

**Language, home, and belonging in migratory contexts -
the case of Camfranglais**

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Statement of originality

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been submitted for any degree or publication. I certify that the content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received and sources have been acknowledged.

Constance Mbassi Manga



Image 1: MTN ad billboard - Douala, Cameroon

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Abstract

Urban hybrid linguistic registers (often called 'youth languages') have been researched for over 30 years (Simo-Souop, 2009; Harris, 2006 etc.). Camfranglais, which combines elements of French, English, Pidgin English and Cameroonian vernaculars, is no exception. Identified (and named) in the 1980s as an in-group language form used primarily to exclude adults, Camfranglais has aroused substantial sociolinguistic interest mainly in relation to the urban youth in Yaoundé, Cameroon, a country with two official languages (French and English) and 250+ vernaculars (De Féral, 2004; Lobe Ewane, 1989). Over the last twenty years, Camfranglais spread beyond the Cameroon-based youth. Accordingly, more recently, research started integrating attention to its use by adult Cameroonians in migratory contexts (Telep, 2014; Machetti & Siebetchu, 2013), at a time when the diverse ethnic composition of major Western cities is thought to have led to an increased diversification of linguistic practices.

Using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, combined with a Linguistic Ethnographic lens, this thesis draws out an understanding of the role and function(s) of Camfranglais from Skype interviews of a group of adult Cameroonians living in Europe and the US (against the aforementioned backdrop), and chats from a Facebook-based group dedicated to Camfranglais. The analysis of the transcripts shows that both groups engage with Camfranglais, and no longer use the register to exclude non-speakers. In the participants' accounts of the place and value of language in their life trajectories, and in the Facebook chats, the presence of markers of identity, home and belonging reveals that Camfranglais creates a sense of closeness and community between speakers, reinforcing the feeling that they belong. The study highlights Camfranglais' symbolic value and its role as an expression of a diasporic Cameroonian identity, a coping mechanism useful for negotiations of home and belonging in online and offline communities of practice.

Dedication

« À ma fille, MBANGO Constance Lydie, qui veut suivre les pas de son papa. Fais mieux que moi dans les humanités à partir de cette année nouvelle. 1990. Papa. »

“The aim of language is not only the communication of cognitive information. It is used to persuade and to create [...] create a belief in a mind which has not previously held it [...]” – Francis Mbassi Manga – Yaoundé, 1976

Dedicated to the memory of my parents:

- my late father, Professor Mbassi Manga Francis – my champion, the one who taught me that I can do anything I set my heart to, as long as I work hard and give it my best, the one who embraced me exactly as I was from birth until his last breath, for undertaking the first PhD in our family before the Internet was a thing, hence travelling miles in 3 different countries and 7 cities and towns, recording and analysing raw data over nearly a decade, and for writing a ground-breaking PhD thesis that is still referenced and considered a standard by many to this day;
- my late mother, Ndome Seppo Odette, for her discrete intelligence – the best kind! –, infectious sense of humour and her willingness to play silly games to keep me smiling when I was child, her strength and resilience, even when faced with debilitating illness, for the laughter and joy that irradiated from her, for her calm, balanced nature, for her ever-open arms, and her gentle guidance, for showing me what a lady looks like in every situation.

I am who I am today thanks to your care, nurture, education and sacrifice.
I love you both eternally.

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Transcription Conventions¹

<p>x-: interrupted word</p> <p>x-x-: repeated letter</p> <p>(.): short pause</p> <p>(...): unusually long pause (measured by comparison with the speaker's usual pace)</p> <p>[xyz]: clarification</p> <p><i>italics</i>: English word (in the French dialogue)</p> <p>bold: CFrA utterance</p> <p>bold and italics: words in Cameroonian national languages</p> <p>=: latching/overlap</p> <p>(): unclear word</p> <p>(xyz): guess at unclear word</p>	<p>xyz: use of non-standard syntax, grammar or other non-standard language forms (such as non-standard choice of words or statements conveying a different meaning than the most obvious ones)</p> <p>?: rising tone which may or may not indicate a question</p> <p>,: slightly rising tone giving a sense of continuation</p> <p>//: final fall</p>
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¹ Loosely based on Gumperz & Berentz, 1992

Chapter 1 – Introduction and background

This study explores ways in which language use intersects with a reconciliation (if possible, and to an extent to be explored and potentially uncovered) of the different parts of identities fractured by the legacy of postcolonialism, by migration and the change in (socio-economic) status and self-perception caused by the resulting displacement, and more. It is an ethnographically attuned qualitative study of ways in which post-postcolonial² diasporic Cameroonians negotiate and make sense of their understanding of home and belonging, and the position of their displaced selves, through their linguistic communicative practices in their host country. More specifically, the study examines their statements about the place of Camfranglais in these negotiations that reflect the linguistic dance in which they engage as they seek to root themselves professionally and personally in the host country, while retaining some sense of ‘who they were’, pre-migration.

Camfranglais (hereafter CFrA) is a language practice associated with French-speaking Cameroonians, and its affiliation to French is undisputed, so French is also an essential part of who they were and who they are becoming, more so because most of the participants in this study consider French their first language. Throughout this thesis, the term CFrA is taken to be whatever linguistic register users identify as CFrA (whether they call it Camfranglais or whether they use any of the other variations of this name) in relation to more or less specific rules of sentence-formation, vocabulary, style, syntax etc. but also in relation to particular situations and positioning choices identified as being representative of CFrA.

This study focuses on its change in status from a marginal, ostracised language form reserved for insider communication in Cameroon, aiming at excluding others, to a language form that brings people together in a community of

² The use of the term here is explained in Chapter 4.

practice outside Cameroon, where the practice of “doing being Cameroonian”³, is noteworthy.

To set the stage for the exploration of these issues, I present in the chapter that follows a statement outlining the origins of, and reason for, my interest in the topic, leading into a brief background to this study, followed by a succinct overview of the historical and linguistic contexts that enabled the appearance of CFrA. Next, I outline the research to date on CFrA, what it means to be a diasporic Cameroonian, and the significance of this study. The research question follows, and after that, the ontological and epistemological position taken in this study. Next, I review the theoretical frameworks and methodology for this research, drawing primarily on Linguistic Ethnography and Critical Discourse Analysis. I conclude the Introductory chapter with an outline of the organisational structure of the thesis, before delving into the body of the thesis.

1.1 My personal interest in CFrA

Camfranglais, a contraction of Cameroun-français-anglais, is a French-based composite urban lect thought to have been created by young Francophone Cameroonians, that combines elements of French with English, Cameroon Pidgin English⁴ (CPE) and Cameroonian vernacular languages such as Beti-Fang languages, Douala or Bamileke-languages. My interest in this linguistic code is linked to and finds its origins in, my wider interest in languages. This interest can be explained by my early childhood years spent in a multilingual environment with a linguist and phonetics expert father, and my precocious inclination for languages, further enhanced by over 30+ years of practice as a translator and an interpreter.

³ See Sacks, 1985, for more on 'doing being'.

⁴ Cameroon Pidgin English or CPE is the country's main lingua franca, a contact language used in the French and Anglophone parts of the country, useful for business and interethnic communication, and influenced by the two official and the indigenous languages, and of which there are several varieties (Schröder, 2007; Echu, 2004; Mbassi-Manga, 1973, pp. 263-300).

Born in Paris, I was taken to Cameroon when I was nine months old and raised in the capital, Yaoundé. I returned to Paris at 14, lived 20 years in France, then moved to the UK where I have now lived for over 18 years.

When I was a child, we mainly spoke French at home, as my parents were both born in Francophone regions of Cameroon. My mother's first language was Duala and my father's dialect was Pongo⁵. However, I received an American primary education, then a Cameroonian bilingual secondary education in which pupils were taught in both official languages, but the main medium of instruction in the Anglophone section (where I was) was English. I also learnt CPE⁶ in secondary school. The diagram below illustrates the languages I used as a child and the people/groups with whom I used them.

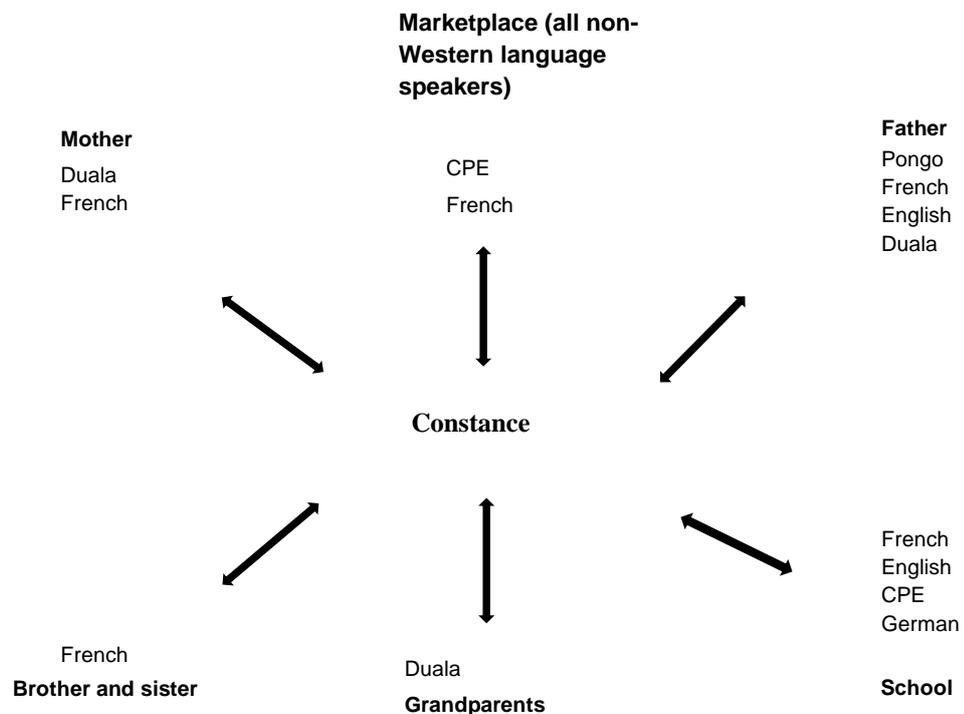


Image 2: Languages used as a child

⁵ Duala is a Bantu language of the Niger-Congo group and Pongo is an affiliate dialect of Duala (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2021, Ethnologue). I use the Francophone spelling for the town for clarity.

⁶ Forbidden in the classroom and barely tolerated on school grounds, CPE was the main language of communication between Anglophone students.

I found myself in a privileged and quite unique position at the time: a Francophone child studying in the Anglophone educational system. Needless to say in school and in the extended family, my ability to speak more than one European language (and two indigenous languages) fluently earned me a special status, particularly among Francophones⁷. I was often asked to 'perform' English by friends or members of our family. As a result, I quickly became aware of the importance of languages, of the power I had as a multilingual child and of the value of each language in the different fields I interacted in, especially as a child of a Cameroonian upper class that was very selective about the varieties of languages they deemed acceptable. I used these assets⁸ very early on as a strategic tool of empowerment particularly because I was always the youngest (and physically the weakest) in school and at home, having 'skipped' two classes in primary school. Both my parents chose not to speak the other party's vernacular language. Their linguistic apartheid enhanced my awareness that language signalled affiliation, and highlighted tensions between my mother and her in-laws, and in the background, between the very westernised Duala people, considered 'civilised', and the Pongo who were rural. My proficiency in Pongo and in Duala also earned me my grandparents' approval and that of other (extended) family members in Dibombari, my father's birthplace, and in Douala, my mother's birthplace. Of all three children, I was the one who best mastered our mother's language and our father's dialect. It signalled the fact that, unlike my sister, I was not only my mother's daughter⁹ but also my father's. Retrospectively, I suspect that I was practising what Anchimbe (2006, p. 49) calls 'identity opportunism'¹⁰, using

⁷ The Cameroonian government's policy (at least during the first years) was more geared towards the assimilation of the Anglophone minority into the Francophone culture, so Francophones very rarely needed to speak English; as a result of this imbalance, only a minority of Francophones could speak English in the 1980s.

⁸ See Bourdieu, 1991, for notions of linguistic capital, field, and assets.

⁹ A very strong element of the matricentric culture of Bantu ethnic groups of the coast of Cameroon, such as the Duala, that identified children according to, and by reference to, their mother. (See Balandier, 1975, p. 363)

¹⁰ "It covers those strategies that make the use of one language more acceptable than the use of another; that give a sense of attachment or status to a given language and its identity; that make one feel at home and linguistically secure, at least for the moment, in given contexts and situations; and that provide linguistically solid foundations for the exclusion of out-group and non-group members." (Anchimbe, 2006, p. 249)

Pongo as a counterweight that had the potential to give me some leverage in the paternal family. Furthermore, I started studying German at the age of ten at the Goethe Institute in Yaoundé, then a few years later, I studied and spoke it in secondary school. German played an important role as an additional bond with my father, because his father (who had passed on long before I was born) also spoke German.

To this date, in Cameroon, particularly in the major cities, standard varieties of European languages are the only accepted registers for the middle and upper class¹¹ in education and in formal and professional settings. Although most parents when I was growing up spoke their indigenous language(s), in the upper layers of Cameroonian society, children were expected to speak indigenous languages only with family members – if at all – the emphasis being on European languages as the only means of accessing good jobs and the higher rungs of society.

Code-switching and code-mixing were also frowned upon and considered to be signs of poor proficiency in standard European language varieties, except in cases when the (Cameroonian vernacular) vocabulary did not exist in French or English. In our family, because my father had a counter-current attitude towards the value of indigenous languages, their use was strongly encouraged.

1.1.1 My relationship to CFrA and other non-standard codes in my repertoire

“Prescriptive socialization within the family plays a critical role in the [...] acquisition of many registers” (Agha, 2004, p. 28).

¹¹ The Cameroonian middle and upper class mostly counted professionals e.g., doctors, university lecturers, lawyers...mostly intellectuals. Affluent businessmen and men belonged to the upper class, but many had little formal Western education and were not respected in the same way as intellectuals were, because formal Western education was considered very valuable in Cameroon between the 1960s and the 1990s. These values tend to be different now, as being educated no longer guarantees work or an income in Cameroon.

The first reason why I don't speak CFrA is the fact that I was not socialized into this particular language. Being from the background I described above, I was not expected to speak it and none of the young people living in our household – my brother, my sister and my cousins – spoke it at home, even though I have no recollection of my parents mentioning or forbidding it. Secondly, I studied in the Anglophone system and CFrA was not one of the languages used by English speakers. Additionally, very few of the teenagers from my family's social network spoke CFrA, and most of those who did were boys, and none were 'good boys'¹². I think unconsciously and to a limited extent, I aligned myself with the official discourses of the adult, educated Cameroonian society in general about CFrA. To me, it was not 'proper' because it was mixed, and it was not even remotely as useful as CPE. I didn't need it, as it had no value as a linguistic commodity in my world. Furthermore, the characterisation of CFrA speakers by the adults in our social class was so emblematic of everything I did not want to be, viz. a rebellious child, the opposite of '*une fille de bonne famille*', i.e. a girl from a good family, of good upbringing, that I had no inclination or motivation to engage with CFrA. To this day, I have limited competence in CFrA but I mostly understand it. When I attempt to speak CFrA, it feels unnatural and awkward to me. My use of CFrA is often perceived and portrayed as 'odd' by Cameroonians from roughly the same social background as me, and this social pressure is reminiscent of the pressure middle- and upper-class parents put on their children.

My relationship with CPE, however, is quite different. I very occasionally spoke a bit of CPE as a teenager. Even though it was forbidden in the classroom and not considered appropriate in many middle-class families, it had a different status from CFrA. Where CPE has always been considered essential historically as a lingua franca (needed for interethnic or Anglophone-Francophone communication in some cases), CFrA was and still is a code used by speakers who already have one or more language(s) in common. **They**

¹² A good girl/boy was one who generally complied with her/his parents' recommendations and did well at school.

speak it by choice rather than by necessity. Besides, my school mates knew that I was from a Francophone family, my status as an Anglophone was not clear-cut, so the use of CPE was useful for me as it acted as a sign of my affiliation to the Anglophone group¹³. My acceptance in the Anglophone group was not a given, because of enduring tensions between Francophones and Anglophones in Cameroon (Takam, 2007; Yeriwa, 2003; Nkwi & Vidacs, 1997 and others). Moreover, my father approved of my ability to understand and speak CPE, because it was the language of market people and the working class, and he had spent a number of his early adult years with limited material wealth and thus felt close to the usual speakers of CPE. He studied at college and university level in Anglophone Cameroon, and later on in Nigeria and Ghana (both English-speaking African countries), and he identified himself as culturally Anglophone. Finally, my father's interest in CPE was professional; he researched and wrote about CPE. It is very likely that his influence opened me up to non-standard varieties and prepared me for the present study.

