Gender-Based Differences in Exposure to and Usage of Camfranglais in Yaoundé

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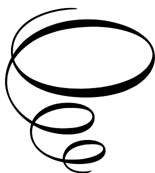
The Power to Exclude?

By

Gardy Stein

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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To my parents and children

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PRELIMINARIES

Over the years of studying African Languages, I have increasingly become fascinated by the sociolinguistic aspects of the spoken word. Especially youth culture and its ever changing, ever dynamic use of language has sparked my interest, and when I took the decision to earn a doctorate, I decided to still my curiosity about youth languages in Africa and started to consult the literature available. Inspired by a few articles about the linguistic phenomenon *Camfranglais*[1], I wanted to find out how young Cameroonians employ this *variety*[2] to communicate among themselves. Especially one description caught my attention because it seemed to imply that this Camfranglais has become a tool to grant or deny access to a group: "[...] Camfranglais, a composite language developed by Cameroon secondary pupils to communicate among themselves to the exclusion of non-members." (Kouega 2003b, 512).

I thus prepared my field-trip to Cameroon with the plan to define who is speaking this variety, which groups do and which groups do not use it, who is excluded (and how) and what the attitudes both of the young speakers and the older caretakers concerning this variety might be. On my arrival in Yaoundé in April 2004, it soon became clear that, at least among

---

[1] The exact definition of the phenomenon "Camfranglais" is still disputed–an overview about the most common definitions is given in Chapter 1.3.3.

[2] The term variety is used throughout this work as referring to a "distinct form of language" (McArthur 1998) in order to avoid possible stigmatization connoted with terms like dialect or slang: "To avoid difficulties and the social judgements that go with them, language scholars have in recent decades used the term variety to label a subdivision within a language. Varieties may relate to place or community (as with Indian English) [...], to uses (as with legal English and advertising English), and to combinations of the two [...]. In recent years, variety has proved to be a fairly safe term, allowing language scholars to avoid being too specific about kinds of speech and usage on occasions when being specific is not necessary and/or when there is a risk of being charged with discrimination against a group by calling its usage 'a dialect'." (McArthur 1998).

Additionally, the notion of Fishman's definition of variety is understood to inform the linguistic choices of the speakers: "[...] a language variety is an inventory of the concerns and interests of those who employ it at any given time." (Fishman 1972, 166).

the youths I was working with, nobody seemed to be excluded since everybody spoke or at least understood Camfranglais to a certain extent. So, why still the subtitle?

I admit that the preliminary headline did not contain a question mark–now it does, because the exclusion of peers via linguistic strategies is not so much a successful mission but rather an attempt among the youths I worked with. For one thing, most urban adolescents I interviewed do have a good command of the variety, and those who choose to speak Standard French instead in certain situations do so of their own free will. The most that can be said is that they exclude themselves. Adults (parents and teachers) are supposed to be excluded from peer-group communication, but the majority of them ban the variety from their immediate surroundings by prohibitions, thus minimizing the possibility of being excluded drastically. Still I decided to keep the title. It is a common finding for non-standard-varieties (or *anti-languages*[3]) around the world that the majority of speakers are by far male, as my counsellor Prof. M. Reh pointed out to me[4], and the situation in Cameroon is no exception to this pattern. This fact is often explained by the greater status-consciousness of females as far as youth languages are concerned (see Chapter 1.2.). The case studies that do exist on this subject were, by the time of writing this study, quite rare on a global scale, and almost non-existent when it came to African youth languages. For the case of Camfranglais, status-consciousness is not the only reason for the reluctance of girls and women to express them in this variety. In the course of this work, I will show that many factors have played and continue to play a role in the context of Camfranglais usage, and status concerns are but one of them.

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[3] *Anti-language* is a term that was created by Halliday (1976) to describe a way of communicating within a language that excludes outsiders–so to say, the way an anti-society speaks.

[4] For instance, Stenström et al. state that male speakers use slang and dirty slang relatively more often than female speakers (Stenström et. al. 2002, 73).

STRUCTURE

The present work is organized as follows: the introduction will present the subject of this study (1.1.). The next chapter allows the reader to consult the scientific treatment of the topics involved and gives an impression of the language situation in Cameroon, both historically and contemporarily (1.2.). This is followed by a short explanation of the origins and representations of the phenomenon Camfranglais (1.3.). The reader is then acquainted with the theoretical framework and the methodological approach of the present work (1.4.).

