyé	néngágì	néngágíze	néngági	néngágì	néngágì
Animal	élie	neri	neli	neri	neri	neri
Tree	kililéyè	nèkìrè	nèkilè	nèhò	nèkilè	nèhò
Mouth	tikpòè	nètìkpò	nètìkpò	nèti	nèkóró	nèkóró
Arm	tè	nété	nété	nété	nété	nété
Goat	àmémé	nàmémé	nàmémé	nàmyémyé	nàmémé	nàmémé
Dog	isiyè	nesi	nesi	nesi	nesi	nesi
Horn	ligá	néigá	néégá	náligá	náágá	náéigá
To cultivate	òʔà	nòʔà	nòʔà	nòʔà	nòʔà	nòʔà
Water	gwò	ègwò	ègwò	ègwò	ègwò	ègwò
Elephant	òkò	nókò	nókò	nókò	nókò	nókò
Iron	kidìgwá	néimbá	nèembà	èdùmòòmà	náámbá	náéimbá
Arrow	likámóè	nèvàngà	nèvàngà	nèmbààngú	nèvàngà	nèvàngà

# Bantu and Central Sudanic comparative lexicons of Ituri languages

## Bantu

## Central Sudanic

	*PB	ndààká	mbò	bàlí	likó	bila	kángò		lese	mamvu	éfé
bee	júkì	ngùngù	ngùngù	nzóló	nzó	njòkí	nzòkí		ìdì	ìdì	idi
mouth	nùà	nù	nù	nòkù	tùlù	njòkò	nyòkò		ùṛì	ùṛì	ùṛì
arm	bòkò	bòkò	kóndó	bòkò	bókúkò	mbómbó	kóndò		ṭòhù	tòqù	ṭòʔù
dog	búà	vá	vá	vá	vá	mbwá	vá		ībū	ībú	ībū
to cultivate	dim	ìmà	lìmà	dèmè	ḍimá	tèmá	téémyá		ùsú	ìqō	ùsú
to dance	ḥin	búnò	nijò	ìnè	bínó	bínò	kiyá		òbē	òbē	òbē
tooth	jínò	yénù	lénú	nwà	lǎnwù	mìnyò	nyò		úsé	ūsé	úsé
water	ḍìbà	ípó	ípó	bó	bó	lìbó	bá		úū	úū	úū
child	jána	àná	àná	sí	kí	míkí	níkí		ádī	mūngú	ádī
arrow	gùì	gùsà	gùsà	ngùlé	wàgásù	ápì	pì		àpì	èbī	àpì
knee	dù	hú	lúlú	lúlú	líkò	mòákù	kúsú		gbòrò	ngbòrò	gbòrò
man	ntù	gùwè	gùwè	mètù	tú	tùwá	ùkú		ágbī	áfū	áqbī
moon	jéṽ	lí	lí	lí	sínzi	sóngè	lí		tèbá	tèmbá	tèbá
house	dǎkù	kàà	kàà	ndàbò	ndàbò	éndú	àndú		àí	ùyá	āí
nose	júdù	màó	lúlú	míò	sóngó	élò	èlò		ṭògí	ṭònjí	ṭògí
black	jínà	ìnó	ìná	ḍimbè	línò	àhí	ínà		ákōgù	qó	ákōgù
eye	jícò	ìsò	ìsò	ìsò	ìsò	ùsò	ùsá		éhí	ēqē	éʔí
ear	tùṽ	cwéí	cwéí	tóì	tílíkò	tóì	tóí		ògì	ònjì	ògì
bone	kúpà	wó	wó	kùò	kùò	kùà	kúwà		ígbī	ífù	īgbī
skin/bark	kòbà	pàpì	pàsì	pàsì	ìkó		pàsì		ègbā	qabū	ègbā
rain	bùdà	gbàá	gbàá	mbúlò	mbwái	mvúù	mbúà		tìbō	tìbō	ūbvī
coeur	tímá	tímá	túmá	lómà	mbèngí	moyo	kámìnà		bòrù	bòrù	bòrù

