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Reading Comprehension Passages

4TH



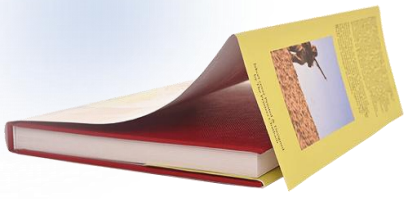
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PARTIE I



The Boma Journal: A Study in Narrative Time

The Discovery in the Archives

In the quiet, dust-filled archives of Boma, the original capital of the Congo Free State, a young historian named Elodie stumbled upon a cache of documents. These were not the official reports or shipping manifests she had been studying. Instead, tucked within a dry, brittle ledger, was a small, leather-bound journal. Its pages, yellowed with age, were filled with the dense, hurried script of a man named Antoine Dubois, a mid-level administrator who had lived in the port city in 1899. Elodie, whose research focused on the economic life of the lower Congo River, recognized the name; Dubois had been mentioned in official correspondence, but always peripherally. This journal, she quickly realized, offered an entirely different perspective. It was personal, subjective, and, as she would soon discover, a masterpiece of unintentional narrative complexity.

The Entry: A Shift in Time

The most compelling section, dated October 14th, 1899, detailed a tense confrontation on the docks. Dubois began by setting the scene, using the Past Continuous to describe the oppressive humidity and the ongoing activity: "The sun *was beating* down relentlessly, and the stevedores *were loading* rubber onto the *Herzog*. I *was watching* them from my office window, trying to ignore the headache that *had been pounding* behind my eyes since dawn."

This establishing atmosphere is abruptly shattered. He shifts to the Simple Past for the main action: "Suddenly, a shout *erupted*. I *looked* up and *saw* Captain Nielsen storming toward the quay." The brilliance of the entry, however, lay in its use of the Past Perfect to provide crucial backstory that explained the captain's rage. "Nielsen *had arrived* the day before, convinced that his cargo manifest *had been altered* by our clerks. He *had demanded* an immediate recount, which, of course, *had been refused* by my superior, Monsieur Gravier, who *had already left* for Léopoldville." The conflict of that moment was comprehensible only because of the events that *had* (or *had not*) happened before it. The narrative skillfully wove these timelines together, demonstrating a natural command of the sequence of tenses.

A Reported Conversation

Dubois did not merely state what happened; he reconstructed the entire argument. This section proved a challenge for Elodie to transcribe, as it was a dense block of reported speech. Dubois, it seemed, was summarizing a conversation he had overheard and a subsequent interrogation he had conducted.

He wrote: "Nielsen, red-faced, *accused* Gravier of deliberate sabotage and *threatened* to report the incident directly to Brussels. He *insisted* that he *would not permit* his ship to be delayed by such incompetence. A young clerk, perhaps foolishly, *suggested* that the captain *should check* his own ledgers first. This interruption was unfortunate. Later, when I questioned the clerk, he *explained* that he *had seen* Nielsen arguing with his own first mate just an hour before. He *admitted* that he *should not have spoken* but *protested* that he *had only wanted* to help. He then *beg..." (the entry was smudged here).

Elodie noted the variety of reporting verbs: *accused*, *threatened*, *insisted*, *suggested*, *explained*, *admitted*, *protested*. Dubois was not just reporting words; he was reporting intent, tone, and emotion, shifting tenses and pronouns with precision to maintain the indirect style over a long, complex exchange.

The Historian's Analysis: Voice and Register

As Elodie prepared her own notes for a future publication, she reflected on the journal's linguistic properties. Dubois's personal entries were written in a fluid, somewhat informal register, filled with subjective observations ("my pounding headache," "perhaps foolishly"). Yet, this style contrasted sharply with a draft of an official report he had tucked between the pages.

This draft, intended for his superiors, was a model of formal, objective language. Where the journal read, "I saw Nielsen storming toward the quay," the report stated, "An altercation *was observed* on the quay at approximately 14:00." Where the journal said, "I questioned the clerk," the report read, "The clerk in question *was interrogated* regarding the incident."

