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Language Play in Cameroon English Usage: A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Facebook Posts by Cameroonian Diaspora

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Master's
Degree in English Language Studies

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DEDICATION

To my parents for their love and care

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My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor, Professor Valentine Ubanako, for his invaluable guidance and professional support. His expertise and insights have been instrumental in shaping both the structure and content of this dissertation.

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this MA dissertation entitled: “Language Play in Cameroon English Usage:
A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Facebook Posts by Cameroonian Diaspora”
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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Facebook posts from the Cameroonian diaspora between 2018 and 2024 to investigate the use of language play as a means of conveying meaning in response to socio-political tensions. Through a qualitative lexico-semantic analysis, the study identifies various inventive linguistic strategies, including word combinations, stylized spelling, text-image juxtaposition, language mixing, blending, and sarcasm. The findings demonstrate that language play serves as a potent tool for social and political engagement, cultural expression, and identity construction within Cameroonian online political discourse, highlighting the need for educational programs to incorporate this emerging discourse for enhanced communication and social cohesion.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude analyse des publications Facebook de la diaspora camerounaise entre 2018 et 2024 afin d'examiner l'utilisation du jeu linguistique comme moyen d'exprimer du sens en réponse aux tensions socio-politiques. Grâce à une analyse lexico-sémantique qualitative, l'étude identifie diverses stratégies linguistiques inventives, notamment les combinaisons de mots, l'orthographe stylisée, la juxtaposition texte-image, le mélange de langues, le télescopage lexical et le sarcasme. Les résultats démontrent que le jeu linguistique est un outil puissant d'engagement social et politique, d'expression culturelle et de construction identitaire au sein du discours politique camerounais en ligne, soulignant la nécessité pour les programmes éducatifs d'intégrer ce discours émergent afin d'améliorer la communication et la cohésion sociale.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

To effectively begin this chapter on language play in Cameroonian Facebook posts, it is important to acknowledge the concerns raised by experts regarding the negative impact of technology on communication (Thurlow & Bell, 2009). These concerns are echoed in two notable comments from influential British newspapers. The first is the assertion that “text messaging corrupts all languages” (*The Economist*, 24 May 2008) and the second is the statement that “the English language is being beaten up, civilization is in danger of crumbling” (*The Observer*, 7 March 2004). To justify their apprehensions, the experts refer to the following text written by a young British girl (with a translated version provided for clarity):

My smmr hols wr CWOT. B4, we used 2 go 2 NY 2C my bro, his GF & thr 3:-@ kds FTF. ILNY, its gr8. Bt my Ps wr so {:-/ BCo 9/11 tht thay dcdd 2 stay in SCO & spnd 2 wks up N. Up N, WUCIWUG-0. I ws vvv brd in MON. 0 bt baas & ^^^^.

My summer holidays were a complete waste of time. Before, we used to go to New York to see my brother, his girlfriend and their three screaming kids face to face. I love New York, it's a great place. But my parents were so worried because of the terrorism attack on September 11 that they decided we would stay in Scotland and spend two weeks up north. Up north, what you see is what you get- nothing. I was extremely bored in the middle of nowhere. Nothing but sheep and mountains.

In a subsequent news report of March 7, 2004, *The Guardian* observed: “What is certain, however, is that the ensuing fear failed completely to address the young girl’s original communicative intent or her linguistic (and institutional) awareness. It is not hard to imagine that she knew perfectly well what she was up to in terms of playing with language” (Thurlow & Bell, 2009:1040). This highlights that the phenomenon of language play, which is becoming increasingly prominent among younger people in social media spaces, warrants thorough investigation rather than instill fear. Language usage on social media spaces in this technology age has brought to English the creativity and innovations that cultural adaptations brought to it in the 1980s, with research on “New Englishes” providing the basis for understanding the dynamics of language as it travels across cultures (see Kachru 1992; Schneider 2007). This use of language online presents linguists with an unprecedented opportunity for investigation of language on the basis of new data.

1.1 Motivation of the study

This study is motivated by the broader academic interest in understanding how digital communication influences language use and development. Social media has been a fertile ground for linguistic innovation, where users engage in playful manipulation of language, including word blends, code-switching, stylized spelling, and the creation of new expressions. These practices not only reflect the creativity of users but also serve as a lens through which to examine the evolving nature of language in a digital age. By focusing on the Cameroonian context, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on World Englishes, digital linguistics, and sociolinguistics, offering insights into how language is adapted and transformed in online spaces. A further motivating factor for the study is its potential pedagogical implications. Understanding the ways in which language play is used in digital communication can inform language teaching practices, particularly in multilingual contexts like Cameroon. By recognizing and incorporating these forms of language use into educational curricula, educators can foster a more inclusive and relevant approach to language learning that acknowledges the linguistic realities of students both within Cameroon and in the diaspora.

1.2 Scope and purpose of the study

The study focuses on the innovative and playful use of language by Cameroonians living abroad, particularly as it manifests in their English-language usage on Facebook posts. The research aims to explore how members of the Cameroonian diaspora creatively manipulate language to express their identities, socio-political views, and cultural ties, using English as a medium enriched with local linguistic elements. The study is limited to a lexico-semantic analysis of Facebook posts made by Cameroonian diaspora members over a six-year period, from 2018 to 2024. This timeframe was selected to capture the evolution of language use against the backdrop of significant socio-political events in Cameroon, particularly in the English-speaking regions. The posts analysed are written in Cameroon English, with a focus on how this variety of English is employed in combination with other languages, such as Pidgin and indigenous languages, to create new meanings, expressions, and forms of communication.

The primary purpose of the study is to investigate the linguistic strategies used in these posts, including word blends, code-switching, stylized spellings, and other forms of language play. By

examining these elements, the research seeks to understand how language is adapted and transformed in digital spaces, and how it reflects the unique experiences and identities of the Cameroonian diaspora. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the broader field of sociolinguistics, particularly in the areas of World Englishes and digital linguistics, while also offering insights that may inform language teaching practices in multilingual contexts like Cameroon.

1.3 Social media landscape and language change

The emergence of social media platforms has revolutionized the way people communicate and interact online. These digital spaces have become fertile grounds for linguistic innovation, leading to the evolution of new forms of language and communication styles. In the context of Cameroon, a country with a rich linguistic diversity and a history of colonial influence, the use of English as a lingua franca has given rise to unique linguistic practices and expressions among its speakers. This essay seeks to explore how Cameroonian English speakers engage in language play on Facebook, a popular social media platform, and how this phenomenon contributes to language change within this specific linguistic community.

The literature on language change in the digital age highlights the significant impact of social media on language use and communication styles. Crystal (2011) discusses how social media platforms have facilitated the rapid spread of new words, phrases, and expressions, leading to the emergence of a global digital language. This phenomenon is particularly evident on Facebook, where users engage in language play through various forms of linguistic creativity. Thurlow and Mroczek (2011) emphasize the role of social media in shaping linguistic creativity and innovation among users. They argue that social media platforms provide a space for users to experiment with language and engage in playful interactions, resulting in the creation of new linguistic forms.

In the context of Cameroon, Deumert (2010) explores the complex linguistic landscape of the country, highlighting the dynamic interactions between English and indigenous languages. The use of English as a lingua franca has resulted in language contact and code-switching between English and indigenous languages. This linguistic diversity is reflected in the language play observed on Facebook among Cameroonian English speakers. Users often engage in code-switching, combining English with indigenous languages to create humorous and culturally-relevant expressions.

1.4 Language play

Language play is a ubiquitous phenomenon that has been observed across various linguistic and cultural contexts (Kress, 2010). It involves the use of language in creative and playful ways to convey meaning, often transcending the literal sense of the words used (Halliday, 1978). This concept has been extensively studied in linguistics, with researchers highlighting its significance in shaping social interactions and cultural identity (Thurlow, 2003).

One of the key areas where language play is particularly prevalent is social media (Herring, 2007). Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have become essential tools for communication and self-expression. The informal nature of these platforms allows users to engage in language play, experimenting with linguistic forms and styles to convey their thoughts and emotions (Danet, 2001). This phenomenon has been extensively documented in various studies, which have shown that language play on social media is a key aspect of online communication and social interaction (Tagg, 2015).

The importance of language play in social media cannot be overstated. It serves as a means of building social connections, fostering community, and creating a sense of belonging among users (Warschauer, 2000). Language play also enables users to express themselves creatively, using language as a tool for self-expression and identity construction. Furthermore, language play on social media can be a powerful tool for social change, as it allows users to challenge dominant discourses and promote alternative perspectives.

Social media is a crucial link for communication and learning, as it provides a platform for people to share knowledge, ideas, and experiences. Facebook, in particular, is one of the most popular social media platforms, with over 2.7 billion monthly active users worldwide (Facebook, n.d.). Its widespread use has made it an essential tool for communication, education, and social interaction.

1.5 Cameroonian youth and social media engagement

Cameroonian youths have increasingly become active participants in the global phenomenon of social media. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have

become integral parts of their daily lives, providing them with a platform to connect with friends, share information, and express themselves. This trend is not unique to Cameroon, as young people across the world are embracing social media as a means of communication and self-expression.

Social media has become a powerful tool for Cameroonian youths to engage with each other and the wider world. According to a study by Njock (2016), social media usage among Cameroonian youths has been on the rise in recent years, with a significant portion of the population actively using platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. These platforms allow young people to connect with friends and family, share photos and videos, and stay up-to-date on current events and trends.

Cameroonian youths are among the most active social media users in Africa (Pew Research Center, 2022). A 2022 study by the Pew Research Center found that 94% of Cameroonian youths aged 18-29 use social media, with Facebook being the most popular platform. This high level of engagement is driven by several factors:

- *High mobile phone and internet penetration:* Cameroon has experienced a significant increase in mobile phone and internet access in recent years (International Telecommunication Union, 2022). According to the International Telecommunication Union, mobile phone penetration in Cameroon reached 92% in 2022, while internet penetration reached 43%. This widespread access to mobile technology has made social media more accessible to young people in Cameroon.
- *Cultural affinity:* Social media aligns with Cameroonian youths' cultural values of community and self-expression (Mbembe, 2017). Facebook, in particular, provides a space for them to connect with friends and family, share their experiences, and engage in discussions on topics that matter to them. Cameroonian youths also use social media to express their creativity and individuality through memes, videos, and other forms of online content.
- *Educational and professional opportunities:* Facebook offers Cameroonian youths opportunities for learning and career development (Lenhardt & Madden, 2017). They use the platform to access educational resources, connect with potential employers, and showcase their skills and talents. There are numerous Facebook groups and pages dedicated to career advice, job postings, and professional networking in Cameroon.
- *Political and social activism:* Social media has become an important tool for Cameroonian youths to engage in political and social issues (Tsalikas & Katsaitis, 2018). They use Facebook to

mobilize for social change, participate in online debates, and hold authorities accountable. In recent years, Cameroonian youths have used social media to organize protests, raise awareness about human rights abuses, and advocate for political reforms.

The high level of social media engagement among Cameroonian youths has a number of implications. First, it suggests that social media is a powerful tool for reaching and engaging with young people in Cameroon. This is important for organizations working in the areas of education, health, and development (UNESCO, 2011). Second, the use of social media by Cameroonian youths is shaping the country's media landscape (Chadwick & Howard, 2017). Social media platforms are increasingly becoming the primary source of news and information for young people, and they are also playing a role in shaping public opinion and political discourse. Finally, the high level of social media engagement among Cameroonian youths presents both opportunities and challenges for the country's future. On the one hand, social media can be a force for positive change, allowing young people to connect with each other, learn new things, and engage in civic activities (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010). On the other hand, social media can also be used to spread misinformation, hate speech, and other harmful content (Boyd, 2014). It is important for Cameroonian youths to be aware of the potential risks and benefits of social media use, and to use these platforms in a responsible and ethical manner.

Social media plays a significant role in the lives of Cameroonian youths, providing them with a platform to connect, express themselves, and engage in public discourse. While social media has its drawbacks, its importance in Cameroon cannot be underestimated. As technology continues to advance, it is likely that social media will continue to play a central role in the lives of young people in Cameroon.

1.6 Articulating the research problem

The linguistic features of Cameroonian English, which are shaped by the country's complex linguistic and cultural heritage, are also significant in understanding language play on Facebook (Simo Bobda, 2008). Cameroonian English is characterized by a blend of African and European linguistic influences, which has resulted in a unique linguistic profile that is distinct from other varieties of English. Cameroon is a multilingual country with over 250 languages spoken. English is one of the two official languages of Cameroon, and it is the language of instruction in schools and universities.

Cameroonian English (CamE) is a distinctive variety of English spoken in Cameroon, a Central African nation with a rich linguistic heritage. Its emergence and evolution are deeply intertwined with Cameroon's colonial past, postcolonial experiences, and diverse cultural influences. CamE exhibits unique linguistic features that set it apart from other English dialects, reflecting the country's multilingual environment and socio-historical trajectory (Mbangwana, 2013). CamE is characterized by a blend of English vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation influenced by Cameroon's indigenous languages and French, the other official language. Its lexicon incorporates numerous Cameroonisms, words and expressions specific to the Cameroonian context (Todd, 1984). These include terms related to local flora and fauna, cultural practices, and everyday life, such as "chop" (eat), "palaver" (dispute), and "juju" (traditional medicine).

Grammatically, CamE exhibits certain deviations from Standard English. For instance, the habitual aspect is often expressed using the present continuous tense (e.g., "I no can go") is common (Mbangwana, 2013). Furthermore, CamE phonology is influenced by the prosodic features of Cameroonian languages, resulting in distinct intonation patterns and vowel pronunciations (Mafany & Ambe, 2011). Cameroonian English speakers on Facebook engage in a variety of different types of language play. These include: Code-switching, wordplay, neologism, emojis

Language play, the creative and humorous manipulation of language, is an integral aspect of CamE. Cameroonian English speakers employ language play to express their unique identities, engage in social interactions, and navigate cultural norms (Ngefah, 2019). CamE speakers use language play to construct and negotiate their identities within diverse social contexts. Through the use of humor, wordplay, and creative language, they assert their individuality, align themselves with particular social groups, and challenge societal expectations (Mbangwana, 2013). Language play also serves as a tool for social interaction and relationship building in Cameroonian society. CamE speakers engage in playful banter, teasing, and storytelling to foster a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Language play facilitates the sharing of cultural knowledge, values, and beliefs, strengthening social bonds within communities (Ngefah, 2019). The key issue however, is the enormous new innovations that this media has brought to the use of language in a virtual space, a problem that is still to be fully investigated and documented. Certainly this new mode of communication is challenging to traditional classroom pedagogy. How is the traditional language teacher in the classroom going to reconcile this new way of speaking with the formal way of speaking taught in the classroom? How can we formalize and

make this variety usable across speakers both social media savvy and novices? These are the problems that this thesis raises and hope to provide some attempted answers.

1.7 Research objectives

This research investigates the linguistic features and strategies employed by Cameroonian English speakers on Facebook to engage in language play. It examines how these language play practices differ from standard English usage and explores the cultural and social implications of such language play in online interactions, identity formation and social dynamics that underlie this phenomenon. By analyzing the language play of Cameroonian English speakers on Facebook, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of language play in social media and its significance in shaping social interactions and cultural identity within this community of users.

Specifically, the following objectives key will be pursued:

- identify and describe the linguistic features and strategies of language play employed by Cameroonian English speakers on Facebook.
- analyze how these language play practices reflect and shape Cameroonian identity and social interaction online.
- investigate the implications of language play for understanding the evolution and dynamics of Cameroonian English as a variety of English.
- provide recommendations for language education and policy in Cameroon based on the findings of the research.

1.8 Research questions

This study is guided by the following research questions.

1. What linguistic features and strategies do Cameroonian English speakers use on Facebook for language play?
2. How do Cameroonian English speakers use humor, sarcasm, and irony on Facebook?
3. How does language play on Facebook help Cameroonian English speakers shape their social identities and handle linguistic norms?

4. How do Cameroonian English speakers blend global internet slang and memes into their Facebook language?
5. What are the teaching implications of this new communication style, and how can educators connect traditional English with online language use?

1.9 Relevance/ rational of the study

The research is significant because it provides a detailed analysis of language play in a context that has been understudied: Cameroonian English on Facebook. It also examines the cultural and social implications of language play, which has been largely overlooked in previous research. The findings of this study have implications for language teaching and learning, as they can help educators to understand how learners use language play in online contexts and how to teach language play more effectively. In summary we can at least articulate five key domains in which this study will be of relevance.

- *Academic significance:* The study will contribute to the growing body of research on language play and online discourse, particularly in understudied regions like Cameroon. It will provide new insights into the linguistic features, social functions, and cultural implications of language play in this context.
- *Theoretical contribution:* The study will develop a theoretical framework for understanding language play in online discourse, with a focus on the Cameroonian context. This framework will contribute to sociolinguistic and discourse analytic theories by providing a detailed analysis of a specific language play phenomenon and its social and linguistic implications.
- *Social relevance:* The study will provide insights into the language practices and attitudes of a significant portion of the Cameroonian population, with implications for language education and policy. The findings could be used to develop resources and strategies for teaching and learning Cameroonian English, and for promoting intercultural communication and understanding.
- *Methodological innovation:* The study will employ innovative methodological approaches to analyze language play on Facebook, such as corpus linguistics or social network analysis. These methods will allow for a comprehensive and rigorous analysis of the data, and will contribute to the development of new methodological tools for studying online discourse.

- *Practical application:* The findings of the study could be used to develop resources and strategies for teaching and learning Cameroonian English, and for promoting intercultural communication and understanding. Additionally, the study could inform language policy decisions in Cameroon, ensuring that the language practices and needs of Cameroonian English speakers are taken into account.

1.10 Structure of the work

This work is divided into five chapters: A general introduction, which presents the background of the study, general view of Cameroonian youths and their engagement towards social media, social media landscape and language change, research problem, question, objectives, motivation, the relevance of the study and the structure of the work. Chapter Two is a literature review. Here, some conceptual approaches that underpin language play are discussed and a number of empirical studies in the domain of language play are summarized. Chapter Three is methodology; here we discuss the methodology of data collection and analysis used for this research while Chapter Four is presentation and analysis of data. Chapter Five, which is the general conclusion, presents a summary of the major findings, the pedagogic relevance of the study, suggestions for further research and a conclusion. This is followed by a list of references. An appendix of some key Facebook posts not discussed in Chapter Four ends the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

This chapter focuses on three broad aspects, namely a review conceptual literature, a review of theoretical literature and a review of empirical literature. Given the dynamics of communication in online space, several issues related to human communication will be thoroughly summaries, including how this new medium of communication is changing the nature of human to human interaction. The chapter ends with a summary of contribution.

2.1 Conceptual literature

A broad area of conceptual issues shed light on any research on social media space. These conceptual matters are discussed in this section.

2.1.1 Computer-mediated communication, discourse, social media and language play

This investigation can be broadly situated within the bigger context of Computer-mediated communication (CMC), but also boards on discourse analysis within social media. CMC stands as a cornerstone in various academic disciplines, including psychology, communication studies, media studies, and linguistics. It serves as a foundational lens for understanding human interaction in the digital realm from a cyber-psychological standpoint. While CMC predates the internet, the advent of Web 2.0 and the proliferation of internet-enabled technologies have propelled it into a prominent area of study, shedding light on the intricate interplay between human communication and technology. CMC predominantly entails interactions mediated by electronic devices, facilitating human-to-human communication across digital platforms (Metz, 1994). Early investigations into CMC predominantly centered around text-based communication, examining the influence of specific technological features on user behavior. Concepts such as the synchronicity of communication, communication modality, persistence of communication, media richness, media naturalness, and social presence have been pivotal in shaping our understanding of CMC and its effects on user perceptions and behavior (Herring, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Ziegler, 2016; Zhou & Zhang, 2007; Treem et al., 2020; Walther et al., 2018; Daft & Lengel, 1986; Kock, 2011). Despite the evolution of CMC research, these factors continue to be central to inquiries within the field (Petrocchi et al., 2020).

Discourse analysis is a diverse and complex area of study that integrates multiple principles, approaches, and methodologies to examine how language is used across different social settings. Van Dijk (2001) notes that discourse analysis scrutinizes spoken, written, or digital forms of communication to reveal hidden social, cultural, and cognitive frameworks. When applied to online communication, discourse analysis offers an insightful perspective for comprehending the nuanced use of language on social media platforms like Facebook. Social media platforms are crucial in influencing and managing how language is used and communication is practiced. According to Crystal (2011), the digital nature of social media has greatly changed language dynamics, including linguistic creativity and identity formation. Social media's features have introduced new ways for people to express themselves and interact, allowing for playful language use that showcases both personal and group identities. The examination of social media discourse employs multiple theoretical frameworks such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and critical discourse analysis. Sociolinguistic theories, as outlined by Androutsopoulos (2014), shed light on language variation and identity expression in online contexts. Pragmatic frameworks, discussed by Gumperz (1982), provide a means to explore the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use on social media. Additionally, critical discourse analysis, as proposed by Fairclough (1995), enables the investigation of power relations, ideologies, and social inequalities present in online discourse.

Studies on language play and creativity within social media discourse have highlighted the widespread use of humor, wordplay, memes, and other forms of linguistic playfulness (Tagg, 2012). Social media platforms provide distinctive environments where users can engage in language play, producing and disseminating content that showcases their linguistic creativity and cultural allusions. These playful linguistic activities play a crucial role in shaping digital identities and fostering the development of online communities. The cultural and sociolinguistic aspects of language use on social media are especially notable among Cameroonian English speakers. Focusing on this linguistic group, it is crucial to investigate how their unique language features and communication practices interact with the digital environment of social media. Exploring how they negotiate linguistic norms, perform identities, and build communities within this cultural setting offers valuable insights into the intricate relationship between language, culture, and social media.

Language play is an integral part of language development and use, extending to adult language behaviors (Crystal, 1998; Cook, 2000). It encompasses a broader sociocultural perspective and often involves integrating form, meaning, and function by creatively manipulating language.

According to Cook (2000), language play includes both playing in and with the language. Playing in the language involves using language in a playful manner, focusing on sounds, rhythm, rhyme, and grammatical structures. Playing with the language means experimenting with units of meaning, inventing new words, or combining them in creative ways. This can include using irony or mockery to play with the message. Thus, language play blends form, meaning, and function. Cook (1997) posits that language play is fundamental to being part of a community.

Language play occurs when the rules of literal discourse are suspended (Crystal, 1998:4). This idea is similar to Bakhtin's (1941) concept of carnival, which refers to the medieval carnival as a time when everyday rules and regulations are temporarily lifted, allowing for playful and imaginative language use (Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013; 2016). Danet (2001), a pioneer in studying online language, identified four factors contributing to frequent language play in online communication: (a) the dynamic nature of digital interaction, which provides instant feedback; (b) its immersive quality, allowing users to become deeply engaged and lose track of time; (c) the influence of hacker culture, which popularized playful uses of symbols and typography in online communities; and (d) the masking of identity, including physical appearance, ethnicity, and gender.

