

Linguistic Features in a Marginal Corpus. The Case of Written Camfranglais, a Cameroon Youth Language

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Abstract

This paper explores linguistic features in a marginal corpus, written Camfranglais, a Cameroon youth language. Two types of corpora are examined: Camfranglais written by its speakers and another based on transcriptions of oral corpora by researchers. It is revealed that Camfranglais written by the speakers, Cameroon youth, shows two varieties: one variety written by post-secondary school students, which includes Baccalauréat/Advanced Level holders, primary and secondary school teachers, young university lecturers, young civil servants, etc. reproduced, in all its aspects, up to grammatical inflections and graphological renderings, with original French and English languages, with a high tendency towards “Frenchification” of all non-French and English words from Cameroon source languages like Duala, Ewondo, Basaa, Mokpe, etc. Another variety of Camfranglais written by either those who did not go to school or are dropouts, or those who did not complete the entire secondary education. They lack good mastery of the source languages involved in Camfranglais, particularly French and English. This study shows that Camfranglais corpora written and/or transcribed by authors and speakers reveal linguistic tendencies, particularly at the levels of spelling, syntax and morphosyntax, which vary according to the level of knowledge of the source languages Camfranglais relies on.

Keywords: marginal corpus, Camfranglais, written Camfranglais, youth language, level of education.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores linguistic features in a marginal corpus, the written form of Camfranglais in Cameroon. Camfranglais is a Cameroon youth

language. Like any other youth language, it is a marginal language, and its marginality is reinforced by the fact that it is spoken by marginal social classes and categories. But, our attention in this paper is focused on written

Camfranglais, which has received less attention from researchers than oral corpora. The aim is to describe its linguistic features. In a context where oral corpora prevail, written corpora are neglected by researchers who prefer oral corpora to the detriment of the written ones. Due to the fact that transcription consists of representing oral corpora in written forms, transcribed corpora are considered as written Camfranglais.

LITERATURE ON (WRITTEN) CAMFRANGLAIS

It should be noted in this study that written corpora refer to Camfranglais written by the language's speakers and by researchers who have to transcribe their oral corpora into written forms in order to examine or describe linguistic features. In this regard, we collect data from Ebongue & Fonkoua (2010), and Ngo Nlend (2006), whose corpora are made of speakers' writings, from other researchers, who include Ntsobé et al. (2011), Eloundou Eloundou (2011), Biloa (1999) and Feral (2006). They collected oral data that were put in writing. The difference between the two types of corpora is clear: while Ebongue & Fonkoua (2010), and Ngo Nlend (2006), worked on corpora written by speakers, others examined corpora they transcribed themselves. Camfranglais is spoken by young Cameroonians: some are early school dropouts, others are literate and well-educated. This social category includes university students, young civil servants, young teachers, etc. The Camfranglais they write, when it comes to writing, is similar to the one transcribed by researchers. We will describe the linguistic features in two types of corpora: The transcribed corpora and the written corpora. The

two are referred to as "Camfranglais writings" in this study.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

These two types of corpora highlight linguistic features that exhibit the instability in Camfranglais spelling. These linguistic features, which will be described from a sociolinguistic perspective, appear in spellings, syntactic and morphosyntactic constructions. It should also be noted that, whether written by speakers or by the researchers, the written forms of Camfranglais at hand seem to reflect their degree of knowledge and mastery of French, English and Pidgin English. In section three, we describe the graphological renderings of this Cameroon youth language, section four is focused on morphosyntactic tendencies; and the fifth section examines the syntactic renderings of Camfranglais.

GRAPHOLOGICAL RENDERINGS

The Camfranglais writings examined here display some graphological features that can be classified in various categories. Some of them are etymological spellings and lexicons are written according to their origin. Words borrowed from English tend to maintain the orthography of the English language. Let us consider the following items from researchers, such as Ntsobe et al. (2011) and Eloundou Eloundou (2011), etc.:

1. Laugh,
2. came (come)
3. « give »
4. « school»,
5. « talk »,
6. meet",

7. « speak »,
8. “know”,
9. « way »

As observed, the above renderings are spelt the same as in English. And according to Carol de Féral (2006: 215), ‘Choosing the etymological transcription means the origin of the word is known’ (Féral 2006: 215). One can argue that a higher level of education enables speakers to know the origin of many Camfranglais words. As such, they can easily identify and write English borrowings like they are written in English. These etymological spellings are mostly used in corpora, which are transcribed either by university teachers, or written by university students who are supposed to know the origin of many Camfranglais words. In this regard, they can easily identify and write English borrowings as they are written in English.