The strategic use of the **passive voice** was striking. In the formal report, the agent (Dubois himself) was entirely removed. The focus was shifted from the *person* observing to the *event* being observed. The incident *was observed*; the clerk *was interrogated*; the manifest *was found* to be correct. This linguistic choice, Elodie knew, was not accidental. It was a tool of the administrative register, designed to create an aura of objectivity and distance, transforming

a chaotic, emotional event on the docks of Boma into a sterile, manageable fact for the archives in Europe. The journal, by contrast, preserved the human reality.

Scenarios et Exercices

Exercises

Gap-Fill Exercises

1. The chief accountant, whose testimony was crucial, explained to the investigators that his team _____ (work) on the financial projections for the new railway from Lubumbashi for three months before they _____ (realize) that the initial calculations _____ (be) flawed, and he immediately _____ (suggest) that all operations _____ (be) halted until a full review _____ (can) be conducted.

2. In the formal report that _____ (submit) to the ministry, it _____ (state) clearly that the decision _____ (make) by the previous committee, and it _____ (emphasize) that all procedures _____ (follow) correctly, although several junior officers later _____ (admit) privately that they _____ (feel) pressured to approve the plan without adequate analysis.

3. The union leader, who _____ (be) known for his passionate speeches, _____ (threaten) to call a general strike unless the management _____ (agree) to discuss the new safety protocols, _____ (insist) that the workers _____ (deserve) better conditions, and _____ (warn) that if his demands _____ (not/meet) by the following Tuesday, the entire port of Matadi _____ (be) shut down.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. **Voice and Emphasis:** Look at the final paragraph ("The Historian's Analysis"). The text contrasts "I questioned the clerk" (Active) with "The clerk in question was interrogated" (Passive). Beyond formality, what is the *strategic difference* in implication between these two sentences? Which one sounds more severe, and why does the passive voice help achieve this?

2. **Narrative Tense:** In "The Entry" section, the text says: "He *had demanded* an immediate recount, which, of course, *had been refused* by my superior, Monsieur Gravier, who *had already left* for Léopoldville." Why is it grammatically necessary to use the Past Perfect ('had demanded', 'had been refused', 'had left') here? What would happen to

the meaning of the story if these verbs were all in the Simple Past ('demanded', 'was refused', 'left')?

3. **Reported Speech:** The text uses a variety of reporting verbs (*accused*, *threatened*, *insisted*, *suggested*, *explained*). If Dubois had *only* used the verb "said" (e.g., "Nielsen said he was angry..."), how would this change our understanding of the conversation he was reporting? What specific information do these varied verbs provide that "said" does not?

Assimilation Scenarios

Scenario 1: The Witness Report

Task: You are a police officer in Kananga. You have just interviewed a witness to a traffic accident. Below is your messy, informal transcript of the witness's direct quotes. Convert this dialogue into a single, formal, coherent paragraph using reported speech and a formal register.

- **Witness Dialogue:** "It was terrible, officer! I was just standing here, you know? I saw the big blue truck. It was going way too fast. Then this kid on a motorbike—he couldn't have been more than 17—he just shot out from that side street. I don't think he even looked! The truck driver slammed his horn, but it was too late. I guess the kid panicked? He tried to swerve, but he slipped. Look, it wasn't the truck driver's fault, I swear! You have to believe me!"

- **Sample Answer (Corrigé):** The witness stated that he/she had been standing on the corner when the incident occurred. He/She reported seeing a large blue truck that, in his/her opinion, was traveling at an excessive speed. According to the witness, a young motorcyclist, estimated to be around 17 years old, suddenly emerged from a side street, apparently without looking. The witness explained that the truck driver had sounded his horn, but the motorcyclist, who the witness speculated might have panicked, subsequently lost control while attempting to swerve. The witness expressed a strong conviction, insisting that the truck driver was not at fault for the collision.

Scenario 2: The Historical Rewrite

Task: The following paragraph is written in the active voice, focusing on the actions of "the company." Rewrite the paragraph using the passive voice to shift the focus onto "the local population" and "the environment."

- **Active Voice Text:** "In 1925, the company began massive operations in the region. They clear-cut thousands of hectares of forest to build the railway. Furthermore, they diverted the local river to power their mills,

which drastically changed the local ecosystem. They paid minimal wages to the local population and forced them to work in dangerous conditions. By 1930, the company had extracted over a million tons of minerals."

