

*bàk mwà mè dó*¹ – Camfranglais in Cameroon

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Abstract

Camfranglais, a highly hybrid sociolect of the urban youth type in Cameroon's big cities Yaoundé and Douala, serves its adolescent speakers as an icon of "resistance identity" (Castells 1997), i.e. they consciously create and constantly transform this sociolect of theirs by manipulating lexical items from various Cameroonian and European sources, in an effort to mark off their identity as a new social group, the modern Cameroonian urban youth, in opposition to established groups such as the older generation, the rural population and the Cameroonian elites who have subscribed to the norms of "la francophonie". The linguistic strategies preferably applied in this lexical manipulation, i.e. phonological truncation, morphological hybridisation, hyperbolic and dysphemistic extensions, reflect the provocative attitude of its speakers and their jocular disrespect of linguistic norms and purity, clearly revealing its function as an anti-language (Halliday 1978). From a socio-political perspective, the creation of Camfranglais represents the appropriation of an imported language, French, under strong pressure of an exoglossic language policy which excludes the majority of the population from national discourse and upward social mobility. Being born as an anti-language, Camfranglais seems to be growing into an icon of the emerging new "project identity" (Castells 1997) of modern Cameroonian urbanity.

¹ Orthographically: 'Back moi mes do!' = 'Give me back my money!' (Camfranglais): *bàk* represents the functional extension of the English adverb 'back' in Camfranglais as a verb meaning 'return, give back'; *dó* 'money' either originates in the truncated Ewondo noun *dóla* 'money' which is an adaptation of English *dollar*, or in the English substandard *dough* 'money'.

Introduction

A growing awareness of the complexities and dynamics of the linguistic landscape in the big African cities (Gouaini & Thiam 1991, Kropp-Dakubu 1997, Calteaux 1994, Haeri 1997, Juillard 1995, Thomanek 1996) brings out new exciting insights into dimensions and patterns of multilingualism (Kamwangamalu 1996), into the mechanisms and motivations of code-switching (Finlayson & Slabbert 1997a, 1997b, 2000, Myers-Scotton 1993), into the rise of new urban vernaculars (Spitulnik 1998, McLaughlin 2001), and especially into the birth and emancipation of highly hybrid juvenile sociolects most of which seem to have started out as argots of the underworld (Kießling & Mous in print), e.g. Nouchi in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), Sheng in Nairobi (Kenya), Iscamtho in Johannesburg (South Africa), Indoubil and Lingala ya Bayankee in Kinshasa and Brazzaville (Congo), and Camfranglais / Francamglais in Yaoundé and Douala (Cameroon). These new urban varieties deserve careful study for three reasons. First, they directly reflect the transformations of local linguistic communities in confrontation with challenges of globality (Silverstein 1998, Castells 1997) and run counter against pessimistic theories about language death in the context of language shift and global convergence (Dixon 1997). Second, since they represent extreme cases of language hybridisation, they must be integrated into a comprehensive model of language contact; and in this, third, they might also add fundamentally to our understanding of the mechanisms of contact-induced language change, since conscious linguistic manipulation plays an important part in their making, which is not taken into account in received conceptions of language change (Thomason 2001, Thomason & Kaufman 1988, Sommer 2002).

It is not the aim of this contribution to add yet another description of Camfranglais to the ever-growing corpus of sketchy articles and lexical collections on this topic, e.g. Tiayon Lekobou 1985, Chia 1990, Chia & Gerbault 1991, Essono 1992, 1997, Cook 2001, Biloa 2003², Kouega 2003 – some of them remote and inaccessible though –, but rather to critically review some of the analyses, hypotheses and generalisations provided in most recent publications on this topic, to draw attention to some features of Camfranglais that have gone unnoticed so far, to present new data collected during fieldwork in Yaoundé 2002 and to integrate this case of language birth into the wider context of the discourse on the jargons and speech styles of the urban youth in Africa.

A short history of Camfranglais

Camfranglais – or Francamglais, as it tends to be called by its adolescent speakers today (p.c. Gardy Stein) – is a hybrid language spoken in the big cities of Cameroon, Douala and Yaoundé. In order to understand its linguistic makeup and its sociopsychological functions, it is necessary to sketch the sociolinguistic setting in Cameroon.

² This text has obviously been published twice: it is a copy of Biloa 1999.

Cameroon has been described as “Afrique en miniature”. With 248 distinct national languages (Breton & Fohtung 1991: 11) or even 275 (SIL 2001) it is number two in Africa after Nigeria, as regards sheer linguistic complexity.³ Since its independence in 1960, Cameroon has adopted and adhered to an exoglossic language policy, i.e. none of its 248 indigenous languages plays a role in vital domains of official language use on the national level such as education, administration and politics. Instead Cameroon has installed the imported languages of its former colonial masters, French and English, as official languages. This official exoglossic bilingualism is the outcome of Cameroon’s colonial past. After its “creation” in the Berlin Africa Conference in 1884 and an initial period under German rule (1884-1918), the territory of Cameroon was divided as a consequence of the treaty of Versailles after World War I: four fifths were mandated to France, the remaining fifth to Britain. Both colonial powers installed their languages in their sectors, which made the French Cameroons francophone and the British Cameroons anglophone. With the reunification of both parts in 1961 after independence, Cameroon had to face the problem of building a nation from a multitude of highly diverse, partly antagonistic, ethnic groups who had already started to define themselves along the lines of two major competing identities, francophone and anglophone, superimposed on the background of 248 ethnolinguistically defined identities.