1.1.2 Reasons that led me to research CFrA

My interest in CFrA emerged in Europe, after I came in contact with the academic world studying this linguistic code. I am aware that as a researcher, I am joining forces with the increasing number of scholars who have written and are still writing about CFrA. In so doing, we are giving it its mark of prestige, making it worth studying and worth looking at. Most scholars who study CFrA do so within the framework of a Western (or a Westernised) academic institution¹⁴ and the institution officialises the studies. This is an echo of the enduring importance to Africans of the validation of their cultural resources, their values and languages, by the Western world. Scholars such as Wa Thiong'o (1986, pp. 7-9) or Bitja'a Kody (2005) have discussed the fact that many

¹³ Beyond the obvious link to French and English, the labels 'Francophone' and 'Anglophone' here are taken to refer to the region of Cameroon a person comes from e.g., Francophones could be from the north, the south, the centre, the west of Cameroon, and Anglophones from the northwest or southwest provinces.

¹⁴ Even scholars based in Cameroonian universities are strongly Westernised in their perceptions, and their choices of areas of research often tally with trends in research in the Western world.

Africans have inherited a sense of the uselessness of their indigenous languages in the modern world from colonial times, and hence display the strongest affiliations with other (mainly) Western languages.

I am in no way immune to the influences mentioned above, as attested by the radical shift I experienced from total indifference to CFrA (and a rather strict adherence to the dominant discourse of my social strata in Cameroon) to the recognition of CFrA as a code valuable enough to be studied. Furthermore, I suspect that the fact that I have been living in Europe for most of my life and that I am thus increasingly culturally hybrid as the years go by heightened my interest in the register.

My study focuses on CFrA used by diasporic Cameroonians, and I believe this use points to issues of hybridity, postcolonialism, language choice in relation to migration, questions I am very interested in as a member of the Cameroonian diaspora.

My position vis-à-vis CFrA and this study is ambiguous, as I am an in/outsider, part of several different and intersecting linguistic and cultural circles, including one that features CFrA.

I am also aware that I am (and will probably always be) looking for my 'third space' in which I hope to be free to be neither/nor OR all the different versions of me. I suspect and confess that as I started this research project, I 'wanted' to find in the use of this code in this context some 'solution', I unconsciously hoped to show that it could be a coping mechanism used by its speakers as a way of patching together parts of their (and of course, my) fractured and multi-layered identities, and making some sense of who we are in the global diasporic context we find ourselves in. This need to find a linguistically neutral language form is likely to have originated from the extraordinary complexity of Cameroon's linguistic landscape, and the concomitant desire to find one form that could

potentially unite all Cameroonians. The section that follows outlines the linguistic landscape of Cameroon.

1.2 Background

Camfranglais is thought to have emerged in Yaoundé in the 1980s (De Féral, 2004; Lobe Ewane, 1989), and it has aroused substantial linguistic and sociological interest in the last 40 years, mainly in relation to its use by young people in Cameroon¹⁵. Like other urban mixed registers that blend former colonial languages and local languages (e.g. the now defunct Hindoubil in the DRC, or Nouchi in the Ivory Coast), *i*) CFrA emerged in a multi-ethnic country in which the official language is a former colonial language with no African vehicular language (or lingua franca); *ii*) it was characterised as a ‘youth language’ whose primary role was to exclude outsiders from conversations; *iii*) it was portrayed negatively by educators and parents, and *iv*) it is often associated with socially marginal people (De Féral, 2007-b, Biloa, 1999, and more). However, regardless of these negative characterisations, CFrA made its appearance in the media (press and TV) and the arts (music, comic books) from the 90s onwards, but also on a global scale, on blogs and online dictionaries, with some of those virtual spaces even teaching how to speak CFrA (for ex. Grioo.com).

1.3 Research to date

Like other mixed varieties, CFrA has generated controversy among researchers, because it does not fit traditional and idealised views of languages as homogeneous communication tools, defined by specific, recognisable and bounded grammatical and syntactic rules, spoken by (imagined) equally

¹⁵ (Kenne, 2017; Siebetchu, 2016; Telep, 2013; Machetti & Siebetchu, 2013; Nyemb, 2006; Ebongue & Fonkoua, 2010; Stein-Kanjora, 2009; De Féral, 2007a, 2007b, 2009...; Schröder, 2007; Ngok-Graux 2006; Harter, 2007; Fosso & Nzesse, 2004; Chumbow & Bobda, 2000; Efoua-Zengue, 1999; Fosso, 1999; Biloa, 1999; Essono, 1997; Tiayon-Lekobou, 1985; Zé Amvela, 1989, 1983 and more.)

culturally homogeneous, closed speech communities. This has led to disagreement about its genealogy and filiation and the characterisation of its users. Some scholars have characterised it as a threat to education and standard French (e.g. Nzesse, 2005; Fosso & Nzesse, 2004; Chumbow & Bobda, 2000), while others attribute significant sociological value to CFrA, portraying it as a reflexion of the hybrid linguistic identity of Cameroon that has the potential to enable its users to overcome social and ethnic divides (Harter, (2007, p. 4), the token of a purely Cameroonian identity (Tandia & Tsofack, 2009, p. 311) that unites its mixed multi-ethnic and multilingual population (Schröder, 2007, p. 294; Essono, 1997, p. 382). In more recent years, a new trend in the research on the topic started integrating its use by an adult Cameroonian population in migratory contexts (Telep, 2014; Machetti & Siebetchu, 2013).

1.4 CFrA in the diaspora

I would like to start by stating that calling the population whose experiences I am drawing on ‘Cameroonians’ is problematic, because some of them are actually French, British or American nationals.

For the purposes of this study, the term ‘diasporic Cameroonians’ is taken to include people of Cameroonian origin and heritage, whether or not they were born in Cameroon and whether or not they hold the Cameroonian nationality¹⁶. These Cameroonians living in the West swim in a sea of generally negative portrayals of Afro-descendants by the media, politicians spewing racist statements in a bid to vie for votes, and increasing numbers of foreign but ethnically European citizens. The rise of Western nationalism and the growing popularity of right-wing leaning political parties imply a failure (if only relative) of these Afro-descendants’ acceptance or integration in the host society. On this basis, it is logical to imagine that they would engage either in various forms of

¹⁶ Cameroonians cannot legally be binationals as this is forbidden by Cameroonian law.

resistance or in active attempts to 'belong' in a context that too often tells them that they don't, hence the need, I propose, for 'spaces' where they are more likely to fit in. It is the history of Cameroon, the geographical displacement of these people, and the diasporic context, that intersect and create the perfect storm in which these diasporic Cameroonians find themselves engaging with CFrA.

1.5 Aims of the study

This study examines CFrA in the lives of eight diasporic Cameroonians, by looking at what they say about the register as they engage with it in various contexts, and at any discourses of identity that emerge in their statements. Notions of home and belonging emerge, as these diasporics align to an imagined Cameroonian identity, striving to find a peaceful frame of existence alongside (and often overshadowing) these people's relationship with and attachment to their current physical home in the West¹⁷. Terms like 'we', 'my people', 'we are in this together', 'we have a common background' recur in their statements but these terms do not tell the full story of their lives in their new homes, in their host countries. With these diasporic Cameroonians' life trajectories in the background, defined here as their "movement in space and discursively in time" (Charalambous & Karrebæk, 2017), i.e.

- i) their physical displacement from their starting point (in Cameroon) to the Western cities they find themselves in, viz. Paris, London, Davis, Nantes and Kansas City, and
- ii) the journey their linguistic practices took in parallel and as a result of this movement, this case study investigates what these adult diasporic Cameroonians think CFrA does for them, the perceived role CFrA plays in their lives.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that these relationships may sometimes be in competition but can be (and are worth being) balanced.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study links to urban sociolinguistics and focuses on the use of a mixed register of Central African¹⁸ origin by people from educated middle class backgrounds. It also opens up to diaspora and postcolonial studies, and touches on issues linked to migration. Besides, little has been written on a) CFrA in adults' linguistic repertoires, on the Internet; b) diasporic Cameroonians; c) functions of the register beyond its purely communicative role; and d) potential links to identity, culture, postcolonialism etc. Drawing from previous studies on language and identity, my approach is "rooted in sociolinguistic and linguistic [ethnographic] understandings of interaction" (Wagner, 2011). I draw mainly from the participants' statements about language, and also points of intersection or tension with the online interactional data I downloaded. My knowledge of the subject and the general macro context these participants find themselves in also co-determine my understanding of and my interpretation of their experiences as 'diasporics'. With this approach, I explore how far the use of language in general and CFrA in particular impacts these individuals' well-being.

1.7 Research question

In light of the above, the main research question that has guided and shaped my enquiry is:

- What are the functions (if any) that CFrA performs for Cameroonians in the diaspora?

I approach this question from the perspective of these diasporic Cameroonians, and by examining their stances on the subject. It can be broken down into the following sub questions:

¹⁸ In French-speaking countries and in Cameroon, the country is classified as being in Central Africa, while in the UK and in the USA, Cameroon is referred to as a West African country. I use the classification that I am most familiar with.

- i) Do my participants engage with CFrA? If they do, in what form, when, where and with whom?
- ii) How far has CFrA's emblematic significance changed in its move from a Cameroonian context to a diasporic one? What does it do for its diasporic speakers? What do they 'use' it for?
- iii) How (if at all) is CFrA a part of negotiating belonging for its diasporic speakers online and offline, and how do they enact their Cameroonian identity in these contexts using CFrA? What role does it play (if any) in their reconstructions of home away from home?

To answer these research questions, I have drawn on:

- i) conversations with eight diasporic Cameroonians based in France, in the UK and in North America, and their statements about their life trajectories and language practices, collected via Skype and face to face, and
- ii) written interactions downloaded from a Facebook-based group and observed a posteriori.

1.8 Ontological and epistemological position

"What speaks is not the utterance, the language, but the whole social person. [...] the whole social structure is present in each interaction (and thereby in the discourse uttered)." (Bourdieu 1991, p. 67)

As mentioned in the abstract, I approached this study with a linguistic ethnographic lens, where the ethnographic refers to "a style of research that is distinguished by its objectives, which are to understand the social *meanings* and activities of people in a given 'field' or 'setting'" (Brewer, 2000, p. 11, emphasis in original), coupled with a critical discourse analytical perspective, understood as "a critical perspective that may be found in all areas of discourse studies", such as the ethnography of communication or

sociolinguistics (or linguistic ethnography¹⁹, which is a closely related tradition; see Rampton 2019).

The linguistic ethnographic lens offers an ontological understanding of the world that views social reality as being “discursively constructed, reproduced, naturalized, and sometimes revised in social interaction” (Pérez-Milans & Soto, 2016, p. 53). This view ties in with Interactional Sociolinguistics²⁰ belief that language practices are socially and locally situated, constructed or produced in interactions (Gumperz, 1982), which informed the sociolinguistic view of language and identity as products of social interactions and situated performances. According to Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, “social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language” (1982, p. 7), and this framework presents individual actions and social structures as being linked. Bourdieu’s perspective on language as currency with variable value depending on the market (1977a, p. 651) also underpins my ontological position in this study.

From an epistemological viewpoint, this study is situated within a broadly interpretative and post-structuralist framework, with the aim of pulling in the theories and methods that would allow me to best answer my research questions, including if/where that means grappling with the paradigms associated with various perspectives that threaten to constrain me. For this reason, the interdisciplinary nature of LE with its suitability for the study of language and identity (Rampton et al., 2004; Tusting & Maybin, 2007; Creese 2008; Copland & Creese 2015, Pérez-Milans, 2016) made it particularly attractive for this project. Furthermore, LE’s emphasis on avoiding “presuppositions about fixed mechanisms of social relations that originate in stable and abstract political and economic structures that shape local forms of social life” in favour of “empirical documentation of the ways in which social

¹⁹ Hereafter LE.

²⁰ Interactional Sociolinguistics is the analytic perspective on language and identity developed by John Gumperz. (Rampton 2019, p. 3)

actors negotiate meaning and stance in response to the increasing uncertainty, discontinuity and lack of sharedness brought about by the institutional, socio-economic, sociolinguistic and cultural conditions of late modernity” (Pérez-Milans & Soto, op. cit., p. 53) seemed particularly suited to the aims of this study.

I did not opt to use all the data collection methods traditionally associated with LE, as I am interested in listening to what **the participants say** about the importance of this language practice, in their efforts to find a place where they can be ‘at home’ away from home – thus, my data do not include so-called ‘naturally-occurring’ spoken interaction featuring CFrA. Rather, as argued by Nossik, (2011), Canut, (2007) and others, I chose to “consider [the] “semi-directive” or “narrative” interviews” of my participants as interaction, and analysed those data as such (Bertaux [1997] 2005, p. 11; Bres 1999, p. 68). I am a diasporic Cameroonian, a relative insider, as I am quite familiar with the context and social realities my participants experience, so I found it important to approach this study ‘from the inside out’, with the awareness of my quite extensive relatable personal experience, which I shared in the introduction of this study (in section 1.1). I also strove to keep in mind the need to make every effort to render the [relatively] familiar strange (Agar, 1996), by letting my natural empathy for my participants inform my emic understanding of their experiences, and being careful to also step back to gain an etic outsider perspective. I find Davies’ (1989, p. 139) statement that follows particularly pertinent:

“Poststructuralist thought allows me to recognise the multiple discourses in which I participate and to see myself differently constituted through each of them. ... It allows me to see fully ... the extent of my entrapment in known discourses”.

In light of my ontological and epistemological positioning exposed above, I chose to approach this project as a case study, drawing on some of the principles of Linguistic Ethnography, and using a range of research and

analytical methods (including the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis) to address different aspects of my research questions.

1.9 Theoretical framework

This study is built broadly on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework drawing from theories around the relationship between language and identity (e.g. Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985), and the ways in which language is used to express and construct identity. The relationship between language and identity has been amply described, discussed and debated by the aforementioned scholars and many others. Specifically with regard to hybrid non-standard language use originating from the postcolonial sub-Saharan context, Hurst-Harosh's description of these hybrid lects as decolonial practices (2019) is particularly useful to this study. Where these lects have often been characterised as "lexical resources [used] to engage in the performance of an urban streetwise identity" (Hurst, *ibid.* p. 113), I argue that in Western migratory contexts, they are used to embody diasporic identities that reject the imposed and ill-fitting limitations of labels such as migrant, refugee, *étranger*, alien and others, inherited from the shared colonial past of the hosts and the African continent, to embrace a middle ground that evolves and is defined by these diasporic people.

What this study brings, I believe, is the description of the relationship between language and identity 'from the horses' mouths', and the data examined in this study take the basic and agreed upon relationship further, arguing that language defines speakers' (or writers') identity, specifically their ethnic identity, and that these people use language to justify their presence in a social context that depicts them as alien, that *others* them. Language in this context, I argue, can be (and is) used to embrace the separation imposed by the host countries, not only that, but to own that separation as a distinguishing factor, as *lettres de noblesse*, badges of honour that restore dignity and meaning to those thus othered. Further, CFrA in the diasporic context becomes a third space language

of sorts used to express these post-postcolonial fluid and ever-adapting identities that are caught between the geographical and past home, and their new home in which they seek to find belonging.

Secondly, I adopt a complexity perspective, drawn from Kramsch and Whiteside's (2008) complexity theory, aptly refined by Blommaert (2016, p. 249) as one that "offers a *freedom to imagine*, not an obligation to submit". The post post-modern hybrid social context the people 'studied' evolve in has been characterised as superdiverse by Blommaert & Rampton (2011), Vertovec (2006) and others, and is understood as a complex system situated in and born from the multilingual reality of communication in these times. Where Kramsch and Whiteside argue for a translingual approach in language education, which recognizes symbolic competence rather than a monolingual stance toward languages as bounded systems, in the context of this study, I draw an attitude to language from the authors' position, that aligns with Blommaert's (op cit., p. 249) point that "chaos is not an absence of order but a *specific form of order*, characterized, intriguingly, by the increased interaction, interdependence and hence coherence between different parts of a system". Blommaert draws out of his reasoning on these two points and others, a set of theoretical propositions, from which I have identified two that I find particularly relevant to this study and the object CFrA, namely:

- i) that sociolinguistic systems, defined as any set of systemic – regular, recurrent, non-random – interactions between sociolinguistic objects at any level of social structure, are complex systems characterized by internal and external forces of perpetual change, always dynamic, never finished, never bounded, and never completely and definitively describable either;
- ii) that sociolinguistic systems are characterized by mobility and that in such forms of mobility, the characteristics of the elements change: language varieties that have a high value here, can lose that value easily by moving into another 'field of force', so to speak – another sociolinguistic system.

