This paper has three parts, each one a response to a simple question. These are What? Why? and So What? They obviously have to do with description, analysis, and conclusions about the significance of our study.

What

We are addressing ourselves to the verb 'to be' in Sango, more specifically the Sango of young people and children in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, for whom this language is the primary linguistic instrument of social interaction and play; for many even the native language.

Anticipating remarks that will be made in the last section of this paper, we will say that we are interested in what has happened to the verb in this process of creolization, whose linguistic consequences constitute the primary goal of on-going research at the University of Toronto.

The copula attracted attention to itself by the fact that in Bangui it occurs in several forms, in marked contrast to the state of affairs in 1952, when I began learning the language in a rural area, where it was a second language for everyone, therefore, a pidgin. Furthermore, most of the people with whom I regularly spoke Sango in the 1950s were Protestants, whose speech, even at that time I recognized, was in some ways different from that of non-Christians. In those days, as I recall, the verb was yeke.

Ten years later -- that is, in 1962 -- when I collected tape-recorded extemporaneous texts throughout the country from all kinds of people for the writing of a grammar, I codified the verb as eke, the form in which it most frequently occurred, noting, however, that ke was also a variant. It was in these forms that the verb was entered in Taber's dictionary, based on the same corpus as my grammar. No other forms, therefore, are noted in it.

In 1966, after four months of field work, which included the tape-recording of more spontaneous discourse, some of it in Bangui, I was led to say, "it is commonly abbreviated to ke. Some speakers have even been heard to say [ee] ..." (1967:105). But in one extemporaneously recorded conversation (p. 255) a short vowel occurs in mbi e qa so 'I'm coming.'

After these few words you may already be anticipating the next section: Why? You are drawing the conclusion that in creolization yeke has been reduced, at least for some speakers, to ee. But we must go on, for things become somewhat complicated.

When we add to these five forms of the copula (that is, eke, ke, ee, e), all those that are found in the extemporaneous speech tape recorded in 1988, during ten weeks of field work, we now have fifteen: eke, ke, ki, ko, ku, ka, ka (shwa), k, e, ee, ye, y, l, o, and g. (These are listed in the handout. The order is not random. It therefore suggests the analysis that will be presented in the next section.) Two other forms I have
heard but which did not occur in the tape-recordings are these: ky (compare ki) and yke, which always follows the predicate marker, resulting in ayke. It should be noted that yke did not occur at all in the tape recordings, but we can add it as a possible form. (Other recordings from Protestant children, for example, have this item.) That now makes eighteen forms that have been found in transcribed speech or that I remember having heard. (One or two others were heard but were not noted.) Since, however, close and open mid vowels, written orthographically with the letters 'e' and 'o,' are in free variation from speaker to speaker, there are even more forms.

The prefixed subject marker a- plays a role in the realization the form a as well as that of yke. This fact will be discussed below.

We have now answered the first question 'What?' Let us proceed to the next. Why

Before we attempt to explain why there are so many forms, we have to know how they are related: or, to be more precise, from what they are derived.

You may have concluded that the basic form is yeke, because it was listed first in the handout. You will have further reason to believe this when I tell you that in the earliest document on Sango, dated 1908, this is the form in which the copula is given. But isn't there reason to be critical of linguistic data from linguistically naive sources? So let us postpone coming to a conclusion about the pidgin form or forms of the copula for a few minutes.

To explain the data we naturally considered linguistic constraints, both phonological and syntactic. And we also considered demographic factors, the most important being age and gender. The data themselves came from 104 texts from as many speakers. The total number of instances of 'yeke' is 598, with an additional 7 that are questionable.

Syntactic Constraints

The syntactic functions of the verb 'to be' are two. The first is as a true copula (185 records) used in predications semantically classified as identity (N = 54), existence (N = 11), and 'locative' (N = 92). (The latter, because of the use of the preposition na 'with,' also includes possession.) The second is as an auxiliary (N = 413) for marking the progressive, continuative, and irreals. This will be referred to as the grammaticalized use of the verb 'to be.'

Not one of these records includes the ostensible basic form yeke, and even yke occurs only twice.

Anticipating the next section -- So What -- we must observe here that in the auxiliary the forms with the consonant 'k' represent 62% of the corpus, and the forms without 'k' 38% (figures being rounded). The figures are reversed for the copula: 62% without 'k' and 38% with 'k.' With an identifying function the copula with 'k' represents 47% of the total (N = 51). With the 'locative' function (N = 94) 'k' forms (N = 28) represent 30%, the form a (N = 31) 33%, and e (N = 20) 22%.