2.1.2 Writing in a textually mediated social world

The concept of texts is fundamental to the study of language; as most social practices involve language in some capacity. It's important to clarify what we mean by "text" since its definition varies across disciplines. In fields like media studies or literature, a text can encompass a film, a novel, a TV program, or a newspaper article. For linguists, a text refers to any coherent piece of language, usually written, though spoken language becomes a text when transcribed. The term "text," like "practice" and "discourse," can vary in scale. A text can be as brief as a single-word headline or as extensive as an entire book. Texts are situated in both time and space, created and recorded in diverse ways. They might be spray-painted on walls, published in newspapers, or written in diaries. Once created, texts are used by being read, acted upon, or responded to. Text is often considered a product of language, characterized by stability and fixedness. It serves as a reference point in interactions and a starting point for analysis. Texts such as letters, novels, or newspapers can change in function and value as they move across different events. They originate from one context and transition to another.

As social practices have shifted online, many texts in contemporary life have also moved to digital platforms, acquiring new properties. The materiality of text has changed; a letter, novel, or newspaper once existed on paper but now appears on screens. This transition has been extensively studied (e.g., Snyder, 1998). Online texts, such as Twitter posts, exist within a stream of messages, linked to previous and subsequent tweets, and can be original posts or retweets. The relationships between texts vary across platforms like Twitter, Facebook, weblogs, or Wikipedia.

Texts are crucial in the online world, making text and text creation more pervasive in all aspects of life. Everyday activities, such as planning a holiday or writing an assignment, are mediated through texts. The digital world is constantly being written, whether through single-authored websites, collaboratively written wikis, or brief comments on social networks. This constant writing creates records and information used by others, fuels search engines, and becomes the product of companies like Google and Facebook. Google has become the largest language corpus in the world. Both online and offline texts are interconnected, with their meanings influenced by intertextual links, which are more complex online.

Online texts are not stable reference points like print-based texts; they are fluid and subject to continuous change. Many people can contribute to this change. Newspapers illustrate the difference between the physical and virtual worlds. A physical daily newspaper is fixed for the day and can be archived, whereas online news is constantly updated, and users can add comments at any time. These changes in the nature of text reflect the idea that most social practices involve language and literacy. We live in a textually mediated social world where texts are integral to social life. Texts are central to social interaction, with much spoken language performed in the context of written language. Language and literacy are at the core of social change, structuring knowledge and enabling communication, especially in the online world. Online interactions are more mediated, and the connections between texts are greater, with different constraints and possibilities emerging in digital spaces.

2.1.3 Sociocultural perspectives on Communication

This investigation adopts sociocultural perspectives on communication and learning, emphasizing that interaction is central to human learning (Vygotsky, 1939/1978). From this viewpoint, language use is seen as part of social activities within the context where users are engaged. The nature of these interactions is not predetermined but is dynamically negotiated within the social context, aligning with Goffman's (1974) framework theory. Goffman argues that participants

always seek to understand the activity they are involved in, frame their activities based on this understanding, and adjust their communication accordingly, influencing the course of the interaction. Hence, the framing of the activity is continuously redefined by the participants.

Goffman's framework theory posits that interactions involve a primary framework and various layers of framing. During interactions, participants can transform these primary frameworks, for instance, by shifting from serious to playful modes through jokes or irony, thereby changing the nature of the interaction. The most common transformation, according to Goffman, is "make-believe keying," where playfulness is central, often achieved by manipulating the linguistic elements used in communication. When language play is used, it adds layers of humor, satire, or irony to the interaction. Danet (2001) suggests that online communication is particularly suited for language play because the relative anonymity reduces accountability, allowing for more "pretend" or "make-believe" behaviors.

In social media interaction studies, small shifts in textual expressions indicate how communication is framed and keyed. Online interaction provides unique linguistic repertoires, distinct from face-to-face communication. For example, using emoticons can shift a serious message to a more playful tone. All forms of make-believe keying can be seen as a type of play. The focus and theoretical foundation of this study necessitate a method that closely examines the linguistic repertoires used by Cameroonian social media users in their textual interactions.

2.1.4 Approaches to language online

Baton & Lee (2013) outline three key directions to which research in language in the virtual space is taking. A brief review of these approaches is necessary to situate the context of our study. This section describes the three key approaches to language online within linguistics.

Structural features of computer-mediated communication

A prevalent approach to analyzing language online has focused on identifying and describing linguistic features and strategies unique to online communication, distinct from formal written or face-to-face spoken interaction. Typically, researchers compare language strategies used in online media with those used in traditional modes of communication. A central topic within this approach is whether text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) should be categorized as speech, writing, or a hybrid of both (Herring, 1996; Baron, 2003). Thus, early research in CMC

drew on established linguistic concepts to comprehend language use online. Additionally, some scholars have sought to characterize CMC as a "new" language variety, highlighting distinctive features such as... (examples from Barton & Lee, 2013:5):

- acronyms and initialisms (e.g. GTG for 'got to go', LOL for 'laugh out loud'),
- word reductions (e.g. gd for 'good'; hv for 'have'),
- letter/number homophones (e.g. U for 'you' and 2 for 'to'),
- stylized spelling (e.g. I'm sooooooooo happy!)
- emoticons (such as :-) and :(),
- unconventional/stylized punctuation (e.g. '!!!!!!!!!!!!!!', '.....').

As a result, many labels have been used to describe the set of peculiar discourse features identified in CMC such as "emailism" (Petrie 1999), "Netspeak" (Crystal 2006), "interactive written" discourse (Ferrara et al. 1991), and other publicly recognized terms such as "e-language", "chatspeak", "textspeak", "cyber language", and "internet slang" etc. Early studies on computer-mediated communication (CMC) often took a deterministic approach, suggesting that new technological features inherently led to new forms of language. Initially, there was little discussion of the contextual and social factors that might have also influenced these linguistic changes. Researchers frequently collected large amounts of publicly available online data randomly, without considering their specific discursive and social contexts. They made generalizations based on statistical analyses of these corpora. Over time, corpus data began to be combined with discourse analysis, leading to the development of the term "computer-mediated discourse analysis" (CMDA) (Herring, 2001). For instance, Ko (1996) compared structural features of synchronous CMC data from InterChange, an online educational platform, to existing spoken and written corpora from offline contexts. This body of work provided valuable theoretical insights and new research opportunities. However, there was a tendency to overgeneralize findings, implying that static and predictable conventions existed across all CMC language. In reality, what might be called Netspeak features are not used uniformly in all types of CMC or contexts. There are variations among individual users and across different online platforms.

Social variation of computer-mediated discourse

As researchers delved into computer-mediated communication (CMC), they recognized that written genres are intricately linked to their users and social contexts (Hyland, 2002). This realization prompted a shift in focus towards understanding how CMC language is influenced by diverse social factors and situated within specific usage contexts (Herring, 2002; Giltrow & Stein, 2009). This line of inquiry acknowledges both the regular patterns and variations in CMC

language usage across different contexts. Users adapt their writing styles in various CMC modes to suit different communicative goals. Consequently, studies began to emerge exploring social variations in CMC language. These investigations include detailed analyses of specific CMC types such as blogging (Myers, 2010) and SMS texting (Tagg, 2012). Additionally, there is a growing body of research focusing on how language usage online intersects with identity, particularly regarding gender differences (Herring, 1996; Danet, 1998), and how individuals perform social identities through linguistic features and styles (Bechar-Israeli, 1995; Nakamura, 2002). Viewing social network sites as platforms for everyday storytelling, Page (2011) adopts a narrative approach to examining identity performance in social media, exploring how new narrative genres emerge as traditional ones are reshaped in new media environments. Reflecting this socio-cultural perspective, another group of researchers investigates CMC features across different cultures and linguistic backgrounds. Instead of solely examining CMC from a monolingual (often English) standpoint, this research examines how speakers of various languages adapt new writing forms to different degrees (Danet & Herring, 2007). This approach often draws on pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis, considering the influence of context and users' perceptions of their online activities.

Language ideologies and metalanguage

In more recent years, another strand of linguistic inquiry has emerged, drawing upon concepts rooted in sociology and language ideology (Blommaert, 1999). Studies within this framework not only examine the micro-level features of language online but also explore how communication practices are influenced by societal ideologies and how these ideologies are constructed through discourse in new media. This line of inquiry has often evolved from discourse analysis approaches applied to language in traditional media forms such as newspapers, films, and television.

A recurring focus of this research is on how language itself is discussed online, often termed as metalanguage. While relatively recent, scholars in this field tend to concentrate on Web 2.0 platforms, particularly those featuring user-generated multimodal content like Flickr (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011) and YouTube (Chun & Walters, 2011). Notably, researchers in this domain often adopt a critical perspective, interrogating their data within their discussions. A central concern of this research trajectory is how the researcher's standpoint influences their specific analysis and interpretation of data.

This line of inquiry moves beyond viewing language solely as a means of communication; it delves into understanding how language is represented, or potentially misrepresented, both online and within broader societal contexts. In addition to these academic investigations into online language, public discussions have consistently revolved around the impact of new media. These discussions often give rise to moral panics, particularly concerning "young people," encompassing anxieties about the uncertainties and rapid changes associated with new technologies, alongside fears regarding declining standards of language and literacy.

2.1.5 Online world as a resource for linguistic research

The online world has therefore become a resource for data for the study of language behavior. It is giving rise to a new kind of language use and variety hitherto unseen. To conclude the discussion on the three directions just discussed, it is important to cite the following ten reasons that encapsulate the approaches; and to give pointers to what one expect to see in the discussion in this research (cf. Barton & Lee 2013).

The shift towards textual mediation in a digital world

In contemporary society, the significance of written communication is increasingly evident across various facets of daily life. Written language plays a pivotal role in everyday interactions, educational pursuits, and professional endeavors. Often taken for granted, it seamlessly integrates into these activities, facilitating note-taking, rule adherence, and effective communication. As Barton (2001) emphasizes, written language serves as the adhesive that binds together diverse social activities, permeating through the fabric of society. Moreover, with the advent of new technologies, the landscape of written communication has undergone significant transformation. These technologies have ushered in novel writing spaces, each with its unique characteristics and capabilities, as explored in subsequent chapters. Users of these platforms continually explore the possibilities afforded by these digital environments, leading to the emergence of new genres and evolving literate practices. These nascent forms, termed proto-genres, serve as the foundation for future genres, reflecting the dynamic nature of textual mediation in the digital age.

Evolving linguistic concepts in the era of new media

In linguistics, the foundational concepts that once stood as pillars of understanding are undergoing profound shifts in meaning and interpretation in the era of social media. No longer can texts be viewed as static entities with fixed meanings. Instead, they exhibit fluidity, constantly adapting to

the evolving affordances of new media. Moreover, texts are increasingly imbued with multimodal elements and interactivity, forging intricate connections between disparate pieces of online content. Intertextuality, the practice of referencing and remixing existing texts, has become commonplace in the digital landscape, blurring the boundaries between original and derivative works. Furthermore, the traditional dichotomy between speech and writing is being reshaped by the emergence of hybrid genres in online environments. Concepts such as 'audience' and 'authorship' are undergoing reevaluation, as the lines between creators and consumers of content become increasingly blurred. The proliferation of user-generated content on the web further complicates notions of authorship, challenging traditional hierarchies of textual production and consumption. In this dynamic linguistic landscape, the fluidity of language use extends beyond individual domains to encompass notions of community and identity. Users of new media platforms leverage the unique affordances of digital communication to redefine social groups and linguistic communities, presenting novel challenges to established frameworks within linguistics.

Unraveling the dynamics of multilingual encounters in the digital realm

The digital landscape has ushered in a new era of multilingual interactions, fundamentally reshaping the dynamics of language contact and choice online. Participants in online spaces now find themselves navigating diverse linguistic landscapes, where the strategic deployment of multiple languages is not only possible but increasingly prevalent. This phenomenon opens up avenues for the revitalization of minority languages and provides a platform for their expression in previously inaccessible spaces.

Navigating identity in the digital realm: language and self-representation online

The intricate interplay between language and identity in the online sphere constitutes a pivotal area of inquiry within language and identity research. This thematic thread is intricately woven throughout the fabric of this discourse online. At the heart of this discourse lies the profound significance of language choice as a vehicle for identity performance.

Exploring multimodality: language, image, and meaning making online

In the dynamic landscape of online communication, individuals harness a diverse array of semiotic resources to construct meaning and assert their relationships to the conveyed messages. Of particular significance is the fusion of written language with visual elements, ushering in novel modes of meaning-making and interrelations between language and imagery. Within this evolving

paradigm, the symbiotic interplay between language and image emerges as a focal point of inquiry, propelling scholarly interest into the burgeoning field of linguistic landscape research. Traditionally situated within the public sphere of urban landscapes, the purview of linguistic landscape research has now expanded to encompass the digital realm, where multimodal expressions proliferate across online spaces. Central to this exploration is the concept of multimodality. Herein lies a concerted effort to dissect the link between language and image as potent conduits of meaning, often intertwining to shape individuals' self-representations and social interactions.

The digital realm as a space for language reflection and engagement

In the ever-expanding digital landscape, individuals find themselves endowed with unprecedented opportunities for introspection and discourse on language and communication. Through novel modes of participation and interaction, users cultivate a heightened sense of reflexivity, fostering an acute awareness of linguistic nuances and embracing the rich tapestry of language varieties. Central to this paradigm shift is the cultivation of meta-linguistic awareness—a playful and creative engagement with language that thrives on the dynamic platform of the internet. Here, the digital sphere emerges as a crucible for language evolution, catalyzing reflection and dialogue that propel the development and utilization of linguistic affordances in the broader socio-cultural milieu.

The role of language in continuous online learning

Navigating the ever-evolving landscape of online activities necessitates a perpetual journey of learning, predominantly informal in nature. Users engage in diverse modes of learning, embracing novel methodologies and undertaking deliberate learning initiatives to augment their digital literacy.

Emergence of vernacular practices in the digital sphere

Exploring the intricacies of everyday or "vernacular" practices holds paramount importance in literacy research. Reading and writing activities in daily life encompass a diverse array of literacy practices, serving multifarious purposes. While certain tasks like completing tax forms or settling utility bills are prompted by external obligations, a significant portion of reading and writing endeavors—such as perusing novels, jotting down recipes, or maintaining correspondence with friends—are undertaken voluntarily. It is imperative for language and literacy scholars to

acknowledge the migration of these writing activities to the online realm and their subsequent transformation.

Language's role in novel forms of inquiry and knowledge creation

Traditionally, language has been perceived merely as a conduit for communication—a passive vehicle for transmitting fixed messages from sender to audience. This perspective, rooted in early media studies and the theatrical origins of audience notions, persisted even in the nascent stages of online communication during the Web 1.0 era. However, a paradigm shift is imperative, necessitating a more dynamic conception of communication. In contemporary online landscapes, individuals are not merely recipients but active creators of knowledge and inquiry, manifesting in diverse activities ranging from everyday interactions to cloud computing and citizen journalism.

Through processes of naming, sorting, and categorizing, individuals wield language as a tool for forging new realms of understanding and organizing knowledge. Language, thus, assumes a dual role as both a vehicle for communication and a catalyst for knowledge creation and organization. This convergence underscores the intrinsic link between language and meaning-making in online interactions, warranting a nuanced examination of linguistic dynamics in digital spaces.

Moreover, the advent of globalization has engendered unprecedented diversity in communication practices and societal structures, epitomized by the burgeoning multilingualism observed online. This superdiversity permeates both virtual and physical domains, blurring the boundaries between online and offline contexts.

Innovative approaches to language research in the digital era

The advent of online platforms has revolutionized linguistic research methodologies, offering unprecedented opportunities for investigation. A pivotal aspect is the abundance of freely accessible textual data facilitated by the internet. This wealth of resources enables novel intersections between linguistic subfields, such as discourse analysis and corpus linguistics. By melding discourse analysis with ethnographic techniques, researchers can delve into the intricate interplay between texts and practices, thereby enriching their investigations. The interdisciplinary nature of language and literacy studies opens avenues for collaboration with socio-cultural, technical, and sociological disciplines, as well as media studies. This interdisciplinary synergy broadens methodological horizons, incorporating innovative approaches like auto-ethnography and techno-biography into the researcher's toolkit. An investigation based on data produce by

Cameroonian users of social media should provide us with a new way of looking at language as far as these community of users are concerned.

2.2 Theoretical literature

In this section we discuss three basic conceptual frameworks. These include language contact, Code-switching and code-mixing as well as language (linguistic) borrowing.

2.2.1 The phenomenon of language contact

The influence of English on other languages is part of a broader, global linguistic phenomenon known as language contact. Language contact occurs when speakers of different languages or dialects interact regularly, leading to mutual influence and the incorporation of elements from one language into another. This process is especially visible in multilingual societies and in contexts where English, as a global lingua franca, exerts significant influence on other languages. To understand how elements from English become integrated into other languages, Poplack and Sankoff (1984) propose four key parameters for assessing the integration of borrowings and for distinguishing between borrowing and code-switching. These parameters are essential for understanding how languages evolve and adapt in response to contact with English or any other dominant language. The first parameter is the frequency of use. Borrowed words or phrases that are used frequently by speakers of the receiving language are more likely to be integrated and accepted as part of that language. Frequent use often indicates that the borrowed term fulfills a communicative need that the native language may not fully satisfy. The second parameter involves native-language synonym displacement. This occurs when a borrowed word from English begins to replace an existing word in the native language. This displacement suggests a deeper level of integration, where the borrowed term becomes the preferred choice over its native counterpart, often due to perceived prestige or utility associated with the English term. The third parameter is morphophonemic and/or syntactic integration. This refers to how well the borrowed term adapts to the phonological, morphological, and syntactic rules of the receiving language. A borrowed term that conforms to the linguistic norms of the host language is more likely to be accepted and used regularly. For example, in many languages, borrowed English verbs are adapted to fit the conjugation patterns of the host language. The fourth parameter is the acceptability of the borrowed term by native speakers. The extent to which native speakers of the receiving language accept and use the borrowed term is crucial for its integration. Social attitudes

towards borrowing can vary, with some speakers embracing it as a sign of modernity and others resisting it as a threat to linguistic purity.

Contrary to the common perception that English borrowings are displacing native terms in the languages of the Nordic countries, research on pragmatic borrowing reveals a different scenario. Rather than replacing heritage forms, these borrowed expressions from English often coexist as stylistic alternatives. For instance, Peterson & Vaattovaara's (2014) study on the English term "please," which has been adapted into Finnish as "pliis," illustrates this phenomenon. In Finnish, "pliis" is used in a much more limited set of social and pragmatic contexts compared to the broad application of "please" in English.

Meaning, connotation, and context of use

English borrowings can be divided into three main categories from a semantic point of view: 1) those with a full copying of the semantic content of the source language; 2) those with partial copying of the semantic content; and 3) those that have developed new meanings in the receiving language (cf. Andersen 2014; Kvaran & Svavarsdóttir 2002). The first category includes terminology and words, in particular nouns, that have a clear denotative meaning (cf. Kvaran and Svavarsdóttir 2002). This includes words that are used in email, blogg, podcast, and internet. In the second category, there are polysemous words that have a limited use in the receiving language. Icelandic examples include the verb *læka* 'like,' which is used exclusively in the context of giving "likes" on social media platforms. Similarly, the verbs *followa* 'follow' and *posta* 'post' are used only in the context of social media. The third category includes words that have acquired a new meaning or function in the receiving language. For example, the verb *fi la* 'like, dig' comes from the English verb *feel*, but has acquired a new meaning in Icelandic slang: *ég fi la þessa hljómsveit* 'I like this band.

Interaction and adaptation

Pragmatic borrowing, like other types of linguistic borrowing, is a complex and multifaceted process that involves more than the mere transfer of words or phrases from one language to another. In the context of English and Cameroonian languages, including Cameroonian Pidgin English, this process reflects deeper sociolinguistic dynamics, cultural exchanges, and the adaptation of borrowed items to fit the specific needs and contexts of the receiving language. In Cameroon, a multilingual country with over 250 languages, English serves as one of the official languages alongside French. However, Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE) functions as a widely

spoken lingua franca, especially in informal settings. The interaction between English and CPE, as well as other local languages, provides fertile ground for pragmatic borrowing. (cf. Anchimbe 2007; Kouega ;2003; Echu; 2004; Ebot; 1999; Kouega; 2013; Ngefac; 2008; Mforteh 2006). Take, for example, the English word "sorry," which is frequently borrowed into CPE. In English, "sorry" is a versatile term used to express apologies, sympathy, or regret. However, when borrowed into CPE, its usage is often extended and adapted to fit local communicative norms. In CPE, "sorry" is not only used to apologize but also to express empathy in a broader range of situations. For instance, if someone is experiencing hardship or even physical pain, a Cameroonian might say "sorry" as a way to convey sympathy, even if they are not directly responsible for the situation. This usage reflects a cultural adaptation where the borrowed term is integrated into the local language in a way that resonates with Cameroonian social values, particularly the emphasis on communal support and solidarity (see similar trends in Njike, M. T. 2004).

Similarly, the English phrase "take care" has been borrowed into CPE, where it often takes on a more directive and protective connotation than in its original English usage. In CPE, "take care" can be used not just as a parting phrase, but also as a reminder to be cautious or to avoid danger, reflecting a more community-oriented concern for the well-being of others. This adaptation shows how pragmatic borrowing involves the recontextualization of linguistic items to meet the communicative needs of the borrowing community.

Furthermore, the process of pragmatic borrowing in Cameroon also involves a degree of linguistic creativity. Borrowed terms are often phonetically or morphologically modified to align with the phonological and syntactic norms of the local languages. For instance, the English word "driver" may be borrowed into CPE as "drivah," with a vowel change to fit the phonological patterns of Pidgin. This kind of modification underscores the fact that borrowed items are not simply transplanted but are actively reshaped to fit the linguistic and cultural landscape of the receiving language.

Pragmatic borrowing between English and Cameroonian languages, including Pidgin English, is a complex process that goes beyond the mere transfer of words. It involves significant cultural and linguistic adaptation, where borrowed items are integrated into the local context in ways that reflect and reinforce the communicative practices and social norms of the borrowing community. This dynamic process illustrates the richness of linguistic interaction and the creative ways in which languages evolve and influence each other in multilingual societies.

2.2.2 Code-switching and code-mixing

Code-switching and code-mixing are critical phenomena in the study of bilingualism and multilingualism, reflecting the dynamic and fluid nature of language use in multilingual societies. Historically, these practices were often viewed with skepticism, seen as indicators of linguistic confusion or a lack of proficiency in the individual languages involved (Bokamba 1988). However, contemporary research has shifted this perspective, recognizing code-switching and code-mixing as sophisticated and strategic aspects of bilingual communication.

Code-switching, also known as 'code-mixing,' 'code-shifting,' or 'code-changing,' refers to the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a single discourse, sentence, or even a single phrase. Milroy and Muysken (1985) define it as the alternate use of multiple languages by multilingual speakers during the same conversation. Mac Swan (1999) describes it as a speech style where bilingual individuals navigate between languages fluidly. Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2007) emphasize that code-switching occurs in bilingual contexts where speakers transition from one language to another due to various linguistic and social factors. Ahmad (2009) highlights its practical utility in educational settings, where switching between languages can facilitate instruction and help teachers clarify complex concepts without extensive explanations.