- **Sample Answer (Corrigé):** In 1925, the region *was subjected* to massive operations. Thousands of hectares of forest *were clear-cut* to allow for the construction of the railway. The local river *was also diverted* to power the mills, which resulted in the local ecosystem *being drastically changed*. The local population *was paid* minimal wages and *was forced* to work in dangerous conditions. By 1930, over a million tons of minerals *had been extracted* from the area. (Note: The focus is now entirely on what *happened to* the region and the people, not what the company *did*.)

Scenario 3: The Formal Inquiry

Task: You are a student at the University of Kinshasa (UNIKIN). You need to ask your professor for an extension on a major essay. You sent your friend a quick, informal message explaining the situation. Now, write the formal email to your professor.

- **Informal Text Message:** "OMG I'm totally stressed. my computer just died and I lost my whole paper for Prof. Mbemba. 😭 it's due tomorrow! I'm totally panicking. I need to ask him for more time. think he'll say yes?"
- **Sample Answer (Corrigé): Subject:** Request for Extension: [Course Name/Essay Title] - [Your Name]

  Dear Professor Mbemba,

  I am writing to respectfully request a brief extension for the [Essay Title] assignment, which is currently due tomorrow, [Date].

  Unfortunately, I encountered a significant technical problem last night; my computer suffered a critical hardware failure, and I have lost the final draft of my paper. I have been working diligently on this assignment, and I am confident in the research I have completed, but I will need to rewrite the essay from my notes.

  If it would be possible, I would like to request an extension until [Suggest a new, reasonable date, e.g., this Friday, Date]. I apologize for this inconvenience and assure you that I will submit a high-quality paper on the new due date.

Thank you for your understanding.

Sincerely,

[Your Full Name] [Your Student ID]

The Tshopo Bridge Decision: A Case Study in Modality

The Initial Proposal (1985)

In 1985, a comprehensive development plan for the Tshopo province was presented to regional authorities in Kisangani. The centerpiece of this plan was an ambitious proposal: the construction of a new, four-lane bridge over the Congo River, just north of the existing Tshopo River confluence. Proponents argued that such a bridge was essential. "If we build this bridge," the lead engineer stated in his presentation, "we *will* unlock the economic potential of the entire northern bank. Farmers *will be able to* get their goods to market in half the time. This isn't a cost; it's an investment." The plan was detailed, the economic projections were optimistic, and the initial funding seemed plausible. However, competing priorities and significant political debates ultimately led to the project being shelved. The 1985 plan became a forgotten document in a dusty filing cabinet.

Regrets and Retrospect: The "If Only" Factor

Today, driving through the congested streets of Kisangani, it is impossible not to speculate about that decision. The city's economy, while vibrant, is hampered by logistical bottlenecks. An elderly merchant, who remembers the 1985 proposal, often laments the missed opportunity. "I *wish* they *had listened*," she says. "*If only* they *had built* that bridge back then, our city *would have grown* completely differently. We *should have seized* the opportunity. The authorities *must have underestimated* the potential for growth; they *can't have known* what the city would become."

This sentiment is echoed by modern urban planners. They look at the old plans and see a turning point. "From a purely logistical standpoint," one planner noted, "it was a critical error. They *could have financed* it with international loans, but they chose not to. They *ought to have prioritized* infrastructure over the other, shorter-term projects." This language of past modals—*should have*, *could have*, *must have*—is the language of regret, of paths not taken. It frames the past not as a fixed series of events, but as a series of choices that could, and perhaps should, have been different.

Present Realities and Mixed Conditionals

The most powerful analysis, however, comes from linking the past decision to the present reality. This is the domain of the **mixed conditional**. A modern economist, analyzing the 1985 decision, might formulate it this way:

- "If the authorities *had built* that bridge (Unreal Past Condition), Kisangani's traffic *would not be* so congested today (Present Result)."
- "If they *had invested* in that infrastructure (Unreal Past Condition), we *would have* a stronger economic base right now (Present Result)."