Transcriptions of Camfranglais also reveal some spelling patterns of Camfranglais words that recall spellings in French. This seems to happen when word etymology is unknown. This can be illustrated by the following examples collected from Ngo Nlend’s corpus :

10. « taco » (taxi)
11. « copo » (boy/girl friend)
12. « mater » (mother),
13. « pater » (father),
14. “gniè” (see)

It appears revealing that the above spellings are phonological and are close to what Carol de Féral (2006: 215) calls ‘phonological transcription’ (‘transcription phonologisante’). The speakers spell what they pronounce. Phonological writings and transcriptions appear when words are neither French nor English.

At times, some transcriptions reveal spellings that cannot be categorised, for

being closer to what Féral (2006: 215) calls ‘indecisive spellings’ (“graphies indéscises”)¹. Below are some examples:

15. « Wé »/« weh »/« we »/ « wei » (way).
16. « quart », « quat », « kwatt », « kwat », « quatt » (quarters)
17. “Gif(f)”/“guip”/“gui”/“guy”/“gi” (give)
18. « scool », « skool », « scoul », « skoul » (school)
19. « comot », « commot », « komot », etc. (come out)
20. “mit”, “met” (meet)
21. “lap”, “lapp”, “lappe” (laugh)

What characterizes these examples is that they are from very young speakers, who lack a good mastery of both English and French. The above-mentioned examples were mostly collected from Ebongue and Fonkoua (2010), and Ngo Nlend’s (2006) corpora. The informants who provided her with these items are in the first cycle of secondary education. All these examples are English words in form, but French in content. Speakers spell them as it is done in French. Though they are English words, their spelling is very close to that of French; this gave room to “Frenchification”, to refer to such words. “Wé” for instance is calqued from the spelling of “way”; and we can see that the /é/ is transcribed or spelt in various ways. The “ay” which is sounded /ei/ is expressed by /eh/, /ei/, /e/. “Quart”, which means “quarter”, is spelt either “quat”, “kwat”, “kwart” or “quatt”, etc. “Gif” (give) which means to “give” appears with different spellings, such as “guip”, “gui”, “guy”, “gi”. As for “school”, it appears “scool”, “skool”, “scoul”, “skoul”.

“Frenchification” is extended to incorporate words borrowed from Cameroonian languages and from other African languages. For example, “Ga” (young girl) is a borrowing from

an Ivorian language. In our corpus, it has many spellings like “ngah”, “nga”. “Ngniè”, “ngnè”, “gné”, “gnié” are also from Bassaa and, according to Tabi-Manga (2000: 74), they are classified A40. “Ngnié” and its various forms mean “see” or “ugly/ugliness”. Curse in Camfranglais is expressed by the word “ndutu” which is a Douala word and means “curse”; it has other spellings such as “ndoutou”, “dutu”, “ndutu”, “doutou”, etc. according to the level of education of the speller or speaker.

It should be noted that these types of spellings can also appear in corpora that are transcribed by researchers who transcribe Camfranglais items according to their pronunciation patterns. As observed, the process of “Frenchification” affects words that are borrowed from languages whose origins are unknown to speakers or transcribers. This process facilitates their spelling. So this study shows that in Camfranglais, each lexicon has at least two or three spellings which can correspond to those of Féral’s (2006: 215). They do vary according to the level of education of the authors of the corpora.

All the above-mentioned examples reveal four types of spellings such as phonological spellings, morpho-syntactic spellings, etymological spellings, and undetermined spellings. Some of them like phonological, etymological and undetermined ones can be likened to those of de Féral (2006) who identified three main types of transcriptions adopted by researchers. It seems important to evoke them here: “transcriptions étymologiques”, “transcriptions phonologiques” and “transcriptions indéterminées”. These various ways of spelling lead to a multiplicity of ways of spelling for every lexicon. It pays to emphasize the pronunciation of words

in the study of spellings. This would, no doubt, help to explain variations in spelling. Graphological renderings, irrespective of level of education, may either be etymological, or pronunciation-based. Also, considering the fact that in most languages there is no direct correspondence between pronunciation and spelling, variations appear to be unavoidable.