The manifestation of code-switching can be categorized into several types, with sentence alternation being the most observable form. For instance, a sentence might begin in one language and conclude in another, or phrases from different languages might appear in a seemingly random sequence. This behavior is often driven by specific linguistic or social motivations. Speakers might switch languages to overcome expressive limitations, convey nuanced meanings, or signal solidarity with a particular social group. For example, in multilingual contexts like Cameroon, speakers might switch to a local language or pidgin to express cultural identity or solidarity, reflecting the complex interplay of languages in their daily interactions.

Code-switching can occur at various levels: between sentences (intersentential code-switching), within sentences (intrasentential code-switching), or even within words. Clyne (2000) notes that these variations in code-switching are influenced by contextual factors and the communicative needs of the speakers. Intersentential code-switching typically occurs when speakers switch languages at sentence boundaries, while intrasentential code-switching involves language alternation within a single sentence. Code-switching within words, though less common, can involve blending or borrowing elements from multiple languages.

Code-switching and code-mixing are integral to understanding bilingual and multilingual communication. Far from indicating linguistic confusion, these practices reflect the adaptive and strategic use of language to meet various communicative needs and social functions. This nuanced view acknowledges the complexity of bilingual interaction and the role of language contact in shaping linguistic practices.

2.2.3 Language (linguistic) borrowing

Language borrowing is a linguistic phenomenon where one language adopts words, phrases, or other linguistic elements from another language. This process occurs due to contact between languages, often as a result of trade, colonization, migration, or cultural exchange. (Thomason & Kaufman 1988; Matras 2009). Borrowed elements may include vocabulary, phonetic patterns, syntax, or even entire phrases. Over time, these borrowed elements can become fully integrated into the borrowing language and may undergo various levels of adaptation, such as changes in pronunciation, meaning, or grammar to fit the structure of the new language.

The most productive aspect of linguistic borrowing is lexical borrowing (Haspelmath 2009). Lexical borrowing refers to the process by which one language incorporates a word or phrase from another language into its vocabulary. This phenomenon typically occurs for various reasons, such as the introduction of new concepts, the influence of cultural exchange, or economic interactions between communities or as we have in the context of this research the influence of social media. When a word is borrowed, it may undergo adaptations in pronunciation, spelling, or meaning to align with the linguistic norms of the borrowing language. Spahiu & Nuredini (2023) cite four main types of lexical borrowing to illustrate how multifaceted this phenomenon can be, and how it shed light on the influence of Anglicism on other languages.

1. *Loanwords*:

Loan words are words that are adopted from one language into another with little or no modification in spelling or pronunciation. For example, Cameroonian English has contributed unique loanwords to the broader English lexicon, especially in cyberspace. Terms like "dielocker" (referring to a dialogue process that is doomed to fail) and "Bamendazonia" (a blend of

"Bamenda" and "Ambazonia," symbolizing the Anglophone crisis) highlight the creative linguistic responses to socio-political realities, illustrating how local contexts shape global digital communication. Further, Cameroonian cultural realities have influenced the English language by introducing unique loanwords that reflect the country's rich traditions and social dynamics (Anchimbe 2006; Ngefac 2010; Zachary 2014)) One notable example is the term "njangi," which refers to a traditional rotating savings and credit association commonly practiced among Cameroonian communities. This concept, deeply rooted in the culture, has been adopted in English to describe similar informal financial groups, especially among the Cameroonian diaspora. Another example is "fufu," a staple food made from cassava, yams, or plantains, pounded into a dough-like consistency. Although "fufu" originates from West African cuisine, it has gained recognition in English, particularly in culinary contexts, as more people become familiar with African food culture. Lastly, the term "pagne" has also been integrated into English, referring to the colorful, patterned cloth commonly worn by women in Cameroon and other parts of Africa. While the word retains its French origins, it is often used in English to describe this specific type of fabric, symbolizing the blend of cultural influences in Cameroonian society. These loanwords reflect how Cameroonian cultural practices and artifacts have enriched the English language, contributing to its diversity and global reach.

2. *Calques*:

Calques are words or phrases that are translated literally from one language into another. For example, in Cameroon English, calques are direct translations of phrases or idioms from local languages or Pidgin English into English, which often results in expressions that are unique to the region. One common example is "take in," used in Cameroon English to mean "become pregnant," directly translating from the Pidgin English "tek in." Another example is "hear bad," meaning "to be reprimanded" or "scolded," which is a calque from the French "entendre mal" or Pidgin "hear bad." A third example is "on seat," used to indicate that someone is present or available, particularly in an official capacity, reflecting the influence of French "en place" (literally, "in place"). These calques illustrate how Cameroon English has been shaped by the linguistic influences of the country's multilingual environment (see Anchimbe 2006; Kouega 2007).

3. *Hybrid words*:

Hybrid words are created by combining elements from two or more languages. For example, the word "brunch" is a combination of "breakfast" and "lunch". In West African Englishes, hybrid

words emerge from the blending of English with local languages, reflecting the region's rich linguistic diversity. One example is "chop bar," a term used in Ghanaian English to refer to a small, informal restaurant. "Chop" comes from Pidgin English, meaning "food" or "to eat," and "bar" from English, creating a unique expression that conveys both the act of eating and the place where it happens. Another example is "cash madam," commonly used in Nigerian English to describe a wealthy woman. Here, "cash" is English, while "madam" is used in a way influenced by local languages, signifying respect for a woman of high social status. These hybrids illustrate the dynamic interplay between English and indigenous languages in West Africa, contributing to the region's distinctive linguistic identity. (Mufwene 2001; Kachru et. al.2006).

4. *Semantic borrowing:*

Semantic borrowing is the adoption of a word from one language into another with a different or expanded meaning. For example, in Indian English, the word "prepone" has been semantically borrowed from "postpone" (Mesthrie & Bhatt. (2008). While "postpone" means to delay an event, "prepone" is used to indicate moving an event to an earlier time. Another example is in Singaporean English, where the word "takeaway" has expanded in meaning under the influence of Mandarin and Malay, referring not only to food taken out from a restaurant but also to key points or lessons learned from a discussion or presentation (Bolton 2006). These examples highlight how English adapts to different cultural and linguistic environments, enriching its vocabulary with new meanings influenced by local languages

5. *Phono-semantic matching:*

Phono-semantic matching is the adoption of a word from one language into another based on its sound and meaning. For example, the English word "baby" has been adopted into Cameroonian and West African English as "bebi", which sounds similar and has the same meaning. In West African Englishes, this is evident in several instances. For example, the English word "shine" is phono-semantically matched in Nigerian Pidgin as "shaina," where it retains both the phonetic similarity and the meaning of being bright or successful (Huber 1999). Another example is the adaptation of "pepper" in Ghanaian English, where "pepe" is used to describe someone who is sharp or quick, drawing from both its phonetic resemblance to "pepper" and the idea of sharpness. The word "dash," originally meaning a small gift in Nigerian English, matches the sound and meaning with local expressions that imply giving (Mufwene 1994). These examples highlight

how phono-semantic matching enriches West African Englishes with culturally resonant expressions.

2.3 Empirical literature

Several researchers have studied the use of language in social media space and related matters. This section explores some of this research within and out of Cameroon. Typology of language play observed on social media, explorations of online behavior in computer-mediated communication and the nature of humour in language play in CMC are also discussed.

2.3.1 Previous research within Cameroon

Many Cameroonian authors working on Cameroonian data have investigated several aspects of language play in social media and other spaces (Mbangwana 2013; Ngefac 2019; Tchuenta 2020; Ngwainmbi 2021; Neba & Asonganyi 2022; Tita & Mbangwana 2022; Che & Tita 2023; Ngwainmbi, E. N., & Asonganyi 2023). Because they have worked on related issues, some of the findings are similar. In this section, it suffices to catalogue some of the key findings they have documented.

Several of the studies above identify code-mixing and code-switching as prominent strategies employed in language play, delving into their utilization for purposes such as humor creation, solidarity reinforcement, emotional expression, and group identity establishment. It sheds light on the sociocultural influences impacting language play in Cameroonian English and illustrates how variables like age, gender, and social status shape language play dynamics and reveals its role in navigating social boundaries and power dynamics. Key Findings includes: (a) Lexical innovation: The creation of new words, such as neologisms and blends, to express unique cultural concepts or local experiences. (b) Semantic shift: The use of existing English words with unconventional or localized meanings, often based on metaphorical extensions or cultural associations. (c) Orthographic manipulation: The playful use of spelling variations, creative capitalization, and the incorporation of local language elements to achieve stylistic effects. d. Grammatical and syntactic deviations: The employment of non-standard grammatical structures, word order, and clause formations to convey specific pragmatic meanings. On the pragmatic functions of language play,

the study highlights the various pragmatic functions that Cameroonian English speakers achieve through their use of language play, including: (a) Identity construction: Language play allows speakers to assert their cultural identity, socioeconomic status, and group affiliation within the Cameroonian context. (b) Relationship building: The use of language play serves as a means of fostering camaraderie, expressing solidarity, and negotiating interpersonal dynamics among Cameroonian interlocutors. (c). Humor and entertainment: Cameroonian English speakers employ language play to create humorous effects, engage in playful banter, and entertain their audience. (d) Critique and subversion: Language play can be used as a tool to challenge dominant discourses, express dissent, and resist social or political norms. Lexical innovations are also widely reported in the study. For example, "I just wanna be a Jakartaman, you know, like those guys who ride the Okada and hustle for small small money." In this example, the speaker creates the term "Jakartaman" to refer to individuals who operate informal motorcycle taxis, known as "Okada," in the Cameroonian context. This lexical innovation reflects the speaker's familiarity with local transportation practices and their attempt to express this concept using English. There is also semantic shift such as in the following: "Ah, my brother, this country is just too 'hot' these days. The politicians are really 'heating' things up with their new policies". The speaker uses the words "hot" and "heating" in unconventional ways, drawing on metaphorical associations to convey the sense of political tension and unrest in the country. This semantic shift reflects the speaker's contextual understanding of the sociopolitical climate.

A key aspect of these studies has also been the significance of language play in shaping identity formation and social dynamics within the Cameroonian English-speaking community (Ngefac 2019; Tchunte 2020; Ngwainmbi 2021). Utilizing qualitative methods, the study scrutinized language usage across diverse situations to uncover how individuals craft and navigate their identities through linguistic interactions. The studies found that language play is a crucial mechanism for constructing and negotiating identities in Cameroonian English. Language play is used to establish social relationships, negotiate power dynamics, and create a sense of belonging among individuals. The conclusion of these studies are that: (1) Language play is a prevalent feature of online identity construction among Cameroonian Facebook users. (2) Language play allows users to express creativity, humor, and individuality, while also conforming to group norms and expectations. (3) Language play can be used to negotiate social boundaries, establish group membership, and enhance self-esteem and (4) Language play contributes to the development of online communities and enhances the overall social capital of individuals.

The strategies of linguistic creativity and humor construction, have also been severally reported (Neba & Asonganyi 2022; Tita & Mbangwana 2022; Che & Tita 2023; Ngwainmbi, E. N., & Asonganyi 2023). These studies identify various linguistic strategies employed by Cameroonian Facebook users to construct humor and engage in language play. These strategies include: (a) Lexical creativity: Users create new words, expressions, and acronyms by blending or modifying existing lexical items, often drawing on multiple languages (e.g., Cameroonian Pidgin English, French, and local Cameroonian languages). (b) Orthographic play: Users manipulate spelling and punctuation to achieve humorous effects, such as intentional misspellings, creative capitalization, and the use of emojis. (c) Grammatical and syntactic deviations: Users play with the norms of standard grammar and sentence structure to generate humor, including the use of non-standard constructions, word order inversions, and ellipsis. (d) Intertextuality and cultural references: Users incorporate references to popular culture, current events, and shared cultural knowledge to create humorous content that resonates with their online community. The researchers observe that Cameroonian Facebook users leverage the multilingual and multimodal affordances of the platform to construct and convey humor. They often seamlessly integrate multiple languages, such as English, French, and local Cameroonian languages, within a single post or comment. Additionally, users employ various multimodal elements, including images, GIFs, and emojis, to enhance the humorous effect and amplify the intended message. On the pragmatic Functions of Humor, Asonganyi & Neba (2022) found out that users employ language play and humor to achieve various communicative goals, such as: a. Relationship building and social bonding: Humor serves as a means of fostering solidarity, camaraderie, and a sense of shared identity among Cameroonian Facebook users. (b). Identity expression and negotiation: Humor allows users to navigate their social and cultural identities, often through the strategic deployment of linguistic resources that reflect their multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. (c). Resistance and subversion: Cameroonian Facebook users sometimes use humor as a tool to challenge societal norms, critique political and social issues, and resist dominant discourses.

Structural features of computer-mediated communication have also been the focus of some of the studies by Cameroonian researchers (Tita & Mbangwana 2022). For example, the use of orthographic play: (e.g. "Blacc #KKMK 😊😊😊"), where the user intentionally misspells the word "black" as "blacc" and includes the hashtag "#KKMK" (an abbreviation for a Cameroonian phrase) along with emojis to convey a playful and humorous message. Another example includes orthographic manipulation: (e.g. "THEM no wAnt DEVLOPMNT 😞 #SeyWeyNoPossible"). The user employs intentional capitalization, misspellings, and emojis to convey a sense of outrage and

frustration with the perceived lack of development. The hashtag "#SeyWeyNoPossible" (meaning "that's not possible" in Cameroonian Pidgin English) further reinforces the political critique. Furthermore, we also have grammatical and syntactic deviations: (e.g. "I no go lie, dis post na fire 🔥🔥🔥"). In this comment, the user employs the non-standard negation construction "I no go lie" (I won't lie) and the copula-less structure "dis post na fire" (this post is fire) to create a humorous and colloquial expression. This other example is poignant (e.g. "Dem say no money, but dem still dey buy new cars #CashFlow"). In this comment, the user employs non-standard grammatical constructions, such as the use of "dem" (them) and the copula-less structure "dem still dey buy new cars," to mock the political rhetoric around a lack of resources. The hashtag "#CashFlow" suggests a sarcastic implication of financial mismanagement. The strategy of intertextuality and cultural references is also widely documented in the studies cited here: (e.g. "When you try to speak 'Standard English' but your 'Camfranglais' keeps pulling you back 😊😊😊"). This post makes a humorous reference to the phenomenon of code-switching between Standard English and the Cameroonian variety of Franglais (a blend of French and English), which is a common linguistic practice among Cameroonian social media users. The study by Tita and Mbangwana (2022) provides valuable insights into the linguistic and pragmatic strategies employed by Cameroonian Facebook users in the context of political discourse. The researchers explore how Cameroonian social media users engage in language play to negotiate and construct political meanings, contributing to a deeper understanding of the intersections between language, technology, and political communication.

2.3.2 Previous research in the global research context

The emergence of social media platforms in the last two decades has profoundly transformed online communication practices and language usage dynamics (Herring, 2013; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). A noticeable trend is the growing informality and creativity observed in language utilization across these platforms (Danesi, 2016; Kytölä & Westinen, 2015). Unlike conventional written discourse, social media posts frequently adopt a conversational tone, incorporating elements such as slang, abbreviations, emojis, and colloquial speech patterns (Baron, 2008; Crystal, 2011). This informality is in part attributed to the rapid and real-time nature of interactions on social media, where users prioritize immediacy and expressiveness over adherence to strict grammatical norms (Tagg, 2015). Platforms like Twitter, characterized by character limitations, further incentivize succinct and inventive language usage (Wikström, 2014).

Additionally, social media language exhibits a propensity for swift dissemination and evolution (Eisenstein, 2015; Zappavigna, 2012). Memes, hashtags, and newly coined terms have the potential to rapidly propagate across the digital landscape, integrating into the collective online lexicon with remarkable speed (Blommaert, 2018; Milner, 2016). This phenomenon contributes to the dynamic and fluid nature of social media vocabulary, as novel words and linguistic conventions emerge and proliferate across diverse online communities (Androutsopoulos, 2011; Varis & Wang, 2011).

Significantly, social media platforms have facilitated the amplification of marginalized voices and the cultivation of subculture-specific linguistic norms (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015; Nemer, 2016). Whether within internet subcultures or activist circles, social media serves as a platform for the dissemination of diverse linguistic practices that challenge mainstream linguistic norms (Castells, 2012; Milner, 2013). However, alongside these positive developments, concerns have been raised regarding the adverse effects of social media language, including the proliferation of misinformation, the propagation of hate speech, and the potential degradation of formal communication skills (Baym, 2015; Carr & Hayes, 2015). As social media continues to evolve, a nuanced understanding of language use within this domain remains crucial for linguists, communication scholars, and the broader public.

2.3.3 Typology of language play observed on social media

The universality of social media platforms has given rise to a vibrant landscape of linguistic creativity and playfulness. Users across various online spaces have embraced the affordances of digital communication to engage in a diverse array of "language play" - the creative manipulation and subversion of linguistic norms (Crystal, 2008). This proliferation of language play on social media reflects the users' desire to express their individuality, forge social connections, and negotiate the sociocultural dynamics of the digital realm.

One prominent category of language play on social media is wordplay, which encompasses a range of lexical and phonological techniques such as puns, malapropisms, and spoonerisms (Chiaro, 1992). Users adeptly deploy these linguistic devices to generate humorous, thought-provoking, or even subversive expressions that challenge the conventions of standard language use. The creation of neologisms and creative lexical formations further demonstrates the innovative capacity of social media users to expand the linguistic repertoire (Danesi, 2016). From blending existing words to crafting entirely novel coinages, these linguistic innovations often

serve as markers of in-group belonging and subcultural identity. Unconventional spellings and typographic play also abound on social media, as users experiment with the visual and orthographic dimensions of language. Deliberate misspellings, creative capitalization patterns, and the strategic use of punctuation and symbols contribute to the expressive richness of online interactions (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). The integration of emoji and other visual-linguistic elements further exemplifies the multimodal nature of language play in digital contexts, where the interplay between text and image enhances the communicative and affective potential of expression (Danesi, 2016).

Social media also provides a fertile ground for intertextual language play, as users draw upon and recontextualize references to internet memes, popular culture, and shared cultural knowledge (Shifman, 2013). These intertextual references not only showcase the users' cultural capital but also foster a sense of belonging within networked communities. The prevalence of code-switching and multilingual play on social media reflects the linguistic diversity and cosmopolitan nature of digital communication (Androutsopoulos, 2013).

The various forms of language play observed on social media hold significant implications for understanding the creative, identity-constructive, and sociocultural dynamics of digital communication. These linguistic innovations serve as markers of individual and collective expression, allowing users to negotiate their sense of self, affiliation, and social positioning within the online landscape (Georgakopoulou, 2011). As social media continues to transform the ways in which we communicate and interact, the investigation of language play remains a crucial area of inquiry for scholars interested in the interplay between language, technology, and sociocultural change.

2.3.4 Explorations of online behavior in computer-mediated communication

In cyber psychology, the term "online behavior" encompasses various actions individuals undertake in digital environments. However, it's essential to differentiate this concept from "online communication" and "online interactions" to avoid potential overlaps in terminology. Communication involves sharing information, which can be either two-way or one-way, necessitating an exchange or transmission of information. On the other hand, interactions influence others and must be two-way but may not always involve information exchange. Behavior, in contrast, responds to a situation or stimulus and does not require information exchange or directionality. It can occur regardless of the presence of an audience.

While communication inherently involves some form of behavior, not all behaviors are communicative in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Despite this, the current understanding of CMC theory may not fully capture the distinct effects stemming from CMC due to the diverse behaviors represented within it. The subsequent section provides an overview of commonly proposed effects, highlighting areas requiring additional clarification and conceptualization. Subsequently, we propose how our Online Behavior Taxonomy can aid in this endeavor.

One critical aspect in CMC is audience effects, where an individual modifies their behavior when they perceive they are being observed. This phenomenon aligns with self-presentation theory, wherein awareness of an audience influences impression management efforts. However, further elucidation is needed on how online self-presentation interacts with various online audiences and differs across different types of behavior.

For instance, users may target their behavior toward specific or multiple receivers, or engage in behaviors that involve one-to-many or many-to-one dynamics. In interactions with Artificial Intelligence (AI), behaviors could be classified as one-to-zero, where AI acts as an audience. Despite bidirectionality with AI, audience effects may not occur as users may not attribute mental states to AI.

The issue of anticipated response, or the user's expectations regarding interactional consequences, varies across platforms and may not always align with the actual response obtained. Moreover, the multiple audience problem (MAP) complicates how users present themselves to different audiences concurrently, necessitating nuanced considerations for different types of CMC. While audience effects theories are crucial, they may operate differently across various types of CMC and may not apply to interactions with AI. Additionally, the congruence between anticipated and actual audience may influence the observed effects. For instance, the longevity of online behavior may impact content interaction with different audiences over time.

Alongside audience effects, social presence is a key component of CMC theory, influencing individuals' sense of being "present" with others in digital environments. However, concepts such as media naturalness and media richness have limitations in explaining the diversity of online behaviors. Behaviors originating offline may be communicated differently online, necessitating a distinction between the behavior itself and its representation in communication. These conceptual

nuances warrant explicit consideration in existing theoretical models of CMC to enhance our understanding of online behavior.

2.3.5 The nature of humour in language play in CMC

Humor is anything that is "funny, amusing, or laughable" (Attardo, 2005). Verbal humor is often discussed under the broader category of 'language play,' which includes a variety of activities such as children's verse, fiction, insults, jokes, magical rituals, puns, riddles, and playful languages. These activities represent a single underlying phenomenon characterized by a "disconnection from reality, disruption and subversion of social structures, and the introduction of random elements" (Cook, 2000:5). While language play isn't always humorous, humor is frequently seen as a form of play (e.g., McGhee, 1979). Both play and humor can be planned, like a game or a joke, but this chapter will focus on spontaneous humorous play. In computer-mediated communication (CMC), this includes form-based play, which involves playing with the structure of language, and pragmatic play, which involves playing within the context of language. Although certain settings like role-playing scenarios or gaming environments may encourage humor and play, this chapter will concentrate on the spontaneous emergence of verbal play in all types of CMC environments.

Even in humorous language play, humor often accompanies aggression and resistance (Cook, 2000). For instance, verbal dueling, which involves clever and intricate insults and boasts, storytelling competitions, or setting verbal puzzles like riddles, can simultaneously offend an opponent, provoke laughter, and strengthen group solidarity. Cook (2000) draws parallels between athletic contests and verbal duels, noting that "like sporting contests, verbal duels may be a prelude to violence" (Cook, 2000:64). However, both competitive ballgames and verbal duels require a level of cooperation, as participants usually accept shared conventions. Some researchers have gone further, asserting that humor is inherently hostile or aggressive because laughing with someone often means laughing at someone else (e.g., Rapp, 1951; Morreall, 1983, as cited in Cook, 2000, p. 71). Conversely, Cook highlights that humor doesn't always aim to assert superiority or secure a victory, as seen in "'loser's humor'" (Cook, 2000:72). In this context, humor serves as a tool for rebellion, resistance against tyranny, or compensation for defeat.