Blommaert's two points give me the freedom to examine CFrA without pre-judging its reality or its validity, the freedom to look at, and see, what it brings to the table for sub-Saharan African background people living as diasporics in the West.

Regarding the first of Blommaert's propositions, the unpredictability and high variability of CFrA has been widely discussed by scholars, and has even been considered problematic, taken by some as grounds that disqualify CFrA from earning the label of 'a language'. This study, however, embraces its variability and unboundedness, what I call its liquidity, i.e. its ability to adapt and change depending on the context, the way liquids adapt to the shape of their containers. We see for example how CFrA embraces and includes Italian, when spoken by diasporic Cameroonians living in Italy, and the same applies in Germany. Any description and study of CFrA has to adopt this principle of happy and valued chaos as a prerequisite, otherwise the battle is lost before any analysis even starts. Embracing that principle liberates the scholar, frees her to examine what CFrA is, and what its use has to teach us, rather than trying to make it fit obsolete notions of linguistic purity and boundedness.

Blommaert's second point above describes the *raison d'être* of this project. It is precisely because CFrA which was once devalued and despised in the Cameroonian nation-state's educational project (and still is in some circles of linguistic purists) has gained value in the diasporic contexts examined in this study that I have been able to **look** beyond those past restrictive characterisations **and see** what the register offers its diasporic users.

The above broad lens and framework enabled me to approach this study with a conviction:

i) that language practices, more specifically, the linguistic object called CFrA, play(s) an important part in diasporic Cameroonians' negotiations of home and belonging based on their assumed commonality of origin and nationality, theorised as and subsumed in Cameroonian-ness, and

ii) that the importance of CFrA for these negotiations is built through imaginations (of CFrA as an idealised expression of this Cameroonian-ness), interactions and encounters in the space(s) that these Cameroonians occupy.

In order to clarify these two convictions, I start by deconstructing 'being Cameroonian' or Cameroonian-ness, also looking at what it means to be diasporic Cameroonians. Next I discuss theories of 'home and belonging' that could be useful to understand diasporic Cameroonians' sense of identity, also examining potential links between those theories and the "language and identity" binomial pair.

1.10 Theorising Cameroonian-ness

To start with, I have to explore what this Cameroonian-ness is. I postulate that the concept does exist, at least in these diasporic Cameroonians' perception, and that to them, it is a bond that links them to one another, includes them all, and draws them together in an idealised diasporic, 'national' Cameroonian community. This has been confirmed by the participants in this study and also in some of the Facebook group chats. This community includes nationals of Cameroon living in Western countries, but also nationals of other (Western) countries, of Cameroonian origin, both usually colloquially called (by Cameroonians in Cameroon) *Kamers de Mbeng* or *Mbengetaires*, or *Mbengistes* (Egbe, 2016) all three expressions actually 'othering' them.

The concept of othering finds its roots in postcolonial theory (see for example Said, 1994, on the construction of the Oriental as the opposite of the Occidental). It was coined by Spivak (1985) and has been used in studies about ethnic minorities (e.g. Jensen, 2011) and other areas of scholarship such as feminist theory (in which the concept was pioneered by De Beauvoir in 1949 and has since been written about extensively). Spivak depicts othering as unidirectional, produced by the colonial master to describe the native subject, and (stereo)typical discourses about migrants/foreigners etc. still retain hints of

this power structure in which the Other is always inferior, never fascinating and certainly not attractive.

In this study, the term is used in the sense of a process of differentiation and demarcation drawing a line between an imagined 'us' and 'them' and through which social distance is established (Lister, 2004, p. 101), and with it comes an automatic dehumanisation of the 'Other'.

When post-postcolonial subjects do the othering of people from the same ethnic background, othering becomes tribalism, especially in the African context. In the Cameroonian context mentioned above, what is expressed is othering of diasporic Cameroonians by Cameroonians residing in Cameroon, and this raises the question of the fragility of 'Cameroonian' as a category. This said, I am not calling into question the validity of these diasporians' identification as 'Cameroonians', which is what Cameroonians on the continent seem to challenge with those terms; neither am I stating that being Cameroonian fully represents and defines diasporic Cameroonians.

On the question of what it means to be Cameroonian, I would like to first acknowledge that being 'Cameroonian outside Cameroon' appears to be different from being 'Cameroonian in Cameroon'. The most obvious reason is the fact that there is no Cameroonian construct without the Cameroonian nation-state, so the concept of the Cameroonian *nation-ality* is linked to a specific territory, a geographical location with boundaries. However, when Cameroonians leave Cameroon, one cannot simply conclude that they have ceased to be Cameroonians. This highlights the relative irrelevance of the construct of the nation, as one could argue that the boundaries of Cameroon could be conceived as being 'internal to the Cameroonian', rather than linked to a geographical location, or to linear ideas of blood and soil.

Wagner (2011, p. 43-44) raises questions regarding the Moroccan-ness of post-migrants living outside Morocco, both with relation to the perceived legitimacy of

their allegiance to Morocco, and to the challenges their Moroccan-ness raises in their host country, stating that

“Migration challenges this national form by presenting contrasting influences and conflicting opportunities for [people] who migrate to show allegiance to [...] national projects. It presents a challenge as well to the countries where migrants arrive, who design different ways of incorporating their bodies and lives into those national spaces. The ability to belong within two different nations [...] violates the imagined unity of ‘nation’ and creates the need for new configurations for how this sense of hybridized belonging can exist.”

Quoting Wimmer & Glick Schiller (2002, p. 324), Wagner discusses the fact that reliance on “pre-assigned monikers of ‘nation’ or ‘ethnicity’ to characterize groups encourages the researcher to make assumptions that may not be reflected in data”, and the unhelpful alternative, transnational, which “semantically refers us to the non-trans*national* or simply to the national as the entity that is crossed or superseded.” (ibid., italics original), is equally misleading. This term again brings the focus back on the nation, “whether or not ‘nation’ is relevant to the potentially diverse social fields within which migrants position themselves on an everyday basis”. (Wagner, 2011, p. 46). Wagner’s point about these monikers is particularly pertinent to my study, first because, like many migrants of sub-Saharan African origin living in the Western world, Cameroonians find their legitimacy as nationals back in Cameroon challenged, and they are also considered foreigners in the host nation, regardless of their nationality. The construct of nation is particularly unhelpful here because it does not even begin to cover the depth and complexity of their experience as ‘others’ often simultaneously in their country of origin and in the host nation. As for ethnicity, considering that every human being regardless of their skin colour and background is ‘ethnic’ in some way, I find the term particularly loaded because it is generally not associated with White inhabitants of the Western world and is officially and almost always systematically associated with non-White people, especially Black and brown ones. Umbrella terms such as BME or BAME or the

less popular BEM in the UK, (respectively, Black and minority ethnic, Black, Asian and minority ethnic, and Black and ethnic minority), or the 20+ years old expression 'les minorités visibles' (visible minorities) in France (Blandin-Estournet, 2020; Bruneel, 2020; Dick Bueno et al., 2019), more recently replaced by the more deconstructed and progressive term 'racisées' or 'racialisées' (Bilge, 2015; Tissot, 2014; Laplanche-Servigne, 2014; Launay, 2014; Poiret, 2011) which both translate as 'racialised', attest to these generalisations. The first set of terms comes with an automatic assumption that the norm is to be White and conversely, that being Black or brown is not normal, is outside of the scope of normality. The more recent ones emphasise the imposition of an assessment if not a judgement by others on the basis of people's skin colour, and while this critical stepping back is useful, it highlights the fact that it is the beholder that thus qualifies these people, portraying them as victims, people whose rights need to be defended, the assumption being that it is these (white) others who will be able to defend them. These ethnic lines are not relevant to this study, because what qualified the participants for this study was their personal (or their families') history and experience of international migration. Brubaker's (2009, 2002) revision of these social categories, calling for "a new field of study that is comparative, global, cross-disciplinary, and multi-paradigmatic, and that construes ethnicity, race, and nationhood as a single integrated family of forms of cultural understanding, social organization, and political contestation" (2009, p. 22) points us in the right direction, away from quick and reductive assumptions about what constitutes people's identities.

Zooming in once more on Cameroonians, one could further challenge the territorial connexion, and argue that there is a case for a reappropriation of that name and identity, as the word Cameroon is itself a colonial construct, derived from the name 15th century Portuguese explorers gave to a river they stumbled across in Central Africa – the Wouri River estuary located on the Atlantic coast of Cameroon – during a migration of what they thought to be giants shrimps – Camarões. They named the river Rio dos Camarões, and from that name, the territory was later named Cameroon.

Like all identity labels, this label varies depending on the context. For instance, in Cameroon, we do not stand out so visibly just because of the colour of our skin. We do not constantly find ourselves answering the “quintessential question of identity”, “Where are you from?” (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2010, p. 1), nor are we affected by what Hua & Wei (2016, p. 450) call the “perpetual foreigner syndrome”, expressed even more strongly as, “Where are you really from?” I argue that the question should not be where these Cameroonians (or Africans) are from, but rather what the legacy of colonisation and the majority White host country has made of them. In Cameroon, the people around us do not make immediate culturally reductive assumptions about our favourite foods for example, just on the basis of the colour of our skin (see Ghavami & Peplau, 2012, p. 117, or Hua & Wei, op cit., p. 450). There is more room for self-definition, in a similar way as White people in Western nations benefit from the unquestioned legitimacy of their presence (Fine, 2013). I propose that the (perceived or real) requirement to explain and often, defend oneself, positions these diasporic Cameroonians as ‘wanting’, defective or at the very least ‘in some sort of debt’ to any random (white) Tom, Dick and Harry whose path crosses theirs, just because they are Black/African. Taking ‘Cameroonian’ to be one of the subcategories implicitly included in the umbrella terms ‘ethnic minorities’ or ‘migrants’ or ‘foreigners’ or ‘BAME’ or ‘aliens’, in Western host societies and especially through news media discourses, I believe these imagined simplified identities (often presented as being problematic) deny the positive value, the complexity and the hybridity of post-postcolonials, and definitions based solely on their African country of origin only recognise part of their multi-layered identities.

From my own experience and as stated by most of the participants in this study, there is a ‘we’, an ‘us’ that circulates in diasporic Cameroonian circles, especially well summarised in the catch phrase ‘*on est ensemble*’ (literally ‘we are together’) that has a range of meanings, from ‘goodbye’ to ‘let’s stay in touch’, which also reinforces the idea of a Cameroonian ‘us’ versus an ‘other’,

'them'. Moreover, these diasporic Cameroonians, I argue, are able to place themselves outside the 'Cameroonian' construct and negotiate their hybridity from a position of otherness, depending on the context they find themselves in, and on their assessment of how useful (or not) it is at any given moment to draw on that aspect of their selves (see Tate 1999 on critiques of Black identity). Taking my own example as further evidence of this flexibility, I am placed "very firmly within the concerns of this project", and yet simultaneously, "sitting somewhere outside it" (Tate, *op. cit.*, p. 8), observing, analysing, and commenting on the participants' experiences. This concept of Cameroonians appears to shift depending on various other criteria, such as location, who the diasporic person is interacting with etc., and thus, these diasporic Cameroonians are likely to find themselves re-evaluating and reframing their ideas about their identity as their circumstances and their perception of themselves evolve.

This leads me to two considerations. The first one is that the assumed need for Cameroonians in the diasporic context arose from, or as a reaction to, what Hua and Wei term NET, Nationality and Ethnicity Talk, i.e. "discourse that either explicitly or implicitly evokes or orients to one's national or ethnic membership" in everyday conversation (*op. cit.*, p. 449). Linked to this assumed need for a Cameroonians that is presumed to exist, is my research question and my two sub-questions detailed in the introductory chapter. In my discussion on my two data sources (see Chapter 8), I explore what aspects of Cameroonians emerge through the participants' engagement with CFrA, and how this helps them recreate a 'home away from home' (or not), or at least what their perception is about that. In my analysis chapter and in my concluding chapter, I further comment on ways in which (if at all) CFrA constitutes, shapes and sustains this Cameroonians.

1.11 Of the relevance of 'home' and 'belonging' for questions of identity

A number of scholars have researched home and belonging with regard to the migratory experience, and quite a few, African origin migrants living in the Western world. Binaiisa (2013) conducted a multi-sited ethnographic study aiming to understand how members of the Ugandan 'community', which includes "naturalised citizens, refugees, those granted 'indefinite leave to remain' or 'exceptional leave to remain' by the UK authorities, students, economic migrants, asylum seekers, second and subsequent generations of migrants, and undocumented people", negotiate questions of 'home' and 'belonging' within their everyday lives in Britain (p. 554). As the author points out aptly, like all sub-Saharan African origin migrant communities living in the Western world, this community is "heterogeneous and it reflects a diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicity and immigration statuses due to the sustained nature of its formation over time". Starting from the "hypothesis that migrants' lives continue to be marked by notions of mobility and 'otherness' that potentially negate differentials of migration trajectory, status or longevity of stay", a point that I strongly subscribe to, the author highlights two aspects that, unaddressed, cloud all attempts to understand these people's experiences: "The first is the neglect of the sending context within migration theories that privilege the host context and leaves the origin context under-theorised. The second is the tendency to frame the presence of migrants in simplistic discourses of documentation, status and integration, thereby obscuring questions of culture and history."

Binaiisa, who also used personal life narratives as part of her data collection, highlights the importance of taking into account "identity dynamics within the diasporic landscape" (op. cit., p. 558). I find the author's point that "migrants' experiences reveal [...] their own sociocultural struggles over who belongs in what space and place" particularly pertinent. Some of these struggles, I argue, are directly linked to the fact that their entry into Britain (or any Western host country) triggers "a process that simultaneously confers one set of identities,

while stripping them of another, as the political markers of identity from the past inter-mingle within an increasingly restrictive asylum and migration regime” (Binaisa, op cit. p. 560). The often-hostile climate created by these restrictive asylum and migration regimes, and the concomitant negative perceptions of migrants make up the bedrock that fosters the development of the discourses subsumed in Hua & Wei’s aforementioned acronym NET. According to Binaisa, ‘home’ and ‘belonging’, expressed in migrants’ everyday practices, “emerge as both contested and negotiated”, and can be reconfigured at will by migrants in the diasporic landscape that they occupy.

In a study about sub-Saharan African migrants entering Spain from its southern border, Carnet (2011) describes an atmosphere marked by political and media-led official discourses focusing on illegality and insecurity; she touches on the idea of belonging, highlighting two conceptions of cosmopolitanism that are useful to this discussion. These conceptions, Carnet argues, do not imply international mixing, but imply mutual acceptance and an ability to cohabit while avoiding conflicts.²¹ They both refer, on one hand, to urban residential groupings organised on a professional or “ethnic” basis, and on the other, to an internal cosmopolitanism, described in a private conversation by scholar A. Tarrus (2000) internal to the world of migrants, as “a sectoral cosmopolitanism. The cosmopolitan foreigner does away with the necessary cosmopolitan coexistence with the natives to develop partial cosmopolitanism: one which only concerns foreigners. “We”, among foreigners, are capable of developing plans for cohabitation” (p. 36)²². This focus on common ground bringing migrants together is referred to as a community of itinerancy (Escoffier, 2006), or a migratory identity i.e. a common identity based on the migratory project (Alioua,

²¹ “La première, classique, se réfère à des regroupements urbains résidentiels effectués sur une base professionnelle ou « ethnique » : ce cosmopolitisme ne présuppose en rien des mixités, mais implique une reconnaissance mutuelle et une capacité à cohabiter en évitant les conflits.”

²² « c’est ce qu’on appellerait un cosmopolitisme sectoriel. L’étranger cosmopolite se défait de la nécessaire coexistence cosmopolite avec les autochtones, pour développer un cosmopolitisme partiel : celui qui ne concerne que les étrangers. “Nous”, entre étrangers, sommes capables de développer des plans de cohabitation ». Alain Tarrus. From a meeting in June 2010.