MORPHOSYNTACTIC TENDENCIES

This section describes some word inflections related to grammatical arrangements. When raising the issue of the transcription of Camfranglais utterances, de Féral (2006: 216), suggests that only what is sounded in speaking should be transcribed. Our corpora reveal that researchers mostly transcribe syntactic and morphosyntactic agreements and endings, which are not sounded in oral renditions. De Féral (2010: 59) argues that transcribing morphosyntactic features, which are not always perceived in speaking, might indicate that “the speaker masters English and that there is code switching” as per the English words present in Camfranglais. With regards to the transcription of words borrowed from English, it may be interpreted that the speaker knows the French grammar and that of English and Pidgin English, which provide, according to de Féral (2010: 56), more of any other language words in Camfranglais. We have noticed that transcriptions by researchers and university students display a certain degree of systematicity and stability in spelling whereas educated speakers propose unstable and non-systematical linguistic features.

Agreement of the verb with its subject

Some examples show agreement between verbs and their subjects. These linguistic features tend to appear in the transcriptions of educated speakers and that of the researchers. The following utterances are collected from Eloundou Eloundou (2011) and Ntsobé et al. (2011), whose corpora reveal occurrences of verbs agreeing with their subjects.

22. Tu **vas** go au ngata (you will go to prison.)
23. Tu no son pater, il **va** te nak (u know her/his father; he will beat you)
24. Tu **parles** la go là **déchirait** le nerf (what are you talking? the girl was very angry.)

As seen in the above utterances, ‘vas’ (go), ‘va’ (go), ‘parles’(talk) and ‘déchirait’ (torn) agree with their subjects. In (23), ‘vas’ agrees with ‘Tu’, ‘va’ with ‘il’, ‘parles’ with ‘Tu’ and ‘déchirait’ with “la go là”. Still in the educated speakers’ Camfranglais, we notice that some English words adopt a French morphosyntactic behaviour. Many examples show that speakers who are educated attribute to English and French verbs endings.

25. Tu **knows** que la fille là est bèlè ? (You know this girl is pregnant?)
26. Tu **eats** le jazz. (You are eatings beans.)
27. Quand tu **speakais** de cette affaire, nous on ne *knowait* pas que c’était vrai. (when you were talking about this issue, we didn’t know it was true).
28. Darling, je tombe à une bougie cette night. Tu **comes**. (Darling, I’ll go to a parti this night.)
29. Ce n’est pas qu’il deny qu’on go. Tu **knows**, il te fait confiance, mais il fea que la-bas on ne lui

move sa nga. (it’s not that he is refusing to go, but he is just afraid that somebody may snatch his girl friend there.)

30. Qui te talk qu’à two, nous **n’enjoyons** pas nos élèves (who is telling you that at two we won’t enjoy it with our students ?).

In the examples above, we observe that educated speakers attribute French endings to English verbs. “Know”, “eat”, “come” take “s” at the end like in French when a verb is conjugated in the second person present tense, in singular form where it usually takes “s”. There is “enjoy”, which has received a French ending “-ons” that marks the first person of the plural form in the present tense. We also see “speak” which has received the ending of the past tense “-ais”.

Other utterances display the examples of verbs scarcely agreeing with their subjects. Below are some examples provided by Ebongue and Fonkoua (2010), and Ngo Nlend (2006). This can be due to the fact that speakers master neither French grammatical rules nor English ones. Let’s look at the following:

31. Tu **a** dou quoi après (You did what after?)
32. Je suis came pour que tu me **saue** avec ta kam (I came to see you if you can help me with your bedroom.)
33. Après tu me **rythme** (After you see me off.)
34. Well tu me le **salote** (Well, extend my greetings to him.)
35. Tu **est** gueme et les ga-là **aime** les do et elles **piff** les do (You are short of money, these girls like money, they like money.)
36. Gar nkem sat ici je **veut** qu’on speak bien de ce wé par ce que qu’il y a une bringue au kwat et je **voulait** y être là avec ma nga (Dear,

- have a seat here I want us to discuss about this issue because there is a parti in the quarters and I would like to be there with my girlfriend.)
37. tu **science** comment tu vas go au work demain. Mouf tu **cause** quoi le work (You think how you will go to work tomorrow what do you mean by work?)
38. Je **veut** que tu me **rythme** (I want you to see me off)

In the examples above, the verbs do not agree with their subjects as we have seen in some corpora. 'A' (has), 'sauve' (save/secure), 'rythme' (see off), 'aime' (like), 'piff' (like), 'veut' (want), 'voulait' (wanted), 'science' (think), 'cause' (discuss), 'veut' (want), 'rythme' (see off) do not respect the rules of agreement between the verb and its subject.