Language play in computer-mediated communication (CMC) manifests in various ways, all of which fall under the broad category of form-based language play. Form-based language play involves the creative manipulation of linguistic forms (Crystal, 1998). Studies on this type of play

in CMC settings (e.g., Belz, 2002b; Belz & Reinhardt, 2004; Crystal, 2008; Derks et al., 2008a, 2008b; Holcomb, 1997) have highlighted several forms, including derivation, nominal compounding, orthographic play, and revoicing of prominent language bits, all driven by linguistic creativity. The lack of nonverbal cues in CMC may also heighten participants' metalinguistic awareness (e.g., Georgakopoulou, 2005), encouraging playful language use and joking.

In texting (SMS), for instance, Crystal (2008) notes the use of logograms (e.g., b4 for 'before,' @toms for 'atoms,' or the German 8ung for 'Achtung' meaning 'attention'), pictograms like Japanese (o) for 'surprised' and (^_^) for 'cute,' and other emoticons such as :-) for 'smile,' ;-) for 'wink,' and :-@ for 'screaming' (p. 38). Texting also features playful use of initialisms, abbreviations, and nonstandard spellings more frequently than other forms of CMC. For example, Crystal discusses playful variations of the initialism IMO ('in my opinion') into forms like IMHO ('in my humble opinion'), IMCO ('in my considered opinion'), IMHBCO ('in my humble but correct opinion'), and IMNSHO ('in my not so humble opinion') (Crystal, 2008, p. 53). This playful use involves creatively modifying familiar materials and principles, thereby "upping the ante" (Crystal, 2008, p. 53) through variations and extensions of initialisms.

Researchers in second/foreign language learning (e.g., Cook, 2000; Warner, 2004; Vandergriff & Fuchs, 2009) have advocated for expanding the scope of research on language play beyond linguistic forms. In her 2004 article, Warner argues for greater attention to playful elements in language use that extend beyond linguistic form (p. 81). For example, when learners engage in frame play, they aren't manipulating linguistic form or semantic meaning. Instead, pragmatic play involves using language in unexpected ways at the level of comprehension, not evident in the linguistic form. A sarcastic remark, for instance, conveys the opposite of its literal meaning, with contextual factors indicating the speaker's playful intent. From this perspective, any shift in tone or context (rekeying) is a form of pragmatic play (Warner, 2004).

Among the different types of pragmatic play, identity play has received a lot of research attention. Identity play encompasses play with social, relational, or individual identity such as participants' manipulation of "roles, positions, relationships, reputations, and other dimensions of social personae" (Ochs, 1996, p. 424). CMC-based environments appear to provide participants with increased opportunities for such play (Baym, 1995; Belz & Reinhardt, 2004; Warner, 2004). For example, MUDs (Multiuser Domain or Dungeon) and MOOs (Multiuser Domain or Dungeon Object-Oriented) are online gaming environments that encourage participants to role-play and

take on new identities (e.g., Rellstab, 2007; Warner, 2004). In the process of playing, users frequently assume multiple identities, such as an opposite- gender or even nonhuman identity (Turkle, 1995; Warschauer, 1995, as cited in Levy, 1997). Turkle (1995) hypothesizes that this kind of identity play allows people to better understand hidden aspects of themselves due to the freedom which comes with the anonymity of the Internet: “The Internet has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterize postmodern life. In its virtual reality, we self-fashion and self-create” (1995, p. 180). Research suggests that online communication participants may overrate minimal cues, especially if they have never met face-to-face. This “‘overattribution’ process” (Walther 1996, p. 18; quotes in original), in turn, facilitates the projection and manipulation of identity and thus may foster identity play. Additionally, Walther (1996) claims that “not only do CMC senders overcome the limits of the media to express personal cues, they may actually do so in ways that F2F communicators cannot” (p. 19). Other studies, however, suggest that CMC does not always promote identity play (e.g., Chester, 2004; Herring, 1996).

2.4 Contribution

The discussion in the preceding sections have highlighted the complexity and fluidity of online communication. The research documented is varied and ongoing to the extent that no individual study can as yet claim to be conclusive as to the stability and/or regularity of any distinctive features that may be attributed to Cameroonians who use social media. Indeed, the social media linguistic features cut across strategies; from unusual capitalization, neologism, unconventional spelling, deliberate misspelling, remixing and recontextualizing memes, expressing creativity and playfulness to language play in the general sense of the term (cf. Section 2.1). With respect to the context of this present investigation which is Facebook, it is evident that this media is being used by so many youth and adult alike, serving as a vital hub for Cameroonians to connect, exchange information, and express themselves. It has emerged as a valuable resource for sociolinguistic research, providing a window into the distinctive ways Cameroonian English speakers engage with language in the digital realm. My study is a continuation of this line of research. It is largely assumed that the features of this online discourse are diverse as they are structurally complex. They do not fit any formal classification of language as we have hitherto been used to. Consequently, an inventory of such features will have to be continuously assembled until such

that time that appropriate digital tools may be developed to track features in a quantitative manner sufficient enough to attribute to a group of users such as Cameroonian Facebook users.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0. Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological approach adopted for the study and offers justification of the choice of Facebook as research site. It then goes on to outlines criteria for recruitment of participants, method of data collection method of data analysis, boundary between language play and criticism, ethical issues and limitations of the study.

3.1. Justification of choice of a qualitative research approach

Qualitative research design is used for this study. Qualitative research is a methodological approach that aims to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the participants involved. It focuses on exploring and interpreting the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals within a particular context. In the context of discourse analysis, qualitative research is particularly useful as it allows researchers to delve deep into the complexities of language use and communication patterns.

The choice of qualitative research for conducting discourse analysis as it is the case of this study is justified by several reasons. First, qualitative research allows for a detailed exploration of language use in its natural context, providing rich insights into the nuances and subtleties of communication. Discourse analysis, as a qualitative method, is concerned with understanding how language constructs and reflects social reality. Second, qualitative research is well-suited for studying complex and dynamic social phenomena such as language play. Language play involves the creative and playful manipulation of language norms and conventions, which may not be easily captured through quantitative methods. Qualitative research enables researchers to uncover the underlying meanings and intentions behind linguistic choices, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of language play practices on Facebook. Furthermore, qualitative research is characterized by its flexibility and adaptability, allowing researchers to adjust their methods and techniques based on emerging insights and findings. In the context of studying language play on Facebook, where new forms of linguistic creativity and innovation constantly emerge, a qualitative approach provides the necessary tools to capture and analyze these evolving practices.

The qualitative approach is relevant to studying language play on Facebook due to the interactive and dynamic nature of online communication. Facebook serves as a digital platform where users

engage in various forms of linguistic creativity, humor, and playfulness through written texts, images, videos, and emojis. Qualitative research enables researchers to closely examine these multimodal forms of communication and uncover the underlying discursive strategies employed by Cameroonian English speakers in their language play practices.

3.2. Justification of Facebook as a research Site

Facebook has been chosen as the primary platform for data collection in this study due to its widespread usage and significance among Cameroonian English speakers. The decision to focus on Facebook aligns with the research aim of conducting a discourse analysis of language play within the context of a digital communication platform that is widely accessed by the target population. This section discusses the significance of Facebook in Cameroon and justifies its selection as the research site.

Facebook holds significant importance as a social media platform among Cameroonians, playing a crucial role in shaping online communication, social interaction, and information dissemination. According to a report by Hootsuite (2021), as of January 2021, there were approximately 4.8 million Facebook users in Cameroon, representing a substantial portion of the country's population. This statistic highlights the widespread adoption of Facebook as a primary means of digital communication and social networking among Cameroonians.

The popularity of Facebook in Cameroon can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, Facebook provides a space for individuals to connect, share content, and engage in various forms of online interaction. Given the linguistic diversity in Cameroon, where English is one of the official languages alongside French, Facebook serves as a platform for multilingual communication, allowing users to express themselves in their preferred language variety, including Cameroonian English.

3.3. Criteria and procedure for recruitment of participants

The participants in this study are Cameroonian Facebook users. The selection of these participants was based on a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling techniques. This approach ensures that the participants are representative of the target population and that the data collected is rich and diverse. The participants were selected based on their active use of Facebook and their willingness to participate in the study. English language proficiency was an important criterion used to select these participants. For example, it was necessary to determine that these users were

people who could write in the English that can be intelligible across the board. That is, the participants had a good command of the English language and can effectively communicate their thoughts and opinions through Facebook. Certain demographic considerations such as age, gender and location were also taken into consideration so that the study is representative of the diverse population of Cameroonian English speakers and that the findings can be generalized to the broader population.

The study recruited 30 participants to ensure that the data collected is rich and diverse. This number is based on the recommendations of previous studies on discourse analysis and language play on social media. The participants were recruited through a combination of online and offline methods, including social media advertisements, flyers, and word of mouth. The participants were asked to complete a consent form and a demographic questionnaire before participating in the study. The participants were also asked to provide their Facebook profiles and to agree to the terms and conditions of the study.

The following is a summary of the criteria for selecting participants:

1. *Cameroonian English Speakers*: Participants were required to self-identify as Cameroonians who could speak and write English;
2. *Active Facebook Users*: The participants had an active presence on Facebook, engaging in regular posting, commenting, and interacting with others on the platform;
3. *Language Play Enthusiasts*: The selected participants exhibited a strong interest in language play, humor, wordplay, memes, or other forms of creative linguistic expression within their online interactions on Facebook;
4. *Diverse Age and Gender Representation*: The study sought to include participants from diverse age groups and gender to ensure a varied representation of perspectives and experiences within the Cameroonian English-speaking community.

With the above-stated criteria in mind, the recruitment of participants took the following stages:

1. *Initial Identification*: To initiate the recruitment process, existing networks and online communities of Cameroonian English speakers were identified. This included language-specific Facebook groups, forums, or pages where individuals engage in discussions related to Cameroonian English and language play.

2. *Snowball Sampling*: Once initial contacts within the target population were established, snowball sampling was used to expand the participant pool. Snowball sampling involves asking initial participants to refer or nominate other individuals who meet the study's criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This approach is particularly effective for reaching individuals who may not be easily accessible through traditional recruitment methods.

3. *Social Media Outreach*: Given the focus on Facebook as the platform of interest, targeted outreach efforts were conducted on relevant Facebook groups and pages frequented by Cameroonian English speakers. Recruitment posts were shared, inviting potential participants to express their interest in taking part in the study.

4. *Screening and Selection*: Interested individuals were screened based on the established criteria for participation, including their self-identification as Cameroonian English speakers, active engagement on Facebook, and enthusiasm for language play. This screening process was needed to ensure that the selected participants align with the research objectives.

3.4. Method of data collection

Data collection involved the extraction and analysis of textual data from Facebook posts, comments, and interactions that exhibit language play practices among the target population. The data collection process was guided by the principles of qualitative discourse analysis, aiming to uncover patterns, themes, and discursive strategies employed in language play on Facebook. In doing so, five basic processes were followed.

1. *Data Extraction*: The initial phase of data collection involved systematically capturing relevant textual data from Facebook posts, comments, and interactions shared by Cameroonian English speakers. This may include screenshots, copies of text, or transcripts of conversations that showcase instances of language play, humor, wordplay, or linguistic creativity.

2. *Sampling Strategy*: Given the vast amount of data available on Facebook, a purposive sampling approach was employed to select specific posts and interactions that exemplify different forms of language play. The selection criteria included the frequency of engagement, diversity of participants, and the richness of linguistic features displayed in the content.

3. *Data Coding and Analysis*: Once the data was extracted, it was coded and analyzed using qualitative discourse analysis techniques discussed in Section 3.1 above. This process involves

identifying recurring themes, linguistic patterns, rhetorical devices, and discursive strategies employed in language play on Facebook.

4. *Interpretation and Meaning-Making*: The analysis of the collected data was focused on interpreting the meanings embedded in language play practices among Cameroonian English speakers on Facebook. This involved exploring how language play contributes to identity construction, social interaction, humor, and cultural expression within the online community.

5. *Triangulation and Validation*: To enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, triangulation techniques were employed by comparing data from multiple sources or involving participants in member checking to validate interpretations and conclusions drawn from the analysis.

3.5. Data and method of data analysis

We used a total of 23 Facebook posts out of the many that were collected for this qualitative study (see Appendix). The data were posted between 2018 and 2024. Table 1 presents the quantity and timeline of these Facebook posts.

<i>Facebook post</i>	<i>Name description</i>	<i>Date posted</i>
1	Biyarony	Oct. 2020
2-4	Dielockers, Phobia, dielock	Sept. 2019
5-6	BAMENDAZONIA Hell, dog-ta	July 2024, Oct. 2020
7-8	MeFOOL, amba 400Ls	Feb. 2019, July 2019
9-10	Ngannou, il y avait quoi avant	Oct. 2323, March 2023
11-14	Their log, Bamis, ambazonianin, grumbeep!	Oct. 2019, Jan. 2020, July 2020
15-17	Dogvernor, Dogvernor okalie be lie, Cameruïn	Sept 2023, March 2020
18-19	Praisident, docy men	Oct. 2018
20-22	Republeak, alakata pepper	Nov. 2023, Sept 2019, Jan. 2020

Table 1. Timeline of Facebook posts used for the study

The content analysis procedures will be used to interpret the data. According to Cole (1988), it is a “method of analyzing written, verbal or visual communication messages.” Content analysis is the study of recorded human communications such as dairy entries, books, newspaper, videos, text messages, tweets, Facebook updates etc. Being the scientific study of the content of

communication, content analysis is actually the study of contexts, meanings, subtexts, intentions contained in the messages. In simple terms, content analysis is the analysis of what is being said, written or recorded. Through systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns, content analysis is a “research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data,” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In other words, content is a message, and analysis its meaning. Content analysis method can be used in quantitative and qualitative research. One of the main purposes of a content analysis is to arrive at an interpretation of the meaning of the exchanges and an understanding of how participants jointly construct new meanings and new perspectives on old concepts. However, the meaning of an expression is not a fixed and literal phenomenon. Meaning is itself a construction between participants within a social and cultural context and related to a specific purpose. Participants in any conversation are constantly engaged in a process of interpreting meaning, guided by generic principles of conversation, systemic grammatical and semantic principles and their knowledge and understanding of the context. Further, meaning and the ways in which it is conveyed and constructed through the course of a conversation, alters with changes in the nature and extent of shared experience between speakers, shifts in the speakers’ goals, changes in the interpersonal and communicative context and a myriad of other ways.

Natural conversation is not restricted to using language to transfer information or propositional content. Language is used in groups to achieve transactional and interaction goals. Consequently, meaning is described here as the relation of the proposition and the speaker’s intentions both with respect to their goal for the interaction as a whole and their goals in relation to the local management of the conversation. All of these factors will influence the choice of expression. Meaning is therefore represented here as multi-componential. The central principle of pragmatic theory is that interpretation of meaning is an inferential process. Certain constant principles enable and constrain the inferencing process. The principle of regarding meaning as an inferential process drives from Grice’s (1957, 1975) work on the theory of meaning. Grice draws the distinction between what is said (literal meaning) and what is implicated. Literal meaning is an entailment mapped directly on to the words used, and the meaning is present on every occasion of use. However, the same sentence can be used to express implicated meaning (an implicature). An implicature is any non-conventional meaning that is conveyed and understood implicitly without ever being directly stated. Therefore, in my interpretation of the Cameroonian data from Facebook, I will draw very strongly from these conceptual frames.

3.6 Boundary between language play and criticism

It is important to make the difference between what is considered as language play and what others may perceive as outright criticism, since there is some degree of overlap between the two. The boundary between language play and criticism lies in the intent and manner of expression. Language play involves the creative and often humorous manipulation of words and phrases, primarily for entertainment or intellectual engagement. It is characterized by puns, wordplay, and playful use of language that can sometimes have underlying social or political commentary but is not necessarily meant to harm or insult. Criticism, on the other hand, focuses on expressing disapproval or pointing out faults and shortcomings. It is more direct and intentional in its purpose to critique or challenge someone or something. While criticism can be constructive, aiming to provoke thought and improvement, it can also be negative and confrontational. When language play crosses into criticism, it often adopts a more pointed tone, aiming to ridicule or undermine the subject or a situation as it is generally the case with my Facebook data. This transition becomes evident when the playful manipulation of language shifts towards targeting individuals or groups with the intent to mock, insult, or provoke. For example, a pun or a clever twist on a politician's name might initially seem playful, but when it carries derogatory connotations or is used to highlight perceived failures or flaws, it borders on criticism. Thus, the key difference lies in the underlying intent and the impact on the subject of the discourse. To further illustrate, the following Facebook post exemplifies language play through its creative use of neologisms, irony, and a casual tone to critique the political situation in Cameroon. Five level of analysis can be done.

1. Inventive Neologism: "Biyarony"

The term "Biyarony" is a key instance of language play. It is a portmanteau combining the name "Biya" (referring to Paul Biya, the President of Cameroon) with the suffix "-rony." The suffix "-rony" evokes "irony," suggesting that the term "Biyarony" represents a situation marked by irony or absurdity related to Biya's rule. This inventive wordplay creates a critical term that succinctly encapsulates the perceived contradiction between the regime's actions and the public's reaction, reflecting the user's dissatisfaction with the political process.

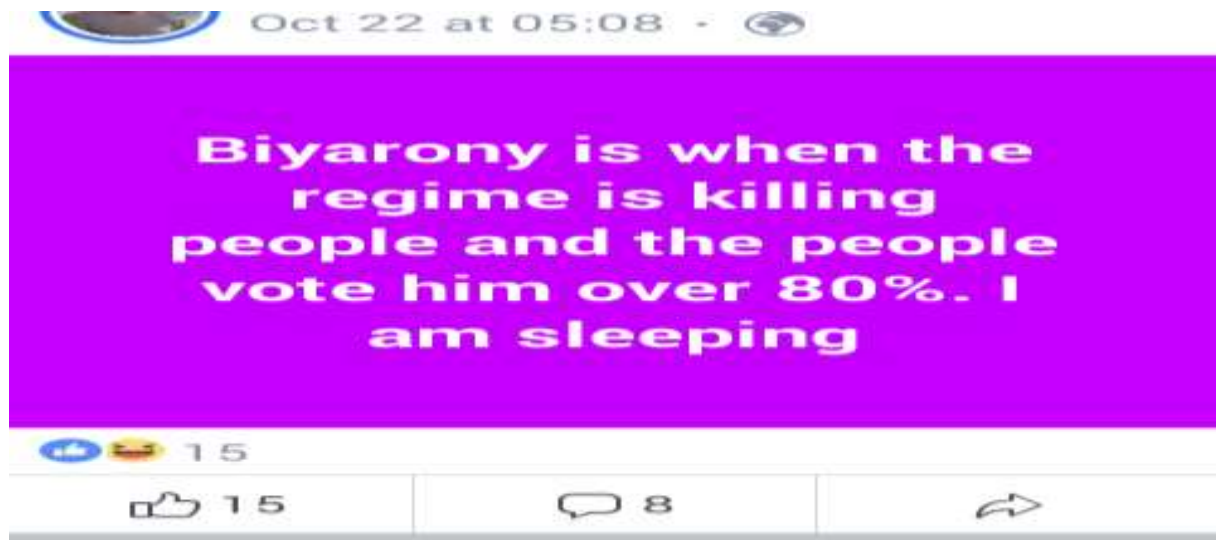


Figure 1: Facebook post 1: Biyarony (Oct. 22, 2020)

2. Irony and Critique

The post employs irony to highlight the dissonance between the regime's actions and the electoral results. The phrase "when the regime is killing people and the people vote him over 80 %" contrasts the alleged violence and repression of the regime with the surprisingly high voter support for Biya. This ironic juxtaposition emphasizes the perceived absurdity or hypocrisy of the political system, where public support seems contradictory to the regime's actions. By framing the situation in this way, the post criticizes the electoral process and the legitimacy of the regime, illustrating the disillusionment of the speaker.

3. Casual Tone and Humor

The concluding statement, "I am sleeping," adds a layer of humor and resignation to the post. By stating that the speaker is "sleeping," the post implies a sense of detachment or fatigue regarding the political situation. This casual remark serves to underscore the speaker's disillusionment and frustration, as if the political scenario is so predictable or disheartening that it prompts a dismissive attitude. The use of "sleeping" contrasts with the seriousness of the critique, providing a humorous and relatable way to express apathy or exhaustion with the political system.

4. Subtext and Implicit Criticism

The post's language play also involves subtextual criticism. The term "Biyarony" and the juxtaposition of violence with high electoral support suggest a critique of political manipulation or voter suppression. The implicit message is that despite the regime's alleged actions, public support

is manufactured or coerced, reflecting skepticism about the authenticity of the democratic process in Cameroon.

5. Cultural and Political Context

Understanding this language play requires knowledge of the political context in Cameroon, where Paul Biya's presidency has faced criticism for alleged corruption and authoritarian practices. The post's use of language play reflects a broader discontent with political realities and electoral practices. The inventive term "Biyarony" captures the essence of this discontent in a memorable and impactful way, resonating with those familiar with the political landscape.

In summary, the Facebook post uses language play effectively to critique the political situation in Cameroon. The term "Biyarony" creatively combines elements of irony with a critique of electoral outcomes, while the casual remark "I am sleeping" adds a layer of humor and resignation. Through this playful manipulation of language, the post captures and communicates the speaker's disillusionment with the political process, making complex political commentary accessible and engaging for the audience. Because of the force and vitality of language play achieved essentially by wordplay, I consider this example more on the side of language play than criticism. Throughout the analysis therefore, we will be confronted with this kind of data. In all of these cases, this study will conclude that language play is invoked.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues related to data collection on Facebook include obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring data privacy and confidentiality, and maintaining the integrity of the research process. Given that Facebook is a public platform, researchers must consider the ethical implications of collecting and analyzing user-generated content without explicit consent. To address these ethical concerns related to data collection, we took several measures, including:

1. *Informed Consent*: Informing participants about the research objectives, data collection methods, and potential uses of their contributions on Facebook.
2. *Anonymity and Privacy*: Ensuring the anonymization of participant identities and protecting sensitive information shared in Facebook interactions.

3. *Compliance with Regulations:* Adhering to Facebook's terms of service and data usage policies to avoid infringing on user privacy rights.

3.8. Limitations of the study

This study had several methodological constraints and potential biases. Here are some key limitations to be taken into consideration when assessing the merit of this work.

Limitations Related to Research Design and Methods

1. Scope and sample size; The study focuses on a specific group of Facebook users (Cameroonian English speakers), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Additionally, the sample size of participants may be constrained by factors such as access, willingness to participate, and time and resource limitations

2. Data collection: Relying solely on Facebook posts as the primary data source may not provide a comprehensive understanding of language play among the target group. Participants' posts may not accurately reflect their actual language use and may be influenced by factors such as audience, purpose, and context

3. Linguistic analysis: Conducting a discourse analysis of language play can be challenging due to the subjective nature of interpreting linguistic features and their contextual meanings. Our own linguistic and cultural background may influence the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Potential Biases and Mitigations Strategies

1. Researcher bias: Our personal experiences, assumptions, and preconceptions may influence the interpretation of the data. To mitigate this bias, the researcher engaged in reflexivity, acknowledging their own position and potential biases, and strive for objectivity in the analysis.