2005, p. 20). As argued by Alioua, this migratory identity (in progress) is gradually constructed both at the level of their social trajectories, expressed through a trans-migration that imposes constant reorganisation and a transaction between several expressions of belonging²³, and on an alleged common origin essentially based on mobility, rather than on territory or nation²⁴. The situational, often short-lived “nature of this ethnic and identity-related indifferentiation” (Carnet, 2011, *ibid.*) is what Tarrus qualifies as cosmopolitan, this ability to move in and out of different worlds of norms and values, to use different registers according to circumstances. Tarrus does not oppose the ethnic to the cosmopolitan, but the itinerant to the sedentary.²⁵ There is in this description something reminiscent of the ways in which diasporic Cameroonians forgo tribalistic divides when they are in an often-hostile Western world, united by their diasporic identity, in order to find some sense of belonging. The itinerant nature of their experience does not erase ethnic or tribal labels, but it makes “cosmopolitan competence” necessary. As argued by Carnet, this cosmopolitanism does not imply an erasure of differences, but an “indifference to differences when the situation demands it”²⁶ (Carnet, 2011, p. 37). In a way, both these migrants in Spain, and the diasporic Cameroonians in my study, have to redefine and renegotiate their identities to create a space that will have them, as they seek to secure a sense of home and belonging, or belongings as Alioua terms them.

Aouici and Gallou’s 2013 study about the anchoring and mobility of migrant families of sub-Saharan origins living in France, looking at two generations

²³ My translation.

²⁴ « Cette identité migratoire en chantier est nouvelle selon nous en ce qu’elle s’édifie progressivement à la fois à l’échelle des trajectoires sociales qui s’expriment à travers une trans-migration qui impose une réorganisation permanente et une transaction entre plusieurs appartenances, et à la fois sur une supposée origine commune basée essentiellement sur la mobilité et non sur le territoire ou la nation. »

²⁵ “cette capacité à entrer et sortir de différents univers de normes et de valeurs, cette capacité à utiliser des registres différents selon les circonstances. Il n’oppose pas l’ethnique au cosmopolite, mais les « circulants » aux « sédentaires ».”

²⁶ “Le cosmopolitisme, dans ce cas, n’implique pas l’effacement des différences, mais l’indifférence aux différences, lorsque celle-ci est exigée par la situation.”

(parents, who migrated, and their children, born and raised exclusively in France) outlines the in-between position the younger generations find themselves in. The scholars raise the question of the claimed identity vs the assigned identity, explaining how individuals define and situate themselves along two axes, one personal and the other, in relation to the outside world, with a constant demand placed on them to alternate their position depending on the situation they find themselves in. Their double identity, their in-between position, is rarely a source of discomfort; the two worlds they are rooted in coexist and are either evoked assertively, as a demand, or rather discreetly or passively. What generally raises identity-related questions in the individuals is the assigned African identity versus the French identity they feel is theirs. One of the participants who happens to be of Cameroonian origin, comments (on p. 179):

There will always be this latent thing, which is there without being there too much: “You’re Black, so you come from...”. When people see me, they assume that being Black, I must come from somewhere. And if I am unable to answer, in the eyes of the other, it doesn’t make sense, it doesn’t carry any weight. So I might as well know where I come from for myself, so that I don’t have to ask myself questions about my identity afterwards. [...] If my mother had never sent me to Cameroon, if I had never eaten the food from there, if I had never spoken the language, if I had never had any contact with my family from there, yes, it is clear that there would have been an uneasiness because today, at first sight, this is the only image that people have of me: “You, you are Black, you come from Africa.”²⁷

²⁷ Il y aura toujours ce truc latent, qui est là sans trop être là : « Tu es Noire, donc tu viens de... » Quand on me voit, on part du principe qu’étant Noire, je viens forcément de quelque part. Et si je suis dans l’incapacité de répondre, dans les

It is this constant questioning of who they are that leads them to feel a duty to claim some sort of attachment to their parents' country of origin, and in extreme cases, to reject their French identity completely (Aouici and Gallou, op cit., p. 180) even in cases where they have never even set foot on the African continent. The parents identify with mobility as part of their lived experience, as they came from somewhere and arrived in France. The children's generation is most concerned with anchoring, which I call negotiating belonging in this study. In Aouici and Gallou's study, language is mentioned as a marker of identity, but more so for the parents' generation, as most of the children do not speak their parents' language(s) or have very limited proficiency.

The three studies mentioned above highlight similar issues linked to the perception of the participants by so-called natives, and the impact of the resulting othering on these participants' ability to plant roots in their host country. These studies suggest that notions of home and belonging reflect the lived experiences of non-natives in Western cities, whether or not the terminology that we use differs.

1.12 Methodological framework

The data analysed in this thesis are composed of interviews of the participants in this study, and online interactions downloaded from a Facebook Group dedicated to CFrA. I approached the analysis of the participants' statements drawing from a very broadly ethnographic lens, more specifically the lens of an ethnography of narratives focusing on discourses about language, (so drawing from some of the tenets of Linguistic Ethnography) combined with some of the

yeux de l'autre, ça n'a pas de sens, ça ne trouve pas de poids. Alors j'aime autant savoir d'où je viens pour moi, pour ne pas avoir après à me poser des questions sur mon identité. [...] Si ma mère ne m'avait jamais envoyée au Cameroun, que je n'avais jamais mangé la nourriture de là-bas, ni parlé la langue, ni aucun contact avec ma famille de là-bas, oui, c'est clair qu'il y aurait eu un mal-être parce qu'aujourd'hui, au premier abord, c'est la seule image qu'on renvoie de moi : « Toi, tu es Noire, tu viens d'Afrique. »

principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which I found particularly useful for the analysis of the Facebook Group online interactions.

According to Rampton (2007, p. 585) LE is characterised by the following two key assumptions: firstly,

“That contexts of communication should be investigated rather than assumed. Meaning takes shape within specific social relations, interactional histories and institutional regimes, produced and construed by agents with expectations and repertoires that have to be grasped ethnographically.”

And,

“That analysis of the internal organisation of verbal (and other kinds of semiotic) data is essential to understanding its significance and position in the world. Meaning is far more than just the “expression of ideas”, and biography, identities, stance and nuance are extensively signalled in the linguistic and textual fine-grain”.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, while the internal organisation of the written and spoken communications is undoubtedly fascinating, I purposely chose to adopt a bias towards ‘what the participants say that CFA does for them’, their metacommentary about what it is and its role, and the ways in which they weave language with elements of their biographies. Interestingly enough, this ‘picking and choosing’ of what best serves my perspective is not a new practice in social science and research on language.

LE has been characterised by Creese (2008, p. 229) as “a particular configuration of interests within the broader field of socio- and applied linguistics [with] a theoretical and methodological development orientating towards particular, established traditions but defining itself in the new intellectual climate of poststructuralism and late modernity.” Thanks to its interdisciplinary nature,

LE has historically combined ethnography with many complementary approaches including principles of CDA. Vertovec's (2003) recommendation that researchers consider disciplinary borrowing if it strengthens their theoretical and conceptual frameworks also informs my research design.

For this study, I found LE useful for its 15+ year long association with social actors' negotiations of meaning and identity through language use, especially in the context of late modernity (Pérez-Milans, 2016; Creese, 2008; Rampton, et al, 2004 and others), characterised by "instability, difference and mobility", which stand in opposition to "long-standing binaries in the study of language, culture and identity [...] such as that of 'micro/macro' or 'local/global'" (Pérez-Milans, op cit., p. 84).

Similarly, I chose CDA as a lens for this study for several reasons, first for its critical examination of language to expose taken-for-granted assumptions, and its commitment to making it clear that discourse is never value neutral, but rather influenced by social context and produced in interaction with society, with the assumption that power relations are transmitted through discourse (Van Dijk, 2008). This approach is useful for and relevant to this project, as it questions (dominant) hegemonic assumptions relating to language.

Moreover, CDA's constant balancing between theory and empirical phenomena, which implies abductive analyses confirms Yin's (2003, p. 29) argument for "[t]he distinctive need for case studies aris[ing] out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena." I find Yin's recommendation of abductive research for the social sciences helpful and appropriate for this study, because of its flexibility that allows the researcher to "explain, develop or change the theoretical framework before, during or after the research process" as "abductive research moves back and forth between inductive and open-ended research settings to more hypothetical and deductive attempts to verify hypotheses." (ibid.)

Whilst decolonial studies using a CDA perspective in Latin America generally focus on organisational, corporate contexts imbued with and regimented by capitalistic principles and interests, it is not a far stretch to see how useful CDA's focus on the relations between language, ideology, hegemony, power and society, and its concern with constructing an explanatory critique of language and discourse, is, specifically taking post post-colonial contexts into consideration. The South American decolonial approach confirms the relevance of CDA as a lens for this study, as the approach seeks to uncover coloniality and provide new ontological and epistemological lenses to "understand and act in a world marked by the persistence of global coloniality at different levels of individual and collective life" (Lima, Capelle & Pereira, 2019, p. 175, quoting Ballestrin, 2013, p. 89; and Gohn, 2011). Language use and the politics of CFrA in diasporic contexts point very clearly to the impact of global coloniality on the participants in this study and the Facebook forum users engaging with CFrA.

Both LE and CDA embrace complexity and shy away from dichotomous categories, which allows me to be more open about the assumptions that I bring into the research project even before I start investigating my research questions. Also like LE, CDA advocates the investigation of contexts of communication, but offers more room for a back-and-forth journey between my postulates, the theory and my empirical observations.

Having started this project with the assumption that my research would be conducted following the principles of LE, including its focus on and approach towards studying interaction in detail, as I progressed in my project, I gradually realised that my interest was tilting more strongly towards my participants' statements, perceptions, thoughts, about what language 'does' for them in relation to their identity, especially as diasporic post-post colonials. I was more interested (for example) in their own understanding of the symbolic value of the languages of their repertoire with regard to nation-state hegemonic ideologies of language, and how they made sense of their selves as 'othered humans' living

away from 'home'. I came to the realisation that as invaluable as LE's tried and tested methods are, I had no reason to and no particular interest in using some of LE's ethnographic methods (such as participant observation and recording of naturally occurring interactions etc.) to be analysed using micro-discourse analysis. I was grateful to discover that "[r]esearchers using LE tend to draw on conceptual and methodological resources of relevance to them, from a range of different yet complementary disciplines and embrace interdisciplinarity, even where conceptualisations and assumptions have been slightly at odds." (Normand, 2014, pp 37-38).

1.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to set the stage for my study, discussing the cultural and linguistic background that led me to set out on this exploratory journey, outlining the existing research on CFrA, the aims of my study, my research question, the ontological and epistemological foundations on which my study is built, what Cameroonian-ness entails, the relevance of the concepts of home and belonging, and how they relate to identity. The three studies discussed in section 1.11 seem to lend weight to my aforementioned hunch about the effect of the constant pressure on diasporics of sub-Saharan African background, worded in Aouici and Gallou's study as the identity assigned to them by 'native discourses' that project a sense of illegitimacy on them as non-natives. This malaise suggests the probability that a tool is needed to negotiate belonging for diasporic people, and I propose that language, here CFrA, can be used, online and offline, as a means of enacting their Cameroonian identity in these contexts.

To draw a link between negotiations of home and belonging on one hand, and language practices on the other, I needed methodological tools that go beyond the usual assessment of diasporics' (or migrants') identities as complex or fractured, language practices as hybrid or multi-layered, all snapshots whose downside is that they freeze symptoms of deeper inner social, cultural and

emotional journeys these people navigate, and not by choice, and they risk preventing us from looking deeper. They fall short, I believe. I needed a toolbox with a composite set of tools, in order to be able to justify my decision to step away from the fascination many late modern sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists (amongst other disciplines) seem to have for the ‘micro in the close examination of language practices, that points to the macro in wider society’, or the cherished deconstructed notions of language as ‘not bounded’, ‘defying traditional definitions’, almost ethereal as a result of so much deconstruction. There has been so much emphasis on what language **is not**. I aim to focus here on *i*) the lived experiences of people who find themselves deprived of the freedom to determine for themselves who they are, *ii*) the way they would like to be spoken of and perceived in terms of where they belong (and this ‘place’ can be plural and variable and does not have to be geographical), *iii*) what mechanisms they resort to in order to make sense of what this ‘place’ is, what it looks like, what it feels like, *iv*) and how language intersects with these questions.

My participants can no longer simply be Cameroonian because in leaving Cameroon (or in being born and/or raised elsewhere), their Cameroonian-ness was diluted, transformed. Additionally, being Cameroonian outside Cameroon, especially in the majority non-African, non-Black Western world, becomes devalued in a manner reminiscent of the IMF’s frequent devaluations of African currencies. These people are put in a position where they have to find a social, emotional, cultural currency that enables them to create and nourish, forms of identity that make sense to them and are accepted by like-minded people with whom they can form ‘home’. These questions sit at the intersection of a number of disciplines, methodologies and approaches discussed in section 1.12, and examined in greater detail in chapter 4.

1.14 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis comprises ten chapters, including the introductory chapter. The second chapter discusses key theoretical constructs guiding this study. It is followed by an overview of important characteristics that make up the local context. Next, a chapter on the historical and socioeconomic context introduces the setting and background of the study. Then follows Chapter 4, outlining my research design, followed by the methodology used in this study in Chapter 5. In the next two chapters, I present the data focusing on the Skype interviews (in Chapter 6), also highlighting the themes that bring together all interviews. Chapter 7 focuses on the data from the Facebook Group, and Chapter 8, the framework of analysis and the analysis of the data from both sources. In Chapter 9 I briefly summarise the findings from each dataset, and in the final chapter follows a discussion on the way the data collectively help to answer the research questions, and a brief overview of the main limitations of the study. The concluding sections include some implications of the study and how the findings contribute to the field, and finally, further areas of research.

The next chapter is a discussion of key theoretical considerations that are relevant to this study.

Chapter 2. Key theoretical considerations

2.1 What do we call Camfranglais?

The term 'Camfranglais' is peculiar in that it fails to fully describe the linguistic phenomenon it designates. The term raises questions as it suggests slang or a dialect, because it includes the word 'Franglais'. 'Franglais' has been used extensively in a derogatory way in the past to designate a mixture of French and English, 'bad French' spoken by Britons, or 'bad English', spoken by the French. Historically, Franglais also refers to a specific mixture of English and French spoken in Quebec, (Wardhaugh, 2009, p.107; Rowlett 2009, p. 425). In France, the term symbolises the desertion of French, to be avoided at all costs (Carrère d'Encausse, 2013, p. 1); this has been the focus of the 50+ year-long (and still ongoing) French campaign to protect France's national language from Anglo Saxon infiltrations (Étiemble, 1964).

Further, the term 'Camfranglais' highlights the use of French and English and completely conceals the other 'languages' that are used in CFrA. This research project does not offer a more value-neutral or all-inclusive designation for CFrA as that is not its aim; I am merely flagging here the inadequacies of the term.

As argued by Simo-Souop (2009) CFrA resists existing typologies of linguistic codes and naming it 'a language' would be inappropriate.

The term register (as defined by Agha, 2004) seems useful to circumvent the aforementioned terminological limitations as it carries no obvious reference to status, linguistic specifications, social class of users or any other restricting characteristics. A register, he states, is "...a linguistic repertoire associated [...] with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices" (p. 24). He also outlines the conditions and processes of 'enregistrement' i.e. "...processes whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language

users.” (2005, p. 38). Agha’s use of the term ‘register’ is inclusive of all language practices and is distinct from the language versus dialect dichotomy, while still highlighting *abstand* (Kloss, 1967), i.e. the extent to which a register is differentiable from others. Case in point, CFrA is clearly differentiable from French, and it cannot be clustered with dialects of French “which together form an indivisible linguistic unit” (Kloss, op. cit, p. 158). Agha goes further, stating that a register is a continually changing historical formation, recognisable by *i)* its co-occurring features, *ii)* the (metalinguistic) ability of a demographic group to recognise it (i.e. to identify at least some of its tokens), or to use it, and thirdly, *iii)* the social occasions of its use and the people using it within these practices (2004, p. 26).

Agha’s *register*:

- allows me to discuss CFrA without having to name it a ‘language’ or a ‘non-language,’ because his re-definition of the term trades value judgments and narrow descriptive classification for openness to a language practice, a (socio) linguistic phenomenon;
- can be used to designate CFrA without being undermined by linguistic irregularities or differences in usage and characterisations of CFrA, because no highly restrictive claims are made concerning its nature or the components that make it recognisable (e.g. the use of neologisms combining French, English and Cameroonian vernaculars, the proportion of such neologisms in an utterance etc.).

Furthermore, the validation of its existence is supported not by the external, intellectual and distant knowledge of the researcher, but by the lived experiences of its users and what they make of those experiences.