These sentences are crucial because they directly connect a hypothetical past action to a tangible, real-world present consequence. They are the tools for evaluating history. Conversely, one could also speculate about a present condition affecting the past: "If the 1985 committee *were* more forward-thinking (Unreal Present Characteristic), they *would have approved* the project instantly (Past Result)." This demonstrates a sophisticated ability to manipulate time and hypothesis to build a complex argument.

Future Speculation and Deduction

The debate has recently been revived. A new consortium of investors is re-examining the 1985 proposal. Their language, however, is one of present and future speculation. They use Zero and First Conditionals to establish facts and future possibilities:

- "If a bridge *connects* two banks (Zero Conditional), commercial activity *increases*. That is a simple economic fact."
- "If we *secure* the funding by December (First Conditional), we *will begin* construction next year."
- "Unless the environmental impact assessment *highlights* a major problem, the project *will be* approved."

Simultaneously, they must use modals of deduction to analyze the *current* situation. "The existing infrastructure *must be* at its breaking point," one investor remarked. "Looking at the traffic data, the current bridge *can't possibly* handle this volume for another five years. This new project *might* be expensive, but it *may* also be the only viable solution."

This entire case study—from the 1985 proposal to the present-day regrets and future hopes—is a living exercise in modality and hypothesis. It shows that these grammatical structures are not just rules in a book; they are the

fundamental tools we use to express regret, analyze the past, understand the present, and plan for the future.

Scenarios et Exercices

Exercises

Gap-Fill Exercises

1. If the mining consortium _____ (invest) more heavily in local infrastructure in Katanga during the 1980s as they had promised, the region _____ (be) in a much stronger economic position today, and it _____ (not/face) such significant challenges with its transport network; I *wish* they _____ (have) the foresight to see that.

2. The project manager *must* _____ (realize) that the timeline was unrealistic; he *should* _____ (inform) the board as soon as the delays began, because if he *had*, we *would* _____ (be able) to renegotiate the contract, but now we *would rather* _____ (find) a new partner than continue with him.

3. *If only* I _____ (study) for the exam last week instead of going out, I _____ (not/be) in this difficult situation now, and I *could* _____ (be) celebrating with my friends; I *suppose* I *must* _____ (start) preparing for the retake session immediately.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. **Analyzing Modals:** In the section "Regrets and Retrospect," the text uses "should have," "could have," and "must have." Explain the specific difference in meaning between these three phrases in the context of the 1985 decision. What does each one imply about the authorities' choice?

2. **Formulating a Mixed Conditional:** The text gives the example: "If the authorities *had built* that bridge, Kisangani's traffic *would not be* so congested today." Formulate a *different* mixed conditional sentence based on the text, linking a different past action (or inaction) to a different present result.

3. **Speculation vs. Regret:** What is the main difference between the language used by the elderly merchant ("I wish they had listened") and the language used by the new investors ("If we secure the funding... we will begin")? How do their verb choices (modals, tenses, conditionals) reflect their different perspectives on the bridge project?

Assimilation Scenarios

Scenario 1: The Project Manager's Regret

Task: You are the original project manager from 1985. It is now 2025, and you are visiting Kisangani and see the terrible traffic. Write a short, personal monologue (internal thoughts) expressing your regrets about the failed project. You must use at least one example of `If only...`, one example of `I wish...`, one `should have`, and one `could have`.

- **Sample Answer (Corrigé):** (Looking at the line of trucks waiting for the ferry) "Unbelievable. Forty years... forty years and it's only gotten worse. *If only* we had been more persuasive. *I wish* I *had fought* harder in that meeting. The committee was so focused on the short-term costs... they just couldn't see the future. We *should have emphasized* the long-term benefits more clearly. We *could have secured* the funding, I know it. We had that German investment group interested. If I had just pushed for one more meeting... this whole city would be different now. What a waste."

Scenario 2: The Investor's Deduction

Task: You are a new investor in 2025, looking at the 1985 file for the failed bridge project. You see the engineering reports were perfect, but the project was cancelled "due to lack of political will." Write a short paragraph of your deductions about what *really* happened, using `must have`, `can't have`, and `might have`.