2. Selection bias: The sample of participants may not be representative of the target population if we rely on convenience sampling or self-selection. There was no objective way to avoid this bias

CHAPTER FOUR

FORMS OF LANGUAGE PLAY BY CAMEROONIANS ON FACEBOOK

4.0. Introduction

This chapter attempts an analysis of forms of language play in the data. As already discussed in Section 2.3.5 above on the nature of humour in language play in CMC, my labelling of the subheadings in this chapter can largely be subsumed under the umbrella term: language play, which embodies all aspects of the manipulation of language form at the orthographic level. It may involve coinage and all forms of creative usages intended to induce laughter, humour and/or satire or even criticism (cf. see section above 3.6 for a fine distinction between language play and criticism). That is, the fusing of lexemes with the intend to provoke laughter and sometimes anguish on the part of the other intended partner in the dialogue. It may include non-linguistics cues leading to intertextuality and pragmatic interpretation. It may introduce a different language element into the language leading to code-mixing etc.; and sometimes it may include unusual combination of text and image leading to a multimodal interpretation. The underlying intention in all language play just cited above is linguistic creativity and the attainment of a humorous effect. Most often Facebook posts are used to reference personality in subtle ways albeit sometimes transparent and sometimes veiled; but at the heart of it lies creativity that may evoke humour, raise anxiety or even be seen as motivated by hate. Humour and language play are multifunctional. Beyond fun and amusement, humorous discourse serves a range of social functions. Social identity is taken to be co-constructed and an emergent discourse. Humorous discourse in particular plays an important role in a range of social functions, including self-representation, group-building and attaining relational goals (see Archakis & Tsakona, 2005). It helps shape social structures by defining or sustaining “shared group identities” (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001; Yarwood, 1995), or by demarcating the boundaries of a group (Holcomb, 1997). These aspects are elaborated in this chapter. Lastly, we tackle an unusual language play phenomenon, which we have referred to as mathematical language play for lack of a better term. Because this lone example appears interesting, we chose to include other types of language play. This non-linguistic element was necessary to maintain a relative balance in the subsections of the chapter.

4.1 Variation of language play at orthographic level

In the ten (10) Facebook posts discussed in this section, three basic categories of language play are identified. The first three post is about language play at the level of word spelling

(orthography) illustrated by post 1-3. The second is stylized capitalisation as in post 4. The last category is a kind of juxtaposition of text, image and stylized spelling as in post 5. We begin with the first category which brings out elements of creativity, humour and also has the potential to generate hate from the perspective of the addressee in context.



Figure 2: Facebook post 2-4: Dielocks, Phobia, dielock (Sept. 26, 27 & 30, 2019)

As it was observed in section 2.3.5 above, form-based language play can be defined as the manipulation of linguistic form (Crystal, 1998), taking the form of derivation, play with nominal compounding, play with orthography, and revoicing of salient bits of language, all of which appear to be motivated by linguistic creativity (cf. Belz, 2002b; Belz & Reinhardt, 2004; Crystal, 2008; Derks et al., 2008a, 2008b; Holcomb, 1997). Post 1-3 above is dense with language play and each is a strong source of humour as it is a source of invective.

Let us comment on one post after the other in the order presented above, to bring out aspects of language play. The first post (in the commission for Bilingualism) showcases the writer's ability to manipulate language creatively to express complex political sentiments and critique, blending humor, sarcasm, and socio-political commentary. First, let us unpack the term "dielockers." This word is a playful transformation of "dialoguers," referring to those involved in dialogue or discussions. By replacing "dialoguers" with "dielockers," the author conveys a cynical perspective on the effectiveness of these discussions. The term "dielock" cleverly combines "die" and "lock," implying that the dialogues are deadlocked, futile, and ultimately unproductive. It suggests that the discussions are not leading to any meaningful progress or resolution, but rather are stagnating

and reinforcing the status quo. This linguistic twist adds a layer of sarcasm, highlighting the user's frustration and disillusionment with the political processes in Cameroon.

The phrase "teach SCians to say 'one And Indivisible' in French" is another instance of language play. "SCians" is a shorthand for Southern Cameroonians, a region with a significant population of English speakers. The idea of teaching them to say "one and indivisible" in French points to the government's attempt to enforce unity through linguistic assimilation. This phrase is laden with irony, as it critiques the government's superficial approach to resolving deeper socio-political issues by focusing on language rather than addressing the root causes of disunity. The capitalization of "And Indivisible" mimics the formal and rigid nature of official slogans, adding to the satirical tone of the text.

The entire text uses language play to convey a sharp critique of the Cameroonian government's initiatives. The manipulation of words and phrases reveals the user's skepticism and disapproval, while also engaging readers with its wit and creativity. The playful nature of the language makes the critique more memorable and impactful, allowing the user to effectively communicate their dissatisfaction with the political situation. Moreover, this text reflects broader trends in Cameroonian social media, where users often employ language play to navigate sensitive political topics. By using humor, irony, and sarcasm, they can voice dissent and critique without resorting to outright confrontation. This strategy allows for a more nuanced and layered form of communication, where meaning is conveyed through subtle linguistic twists and turns.

The other interesting example of wordplay via the strategy of nominal compounding, play with orthography mentioned above is the nominal "Phobia" in image no. 3 in post 1 above. It read: "Phobia says his dielock shall only discuss decentralization". The word Phobia is an interesting case of wordplay. Firstly, the name "Phobia" is a play on the name Paul Biya. This alteration serves a dual purpose: it not only phonetically mirrors the president's name but also implies a sense of fear or aversion associated with him. By calling the president "Phobia," the author suggests that Biya instills fear or apprehension among the populace, effectively criticizing his leadership style and the negative emotions it evokes. This renaming is a subtle yet powerful act of resistance, undermining the authority of the president through linguistic creativity. The term "dielock" is another example of language play. It is a portmanteau of "dialogue" and "deadlock," implying that the so-called dialogues proposed by the president are futile and stagnant. This wordplay conveys a sense of hopelessness and frustration with the political process, suggesting that discussions led by Biya are not genuine efforts at resolution but rather empty gestures that are

destined to fail. The use of “dielock” emphasizes the perceived ineffectiveness of the government’s approach to addressing political issues, particularly the crisis in Southern Cameroons. In conclusion, the text is a rich example of language play in Cameroonian social media. Through creative word manipulation, sarcasm, and rhetorical questions, the author critiques the government’s handling of political issues, particularly the dialogue around decentralization, while also engaging readers in a more dynamic and memorable form of political commentary.

The twisted words: “dielockers”, and “dielock” in the posts have been realized using the strategies of nominal compounding “die” + “luck”. In other words, it can be said that the two words have been derived from the one word: dialogue, thus the strategy of derivation as cited above. This unique example is most exciting in its playful content and presupposition. Seen in the context of Cameroon, and in the recent socio-political problems affecting parts of the country since 2016, and more recently in 2019 when the President of the Republic called for a “National Dialogue” to solve the problem, the sense of language play is a clear marker of identity creation among Cameroonian Facebook users. The implicit derogatory perspective associated with the twisted words “dielockers” and “dielock” all derive from the National Dialogue which the opponents of the government wats to paint as “death” even before it began. For one thing, even in humorous language play, humor is sometimes concomitant with aggression and resistance, respectively (Cook, 2000). Other researchers have gone further and claimed that humor is typically hostile or aggressive because, because laughing with somebody mostly means laughing at somebody else (Cook, 2000: 71). By the same token, Cook emphasizes that the use of humor does not always have “to assert superiority or drive home a victory,” as in the case of ““loser’s humor”” (Cook, 2000:72). In other words, humor is then used as a means of rebellion, resistance to tyranny, or as compensation for defeat.

The three Facebook posts were so popular among the Cameroonian Facebook community of users as seen in the 148 users who showed a thumb up, signaling approval. This figure is compared to just 8 who disapproved by showing thumb down. But up to 16 users also forwarded it to other viewers. As social posts are forwarded multiple times, they become a base of identity creation in the virtual space and keeps the group identified with its intends united along that usage of language and what is signifies. Many scholars of language play notably Turkle (1995) and Levy (1997) have hypothesizes that this kind of identity play allows people to better understand hidden aspects of themselves due to the freedom which comes with the anonymity of the Internet. “The

Internet has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterize postmodern life. In its virtual reality, we self-fashion and self-create” (Turkle 1995:180). Along the lines of identity formation, the research further suggests that online users tend to overrate minimal cues, especially if they have never met face-to-face (which is surely the case of Cameroonian Facebook users in this study). It is therefore this “overattribution” process” that in turn, facilitates the projection and manipulation of identity and thus may foster identity play (Walther 1996).

In this brief explanation can be seen how creativity is interwoven with humour. In fact, there are many of such creative uses of the language in the corpus I used. The positive reception of this post was 80 (thumb up), 24 users shared it, and only hate disapproved with a thumb down. Table 1 below shows other related examples of language play through nominal compounding that were found in our data.

<i>Play lexeme</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Context of use in social media</i>
Biyalogue	Biya + Dialogue	“Yannic Kawa, man of the match in the National Biyalogue . I just over like me that boy. It is not easy to turn against your sardine-giver in public.”(Oct 7, 2019)
<i>Commentary:</i> "Biyalogue" is a playful fusion of "Biya" and "dialogue," referring to President Paul Biya and possibly mocking the perceived superficial or one-sided nature of political discussions under his administration. This term suggests that what is presented as a genuine dialogue is merely a façade, where real conversation and democratic engagement are absent.		
Francofrog	Francophone + frog (undesirable creature)	“...Federalists, Unionist, and CameroUnese ARE NOT MY FRIENDS if u are a Francofrog get LOST...” (Feb 26, 2019)
"Francofrog" combines "Franco," referring to French-speaking Cameroonians or Francophones, with "frog," a derogatory term often used in Anglophone regions. This play on words highlights the linguistic and cultural tensions between the Anglophone and Francophone communities in Cameroon, underscoring the deep-seated issues of identity and mutual perception within the country.		
Cameruin	Cameroon + ruin	“ Cameruin . So this is now the vice-rector of my alma mater. A regime that promotes feymanian, scamming, intellectual vandalism...” (April, 2020)
<i>Commentary:</i> "Cameruin," a blend of "Cameroon" and "ruin," is a stark critique of the country's state. This term succinctly expresses the frustration and disillusionment of citizens who feel that the nation is deteriorating due to poor governance and systemic issues. It encapsulates a sense of despair and the perception of a country in decline.		
Praisident Praisidency	Praise + president (a president is praised not out of love, but fear)	“The praisident of Cameroun has been practicing self-isolation and social distancing for his 38 years in power. So, the current situation is nothing new to him. ...” (March 25, 2020)
Dogvornor	Dog+governor	Dogvornor Okalie be lie loses his closest collaborator Stephen in a ghastly moto accident early this morning. The Bulu/beti fail (sic) to realize that bad roads kill them too! 37 years of Experience! (Facebook Aug 4, 2019)
<i>Commentary:</i> "Dogvornor" is a derogatory twist on "governor," insinuating that those in power are behaving like dogs—either in terms of their loyalty to higher authorities without regard for the people's needs or in their perceived lack of dignity and integrity. This term vividly conveys the public's disdain for certain political leaders and their actions.		

Stomachlectual	Stomach + intellectuals (i.e. those intellectuals who enter into politics for selfish motives)	Thanks, Calibri Calibre for stating the most realistic figure of casualties of the on-going war: 12000. Meanwhile, lumpen Anglophone stomachlectuals canvassing for posts in this rogue regime. Continue to deny the carnage that is engulfing their own communities. (Facebook Feb 24, 2020)
<i>Commentary:</i> "Stomachlectual" combines "stomach" and "intellectual," mocking intellectuals who are seen as motivated by personal gain rather than genuine scholarship or public service. This term criticizes those who use their intellect to secure material benefits, suggesting that their actions are driven by their appetites rather than principles or altruism.		
Biyanistan	Biya (name of the president) + -ian (affix for nationality) = a country referred to as: Biyanistan	“Congrats to my Ethiopian friends. This is what vibrant leadership deserves, unlike the kind of inept fossilmen of countries such Biyanistan .” (Oct 11, 2019)
<i>Commentary:</i> " Biyanistan " is a satirical amalgamation of "Biya" and "-stan," a suffix used in the names of several countries. It implies that Cameroon under President Biya's long rule has become like a dictatorial state, akin to those often characterized by authoritarian governance and lack of freedoms. This term captures the sentiment of citizens who feel oppressed and governed by an entrenched autocratic regime.		
Praisenter	Presenter + praise singer (Reference to the presenter of a special TV programme “Insight the Presidency”) Republic + bleak Presidency + praise	This is the guy the praisenter of Insight the Praisidency brandishes as God-sent leader of La Republeak (Nov 1, 2019)
<i>Commentary:</i> " Praisenter " is a playful take on "presenter," possibly mocking those who constantly seek validation and admiration, while "Praisidency" could be a satirical alteration of "presidency," implying a government or leadership characterized by a need for constant praise and adulation.		

Table 2 . Language play at orthographic level

The examples here illustrate a growing trend in language play, not only among Cameroonians Facebook users, but also across the world. The other implication of language play as we have highlighted all along is humour that may lead to simple entertainment, but also frustration on the part of those who fell targeted. Herein lies the complexity of social media use. Since it affords users the freedom and flexibility to do as they chose, and when they like, it can be said to be functionally multifaceted. To this extent, social media post (Facebook in this context) may accentuate and galvanize opposing social entities within communities in the guise of language play and humour and therefore lead to polarization: “the trend found in individuals, after a group discussion, “... to endorse a more extreme position in the direction already favored by the group” (Lee, 2007:385). An obvious finding following this data (Table 1) is that increasingly, Cameroonian Facebook users resort to creative pragmatolinguistic resources of impoliteness disguised as language play, to create exclusive identities with a high risk of polarization of

society. The evidence is that personality related word play tends to be very recurrent in our data than normal day-to-day discourse on issues of human interest which excludes politics. It is fueled and encouraged by the nature of the virtual space which hides individual's identities. This on-line anonymity has been the main course of what Tannen (1998) has referred to as *agonism* experience in contemporary American culture. She defines agonism as "...automatic warlike stance—not the literal opposition of fighting against an attacker or the unavoidable opposition that arises organically in response to conflicting ideas or actions. An agonistic action, to me, is a kind of programmed contentiousness – a prepatterned, unthinking use of fighting to accomplish goals that do not necessarily require it" (p. 8). The use of language play to disguise subtle negative feelings toward groups, individual and entities in this way is therefore not limited to society in this social media era. Although it is always easy to identify separate groups or even national entities (e.g. Cameroon, Nigeria) from what is said, language play options, forms and intents is a global phenomenon.

The second and third categories of word play in this section 4.1 as previously announced include the use of stylized capitalization as in image 4 and the juxtaposition of text, image and stylized spelling as in image 5 (of post 4).

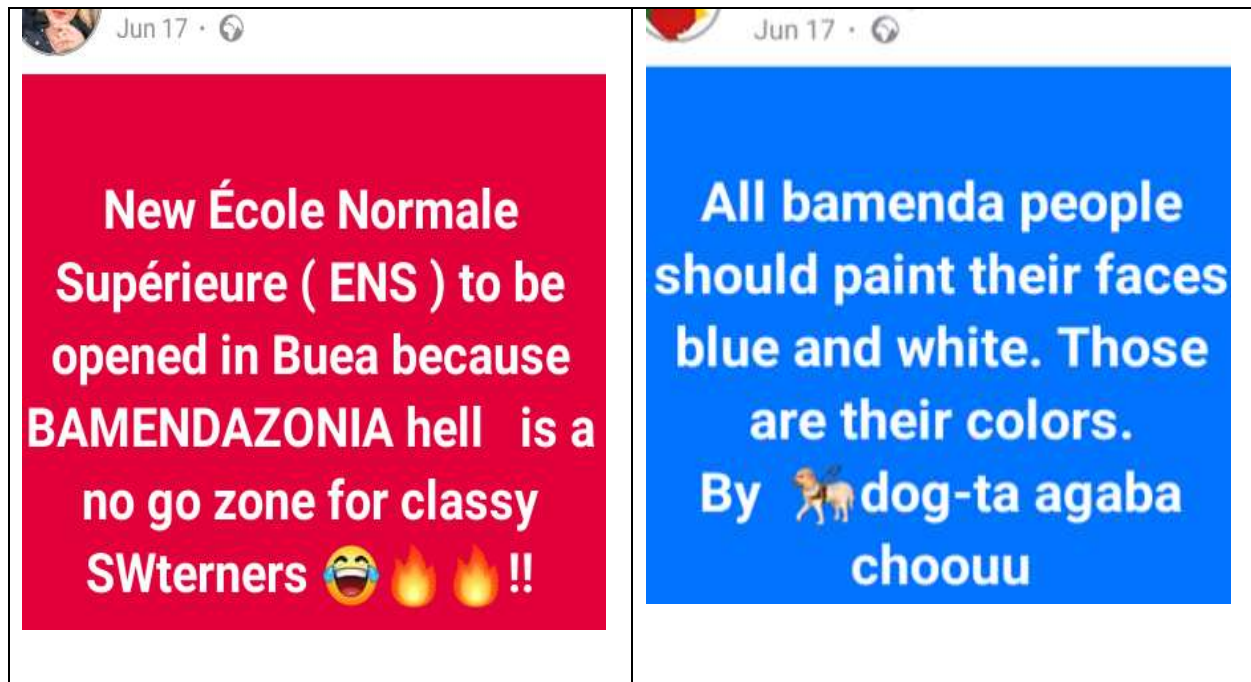


Figure 3: Facebook posts 5-6: BAMENDAZONIA hell, dog-ta (July 17, 2024, Oct. 12 2020)

The first post provides a striking example of language play that reflects the sociopolitical tensions in Cameroon. It employs several linguistic strategies, including capitalization, neologisms, and

regional stereotypes, to convey a nuanced critique and provoke a reaction from its audience. To begin with, the capitalization of "BAMENDAZONIA" and "SWterners" serves as a strategy of language play at the level of the form of the word (Barton & Lee 2013:5 have referred to this phenomenon as stylized) to emphasize these terms and distinguish them from the rest of the text. "BAMENDAZONIA" is a portmanteau that merges "Bamenda" with "Ambazonia," the latter being a term used by separatists to refer to the Anglophone regions of Cameroon seeking independence. By capitalizing this term, the author not only draws attention to it but also imparts a sense of mockery or disdain via the strategy of language play. On the other hand, "SWterners" is a creatively abbreviated and capitalized term referring to people from the Southwest region of Cameroon. The use of "classy" before "SWterners" introduces a stereotype that suggests individuals from this region are more sophisticated or refined compared to those from "BAMENDAZONIA." This contrast is a deliberate form of language play that juxtaposes two regions and their inhabitants, reinforcing regional biases and stereotypes. The capitalization here not only emphasizes the term but also elevates the status of "SWterners" in the context of the Facebook post. The author's strategic use of these linguistic tools highlights the power of language in shaping perceptions and provoking discourse, particularly in a digitally connected and politically charged environment.

The second post exemplifies several key strategies of language play, including humor, mockery, and the use of creative spelling to convey cultural and political commentary. The post opens with a seemingly absurd suggestion that all people from Bamenda should paint their faces blue and white. This is a clear instance of humor, as it is an exaggerated and unlikely proposition meant to elicit laughter or ridicule. The humor is further amplified by the claim that these are the "colors" of Bamenda people, which is not a recognized cultural or regional symbol, thus adding an element of mockery. The name "dog-ta agaba choouu" is a playful distortion of what is likely meant to be "Dr. Agaba Cho." By altering the spelling and pronunciation, the writer injects humor and perhaps a subtle insult. The use of "dog-ta" instead of "doctor" plays on the phonetic similarity but introduces a derogatory term "dog," suggesting mockery or disdain. This creative spelling also makes the name sound exaggeratedly informal and ridiculous, furthering the humorous tone. The suggestion to adopt specific colors as a group identity marker is a form of stereotyping, which is a common tactic in language play to simplify and exaggerate traits of a particular group for comedic or critical effect. By assigning arbitrary colors to Bamenda people, the post trivializes and caricatures their identity, highlighting how language play can be used to challenge and critique social norms and identities. Further, the phrase "dog-ta agaba choouu" showcases linguistic

innovation, as it deliberately deviates from standard spelling and grammar to create a unique, playful expression. This innovation is a hallmark of language play, as it breaks the rules of conventional language to create new meanings and effects. The post engages with the community by referencing shared cultural knowledge and current events, fostering a sense of in-group understanding among those who are familiar with the context. This engagement is a crucial aspect of language play, as it relies on the audience's ability to recognize and appreciate the nuances of the message.

To emphasize the use of capitalization as a strategy in language play by Cameroonian Facebook users, we draw from the following two Facebook posts below. The first uses capitals and the second also include the strategy of logogram (see Crystal 2008). Logograms have been identified as a key strategy of language play at the form-based level, alongside many others.



Figure 4: Facebook posts 7-8: MeFOOL & amba 400Ls (Feb. 7, 2019; July 12, 2019)

The interpretation of “MeFOOLs” (i.e. a proper name, Mefo) and “400Ls” (i.e. fools) in the post above would require a proper understanding of the context of the Cameroonian situation. The entire post is a clear example of the dynamic and nuanced nature of language play in Cameroonian social media discourse, particularly through the strategic use of capitalization, local vernacular, and playful manipulation of words. The capitalization of “Mimi MeFOOL” serves as a central element of word play in this post. The name “Mimi” is combined with “MeFOOL,” which phonetically sounds like “me fool” but is visually emphasized by capitalization to denote a character or person being criticized. This play on words creates a derogatory label, implying that Mimi is not just a fool but a particularly egregious one. The capitalization amplifies the insult, adding an element of mockery and scorn that aligns with the post’s critical tone. The subsequent

phrase, “You sabi say ajaja them nodi shame nor?” employs Pidgin English, a creole language commonly used in Cameroonian social media. “You sabi say” translates to “do you know that,” introducing a rhetorical question that challenges the reader’s awareness. The term “ajaja” is a slang word in Pidgin that can imply “fools” or “idiots,” and “nodi shame nor” translates to “do not have any shame.” Together, this phrase derides a group of people (presumably politicians or public figures) as lacking shame, reinforcing the criticism and adding a layer of local color to the commentary. The overall wordplay in this post involves a blend of satire and vernacular that leverages capitalization to intensify the insult and Pidgin English to ground the critique in a familiar cultural context. The use of “MeFOOL” and “ajaja them nodi shame nor” demonstrates how capitalization and local language functions not only to insult but also to convey a sense of community and shared understanding among readers familiar with these linguistic markers. The post mocks perceived dishonesty and incompetence in a manner that is both specific to the Cameroonian political landscape and resonant with the everyday experiences of its readers.

In the next post (above) the term “Mad Barata” is a play on words where “Mad” signifies extreme or irrational behavior, and “Barata” appears to be a name or title. Together, “Mad Barata” creates an impression of a controversial or notorious figure, suggesting a provocative or disruptive character. The post refers to this person as having sent “amba 400Ls near yi,” using “amba 400Ls” as coded language for a group of people associated with the separatist Ambazonia movement. The combination of “amba” (a shorthand for Ambazonia) with “400Ls”, a logogram, adds a layer of ambiguity and local color, reflecting the nuanced language play in Cameroonian social media. The use of the term “400Ls” might be an in-joke or insider term among users familiar with local political slang or stereotypes.