The second chapter presents a short analysis of some Camfranglais features that stood out in the samples collected (2.2.), focusing on the mechanisms at work in the deliberate modification of lexical items (2.3.). It also includes a discussion of the attention speakers of Camfranglais devote to their variety (2.4.). Chapter 3 then examines the sociolinguistic setting of Camfranglais, with a special focus on its function as marker of identity (3.1.) and its representation in the media (3.2.).

The subsequent Chapter 4 represents the heart of this study. Chapter 4.1. examines the differences between male and female speakers of Camfranglais, based on the answers given in the questionnaires collected during my field research. An attempt at explaining these differences is made in Chapter 4.2., exploring situational contexts, language attitudes of in- and out-group-members as well as discussing differences in education and exposure. The question of exclusion will be discussed in 4.3. before the different findings are summarised in Chapter 4.4.

Chapter 5 draws the conclusion of the present work and compares the Cameroonian situation to other settings in 5.1. Finally, an outlook on the possible future development of the variety and on promising lines of further research is given (5.2.).

In the Appendix, the references are followed by a collection of illustrative materials (language protocols, interviews, transcription of Camfranglais conversations etc.), including an extensive wordlist. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own and placed in square brackets behind the original quotation.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you are 16 years old and you live in Yaoundé. Your mother, a speaker of Fe'efe'e, comes from the city of Bafang and sells shoes on a market, your father, an Ewondo, works on a building site. At home, Cameroonian French is spoken mostly, even though you have acquired some Fe'efe'e from your mother and you can hold easy conversations in Ewondo with your paternal grandparents. While Standard French is the language used at school, you listen to American Hip Hop and, with your friends, you almost exclusively speak Camfranglais…

Although this scenario is fictitious, it gives a quite plausible example of the linguistic diversity experienced by people growing up in Cameroon's capital Yaoundé. There are no neat borders between Standard French, Non-Standard-French, Slang, Pidgin English, English and even African languages. With an estimated 1.2 million inhabitants in 2006 (*Yaoundé*, n.d.) from all corners and ethnic backgrounds of Cameroon and foreign countries, all these tongues transform and develop continually. Likewise, parting lines between the different social classes are hard to draw, with the exception maybe of homeless people living on the street or high-income families who live in restricted quarters and send their children to private institutions or abroad.

It is a challenge to plunge into this pool of diversity; the task of isolating a linguistic form made almost impossible because speakers continuously switch back and forth their linguistic repertoire, adapting to the demands of the moment. However, a challenge is there to be met, and the present work is the outcome of my desire to do so.

Although there are many interesting research questions arising from the intense linguistic contact scenarios present in Yaoundé, this book will focus on adolescent speakers and their access to and usage of a variety commonly called Camfranglais. In doing so, a special focus is laid on the gender-related differences. It is a common finding that female speakers use non-standard languages less than males, but the reasons for this fact

remain to be scientifically explored. This investigation aims to contribute to a better understanding of the processes at work here.

1.1. Subject of the Study

This study explores the sociolinguistic factors underlying the acquisition (channels, sources etc.) and usage (situations and locus of realization) of Camfranglais. Using examples from Yaoundé, the focus thereby lies on the differences between male and female speakers in the acquisition and utilisation of this variety. Among other points, questions such as the following will be discussed: Which factors contribute to the overall dominance of male speakers? Are girls excluded from communication in Camfranglais? If so, how is this exclusion accomplished and maintained?

The underlying assumption is that the access and the amount of exposure to linguistic production as well as the frequent opportunity to speak it determine more than anything else the actual usage of Camfranglais. Thus, the more a person is exposed to the variety, the better he or she will be able to speak it. It is further expected that male speakers have means to limit the access of female speakers, thus consolidating their superior position in Camfranglais production. How exactly this limitation is managed and upheld will be an important focus in the analysis of the results of my field-research (cf. Chapter 4.3.). I will argue that an important reason for the dominance of male Camfranglais speakers is the tendency for boys to speak it only among themselves and the restricted channels through which knowledge of this variety is passed on.