One measure taken to reconcile these internal oppositions was to declare official bilingualism, i.e. French and English were installed as official languages of equal status and the nationwide promotion of this bilingualism was guaranteed, as formulated in article 1, paragraph 3 of the constitution of 1996. Official bilingualism has become a quasi-sacred symbol of Cameroon’s national unity and has gained Cameroon prestige and importance on the international level (Wolf 2001: 185; Tchoungui 1983: 113). The reality, however, is drastically different. Official bilingualism (Echu 1999a, 1999b) is very imbalanced, due to the predominance of francophones on the political and administrative scene, many of whom cannot speak English (Chumbow & Simo Bobda 1995: 19). In order to move up the social or professional ladder, it is absolutely necessary for anglophones to become bilingual in French, whereas francophones do not have to become bilingual in English. Eventually, many pupils in the francophone area leave secondary school without being able to hold a conversation in English (Kouega 1999).

As much as the official bilingualism at the national level is a fiction, individual French/English bilingualism is also grossly underdeveloped. Even though most individuals are multilingual in a series of indigenous Cameroonian languages, they are – if they have mastery of the official languages at all – either francophone or anglophone, but only rarely both. This is because identity has become to be defined partly along the lines of the ex-colonial

³ In terms of internal linguistic *diversity* by the way, it is rather Tanzania which deserves the label „Africa in miniature“, since *this* is the only country in Africa which accomodates representatives of all four traditionally recognized major language phylums on its territory – Afroasiatic, Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan (see Maho & Sands 2002) – whereas Cameroon could only claim to house representatives of three of them: Afroasiatic, Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan, but not Khoisan.

languages. Most Cameroonians, however, use neither French nor English for interethnic communication, but one of the other unofficial vehicular languages such as Pidgin English or Fulfulde, they have no mastery of neither French nor English and are thus excluded from participation in the modern state.

In this situation of alienation from African home languages in the urban setting, with a pressure to linguistically transcend ethnic and superimposed colonial boundaries under conditions of a highly schizophrenic language policy that practically prevents the majority of Cameroonians from taking part in national discourse as free citizens due to their limited access to the official languages, Camfranglais – beside regional Cameroonian varieties of French (Renaud 1976, 1979, de Féral 1993) – has arisen allegedly in the 1970's. Opinions on its ultimate roots diverge. Tiayon-Lekobou (1985: 50) claims that it has originated from an initial criminal argot in Douala, whereas Lobé-Ewane (1989: 33) ascribes its creation to students at the University of Yaoundé. De Féral (1989: 20) who describes the same sociolect under the name “français makro” (probably derived from French *maquereau* ‘pimp’) actually distinguishes two varieties: “makro étroit” spoken primarily by thieves as a medium of secret communication, and “makro large” which is more widespread and spoken mainly by young urbans such as pupils, students, taxi-drivers for the purpose of symbolizing an urban identity. It is this Camfranglais in the wider sense which is used predominantly by male youths between the age of 10 up to 30 who feel the need to establish their identity increasingly by linguistic manipulation, distancing themselves from the the older generations represented mainly by their parents, from the rural population that tends to live a more traditional way of life, and from the upper social classes and Cameroonian elites who define themselves as either franco- or anglophone. Used as an in-code in informal contexts among equals, Camfranglais also spreads to other cities in Cameroon and to other social groups, becoming increasingly emblematic of the urban way of life in Cameroon. This spread is to some extent explained by the fact that many adolescents who have become initiated to Camfranglais at secondary school end their secondary education halfway, and after leaving school continue to use it in their places of work, importing it to other social networks outside school (Kouega 2003: 525).

Although the phenomenon of Camfranglais still tends to be discussed within the prescriptive paradigm of falling standards and cultural degradation, being seen as a major obstacle which prevents pupils from learning proper French and sometimes even perceived as “vandalisme linguistique” (Lobé Ewane 1989: 34), there is a growing awareness of its merits: transcending ethnicity, undermining imported linguistic norms and creating a void where new indigenous linguistic norms are in the making.

The linguistic properties of Camfranglais

The genius of Camfranglais is that it integrates Non-French lexical items into a French morphosyntactic frame: “sa structure morphosyntaxique a surtout l’ossature du français”

(Biloa 2003: 275), i.e. Français Populaire, but its essence and its cognitively salient mark is a vocabulary drawn from virtually all available sources, e.g. French, English, Pidgin-English, even German, and several Cameroonian languages such as Duala, Ewondo, Basaa and Bamileke-Ghomala'.⁴ Thus, in (1a-d), *mbindi* 'small, young' is taken from Duala *mbindi* 'small antelope', *piak* 'take a turn, turn around a corner, escape' is from Bamileke-Ghomala', *sharp* and *kick* are from English, *agogo* 'watch' is from Hausa, and *dumm* 'stupid' is from German.

(1) Lexical insertion of borrowings

- (a) *Le book-là c'est pour les mbindi, moi je suis mini.*
'This is a children's game, I am too old for this.' (Chia / Gerbault 1991: 275).
- (b) *Le test de linguistique étant sharp, j'ai préféré piak.*
'The linguistics assignment was very difficult, I preferred to beat it.' (Chia / Gerbault 1991: 275).
- (c) *On a kick mon agogo.*
'They stole my watch.' (Chia / Gerbault 1991: 274).
- (d) *Il pense que je suis dumm.*
'He thinks that I am stupid.'

The very name Camfranglais or Francamglais – a blend of Cameroon, Français and Anglais – reflects its hybrid nature. In this aspect it resembles on the one hand other simplified hybrid vehicular languages of Cameroon, especially Pidgin French and "Franglais", a pidginised form of Anglo-French (Dang Akuh 1986), and on the other hand code-switching as a process which produces extremely hybrid utterances. However, Camfranglais is decisively different from both phenomena, pidginisation and code-switching, in form, function and in history.