The phrase “if you get kanas!” is a play on “if you have the balls” or “if you are brave enough,” with “kanas” being a localized slang for courage or audacity. This phrase, rendered in capital letters, conveys a challenge or taunt, intensifying the confrontational tone of the post. It implies that only those who are bold or daring would engage with or respond to the situation described.

The final part of the post, “Nobi beb beb beb for facebook!” uses “beb beb beb” to mimic an onomatopoeic representation of meaningless chatter or trivial talk. It is also a strategy of language mixing. This phrase, not capitalized, serves to trivialize or dismiss the online discussions happening on Facebook, suggesting that they are irrelevant or inconsequential compared to the more serious or pressing matters being discussed. The term “Nobi” means “it is not” in Pidgin

English, reinforcing the sentiment that what is being discussed on Facebook lacks substance or importance.

Overall, the post's language play involves a creative mix of capitalization, localized slang, and playful manipulation of terms to critique political figures and highlight the disconnect between online discourse and real-world issues. The use of "Mad Barata," "amba 400Ls," and "kanas" creates a vivid and provocative narrative that engages readers through humor and coded language, reflecting the complex interplay of language and politics in Cameroonian social media. Through these elements, the post not only critiques but also performs a form of social commentary that resonates with the audience's experiences and frustrations.

4.2 Intertextuality and pragmatically induced language play

It was noted in Section 2.3.5 that among the different types of pragmatic language play, identity play is one key area of research in CMC. Identity play encompasses play with social, relational, or individual identity such as participants' manipulation of roles, positions, relationships, reputations, and other dimensions of social personae. It is usually a careful and crafty display of text, image, and memes, to convey a certain meaning. Intertextuality is therefore analytically linked to identity construction. In this section we examine two Facebook posts whose proper meaning can only be deduced by reference to other happening in the past; sometimes a distant historical and/or political past. The basic idea of intertextuality as it may relate to language/pragmatic play is that all texts—oral or written—consist of numerous "intertextual weavings" of what Becker (1995) calls "prior texts" of different sorts (Gordon, 2006, 2009; Tannen, 2007). This view of text as an amalgamation of multiple voices, transformations, and interventions stems from Bakhtin's realization that in using language, we are constantly mixing our own words with those of others. That is, while texts (in theory) stand alone, in reality, they tie back to previous usages of language and simultaneously anticipate future usages. The most important thing here is however that intertextual reshaping of texts has a wide variety of interactional functions, including building shared communities (Becker, 1994), accomplishing tasks (Tovares, 2005), creating involvement (Tannen, 2007), and constructing subtle layers of meaning (Gordon, 2009). Intertextuality has been associated to language play in the broader sense of the notion of "play". That is, the writer uses text to play on our imagination, so that meaning as we have already seen in the previous section is only indirectly deduced from a distant context. Post 8-9 display two seemingly unrelated issues, yet linked by a common strategy—a reference to similar events in political life.



Figure 5: Facebook posts 9-10: Ngannou & il y avait quoi avant (Oct. 29, 2023; March 25, 2023)

These examples reflect identity/pragmatic play by relying on the technique of juxtaposing unrelated event on the surface level. At the deep level the two post converged. The first image features the famous Cameroonian boxer, Ngannou who recently lost a boxing world championship to his English opponent. The prospect of Ngannou winning were very high in Cameroon and politically it had the potential to once again demonstrate that Cameroonians are united just as we often see when our national team is playing a major championship. Although, the English boxer was declared winner, the writer of the Facebook post states: "Dear Cameroonians, Ngannou won, but let us accept the verdict of the Constitutional Council". What else can we do?". This is a reference to the recent national elections in the country in which opponents of the ruling party claimed that presidential elections were not truly a reflection of the popular votes. One needs to be a Cameroonian to understand that text. It is a good example of how language can be manipulated to convey subtle intentions by bringing together unrelated events. Of course, this meaning becomes very clear when we read through the rest of the post. It clarifies the context. The intertextual reference is to a political context of Cameroon, and also point to the workings of the constitutional council. These two references deserve further analysis:

Intertextual References to Political Context: The post references "Ngannou," who is a real individual—likely referring to Francis Ngannou, a Cameroonian mixed martial athlete known for his achievements in the UFC. By mentioning Ngannou's victory and juxtaposing it with the need

to “accept the verdict of the Constitutional Council,” the post intertwines the global with the local. Ngannou’s success is used as a rhetorical device to discuss the acceptance of political decisions, mirroring the sentiments of acceptance and protest that are prevalent in political discourse. This intertextual reference to a widely recognized figure in international sports engages readers by linking global achievements with local political struggles, thereby enhancing the post’s relatability and impact.

Intertextual References to “Constitutional Council”: The mention of the “Constitutional Council” intertextually references the legal and political institutions involved in adjudicating electoral and constitutional matters in many countries. In Cameroon, the Constitutional Council’s decisions are often subject to public scrutiny and controversy. By invoking this institution in the context of Ngannou’s victory, the Facebook post subtly critiques the perceived inconsistencies or injustices in political decision-making. This reference draws on the familiar discourse surrounding political judgments and public reactions to them, highlighting the tension between national and personal contexts.

The next image in the Facebook post above is that of the newly elected Senegalese president with the text written in English and French: “From il y avait quoi avant? To il y quoi ailleurs?” Congratulation Senegal. The Facebook post is a rich example of language play through the strategies of intertextuality and language mixing, demonstrating how these tools can create humor, convey deeper meanings, and connect with a broader audience. The post exemplifies language mixing by combining French and English. The phrases “il y avait quoi avant?” and “il y quoi ailleurs?” are in French, while “Congratulation Senegal” is in English. This blend reflects the bilingual nature of Cameroonian society, where both French and English are widely spoken. Language mixing here serves to engage speakers of both languages and highlights the speaker’s linguistic dexterity. The use of French in the core phrases, followed by English in the concluding congratulation, seamlessly bridges the linguistic divide, making the message accessible and relatable to a broader audience.

Intertextuality is prominently featured in this post. The phrases “il y avait quoi avant?” and “il y quoi ailleurs?” draw on common French expressions. “Il y avait quoi avant?” translates to “What was there before?” suggesting a reflection on the past or what preceded a certain event or situation. “Il y quoi ailleurs?” translates to “What is there elsewhere?” This phrase shifts the focus from the past to exploring what lies beyond the current context, often implying curiosity or a search for alternatives or better options. These phrases are likely referencing a common sentiment

or discourse in Cameroonian society, potentially linked to political or social commentary. By juxtaposing these two questions, the post creates a narrative progression from past reflections to future inquiries, suggesting a journey of realization or evolution in thought.

The intertextual references are likely layered with cultural and social meanings understood within the Cameroonian context. The phrases may be invoking common rhetorical questions posed in discussions about political, social, or economic conditions in Cameroon. By celebrating Senegal's achievement with "Congratulation Senegal," the post subtly contrasts Senegal's progress with the implied stagnation or challenges in Cameroon, thus making a poignant social commentary through intertextuality.

There is an element of humor and irony in the post, arising from the playful use of common expressions and the final congratulation. The humor lies in the clever twist from looking backward ("il y avait quoi avant?") to looking outward ("il y quoi ailleurs?"), culminating in an acknowledgment of Senegal's success. The irony is in the implication that while Cameroonians may be stuck pondering their past and current challenges, Senegal is moving forward, deserving of congratulations.

The narrative structure of the Facebook post, moving from one question to another and ending with a congratulatory note, mirrors a logical progression of thought. It starts with introspection, transitions to exploration, and ends with acknowledgment. This structure is engaging and thought-provoking, using language play to make a broader point about progress and perspective. This Facebook post therefore effectively illustrates language play through intertextuality and language mixing. By blending French and English and drawing on culturally resonant phrases, the post creates a rich, multi-layered message that is humorous, ironic, and socially poignant. This showcases the power of language play in social media to engage audiences, convey complex ideas, and reflect cultural dynamics.

4.3 Language mixing

English, French and Pidgin English are popularly spoken in Cameroon. Language mixing occurs when an individual use more than one within the scope of a single communicative interaction. This phenomenon is also referred to as code-mixing and code-switching. In the context of this study I will refer to such Facebook posts which uses more than one of the languages as language mixing. Language mixing is a form of language play. It can be a marker of identity for

Cameroonian online users who are mostly young and educated, who choose to maximize the advantage of democratic nature of the cyberspace by playing with language. In addition, they are also conscious of the intense language contact in the country, which may even be compounded in online communication where there is potential for identity confusion. One way out for them is code-switch from time to time to any of the languages in order maintain their identities if they would need to do so. The following Facebook posts illustrate this phenomenon.

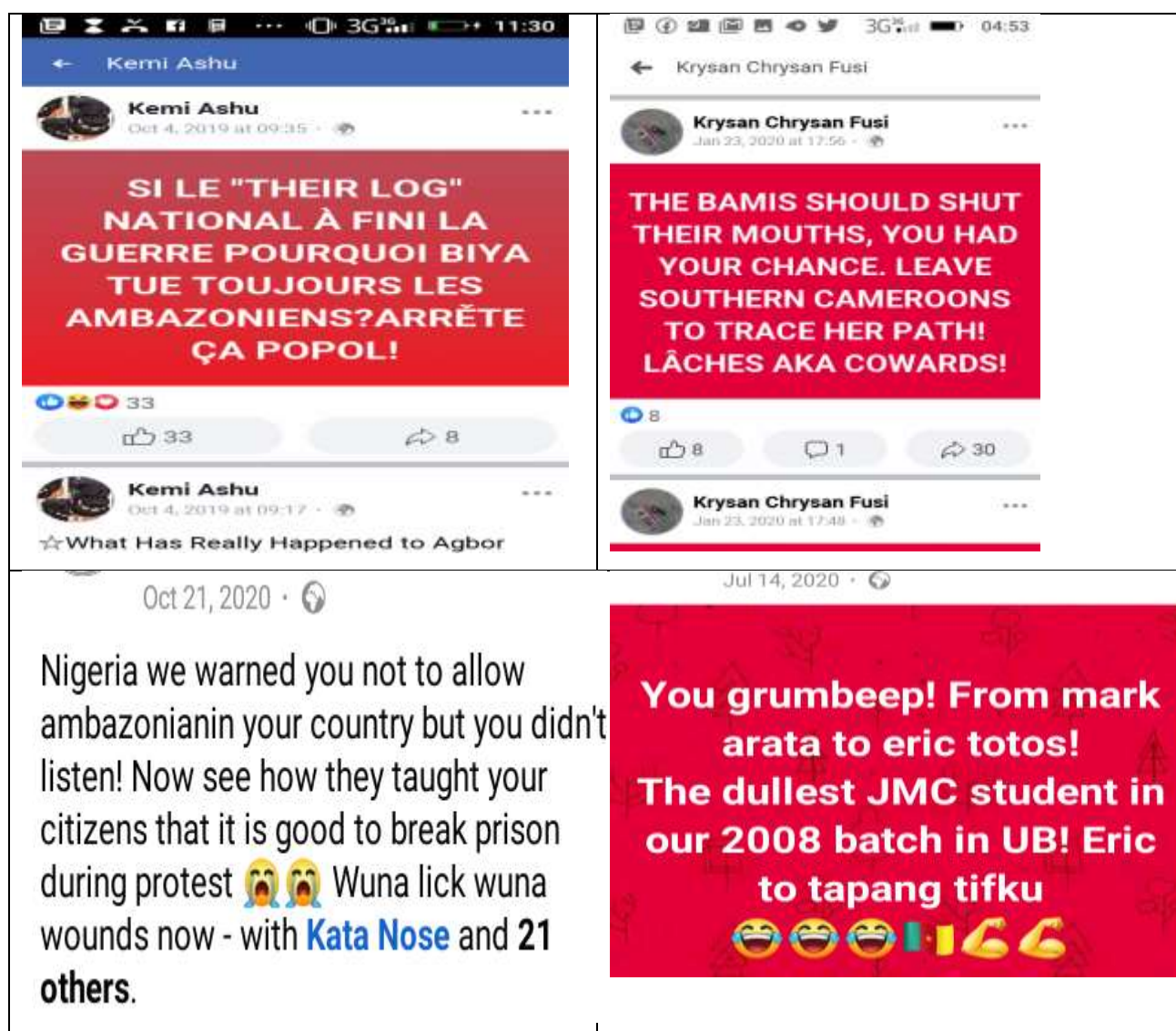


Figure 6: Facebook posts 11-14. Their log, Bamis, ambazonianin, grumbeep! (Oct. 4, 2019; Jan. 28, 2020; Oct. 21, 2020; July 14, 2020)

The distribution of language in the four images above is clearly unequal. In the first image (top left) the only sign of English is the famous twist of the word “Dialogue” realized here as “their log”. In the previous section (4.1, post 1.3) it was realized as “dielockers” and “dielock”. The rest of the text is in French. The play is on the word “dialogue” and the use of French as a

mixture. This kind of style can be a show of strong negative emotion on the topic being discussed upon. The National Dialogue called for by the president of the country was a contentious issue and received mixed reactions. Those who were in favour spoke about it favourably and those who were against it took to social media spaces and other traditional media to condemn it. This post is one example out of many that appear to be negative about it. “Dialogue” written here as “their log” implies that the issue is an impasse, “a log of wood”, “their log of wood” etc. In the previous section, it was referred to as a “dead” thing (dielock) and the people invited to take part as “dielockers”.

The second image is mostly written in English and the only French word “lâches” (meaning coward) is the foreign component yet brings into the whole text a lot of meaning. The post re-enact a historical past of a particular ethnic group of Cameroon, who like Anglophones today, struggled to liberate Cameroon from French colonialism in the 1950s. While majority of the country do not condone such a comparison with the current instability in the two Anglophone-speaking areas of Cameroon today, the writer of the post does. The language play aspect here is reminiscent of the intertextuality discussed in the previous section. Two languages are used to write a Facebook post, to recast a serious issue in a more or less trivial, playful manner. On the one hand it appears to show that Anglophone diaspora who are in the cyber space are united in their “fight” against the “others” as implied in the diminutive way in which the post refers to members of another prominent ethnic group in the country (The “Bamis”). On the other hand, it shows that although diaspora communities generally celebrate the home abroad, they also generally transfer the tensions and problems – social, inter-ethnic, inter-tribal, inter-lingual – that are found at home to the diaspora community. These may not be in the same degree as at home, but they are nevertheless present. In this specific Facebook post, this tension is visible both at the level of conceptualization (Anglophone vs Francophone) and at the level of the form of the word (Bamiléké vs “Bamis”). This characterization is not new in real communities. For example, Anderson (1983) and Mühleisen (2002) document findings on how people in the diaspora from the same community or country tend to build in-groups through regular meetings, the use of language (dialects or sociolects), and other strategies. But with the arrival of the internet, similar patterns of diaspora community building have emerged (see Donath, 1999; Hinrichs, 2006; Mair, 2003). In the digital realm, individuals have created virtual communities that mirror real diaspora communities, engaging in identity construction and communication similarly, albeit with nuances specific to the medium. These online communities, however, differ from their real-world counterparts in several ways. Identities in the virtual space are fluid, often shifting along with the pseudonyms adopted by community members. This anonymity provides a sense of safety and

distance, encouraging members to be more outspoken or bold in their criticisms and suggestions on various topics. The ease of changing positions is facilitated by the ability to alter identities, and despite being geographically dispersed, members remain tightly connected through the internet. While these dynamics also occur in real communities, they are generally less direct, and the risks to harmonious coexistence are typically lower.

The third and fourth image typically employs the use of Pidgin English to mix with English. English and Pidgin play in Facebook posts by Cameroonian is much stronger than mixing French and English. For one thing, many Anglophones in the diaspora, especially those whose data I collected for this research, are united in their support for what they have come to see as domination by the French-speaking political administration. Pidgin language mixing with formal English as a form of language play restricts identity to exclusively Anglophone because French-speaking Cameroonians are not good speakers of Pidgin. Therefore, when the writer reverts to Pidgin, he/she is appealing exclusively to Anglophones as opposed to Francophones. It is not clear from the data what kind of issue may have influenced a switch from English to Pidgin. However, it is clear that when the writer switches from one to the other it may be because of the one of the following reasons as already documented in other studies. The first is the desire for flexibility and freedom of expression. The second is triviality. Social media actors often benefit from the freedom that the virtual space provides to lash out on the status quo. In a way, the virtual space is free from censorship and thus often leads to the trivialization of verbal aggression and exclusionary discourses. By playing with language (mixing) the authors intend to promote an underlying atmosphere of anxiety and insecurity.

4.4 Multimodality-text, image and language play

Multimodal communication encompasses the simultaneous use of various communicative channels, such as speech, eye gaze, and facial expressions (Louwerse et al., 2006:1717). This approach aims to explore the interplay between linguistic (speech) and paralinguistic (eye gaze, gestures) modalities. Researchers not only compare how each modality functions independently but also investigate their simultaneous occurrence. The objective is to determine whether these co-occurrences are incidental or if they carry additional information (Louwerse et al., 2006). From a semiotic perspective, multimodal communication involves language combined with other semiotic resources to create meaning (O'Halloran, 2004, p.1). This approach examines how texts and images are used together to construct or co-construct meaning, as different modes of communication convey information in various ways (Hull & Nelson, 2005). The semiotic

perspective rejects the notion that language operates in isolation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) and critiques analytical methods that view communication purely as a linguistic event (Kress, 2001:42). Post 15 is a typical example of the combination of a text and an image which reveals the political problem that Cameroonians have faced in recent times.



Figure 7: Facebook posts 15-17: Dogvernor; Dogvernor Okalie be lie, Cameruin (Sept. 13 2023; Aug. 4 2019; March 5 2020)

The play in the first image is the clipped word: “dogvernor”. This is a combination of the word “dog” + “governor”. And the image is that of the real person being named. This is the effect of the multimodality in this particular post—the close relationship between the text and the image mutually reinforcing one and the other and contributing to the fun of the whole situation. Many examples of clipped words which results to new words are presented in Table 1 of section 4.1. The telling effect of such post is vivid as it provokes laughter and scorn. The second image replicates the same word “governor” with the play on the named person’s sur name: Bilai which is here written as “be-lie” (i.e. implying he is lying or he is a liar). In the third image Cameroon is written as “Cameruin”. Here again is an example of another clipped word (“Cameroon” + “ruin”). The writer implies that Cameroon is a ruin or Cameroon is ruining itself. The photo on it is that of the president of another country in which opposition for his campaign to run for the third term in office is rife. By bringing in this photo, the writer wants to make a vivid case against supporters of a similar situation in Cameroon. The power of language play in these images is strong, backed by real photos of real political actors.

In fact, the usage of picture and text in designing Facebook posts is intrinsically lined to this medium. Most Facebook posts feature eye-catching images, pictures, cartoons, and photos that beg to be explored and draw in even the most reluctant observer. Although it may seem a superficial way of judging an impactful post, the reality is that readers' experience of consuming such posts and having confidence in it is much affected by how it looks, and whether it contains appealing images and short texts to describe the image. The reader's eyes meet images before texts and it is no secret that readers' first impression is usually shaped by the post's appearance; hence, colorful pictures and alluring illustrations give rise to positive reception and attitudes. But pictures can do even more than hook viewers into looking at the post and forwarding to others. In fact, the second image was forwarded 67 times, a record number compared to most of the Facebook posts examined in this research. As the adage implies, pictures convey information more efficiently and effectively than words do. They can quickly and easily convey much detailed information in visible form; therefore, they contribute a lot to the readability and comprehensibility of social media posts.

4.5 Creative critique through language play

The Facebook post in this category indulges in language play through a combination of satire, inventive language, and cultural references to deliver a critique of political claims and societal realities in Cameroon. Creative spelling, metaphorical exaggeration, sarcastic tone, juxtaposition, and emphasis are also used.

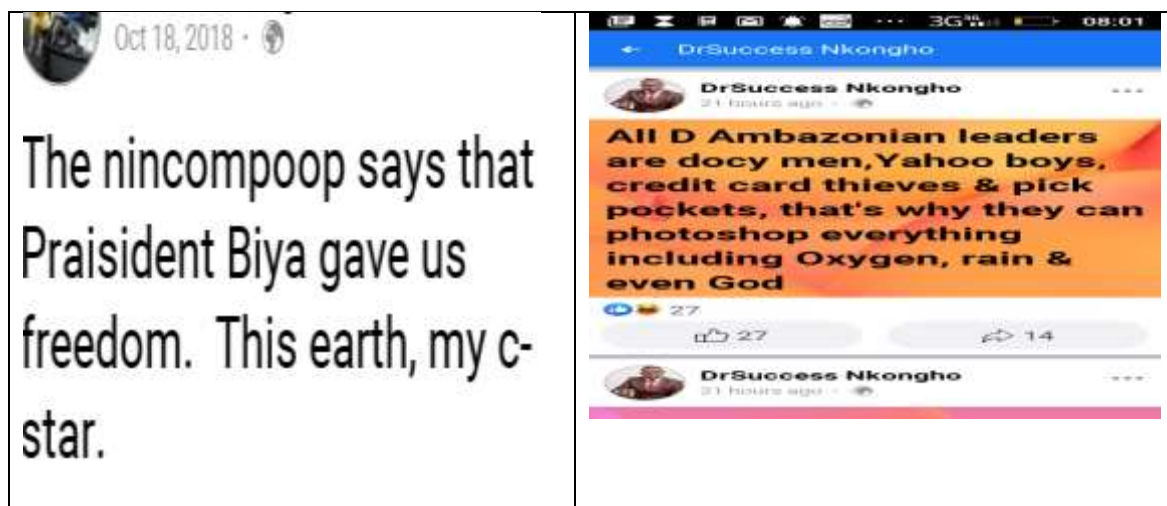


Figure 8: Facebook posts 18-19 Praisident; docy men (Oct. 18 2018; Oct. 24 2018)

The first post conveys a strong sense of skepticism and disdain. The choice of “nincompoop” reflects the speaker’s view of the claim as absurd or misleading, suggesting that the assertion of freedom is far from reality. This term injects a layer of humor and derision into the post, making the critique more pointed and engaging.

Inventive Wordplay: The word “Praisident” is a playful twist on “President,” combining the words “praise” and “president.” This term humorously underscores the idea that the president is being excessively lauded or celebrated, perhaps beyond what is warranted. The use of “Praisident” suggests that the speaker sees the president’s role not just as a leader but as someone being overly praised in a way that might be undeserved. This wordplay highlights the disconnect between the official narrative and the speaker’s perspective on the actual state of freedom and governance.

Cultural and Contextual Reference: The phrase “This earth, my C-star” adds a layer of cultural and contextual nuance to the post. The term “C-star” is a creative blend, likely referencing “Cameroon” (often abbreviated as “C”) and “star,” which can denote both excellence or prominence. By combining these elements, the phrase conveys a sense of disillusionment with the state of affairs in Cameroon. The use of “this earth” implies a broader, perhaps existential, reflection on the state of the nation and the world, suggesting that the speaker views the political situation as part of a larger, troubling reality.