The actual amount of Camfranglais production is also thought to depend on the situation in which a speech event appears (formal vs. informal), the company a person is with and the personality of the speaker (i.e. whether he or she values the variety and whether or not he or she is likely to heed society's attitudes). Since these attitudes also play a central role in shaping the actual linguistic outputs, educational differences as well as the personal and societal attitudes towards the variety and its speakers are thoroughly examined (Chapter 4.2.).

For all the above mentioned points, evidence in the form of interviews and results from questionnaires will be presented in Chapter 4 to lend weight to my arguments.

Although many publications on Camfranglais exist (cf. Chapter 1.3.), most of them focus on its linguistic structure, development and distinctive features. This study seeks to shift the attention to the people who speak and transform the variety, exploring their attitudes, thoughts and feelings

about Camfranglais. It thus presents unique insights into the relationship between speakers and idiom, shedding light on the way Camfranglais is acquired, used, and valued by adolescents living in and around Yaoundé. The explicit focus on the gender issue allows for a comprehensive view on the often neglected female perspective and might serve as a basis for comparative studies in other settings. It thus contributes to an understanding of gender-related questions in sociolinguistic research on linguistic varieties. The synchronic nature of this study (it is based on results from 3 months' field research in Yaoundé in 2004) might serve as an interesting data pool for diachronic investigations.

Furthermore, the exact definition of the motivations and attitudes of the young speakers can possibly contribute to the creation of governmental programmes for education and literacy, health-care or HIV-campaigns. The extensive wordlist in Appendix 9, which contains over 400 words and includes examples of their uses in context, will be a valuable tool in the documentation of linguistic change over the years.

Before focusing on the variety in question in Chapter 2 and exploring the results of my field research in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I will present some background information on some of the topics involved.

1.2. Background Information

In the following chapter, I will discuss important concepts and literature relevant for this research. Since the subject touches on various disciplines (African linguistics, sociolinguistics, youth language studies, gender studies, etc.), some basic works are introduced for each. The reader should be aware, however, that the sources mentioned are in no way exhaustive.

1.2.1. African Sociolinguistics

During the last four decades, sociolinguistic theory has changed considerably from a rather closed focus on the usage of a given language, register or dialect within the defined borders of a *speech community*[5] to an open frame that allows for an understanding of language as a fluid and ever-changing set of resources drawn from what Eckert calls *communities of practice* (Eckert 2006)[6]. This flexibility is especially important in the

[5] "Any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage." (Gumperz 1971, 114).

[6] cf. discussion in Chapter 1.4.2.

context of studying language practices on the African continent, where linguistic diversity peaks in worldwide comparison[7]. Since Africa is a comparatively young territory of systematic linguistic research in general[8], the studies effected from a sociolinguistic point of view are even less numerous. It is scholars such as Myers-Scotton, Heine, Nurse, Wolff and Reh who, in the early eighties, opened the road to the systematic description and analysis of social linguistics in African countries. Their works are important to understand the special circumstances under which languages stand in contact in African societies, societies that are often very different from those in Europe or North America, so researchers have to be very aware of the historical, cultural and social environments that shaped the present-day linguistic phenomena. While early sociolinguistic research in Africa has investigated subjects such as language death (e.g. Brenzinger 1992), Pidgin and Creole languages or codeswitching (e.g. Myers-Scotton 1993), Ebongue and Hurst (2017) focus on African language ideologies and practices.

A rather recent branch of African sociolinguistics is the research on urban languages. A neat summary of the foundations of this discipline can be found in Calvet (1994) and Bulot (2001), while McLaughlin (2009) presents an anthology of case studies. The unique constellations of linguistic contact in African urban centres offer exciting opportunities for researchers to study social differentiation through language, the development of new registers or the creative use of linguistic resources by adolescents.

1.2.2. African Youth Languages

Since deviant speech often received the attention of those concerned with the maintenance of what is considered to be the norm, slang expressions and "die verkommene Sprechweise der Jugendlichen" [the degenerated way adolescents speak] (Achilles 2008) have been commented upon quite early. The first scientific documentations of youth languages date back to the 19th century, when the peculiar way pupils and students spoke was studied, as in Meier (1894) and Kluge (1895). The last five decades have

---

[7] "Von allen Kontinenten ist der afrikanische Kontinent derjenige, dessen sprachliche Situation am komplexesten ist (Schmied 1991: IX)." [From all the continents, the African Continent is the one with the most complex linguistic situation.] (cited in Kube 2005, 23)

[8] The reader interested in the further study of African Languages and Linguistics is kindly referred to the introductory works of scholars such as Greenberg (1966), Reh (1981), Webb and Kembo-Sure (1998), Heine and Nurse (2000) and Childs (2003).

seen a big increase in literature on the subject, so that the study of youth languages, which had occupied quite a marginalized position at first, has become a regular branch of investigation hoisting a fruitful research.