In corpora transcribed by researchers, some English verbs present a French morphology in the third person which has no particular ending in the present tense. Let's consider the examples below:

39. On **go** play au foot (we are going to play football.)
40. La nga là me **ask** toujours les sous (That girl is ever asking me for money.)
41. Regarde comment il **look** les gens (see how they are looking at people.)
42. La big mater **speak** trop (grandmother talks too much)
43. Le manan la **run** comme mip mip (this mother runs like mip mip (she runs very fast)
44. Gars, on **try** de work dur dur, c'est très chaud à Guingamp (Dear, we are trying to work hard to avoid the worse).

There is no doubt that these utterances are from educated speakers, and that

they were picked up from researchers' corpora. We can see the morphology of verbs, such as 'go', 'ask', 'look', 'speak', 'run', 'try' in the above mentioned utterances. These English verbs have no particular endings. They also look like verbs in the third person. It should be noted that all the corpora exhibit the same forms of verbs, whether they are from researchers (i.e., Eloundou Eloundou, 2011, Ntsobé et al., 2008, Feral, 2006, etc.) or from lesser-educated speakers (Ebongue and Fonkoua 2010; Ngo Nlend (2006), etc.). The difference between the categories of corpora found in writing is that the corpora transcribed by researchers and the ones written by higher education students (NgoNlend 2006), respect the English orthography; the ones written by first cycle secondary education students (Ebongue and Fonkoua 2010; Ngo Nlend, 2006), present the spellings very close to what they pronounce.

The Camfranglais written by speakers (Ngo Nlend, 2006; and Ebongue and Fonkoua, 2010), shows specific cases of spellings that are not classified. In this Camfranglais, no grammatical rule is correctly applied. This can be justified by ignorance of French grammar rules by speakers in Ngo Nlend (2006), and Ebongue and Fonkoua (2010). French verbs are not sensitive to the rule of agreement with their subject. Below are some examples:

45. Père, leppe, on **vas fais** comment ? (Father, leave it, we will do how?)
46. car ma remé ne **veux** pas me leppe commoute (thus my mother doesn't want to allow me to go out.)
47. tu ne peu pas stay cool (you can't keep quiet.)

The above examples are from Ngo Nlend (2006). One can see how one of the speakers spells "vas" in the sentence

“on vas fais comment?”. It seems very impossible to find such a verb form in corpora transcribed by researchers or any educated speaker, except in case of a mistake. Higher education students would have spelt “on **va faire**” instead of “on **vas fais**”. In (46), “veux” with “x” is used in place of “veut”, with “t”, since the subject is in the third person. “Peu” lacks “x”. Ngo Nlend (2006) and Ebongue and Fonkoua (2010), display some constructions that seem to characterize Camfranglais written by the less educated speakers, who are less and less influenced by French grammar because they do not know it; they cannot make the difference between “ma”, a possessive adjective, and “m’a”, possessive pronoun ‘m’, and an auxiliary “a” (have). Many of them use the former, “ma”, which seems to be the simplified form, to the detriment of the latter; “m’a”, as shown in the examples below:

48. la mater **ma** bring le ndem (The mother has spoilt my whole action.)
49. gar year se que la go la **ma faire** (Gars, écoute/suis ce que cette fille m’a fait.)

If a semblance systematicity appears in the corpora transcribed by researchers, things are very different from the Camfranglais written by speakers, particularly those who are less educated. Their Camfranglais presents a certain instability and non-systematicity.

The use of infinitive instead of the past participle

The Ngo Nlend’s (2006) and Ebongue and Fonkoua’s (2010) corpora portray some uses in which past participles of verbs are totally unknown. In other words, some speakers use the infinitive where others convoke the past participle as in French and English. It is known in

these European languages that auxiliary verbs are generally followed by past participles of verbs. Here are some examples from Ngo Nlend (2006):

50. Tu as **miser** la jack là (have you seen the girl?)
51. Gars j’ai **miser** la jack (Dear, I have challenged two girls.)