- **Sample Answer (Corrigé):** "This file is fascinating. The engineering data is flawless, and the economic projections were solid. The official reason, 'lack of political will,' seems too simple. The authorities *must have been* under pressure from other lobbies; perhaps the existing ferry operators had more influence than we thought. They *can't have* genuinely believed the project was a bad idea, not with this data. It's also possible they *might have been* worried about the maintenance costs, which aren't fully detailed here. Whatever the reason, it *must have been* a political decision, not an economic one."

Scenario 3: The Mixed Conditional Debate

Task: You are in a public debate about the *new* bridge proposal. Your opponent says, "This project is a waste of money!" Formulate two complex sentences to counter this argument, using a mixed conditional in each. One sentence must defend the project, and one must criticize the *past* inaction.

- **Sample Answer (Corrigé):**

1. **(Defending the project):** "You say it's a waste of money, but if our predecessors *had shared* your same short-sighted view (Past Condition), our city *would not even have* the limited infrastructure it relies on today (Present Result)!"

2. **(Criticizing the past):** "If the regional government *had possessed* more vision in 1985 (Past Condition), we *would be discussing* how to *upgrade* our successful bridge right now, not arguing about whether to build it in the first place (Present/Continuous Result)."

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Kinshasa: An Anatomy of a Megacity

The City Whose Heart Beats Unpredictably

Kinshasa, the sprawling, chaotic, and vibrant capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is a city of profound complexity. It is, first and foremost, a city *that* defies easy categorization. It is a place *where* unimaginable wealth exists alongside stark poverty, a megacity *whose* population has exploded from a few hundred thousand at independence to an estimated 17 million people. This human density, *which* places incredible strain on infrastructure, is also the source of the city's relentless energy. The *Kinois*, the residents of the city, are defined by an ingenuity *that* allows them to navigate a metropolis *whose* formal systems often fail.

To understand Kinshasa, one must deconstruct its complex sentences. The city itself is a living text written in advanced syntax, demanding a reader *who* can follow its many subordinate clauses.

Urban Life: A Study in Contrast

The linguistic key to Kinshasa is the adverbial clause of concession. Life here is a series of "althoughs" and "whereas" clauses. *Although* the city is the seat of national government, many neighborhoods operate with their own informal rules. *Whereas* the upscale district of Gombe boasts wide, paved avenues and secure compounds, the commune of Masina, *while* equally vital, pulses with a different life, one dictated by crowded markets and unpaved roads.

These contrasts create complex realities. A Kinois student might spend her morning studying advanced physics in a university building *that* lacks consistent electricity. She will pursue her degree *even though* the daily commute requires her to navigate three different forms of transportation. This is the Kinois spirit: resilience expressed as a concessive clause. *Despite the fact that* the challenges are immense, the music, the art, and the commerce thrive.

Navigating the Metropolis: Participle Structures

To describe the daily motion of Kinshasa, simple sentences are inadequate. The action is too simultaneous, too layered. This is where participle clauses become essential tools, allowing a writer to combine actions efficiently and elegantly.

Instead of saying: "The driver saw the pothole. He swerved violently." One writes: "*Seeing* the pothole, the driver swerved violently."

Instead of: "The *'maman wa zando'* was exhausted by the heat. She rested against her stall." One writes: "*Exhausted* by the heat, the *'maman wa zando'* rested against her stall."

This sophisticated structure is visible everywhere. One sees "spirit buses"—large trucks *modified* to carry passengers—barreling down the boulevard. Children, *laughing* and *shouting*, play football in a dusty lot *located* between high-rise buildings. *Having finished* his work, an office worker loosens his tie and joins the throng *waiting* for a shared taxi. These clauses paint a dynamic picture, capturing the fluid, overlapping actions of a city in constant motion.

The Challenge of Governance: Emphasis and Punctuation

Finally, analyzing the city's challenges requires the syntax of emphasis. When discussing issues like traffic, sanitation, or electricity, it is not enough to state a simple fact. The speaker must use emphasis to assign priority and identify root causes.

A simple sentence: "The lack of public transport causes traffic." A cleft sentence (emphasis): "*It is* the lack of reliable public transport *that* causes the worst of the traffic." Another variation: "*What* causes the worst of the traffic *is* the lack of reliable public transport."