## Bantu

	*PB	ndààká	mbò	bàlí	likó	bila	kángò
<u>bee</u>	júkì	ngùngù	ngungù	nzóló	nzó	njòkí	nzòkí
<u>mouth</u>	nùà	nù	nù	nòkù	tùlù	njòkò	nyòkò
<u>arm</u>	bòkò	bòkò	kóndó	bókò	bókúkò	mbómbó	kóndò
<u>dog</u>	búà	vá	vá	vá	vá	mbwá	vá
<u>to cultivate</u>	dìm	imà	limà	dèmè	dìmá	tèmá	téemyá
<u>to dance</u>	bìn	búnò	nìjò	ìnè	bínó	bínò	kìyá
<u>tooth</u>	jínò	yénù	lénú	nwà	lǎnwù	mìnyò	nyò
<u>water</u>	dịbà	ípó	ípó	bó	bó	libó	bá
<u>child</u>	jána	àná	àná	sí	kí	míkí	níkí
<u>arrow</u>	gùì	gùsà	gùsà	ngùlé	wàgásù	ápì	pì
<u>knee</u>	dú	hú	lúlú	lùlú	líkò	mòákù	kúsú
<u>man</u>	ntù	gùwè	gùwè	mètù	tú	tùwá	ùkú
<u>moon</u>	jèì	lí	lí	lí	sìnzì	sóngè	lí
<u>house</u>	dǎkù	kàà	kàà	ndàbò	ndàbò	éndú	àndú
<u>nose</u>	júdù	màó	lùlú	míò	sóngó	élò	èlò
<u>black</u>	jínà	ìnó	ìná	dìmbè	línò	àhí	ínà
<u>eye</u>	jícò	ìsò	ìsò	ìsò	ìsò	ùsò	ùsá
<u>ear</u>	tùì	cwéí	cwéí	tóì	tílikò	tóì	tóì
<u>bone</u>	kúpà	wó	wó	kùò	kùò	kùà	kúwà
<u>skin/bark</u>	kòbà	pàpì	pàsì	pàsì	ìkò		pàsì
<u>rain</u>	bùdà	gbàá	gbàá	mbùlò	mbwáì	mvúù	mbúà
<u>coeur</u>	tìmá	tìmá	túmá	lómà	mbèngí	moyo	kámìnà

Data

## Central Sudanic

### Mangbutu-Efe

lese	mamvu	éfé
ìdì	ìdì	idi
ùtì	ùtì	ùtì
ṭòhù	tòqù	ṭòʔù
ībū	ìbú	ībū
ùsú	ìqō	ùsú
òbē	òbē	òbē
úsé	ūsé	ùsé
úū	úū	úū
ádī	mūngú	ádī
àpì	èbī	àpì
gbòrò	ngbòrò	gbòrò
ágbī	áfū	āqbí
tèbá	tèmbá	tèbá
àí	ùyá	āí
ṭògí	ṭònjí	ṭògí
ákōgù	qó	ákōgù
éhí	ēqē	éʔí
ògì	ònjì	ògì
ígbī	ífù	īgbì
ègbā	qàbū	ègbā
tìbō	tìbō	ūbvī
bòrù	bòrù	bòrù

## Some zoological names

### Bantu

### Central Sudanic

	bali	bila	sua bila	bodo	tshwa bodo	ndaaka	kango		asua	lese	efe
<u>chimpanzee</u>	bebeleko	seko	seko	ngole	tobe	ngoe	seko		ozue	dato	ndato
<u>leopard</u>	loli	moli	moli	kuei	biti	kuei	mapiti		kaʔwa	kaʔu	ʔau
<u>daman</u>	ngoyo	soka	toku	kpa	soka	ngoya	koasa		ndoka	yama	yama
<u>elephant</u>	mbongo	mbongo	ndopo	toku	mbongo		bepe		ukɔɛ	uku	ʊʔʊ
<u>buffalo</u>	tibi	njali	njali	ndopo	nzale		nzale		kibiyɛ	tupi	tupi
<u>okapi</u>	ndumbo	mbote	mbote	mundembe	undembe	undembe	mundembe		ndumbæ	okapi	oʔapi

## Zoological names Bantu

	bali	bila	sua bila	bodo	tshwa bodo	ndaaka	kango
<u>chimpanzee</u>	bebeleko	seko	seko	ngole	tobe	ngoe	seko
<u>leopard</u>	loli	moli	moli	kuei	biti	kuei	mapiti
<u>daman</u>	ngoyo	soka	toku	kpa	soka	ngoya	koasa
<u>elephant</u>	mbongo	mbongo	ndopo	toku	mbongo		bepe
<u>buffalo</u>	tibi	njali	njali	ndopo	nzale		nzale
<u>okapi</u>	ndumbo	mbote	mbote	mundembe	undembe	undembe	mundembe

## Zoological names Central Sudanic

	asua	lese	eŋe
Chimpanzee	ozue	dato	ndato
Leopard	kaʔwa	kaʔu	ʔau
Daman	ndɔka	yama	yama
Elephant	ukɔɛ	uku	ʊʔʊ
Buffalo	kibiyɛ	tupi	tupi
Okapi	ndumbaɛ	okapi	oʔapi



# Traces of ancient common lexicon?

**Botanical terms:** *Terashima & Ichikawa (2003)*

Sua (Mbuti) & Bira      94% similarity  
Bantu

Efe & Lese      87% similarity  
Central sudanic

Sua (Mbuti) & Efe      24 à 29% similarity

This could reflect the trace of an old common lexicon

# Traces of ancient common lexicon?

**Zoological terms:** *Ichikawa (1998), Carpaneto & Germi (1989)*

Sua (Mbuti) & Bira  
Bantu High level of similarities > 75%

Efe & Lese  
Central Sudanic High level of similarities > 70%

Sua (Mbuti) & Efe Low level of similarities < 20%

This could reflect the remains of an old common lexicon

Asua & Efe

In a limited set of correctly identified terms, there is about 40% of common vocabulary.