Inspired by Labov's works on the Black English of New York (Labov 1972a), investigations started to be made about the speech of adolescents there as well. Soon European researchers joined in, publishing studies about youth languages in London[9], Paris[10], Barcelona[11], Mannheim[12], Rome[13] , Stockholm[14] and Amsterdam[15], to name but a few. One of the outcomes of the works mentioned are, if compared, the many points in which youth languages in these areas resemble each other: exclusive usage during adolescence, negative attitude and heavy criticism by parents and adults, vernacular use of language (use of non-standard vocabulary such as slang and taboo words, excessive usage of discourse markers, lexical innovations etc.), extensive borrowing from Hip Hop- and Rap-culture or the prominence of male speakers (for a detailed summary, see Androutsopoulos 2005). Explained are those similarities by the similar social conditions under which these speech forms arise: urban life with the increased amount and diversity of human contact, migration, the search for an identity, and the media.

Although the specific circumstances are different in African cities, the development of youth languages has been documented here as well. A general introduction to this highly dynamic field can be found in Kießling and Mous. In their insightful article, the authors not only compare the strategies and functions of five urban varieties in Africa (Nouchi, Indoubil, Sheng/Engsh, Iscamtho, and Camfranglais), but also relate these forms to other instances of intentional linguistic manipulations:

> The antilanguages of the urban youth type differ in function from some other phenomena of deliberate language manipulation, such as professional jargons, guild languages, and reverence languages, in that they have an artistic, competitive, and provocative element to them. (Kießling and Mous 2004, 332)

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[9] Rampton 1995
[10] Billiez 1992
[11] Wieland 2008
[12] Keim 2004
[13] Romiti 1998
[14] Kotsinas 1998
[15] van Lier 2004

By far the best documented of the African youth languages seems to be the Kenyan variety *Sheng*[16], which is a mixture of English, Swahili, Kikuyu and other languages and thrives in the big Kenyan cities of Nairobi, Mombasa etc. Other varieties such as Lugha ya Mitaani in Tanzania[17], Iscamtho[18] or Tsotsitaal[19] in South Africa, Nouchi[20] in Ivory Coast and Indoubil[21] in Congo have also been studied and documented. Nassenstein (2014) added a monograph about the Lingala-based youth language Yanké spoken in Kinshasa to the existing literature, describing in great detail its grammatical structure as well as sociolinguistic features. Focusing on youth-specific ways of speaking in The Gambia, Agha-Mohamad-Beigui (2014) contributes another example of African provenance.

The rapid growth of big metropolitan centres such as Lagos, Douala, Brazzaville and Abidjan in the West, Nairobi, Mombasa and Dar es Salaam in the East and Johannesburg or Cape Town in the South led to linguistic phenomena comparable to the European and American examples cited above when it comes to their identitarian and group-building functions, the linguistic varieties and the underlying social conditions themselves being quite different. Most African examples have in common that they are hardly older than 50 years, and that they are mainly spoken by young people between the ages of about 12 to 25 years. Also, they are heavily opposed by adult educators and parents. Another remarkable characteristic of these varieties is the dedication with which their speakers devote themselves to language planning and corpus-building activities (see Chapter 2.4. for a more detailed discussion of metacommunication in Camfranglais).

The case-descriptions that do exist[22] are valuable resources and can be used as a starting point for further research into areas such as comparative studies, usage of youth languages in HIV-prevention-campaigns, language change and so forth (see also Chapter 5.2.), but most of them analyse the varieties in question from a structural point of view,

[16] Sheng can be defined as "an urban, youth sociolect that mixes English, Kiswahili, and ethnic languages and shares many features with slang" (Samper 2002). For more information, see Ogechi (2005a), Githiora (2002) or Abdulaziz (1997).
[17] Reuster-Jahn and Kießling 2006
[18] Aycard 2007, Childs 1997
[19] Hurst 2008, Hurst-Harosh 2020
[20] Ahua 2008, Kube 2005
[21] Goyvaerts 1988
[22] Since African youth languages are starting to appear regularly in the presentations of international linguistic conferences, the material available is continually increasing.

not a sociolinguistic one. The question of gender, for instance, is underrepresented.