First, it did not come into existence by way of "natural" interference⁵ or imperfect second language acquisition as in cases of pidginization and creolization, but by a conscious effort on the side of the speakers who try to distort the underlying language(s) to create a medium for distancing: „le Camfranglais est une création consciente et artificielle qui tire profit de la présence d'une pléthore de langues en contact.“ (Chia & Gerbault 1991: 269). Thus, while the

⁴ According to Kouega's (2003: 518) recent count, content words in a representative corpus of Camfranglais originate to almost equal parts (between 25% and 30%) from French, English and Pidgin English, all Cameroonian languages taken together are represented by almost 17%. This procedure is of course highly problematic, since it presupposes a simplistic definition of Camfranglais which would include all content words in a given discourse labeled as "Camfranglais" just because of the occurrence of some of its characteristic lexical items, ruling out the possibility of having codeswitching between Camfranglais, Français Populaire, Pidgin English. Kouega's count is useful, however, in this context since it reveals the paramount role of English varieties as lexical sources in the formation of Camfranglais, more than 50% of Camfranglais lexical items being drawn either from Cameroonian English or Pidgin English.

⁵ If „natural“ is to be taken as „not conscious to the speakers“.

West African Pidgin English – one of the ultimate sources of Cameroonian Pidgin English – arose because of the need to find a medium of communication among people who had no language in common (de Féral 1989, Gilman 1980), i.e. the classical background of pidginization, the *raison d'être* of Camfranglais is quite different: on the one hand there is the desire to have a secret code that excludes outsiders, “un besoin de communiquer en excluant certains membres de la communication”, and on the other hand there also is a “besoin de rire et de divertir” (Chia & Gerbault 1991: 269).

Second, even though Camfranglais arises in the context of code-switching and owes a lot to it, it cannot be equated with it for two major reasons: first, the lexical “switches” are not random, but are fixed in certain emblematic lexemes which constitute the core lexicon of Camfranglais. Second, most of these emblematic lexemes cannot be ascribed directly to any of the source language, be that French, English, Pidgin-English or any of the Cameroonian languages such as Duala, Ewondo, Basaa or Bamileke-Ghomala’. Instead they have been manipulated or deliberately deformed on one linguistic level at least, sometimes on more than one level and to a considerable extent, even beyond recognition.

The spirit of the language lives in its lexical creations. So the key to its understanding is the way how these neologisms are formed. Strategies of lexical manipulation operate on all linguistic levels: phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. It is obvious, though, that there is a preference for certain strategies over others. The most common phonological manipulations are truncation (clipping) and metathesis. On the morphosyntactic level, derivational crossing or morphological hybridisation and dummy affixation are most common. Semantically, preferred strategies are metonymy and dysphemism. But before we set out to discuss these properties in detail, some remarks on phonological structure are in order.

Phonology

Bilola (2003: 255-61) – following Tiayon 1985 – devotes an entire subchapter to a phonological description, acknowledging the fact that Camfranglais is more than just French or English, phonologically. This change in paradigm is highly appreciated. Thus it appears that Camfranglais has eight vowel and 22 consonant phonemes.

(2) Vowel system (adopted from Tiayon 1985: 80ff., Bilola 2003: 255 and rearranged):

<i>i</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>u</i>
<i>e</i>		<i>o</i>
<i>ɛ</i>		<i>ɔ</i>
	<i>a</i>	

(3) Consonant system (adopted from Tiayon 1985: 80ff., Biloa 2003: 256 and rearranged)

<i>p b</i>	<i>t d</i>	<i>tʃ dʒ</i>	<i>k ɡ</i>
<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ɲ</i>	<i>ŋ</i>
<i>f v</i>	<i>s z</i>	<i>ʃ</i>	<i>h</i>
	<i>l</i>		
	<i>r</i>		
		<i>y</i>	<i>w</i>

It is important to note that this phonological system is neither French nor English, but approximates Pidgin English (de Féral 1989: 189-94) and actually many Grassfields Bantu systems to some extent. English diphthongs are replaced by monophthongs, e.g. [*kem*] < English *came*, and the Schwa vowel is integrated as /a/ into Camfranglais. English interdental fricatives tend to be replaced either by their alveolar sibilant counterparts, e.g. [*broza*] < English *brother*, or by alveolar plosives, e.g. [*tɪʃ*] < English *thief*. It is not clear to what extent French nasalised vowels become adjusted in this system or whether it is necessary to set up nasal vowels as distinct phonemes. This situation resembles the one in Cameroonian Pidgin English again (de Féral 1989: 193).

What has escaped attention of most investigators so far is that Camfranglais is clearly tonal. At least all the emblematic lexemes display distinct tonal patterns not to be varied (5) and so far at least two tonal minimal pairs (4) have been found. It is not clear to what extent tonality also operates on the morphosyntactic level. It is also not clear which principles govern tone assignment in the creation of French or English based neologisms, nor is it clear to what extent original tone patterns are kept in those lexemes that are transferred to Camfranglais from Cameroonian sources (e.g. Biloa 2003: 262ff.).

(4) Tonal minimal pairs (Chia (1990: 116), cited after Biloa (2003: 254), and Kouega (2003: 513):

- (a) *yáŋ* ‘good’
yàŋ ‘buy’
- (b) *kík* ‘kick’
kìk ‘steal’

(5) Near minimal pairs that display tonal contrasts:

bèlé ‘pregnant’
bólé ‘finish, terminate’
bòlè ‘soil, dirty, blemish’
bùló ‘job’

This after all raises the problem of transcription which has never seriously been addressed in any of the previous analyses. Instead, for purpose of transcription some adaptation of the French orthography has been used for Francanglais. For the sake of phonetic clarity, the following convention will be adopted here: all examples are given in a French type orthography; those lexical items that have been checked for phonetic details thoroughly will be presented in a phonetic-phonological transcription in square brackets [] including tone notation, immediately following their “orthographic” form. At the present stage of investigation it is not possible to give complete transcriptions in IPA, since many of the examples have been drawn from published sources that do not bother to use IPA.

Semantic manipulation

Since the semantic aspects of lexical manipulation have been largely neglected in most previous accounts of Camfranglais, I will present them first. The most common semantic manipulations to be found are metonymy (6), dysphemism (7) and hyperbole (8). Thus, in (6b) the body part noun ‘belly’ is used to convey the concept of pregnancy – which is a functional extension found in many Cameroonian languages (e.g. Isu, Weh, Aghem, Men) and might have been directly adopted from Cameroonian Pidgin English (Todd 1985: 122). In (6d) the deformed French noun *béret* ‘barret’ is taken to refer to those persons who typically wear it.