Comparative data shows that there is a common vocabulary between the [Asua](#) and the [Efe](#), between the [Asua](#) and the [Kango](#) but much less between the [Efe](#) and the [Kango](#), [Tshwa](#) or [Sua](#).

Analysis of specialized lexicons (botanical, zoological and ornithological) suggests that - for this part of the lexicon at least - the Pygmy languages can be divided into two groups which reflect the distinction between Central Sudanic and Bantu.

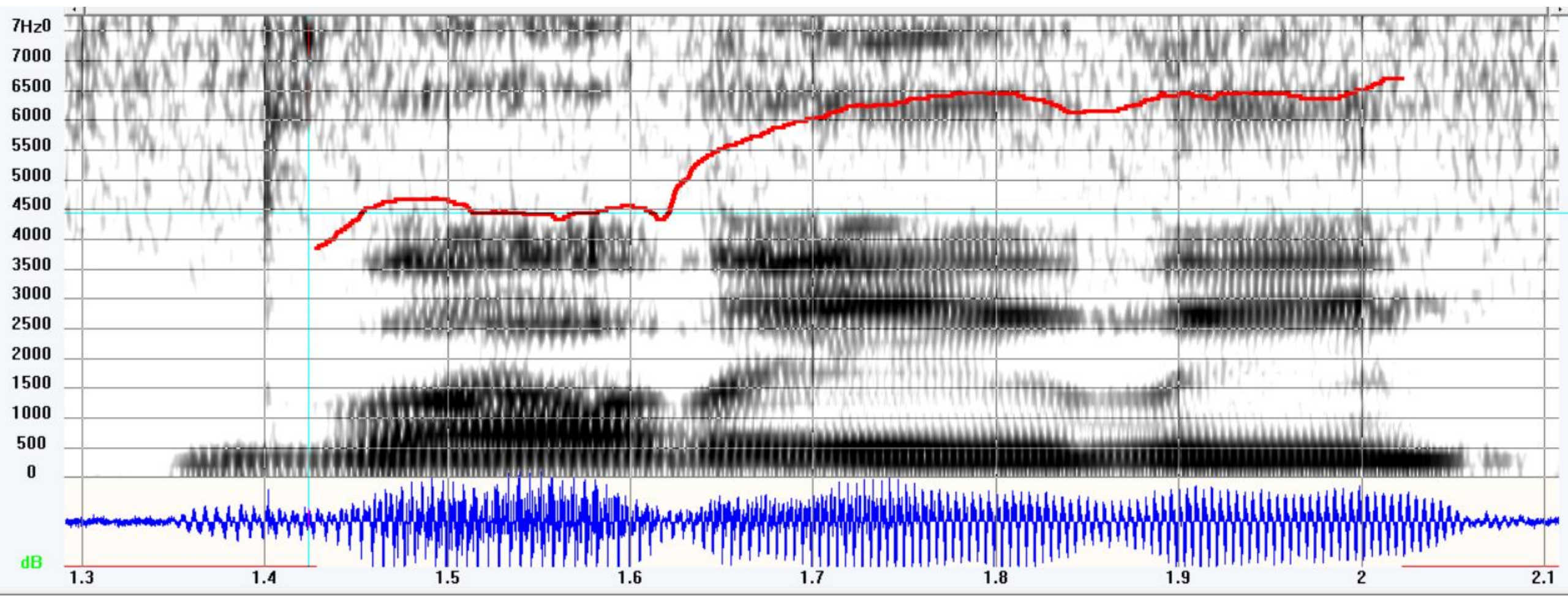
[Asua](#) appears to be closer to Bantu languages than [Efe](#), which suggests a contact of which we do not know how old it is.