This is the language of policy-makers and frustrated citizens. "Never before *have we seen* such congestion," an official might declare, using inversion for dramatic effect.

Furthermore, the very structure of the city demands advanced punctuation. A description of its economy is not a simple list; it is a complex system requiring colons and semicolons: The informal economy dominates, employing millions in various sectors: street vending, transportation, and small-scale manufacturing. The formal sector, meanwhile, remains small; it is centered on telecommunications, banking, and public administration. This punctuation is not merely stylistic; it is the only way to logically organize the disparate and complex parts of Kinshasa's identity into a coherent whole.

Scenarios et Exercices

Exercises

Gap-Fill Exercises

1. The sociologist, _____ paper on the urban dynamics of Lubumbashi was recently published, argued that *it is* the city's unique history as a mining center _____ dictates its social geography, *whereas* other cities _____ economies are more diversified have developed along different lines.

2. *Exhausted* by the long journey from the Kasai province and *having* no money left for a hotel, the traveler decided to seek shelter at the local mission, _____ he hoped he would find a familiar face, *even though* he knew it would be difficult.

3. The new regulations, _____ were designed to formalize the artisanal mining sector, face significant challenges; *not only* _____ they difficult to enforce in remote areas, but they also fail to address *what* many miners consider their primary concern: a fair price for their minerals.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. **Sentence Combining:** Combine the following simple sentences into *one* complex sentence using at least one participle clause and one relative clause. Do not use "and" or "but."

   - *Simple sentences:* "The Congo River is the second-largest in the world. It flows past Kinshasa. It provides transport and hydroelectric power. This power is often unreliable."

2. **Emphasis (Cleft Sentences):** Take the simple statement: "The informal economy supports millions of people in Kinshasa." Rewrite this sentence in two different ways to add emphasis, using:

   - a) An "It is..." cleft structure.
   - b) A "What..." cleft structure.

3. **Punctuation and Meaning:** The text uses a semicolon in the final paragraph: "The formal sector, meanwhile, remains small; it is centered on telecommunications, banking, and public administration." Why is a semicolon (;) used here instead of a comma (,) or a period (.)? What is the specific logical relationship between the two clauses that this punctuation mark establishes?

Assimilation Scenarios

Scenario 1: The Urban Planner's Report

Task: You are an urban planner writing a report on the city of Bukavu. You have a list of simple notes. Combine these notes into one or two complex, sophisticated paragraphs, using relative clauses (who, which, whose) and adverbial clauses (although, because, whereas).

- **Simple Notes:**
  - Bukavu is built on several hills.
  - This makes infrastructure difficult to build.
  - The city is next to Lake Kivu.
  - Lake Kivu is very beautiful.
  - The city has a pleasant climate.
  - The population is growing very fast.
  - This rapid growth causes housing shortages.
  - Many new houses are built on steep, unsafe slopes.
- **Sample Answer (Corrigé):** Bukavu, *which* is the capital of South Kivu, presents unique challenges for urban planning *because* it is built on a series of steep hills overlooking the beautiful Lake Kivu. *Although* this location provides the city with a pleasant climate *that* is the envy of the region, the topography severely complicates the development of infrastructure. The primary issue facing the city is its rapid population growth, *which* has led to critical housing shortages. *Consequently*, many new residents, *whose* options are limited, are forced to construct dwellings on steep, unsafe slopes, *which* creates a significant risk of landslides during the rainy season.

Scenario 2: The Journalist's Description

Task: You are a journalist writing a dynamic description of the *rapides* (rapids) on the Congo River near Matadi. Rewrite the following simple, "boring" paragraph using participle clauses (-ing, -ed) to make it more vivid and active.

- **Simple Paragraph:** "The water moves very fast. It crashes against the rocks. The rocks are enormous and dark. The spray from the water rises high in the air. The sound is deafening. The sound can be heard from

kilometers away. The rapids are a powerful and dangerous natural wonder."

- **Sample Answer (Corrigé):** "The water moves with incredible speed, *crashing* violently against the enormous, dark rocks. *Rising* high into the air, the spray catches the light, while the *deafening* sound can be heard from kilometers away. *Considered* by all to be a powerful and dangerous natural wonder, the rapids demonstrate the untamed force of the Congo River."