(6) Metonymy

- (a) *blo* ‘fight’ < English *blow*
bus ‘go’ < English *bus*
ʃap ‘difficult’ < English *sharp*
bèlé ‘pregnant’ < English *belly*
bùt, mbùt ‘fool, foolish’ < Ewondo [*m*]bùtúkù ‘stranger’
mbéré ‘policeman, soldier’ < French *béret* ‘barret’
kàm-gâs ‘heavily built person’ < English ‘guards’, originally used to refer only to heavily built and muscular persons serving as guards; first component deriving from an abbreviation involving the name Cameroon.
- (b) *má ngà é bèlé.*
‘My wife is pregnant.’
- (c) *Il me prend pour un boutte [bùt].*
‘He treats me like a fool.’
- (d) *Les mbérés [mbéré] aiment beaucoup des problèmes.*
‘Uniformed people very much like (to cause) problems.’

The essence of dysphemism is to render neutral concepts negative by applying derogatory designations or by highlighting unfavourable aspects of the referent. This happens in (7b) where the Camfranglais verb *bólé* ‘finish, terminate’ is used for the meaning ‘make love’ and

in (7a) where a rich old person is labelled a ‘wrinkle-neck’ and ‘elderly people’ are ‘the exhausted’.

(7) Dysphemism

- (a) *couplié* ‘rich old person, old fart’ < French *cou* ‘neck’ and *plié* ‘wrinkled’
mange-mille ‘policeman’ < French *mange* ‘eat!’ and *mille* ‘thousand’⁶
jetter ‘drop (of a passenger)’ < French *jeter* ‘throw out’
lourd ‘rich’ < French *lourd* ‘heavy’
tomber ‘go’ < French *tomber* ‘fall’
baptiser ‘leave without paying’ < French *baptiser* ‘baptise’
chantier ‘small informal restaurant’ < French *chantier* ‘building-site’
appuyer ‘kiss’ < French *appuyer* ‘press’
saccager ‘have sex’ < French *saccager* ‘loot, pillage, plunder’
torpiller ‘have sex’ < French *torpiller* ‘torpedo’
visée ‘the space in-between a girl’s legs as she walks’ < French *visée* ‘aim, mark’
écorce ‘talisman’ < French *écorce* ‘bark (of tree)’
airbags ‘breast and buttocks (of a girl)’ < English *airbags*
[bólé] ‘make love’ < Camfranglais *bólé* ‘finish, terminate’
[bùfé] ‘cheat; earn’ < French *bouffer* ‘eat, devour’
[lóm] ‘cheat, deceive’ < Bamileke-Ghomala’ *lóm* ‘fuck’
[lé fàtigé] ‘elderly people, old people’ < French *les fatigués* ‘the exhausted’
- (b) *J'ai bolé [bólé] avec elle cette night.*
‘I have made love to her that night.’ < ‘I have terminated / finished with her that night.’

Dysphemism also combines with acronyms such as *opep* ‘illegal taxi’ which derives from ‘organisation des pays exportateurs de poussière’ (Echu 1999c: 125), a satirical allusion to the fact that these taxis are frequently found in rural areas where they collect a lot of dust on rough roads.

(8a-b) illustrate the hyperbolic use of French *lancer* ‘throw, hurl’ for the meaning ‘give’ and French *attaque* ‘attack’ for the first rows in a classroom, i.e. those where the teacher attacks.

(8) Hyperbole

- (a) *atak* ‘first rows in a classroom’ < French *attaque* ‘attack’ (Bilola 2003: 258)
lancer ‘give’ < French *lancer* ‘throw, hurl’

⁶ This coinage alludes to the custom widespread among policemen to take bribes of 1000 Francs CFA. It derives an extra-dysphemistic potential from its morphotactic and phonological parallelism to the French compound *mange-mil* ‘millet-eater’, a type of granivorous bird that feeds on millet (Kouega 2003: 523) and is a pest.

- (b) *Lance-moi une pièce.*
 ‘Give me a coin of 100 CFA (at least).’

It is also common to find highly satirical instances of onomastic synecdoche, i.e. cases where the name of a person or a place has become conventionalised as (part of the) designation for one of its salient properties.⁷

(9) Onomastic synecdoche

bakassi ‘dangerous place’ < *Bakassi* disputed peninsula at the Cameroon-Nigeria border, an area of conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon

tchanchouss ‘sandalette made in Cameroon’ < Pidgin English *Dschang-Shoes*, i.e. shoes made by the inhabitants of Dschang mainly from old tyres

johnny ‘to walk’ < English whiskey brand name ‘Johnny Walker’

kodjak ‘totally shaved head’ < *Kojak*, from the name of a hero of an American TV series

Phonological manipulation

The most common phonological manipulation is truncation, i.e. deletion of segments or even syllables. Truncation may work from both ends of the lexeme, either from the end as in (10) or from the beginning as in (11). For further examples see Biloa (2003: 268-272) and Kouega (2003: 520, 527).

(10) Terminal truncation

- (a) *Camer* ‘Cameroon’ < French *Cameroun*
dang ‘dangerous’ < French *dangereux*
bùt, mbùt ‘fool, foolish’ < Ewondo [*m*]bùtúkù ‘stranger’
sap ‘dress’ < French *s’habiller* [plus derivations: *sappeur* ‘someone who is dressed well’]
kat ‘quarter’ < French *quartier*

- (b) *Le blow était dang.*
 ‘This fight was very dangerous.’ (Chia & Gerbault 1991: 274).