Phonological Constraints

Contraction and assimilation explain some forms. The form j always follows the pronouns with the vowel 'i': mbj 'first person singular,' lj 'first person plural,' and nj 'pronoun in quoted speech.' Since all of these have mid tone and our verb low tone(s), the verb is realized phonetically as the low-pitched part of a long vowel with falling tone. This, however, does not explain y (N = 10), which always occurs following
the predicate marker \( a_e \), producing a diphthong \( ay \), of which there were very few, if any, in the pidgin stage. Because of the high incidence of \( o \), one might conclude that \( ay \) is diphthongization of \( ae \).

Similarly \( o \) is realized as a lengthening of the vowel in the third person singular pronoun, \( lo \) (3 with 'locative' and 43 with the auxiliary). With the auxiliary-also there is assimilation with the open 'o' of the \( mo \) the second person singular pronoun (\( N = 3 \)).

If these are instances of regressive assimilation, there are also examples of progressive assimilation: \( ku \) as an auxiliary anticipating the vowel of \( lutu \) 'stand' (\( N = 1 \)); \( ka \) also as an auxiliary (\( N = 2 \)) preceded by the predicate marker and followed by the verb \( ?aanda \) 'to deceive;' \( ko \) as a copula with identifying function followed by the word \( ota \) 'three.' (Similarly, in one instance the vowel of the pronoun \( mo \) 'you (sg.)' assimilates to the verb in the form \( e \), producing \( me e \), and I believe that I've heard \( lo e \) for \( lo o \) 'he/she is' as well.)

The form \( a \) (\( N = 44 \)) must have arisen in the assimilation of \( g \) to the preceding predicate marker (\( ae > aa \), \( N = 17 \)). This in turn has been reduced to a single vowel, i.e. \( a \) (\( N = 14 \)). Only 5 of the instances are of \( g \) functioning as an auxiliary, the rest as a copula, 31 of which in a locative phrase. (Interesting is the problem posed by the sentence 'There is no food,' which is analyzed either as \( koba a \ d'ape \) or \( kob' aa d'ape \).)

The form \( k \) is probably a reduced form of \( ke \), where the vowel is dropped either before another vowel, as in the common expression \( ak \ d'ape \) 'there is/are not,' or before consonants.

No attempt was made to correlate any of the forms of the verb 'to be' and speech tempo. My impression, however, is that it has very little to do with any of these forms, and I will remain incredulous to any statement that explains abbreviated forms by speech tempo. Witness the fact that in a cassette tape prepared for the general public wishing to learn continental Portuguese on their own, where speech is unnaturally slow, there are instances of vowel deletion without any discernible change in tempo: e.g. \( muito obrigado \) vs \( muito' obrigado \) 'thanks a lot.'

It may be that abbreviated forms arise when speakers of a language think they have heard something different and then imitate it (unconsciously or not). If this were the case, the explanation would be cognitive and attitudinal, not physical. What would lead to change is the willingness, if not the readiness, to accept and use new forms. This hypothesis seems to be supported by the fact that older (that is, adult, not elderly) speakers, even in Bangui, consider the newer forms of the younger generation as not fully acceptable. Of course, some of these, including many other words and phrases in the language, have been adopted by adult speakers. One adult woman, reared in a rural village, was heard to say \( aydape \) for \( ake da \ d'ape \) 'there isn't any.' When I questioned her about this, her response was, 'I can stretch it out.'

Let us close this section on phonological constraints by observing that assimilation is a powerful force in urban Sango. Many many examples can be provided: for example, \( sukala \) from \( sukula \) 'to wash,' and \( la kwa \) (< \( kwe \)) \( ala te \) 'they always eat' (see Handout).

Demographic Constraints

If phonological environments explain the existence of some of the forms of the copula and auxiliary, demographic constraints do not. Indeed, we find different forms sometimes in the discourse of a single speaker. The latter statement can be illustrated by \( I \ ki nyo \) 'we're drinking' and \( mbli \ ere \) 'I'm calling' in the speech of a six year-old girl.
In attempting to correlate the form of the auxiliary with age we collected records (N = 141) from 31 of the 104 texts for two cohorts: one including males and females aged 6, 7, and 8; one for ages 14, 15, 16. For the younger group the most frequent (60%) are the forms with 'k;' of which ke is by far the most popular. The forms without 'k' therefore represent the rest, 40%. The figures for the older group are similar: 66% and 34%. In other words, younger children do not use the more reduced forms more frequently than the older in a significant manner. However, when ke and kl are compared, we find that whereas kl comprises only 12.50% of the total for the older group, it is 23.07% for the younger group. But the records are only 52 vs 32.