Emphasis on Discrepancy: The juxtaposition of “Praisident Biya” and the notion of freedom against the critical tone of “nincompoop” and the resigned observation “This earth, my C-star” underscores a significant discrepancy between official statements and the speaker’s lived experience. The post implies that the claim of freedom is in stark contrast with the reality faced by the people, emphasizing that political rhetoric does not align with the actual conditions. This critique is framed within a humorous and ironic context, using inventive language to underscore the gap between perception and reality.

Creative critique through language play: Overall, the Facebook post uses language play effectively to criticize and mock the political status quo. The combination of a satirical term (“nincompoop”), a creative twist on “President” (“Praisident”), and the culturally loaded phrase “This earth, my C-star” work together to deliver a multifaceted critique. The post uses humor and wordplay to highlight the absurdity of the political claims and to reflect a broader sense of disillusionment with the state of freedom and governance in Cameroon. This creative use of

language engages readers and invites them to critically reflect on the disparity between political rhetoric and actual conditions.

The second post is yet another example of language play that leverages various linguistic techniques to convey criticism and humor. Firstly, the post employs creative spelling and informal language to engage a specific audience. The use of “docy men” (likely a playful misspelling of “dodgy men”) and “Yahoo boys” (a term commonly used in Nigerian and Cameroonian contexts to describe individuals involved in internet fraud) reflects an informal, conversational tone. This informal language choice establishes a connection with readers familiar with these terms, enhancing the post's relatability and effectiveness. The playful spelling of “docy” instead of “dodgy” introduces a layer of wordplay that can amplify the humorous and critical undertone of the message.

Secondly, the post employs metaphor and exaggeration through the statement that Ambazonian leaders can “Photoshop everything including Oxygen, rain & even God.” Here, “Photoshop” is used metaphorically to suggest that these leaders are adept at manipulating or fabricating reality. This exaggeration implies that their deceit is so profound that it extends to even the most fundamental and sacred elements of existence, such as oxygen and rain, humorously suggesting an absurd level of manipulation. By including “God” in this list, the post further exaggerates the extent of deceit, highlighting the perceived corruption and dishonesty of the leaders in a hyperbolic manner.

The use of sarcasm is also evident throughout the post. The term “docy men,” coupled with “Yahoo boys” and other descriptors like “credit card thieves” and “pick pockets,” sarcastically portrays Ambazonian leaders as inept and criminally inclined. The sarcastic tone is reinforced by the final claim that these leaders can Photoshop elements as fundamental as oxygen and rain, indicating an underlying critique of their credibility and integrity. This use of sarcasm not only mocks the leaders but also emphasizes the speaker's disdain and skepticism about their actions and claims.

Further, the post utilizes juxtaposition by combining serious accusations with absurd claims. By contrasting the real accusations of theft and fraud with the ludicrous idea of Photoshopping rain and oxygen, the post effectively highlights the perceived dishonesty of the leaders. This juxtaposition creates a comedic effect while underscoring the author's critical stance.

The post's use of capitalization to emphasize "ALL" at the beginning of the statement also plays a role in language play. It serves to underscore the universality of the criticism and to draw attention to the magnitude of the claims being made. This stylistic choice adds emphasis and urgency to the post, reinforcing its critical tone.

4.6 Mathematical language play and others

Another interesting strategy of language play, unique though in my data, is what may be characterized as mathematical language play. There are also other categories which employ the strategies of language play by using creative spelling, metaphorical exaggeration, and sarcastic tone. They blend Pidgin English and local vernacular with standard English, enhancing expressiveness through code-switching and idiomatic expressions.



Figure 9: Facebook posts 20-22: Republeak; Biyalogue; alakata pepper (Nov. 7, 2023; Sept 28, 2019; Jan. 7 2020)

The first post is yet another compelling example of language play through its creative manipulation of language, intertextual references, and satirical commentary.

Creative Manipulation of Language: The post showcases inventive language play through the use of nonce formations and word blends such as “desardinise” and “decipidimsed.” These terms appear to be playful neologisms combining familiar words or concepts. “Desardinise” seems to derive from “Sardine,” a common reference in Cameroon’s socio-political context, perhaps implying a need to remove or reform something related to this concept. “Decipidimsed” combines elements of “decipidem” (a possible play on “deception”) with a suffix to create a term suggesting the need to cleanse or rectify a state of mind. The inventive use of these terms highlights the user's

engagement in linguistic creativity, making complex socio-political issues more approachable and engaging through playful language.

Mathematical Wordplay: “41x3”: The expression “41x3” is a notable instance of wordplay where a mathematical operation is employed metaphorically. “41x3” might signify a vast or exaggerated amount of effort needed to achieve a change in mentality. This playful numerical reference implies that transforming the mindset of Kemerunians (a playful variation of “Cameroonians”) requires more than just simple intervention, suggesting that the process is as complex and unwieldy as performing a mathematical calculation. The exaggeration emphasizes the perceived scale of the challenge in a humorous yet critical manner.

Intertextual and Satirical Commentary: The term “nonagerian” refers to someone in their nineties, and its application in the context of “standing for erections as a natural candidate” uses humor to critique political norms. The word “erections” is a deliberate misspelling or playful twist on “elections,” which highlights a satirical critique of the political process. This choice of words adds a layer of sarcasm, suggesting that nominating an elderly person for elections has become absurdly routine. The term “nonagerian” juxtaposed with “erections” underscores the criticism of how outdated or unsuitable candidates are normalized in the political landscape.

“Republeak” as a Satirical Blend: “Republeak” is a satirical blend of “Republic” and “bleak,” illustrating the post’s critique of the state’s political environment. By merging these words, the term “Republeak” conveys a sense of disillusionment with the current political situation. It creatively criticizes the state of the republic by suggesting that the political climate is not only grim but fundamentally flawed, reinforcing the post’s critical tone through its inventive linguistic fusion.

This Facebook post is a rich example of language play through its use of inventive neologisms, mathematical metaphor, intertextual satire, and ironic commentary. The playful manipulation of language serves to critique and highlight issues within the political landscape of Cameroon, making complex social and political commentary both engaging and accessible. By employing creative wordplay, the post not only entertains but also invites readers to reflect critically on the state of their nation and its political processes.

The second post utilizes creative wordplay, irony, and cultural references to convey a critique of political and social issues in Cameroon.

Inventive Terminology and Irony: The term “fake Biyalogue” is a prime example of language play. It combines “Biya,” referring to Paul Biya, the President of Cameroon, with “dialogue,” but with a twist. The adjective “fake” implies that the so-called dialogue or negotiations led by Biya are insincere or deceptive. The term “Biyalogue” itself is a portmanteau, merging Biya’s name with “dialogue,” suggesting a façade rather than genuine discussion. This wordplay reflects the speaker’s skepticism about the authenticity of political processes and dialogues orchestrated by the regime, highlighting perceived political disingenuity.

Critique Through Irony and Sarcasm: The post continues with “charade,” reinforcing the notion that the dialogue is a mere show or pretense. By calling it a “charade,” the speaker underscores the lack of seriousness and sincerity in the political proceedings. This use of irony serves to criticize the superficial nature of the political engagement, suggesting that the efforts are merely for show and not intended to bring about meaningful change. The language play here serves to amplify the speaker’s disillusionment and cynicism about the political process.

Urgent Call to Action and Imagery: The phrase “S.C. stock food&potable water!” shifts the focus to practical concerns amidst the political critique. “S.C.” likely refers to Southern Cameroons, a region often mentioned in political discourse concerning separatist issues. By urging the stocking of food and potable water, the post highlights the urgent need for preparedness and self-sufficiency in the face of ongoing instability or conflict. This language play mixes political commentary with practical advice, emphasizing the gravity of the situation and the necessity for basic resources amidst turmoil.

Emphasis on Military Readiness: The directive “Forces PLS arm to the teeth!” employs a colloquial expression, “arm to the teeth,” which means to be heavily armed or prepared. The use of “PLS” (often interpreted as an abbreviation for “please” in internet slang) in this context adds a layer of irony, suggesting that even a polite or understated request for military readiness underscores the severity of the situation. This phrase conveys a sense of urgency and preparedness for conflict, reflecting the speaker’s view of the precarious security situation.

Cultural Reference: “UBUNTU”: The post concludes with “UBUNTU,” a term originating from Southern Africa that embodies the principles of shared humanity, interconnectedness, and community. By including “UBUNTU,” the speaker invokes a cultural philosophy that contrasts with the perceived dishonesty and conflict depicted in the rest of the post. The use of this term

adds a philosophical dimension to the language play, suggesting that despite the political charade and urgent needs, there is an underlying call for solidarity and collective humanity.

The third post is a vivid example of language play through the strategy of language mixing. This post combines English with elements of Pidgin English and local Cameroonian vernacular to create a rich and playful linguistic tapestry that conveys both humor and intensity. Firstly, the post exemplifies code-switching by blending English with Pidgin English and local idiomatic expressions. Terms like "Ambazonians" (a reference to separatists in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon), "alakata pepper," and "Juju craze" incorporate Pidgin English and local cultural references. "Alakata pepper" is a Pidgin term that implies something extremely hot or intense, often used to describe a fiery situation or confrontation. Here, it metaphorically suggests that the Ambazonians have stirred up a troubling or challenging situation. The phrase "Juju craze" further exemplifies language mixing by combining English with a reference to "juju," a term used in West African cultures to denote traditional magic or spiritual practices. The term "craze" in English means a state of madness or intense excitement. By combining these elements, the writers implies that the situation will become chaotic or uncontrollable due to magical or supernatural forces. Additionally, the phrase "My one move go give wuna 12 years sleeplessness" blends Pidgin and English. The use of "wuna" (Pidgin for "you all") and "go give" (Pidgin for "will give") with the English phrase "12 years sleeplessness" creates a playful and threatening tone. The hyperbolic claim of causing "12 years sleeplessness" serves as a dramatic expression of the speaker's intent to cause long-lasting distress, showcasing the use of exaggeration in language play. This mix of languages adds a layer of local flavor and intensifies the impact of the message. Finally, the post ends with "Wait for me!" which is a straightforward English phrase. This final statement, following the mixed-language content, amplifies the anticipation and personal challenge posed by the speaker. It indicates that the speaker is preparing for a forthcoming confrontation or response, thus drawing the reader's attention to an impending action.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of main findings

For purposes of reading convenience this section is organized according to the subsections of the analysis chapter (Chapter 4). In this way, the main findings relevant to the various subsections (4.1 to 4.6) are easily seen and appreciated. In an attempt to summarize the main findings, large portions of text in the analysis chapter have been replicated here for the sole purpose of highlighting the key points.

LANGUAGE PLAY AT ORTHOGRAPHIC LEVEL (CF. SECTION 4.1)

The key findings based on the analyzed Facebook posts in this section reveal three categories of language play: manipulation of word spelling, stylized capitalization, and juxtaposition of text, image, and stylized spelling etc. Each category highlights different aspects of linguistic creativity, humor, and potential for generating contentious discourse.

Manipulation of Word Spelling

The first category, seen in posts 1-3, involves playful transformations of word spelling (orthography). This includes creating new words through nominal compounding and derivation, such as "dielockers" and "dielock." These words are derived from "dialoguers" and "dialogue," respectively, but are modified to convey a more cynical and critical meaning. For example, "dielockers" combines "die" and "lock," implying that dialogues are deadlocked and unproductive. This wordplay not only demonstrates linguistic creativity but also serves as a tool for political critique and humor.

One notable example is the term "Phobia," which is a play on the name of the Cameroonian president, Paul Biya. The alteration suggests fear or aversion associated with his leadership, effectively criticizing his governance. Similarly, the phrase “teach SCians to say ‘one And Indivisible’ in French” uses irony to critique the government's approach to unity through linguistic assimilation. The capitalization in “one And Indivisible” mimics official slogans, adding a satirical tone. These examples illustrate how playful manipulation of language can convey complex socio-political sentiments and engage readers with humor and sarcasm.

Stylized Capitalization

The second category, exemplified by post 4, involves the use of stylized capitalization to emphasize certain words or phrases. This strategy can convey mockery or disdain, as seen in terms like "BAMENDAZONIA" and "SWterners." "BAMENDAZONIA" merges "Bamenda" with "Ambazonia," highlighting the regional and political tensions within Cameroon. By capitalizing these terms, the author not only draws attention to them but also imparts a sense of mockery or disdain. The use of "classy" before "SWterners" introduces a stereotype, suggesting that individuals from the Southwest region are more sophisticated, which contrasts with the negative portrayal of "BAMENDAZONIA."

This strategic use of capitalization serves to emphasize regional biases and stereotypes, making the post more provocative and engaging. It also reflects how language play can shape perceptions and provoke discourse in a politically charged environment. The capitalization amplifies the intended message, making it more impactful and memorable for readers.

Juxtaposition of Text, Image, and Stylized Spelling

The third category involves the combination of text, image, and stylized spelling, as seen in post 5. This approach creates a rich and multi-layered form of communication that engages readers visually and textually. For instance, the phrase "All bamenda people should paint their faces blue and white" employs humor and absurdity to critique regional identity and stereotypes. The suggestion is clearly exaggerated and unlikely, meant to elicit laughter or ridicule. The name "dog-ta agaba choouu" is a playful distortion of "Dr. Agaba Cho," adding humor and perhaps subtle insult. This creative spelling and playful manipulation of terms enhance the humorous tone of the post. This category of language play leverages the visual and textual elements to create a more dynamic and engaging form of political commentary. It allows the author to convey multiple layers of meaning and critique, making the message more resonant with the audience.

Broader Implications

The analyzed Facebook posts in this section demonstrate how language play is used to navigate sensitive political topics in Cameroonian social media. The use of language play in these posts reflects broader trends in social media, where users often resort to creative pragmatolinguistic resources to create exclusive identities and foster community engagement. This form of identity creation is facilitated by the anonymity of the internet, allowing users to experiment with self-fashioning and self-creation. However, this playful manipulation of language also has the

potential to generate contentious discourse and polarization. The posts analyzed received significant engagement, with many users showing approval and forwarding the messages to others. This indicates that language play not only entertains but also resonates deeply with the audience, reinforcing shared cultural and political sentiments.

The Facebook posts analyzed in this section therefore illustrate the dynamic and multifaceted nature of language play in Cameroonian social media. Through these creative strategies such as spelling, stylized capitalization, and the juxtaposition of text and image, users engage in complex socio-political commentary that is both humorous and critical. This form of communication not only entertains but also fosters community engagement and identity creation, highlighting the powerful role of language play in digital discourse.

INTERTEXTUALITY AND PRAGMATIC INDUCED LANGUAGE PLAY (REFERENCE 4.2)

The section explores identity play in computer-mediated communication (CMC) on social media, focusing on two Facebook posts that exemplify intertextuality and pragmatic language play. Intertextuality, a critical concept in this analysis, posits that all texts consist of various "intertextual weavings" of prior texts, reflecting multiple voices and contexts. This section demonstrates how intertextuality is used in social media to construct identity, create shared meanings, and engage audiences through layered and nuanced communication.

Intertextuality and Identity Construction

Intertextuality plays a significant role in identity construction in CMC by referencing past events, both historical and political, to convey meaning. This analysis highlights how texts, while appearing standalone, are deeply intertwined with previous and anticipated future usages of language. The intertextual reshaping of texts serves various interactional functions, including building shared communities, accomplishing tasks, creating involvement, and constructing subtle layers of meaning. Two Facebook posts are analyzed to illustrate the use of intertextuality in pragmatic language play:

1. Post Referencing Ngannou and the Constitutional Council:
 - *Surface Level:* The post references the Cameroonian boxer Francis Ngannou's loss in a world championship and juxtaposes it with the acceptance of the Constitutional Council's verdict in the national elections.

- *Deep Level*: The post intertextually links Ngannou's global sporting achievement with local political struggles, subtly critiquing the perceived injustices in the electoral process.
 - *Intertextual References*:
 - *Ngannou*: The post uses Ngannou's defeat as a metaphor for the national sentiment regarding the electoral process, blending global and local contexts to enhance relatability.
 - *Constitutional Council*: By referencing the Constitutional Council, the post critiques the political decision-making process, drawing on familiar discourses surrounding electoral controversies.
2. Post Referencing Senegal's Political Transition:
- *Language Mixing*: The post blends French and English, reflecting the bilingual nature of Cameroonian society and engaging a broader audience.
 - *Intertextual References*:
 - *French Phrases*: The phrases “il y avait quoi avant?” and “il y quoi ailleurs?” reference common expressions in Cameroonian discourse, reflecting on past conditions and exploring future possibilities.
 - *Congratulation Senegal*: This element juxtaposes Senegal’s progress with Cameroon’s challenges, making a poignant social commentary.
 - *Humor and Irony*: The post uses humor and irony to highlight the contrast between the introspective questioning of the past and the outward-looking exploration of future possibilities, culminating in an acknowledgment of Senegal’s success.

Broader Implications

The analysis reveals that identity play and intertextuality are powerful tools in CMC for engaging audiences, conveying complex socio-political ideas, and fostering community. The playful manipulation of language through spelling, capitalization, and juxtaposition of text and image creates multi-layered messages that resonate deeply with readers. This approach not only entertains but also facilitates nuanced political critique and identity construction. The posts analyzed reflect broader trends in social media where users employ creative pragmatolinguistic resources to navigate sensitive political topics. This strategy allows for subtle dissent and critique without direct confrontation, making the communication more nuanced and layered. The intertextual references to familiar cultural and political contexts enhance the relatability and impact of the posts, fostering engagement and shared understanding among readers. The section

underscores the significance of intertextuality and pragmatic language play in constructing identity and engaging audiences in CMC.

LANGUAGE MIXING (CF. SECTION 4.3)

In this section explored the phenomenon of language mixing in Cameroonian social media, particularly on Facebook. In Cameroon, English, French, and Pidgin English are widely spoken, and individuals frequently engage in code-mixing and code-switching—using more than one language within a single communicative interaction. This form of language play in the broader sense of the term is popular among young, educated Cameroonians who leverage the democratic nature of cyberspace to express their identities. The intense language contact in Cameroon, further complicated by online communication, often leads users to switch languages to maintain their identities.

The first analyzed post demonstrates this phenomenon by mixing French with English in a critique of the National Dialogue called by the administration. The word "dialogue" is creatively altered to "their log," symbolizing an impasse or a futile effort, similar to previous variations like "dielock" and "dielockers." This style reflects strong negative emotions towards the topic and exemplifies how language mixing can serve as a tool for political commentary and emotional expression.

The second post primarily in English with the French word "lâches" (cowards) integrated, showcases how language mixing can re-enact historical and ethnic tensions. The post references the struggle of a particular ethnic group against French colonialism, drawing a parallel to the current Anglophone struggle in Cameroon. This intertextuality and code-switching create a playful yet poignant narrative, highlighting the unity among Anglophone diaspora in their opposition to a perceived Francophone dominance.

The third and fourth posts predominantly use Pidgin English mixed with standard English. This form of language play is particularly potent among Anglophones in the diaspora, who view the use of Pidgin as a marker of identity and resistance against perceived Francophone political dominance. Pidgin-English mixing restricts the audience to "Anglophones", excluding "Francophones" who are less proficient in Pidgin. This selective communication underscores the community's solidarity and shared sense of marginalization.

Language mixing on Cameroonian social media extends beyond mere linguistic play; it serves as a medium for expressing complex identities and socio-political sentiments. The virtual space allows users to engage in verbal aggression and exclusionary discourses without censorship, promoting an atmosphere of anxiety and insecurity. “

The analysis here also draws parallels to real-world diaspora communities, where individuals build in-groups through regular meetings, dialects, and sociolects. However, the virtual space offers anonymity and fluid identities, enabling more direct and bold expressions of criticism and solidarity. This dynamics differs from traditional diaspora interactions in that it provides a unique insight into how digital platforms facilitate language play and identity construction.

MULTIMODALITY-TEXT, IMAGE AND LANGUAGE PLAY (CF. SECTION 4.4)

Multimodal communication involves using various channels like speech, eye gaze, and facial expressions simultaneously to convey information. Researchers aim to understand how these modalities work both independently and together, determining whether their co-occurrence adds extra meaning. From a semiotic perspective, multimodal communication combines language with other semiotic resources, such as images, to create and co-construct meaning. This perspective challenges the idea that language operates in isolation, critiquing methods that treat communication as purely linguistic.

In analyzing Facebook posts, a typical example of multimodal communication is seen in posts combining text and images to highlight political issues in Cameroon. One post features a clipped word, “dogvenor” (a blend of “dog” and “governor”), paired with an image of the named individual, reinforcing the text through visual representation. This multimodal approach enhances the message's impact, provoking both laughter and scorn.

Another example involves the word “governor” played with the surname “Bilai,” written as “be-lie,” implying dishonesty. A third image uses “Cameruin” (a blend of “Cameroon” and “ruin”) with a photo of a president from another country facing opposition for a third-term campaign. This juxtaposition vividly criticizes similar political scenarios in Cameroon, demonstrating how text and images together create powerful political commentary.

The effectiveness of these posts lies in their visual appeal and the interplay between text and images. On Facebook, eye-catching images and short, impactful texts draw attention, making posts more engaging and shareable. The use of pictures and text is essential to Facebook posts'

design, affecting readers' experiences and their confidence in the content. Images often capture viewers' attention before the text, shaping their first impressions and encouraging positive reception. Pictures not only attract viewers but also enhance readability and comprehensibility, conveying detailed information more efficiently than text alone. This visual element makes the posts more engaging, facilitating quicker understanding and broader dissemination.

CREATIVE CRITIQUE THROUGH LANGUAGE PLAY (CF. SECTION 4.5)

The analysis of the Facebook posts in this section highlights the use of language play as a powerful tool for social and political commentary. These posts employ a range of linguistic techniques, including satire, inventive language, cultural references, creative spelling, metaphorical exaggeration, sarcastic tone, juxtaposition, and emphasis to deliver pointed and engaging critiques.

The first post demonstrates a strong sense of skepticism and disdain through the use of terms like “nincompoop,” which humorously dismisses certain political claims as absurd or misleading. The term “Praisident,” a playful twist on “President” combining “praise” and “president,” underscores the excessive and possibly undeserved adulation of the president. This wordplay emphasizes the perceived disconnect between the official narrative and the reality experienced by the people. The phrase “This earth, my C-star” adds cultural and contextual depth, blending “Cameroon” and “star” to convey disillusionment with the state of the nation and its governance. The juxtaposition of terms and the overall critical tone highlight the discrepancy between political rhetoric and actual conditions, inviting readers to reflect on the disparity in a humorous and ironic manner.

The second post continues this trend of creative language play to critique political and social issues. It uses informal language and creative spelling, such as “docy men” and “Yahoo boys,” to connect with a specific audience and establish relatability. This informal tone enhances the effectiveness of the critique. The post employs metaphor and exaggeration by suggesting that Ambazonian leaders can “Photoshop everything including Oxygen, rain & even God,” implying an absurd level of manipulation and deceit. This hyperbole underscores the perceived corruption and dishonesty of the leaders in a humorous yet critical manner.