(11) Initial truncation

- nól* < French *bagnole* ‘vehicle’
lédz < English *village*

It is often claimed that metathesis is a central process in the coinage of new words in Camfranglais (Chia & Gerbault 1991, Mbah Onana & Mbah Onana 1994, Biloa 2003), as

⁷ See Kouega (2003: 524) for more examples.

already testified by variation in the very name of the idiom, Camfranglais or Francamglais. But this might be true to a far lesser extent than supposed, since it is often ignored in this context that most of the cited examples, e.g. *meuf* [*mɛf*] ‘woman, girlfriend’ (derived from French *femme* ‘woman’), *rém(é)* ‘mother’, *rép(é)* ‘father’, have perfect parallels in the Verlan varieties of urban French in Paris and other cities (Goudaillier 1997, Andreini 1985, Seguin 1996, George 1993). So just citing these examples (12) does not prove that metathesis is really productive in Camfranglais.

(12) Metathesis à la Verlan

basic French lexeme	epithesis	syllable metathesis	tone assignment
<i>mère</i> ‘mother’ / <i>mɛr</i> /	<i>merɛ</i>	<i>remɛ</i>	<i>rém(é)</i>
<i>père</i> ‘father’ / <i>pɛr</i> /	<i>pɛrɛ</i>	<i>repɛ</i>	<i>rép(é)</i>
<i>frère</i> ‘brother’ / <i>frɛr</i> /	<i>frɛrɛ</i>	<i>rɛfrɛ</i>	<i>rэфрэ</i>
<i>sœur</i> ‘sister’ / <i>sœr</i> /	<i>sɛrɛ</i>	<i>rɛsɛ</i>	<i>rés(é)</i>

These words might simply have been adopted from substandard varieties of French already in metathesized form. This is even more probable as one looks at Nouchi, the urban youth language of the Ivory Coast (Gouedan 1987, Kouadio N’gessan 1991, Kube 2003, Lafage 1991), which also comes up with a couple of verlanised forms, among them exactly those cited above in (12). Moreover, the Camfranglais lexeme *babtou* ‘European’ is a verlanised version of *toubab* which must have been borrowed directly from Nouchi, since the source language Dyula is spoken in the Ivory Coast far away, but not in Cameroon. The background of this transfer is that Francophone Cameroonians tend to orientate towards the Ivory Coast which – as the most francophone country in Africa – is regarded as a trendsetter in many ways.

Examples that might better illustrate syllable metathesis as a productive process in Camfranglais are *dybo* ‘someone’ (already based on the truncated form *body*), *sitac* ‘taxi’ (which seems to coexist with *taco*), *stycmic* ‘complicated, delicate’ (< French *mystique*), *tcham* ‘fight’ (< English *match*).⁸

There are also several processes of phonological adaptations that could simply be explained by restrictions in phonetic and in syllable structure in Camfranglais, e.g. the replacement of English interdental fricatives by their alveolar counterparts ([*broza*] < English *brother*), monophthongisation of diphthongs ([*kem*] < English *came*), epenthesis ([*sukul*] < English *school*) and phonetically conditioned metathesis ([*aks*] < English *ask*), see also Kouega (2003: 513). A replacement of *f* by *p* vis-à-vis Standard English in *lɛp* ‘leave’ and *lap* ‘laugh’ might

⁸ If *tcha* ‘arrest someone, take someone along with force’ originates in English *catch* (as suggested by Kouega 2003: 514), there is at least one other process of distortion that has to be invoked to account for the change of terminal *k* to glottal stop – which is not too far-fetched though, since this kind of sound shift is frequently found in the Grassfields Bantu languages.

be due to the fact that these items have been introduced via Pidgin English where this alternation of final consonants is also observed.

There are, however, simplifications which are highly idiosyncratic and could not be explained by phonetic restrictions, e.g. *mbòk* ‘prostitute’ < French *bordel* ‘brothel’ which combines prenasalisation and truncation with an obscure suffixation of *-k*.

Morphosyntactic manipulation

The most salient mechanisms of morphosyntactic manipulation are hybridization and dummy or parasitic affixation. Hybridization is taken here as the process of combining lexemes and affixes which are not from the same source. Thus in (13) French verbal stems are combined with the English gerund suffix *-ing* and in (14) hybridization is achieved by deriving nouns of agent by applying the Pidgin English suffix *-man* to non-Pidgin words, whereas in (15) non-French lexical items are combined with French suffixes such as *-is* (causative), *-er* (infinitive), *-ois* (adjective), *-iste* (noun of agent), *-ia* (abstract quality).

(13) Hybridization by affixation of the English gerund suffix *-ing* to non-English words

largue-ing [*larg-ij*] < French *larguer* ‘shoot, score, fire’

lanc-ing [*lãs-ij*] < French *lancer* ‘hurl’

(14) Hybridization by affixation of the Pidgin English agentive suffix *-man* to non-Pidgin English words

[*fémàn*] ‘crook, cheat, rogue’ < French *fait* ‘done’

[*dónmàn*] ‘easy-going guy who is generous’ < French *donner* ‘give’

[*èlékémàn*] ‘useless fool who is too strict with obeying rules unnecessarily’

(15) Hybridization by affixation of French suffixes to non-French words

(a) *shak-er* [*ʃeik-e*] < English *shake*

know-er [*now-e*] < English *know*

(b) *whit-is-er* ‘to talk like a white person’ < English *white*

(c) *stat-ois* ‘someone who is or has been in the U.S.’ < English *States*

(d) *Mbengu-iste* ‘someone who goes regularly to France’ < Duala *Mbeng* ‘France’

(e) [*fémàn-ia*] ‘villainy, dirty tricks’ < Camfranglais [*fémàn*] ‘crook, cheat, rogue’

There is also an over-application of non-productive French derivational suffixes such as *-ard* (16a) and *-al* (16b). This is also typical of French argot (Dauzat 1946, Guiraud 1956, Calvet 1994) in general, so it is not possible to determine if these derivations are genuine Camfranglais innovations or borrowings from a non-standard French source.