In these two utterances, ‘miser’ appears in the infinitive form in context where the past participle is expected. Most of these examples are found in Ebongue and Fonkoua (2010) and Ngo Nlend (2006) who have discussed Camfranglais written by speakers. Those of speakers with a high tendency for use of infinitive forms of verbs are in first cycle of secondary education.

Agreement of the past participle

In some corpora, particularly those transcribed by researchers and in the Camfranglais written by higher education students, we have noticed that past participles of verbs are properly used. The past participle mostly agrees either with the subject or the direct object when it appears before the verb in corpora transcribed by researchers, and written by university and high school students. This is probably due to the fact that they have a very good mastery of French. For instance, researchers are teachers either in secondary or higher education. There is no need to say that they have an excellent mastery of French. They tend to mix French grammar with Camfranglais when they transcribe their corpora. Indeed, their use of past participles with “avoir” or “être”, placed before or after the verb is appropriate. The examples below, which are from Ntsobé et al. (2011), display some of these attitudes towards French grammar:

52. Le business là nous a **zappés** (This girl fooled us.)

53. Gars, même si tu me dis quoi, les filles là nous ont **vus** là où on était sat, elles ne voulaient seulement pas nous salote. (Dear, no matter what you say, those girls saw us where we were sitting, but refused to come and greet us.)
54. Le mec là m'a **frappée**. (this guy has fooled me.)
55. Gars, j'ai vu la nga que tu as **collée** hier à la bringue, je know la nga là (Dear, I saw the girl you were dancing with yesterday in the party, I know her.)

In these utterances, 'zappés' (waiting in vain), 'vus' (seen), 'frappée' (fooled) and 'collée' (tied) are past participles. Spelt by educated speakers, they are similar to those of French. 'Zappés' agrees with 'nous', which is a direct object placed before the verb; 'vus' agrees with 'nous', 'frappée' with 'm', a personal pronoun, and 'collée' goes with 'que', a relative pronoun. So the speakers behave as if they were dealing with French.

But in Ngo Nlend's corpus, we have encountered some past participles used by university students who do not respect the same rule. There is no agreement between the past participle and the direct object when the latter appears after the verb as seen in the following utterances:

56. tu as niè la go qui est **passé** là hier soir (have you seen the girl who came yesterday in the evening?)
57. mais la nga que j'ai **pointé** ce jour là m'a shou (But the girl to whom I made advances on that day dealt with me.)
58. Elle a voulu tif mon argent et s'en aller quickly, mais je ne l'ai pas **laisser** (she wanted to steal my money and go, but I did not leave her (go).)
59. Gars ma mouna là est très **occupé** ces derniers temps-ci (Dear, my

girlfriend is too busy this time around.)

In this set of utterances, the past participles appear in contexts where in French they should agree. They are 'passé' (passed), 'pointé' (making advances to a girl), 'laisser' (leave) and 'occupé' (busy). The first one, 'passé' is used with the auxiliary verb être, which expresses a state of *being*. Knowing that a past participle which appears immediately after the être does agree with the subject, this rule is not respected in utterance (56). The same is perceived in (59) where 'occupé' is also employed by the auxiliary être, but is not sensitive to its subject, which is 'ma mouna là' (that girlfriend of mine). 'Pointé' (57) and 'laisser' (58) are not left aside. Employed with the auxiliary *avoir*; to have, 'pointé' has not received from this category of speakers agreement with the direct object, even if in most cases, it does not tie when the direct object is placed after the verb. 'Laisser' is even in the infinitive form instead of being in the past participle.

The past participles of English verbs present two main appearances: either they appear in the infinitive form, in most cases, or they take -ed and this case seems to be very rare. Here are some utterances picked up from various corpora transcribed by some researchers:

60. je l'ai **tell** que moi je veux un muna ? (I have told her I want a child.)

61. elle a **begin** a cry (she has started crying.)

62. il a **put** la candidature pour les pays-bas (he has asked for sex.)