Scenario 3: The Emphasis Task

Task: You are in a municipal meeting in Goma, discussing the response to the 2021 Nyiragongo eruption. You want to emphasize that the *lack of a clear evacuation plan* was the biggest problem, not the volcano itself. Take this basic idea and express it in three different ways, using:

1. A cleft sentence ("It was...")
2. An inversion with a negative ("Never before...")
3. A "What..." cleft sentence

- **Sample Answer (Corrigé):**
    1. **(Cleft):** "*It was* the lack of a clear and communicated evacuation plan, not the eruption itself, *that* caused the most chaos and panic among the population."
    2. **(Inversion):** "*Never before* had the city's vulnerability *been* so clearly exposed, not by the lava, but by the complete absence of a coordinated response plan."
    3. **(What-Cleft):** "*What* ultimately led to the widespread confusion and displacement *was* the failure of the authorities to provide a clear evacuation plan in the critical early hours."

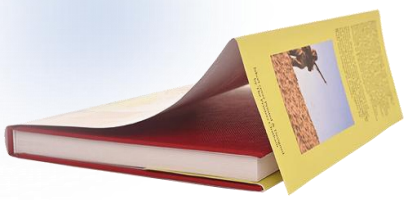
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PARTIE II



The Two-Speed Internet: Navigating the DRC's Digital Divide

The Ubiquitous Connection: An Urban Illusion?

In Kinshasa, the smartphone is ubiquitous. From a student at the Université de Kinshasa (UNIKIN) streaming an academic lecture, to a merchant in the *Grand Marché* coordinating a delivery via WhatsApp, the pulse of the city is dictated by the flow of mobile data. This hyper-connectivity, mirrored in other major hubs like Lubumbashi and Goma, projects an image of a nation on the brink of a digital revolution. Major telecom providers advertise high-speed 4G, and fiber optic cables are, slowly but surely, being laid.

This narrative of progress, however, is one that this editorial seeks to challenge.

The Author's Thesis: A Chasm, Not a Gap

The core thesis presented in this analysis is that while mobile internet has exploded in urban centers, it creates a dangerous illusion of national progress. This illusion masks a deep and widening **digital chasm** between the urban, connected few and the rural, isolated many. This is not merely a "digital divide"—a term suggesting a gap that can be easily bridged—but a structural chasm that threatens to create two different versions of the country, reinforcing economic and educational inequality for decades to come. The problem is not just access, but the *quality*, *affordability*, and *utility* of that access.

Supporting Argument 1: The Fallacy of National Statistics (Factual Analysis)

Proponents of the "revolution" narrative often point to national statistics. For example, the *Autorité de Régulation de la Poste et des Télécommunications du Congo* (ARPTC) reported that internet penetration has surpassed 20% nationally. This fact, while technically accurate, is profoundly misleading.

An in-depth reading of the data reveals the disparity. It is a **fact** that approximately 80% of all 4G and 3G infrastructure is concentrated within the city-provinces of Kinshasa and, to a lesser extent, in the commercial centers of Haut-Katanga and North Kivu. It is a **fact** that in provinces like Kasai or

Maniema, reliable connectivity outside the provincial capital is almost non-existent. Therefore, the national "average" is a statistical fiction, created by averaging the hyper-connectivity of Gombe with the digital isolation of a village in rural Equateur.

Supporting Argument 2: The Affordability Barrier (Author's Opinion and Interpretation)

Even where access exists, the economic barrier is, in this author's **opinion**, the most critical and least-discussed aspect of the divide. The cost of a gigabyte of data, relative to the average daily income, remains one of the highest in the region. This is not just an inconvenience; it is a gatekeeper.

In my **view**, this high cost fundamentally changes the *purpose* of the internet. For the wealthy, it is a tool for education, business, and streaming. For a low-income student, it is a scarce resource to be carefully managed, used only for essential communication. This economic barrier, therefore, dictates utility. It is my firm **belief** that any discussion of the digital divide that ignores the purchasing power of the average citizen is a superficial one. It is an **opinion**, perhaps, but one grounded in the daily reality of millions.