(16) Over-application of non-productive French derivational suffixes

- (a) *ghettos-ard* ‘someone who lives in the ghetto’
fêt-ard ‘someone who likes to party a lot’
- (b) *mbér-ál* ‘policeman’ < Camfranglais *mbéré* id. (< French *béret* ‘barett’)
merc-al ‘Mercedes car’ < *Mercedes*

Hybridization could also be achieved by prefixation of a homorganic nasal which gives a Bantu flavour to non-Bantu words (Chia & Gerbault 1991; Biloa 2003: 260). In a considerable number of Grassfields Bantu languages of Cameroon, e.g. Bamileke-Ghomala’ (Nissim 1981), Bamileke-Fe’fe’ (Hyman 1972, Hyman, Voeltz & Tchokokam 1970), Bali-Mungaka (Stöckle & Tischhauser 1993, Hombert 1980) and Bamum (Hombert 1980), a noun-initial nasal has lost its semantic content and its original function of indicating a specific noun class. Therefore, it is clear that its only function in (17) is deformation and deliberate hybridization.

(17) Hybridization by prefixation of a Bantoid homorganic nasal *N-* to non-Bantu words⁹

<i>ngé</i> [<i>ŋ-ge</i>] ‘gay’	< French <i>gai</i> ‘gay’
<i>nzéré</i> [<i>n-zere</i>] ‘administer’	< French <i>gérer</i> ‘administer’
<i>nga</i> [<i>ŋ-gà</i>] ‘dame, woman, girlfriend’	< English <i>girl</i>
<i>mbèrè</i> [<i>m-béré</i>] ‘policeman, soldier’	< French <i>béret</i> ‘barett’

Dummy affixation by parasitic suffixes in *-o* (18a) and in *-sh* (18b) is often combined with truncation.¹⁰ The difference to hybridization above is that the affixes have no semantic content and could not be ascribed to any specific source.

(18) Dummy affixation

- (a) Parasitic suffixes *-o* and *-cho*
- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>pa-cho</i> | < French <i>papa</i> ‘father’ |
| <i>ma-cho</i> | < French <i>mama</i> ‘mother’ |
| <i>ták-ò</i> | < French <i>taxi</i> |
| <i>ba-cho</i> | < French <i>baccalauréat exam</i> |
| <i>host-o</i> | < English <i>hospital</i> |
| <i>merc-o</i> | < <i>Mercedes car</i> |
| <i>loc-o</i> ‘home’ | < French <i>location</i> |
- (b) Parasitic suffixes *-sh* and *-Vsh*
- | | |
|--------------|------------------------|
| <i>ba-sh</i> | < English ‘basketball’ |
|--------------|------------------------|

⁹ This process of prenasalisation has also been noted as a distinct feature of Pidgin English as spoken by people of Bamileke origin (de Féral 1989: 45).

¹⁰ Actually, *-o* is observed as dummy affix in many substandard varieties of widely different languages, such as English, German (Androutsopoulos 1998, Greule 1983/84), Sheng, the urban youth variety in Nairobi (Moga/Fee 1993, Abdulaziz/Osinde 1997). A parasitic affix *-sh* also occurs in Sheng.

<i>cin-osh</i>	< English / French ‘cinema’
<i>mét-osh</i>	< French <i>métis</i> ‘mixed blood’
<i>tak-esh</i>	< French <i>taxi</i>

Some English verbs seem to have acquired such a high emblematic status either in their radical form or in a specific inflected form that they are inserted into the French matrix “sans tenir compte du génie de la grammaire qui les accueille” (Bilola 2003: 251). This vividly illustrates that these lexical insertions defy any analysis in terms of code-switching.

(19) Lack of adaptation to the morphosyntactic frame

- (a) *On a kick mon agogo.*
‘They stole my watch.’ (Chia / Gerbault 1991: 274)
- (b) *La rém [rém] a cook le tarou.*
‘Mother has prepared the taro.’ (Chia / Gerbault 1991: 276)
- (c) *Est-ce que tu va kè[m] [kém]?*
‘Are you coming?’
- (d) *On va win¹¹*
‘you will win!’

Thus, the English verbs *kick* and *cook* in (19a-b) are not inflected, neither by a French past participle suffix *-é* nor by its English counterpart *-ed*. The English verb *win* in (19d) is left in its basic form and is not inflected by the French infinitive marker *-er*. And in (19c) the past form of the strong English verb ‘come’ appears in a context where either *come* or *com-ing* (English matrix) or *cam-er* (French matrix) would be appropriate strategies of inflection.

Another morphosyntactic peculiarity of some Camfranglais neologisms is their ambivalence with regard to word class – a phenomenon described as ‘hypostase’ by Bilola (2003: 273). Thus, Chia & Gerbault (1991: 276) present a Camfranglais lexeme *tinge* which acts as a noun ‘suit’ in (20a) and as a verb ‘be well-dressed’ in (20b).

(20) Word class ambiguity in Camfranglais

- (a) *Son tinge est mo* ‘His suit is nice.’
- (b) *Il a tinge today* ‘He is well-dressed today.’

Some English items change their original word class as soon as they get established in Camfranglais. Thus, the English adverb *back* and the nouns *thief* and *bus* in (21) become verbs in Camfranglais.

¹¹ The slogan of a lottery in Yaoundé in 2002.

(21) Word class change in Camfranglais

- (a) *Bak [bàk] moi mes do.*
‘Give me back my money!’
- (b) *On a tiff [tíf] mes do.*¹²
‘They have stolen my money!’
- (c) *Je bus à Sawa yang [yàn] chem.* (Bilola 2003: 250)
‘I go to Douala to buy a shirt.’

Purely on the syntactic level, Camfranglais uses the French participle *fatigué* [fàtìgé] ‘exhausted’ in immediate postverbal position to indicate a long duration and an excessive performance of the action encoded in the verb.

(22) French participle *fatigué* [fàtìgé] ‘exhausted’ in durative and excessive function

- (a) *On a work fatigué.*
‘We have worked too much.’; ‘We are over-worked.’
- (b) *... on a bougui fatigués.* (Bilola 2003: 277)
‘... we have danced until exhaustion.’
- (c) *J'attends depuis fatigué.*
‘I’ve been waiting since long.’