# Sound systems



**Efe** (Demolin 1994)

<b>Consonants</b>	Bilabial		Labio-dent	Alveolar		Post-alveol.	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
<b>Stops</b>	p	b		t	d		ɟ	k	g	ʔ
								Labio-velar    Labio-uvular kp/kɸ    gb    qp/qɸ    ɠb		
<b>Implosives</b>		ɓ				ɗ				
<b>Affricates</b>	pf	bv		ts	dz		tʃ	dʒ		
<b>Nasals</b>		m				n	ɲ	ŋ		
<b>Prenasalized</b>		mb	mv	nd		nz		ŋgb		
		mɓ		ndz			ndʒ			
<b>Trills</b>	ɓ	ɓ		tr	dr					
<b>Fricatives</b>	ɸ			s						
<b>Flap</b>		ɸ			r					
<b>Approximants</b>				l			j	z		
<b>Vowels</b>	+ATR	-ATR		-ATR		-ATR	+ATR			
Close	i	ɪ				u	u			
Close-mid	e						o			
Open-mid		ɛ				ɔ				
Open				a						
<b>Tones</b>	Extra High, High, Mid, Low									



**bv**

**à**

**v**

**í**

**v**

**í**

'mosquito'

# Non-pulmonic consonants in Mangbutu-Efe and Mangbetu-Asua

## Labio dorsals (Velaric airstream)

kp, gb

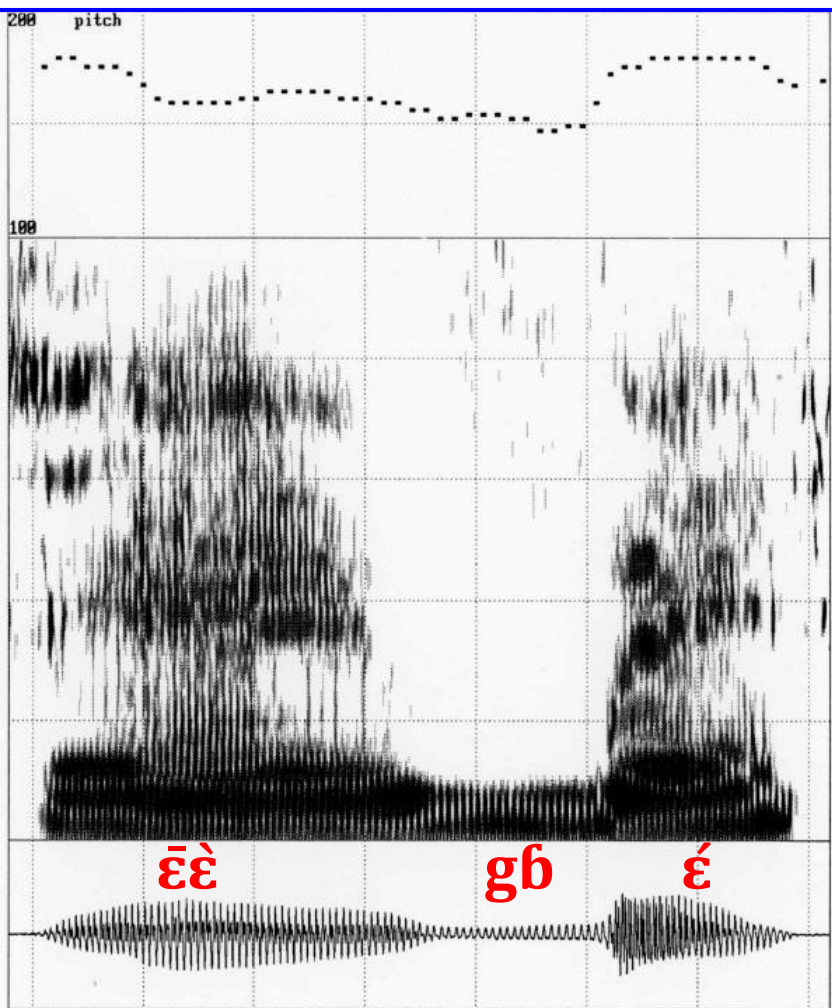
kɓ, gɓ

qp, ɠɓ, qɓ

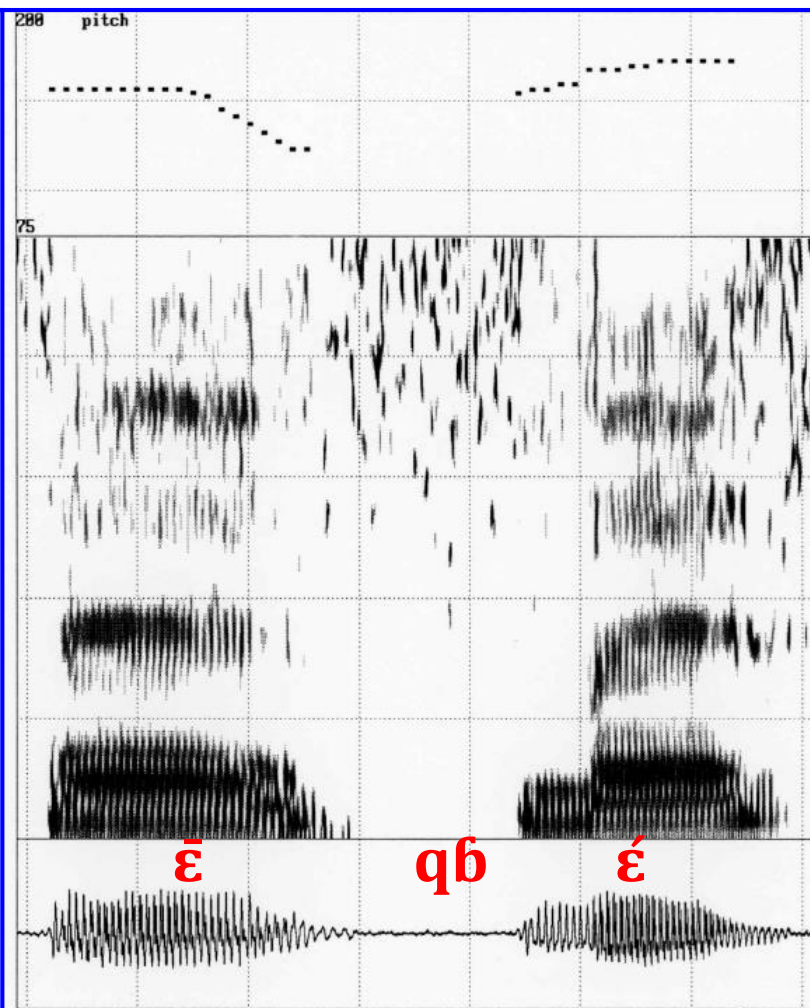
## Implosives

ɓ, ɓ̚, ɗ, ɗ̚

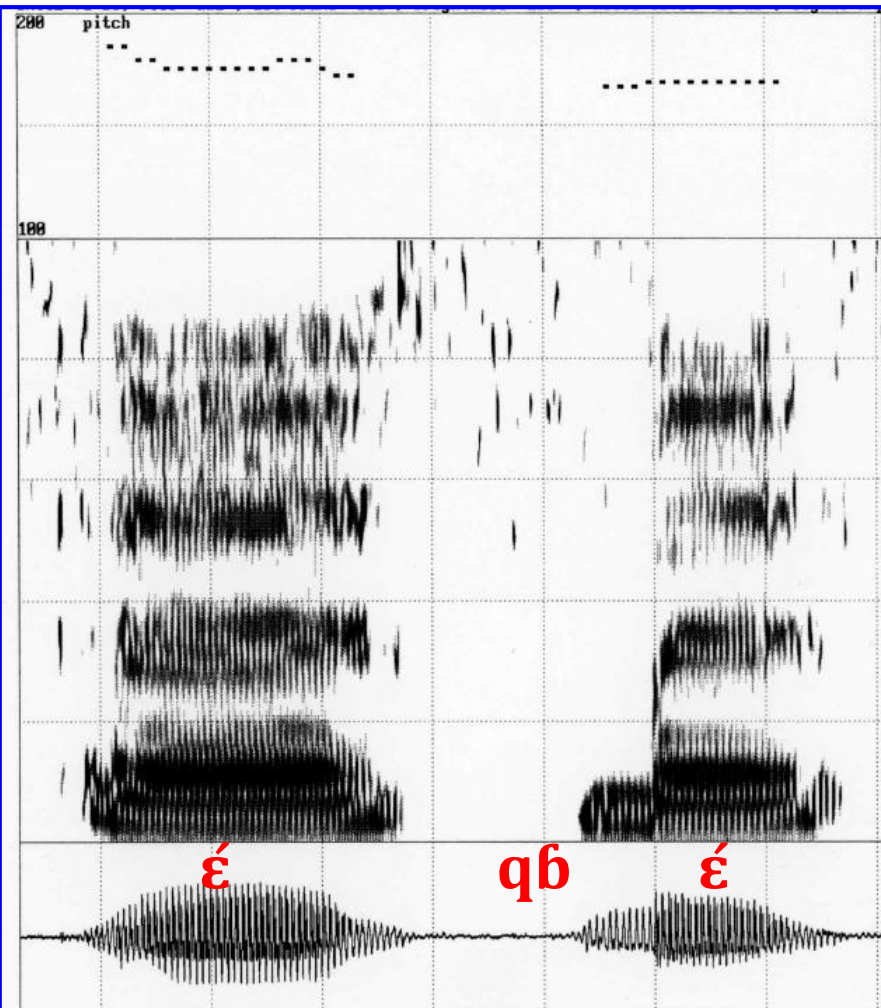




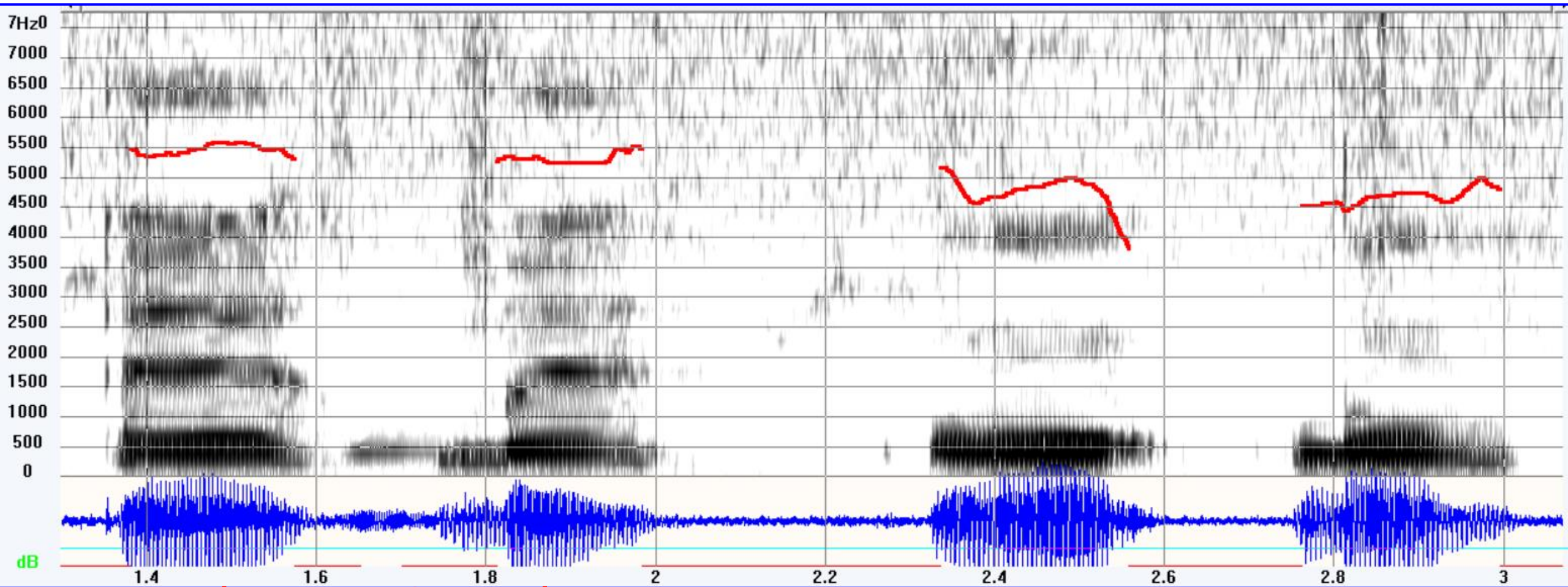
'to do'



'two'



'belly'