63. On a **kick** mon agogo (They have stolen my watch.)

64. J'ai **forget** mon book de maths à la house (I have forgotten my mathematics book in the house.)

65. La réméné a **cook** le taro (the mother has cooked coco yams.)
66. J'ai **speak** à la télé hier (I spoke yesterday on TV.)
67. Depuis que tu as **win** le probat tu ne me mimer plus (Since you passed probatoire, you have forgotten me.)
68. J'ai **see** un body hier qui m'a **ask** si j'étais en T au Lycée (I saw a guy yesterday who asked me if I'm in high school.)

A well-educated Camfranglais speaker will say “je lui ai tell” (I told him) instead of ‘je l’ai tell’. The main feature of the past participle of English verbs in Camfranglais is that they keep the form they have in English. There is no change in their morphology. ‘Tell’, ‘begin’, ‘put’, ‘kick’, ‘forget’, ‘cook’, ‘speak’, ‘win’, ‘ask’, ‘see’ have conserved the morphology they have in English. The position they have in the above utterances has not brought about any change to them. As shown, all of these verbs are well spelt according to English orthography, and all these utterances are from researchers, university students, and young civil servants. This use of past participles is common to all Camfranglais speakers, whether educated or not. But, it is important to note that while university, high school students and researchers spell these verbs as in English, less educated speakers write what they pronounce. The important difference between the Camfranglais written by less educated speakers and the one written or transcribed by literate speakers is that the former corpora, which are essentially written, tend to use English verbs as in French, while the latter transcribe them the same way they are spelt in English. Whether being university or secondary education students, or lecturers, there is a high tendency to keep the infinitive

form of English verbs in the contexts where the past participle is awaited.

We have encountered an example of utterance in which the English ending ‘-ed’, which usually marks the past participles for regular verbs, is added to an English verb. A speaker has added ‘-ed’ to an English verb to form a past participle. Those who are fond of adding the English ending, ‘-ed’, in Camfranglais are generally those who are fluent in the two official languages, French and English. But, such examples are very rare. Let us look at this one:

69. la vie a **changed** (Life has changed.)

As we said earlier, this type of example is very rare. Those who are very fond of it are young English speakers, who also master French, and young French speakers who know English, particularly those who live in the English-speaking regions. Their good mastery of English enables them to attribute to English verbs endings that are accurate.

The plural of nouns

Like any other feature of written Camfranglais, application of the grammatical rule depends on some categories of transcribers and speakers. While the corpora transcribed by teachers, and Camfranglais written by university students tend to respect the rules of French, Camfranglais written by first cycle secondary education students ignores some of these rules. Nouns, for instance in French like in English, can be either in singular or in plural. Some particular endings mark both forms. Generally, in French and English, nouns take ‘s’ at their end to mark plural. The corpora of Ngo Nlend (2006), and Ebongue and Fonkoua (2010), present cases in which names do not take ‘s’ in the plural form. We have some examples in the utterances below:

70. ce sont les **histoire** du quate (these are the stories of the quarters.)
71. je piff ses **lass** mal (I like making love.)
72. les **mouna** de mon big sont kem cet aprem, all sont brun (my elder brother's kids came this afternoon, they are all fair in complexion.)
73. tu doi me ya tu no que je ne peu pas te lep dans les **pebé** (you should like me you know I cannot let you down/in difficulties.)
74. pour que les **nga** nous confirme (a) (The girls should see us.)
75. elle a les **ndombolo** (she has big buttocks.)

In (70), 'histoire' (story) is determined by a plural definite article. It is supposed to take 's' at the end, to mark the plural; it should be 'les histoires' (stories); 'ses lass'(buttocks) has no 's' which expresses plural in French; 'mouna' (kids, children) has no mark of the plural form, though it is determined by a plural article 'les'. The same thing happens with nominal groups, such as 'les pebé' (difficulties), 'les nga' (young girls), 'les ndombolo' (big buttocks). As we can deduce, particularly illiterate young people do not apply and respect the rule governing the agreement between a noun and its determinant that states that when the determinant is in plural, the determined noun should be in the plural and marked by some particular endings.

But, there exist some utterances in which a university student can also ignore the above mentioned rule. The utterances below were produced by two students in Ngo Nlend' (2006):

76. mais tell lui que les **wé** la sont pour la bringue (But tell him that the things are for the party.)
77. elle a des **forme** (she has sexy shapes.)