2.2 Superdiversity

The language practices of non-native communities living in Western hubs have been described as characteristic of ‘superdiversity’. This leads me to take a closer look at CFrA and the context of its use to examine whether the concept

of 'superdiversity' i.e. a "...diversification of diversity [...]", (Vertovec, 2006, p. 1) can be associated with CFrA.

The term was coined by Steven Vertovec in the context of migration in Britain, Vertovec arguing that this 'diversification of diversity' is linked to the growth of multilingualism (p. 10, p.1) originating in the multiplicity and variety of immigrants' countries of origin since the late 90s/early 2000s. According to the scholar, the influx of migrants from these new and diverse origins with no specific historical or colonial links with Britain (see pp 5-9) translates into an explosion of the number of languages spoken in Britain's major cities (e.g. over 300 in London), which raises a number of challenges for British school districts, health services and local authorities, and more.

My initial reaction to the term was one of scepticism, because my Cameroonian background gave me a unique vantage point on, and first-hand contact with, a truly (ethnically and linguistically) super-diverse society. Even if the diversity in Cameroon is primarily national i.e. not necessarily linked to migration, it is notable in the sense that the different ethnic backgrounds and 200+ vernaculars (with the concomitant variety of culinary and musical traditions, religious and traditional practices etc.) cohabit and come into close contact, as *i)* all Cameroonians are aware of their existence (to varying degrees); *ii)* most urban Cameroonians, I believe, should be able to recognise at least five to seven major vernaculars²⁸, as the diversity of Cameroon is often presented as an asset); *iii)* these vernaculars are the main tools of communication between family members in endogamic families and within those ethnically homogeneous communities in rural Cameroon (estimated by the World Bank to represent 46% of the country's population in 2014)²⁹ where official language use is limited to communication with strangers (Zachée Denis Bitjaa Kody, pers. comm. 13 February 2004, in Rosendal, 2008, p. 43); and *iv)* I would assume that these vernaculars are all considered as integral parts of the Cameroonian

²⁸ Duala, Bassa, Ewondo/Bulu or Eton, Bamoun, Bamileke languages and Fulfulde.

²⁹ See <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/cameroon/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html>

socio-cultural fabric, given that on meeting other Cameroonians, one is frequently asked what ethnic group they belong to, what region they come from (the question being “tu es quoi ?” or “tu viens d’où ?” – see Ndonko, 1993, p. 113)³⁰. Comparatively, I considered the term (superdiverse) inaccurate to describe the ethnic and linguistic mix that can be observed and experienced in the largest Western cities such as London or Paris, primarily because of the higher status of the standard national language (which is also a reality in Cameroon), and also because, in my personal experience, the autochthonous inhabitants of the United Kingdom or France have very limited awareness of, and personal contact with, non-English or non-French origin languages and ethnicities, respectively. This is evidenced by the assumptions made about Black people in the UK for example who are often thought to be Nigerian (see Kosmalka & Rostek, 2015, p. 106), Ghanaian, or Jamaican (from personal interaction). Aneta Pavlenko’s 2014 critique of superdiversity raises questions about the awareness of the impact of the word in research circles, its validity and how it frames and depicts diversity in the mega cities of the Western world. She rightfully highlights the fact that it is more an academic buzzword, a brand name, than anything else, as its meaning is difficult to pin down (p. 11), and also because of its (Western) Eurocentric bias. Another strong argument against the undiscerning use of the term is her point that “there is no heuristic that determines at what point *diversity* transforms into *superdiversity*” (p. 15). I later warmed to the term, because it presents the advantage of bringing a refreshing enthusiasm and a counterhegemonic take on negative depictions of ethnic diversity in the Western media and political discourse, especially with regard to the presence of people from Africa. I also concluded that there may be some truth to the concept in that the host population in London or Paris, for example, has come into contact with a wider range of people from different backgrounds (who look and sound different) over the last 50 years or so, and that to them, this is as superdiverse a society as it gets (based on their experience to date).

³⁰ This said, certain ethnic groups might argue that they (and their languages) have been discriminated against more extensively than others, but that would be the subject of one (or several) completely distinct research project(s).

Having said that, however convenient and reassuring it may be (mainly because of its popularity in language research), the term is not particularly useful to my study. My participants live in London or Paris, or a large city in the United States which is heavily monolingual (at least officially) or bilingual (with Spanish). Even if they are aware of, and in contact with a range of languages spoken in private circles, the standard official language largely dominates society, and my participants only use other languages in private circles or community events. The term will appear in this study where relevant, with an awareness of its limiting Eurocentric perspective, and only for the reasons mentioned above.

2.3 Translanguaging

Translanguaging (Creese & Blackledge, 2010) and its cousins, languaging, polylanguaging, polylingual languaging, multilanguaging, heteroglossia and more (Li Wei, 2018, Jaspers, 2018, Jørgensen et al., 2011 and Jørgensen, 2008) are used to designate various perspectives on the way people draw on their linguistic resources when communicating. Originally used to describe a pedagogy that encouraged the use of two languages in educational settings (Williams, 1994), the term is now very popular in sociolinguistics (Jaspers, Li, op cit.). All the scholars who have written on the topic recognise that it is ambiguous and needs clarification, to the extent that Li (2018, p. 1) argues that “any practice that is slightly non-conventional could be described in terms of Translanguaging”. Li’s point resonates strongly with my perspective on the term, as he states that humans (especially multilingual ones, see García and Li, 2014) instinctively go “beyond narrowly defined linguistic cues and transcend culturally defined language boundaries to achieve effective communication”. Li includes in this assessment “[s]ensory, modal, cognitive, and semiotic” resources, but later narrows down the term to the use of varieties of (spoken and written) language, stating that “language users move dynamically between the so-called languages, language varieties, styles, registers, and writing systems, to fulfil a variety of strategic and communicative functions” (op cit., p.

26). I cannot but agree with Li's view of translanguaging because the effects of recognising that such a phenomenon exists frees language users from the hegemony of "monoglot standards" (García and Li, 2014, p. 105), and the term refers to fluid communicative practices that "transcend, socially constructed language systems and structures to engage diverse multiple meaning-making systems and subjectivities" (Li, 2018, p. 27). All the aforementioned scholars agree on the idea that translanguaging is an approach that views the language practices of multilinguals not as "autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, [but] as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to [...] **separate languages**³¹" (Li, op cit., 2). This rather fuzzy definition has been critiqued by Pennycook (2017, p. 15), who argues that translanguaging might look different "if it took up an expanded view of language and attended not only to the borders between languages but also to the borders between semiotic modes", and that the suggested change in perspective "is important not just to accomplish better and more complete urban ethnographies but also to redress an historical imbalance that has placed language and cognition in the head, while relegating the body and the senses to the physical" (p. 279). The fact is that language users live their lives in society and that one can safely assume that the vast majority are not linguists or academics. To most people, bounded languages such as Duala, Ewondo, French, English etc. **are** perceived as separate from one another, and from other means of communication. In this non-academic view of language, and as repeatedly stated by all those who actually engage with CFrA, and also by scholars, CFrA could not be classified as 'a language'. Further, CFrA cannot be limited to crossing between two or more separate languages (however arguable the concept is). Hence, CFrA cannot be labelled as a form of translanguaging, because the prefix trans- presupposes 'going between', 'moving across', one (bounded) language to another.

³¹ Emphasis mine.

In CFrA, two or more lects are blended to create a new, hybrid spoken or written form of language, using words from at least 3 'languages' (generally French, English and one or more Cameroonian national 'languages'), that loosely follows the grammatical rules of French. The term translanguaging opens the door to a world where linguistic hybridity is no longer viewed as problematic, and as such it could still be useful in describing my participants' linguistic behaviours (which is not the focus of this study), but it is not useful as a description of what CFrA is.

2.4 Identity

Another critical point is the problematic nature of the word 'identity', and it is crucial to specify what it is taken to mean in this research project. As argued by Brubaker & Cooper (2000, p. 1), the term is ambiguous as it "tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all". The authors argue that "identities are constructed, fluid, and multiple" (ibid) but this does not really solve the problem because this fluidity and multiplicity might confuse us further and leave us with no tools to examine the concept. Furthermore, the fluidity of the term is not an evidence to all; mainstream media or politicians' essentialising and homogenising statements about certain ethnic groups for example, or people's self-definitions, can be extremely fixed (see Fanshawe & Sriskandarajah 2010 on this). The recent social media #BAMEOver campaign³² launched by Arts professionals who called for an end to the use of the catch-all acronym BAME, typically used in the UK to refer to non-White people, similar to 'people of color' in the US, is (yet another) testament to that. These fixed self- or "external identifications" risk containing the people thus identified into 'boxes' taken as givens, and they leave little room for co-construction. Moreover, putting 'identity' forward as a category that defines people, and making a number of assumptions about what it entails (e.g. all individuals and social groups have,

³² See <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/bame-black-lives-matter-protests-anti-racism-ethnic-minority-a9702831.html>; <https://www.newsweek.com/bame-minority-racism-inequality-people-colour-1529732> and more.

ought to have, or are attached to their 'identity', whether they are aware of that or not, and these collective identities are bounded and homogeneous – see Brubaker & Cooper, p. 10 for a detailed discussion) could potentially push into the background other aspects of people's makeup, such as social class for example, which I postulate is an important contributing factor in the way people see and describe themselves and of course, in the linguistic registers that they use³³.

In this thesis, the term *identity* appears a number of times. Firstly, it is taken to refer to “a category of practice [...] used by “lay” actors in some (not all!) everyday settings to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others.” (Brubaker and Cooper, p. 4). These folk ideas shape my participants' world, and their self-characterisations are key to their definition of their relationship with others. As stated by Dundes (1993, p. 35), such folk analyses give access to “an inside out” view of people in society and can be considered “units of world view” (Dundes, 1971, p. 93). The ethnographic lens allows me to take these folk categories as a starting point for analysis, with the aim of finding more general principles further down the line, following the practice of theory-building in social science (Wilk, 2010, npn).

The term *identity* can be used to map abstract concepts on to common concrete and physical (or emotional) experiences, and this research project aims to achieve that. Beyond people's perceptions of identity as an internal psychological phenomenon, identity is also a relationally constructed social and cultural product of linguistic and other semiotic practices, influenced by macro-level categorisations and systems, by the reflection of one's own stances and positioning, and also by the negotiation (at a micro level) between one's own and others' perceptions and categorisations (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 585). Secondly, as per Bucholtz & Hall's recommendation, in this thesis, the term *identity* is taken to mean “the social positioning of self and other” (ibid. p. 586),

³³ Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' closely links social class to individuals' “acquired”, “durable dispositions”, which he argues provide the basis for the way they act, see and make sense of the world etc. (Bourdieu, 1990, pp 12-13; 63).

and in relation to language, this thesis focuses on the ways utterances (or language practices such as CFrA) index speakers' identity (and this relates to Le Page & Tabouret-Keller's 1985 research on language users' conscious or unconscious attempts to define their belonging to a group based on a shared language).

In this thesis, I have sought to let the voices of 'those studied' speak for themselves (through the interviewees' statements about the register, and the online Facebook interactions). The question of identity is particularly complex when it comes to post postcolonial subjects, especially in the White majority context they find themselves in, because the recognition of the hybridity of these people's identities comes with an othering – the assumption that they are hybrid as opposed to the White majority who would be homogeneous, pure, pedigreed etc... all antonyms of the word 'hybrid'. To voice their self-definitions of who they are, these diasporic Cameroonians have to overcome a number of hurdles integrated in their post postcolonial and 'foreigner' status. They have to "speak [...] against dominant discourses; to at least be aware of their self-perception of 'being other' and the fact that they themselves reproduce "a contingent essentialism"" (Tate, 1999, p. 9) integrated in their thinking, which is what Tate (op cit., p. 120) calls "the conflictually other' within". They have to face the threat of the assumption of sameness i.e. potential assimilation of all Cameroonians as being the same, by themselves and by others, and more. In the hope of deconstructing some of these hurdles, direct and indirect references to identity have been analysed to uncover whether and if at all, how, the use of CFrA is linked to identity construction in participants' statements about and perceptions of the register, and in online interactions from Facebook data,.

2.5 Belonging

Also central to this research project is the concept of *belonging*. My experience as a member of a phenotypic minority leads me conclude that the awareness of the need to *belong* emerges when people are forced to position themselves in

terms of their ethnicity. While similar positioning can also occur in the context of Cameroon (given the substantial number of ethnic groups and the potential tensions arising from their coexistence), members of all ethnic groups are 'at home'³⁴; nobody can tell them that they are not Cameroonians or ask them to leave. In Western countries, ethnicity is often brought to the fore as the primary differentiating feature. It is one's *visible difference* i.e. the fact that one is classified as being part of the visible minority, (see for example Lozès, 2011; UN News Centre, 2007), that draws the attention of the police officer who asks for identification in France (Whembolua et al., 2014; Jobard & Levy, 2009). Similarly, this same phenotypic feature is the reason why (when getting to know people) acquaintances will ask what their country of origin is³⁵. This question forces the addressee to position herself, to qualify herself ethnically, and this positioning marks and amplifies the addressee's difference from the phenotypic majority and raises questions about her sense of belonging in the host society. This ties in with Durkheim's notion of collective consciousness (1984), only here the foreigner is cast as "belonging to the realm of 'the other'" (Miles, 1989, pp 11-30) through the influence of repeated discourses to this effect in the mass media and in everyday situations. In this research project, *belonging* is taken to mean *not standing out*, being *one of us*, being part of '*on est ensemble*'³⁶.

Members of the Cameroonian diaspora are placed in the position of the Other amongst the whiter and wider majority population. However, it could be argued that even the statements of those being thus 'othered' about what they have in common, are part of what Hall (1996, v) calls "a practice of narration", productions of "a fixed belongingness in the way [they] construct, after the event, a persuasive, consistent biographical 'story', about who [they] are and

³⁴ Even though the so-called Anglophone population of Cameroon might argue that their sense of being welcome 'at home' is greatly threatened by the concerning situation in the Southwest and Northwest provinces – see <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/cameroon/policy-brief-risk-of-mass-atrocities-in-cameroon>

³⁵ More so in France than in the UK where I have been living since 2003.

³⁶ 'We are together' – this expression is commonly used by Cameroonians as a parting phrase. It conveys the idea that the speakers live a common experience, understand each other, that they both *know* what the other person is going through, a bit as if they were saying 'we are together in this'.

where they came from” (Tate, 2005, p. 62). I am well aware that these diasporic Cameroonians have a multitude of choices as regards the reaction(s) they choose to have (or even whether they decide to react at all). I simply postulate that language participates in dealing with issues such as this one, and it is this ‘participation’ of language that I refer to as ‘functions’ in my research question. I will now clarify what the term is taken to mean in this thesis.

2.6 The functions of language

Kirkpatrick (2007) argues that the functions of language are communication, identity and culture, all three complex concepts that require clarification. In reference to CFrA, the word ‘functions’ has also been used by Schröder (2007, p. 294)³⁷ for example, to mean what CFrA serves as, what it serves to express, the role it plays, or the end to which it is used by its speakers. In an article about urban (hybrid) languages in Africa, Beck (2010, p. 31) argues:

In sociolinguistic terms, this is the actual “function” and *raison d’être* of urban languages: They are able to overcome the ethnifying difference with an urbanizing discourse that attributes a unifying effect to the use of a common language which is neither the colonial language nor the language of the postcolonial elites or a particular ethnic group.

Beck then discusses several specific examples of such languages, including CFrA. While Schröder and Beck’s assessments of the use of CFrA are much more specific than Kirkpatrick’s, all three authors lay a foundation that I can build on, especially because my experience of language’s place and its importance in my life matches their assessment. Whether this “unifying effect” remains an impression, a feeling of closeness, or translates practically as a

³⁷ The author also uses this word in the title of her paper “Camfranglais - a language with several (Sur-)faces and important sociolinguistic functions”.

reduction of ethnic divides and tribalism remains to be seen, but I can attest that even as a French speaker living in the UK, I have experienced time and time again the unifying effect of speaking French with fellow nationals *in a strange land*.

In this research project, all references to ‘functions’ point to ‘what CFrA is and/or does for its speakers’; I recognise that such considerations are subjective, and my study examines references to the functions of CFrA in the participants’ interviews and in the Facebook chats.