Since Camfranglais in its most current form has a French-based morphosyntax, nouns are either classified as masculine or feminine. It has not been systematically investigated what principles govern gender assignment with those nouns of non-French origin, but it seems that in most cases the parallel French lexeme determines the gender of the competing non-French noun, e.g. *jobajo* ‘beer’ from Duala is assigned feminine gender in Camfranglais on the basis of the feminine French counterpart *bière*, and *ndjassa* ‘scissors’ from Duala is assigned masculine gender in Camfranglais on the basis of the masculine French counterpart *ciseau* (Bilola 2003: 263).

Functions of Camfranglais

Camfranglais is most typically used for “horizontal communication”, i.e. communication among equals in a peer group, and most of all in informal settings where adolescents happen to interact, such as bus stations, school premises, parties and football-grounds, situations where they want to show off and present themselves as streetwise, with topics revolving

¹² At least in this case, the change in word class and the concomitant semantic shift of ‘thief’ to ‘steal’ is not special to Camfranglais: the same word is attested in Cameroon Pidgin English (de Féral 1989), also in Ghanaian Pidgin English (Huber 1999), and thus might represent a direct lexical transfer from Cameroonian Pidgin English into Camfranglais.

around “food and drink, money and ways of laying hands on it, sex and relationships with women, physical look of people and their feelings, and ways of addressing people and referring to them” (Kouega 2003). Camfranglais is also used in written contexts such as sending emails to friends,¹³ but it tends to be avoided in “vertical communication”, i.e. when talking to superiors such as teachers or parents. This pattern is typical of languages of solidarity that have a covert prestige and live on deliberate opposition to a “superstrate”. Thus, the major function of Camfranglais is “that of creating / reinforcing boundaries, unifying its speakers as members of a single speech community and excluding outsiders from intragroup communication” (Saville-Troike 1989: 14). The outsiders to be excluded are the parents, the older generation in general, those that live the traditional way of life and who are not prepared to meet the challenges of modernity, but also the Cameroonian elites who have subscribed to the norms of “la francophonie”. In this ideology Camfranglais truly deserves to be called an anti-language in Halliday’s sense (1978: 164ff.), i.e. a sociolect which creates identity by conscious social and linguistic opposition to established identities of the dominating group(s). In contrast to anti-languages of other socially stigmatized groups, such as criminals, prostitutes, and ethnic minorities, the point with the urban youth, e.g. the Camfranglais speakers, is not only a matter of linguistically marking off an “underdog”-identity, rather, it is a matter of creating this identity first, since it is not readily available. As this creation takes place in the spirit of opposition to the established francophone and anglophone identities, it does not come as a surprise that the linguistic icons of these identities, i.e. lexical items of French and English provenance, are treated with provocative and jocular disrespect. In mutilating them by truncation, distorting them by morphological hybridization and dysphemistic and jocular hyperbolic extensions, violating the norm of linguistic purity (imposed by “la francophonie”) in an aspiration towards mockery and rudeness, Camfranglais clearly reflects its function as an icon of a “resistance identity” (Castells 1997) characteristic of youth subculture.

Taking up Heine’s (1977) distinction of horizontal vs. vertical media of communication, i.e. media that signalise equal social status and solidarity (horizontal) vs. media used for establishing distance and instrumentalised for upper social mobility (vertical), what we observe in the case of Camfranglais, is the formation of a new medium of horizontal communication basically from a vertical one, i.e. French, accomplished by actively creating a vacuum where norms could be easily manipulated. This is corroborated by the observation that youths frequently report that one of their principal motivations to use Camfranglais is that they feel relieved from the pressure to constantly observe the norms of the not fully mastered European standard languages French and English. Camfranglais, after all, seems to represent

¹³ There seems to be another form of Camfranglais which is used predominantly in the market and in the streets, e.g. by street-vendors / hawkers, and in the criminal underworld, already mentioned by de Féral 1989 as “makro étroit”.

the process and the result of a creative appropriation of an imported foreign language (Naguschewski 1997).

At the same time Camfranglais also reflects the inner-Cameroonian antagonism of French and English, since it is to a considerable extent the product of francophone Cameroonian pupils who have been exposed to English, but who left secondary school without being capable of holding a conversation in English (Kouega 2003: 516, Kouega 1999), yet aspiring to its prestige by adopting English words wherever they can get hold of them. This probably explains why content words from English widely outnumber French content words in Kouega's corpus (2003: 518) in spite of the fact that French provides the morphosyntactic matrix. The outstanding eminence of the English contribution to Camfranglais is also testified by the fact that Kouega's article (2003) has been published in the journal "World Englishes" which is devoted to the study of English varieties worldwide, while almost all previous contributions have viewed the Camfranglais phenomenon from the French angle (Lobé-Ewane 1989, Chia 1990, Chia & Gerbault 1991, de Féral 1993, Mbah-Onana & Mbah-Onana 1994, Essono 1992, 1997, Biloa 2003).

From a psychosocial point of view, Camfranglais fills the void between the official languages, French and English, on the one side, which are not felt to be appropriate means of expressing Cameroonian urban identity, and the indigenous languages of Cameroon on the other side which are not appropriate either, since they are too much ethnically loaded and too strongly associated with traditionality and rurality. Cameroon Pidgin English which would be an option due to its spread as a lingua franca and its potential of transcending ethnicity, is also out since it is too strongly associated with lack of education, illiteracy and backwardness.