Sarcasm is another prominent feature, with terms like “docy men” and descriptors such as “credit card thieves” and “pick pockets” sarcastically portraying the leaders as inept and criminal. The use of sarcasm mocks the leaders while emphasizing the speaker’s disdain and skepticism. The post further employs juxtaposition by combining serious accusations with absurd claims, creating

a comedic effect that highlights the leaders' perceived dishonesty. Capitalization is used strategically to emphasize certain points, such as the universal criticism implied by "ALL," adding emphasis and urgency to the post's message. This stylistic choice reinforces the critical tone and draws attention to the magnitude of the claims being made.

Overall, these posts use inventive language play to engage readers and deliver multifaceted critiques of the political status quo in Cameroon. The combination of humor, satire, cultural references, and creative linguistic techniques makes complex social and political commentary accessible and engaging, encouraging critical reflection on the state of freedom and governance in the country.

MATHEMATICAL LANGUAGE PLAY AND OTHERS (CF. SECTION 4.6)

The analysis of language play Facebook posts in this section reveals various creative strategies that users employ to critique and engage with political and social issues. One unique strategy identified in the data is mathematical language play, which stands out due to its rarity. Other common strategies include creative spelling, metaphorical exaggeration, and the use of a sarcastic tone. These techniques often blend Pidgin English and local vernacular with standard English, enhancing expressiveness through code-switching and idiomatic expressions.

In one example, the creative manipulation of language is evident in the use of nonce formations and word blends like "desardinise" and "decipidimsed." These playful neologisms combine familiar words to comment on socio-political issues. For instance, "desardinise" might derive from "sardine," a term loaded with socio-political connotations in Cameroon, suggesting a need for reform or removal. "Decipidimsed" blends elements of "deception" and suggests a cleansing or rectification of a state of mind. This linguistic creativity makes complex issues more approachable and engaging.

Mathematical wordplay is another notable example. The expression "41x3" metaphorically signifies an exaggerated effort needed to change the mindset of Cameroonians, suggesting a complex and unwieldy process akin to a mathematical calculation. This exaggeration humorously underscores the perceived scale of the challenge.

Intertextual and satirical commentary is also prevalent. For example, the term "nonagerian" humorously critiques political norms by referring to elderly candidates in elections. The deliberate misspelling "erections" for "elections" adds a layer of sarcasm, critiquing the routine nomination

of unsuitable candidates. Similarly, the term “Republeak,” a blend of “Republic” and “bleak,” satirically critiques the state’s political environment, conveying disillusionment with the current situation.

Another post exemplifies language play through terms like “fake Biyalogue,” combining “Biya” (referring to President Paul Biya) with “dialogue” to suggest insincerity in political negotiations. This wordplay reflects skepticism about the authenticity of political processes. The term “charade” further emphasizes the superficial nature of these processes. Additionally, practical advice like “stock food & potable water” and “arm to the teeth” underscores the urgency of preparedness amidst instability, mixing political commentary with practical concerns. The cultural reference “UBUNTU” adds a philosophical dimension, invoking a call for solidarity and collective humanity.

Finally, the third post combines English with Pidgin English and local vernacular, creating a rich linguistic tapestry. Terms like “Ambazonians,” “alakata pepper,” and “Juju craze” incorporate Pidgin and cultural references, enhancing the message’s impact. The mix of languages adds local flavor and intensifies the message, while the phrase “My one move go give wuna 12 years sleeplessness” uses hyperbole to dramatize the speaker’s intent. This blend of languages and exaggerated expressions showcases the playful and intense nature of the communication.

5.2 Implication for pedagogy

The findings of this research on language play in Cameroonian diaspora Facebook posts have several pedagogical implications that can inform teaching practices and curriculum development in linguistics, communication, and cultural studies and literacies. In this section, I state these aspects in a manner that can directly be relevant to anyone engaged or committed to enhancing students’ capacities in these areas of online and by extension offline communication. Therefore, the following key pedagogical implications are rather itemized for easy perusal.

Enhancing Linguistic Creativity

1. Encouraging linguistic innovation:

- The playful manipulation of word spelling, such as creating terms like “dielockers” and “Phobia,” showcases how linguistic creativity can be used to convey complex socio-political

messages. Educators can leverage this to encourage students to experiment with language, fostering creativity in their writing and communication skills.

Critical Media Literacy

2. Developing critical media literacy:

- Analyzing language play in social media posts can be an effective way to teach students about media literacy. Understanding how language is manipulated to convey irony, sarcasm, and critique can help students become more discerning consumers and producers of digital content.

Sociolinguistic Awareness

3. Promoting sociolinguistic awareness:

- The use of regional dialects, code-switching, and creative spelling highlights the importance of sociolinguistic context in communication. Teaching students about these practices can enhance their awareness of linguistic diversity and the sociopolitical implications of language use.

Semiotics and Multimodal Communication

4. Exploring semiotics and multimodal communication:

- The combination of text, images, and stylized spelling in the posts underscores the significance of multimodal communication. Educators can incorporate lessons on semiotics to help students analyze how different modes of communication work together to create meaning.

Engagement and Identity Formation

5. Facilitating engagement and identity formation:

- The playful language in the posts serves as a tool for community engagement and identity formation. Educators can explore how digital platforms allow individuals to construct and negotiate their identities through language, fostering discussions on the role of social media in shaping personal and collective identities.

Teaching Political Discourse and Satire

6. Analyzing political discourse and satire:

- The use of satire and irony in the posts provides a rich resource for teaching about political discourse and satirical writing. Students can learn to recognize and analyze these rhetorical strategies, understanding their effectiveness in critiquing social and political issues.

Addressing Polarization and Controversy

7. Addressing polarization and controversy:

- The potential for language play to generate contentious discourse and polarization highlights the need for educators to address these issues in the classroom. Discussions on the ethical implications of language use and the impact of digital communication on public opinion can help students navigate and mitigate the effects of polarized discourse.

Curriculum Development

8. Incorporating digital literacy into the curriculum:

- The findings suggest the importance of integrating digital literacy into the curriculum. Lessons can be designed to help students analyze and produce content that employs creative language play, preparing them for effective communication in digital environments.

Practical Applications

9. Implementing practical applications:

- Educators can create assignments that mimic the language play found in the posts. For example, students could be tasked with creating their own satirical posts or engaging in wordplay to critique current events, thereby applying their understanding of linguistic creativity in practical, real-world contexts.

Cultural Sensitivity and Contextual Understanding

10. Fostering cultural sensitivity and contextual understanding:

- Understanding the cultural references and socio-political context of the language play used in the posts is crucial. Educators should emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity and contextual understanding in communication, ensuring that students appreciate the nuanced ways in which language can reflect and critique cultural and political realities.

With respect to identity play and intertextuality in computer-mediated communication (CMC) on social media, we can catalogue a number of key pedagogical implications:

Enhancing Understanding of Intertextuality

1. Teaching intertextuality in communication:
 - The findings emphasize the importance of intertextuality in constructing meaning and identity in social media posts. Educators can incorporate lessons on intertextuality, helping students understand how texts reference and build upon previous texts to convey deeper meanings. This understanding can enhance students' analytical skills and their ability to interpret complex messages in various media.

Identity Construction and Pragmatic Language Play

2. Exploring identity construction:
 - The use of intertextual references to construct identity highlights how individuals and groups use language to shape their identities. Educators can design activities that encourage students to analyze and create texts that reflect their own identities, fostering a deeper understanding of how language and identity are intertwined.
3. Analyzing pragmatic language play:
 - The playful manipulation of language through spelling, capitalization, and text-image juxtaposition can be used to teach students about pragmatic language play. Educators can use examples from social media to illustrate how these techniques are used to engage audiences and convey nuanced meanings, enhancing students' pragmatic competence.

Sociolinguistic Awareness and Bilingualism

4. Promoting sociolinguistic awareness:
 - The blending of French and English in the analyzed posts reflects the bilingual nature of Cameroonian society. Educators can use this as a basis to teach students about code-switching and bilingual communication, emphasizing the sociolinguistic factors that influence language use in multilingual communities.
5. Engaging with bilingual texts:
 - Analyzing bilingual posts helps students appreciate the complexities and creative possibilities of bilingual communication. Educators can encourage students to create their own bilingual texts, fostering linguistic creativity and a deeper understanding of bilingualism.

Critical Media Literacy and Political Discourse

6. Developing critical media literacy:

- Understanding how intertextuality and language play are used to critique political processes can enhance students' critical media literacy. Educators can teach students to critically analyze social media posts, identifying intertextual references and understanding their socio-political implications.
7. Examining political discourse:
- The posts' critique of political events, such as electoral processes, provides a rich resource for teaching about political discourse. Students can learn to recognize and analyze rhetorical strategies used in political commentary, enhancing their ability to engage critically with political content.

Engaging and Relatable Teaching Methods

8. Using engaging materials:
- The humorous and ironic elements in the analyzed posts make them engaging teaching materials. Educators can use similar content to capture students' interest and make lessons on language, identity, and politics more relatable and enjoyable.

Curriculum Development and Practical Applications

9. Incorporating social media analysis into the curriculum:
- The findings suggest the importance of integrating social media analysis into the curriculum. Lessons can be designed to help students analyze and produce content that employs intertextuality and pragmatic language play, preparing them for effective communication in digital environments.
10. Implementing practical applications:
- Educators can create assignments that mimic the intertextual and playful language found in social media posts. For example, students could be tasked with creating their own posts that use intertextual references to comment on current events, thereby applying their understanding of language play in practical, real-world contexts.

Fostering Cultural Sensitivity and Contextual Understanding

11. Fostering cultural sensitivity:
- Understanding the cultural references and socio-political context of the language play used in the posts is crucial. Educators should emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity and contextual understanding in communication, ensuring that students appreciate the nuanced ways in which language can reflect and critique cultural and political realities.

The findings on multimodal communication in Facebook posts, should be useful in the following areas from a purely pedagogic perspective:

Understanding Multimodal Communication

1. Teaching multimodal literacy:
 - Educators should emphasize the importance of multimodal literacy, teaching students how to interpret and create messages that effectively combine various semiotic resources, such as text, images, speech, and body language. This approach helps students understand that communication is not limited to linguistic elements but also involves visual and contextual cues.

Semiotic Analysis and Critical Thinking

2. Incorporating semiotic analysis:
 - The analysis of multimodal communication from a semiotic perspective can be integrated into the curriculum. Students can learn to deconstruct and analyze how different modes (text, images, etc.) work together to create meaning. This skill is crucial for understanding complex messages and developing critical thinking.
3. Promoting critical media literacy:
 - By examining how multimodal elements contribute to the overall message, educators can enhance students' critical media literacy. They can learn to identify and critique the use of multimodal strategies in various media, understanding how these strategies shape public perception and opinion, especially in political contexts.

Practical Applications and Creative Expression

4. Encouraging creative expression:
 - Students should be encouraged to create their own multimodal content, combining text and images to convey messages. This practical application helps them experiment with different modes of communication and understand their interplay, fostering creativity and engagement.
5. Designing engaging educational materials:
 - Educators can use multimodal communication strategies to design more engaging and effective educational materials. By incorporating images, videos, and interactive elements into lessons, they can capture students' attention and enhance their learning experience.

Social Media and Digital Communication

6. Teaching effective social media communication:

- Understanding the principles of multimodal communication is essential for effective social media use. Educators can teach students how to create compelling social media posts that combine text and images to maximize impact and engagement. This skill is increasingly important in today's digital age.
- 7. Analyzing viral content:
 - The findings highlight the role of visual appeal in the viral nature of social media content. Educators can analyze examples of viral posts with students, discussing what makes them effective and how multimodal elements contribute to their shareability and engagement.

Enhancing Reading and Comprehension Skills

- 8. Improving reading comprehension:
 - The use of images alongside text can enhance readability and comprehension. Educators can leverage this by incorporating multimodal texts in reading assignments, helping students develop better comprehension skills through the combined use of visual and linguistic information.

Cultural and Political Awareness

- 9. Fostering cultural and political awareness:
 - Analyzing multimodal political commentary, like the examples provided, can foster students' cultural and political awareness. Educators can use these analyses to discuss broader socio-political issues, encouraging students to think critically about the media they consume and produce.

5.3 Conclusion

In this study we have attempted an analysis of Facebook posts by Cameroonian diaspora. We have catalogue instances of language play and the use of strategies used by writers. Thus, through an analysis of creative linguistic strategies employed on social media, this study has shaded light on how language play serves as a potent tool for social and political engagement, cultural expression, and identity construction in the context of Cameroonian political discourse.

The research reveals that language play in these Facebook posts involves a range of inventive techniques, including creative spelling, metaphorical exaggeration, satire, and intertextuality. The posts under study exhibit how these techniques function not only as forms of linguistic expression but also as mechanisms for engaging with and critiquing political realities. By manipulating

language in humorous and provocative ways, the diaspora uses social media to voice dissent and convey complex socio-political sentiments.

One of the central findings of this thesis is the significant role of creative spelling and inventive language in constructing political critique. Terms like “Praisident,” “dielockers,” and “nonagerian” exemplify how playful language can underscore serious criticisms of political figures and systems. These neologisms and word blends effectively capture the disconnect between official narratives and the lived experiences of the people. They illustrate how language play can articulate dissatisfaction and challenge political norms while engaging readers through humor and irony.

The study also highlights the use of intertextuality and cultural references as key strategies in these posts. By drawing on historical, political, and cultural contexts, the posts create layered meanings that resonate with both local and global audiences. The blending of languages and cultural references reflects the bilingual nature of Cameroonian society and adds depth to the critiques. For instance, the incorporation of Pidgin English and local vernacular enhances relatability and emphasizes the cultural dimensions of the critique, demonstrating how language play can bridge different linguistic and cultural worlds.

Moreover, the research underscores the importance of multimodal communication in these social media posts. The combination of text and images amplifies the impact of the messages, making them more engaging and memorable. The visual elements work in tandem with the textual content to create powerful critiques that capture attention and provoke thought. This multimodal approach illustrates the evolving nature of digital communication, where visual and linguistic elements intersect to produce compelling narratives. The study demonstrates that language play on Cameroonian Facebook posts is a sophisticated form of socio-political commentary. It highlights the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and politics in the contemporary digital landscape. While these findings are to be taken as only representative of those on social media platform, we are still far away from concluding that they strategies they employ and the results obtained (Section 4) are representative of Cameroonian use of language play on social media. For one thing, the sample had not been large enough due to the difficulties mention in Chapter 3. At this level, we present the findings of this research as a perspective from a cross-section of the Cameroonian diaspora, which nevertheless has profound d pedagogic implications.

5.4 Suggestion for further research

Building on the findings of this study several avenues for further research emerge. One significant area for exploration is the comparative analysis of language play across different social media platforms used by the Cameroonian diaspora, such as Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Investigating how language play manifests and varies across these platforms could provide deeper insights into the role of medium in shaping linguistic creativity and political commentary. Furthermore, expanding the research to include a broader range of social media content, such as memes, videos, and user-generated hashtags, could reveal how multimodal communication strategies interact with and amplify language play in political discourse. Another valuable direction would be to conduct longitudinal studies that track changes in language play over time, particularly in response to shifting political climates or significant national events. Such research could illuminate how evolving political contexts influence the ways in which the diaspora engages with and critiques their home country's politics through language. Again, exploring the perspectives of the recipients and participants of these posts through qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, would enrich our understanding of how these linguistic strategies impact audience perceptions and engagement. Finally, cross-cultural comparisons with diaspora communities from other regions experiencing similar political tensions could provide a broader context for understanding the unique aspects of language play within the Cameroonian

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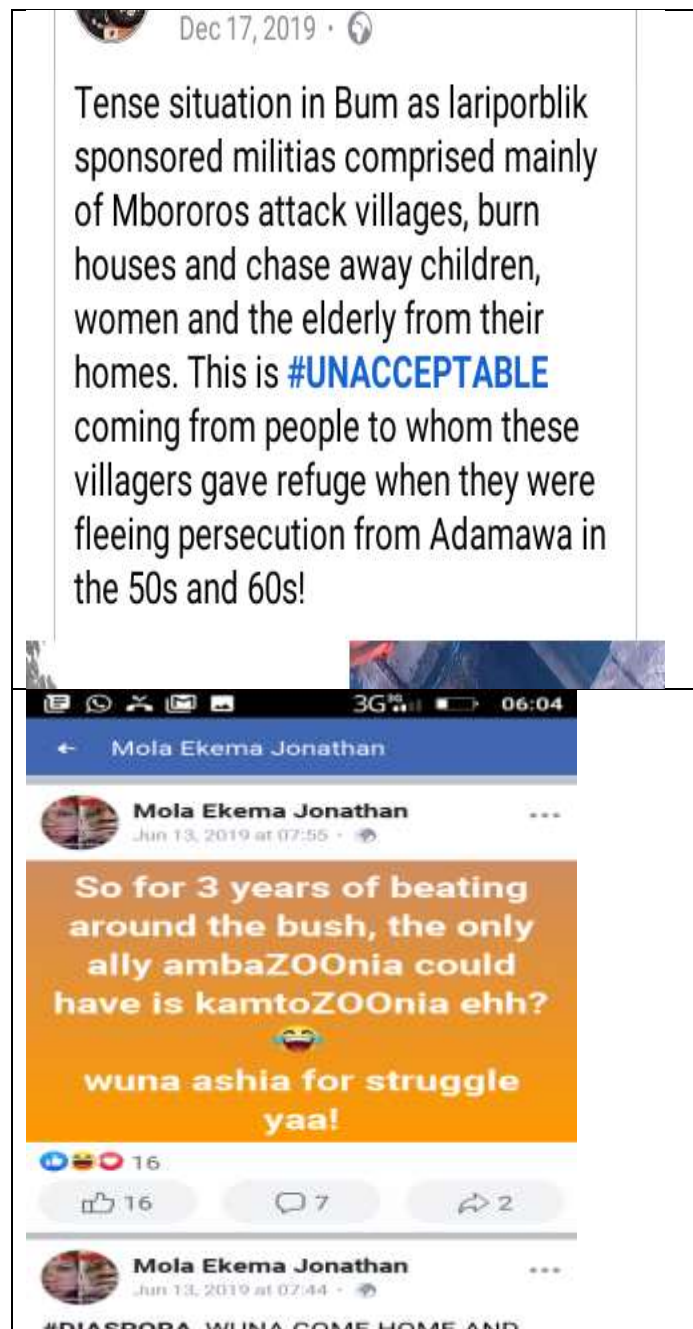
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Appendix: Selected Facebook posts exhibiting aspects of language play, but not used in the analysis





Sep 30, 2019 at 09:37 · 🌐

Fake Calixthe Biyala addressing the
National Monologue as representative of
the Biyaspora.



4



Sep 4, 2019 at 22:21 · 🌐

**Instead of those STEWPEED
lawyers to go on strike to
protest against
ambazonia's attack on
education, they are
planning shit.**



15

👍 15

💬 1





May 25, 2020 · 6

Fru Ndi you are a disgrace to fatherhood, as you decided to continue deceiving Cameroonian youths with the notion of "war declared on us" on that prostitute me4k show, we will henceforth address you for who you truly are. Some of us have been avoiding you for long but u still continue your brainwashing! - with [Ayuk Carine](#) and 36 others.



Helen Essoka

Feb 22, 2020 at 09:18 · 🌐

...

Biyaists will go like, you don't understand Macron. 🤡 Understand what? His statement clearly humiliates Biya. That's what we retain. The rest is rubbish!!!

👍 🤡 6

👍 6

💬 4



May 28, 2020 · 🌐

**When Amelika sponsored
terrorism in Cameroon thru
amba is it not be killing
blacks? Ni body is telling
them to stop!**



Mar 6, 2020 at 08:35 · 🌐

Second case of Covid-19 in Cameruin.
Adding insult to injury, because a lethal
coronaviral regime, Covid-1982 installed
by the French has been wreaking havoc on
its people for the past 37 years.



30

May 24, 2020 · 6

**Mad Arata you be nyongo
pikin for kill your papa**



Jun 27, 2021 · 6

**Sunday Gospel according to the
#BUI_WARRIORS! Assseyyy kontri pipo ...**
Sunday Gospel according to the
#BUI_WARRIORS! Assseyyy kontri pipo
are you just going to take eye chop
chrismen and do nothing. Abeg wuna dip
hand inside kwa helep the warriors ohhh
#DRAFT_FOR_BUI ON 3RD JULY. THANK
YOU

May 5, 2022 · 6

Docta Success, went to scam Celine Dion Ngute but was instead scammed. He didn't know that Dion had a doctorate in Faymanism. He is the one that even trained Grand Atango. - with **Don Dinga** and **2 others**.

Nov 20, 2022 · 6

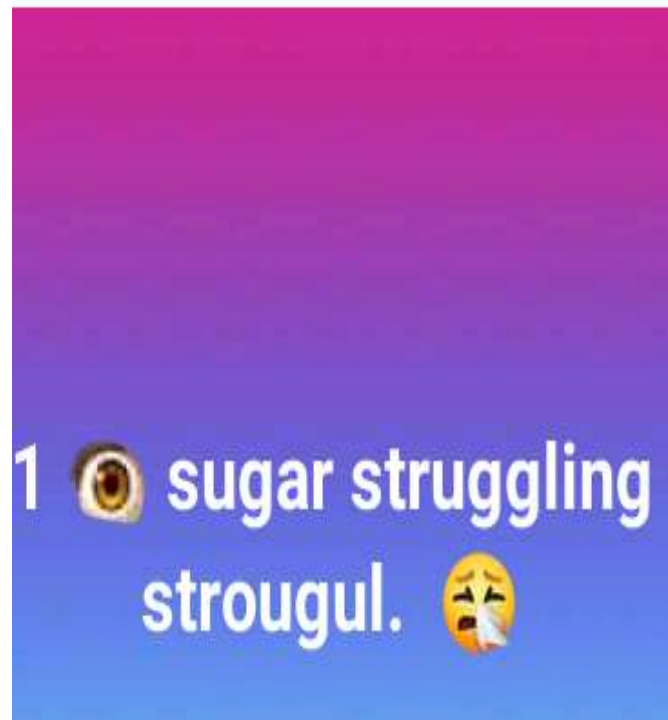
Anglofools are angry b'cos socalled influencers were sidelined for Qatar. So all the killings meant nothing to you. Keep Crying

Sep 2, 2023 · 🌐

TAM FOR SERIOUS DISKUTION BETWEEN
FATHER SON.



Dec 28, 2023 · 🌐





Dec 28, 2023 · 🌐

1 pepper stone head agaba
choouu locked 8 million
North Westerners indoors
on Christmas day 🤪.
bamenda people na wah oh



Feb 12 · 🌐

They kill their own and call
it struggle. Big
fuuuuuuuuuls



Feb 17 · 🌐

**ambashounia strougul is a
cult. As you are
brainwashed to join, your
life span is reduced 😂**



Jun 17 · 🌐

**foolish Bamendazonia pipo
wuna happy Monday ghost
town ! Wuna lock wuna
selves every Monday for
1000 years ! Idiots 😂**