2.7 Diaspora

The term ‘diaspora’ is used here, not in the traditional sense, “which implies the forceful or involuntary dispersion of a given community from its original geographic and cultural center and a concomitant sense of loss, grief and dislocation” (Salazar, 2013, p. 2), but with reference to “a new form of consciousness, collectivity and solidarity on which deterritorialization, fragmentation and decentredness are [...] pivotal points from which to affirm the diasporic group’s identity [...]” (ibid., p. 4). While the sense of loss, grief and dislocation are generally shared by both categories of diasporics, in Salazar’s first definition above (p. 2 reference), the diasporic person has been displaced by war, famine, political persecution or by other threats to their essential physiological human needs as defined by Maslow³⁸. Their decision to leave their country of origin is assumed to have been involuntary. In contrast, the second definition points to the diasporics’ inner sense of the fragmentation of who they are, initiated by their physical displacement from their country of origin which is deemed voluntary (even when it was their parents’ choice for example, as was the case for me and a whole generation of Cameroonians born between the 60s and the 80s), and to the new sense of community and identity they have created for themselves around their common diasporic status. As is the case for

³⁸ Air, water, food, shelter, safety, sleep.

the first group, voluntary diasporics' sense of decentredness and loss is amplified by the change in their status, from being a national of and in Cameroon (in this study) whose right to be present and to go about their activities was never questioned in terms of the colour of their skin or their ethnic origin, to a migrant (in the UK and in France), an alien (in the US), whose right to exist peacefully more often than not needs to be defended and argued about. These defensive activities are often led by and within organisations and activities with a clear commitment to fighting racism, xenophobia, discrimination against people on the basis of their skin colour, religion, culture, nationality, legal status or ethnicity. Both categories of people described above 'become diasporic' as they experience first-hand what they have most probably seen in news reports etc., that they are, or rather they have become, 'them' to the majority 'us', that they are 'Black' 'a minority', 'ethnic' etc. A personal testament to this is the fact that I never thought of myself as Black or in terms of the colour of my skin until I returned to France as a teenager. I argue that things can be worse for the second group of diasporics, as (majority) others bestow upon themselves the right to call into question the legitimacy of their very presence in the country they find themselves in. Indeed, voluntary diasporics can be perceived to have less solid grounds for being in a Western country. The host population seems to associate involuntary diasporics with a home they were torn from with reasons perceived as more traumatic than economic reasons (for example) and they find their situation easier to empathise with. The second group's perceived choice to become diasporic and the sense of identity that they draw from the fact that they belong to a group of diasporic people 'with others', "sets up a further opposition as consciousness of diaspora affiliation stands opposed to the power of nation states." (Tate 1999, p. 113). Their presence can be perceived as standing in opposition to the host nation state's ideologies about what it means to be a national, to be French, British, American, or as Tate puts it, "a talking back to dominant discourses." Great Britain (for example) experienced a major wave of immigration in the 19th century with the Irish escaping famine, and they were often faced with bigotry and xenophobia, but their descendants blended in eventually, and they couldn't and can't be

marked out as obviously 'other', apart from through their surnames, or by occupation or place of residence, for example. For some of the more recent voluntary and involuntary non-White diasporics, their other (and in this case, African) origins are seen to deny them access to the imagined ethnic purity that is often taken as a given with regard to White citizens of the host nations, whose skin colour enables them to blend in much more easily and whose presence is thus legitimised (regardless of their actual country of origin). One evidence of that is the use of the term 'expatriates' for White foreigners living and working in all countries, all around the world, versus 'migrants' for Black and brown ones. As a 2017 article published in the Guardian puts it (Koutonin, 2015), "expat is a term reserved exclusively for western White people going to work abroad. Africans are immigrants. Arabs are immigrants. Asians are immigrants. However, Europeans are expats because they can't be at the same level as other ethnicities. They are superior. Immigrants is a term set aside for 'inferior races'."

This said, beyond the stigma associated with the colour of people's skin, nostalgia for (an often reimagined and embellished) home can be common to both categories of diasporics. The first one's legitimacy, however, is more difficult to call into question, as it is easier for host country nationals to understand that under threat, seeking asylum (for example) is a basic human right, as confirmed by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights³⁹. It is precisely in light of the complexity and the multiple layers of hurdles that diasporic Cameroonians have to overcome just to justify their right to be where they are, that I set out to examine their use of language as a potential means of making sense of their situation.

³⁹ See <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/what-are-human-rights?>

2.8 The deconstruction of diasporic Cameroonian-ness

In relation to the notion of being diasporic, I consider here whether Cameroonian-ness would benefit from being approached from the lens of these diasporics' language practices rather than their ethnicity or country of origin. I find it important to start by stating my awareness that their self-definition as Cameroonian is constantly shifting and is shaped and expressed in doing 'being Cameroonian', more specifically within their communities of practice, one of the practices being engaging with CFrA. Taking this stance, I reconsider the relevance and effectiveness of the concept of diaspora for providing a framework of home and belonging for these participants.

The term diaspora points to the idea of having left one's 'nation', a historically loaded term, yet useful in highlighting the undeniable fact that one becomes diasporic when one crosses the boundaries of the nation of origin (Wagner 2011, p. 41). Like Wagner (ibid), I argue that the participants "like many international migrants, [...] did not leave the 'nation', but rather a home, a specific place located within state boundaries." I believe the project of recovery or rather, reconstitution of home away from home, is reflected in their practice of engaging with CFrA in the diasporic context (and also that engaging with CFrA in this context is part and parcel of the reconstitution of home away from home). This view of languages that one speaks symbolising belonging to specific national groups, is probably the reason why so many Africans living in Europe would be asked whether they speak 'African', or (by mildly more enlightened interlocutors), whether they speak Cameroonian or Senegalese (which are both inaccurate of course). This brings us back again to the imagined and idealised view of 'one nation-one language-one people' (see for example Berthele, 2010; Judge, 2000 and many others), a question the then newly independent Cameroonian nation itself grappled with in the late 50s/early 60s, which led its leaders to opt for former colonial languages as official languages. Participants' statements on the role of CFrA, and some of the comments made on the Facebook Group chats suggest that CFrA has been used as a language they

have in common, that supports the Cameroonian identity they have in common, away from Cameroon, in a way that French or English couldn't (due to the weight of their colonial associations), and that Cameroonian vernacular languages couldn't either (due to their number and variety and their association with traditional/rural Cameroon).

So, how useful is the concept of diaspora in helping us understand how displacement impacts these people, and how relevant is it in relation to their purported quest for home and belonging?

The most obvious point, I believe, is the link between diaspora, and a **home** that they have been displaced from, where their roots are, a place they are missing and have lost forever (because it has changed irremediably, as have they), the place where they 'belong' i.e. where the legitimacy of their presence, one of a number of aspects that define a home, goes unquestioned. It is this home that their new locus is **not**. In this, the concept of being diasporic is useful, because it zooms us out from the restrictive, bordered nation that would be the imagined place these people long for, to "a homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a "homeland"" (Wagner, op cit., p. 49, Brah, 1996, p. 180). This home, Wagner argues, is not fixed. Brah (1996, p. 192) states,

On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings [...] all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations.

The importance of social relations in one's sense of being diasporic, as highlighted by Brah, is key. The sense of being at home is intrinsically linked

with ways in which these people experience inclusion or exclusion, which these Cameroonians can experience albeit in different ways and to varying degrees, in Cameroon and abroad. Wagner's claim that "belonging in a diasporic context is being both attached to and detached from the referent spaces of home, being both 'local' and 'stranger'" (op. cit., p. 49) resonates particularly strongly with my understanding of these Cameroonians' experiences. These people are drawn together in a common diasporic identity, that binds them together as it enables them to recognise themselves in one another, through this sameness and otherness that is their daily experience. They have a right legally, to be where they are, but at the same time, this right can be questioned at any time (and frequently is), because they are local but also alien, stranger, foreigner, migrant. What adds to the complexity of their experience is the fact that their sense of home is now distant from their former physical home. They were displaced, their biography experienced a sharp turn, their reality was forever altered, so depending on the day, their personal situation, they (can) feel out of place everywhere. As expressed very insightfully by Ahmed (2000, p. 89), "the question of home and being-at-home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being-at-home is a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel". So like Wagner (op cit., p. 50), I postulate that the notion of diaspora, of being diasporic, can offer a common centre to gravitate towards as people pursue the satisfaction of their homing desire, and this "diasporic attachment" can help meet their need for belonging. Simultaneously and conversely, the term also reinforces the sense of lack of belonging, "the failure to feel at home".

I recognise the usefulness of this terminology in relation to language (and other) practices these Cameroonians engage in as means of satisfying their need for home and belonging, but I also find it important to highlight the fact that the notion of being diasporic is not necessarily applicable to all displaced populations. To me, defining oneself as diasporic is very similar to Bhabha's notion of Third Space with regard to the postcolonial experience. I take being diasporic to mean operating in a liminal or in-between space, characterised by

ambivalence and flexibility. This space is a mode of articulation that engenders new possibility, an interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative space of new forms of cultural meaning and production, blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorisations of culture and identity (Bhabha, 1994; Meredith, 1998). It is a place of resistance to definitions of the self, imposed by others. It is as these Cameroonians appropriate this space and get comfortable with the idea that nowhere is truly home, but that it behoves them to define what home is and what belonging means, and that these two notions can change from moment to moment, that they can find ways of being Cameroonian, away from Cameroon, in the Western world. This emphasis on what striving to 'be' Cameroonian is (in this diasporic context), opens up a theoretical framework of their sense of belonging that is rooted, not in being hybrid and multi-layered in terms of their identity, and definitely not in being diasporic, but in constant negotiations of home and belonging expressed through their language practices in interaction, and also in their narratives about themselves.

In Chapter 2, I have discussed the general framework, key theoretical concepts that are used in this research project, and some problematic issues linked to 'studying CFrA'. In order to get a more accurate sense of CFrA within this framework, in the next chapter, I briefly discuss the historical and social context that preceded (and some might argue, that led to) its appearance. To attend to the question of the origin and specificity of CFrA, I start by reviewing elements of the history of Cameroon from the colonial era to the appearance of CFrA, broaching the historical and socio-economic environment that favoured its emergence. Next, I discuss the main trends dominating the study of CFrA to date, highlighting the most significant differences between them, followed by the description of three studies that do not fit in the categories mentioned previously (viz. Linguistic analyses, Prescriptive analyses, and CFrA as a sociolinguistic asset). Finally, I discuss research exploring some of the themes central to this study, namely language and identity, and home and belonging.

Chapter 3 – Historical and socioeconomic context

3.1 From colonial era to independence

The Republic of Cameroon, with an estimated 250 ethnic groups (Griffiths, 2003) and approximately 280 indigenous languages (Eberhard, Simons and Fennig, 2021; Brenzinger, 2004; Hagège, 2000) has been in contact with European languages since the late 1400s (Mbassi Manga, 1973). Cameroon became a German colony from 1884 to the end of the First World War and after the Versailles treaty in 1919, 4/5th of the country came under French mandate and 1/5th under British protectorate. After World War II, the two European powers continued to administer the same territories. The Cameroons gained independence in January 1960; the two parts of the country were reunited under one flag as the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961. The country was split linguistically and culturally along former colonial lines; the formerly French and British regions each maintained substantial autonomy and the Cameroonian constitution chose English and French as official languages of equal value. Finally, the Referendum of May 1972 gave birth to the United Republic of Cameroon, renamed the Republic of Cameroon in 1984, which was when the country was divided into ten provinces, eight of them Francophone and two Anglophone. To date, French is the official language of 80% of Cameroonians, whereas English is the official language of 20% of the population, but the majority of the population uses the local languages and CPE for informal linguistic communication (Mbassi-Manga, 1973; Constable, 1974; Echu, 2004; Biloa, 2004).

After independence (from 1960 onwards), institutional bilingualism was advocated by the federal government, whose aims were to avoid language conflict, considered a potential risk if one of the numerous indigenous languages were chosen as official language, and to achieve and sustain social cohesion (Takam, 2007; Echu, 2004; Constable, 1974). Official bilingualism was defined by Cameroon's first president as "the use of [the] two official languages,

English and French throughout the national territory”⁴⁰. Official documents and media programmes were available in both languages but there was no systematic implementation, and the balance was strongly tilted towards the French majority.

National (vernacular) languages were not to be used in official contexts (such as educational establishments or for official government activities).

Education was key to the implementation of the Cameroonian state’s language ideologies. Officials in the Francophone and Anglophone regions attributed higher value to Western languages; however, these (pro-colonial language) ideologies were particularly strong in the Francophone regions. Echu (2004) argues, “...in French-speaking Cameroon, the policy of Assimilation aimed at transforming Cameroonians into Frenchmen gave little or no room for the use of indigenous languages”. This is confirmed by Bitja’a Kody (1998, p. 64) who states that from 1920 onwards, the French colonial administration passed a law strictly forbidding the use of Cameroonian vernacular languages as media of instruction in the territories under their control, whereas the British colonial policy did not impose the sole use of English as the medium of education until 1958. However, by the 1980s, only a minority of Cameroonians were bilingual or even functional in both languages and this was still the case 25 years later (Ayafor, 2005, p. 123). Indeed, most Francophones spoke French and CPE, and/or indigenous languages, and some spoke Camfranglais (Takam, 2007; Ayafor, 2005). Moreover, the majority of bilingual Cameroonians spoke one indigenous language and one official language often with little to no written competence in the indigenous language (Ayafor, op cit.).

Lastly, some Cameroonians were multilingual, and spoke several indigenous languages, with or without the different varieties of French, English and CPE.

⁴⁰ 'Par bilinguisme, nous entendons l'usage de nos deux langues officielles, le français et l'anglais, sur toute l'étendue du territoire' (Djimeli, 2005) Available on Cameroon Info Net website <http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/bilinguisme-le-fulfulde-a-la-place-de-langlais-109356.html> The first president of Cameroon later specified that these languages were to be spoken to standards of language not only understood by Cameroonians (Ayafor, 2005).

To date, official bilingualism has been unsuccessful in the 2 regions. In fact, from independence, far from achieving the clear-cut results that were hoped for, the country gradually became the theatre of multiple and complex language practices, including CFrA. These practices were greatly influenced by the dominant language policies in the country and could be linked to wider socio-economic events that greatly transformed the country during the 30 years that followed independence.

3.2 Language ideologies of the new Cameroonian state

20 years after its accession to independence, Cameroon was still very much tied to the legacy of colonial times. According to many scholars (e.g. Mbassi-Manga, 1973; Constable, 1974; Echu, 2004; Biloa, 2004), after January 1960, the colonial rulers were still largely the majority in all positions of power. As confirmed by Austen and Derrick (1992, p. 2, p. 81) or Schler (2007, pp. 28-29), Cameroonians who had a good knowledge of European languages (and often of several national languages) had a special, privileged status, and played a middleman role between the White colonizers and the locals. These privileges linked to language use created a new social group of Western educated elite Cameroonians (generally the native clergy and children from elite Cameroonian families), and they took over from the French and the British officials who were preparing their departure from the continent after the wave of independences. In contrast, CPE and Cameroonian vernacular languages were perceived as having no value, so Cameroonians who had received little or no Western education and had little knowledge of European languages constituted the newly created labouring class in rural and urban areas in Francophone and Anglophone Cameroon⁴¹. As a result, education in French and English was

⁴¹ Children of the clergy and of African elites would have had more contact with French and British officials, and thus were more likely to have mastered English or French. One needed fluency in English or French to gain access to those office-based jobs.

considered the best (if not the sole) means of achieving upward mobility and professional success.

This attitude to education and standard Western languages was reinforced by the first Cameroonian government's educational policy. From the 1960s, Cameroon invested heavily in education with the conviction that this would generate rapid economic growth by improving the productivity of the labour force, thus reducing income inequality and poverty (Amin & Awung 2005, p. 2). In educational institutions, the policy translated as very high competitiveness and a strong drive to achieve well, shared by children and students from all social classes, and in terms of language use, all non-standard European registers were banned from the classroom since independence (Todd, 1982, p.114; Alobwede, 1998, p. 55; Bitja'a Kody, 1999; Echu, 2003, p. 2; Kouega, 2008, p. 87).

As mentioned previously, it is in this context that Camfranglais emerged, in the late 1980s and according to most scholars, amongst educated youngsters. In the following section, I outline major socioeconomic events that took place in the country between independence and the late 1990s, when the use and the popularity of CFrA had increased remarkably.

3.2.1 From independence to the late 1980s

As has been mentioned by many scholars, and as attested by its presence in music, the press and advertising (Stein-Kanjora, 2009; Schröder, 2007; Kießling, 2004 and more), the use of CFrA substantially increased in the decade that followed its emergence. However, to the best of my knowledge, the body of work relating to the social and economic changes that affected Cameroon between independence and the late 1990s does not draw explicit links between these events and the increase in popularity and the spread of

CFrA. Ngok-Graux (2006, p. 232)⁴², however, argues for such a link although this point is only made superficially in her article. The key events and moments that marked those changes and their impact on the Cameroonian population, and personal hypotheses about factors that could have encouraged the use of CFrA are discussed in this section.