1.2.3. Gender[23]

It is true that people in any given community speak at least one common language. It is also true that everybody speaks a little bit different from anybody else. However, is it true that male and female speakers as a social group[24] acquire and use language differently? Ladegaard claims that "there is substantial evidence in the sociolinguistic literature that the language of women (and girls) on average […] is closer to the prestige standard than is the language of men (and boys)." (Ladegaard 2000, 217). He cites Trudgill (1983, 162) saying about this split that this is "the single most consisting finding to emerge from sociolinguistic studies over the past 20 years." (ibid.). Labov explains these findings by the different compliance to language attitudes:

> The major differences between the sexes are in the important areas of attitudes towards language. The sociolinguistic behavior of women is quite different from that of men because they respond to the commonly held normative values in a different way. (Labov 2003, 245)

Looking at slang production, many researchers find that male speakers dominate as well. To explain this fact, authors have suggested that girls generally conform to social norms more[25], that boys are more rebellious etc., but thorough examinations of the underlying reasons are rare. Grossman summarizes existing statements as follows:

---

[23] While the term *sex* describes the commonly held biological categorization of male and female, "gender" is the social elaboration of this division. Following Eckert and McConell-Ginet, gender is understood in this work as something we are not born with or have, but something we learn to perform. It is "not an individual matter at all, but a collaborative affair that connects the individual to the social order." (Eckert and McConell-Ginet 2003, 31).

[24] As much as this dualistic concept is challenged and disputed in recent research, I will stick to the "male-female" dichotomy as self-assigned by the informants in the analysis of my data.

[25] Trudgill (1974) stated, "[...] as standard bearers in society, most women would rather stick to the acceptable norms of language and language usage than slip into jargon, or nonstandard forms of the language, an area that appears to be the preserve of men." (cited in Chia 1990, 124).

> In compiling the Dictionary of American Slang in the 1970s, Flexner (1975) became aware that "most American slang is created and used by males. Many types of slang words [...] refer primarily to male endeavor and interest (p. xii)." de Klerk (1990) concurs with this belief and attributes the greater use of slang among males to the inherent "daring" component of slang use, as well as to the greater self-confidence experienced by males. Similarly, the high value placed on obscene language found in male peer groups (Romaine, 1994) may lead to the greater prevalence of slang use among males. (Grossman 1997, 102)

Since the first systematic studies, more details of the gender-question in non-standard speech and slang production are gradually put into focus. Pichler (2009), for instance, published an interesting case study on verbal interactions of young females of different socio-cultural backgrounds in the UK, while Mendoza-Denton (2008) investigates linguistic and cultural practices of girls' gangs in California. An important addition to the field of youth language research has been published by editors Mertzlufft and Kotthoff (2014). They bring together authors from around the world who, with a focus on youth languages, write on as diverse topics as identity construction, humour and social networks as well as their usage in male and female peer groups.

In the context of African youth languages, the predominance of male speakers is a fact as well, as some striking examples show. Dako (2002), for instance, reports on a "Student Pidgin" in northern Ghana, which seems to be a gender-specific variety. Out of 50 male informants, 47 use it on a regular basis, whereas only 3 out of 50 female informants claim any knowledge (ibid., 54). Similarly, in his work on *Secret languages and cultural niches in Bukavu*, Goyvaerts notes that, whereas Indoubil is spoken by youngsters in general, *Kibalele*[26] is almost exclusively spoken by males (Goyvaerts 1992, 310). Likewise, Reuster-Jahn and Kießling (2006) state that "[...] the creators of LyM [Lugha ya Mitaani, author's note] are mainly male." (ibid., 21). Hurst, working on Tsotsitaal in Cape Town, finds evidence as well that it is mostly young men who use it:

> One of the respondents disagrees that it is all young people from the townships: she claims that 'the township young girls at least speak nicely',

[26] "Kibalele, also known as Kinoushele, [...] is a secret language used by those who operate in Bukavu's underworld or who live on the very periphery of society. Its primary aim is to render one's speech unintelligible to outsiders and to preserve secrecy among the members of the group. [...] The attitude towards Kibalele is always extremely negative to the point even of evoking anger in some respondents." (Goyvaerts 1992, 308)

> implying that Tsotsitaal in Cape Town townships is a male language domain. (Hurst 2008, 110)

Considering an example of the World Wide Web, the registered members of a Kenyan Sheng Chatroom divide into 1296 female and 4396 male users in 2010 (*Sheng Chatroom*, n.d.).