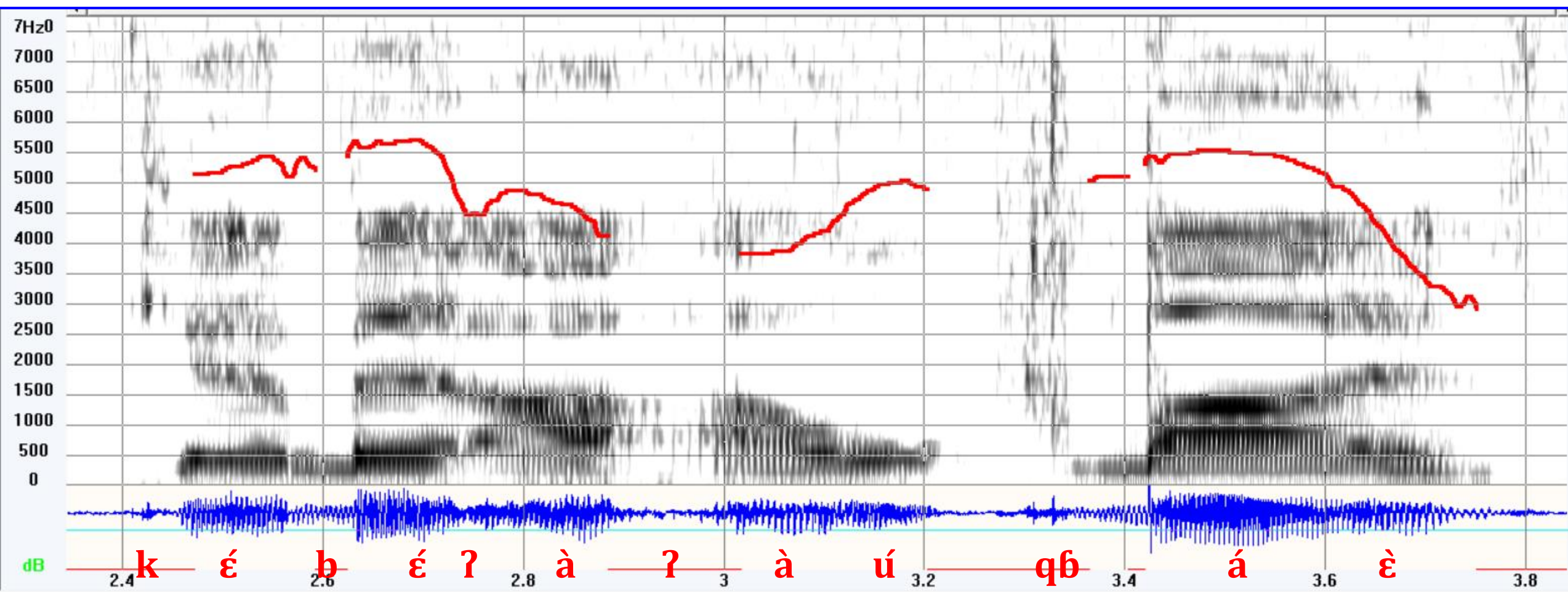


1.4 1.6 1.8 2 2.2 2.4 2.6 2.8 3

έ γβ έ έ γβ έ

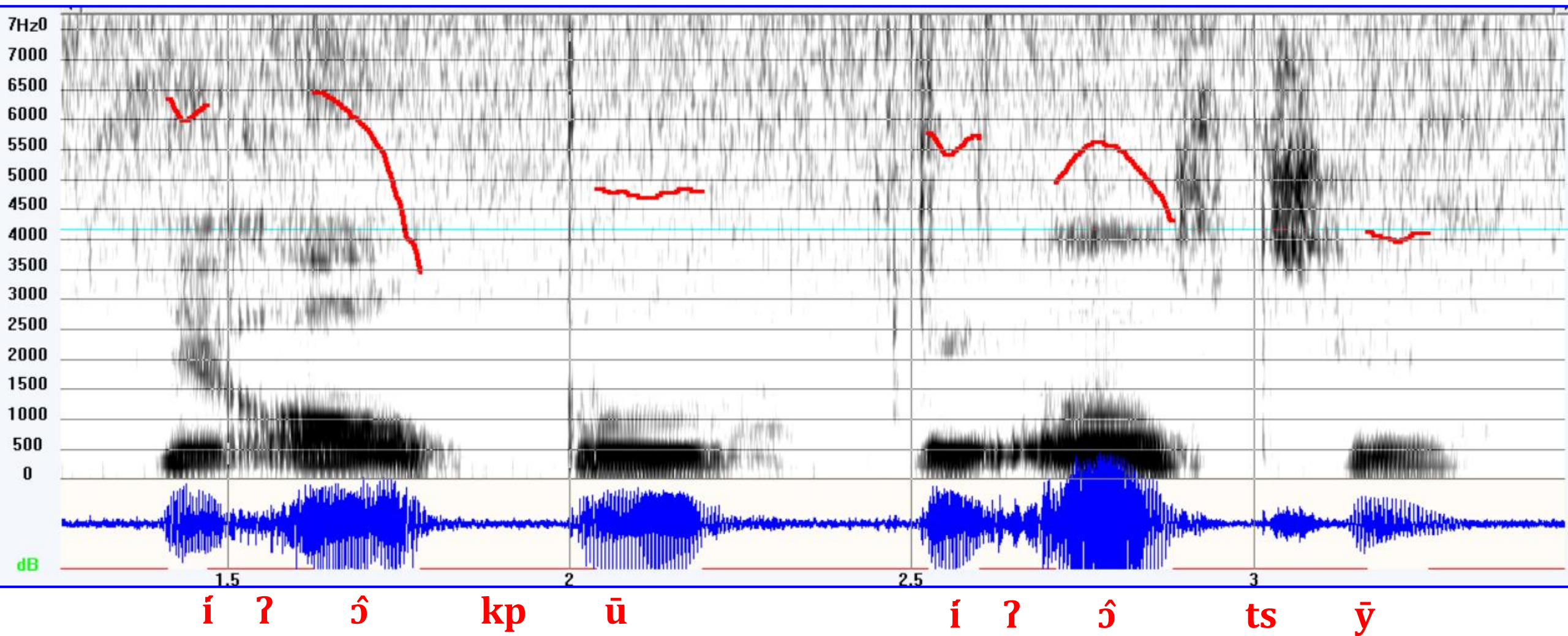
'belly'