It is shown that the plural form of 'wé' (things) and 'forme' (shapes) is not marked as it is supposed to, due to the fact that Camfranglais speakers often transfer the knowledge of the two official languages they have to the Cameroon youth language. Due to the fact that these two sentences were produced by students, people may think they have omitted 's' to the singular in order to get the plural form. The choice of "lui" in this context shows that utterance (76) can be from an educated speaker. Some French speakers do present confusion in the choice of personal pronouns, such as "lui", "la", "le", "l'" when they are direct object in a sentence.

In many cases, the names and nouns are in plural when they have to be. This mainly appears in the writings of university students, second cycle students of secondary education, and in corpora transcribed by teachers. The following examples are from secondary school students:

78. Je bac chez mon mec tia **les bogos** des fringues on se col après (I'm going back to my boyfriend to collect my money to buy dresses and shoes, I'll get back to you later.)
79. j'ai forget mes **ronds** chez ma big (I have forgotten my money in my elder sister's place.)
80. les gars kemmons se soir avec les **ngas** au jet 7 (a) (guys, let us see tonight with girls at the Jet 7.)
81. je ne ya pas les **wés-ci** (I do not understand anything from these things.)
82. je suis go take mes **dos** chez mon oncal (I went to my uncle to take my money.)
83. gare hier j'ai brin deux **nanas** dans ma cam, parmi les deux **nanas** il y avait ma go (dear, I have invited two girls in my room, and amongst of them there was my girlfriend.)

This set of sentences contains nouns and names that have the same morphosyntactic behavior as the one in French. ‘Bogos’ (money), ‘ronds’ (money), ‘ngas’ (young girls), ‘wés’ (things), ‘dos’ (money) and ‘nanas’ (young girls), are in plural because they are determined by plural determinants.

Some speakers do not respect the rule of agreement between a noun and its determinant when the word is an English one. Let us look at the following utterance:

84. les **wé** que j’ai do est le lommage pour go dans mes **enjoy** (the things I did were just a lie, it’s just that I wanted to go and enjoy myself.)

It is easy to see that ‘les wé’, which is ‘way’ (things) and ‘mes enjoy’ (my pleasures) do not have any mark of plural. It seems very clear that the level of education has quite a significant impact on the writings of Camfranglais by its speakers, and those who are interested in it, like researchers.

MORPHO-SYNTACTIC FEATURES

Verbal valency

The selection of personal pronouns functioning as indirect or direct objects in a verbal group shows some variations that depend on the author of the corpus. The corpora of Ngo Nlend (2006) and Ebongue and Fonkoua (2010) show that speakers from first cycle secondary education are free to select any personal pronoun amongst those expected, such as *le*, *la*, *l’*, *les*, *lui*, *leur*. Their limited knowledge in French does not enable them to differentiate the indirect transitive verbs that agree with indirect

personal pronouns (“lui”, “leur”) which can replace male or female nouns and direct transitive verbs that go with the following personal pronouns “le”, “la”, “l’”, “les”. Literate speakers remain very observant of French grammar, which recommends *le*, *la*, *l’* or *les* when it is a direct transitive verb, and *lui*, *leur* when the verb admits an indirect object. Here below are some examples in which there is confusion in the choice of one of these pronouns:

85. Gars le djo la call en solo il lui tell sa situation et il *l’a lancé two pièces*. (« dear, the guy called him in private, and told him his problem, and he gave him two hundred.)
86. *Guip-là* au moins fap cents avant de voir ce qu’elle va do. (« give her at least 500 before seeing what she will do.)
87. *Dis-là* que je la falla from. (« tell her that I have been looking for her.)
88. *Donne-le* les gomma là. (« give him the 50 francs.)
89. Tu hia non! *Guip les* d’abord les ultimatum. (« are you getting me? warn them first.)
90. Quand il sera nguémé, tu *le* guip même silan il va tcha. (when his money finishes, you give him 100 he will take.)

The above utterances contain direct transitive verbs and indirect transitive verbs. In these usages, speakers with a limited knowledge of French choose personal pronouns to function as direct object instead of the ones in indirect object. They do not know the difference between *lui*, *leur* and *le*, *l’*, *la*, *les*. In this set of examples, we have *guip-là* (give her), *donne-le* (give him), *guip-les* (give them), *tu le guip* (you give him), verbs such as *guip* (to give), *donner* (to give), *dire* (to

tell), are granted direct objects where the acrolectal variety users convoke *lui* (him/her) or *leur* (them). In (86) and (87), “là”, which is an adverb, is convoked instead of “la”, as personal pronoun.