When we looked at all discourses in which could be found the 'locative' sequence a na 'be with,' we found that the ages ranged from 3 to 13 (average 9.45) and that girls outnumbered boys: 8 to 3. We attempted to compare (a)ke da and a da 'is there' in the same way, but the number of discourses were too few to reveal anything of significance (4 vs 7).

To conclude this section on demographic factors we must say that at this time there does not appear to be a strong correlation of the use of any form of the copula-auxiliary with either age or gender. Even ethnicity, in the few cases where it could be assessed, proved to have no effect on results.

Stylistics

There is nothing to be said at the moment about stylistic correlations with any of the forms of the verb 'to be,' partly because our corpus is apparently rather uniform in style. However, when examining what happens after long pause, even when a noun-phrase subject is separated from the verb, a predicted 'basic' or 'canonical' form does not appear. There are only three examples, as a matter of fact, in three texts, all following the predicate marker. They are ke, a, and i. I would predict, however, that stylistic differences will be found in adult speech.

And to conclude this whole section on 'Why' we must return to 'What.' Where do all these forms of the verb come from? What is their source?

The etymon of the verb 'to be' in Sango has been traced to some dialect of the Kikongo language. (For reasons why speakers of this Bantu language should have been in the Ubangi River basin one must see my already published works on the colonization of this area.) It may have had the form ike. From that speakers could easily have gone to eke. When this form took the predicate marker a, some speakers -- native to the area or foreigners, or both -- could have inserted y. The foreigners in this case may have been Europeans more than African workers.

In any case, what is most important for us is the attestation of the copula three times in one document from 1909 from a person who almost certainly was on the same expedition as the person who reported veke in 1908. These forms are all ike.

We are therefore not justified in assuming that all contemporary forms are derived from veke.

But how do we explain the forms without 'k'? Well, we can hypothesize that 'k' was deleted, producing ee, which was then reduced to e. And there is indeed some evidence of 'k'-dropping dialectally in the source language. But this would suggest that the 'k'-less form or forms existed some time ago in the language's long history. For this there is no evidence whatsoever. We are therefore left with having to date the emergence of 'k'-less forms to about twenty or thirty years ago, during which time both 'k' - and 'k'-less forms, among other variations, must have co-existed.

So What
What do we learn from this glimpse into contemporary urbanized (or creolized) Sango?

1. The verb 'to be' has been subjected to phonological processes that are affecting much of the rest of the language and much more than any other single verb.

2. There is no evidence yet that any of these processes are due to speech tempo that is greater than what it was in the pidgin stage, as has been asserted -- without scientific evidence -- for Tok Pisin. And it is doubtful that any convincing data will ever be produced.

3. It is not true that the grammaticalization of an aspect marker in a pidgin that is becoming a primary language of its speakers is necessarily more reduced in form. The auxiliary forms of ke are more reduced than ke with other functions. (One can, of course, hypothesize that the changes started with the auxiliary and were then transferred to the other uses of the verb. Reasonable though this may be, I would argue that the general reduction of frequently used forms, like fadeso 'now, then', makes this hypothesis unnecessary.

4. It would appear that it is the young urban speakers, for whom Sango is the primary if not native language, who have introduced the many forms of the verb 'to be.' Sango's history would therefore in this instance seem to be different from that of Tok Pisin, where changes "in the status" of the future tense marker bal occurred before there were many native speakers.

5. It is not true, as has recently been stated (Jourdan 1991:195), that children regularize a pidgin as they "streamline and condense phonology and general grammatical patterns."

6. It is not true that with the expansion of linguistic functions that obviously accompany what is called creolization there is a relative stabilization of variation (Hymes 1971). There is greater variation now in 'nativized' Sango than there was in the pidgin stage.

7. It is true, as Muhlhausler has said, that the linguistic documentation of creolization is sketchy (1986:205).

Finally, I hope that we are contributing something to redress this lack of documentation.
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03 More recording in 1966, some of it in Bangui, led to discovery of ee and e forms.

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14 Demographic constraints do not explain any variants. Younger children do not use the more reduced forms more frequently than the older: e.g. for k forms 60% and 66% respectively. Gender plays no role.

15 Style does not appear to play any role. (My corpus is rather uniform stylistically.) Even after long pause a predicted 'basic' or 'canonical' form does not appear.