What is absent in many of the available works on African youth languages (and one of the reasons that inspired my own research) is a systematic description of the gender question. In most cases, one or two lines are dedicated to this phenomenon, which in no way clarifies the picture. Utterances like the following are typical:

> De manière générale les garçons ont donné l'impression d'être plus innovatifs et transgressifs par rapport aux filles ou, plus simplement, moins timides lorsqu'il s'agit de parler de sexe, drogues et insultes. [In a general manner, the boys have given the impression to be more innovative and transgressive in relation to the girls or, more simply, less timid when talking about sex, drugs and insults.] (Fontena 1998, 92)

It can be seen that the author addresses an interesting question, namely the cause of male dominance in slang production, and even stimulates an answer: the girls are just too shy to publicly voice insults or topics like sex and drugs. However, if and why this is so remains open.

Generalizations like those mentioned above are quite common, as the introduction to the compilation *The Languages of Urban Africa* shows: "[...] the various youth languages found throughout the continent, spoken mostly by young men [...]" (McLaughlin 2009, 8). Even detailed disquisitions on specific varieties do not offer more insights: "The two varieties [Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho, author's note] [...] are largely used in casual in-group conversations by male speakers." (Slabbert and Myers-Scotton 1996, 317).

The issue of gender is raised and discussed quite explicitly by Aycard (2008) for Iscamtho in South Africa. For the African context in general, a work published by Atanga et al. (2013) gives unique insights in gender-related issues of diverse Sub-Saharan African examples, including gender and linguistic description (Kenya, Setswana), public settings and gendered language use (Botswana, Nigeria), mediated masculinities and femininities (South Africa, Botswana) and gendered struggles and change (Ghana, South Africa), but few is said in relation to gendered youth language use.

1.2.4. Linguistic Diversity in Francophone Africa

Multilingualism on the African continent is widespread. It evolved along the ancient trading routes that have connected the commercial centres of the powerful African kingdoms. Colonialism and the imposition of colonial languages during the 19th and 20th centuries have further increased the linguistic complexity in Africa. Especially in the urban centres, due to migration and both national and international commercial activities, settings with a high degree of linguistic diversity developed[27].

What is especially relevant in the present context is the research on regional variations of the European languages in Africa. Among these, probably the best-documented cases of *appropriation*[28] can be found in francophone countries. Writing about the history of this research, Kube remarks that, while researchers described the differences between regional varieties of French in a first step, a further differentiation has been made since; now, the characteristics of the French varieties are observed between and within single African countries, a fact that may be contributed to the horizontal (acquiring new speakers) and vertical (acquiring new domains) spread, and thus usage on a daily basis, of the French language (Kube 2005, 40f). This means that, whereas in the beginning scientists wrote about the specifics of "African" French, today we are able to differentiate between "Ivorian", "Senegalese" and "Cameroonian" French, which–as we will see–is important in explaining the differences between the respective *vernaculars*[29]. An extensive overview on the history of francophone research in Africa can be found in the introduction of Kube (2005), while Dumont (1990) and Abolou (2012) give a comprehensive comparative description of different African varieties of French.

Especially noteworthy and important in this context is the gradual shift from describing African French and English as forms deviant from

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[27] In recent sociolinguistic theory, this phenomenon is discussed under the term *superdiversity*, established by Vertovec (2007) and expanded by Blommaert and Rampton (2011).