From independence to the 1980s, according to Amin & Awung (2005, p. 6), the Cameroonian economy expanded steadily with "...the GDP [growing] at a [...] rate of 8% per annum and [a] per capita income at approximately \$800. Jobs were readily available in the public service to the extent that in 1986, Cameroon had about 180,000 civil servants, the third largest [number] in Africa" (op cit.). These civil servants had guaranteed jobs and salaries, thanks to the stability of the civil service, the minimum wage legislature and the compulsory annual pay rise in the public sector. Though less developed, the private sector also offered employment for educated and skilled people (op cit.). It is my experience that this relative stability reinforced among the (educated) population the assurance that Western education was truly the key if one was to succeed professionally.

In the mid-1980s when Cameroon started experiencing its first economic downturn, many young upper- and middle-class Cameroonians were sent abroad by their parents to continue their studies (as I was). However, the opportunity of leaving Cameroon to study in Europe was not accessible to all. By the end of the 80s, the crisis was so severe that a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was implemented as requested by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (as was the case for many other West African countries), and one of the consequences was a freeze in employment in the civil service and more than 60% reduction in the salaries of civil servants in 1993 (ibid., p. 6). Furthermore, the impact of the loss of jobs or the stringent reduction of salaries on the middle and upper classes was immediately reflected on to the more deprived strata of Cameroonian society. For example, the

⁴² The main arguments of her article are discussed later in the study.

number of household staff and their salaries had to be drastically reduced, and it became more difficult to support less affluent family members. People in my personal network witnessed the increasing powerlessness of educated Cameroonians and many started losing faith in the value of Western education as a means of climbing up the social ladder.

3.2.2 From the 1990s onward

By the 1990s, corruption had become an ingrained reality in all sectors including education; for example, head teachers would often take bribes to award qualifications or to enrol children in schools, or teachers would sell first row seats in overcrowded schools (and these practices continued to take place, as reported by Transparency International Cameroon (Ambassa, Ngwe & Dossing, 2011), Fonchingong, 2009, p. 43, or Bennett & Berger, 2001, p. 5. As reported by students and parents (in my close network), teachers' absenteeism was also becoming a big problem as it affected the quality of education and contributed to discredit education⁴³. Corruption grew so much that Cameroon would be rated the most corrupt country in the world in 1998 and 1999 (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010). The economic decline also prepared the way for a new category of fraudsters and crooks called 'feymen' or 'faymen', often from underprivileged backgrounds, who started operating in the 1990s in Cameroon and abroad, and whose main activity was to con heads of states out of millions of dollars (Malaquais, 2001, p. 2; Ndjio, 2009, p. 271). As Ndjio so aptly puts it, they gradually became "...the iconic figures of what many Cameroonians conceive as prosperity, success, and good life, and not only that, but also the embodiment of a successful monetary quest which is the main concern of many marginalized youths in this country" (p. 271). In a country where education represented the most respected means of climbing the social ladder until the 1990s, at least in the political discourse and in the middle and upper classes,

⁴³ One of the consequences of corruption in education was a loss of credibility of Cameroonian qualifications in Western countries, and this had a direct impact on Cameroonians who wished to pursue studies abroad.

the growing attraction of illegal activities seemed to signal an important change in the values of many Cameroonians.

The worsening economic conditions in the country also had an impact on language practices and perceptions Cameroonians had of the registers present in the country. The composition of the population of major centres such as Yaoundé (the capital) started changing rapidly from the 80s onwards, making for an economically, socially and ethnically hybrid mix: disenchanting civil servants, Cameroonians who returned to the country from Europe and who were more or less successful professionally⁴⁴, hawkers and marketplace vendors, former students of elite schools or vocational schools, victims of 'qualification escalation'⁴⁵, often compelled to turn to petty jobs, young people from rural areas⁴⁶, street children⁴⁷. As a result, the number of *sauveteurs*, which includes "taxi men, cart-pushers, hawkers and the unemployed, in other words, those on the margin of subsistence who must scrape by to stay alive" (Nyamnjoh & Fokwang, 2005, p. 269) increased in the country, which in turn resulted in greater familiarity with their particular brand of Pidgin. Their 'language' spread even more in the late 80s as it appeared in the media and popular culture. A singer songwriter named Lapiro de Mbanga's first hit song 'No Make Erreur' ('Make no mistake') was released in 1986 with lyrics in the *sauveteurs'* variety of French Pidgin⁴⁸. The song was a spectacular success, raising the singer to the status of national hero for the lower layers of the

⁴⁴ From 1990 onwards, it was becoming very difficult to find jobs and many qualified Cameroonians were unemployed, including those who returned from studying in Western countries. Most Cameroonians who secured well-paid jobs were employed by foreign companies located in Cameroon.

⁴⁵ i.e., the steady rise in the qualifications required for any particular job, also called 'qualification inflation', the steady fall in the job-getting value of any particular level of qualification, see Dore, 1997, p. ix

⁴⁶ According to Tchoungui's study (2000, p. 116) young people leave their villages en masse; the study indicates that villages in Cameroon tend to be inhabited mainly by the older generations, and that 85.8% and 85.6% of the residents of Yaoundé and Douala (respectively) were born elsewhere (2000, p. 116).

⁴⁷ According to Matchinda (1999, p. 250) street children are mainly from low-income home backgrounds and have received little education (64.29%).

⁴⁸ This was like a revolution in Cameroonian music because previously, most songwriters had produced work in national languages, in French or in English, and when lyrics were written in CPE, Anglophone Cameroonians (i.e., a minority) were the main consumers of that music.

population in particular the *sauveteurs* (Nyamnjoh & Fokwang, op cit.). This success spread throughout the nation as the song and the artist gained popularity beyond the hawker population. By the mid-90s he had written many other hits and popularised this register even more.

During the same period, the increasingly frequent presence of CFrA in advertising (specifically billboards), in the press⁴⁹, in radio programmes, and even occasionally in literature⁵⁰ familiarised increasing numbers of Cameroonians with the register and CFrA became part of many Cameroonians' language practices (Feussi, 2008, p. 34).

3.2.3 Practical example – Camfranglais in pop culture

In 2004, the normalisation of non-standard registers was promoted even more, as a young artist named Koppo released a hit song, titled 'Si tu vois ma go', this time in CFrA, aimed at educated, young and hip Cameroonians.

Here is an extract of the lyrics and their translation in English⁵¹:

Legend:

Bold – National language	bolo – from the Duala language, ebolo, meaning work mbindi – younger brother or sister
<i>Italics – English or CPE or CFrA neologism</i>	forget; do – from dough, money
<u>Bold+Underlined</u> – other languages	pater, mater – Latin words (father, mother)
Green font – Verlan ^{52 53}	ress – from the French word sœur, in Verlan (reuss)

⁴⁹ Particularly in youth magazines and youth-target sections in the national press.

⁵⁰ Such as the Cameroonian author Patrice Nganang who wrote the 'plurilingual' novel *Temps de Chien* (Ed. Serpent à Plumes, 2001) which includes passages in Camfranglais, or Elizabeth Tchoungui's novel *Je vous souhaite la pluie*, 2005, (ed. Plon).

⁵¹ Full lyrics in Appendix.

⁵² Verlan is a French youth argot characterised by the inversion of word syllables. Online Verlan dictionary: https://zlang.fandom.com/fr/wiki/Dictionnaire_Verlan

⁵³ See this online dictionary for translations of these words <https://fr.wiktionary.org/wiki/Annexe:Camfranglais>

Lyrics:

Dis-lui qu'il n'y a pas de pête, je vais jamais la <i>forget</i> . Tu bolo , tu bolo , mais où sont les <i>do</i> ? Le pater , la mater et les mbindi ress .	Tell her there's no problem, I will never forget her. You work, you work, but where is the money? The father, the mother and the younger sisters.
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The song tells the story of a young man leaving the country to go to France because he can't find work in Cameroon. It summarised the youth's state of mind and the crisis the country was experiencing. This young population was no longer as strongly divided along ethnic lines as their parents and grandparents and had in common a strong preoccupation for their professional future in the country. Evidence of this decline of tribalism was noted in the increase of interethnic marriages among young Cameroonians (Bitja'a, 2005, p. viii).

Bitja'a argues that indigenous languages are "progressively abandoned in urban and rural areas to the advantage of French, which has become the language of integration in the urban centres and the main vehicular language in the Francophone provinces of Cameroon". Bobda (2006, p. 67) confirms this, stating that the European language has become the mother tongue for approximately 32% of under-18s living in the capital. It seems natural for these people to adopt CFrA, a register that embodies all elements of their linguistic and cultural 'capital'. The authors add that increasing numbers of young people are unable to speak their vernacular language (Bitja'a 2005, p. 209 and Bobda 2006, p. 67), and now use one of the official European language as a mother tongue.

The factors discussed above could be taken to index the growing irrelevance of ethnic and linguistic divides and could have promoted the growth in popularity of CFrA. This issue is further discussed in the analysis sections of this thesis.

I have given a brief overview of the socio-historical and political context of Cameroon during the years preceding the emergence of CFrA and outlined a few hypotheses about factors that could have encouraged its spread. The section that follows focuses on relevant literature, specifically research on CFrA.

3.3 Main trends in the study of CFrA

3.3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I first discuss the main trends in the study of CFrA from the late 90s when it was identified by researchers as a definite and distinct linguistic object, to the mid-late 2000s when studies started looking beyond its linguistic nature to its role in society.

3.3.2 Trends in the study of Camfranglais: late 90s to mid-2000s

3.3.2.1 (Socio) linguistic characterisations of Camfranglais

According to Kouega (2003, p. 23; 2009, p. 94), the term Camfranglais emerged in 1989. Many scholars (Zé Amvela⁵⁴, 1989, p. 56; Lobe Ewane, 1989, p. 33; Ngok-Graux, 2006, p. 232; Njiale, 2006, p. 278; Harter 2007, p. 2) state that the register was ‘consciously developed’ by secondary school pupils and tertiary-educated Francophone Cameroonians who have in common a number of linguistic codes, namely French, English, CPE, and a few widespread indigenous languages, to communicate among themselves to the exclusion of non-speakers. In the majority of the literature, the term *Camfranglais* is used to refer to the register, as there seems to be an unspoken consensus on its authority. However, a study by Harter (2007, p. 2) indicates that its users often call the register something different, reporting that the name ‘Francanglais’ occurred 24 times in her study, and ‘Camfranglais’ 16 times, and that there

⁵⁴ Zé Amvela is thought to have coined the term. He wrote, “‘Camfranglais’ is used here as a cover term to what has been called ‘Franglais’, ‘Pidgin French’, ‘Majunga Talk’, ‘Camspeak’.” (1989, p. 56).

were eight other forms of the name including *francamanglais*, *fran-anglais*, *francam*, *français camerounais*, and the very creative *cam-quoi-là* (or *cam-whatsitsname*).

Other scholars such as De Féral (2009) locate the origin of CFrA in the streets⁵⁵ while a few scholars, such as Ebongue & Fonkoua, (2010), distinguish between different varieties (spoken by poorly educated youngsters, secondary school pupils, university students, and *sauveteurs*, stating that the latter is reminiscent of Anglophone CPE).

As is often the case for non-standardised linguistic registers, there is a fair amount of speculation as to the nature of CFrA, and its filiation to CPE or Cameroon Pidgin French (CPF⁵⁶). Most of the early work carried out about CFrA attempts to make "...an inventory of its linguistic traits [to] help circumscribe it from lexical and phonetic standpoints" (Simo-Souop, 2009, p. 37).

Researchers have approached the phenomenon prescriptively or descriptively as a linguistic object: i) through a number of typologies and structural analyses; ii) with a focus on other foreign, local or unknown lexicon and/or as a deficient anti or non-language in comparison with other Cameroonian and Western registers; and iii) with language-ideological prescriptions of the nation-state in the backdrop, qualifying CFrA as being inadequate as a national language, not appropriate in educational settings, and a threat to good knowledge of standard official French. However, some scholars such as Tandia & Tsofack (2009) or Essono (1997) describe CFrA as a fragile and unstable register while others such as Chia (1990) or Tiayon-Lekobou (1985) recognise it as a novel and

⁵⁵ De Féral deems CFrA a by-product of what she calls 'français makro', or the variety of French spoken by 'delinquents' in Yaoundé and Douala (De Féral, p. 2010).

⁵⁶ The reality of CPF as a distinct code has been discussed and debated by scholars (Echu, 2005; Chia & Gerbault, 1992).

creative linguistic phenomenon and/or a sociolinguistic asset. Its contexts of production have been investigated, its speakers (mainly those living in Cameroon) have been interviewed and their views analysed in some studies (e.g. Stein-Kanjora, 2009; Feussi, 2008). The majority of scholars who have studied CFrA have used recordings of 'spontaneous' interactions, and have analysed the data collected, highlighting its relation to other linguistic registers spoken in Cameroon, mainly standard French or CPE (Ngok-Graux, 2006; De Féral, 2004; Kouega, 2003a & 2003b; Biloa, 1999, Efoua-Zengue, 1999; Chia, 1990; Zé Amvela, 1989; Tiayon-Lekobou, 1985).

3.3.2.2. CFrA as a linguistic system

Some scholars have attempted to study CFrA as a linguistic system like they would any high status or official 'standard' language, paying detailed attention to lexical, syntactic and semantic features (Kießling, 2022; De Féral, 2005, 1998; Kouega, 2003b; Biloa, 1999; Tiayon-Lekobou, 1985), or descriptions of word formative processes and characterisation of users and topics discussed (Kouega, 2003a).

Comparing CFrA to slang, Schröder (2003, p. 81) describes it as an "intragroup language" that is unintelligible to outsiders. De Féral (2007b), Echu (2005) and Biloa (1999) go even further, arguing that CFrA could simply be a Cameroonian L-variety of French.

In an attempt to attend to what CFrA is, scholars have compared it to a form of Pidgin (Echu, 2005; Schröder, 2007) and to a Creole (Nyemb, 2006). According to Kouega (2003a), both options are inaccurate as he argues that CFrA is akin to a Pidgin as a code born from contacts between different languages and with a simplified grammar, but that unlike most Pidgin speakers, its speakers are fully proficient in one or more shared languages and nearly all its speakers have French in common (pp. 23-24). Its comparison to a Creole does not stand because it is not the first language for any speaker.

Whilst Kouega focuses mainly on its origins, the ways in which CFrA is differentiated from other non-standard hybrid language forms used in Cameroon, and what justifies the idea that CFrA is more than just code-mixing or code-switching, Kießling presents a comprehensive and detailed description of CFrA as “characterised by a highly hybrid lexicon embedded in a morphosyntactic frame which mainly builds on Cameroonian French and includes various features imported from Cameroonian Pidgin English, some of which ultimately derive from Bantoid structures” (p. 14). The author specifies however, that while there is consensus amongst most scholars on the fact that CFrA’s lexicon is inserted into a French matrix, it cannot be reduced to simplified French, as it “incorporates items derived from Cameroonian French, Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE) and Cameroonian home languages, such as Duala and Ewondo” (ibid.), deployed through a range of linguistic strategies prominently represented in African urban youth languages.

Kießling (2022, p. 22) comments that “at present, it is not possible to pinpoint precisely the demarcation line between Camfranglais and Cameroonian French in terms of grammatical structures” as “they both deviate from Standard French” (op cit., p. 22). With this comment, Kießling suggests that no satisfactory answer has yet been proposed for the recurring question of what type of linguistic object CFrA is, a question scholars have been grappling with since CFrA’s emergence.

3.3.2.3 CFrA and other registers

In most studies, the linguistic value of CFrA is presented as being more or less exclusively tied to its relation to the other registers in its environment, and it is often described as a lesser version of a Western language (French), a distortion of or a cousin to other non-standard Cameroonian registers, or a deficient mixture of several linguistic registers. For example, De Féral (2004, p. 593) states that CFrA is a “vernacular (re) appropriation of French by young

Cameroonians”, based on the fact that she believes that none of the linguistic processes used in CFrA are peculiar to this register, be it borrowing, the use of *Verlan* forms, truncation or neologisms. This prompts her to claim that CFrA is not a code⁵⁷ (2007, p. 272) but rather a subordinate to standard French or a by-product of *français makro*. In the same vein, Nzesse (2005, p. 180) describes CFrA as “a genuine street language, a comical concertinaing of French, English, Pidgin English and Cameroonian words in the same phrasal syntax”⁵⁸, spoken by people with little to no education.