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02 muito obrigado / mult' obrigado (continental Portuguese); que [ki] e ... do que o [kyu] senhor acha

03 ake da ape / ay d.ape (is there not) 'there isn't any'

04 l ki nyo 'we're drinking'; mbi i ere 'I'm calling'

05 fadeso, fatso, fayso, faaso, faso, foso 'now'

06 nda na a da < nda ni ake da (end det. is there) 'there's a moral (to it)'

07 ala e see yi nzon ape < ala ke sara yi nzoni ape (they are do thing good not) 'they are doing bad things' or 'they are not doing things well'

08 sukala, skaa : sukula 'to wash'; lakwe aa te < lakwe ala te (always they eat) 'they always ate'; zaa la < zo wa laa (person what? there-is) 'who's that?' mo o ti ba? < mo yi ti ba (you want to see) 'do you want to see?'

09 aki duti ake mu batoo ([she] is sit is take boat) 'she's sitting and seizing a [toy] boat'

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12 tala a ndwa < ti ake na ndo wa (of they is prep. place what?) 'where's theirs?'

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16 From 8 year-old male, Yakoma ethnicity, single discourse: ngu ni # ake da (water det. [pause] is there) 'there was a river there'; ake na tere ... (is prep. body) 'it was beside the ...'; zo e ... (person is) 'someone was ...'; tere ti mbl a na ndo ... (tale of me is prep. top) 'my tale is about'; kob (< kobe) aa da mingi (food is there much) 'there was a lot of food'; yi ke ape (thing is not) 'there wasn't anything' [notice deletion of subject marker a-]; lo o duti 'he was sitting'; aa lo ape (is he/she not) 'it wasn't her'
ak wa
wa
nyi
yin ona

lo 0
mo 0

Ki

koli so a-ki
ale ki de
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i

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Dear Family and Friends:

Good news from Benin: An FM radio station in Djougou, central town/city of the Yowa people, where we spent many years, has agreed to broadcast three 15-minute programs per week in the Yom language. What an opportunity! Everyone with any extra money buys a radio. So, although many cannot read, they all have ears! Pray for programming and funds for this project. If you would like to help bring this about, gifts for this may be sent to SIM USA, P.O. Box 7900, Charlotte, NC 28241, and designated for the Yom Radio Project: #BJ 93338.

An update:

On April 29th, a car coming out of a store parking lot crossed 3 traffic lanes to turn into a street we were about to pass. He did not see us coming and due to traffic in the left lane beside us, we did not see him so were not able to stop before running into him. Instinctively, I (Joyce) had my foot down "on the brake" on my side, too, and the impact of our car hitting the other one broke all 5 metatarsal bones in my right foot. We are so grateful that the surgeon felt an operation was not necessary because the bones would heal on their own, which in fact they are doing. I have advanced from 2 crutches to one, but around the house use none. Swelling and pain will be with me for a while, the doctor said. A morning or two later I read this:

"God is a master at putting broken pieces back together
and He will do this because He is sovereign and because
He loves you with an everlasting love." (In Touch, May 1999)

What a heaven-sent message to encourage me!

Our car was totaled, but a friend was helpful with all the details involved and was able to get us another car with less than half the mileage of ours. We are so grateful for all he did. Our church family also supplied weeks of meals while I was "leg up". How thankful we are for them! God is good and has supplied all our needs.

Special news:

If we felt that the timing of the accident was not good since it resulted in cancelling 2 planned trips to see family, it was of even more concern because there was a special third trip planned. Friends of our son-in-law Bob Thomas (Bob and Grace, you remember, are in Sucre, Bolivia with SIM) gave money for us to visit them as a total surprise for Grace. We leave July 1st, and trust my foot and ankle will continue to do well! We will be there until Aug. 9. What a gift to us in so many ways, and we are grateful and excited to surprise Grace at the door!! We pray for a time of blessing, as a family. We pray also for a challenge and new blessing in seeing how God is working in this area of the world.

Our "thank you" to so many of you who have touched our lives and helped us in such a variety of ways through the years.

With grateful hearts,
Gordon & Joyce

SIM: Society for International Ministries includes Andes Evangelical Mission, International Christian Fellowship, and Sudan Interior Mission
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17 From 15 year-old female, Mbati ethnicity, single discourse (selected examples): lo ia ka na kodro (he is there prep. village) ‘he’s at home’; cheval [French] ti baba ti lo i magie [French] ni (horse of father of him is magic det.) ‘his father’s horse was magical’; tuu ake na a ti kodo so < tout [French] ake na ya ti kodo so (all is prep. belly of village this) ‘all kinds of things were in this village’; kol oko a da peel < kol ooko ake da ape! (man one is there not) ‘there wasn’t one man there!’ wall na ( < ni) ake yi ande (woman det. is want someday) ‘the woman will agree’; si li i go ande (then we are go someday) ‘then we’ll go’; mo o saa < mo o sara (you are do) ‘you’re doing’; ay la ‘is there’