[28] "Appropriation [...] refers to the practice of adopting words, expressions, or ways of speaking that are generally thought to "belong" to someone else." (Hogan 2011, 406)

[29] In this context, I understand the term *vernacular* as a result of the ongoing process of vernacularization, defined as follows: "[...] a vernacular language is the language of a small group, which therefore limits communication to a few and whose form is characterized by this desire for limitation. This is, of course, the case with cryptic forms, like coded slang [...], but this is also the case with social registers, with the linguistic forms of age-groups and even family languages." (Calvet 1998, 56).

the (European) norm to understanding this process as an adaptation to the African environment. Crucial for this development is the changing self-concept of the African speakers. They should and do see their distinct use of French and English as legitimate, as Kube (2005) describes:

> Wie Bal 1983 bemerkte, hatten sich in der afrikanischen Sprachverwendung nach und nach eine Reihe von Besonderheiten herausgebildet, deren Verwendung relativ stabil und häufig war und vor allen Dingen auch von den Sprechern mit guten Kenntnissen der Standardsprache nicht als Fehler oder ungewöhnliche Abweichungen von dieser Norm betrachtet wurden." [As Bal remarked in 1983, a number of distinctive features had gradually developed in the African Language use, the usage of which was relatively stable and common; most of all, they were not perceived as mistakes or divergences of the norm by speakers with a good command of the Standard Language.] (Kube 2005, 34)

We are thus living in a time that sees the development of new varieties of "Frenches" and "Englishes" around the world, especially in countries that have adopted the former colonial languages as official languages. To understand the special linguistic situation that gave rise to the variety Camfranglais, the following section will introduce in detail the linguistic landscape of Cameroon.

1.2.5. Linguistic Landscape of Cameroon

The Republic of Cameroon, often called *Afrique en miniature* because of its linguistic and geographical diversity, is situated in the middle of the African continent, bordering on the Atlantic Ocean, Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. It is divided into 10 regions (or administrative divisions), namely Adamawa, Center, East, Far North, Littoral, North, Northwest, West, South and South-West and covers a total area of 475.440 km². In 2009, 18.879.300 inhabitants live in the country (CIA 2009). Of these, about 41% are under the age of 14, which means that more than half of Cameroon's population is 18 years and under. In fact, the median age of Cameroon's population is given to be 19 years in 2009 (ibid.).

Cameroon is one of those African countries in which–as linguists and especially Africanists are quite used to–a multitude of languages are spoken, representing three of the four major language phyla found in Africa: Niger-Congo (to which most Cameroonian languages belong), the

Afro-Asiatic phylum and the Nilo-Saharan phylum[30]. The estimated number ranges from 248 (Tadadjeu and Mba 1996, cited in Anchimbe 2006, 100) to 286 (Lewis 2009). Special about this case is the fact that, while there are languages of wider communication on a regional scale, such as Fulfulde in the North, Douala in the West and Ewondo in the Central provinces, no single language was able to claim dominance over others. Even a countrywide lingua franca does not exist, even though *Cameroon Pidgin English*[31] has spread far from its original location, the coast.

Although Cameroon has been a German colony for 32 years (1884-1916), the German language does not play any essential role in everyday communication; it is, however, still taught as a foreign language in most schools (Bassock 2011). In March 1916, Cameroon was divided unevenly between Britain and France; while the French administration took over about five-sixths of the territory, the British extended their indirect rule from Nigeria to Western Cameroon (Ngwa 2005, 350). After the independence of French Cameroon and Nigeria in 1960, a referendum was held in 1961 to decide what would become of British Cameroon. The northern end voted to become a part of Nigeria, while the bigger southern part united with French Cameroon, thus yielding the borders that are existent until today (ibid., 351). This eventful past has left its traces until today. Cameroon is one of the 55 countries in the world that chose official bilingualism. While no Cameroonian language has official status, this position is transferred to English and French. The constitution includes the following paragraph on the adoption of the official languages and on national languages:

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[30] A detailed overview of the linguistic landscape in Cameroon is given in Biloa (2003b, 15ff) while *Le Français langue Africaine*, a book edited by Mendo Ze (1999), discusses the status of the French language and related fields such as the history of official bilingualism in Cameroon, cohabitation of languages and problems arising thereof, French as language of Cameroonian literature and so on.