The Conclusion: A Call for Digital Equity

To conclude, celebrating the rise of smartphones in Kinshasa while ignoring the connectivity drought in the rest of the country is both irresponsible and dangerous. The thesis is simple: without a deliberate, national policy focused on affordable, high-quality rural internet, we are not building a digital republic. We are, instead, cementing a digital oligarchy, where opportunity and information are privileges reserved for those who can afford the connection. It is **imperative** that we shift the focus from "penetration" (a fact) to "equity" (a guiding principle).

Scenarios et Exercices

Exercises

Gap-Fill Exercises

1. While the government report celebrated the fact that internet _____ had increased nationally, the author of the editorial argued this was a _____ statistic, claiming that it masked a deep _____ between the hyper-connected urban centers like Kinshasa and the isolated rural provinces.

2. In the author's opinion, the most significant barrier to digital equity is not the lack of infrastructure but the _____ of data, which, relative to the average income, remains prohibitively expensive and therefore dictates the _____ of the internet for most citizens.

3. The editorial's central _____ is that it is _____ for policymakers to stop focusing on simple penetration rates and instead develop a strategy that ensures digital _____, which the author believes is the true measure of progress.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. **Fact vs. Opinion:** The text contains both factual claims and the author's opinions. Identify one statement from the text that is a verifiable fact and one statement that is clearly the author's opinion or interpretation. Explain *why* you categorized them this way.

2. **Author's Thesis vs. Supporting Argument:** In your own words, what is the author's main thesis (the central argument of the entire text)? How is this *different* from Supporting Argument 1 (the argument about national statistics)?

3. **Reading Strategies:** If you were given this text and asked to (A) find the specific statistic for 4G/3G concentration and (B) understand the author's emotional tone, which reading strategies would you use for each task (Skimming, Scanning, In-depth Reading), and why?

Assimilation Scenarios

Scenario 1: Fact-Checking a Political Speech

Task: A politician gives a speech about education in Mbuji-Mayi. Read the following statements from the speech and categorize each one as either a **Fact** (a statement that can be verified with objective data) or an **Opinion** (a statement reflecting a belief, judgment, or feeling).

1. "We have built 25 new primary schools in the Kasai-Oriental province in the last two years."

2. "In my view, these new schools are the most beautiful, modern facilities in the entire country."

3. "Student enrollment has increased by 12% since these schools were opened."

4. "I believe that access to education is the only way to guarantee a prosperous future for our children."

5. "I think everyone will agree that our efforts have been a tremendous success."

- **Sample Answer (Corrigé):**

    1. **Fact** (This is a specific, verifiable claim; one can check government records to see if 25 schools were built).
    2. **Opinion** (This is a subjective judgment; "most beautiful" and "modern" are relative terms and cannot be objectively measured).
    3. **Fact** (This is a specific, verifiable statistic; one can check school enrollment records).
    4. **Opinion** (This is a personal belief or value statement; "only way" and "prosperous future" are subjective).
    5. **Opinion** (This is a supposition about other people's feelings; it is not a verifiable fact).

Scenario 2: Identifying the Thesis

Task: Read the following short paragraph from a different article about Kinshasa's traffic. Identify the author's **Thesis Statement** (the main claim) and one piece of **Supporting Evidence** (the example or data used to support the claim).

- **Text:** "While many blame the state of the roads for Kinshasa's infamous traffic jams, this is a misdiagnosis. The poor road quality is merely a symptom, not the cause. The true root of the problem is the city's chaotic and unregulated public transport system. For example, the prevalence of '207' buses that stop unpredictably in the middle of the road to pick up or drop off passengers, combined with the thousands of unregistered motorbike taxis (wewa) that ignore all traffic laws, creates a state of perpetual anarchy. Until this human element is addressed, even perfect roads would remain congested."
- **Sample Answer (Corrigé):**
    - **Thesis Statement:** The true root of Kinshasa's traffic problem is the city's chaotic and unregulated public transport system, not the poor state of the roads.
    - **Supporting Evidence:** The example of "207" buses stopping unpredictably and unregistered motorbikes ignoring traffic laws.