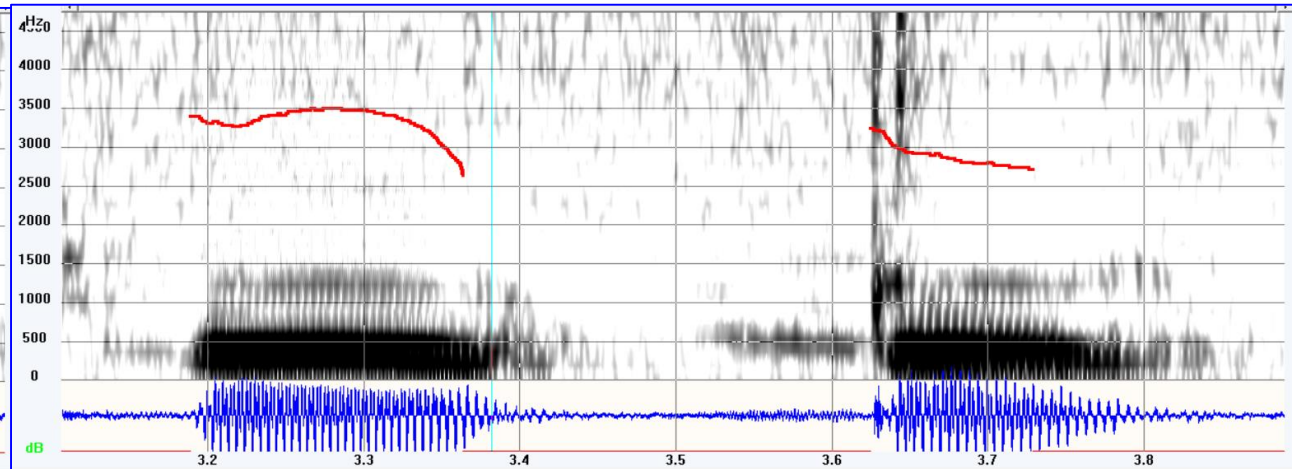
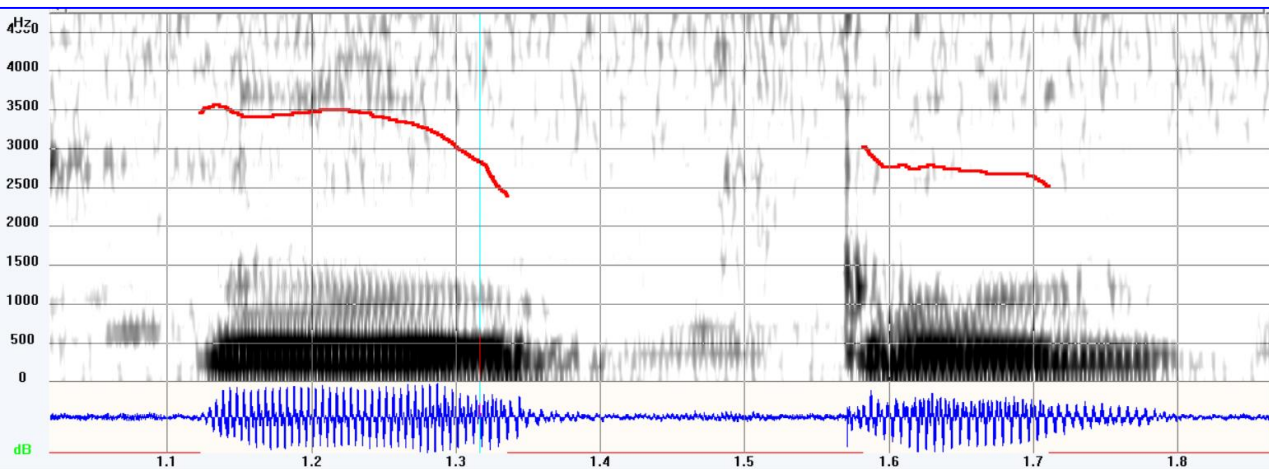
'kebe cuts the tree'





í ʔ ô kp ū í ʔ ô ts ȳ





ú

kʋ

ū

'head'

ú

kʋ

ū



In terms of language, the relation between Pygmies and their neighbors followed the outcomes of the contacts between the different Bantu groups.

This situation reflects an ancient schema of contact between hunting gathering Pygmies and slash-burn agriculturalists.

The [Efe](#) cluster still needs a detailed investigation to establish the dialectal variants of the language (crucial for the comparative work between Central Sudanic and Bantu).

[Asua](#) shows differences from the Mangbetu languages (at least from a morphological point of view). The relation between Mangbetu-[Asua](#) and Bantu C & D languages needs a deep investigation.

The different Pygmy groups show obvious marks of independent cultural features as in music where their vocal (and instrumental) polyphonies are radically different from the musical systems found among their neighbors.

One interesting case is the [Djofe](#) from the DR of Congo. They seem to have adopted the language of the Boyela neighbors (Mongo) with some idiosyncratic features (Hulstaert 1986). Their music is however radically different from the systems found in the Mongo area and clearly belong to the Ituri cluster.

The way to the Southern [Twa](#) Pygmies (Zambia and Angola) follows a path through the Western rift valley. This would be interesting to evaluate their sound systems and establish comparative vocabulary.