In contrast to European settings of "resistant" youth culture, though, in Cameroon, just like in most other African settings, the generation conflict does not seem to be the predominant motor in the creation of the anti-language, it is rather a feeling of socio-economic deprivation and being excluded from the access to the commodities of the modern world by corrupt elites. This becomes manifest in the association of Camfranglais as a medium of artistic expression with rebels such as Lapiro¹⁴ de Mbanga, a song-writer and performer who used to be very popular in the late 1980's. Many adolescents hold him responsible for neologisms coming up in modern Camfranglais. Actually, youths would rather sit and listen to his texts than dance to the songs when he performed, eagerly picking up his neologisms as stylish and emblematic of the urban way of life. The attractiveness of his lyrics owes to the fact that he used to be very critical with life circumstances in Cameroon, especially regarding corrupt politicians, and spoke out openly and satirically what others were afraid to express in public, in fear of

¹⁴ Probably a stylised acronymistic abbreviation of his name Lambert Pierre Roget.

governmental repression.¹⁵ According to Gardy Stein (p.c.) musicians of the next generation such as Koppo who play hiphop music also use a form of Camfranglais in their songs, though they tend to call it Francanglais – which might mark a major break in subcultural linguistic norms.

Conclusion: from youth subculture to new urban style?

It has been shown that Camfranglais as an urban sociolect in the big cities of Cameroon is more than just “un conglomérat de langues formé des deux langues officielles du Cameroun, le français et l’anglais et des langues nationales” (Mbah Onana & Mbah Onana 1994: 29), more than a mere “mélange de langues camerounaises, de français et d’anglais” (Bilola 2003: 247, 262) or even “mélange confus de vocabulaire français, anglais, pidgin et camerounais (douala, ewondo, bassa, etc.)” (Lobé-Ewane 1989), but that there is an element of deliberate creative distortion to it which is manifest in a range of linguistic strategies applied to lexical items of all origins, which makes it a typical anti-language of the urban youth type (Kießling & Mous in print), one of the stylistic icons of adolescent subculture.

The meaning of youth subcultures is to challenge the dominant discourse about reality which is manifest in mainstream “culture” as the authorized and “normalized” codes through which the social world is organized and experienced. This challenge is expressed not directly, but obliquely in style (Hebdige 1979) – potentially on all levels of life, but predominantly in those close to the surface, e.g. dress, hair-cut, music, dance and language use. It is in these accessoires that symbolic violation of cultural norms is celebrated, articulating a “resistance identity” (Castells 1997). “The communication of a significant *difference*, then (and the parallel communication of a group *identity*), is the ‘point’ behind the style of all spectacular subcultures” (Hebdige 1979: 102). The difference articulated by Camfranglais is jocular resistance against linguistic norms imposed by an exoglossic education system which forces two ex-colonial languages, French and English, upon pupils, blocking upward social mobility and perpetuating the exclusion of the majority of the population from public life. In violating the linguistic icons of this suppressive exclusion (by truncation, morphological hybridisation, dysphemistic and hyperbolic extensions and bizarre metonymies and synecdoches), Camfranglais becomes at the same time powerful symbol and articulator of non-conformism to standard (linguistic) norms.

But since it is also part of the larger complex of youth subculture, it is necessary to view Camfranglais in its wider context. An investigation like this calls for supplementation by in-depth discourse studies¹⁶ to find out precisely who uses this highly emblematic vocabulary of

¹⁵ Due to his popularity Lapiro was to a certain extent immune against these repressions. Though after some time, it is said, the government succeeded in making him stop by buying him.

¹⁶ Presently undertaken by Gardy Stein at the University of Hamburg.

Camfranglais in what kinds of situations to achieve what kinds of communicative goals? Studies such as these should also address the following questions and puzzles:

To what extent has Camfranglais also spread to the provinces of Adamawa, the North and the Extreme North, in towns such as Ngaoundéré, Garoua and Maroua, where the sociolinguistic setting is decisively different from the rest of Cameroon in that the Ful language competes with French for the vehicular function? To what extent is Camfranglais spread in the Anglophone provinces where Pidgin English has a much stronger standing as lingua franca (Schröder 2003)?

Is Camfranglais mainly a francophone phenomenon? Or to what extent is there „diglossia“ of a French-based and a Pidgin-English-based variety, as suggested by Chia (1990: 123) cited by Biloa (2003: 274f.), illustrated by the examples (23) and (24) from Schröder (2003: 76).

(23) Camfranglais as relexified Cameroon Pidgin English

A fi blou yu.

‘I can beat you up.’

(24) Camfranglais as relexified French

On l’a blou.

‘He has been beaten up.’

The same phenomenon has been described by Tiayon Lekobou (1985: 62) as a contrast of “Camspeak via French syntax” vs. “Camspeak via Pidgin English syntax”, and by de Féral (1989: 20f., 165ff.) as an opposition of “français makro” vs. “pidgin makro”. If these findings could be corroborated by in-depth discourse studies, it would confirm the point that the emblematic core of Camfranglais indeed consists of a set of lexical items which could be embedded – theoretically – into any morphosyntactic matrix. A parallel observation has been made by Goyvaerts (1988: 233) in the context of Indoubil, an urban youth language of the Republic of Congo, which has a Lingala matrix in Kinshasa / Brazzaville and a Swahili matrix in Bukavu.

Furthermore, Camfranglais seems to acquire new functions which go beyond its resistance image. There is an internet presence of Camfranglais neologisms¹⁷, obviously inspired by the Nouchi website (<http://www.nouchi.com>). Camfranglais also starts to be exploited effectively for literary purposes, marking urbanity (Nganang 2001). This indicates that there is a growing awareness of Camfranglais, still transcending ethnic identity, but also transcending the discourse paradigm of falling standards and reaching beyond the adolescent user group. Having started off as an antilanguage articulating resistance identity, Camfranglais seems to

¹⁷ <http://www.cameroononline.org/go/index.php?module=Semantics&func=display&cid=1>

be on its way to become adopted also by other social groups, spreading outside the urban youth, forming new norms and setting its own standards, slowly growing into an icon of an emerging new “project identity” (Castells 1997), a symbol of modern urban life in Cameroon. Therefore, what we witness here might be nothing less than the birth of a new national language of Cameroon in the linguistic “configuration of an urban identity” (McLaughlin 2001).

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