[31] "Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) is widely used not only in the North-West and South-West provinces, but also in the Littoral and West provinces. [...] In short, CPE is no longer perceived exclusively as a lingua franca of the English-speaking population, but a language that has a possible national dimension. In urban as well as rural areas, CPE is used in churches, in market places, in motor parks, in railway stations, in the street, as well as in other informal situations. In fact this 'no man's language' is very present in the daily socio-economic lives of the people, a role it began to play as far back as the German colonial period." (Echu 2004, internet source)

> §1 (3) La République du Cameroun adopte l'anglais et le français comme langues officielles d'égale valeur. Elle garantit la promotion du bilinguisme [English and French, author's note] sur toute l'étendue du territoire. Elle œuvre pour la protection et la promotion des langues nationales. [The Republic of Cameroon adoptes English and French as official languages of equal value. It guarantees the promotion of bilingualism within its complete territory. It works for the protection and promotion of the national languages.] (*La Constitution de la République du Cameroon*, n.d.)

As diverse studies show[32], the thus proclaimed promotion of national languages in Cameroon is almost non-existent. Apart from the existence of the department *Langues Africaine et Linguistique* at the University of Yaoundé I, there are no governmental programs involved in the direct documentation, corpus planning or implementation of Cameroonian languages. Echu, writing about the failure of language policies in Cameroon, remarks that "[…] language policy in the country lacks clear-cut objectives and orientation: it does in no way sufficiently promote the indigenous languages and fails to guarantee the appropriate implementation of official language bilingualism." (Echu 2004).

It is private initiatives of the speech communities themselves, NGOs or foreign institutions such as the SIL who run and finance projects aimed at the perpetuation of African languages. For instance, the PROPELCA (*Projet de recherche operationelle pour l'enseignement des langues au Cameroun*) was created in 1981 to promote mother-tongue education in Ewondo, Duala, Fe'efe'e, Nso' and later Bafut and Kom (Tadadjeu and Mba 1996). As mentioned above, there are no governmental programmes supporting schooling in African languages, not to mention the compilation of written material. While working on my thesis, the radio stations aired a total of only 8:40 h per week for 28 languages (Jean 2010), and there were, according to informants asked, no TV-shows in one of the national languages broadcasted.

It should thus come as no surprise that African languages do not enjoy a high prestige among their speakers. Especially in the urban context, French is taking over more and more domains that were reserved to the indigenous languages before[33], competence in the latter losing ground in the younger generation. Today, attempts to introduce Cameroonian languages in early education are jeopardized by parents who insist that

[32] e.g. Tabi-Manga (2000), Bitjaa Kody (2001)
[33] cf. Chapter 3.

their children are taught in the prestigious official languages as early as possible:

> Experience has shown that most parents in Cameroon seem to be generally hostile towards the introduction of early childhood education in the indigenous languages. […] Such negative attitudes are responsible for the continuous marginalization of indigenous languages, considered as inappropriate languages for instruction in Cameroon. (Echu 2003b, 41)

Due to the strict language policy of French colonial rule in the past (only French was allowed as medium of instruction in the governmental schools) and the constitutional instalment of French as official language after independence, it has spread throughout the country, albeit in varying degrees of competence. While a small intellectual elite is capable of reproducing Standard French, the majority of Cameroonians speaks a locally flavoured variety of French, differing from the European standard by phonetic and prosodic interferences as well as lexical particularities (de Féral 1993, 208). This *Cameroonian French* can be further differentiated in four accents, as Mendo Zé (1990, 78ff) calls them: the *Bamiléké Accent* in the Western Region, the *Nordic Accent* in the North of the country, the *Bassa Accent* in the central Littoral Region and the *Beti and Bulu Accent* in the Central and Sothern Region (a description of the differences is given in Biloa 2003b, 60ff.).

Because of the sheer size of the former French-administrated territory and the dominant position of French in most areas of daily life, the ability to converse fluently in English is limited to the Anglophone part of the country[34], although it is taught as subject in schools. However, since English has a global importance, especially in youth-culture-related fields such as music, style and fashion, it does enjoy a high prestige among young people, as we will see in Chapter 3.1.

With all the above in mind, we will now find out how Camfranglais developed in the midst of this multilingual setting.

1.3. Camfranglais

> L'origine… en fait, elle [le Camfranglais, author's note] vient du ghetto. Bon, on peut dire qu'elle était crée pour être secret, donc pour passer des

[34] Wolf (2001) has focused on English in Cameroon. In addition, de Féral has conducted research in both the Anglophone and the Francophone region of the country for more than 40 years, publishing works like *Pidgin-English du Cameroun* in 1989.