According to Noumssi (1999), Cameroon French speakers present similar confusions in French. This shows that speakers of French in Cameroon, who practice basilectal and mesolectal French are confused in the selection of some personal pronouns that function as direct and indirect objects, such as *le, la, l', leur; les*. Noumssi (1999), analyses the use of these personal pronouns in Cameroon French. This confusion is extended to the practices of Camfranglais. One utterance has drawn our attention:

91. Tu *lui* as *see* où ? (where have you met or seen him?).

If the person that the personal pronoun replaces were a female, the speaker would have used *la* instead of *lui*, which indicates the masculine, according to them. The verb *see*, which is formerly a direct transitive verb in French and English, has become an indirect transitive verb. We have here a specific case of basilect users. Biloa (2003) examines the same cases in spoken and written forms of French in Cameroon. It is only the ignorance of grammatical rules of French that can justify these writings. Ignorance seems to be one of the reasons that make some users to prefer a simplified writing system TO that of French, which according to them, is very complicated and difficult to master. It is so clear that such writings are from the less and non-educated Camfranglais users. They do not know when and where to use personal pronouns for direct and indirect objects, such as *le, la, l', lui, leur*.

CONCLUSION

The study was carried out on a marginal corpus of a marginal language: A written corpus of a Cameroon youth language. The analysis of Camfranglais corpora transcribed by the authors, and written by its speakers with different school background, reveals linguistic tendencies particularly at the level of spelling, syntax, and morphosyntax, that vary according to the level of knowledge of the source languages it relies on. Whereas, Camfranglais written by school drop outs and students of the first cycle secondary education shows an orthography, a syntax, and a morphosyntax of Camfranglais, which ignore many grammatical rules of the two Cameroon official languages from which this Cameroon youth language is generated, Camfranglais of high school and university students tend to respect these grammatical rules in their writings. Besides, written corpora portray two types of Camfranglais: the Camfranglais of high school and university students, who tend to respect most of the French grammar rules, and some English grammar rules, and Camfranglais of the first cycle secondary education students, who still lack mastery of either French or English. This Camfranglais presents not only spellings very different from those in French, but also grammatical features, which are not French ones as we have seen in this study.

The Camfranglais transcribed by teachers contains the same grammatical features as that of university and high school students. Like high school and university students, teachers use their knowledge in French, English and any other language that provides Camfranglais with items to transcribe their oral corpora. That is why their Camfranglais is very close to each of these languages. Some linguistic features,

such as noun and verb agreement, and past participle agreement are managed according to the authors of each corpus. Sometimes, whether being more or less educated, there is a process of simplification and Frenchification of the writing system of Camfranglais. Lesser and (non-) educated speakers affranchise themselves unconsciously, due to their ignorance of the French and English grammatical rules.

A survey carried out by Ngo Ngog-Graux (2006) reveals that Cameroonians who speak Camfranglais very well are particularly the less and the non-educated ones. If educated young people systematically respect French and English grammatical rules, and try to spell even words coming from Cameroonian languages as they are spelt in the source languages, Camfranglais written by those who did not go to school, or those who hardly completed primary or secondary education, highlights spontaneous features. Their written Camfranglais is characterized by the disregard for French and English rules. This disrespect is due to their ignorance of Cameroon official languages and lack of basic knowledge of Cameroon languages, which provide Camfranglais with lexicons.

There may be a social variation of Camfranglais, which seems to be the beginning of the process for this Cameroon youth language to become a language. This process is subjected to three parameters, such as “social parameter, geographical parameter, and historical parameter. These parameters related to three variations: diatrasitic variations (co-related to social groups), diatopic groups (co-related to geographical situation), and diachronic variations (co-related to age groups)”² (Calvet 1993: 82). The written Camfranglais, which can be considered

as a marginal corpus, has just revealed the just described important linguistic features and attitudinal features that are the systematicity and stability of the acrolect of users due to their high level of education. This has enabled them to master French and English, and the non-systematicity and instability of mesolect and basilect users coming from their poor knowledge of English and French.

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ENDNOTES

1. "Indecisive spellings"
2. Our translation.