These studies also highlight the difficulties met when attempting to distinguish CFrA from instances of code-switching between French and CFrA or CPE. De Féral (2006, p. 212) argues that some conversations included utterances that were very close to standard French but were identified as CFrA by Cameroonians she and her team consulted. This seems to indicate the existence of an unspoken rule applicable to CFrA, which assigns utterances that display even the slightest deviation from the rules of standard varieties to the lower status variety, viz. CFrA. De Féral (op.cit.) concludes that speakers make discursive choices rather than submitting to linguistic constraints when using a CFrA word instead of a standard French one. In her opinion, only when these choices will be determined by a linguistic diktat, when all French words will be systematically replaced by CFrA ones, will observers start to wonder if a new language is born.

In contrast, Simo-Souop (2009, p. 35) argues that the unique lexical hybridity displayed in the use of English and/or CPE words with a French grammatical inflexion is characteristic of, and peculiar to, CFrA. It does not exist in CPE, neither does it seem to exist in French-based Creoles. She gives examples of CFrA speech that she describes as having a more-important-than-

⁵⁷ “...le CFrA n'existe [...] pas en tant que code” (De Féral, 2007, p. 272)

⁵⁸ My translation - original in French: “Véritable langue de la rue, le “camfranglais”, tel qu'il se parle au Cameroun, est un télescopage comique des mots français, anglais, “Pidgin-english” et camerounais dans la même syntaxe phrastique.” (p. 180); “[...] Il faut dire, à bien observer, que cette “langue” est parlée en majorité par les couches, jeunes ou non, ayant écourté leur scolarité ou n'ayant même pas eu de scolarité” (pp. 181-82).

usual proportion of French, and very few words that could be identified as being CFrA, stating that the line separating both codes is 'porous' (p. 36) when she comes across standard French sentences with very few tokens of CFrA. For example, one of the speakers says, <Je vais te dire quelque chose hein> (for 'I will tell you something', all in French). This could be expressed in CFrA as <je vais te tchat un ting> or <je vais te talk un way>. The choice to use only standard Cameroonian French in these examples points to the relation between registers and their context of use, and to the fact that people draw on the linguistic resource in their repertoire that they consider the most relevant or valuable to them in a specific setting.

As argued by Souop, attempts to circumscribe CFrA based on a structuralist approach that seeks to identify its linguistic traits are bound to remain inconclusive.

3.3.2.4 CFrA as an unstable register

A few scholars have argued that CFrA is not likely to last, or to become an officially recognised linguistic register (by Cameroonian authorities), mainly due to its highly hybrid nature.

For example, Essono (1997, p. 393) concludes that CFrA is doomed to fail ("*voué à l'échec*") by virtue of its unstable nature. Tandia & Tsofack describe CFrA as an 'unhappy speech form' ("*cette parole malheureuse*", p. 311). They argue that this alleged unhappiness is the consequence of: *i*) "asperities in the way it is written", in reference to the variable transcription described earlier or rather the lack of a set system, and *ii*) "other forms of demarcation [...]" in reference to the systematic use of inverted commas or italics around CFrA text in a youth magazine (100% Jeunes) which "reject" and "isolate" the register

(2009, p. 311)⁵⁹. These markers of alterity, they add, index the fact that it is the 'language' of the 'Other', a register the author (in this magazine) distances her/himself from. Tandia & Tsofack support this assertion by explaining that these markers could not have been placed around CFrA text to signal direct speech, as some extracts are 'artificial compositions' of CFrA rather than reported direct speech. They conclude that these markers invite readers to look critically at the register in general (and at specific words and dialogues in particular).

3.3.2.5 CFrA and official language ideologies

Many scholars have written about CFrA with the diktats of language ideologies and policies of the Cameroonian nation-state in mind, specifically the view that standard former colonial languages are the only ones that are suitable for education and official matters (e.g. Tandia & Tsofack, 2009; Nzesse, 2005; or Fosso, 1999⁶⁰). Nzesse (2009, p. 7) states that CFrA (one example of the 'africanisation' of French) is an estrangement from a purported "norm of reference" and he describes its speakers as people with limited or incomplete education. He concludes that CFrA is not a language spoken for particular sociocultural reasons but is merely 'bad French'⁶¹ whose propagation in educational contexts must be stopped as a matter of urgency. De Féral (who is part of an editorial team that also includes Nzesse and that monitors contemporary French in Africa) adopts a similar position⁶² (2004, p. 592). However, she acknowledges that not all speakers of CFrA have limited

⁵⁹ "Le camfranglais est de plus en plus revendiqué par les jeunes comme un don générationnel, gage d'une identité proprement camerounaise, mais il est aussi rejeté, tenu à l'écart par des "aspérités graphiques" et autres formes de démarcation [...]" (p. 311)

⁶⁰ Fosso states that speakers of CFrA (which he describes as a 'mumbo-jumbo') should dedicate themselves to studying spelling and French dissertation (1999, p. 193-194).

⁶¹ "...il est utile de réaffirmer l'option pour une langue française correcte, de contrecarrer les facteurs socio-médiatiques de propagation du mauvais français, de prendre des mesures énergiques contre la diffusion en milieu scolaire et universitaire du "camfranglais" (id.:129-131) et autres jargons..." (2008, p. 319) – [In order to achieve correct French, it is useful to reaffirm the option of counteracting the socio-mediatic factors of propagation of bad French, of taking energetic measures against the spread of "Camfranglais" in schools and universities] - my translation.

⁶² <http://www.unice.fr/ILF-CNRS/ofcaf/Presentation.html>

competence in French, but even when she recognises that the register has some sociolinguistic value (as a youth secretive and intra-group code), she states that it needs to be managed by educators to stop it from becoming a 'prison' for its speakers, and to enable it to become a springboard giving access to the 'benchmark', standard French⁶³.

Like De Féral and Nzesse, Tandia & Tsofack (2009, p. 325) argue that CFrA is a "...maggot that threatens to settle for good in the fruit that is the French [standard] language"⁶⁴ but they offer a different 'solution' to the 'problem CFrA', stating that its redemption is possible, only if it is "...attached to the base of Cameroonian linguistic entities [...]".

3.3.2.6 CFrA as a sociolinguistic asset

Some scholars agree on attributing a symbolic value to CFrA in terms of its social and cultural importance for its users, and some describe the register as the logical result of multilingual Cameroon. Their studies include a positive appraisal of its sociolinguistic functions (Simo-Souop, 2009; Stein-Kanjora, 2009; Feussi, 2008; Schröder, 2007; Nyemb, 2006; Kießling, 2004; Essono, 1997 among others). For example, Feussi stresses the importance of CFrA as a "strategy of social positioning comparable to other urban codes"⁶⁵. He also argues that CFrA is a tool of socialisation and/or negotiation for example in a quest for acceptance by a group of speakers or when a father introduces a few words of CFrA in his repertoire to buy a new identity that breaks intergenerational barriers in order to gain the trust of his daughter. He highlights the change in status of the code over the years from "language of misfits", a

⁶³ My translation - in French : "Que le Camfranglais devienne une variété autonome ou qu'il reste une pratique identitaire de français, le problème qui se pose pour les enseignants est de savoir comment gérer le phénomène pour que celui-ci ne soit pas un emprisonnement mais un tremplin vers le français de référence" (2004, p. 592).

⁶⁴ My translation - in French : "Le risque est donc grand que le ver Camfranglais ne s'installe définitivement dans le fruit de la langue française [...]" (p. 325)

⁶⁵ [...] une véritable stratégie de positionnement social, comparable à plusieurs autres parlers de jeunes urbains" (2008, p. 47)

marginal status, to a “positive identity”⁶⁶ encapsulated in the fact that it is given a name, ‘Camfranglais’ (or Francanglais as he calls it). Finally, he stresses the importance of CFrA, stating that it is a constitutive element of a Cameroonian identity.

Harter also expresses this view, arguing that the name ‘Camfranglais’ reflects what she calls the tripartite linguistic identity of Cameroon, and articulates its different components, subsuming in a manner redolent of colonialism, the 250+ linguistic registers of Cameroon into one, and attributing to French and English the other two parts of this three-part group of languages (2007, p. 4). She adds that this name reflects a willingness to transcend ethnic and social divides⁶⁷. Tallying with Harter’s analysis, De Féral (1997) describes CFrA as an interethnic means of communication primarily signalling identification with a peer group and conferring on its speakers a sense of belonging.

Essono’s study stands out because unlike the other scholars, he locates the origins of CFrA in comedy shows and in Cameroonian singer songwriter Lapiro de Mbanga’s songs (1997, p. 381). Secondly, he argues that the register arose from the desire to (re)claim and to reassert the value of national languages and also to create a (phonologically, morphologically and syntactically) “simple” language in order to circumvent the complexity of Western languages⁶⁸. This is a questionable perception as the register is actually quite complex, and also because this view reinforces the official Cameroonian nation-state ideologies of language that inherited the colonial construct of African languages as simple, primitive, not desirable, versus the promotion of Western

⁶⁶ “L’image sociale de cet idiome a d’ailleurs beaucoup changé, ce qui s’observe par exemple dans la glossonymie du « français makro », on est passé au Camfranglais / francanglais.”

⁶⁷ “Elle reflète la volonté d’inscrire le CFrA dans un dépassement des clivages ethniques ou sociaux [...]”.

⁶⁸ “Le Camfranglais est né du souci de revendication et même de revalorisation des langues nationales.” ; “La pratique du Camfranglais est aussi justifiée par ce désir des locuteurs Africains à forger une langue “simple” tant sur le plan phonologique que morphologique et syntaxique. Les langues officielles, langues occidentales sont fort complexes. [...] Il fallait contourner la complexité des langues européennes.” (p. 382)

languages as complex, refined, desirable. Furthermore, Essono claims that the existence of CFrA can be explained by the fact that the country does not have a unique national lingua franca. CFrA, he states, is a unifying language in which both the Cameroonian official and national languages are integrated without the exclusion of any.

Like Essono's, Schröder's analysis stresses the unifying properties of CFrA, as she suggests that it is not only a means of intra-group communication (for the young speakers involved in her study), but also a means of communication between "...people from different ethnic backgrounds" (2007, p. 294). She goes further, arguing that the register "...seems to carry out important sociolinguistic functions that neither French (nor English) can fulfil."

Kießling offers a similar perspective, which is that:

From a psychosocial point of view, Camfranglais fills the void between the official languages, [...] which are not felt to be appropriate means of expressing a Cameroonian urban identity, and the indigenous languages of Cameroon [...], which are not appropriate either, since they are too [...] ethnically loaded and too strongly associated with traditionality and rurality.

He adds that this role played by CFrA could not be played by CPE, "...too strongly associated with lack of education, illiteracy and backwardness" (2005, p. 102). Finally, Stein-Kanjora suggests that CFrA might be the only Cameroonian language capable of developing to become a national language, if it sheds its negative reputation⁶⁹ (2009, p. 136).

⁶⁹ This view of CFrA as the Cameroonian language par excellence is shared by Tandia & Tsofack who state that its members belong to a "social class that shares common urban aspirations of tolerance, freedom and democracy [...]",

For the first 20 years after it was identified and named, research about CFrA failed to identify what makes it CFrA, why it is active in adults' linguistic repertoires, let alone discussing its presence on the Internet. The considerable number of contradictory theories produced in those years indicates how incomplete the approaches to those studies of CFrA were. For example, trying to capture CFrA as a linguistic system failed to the extent that some concluded that it has no reality as a self-sufficient 'linguistic code' or that it is an unstable register. It became evident that CFrA cannot be reduced to 'a threat to education' either, because some of its speakers have been shown to be educated and even competent in various registers and able to use standard French correctly where appropriate (Feussi, 2008, p. 37⁷⁰; Ngok-Graux, 2006, p. 232; Zé Amvela, 1989, p. 56).

Moreover, saying that CFrA is a strong marker of a Cameroonian identity to the extent that it brings ethnic groups together is an overclaim. Over 30 years after the emergence of CFrA, Cameroon has still not yet overcome ethnic and social divisions. Furthermore, CFrA was and still is an urban phenomenon, and thus does not have the same presence or importance in rural areas of the country. The approaches discussed above also failed to address other phenomena linked to CFrA. For example, research on CFrA that explores its non-linguistic functions is still quite scarce as discussed in section 3.3.2.5. This leads me to conclude that CFrA cannot be reduced to one function only; it performs different functions for different people in different contexts, and this thesis investigates what function(s) it performs for its diasporic Cameroonian respondents.

Further, the use of CFrA in spoken and written form by adults such as the participants in this project indicates a shift in the characteristics of its users and

(op cit., p. 325), and add that CFrA is increasingly claimed by young people as "...a generational gift, the token of a purely Cameroonian identity [...]" (p. 311).

⁷⁰ "...enquêtes m'ont permis de constater que les jeunes francanglophones avaient une pratique assez régulée des différentes (pôles de) langues, de leurs répertoires, et tenaient régulièrement des discours dans du français « correct » quand le besoin s'imposait".

the strata of society in which it is present; this shift is worth exploring, and hasn't really been examined. A growing body of research has been conducted on CFrA used online (see Telep, 2014). However, it is still limited, regardless of the fact that CFrA is one of the main media of communication on dedicated online fora or websites. Furthermore, few scholars have touched upon the Cameroonian diaspora in Europe or in the US. This is a gap this project addresses, with the potential to add to the existing body of research on African minorities in the Western world, especially because it focuses on the functions of language that link to identity, culture, postcolonialism and more. In order to address this gap, and in contrast with the previous approaches, I draw on a number of useful studies of CFrA and of language use in multilingual and multi-ethnic environments.

In the next section I discuss approaches that provide a useful platform for my research.

3.3.3 Trends in the study of CFrA: mid to late 2000s onward

3.3.3.1 Previous studies about the socioeconomic context of emergence of CFrA

In the previous chapter, I drew attention to Ngok-Graux's approach which suggests links between CFrA and its socioeconomic context of emergence and increase in popularity. I find this approach useful because my project focuses on some of these middle class educated people she mentions, who left Cameroon in the 1980s and the 1990s. I also think it is important to understand how the popularity of CFrA spread, and its links (if any) with the changes that affected the Cameroonian society over the 20-year period that saw it evolve from being a marginal linguistic marker of a form of youth "resistance identity" (Castells, 1997, p. 8), to a relatively commonly used linguistic register, and how well it has survived its displacement to Paris, London and other Western cities.

3.3.3.2 Previous studies about CFrA as a language practice

Simo-Souop (2009, pp. 37-43) argues that a close study of CFrA that correlates its linguistic traits with language practices of specific groups of people (considered as social acts) is a way of transcending attempts to study CFrA as a linguistic system. To her, CFrA is a language practice, a social event that requires not only that the viewpoint of its speakers be taken into account – and this has been done by many scholars – but also that social changes that contribute to the variation of CFrA be integrated in the studies. Simo-Souop's study offers promising and valid leads; it draws attention to the mismatch between traditional views of language and hybrid speech practices such as CFrA, and also to the fact that being a communicative practice, it requires a different lens (and she argues that this lens needs to include the study of CFrA in interaction).

3.3.3.3 Previous studies about CFrA and the diaspora

The third useful approach is broached in Nyemb's article (2006, pp. 11-12), which introduces the notion of diaspora. She discusses the use of CFrA by educated Cameroonians living in Bremen, stating that the register has become a part of those young Cameroonians' identities not only in Cameroon but also in the diaspora⁷¹. To her, those speakers used the code at home and continued to use it when they emigrated abroad.

She gives the following example: “*L'Uni m'a gi ma Bescheinigung*”

⁷¹ “Le Camfranglais est devenu aujourd'hui une partie de l'identité de la jeunesse camerounaise non seulement au pays mais également au sein de la diaspora. La jeunesse camerounaise de la diaspora, qui s'est identifié à travers le Camfranglais au pays continue instinctivement à développer cette créolisation linguistique même vivant dans un environnement étranger.” My translation: Camfranglais has now become a part of young Cameroonians' identity not only at home but also in the diaspora. The Cameroonian youth of the diaspora, which identified itself with the country [of origin] through Camfranglais, instinctively continues to develop this linguistic creolisation even though they live [abroad], in a foreign environment.

*aujourd'hui*⁷². Nyemb's example suggests a strong possibility that other varieties/versions of CFrA have emerged among diasporic Cameroonians, a suggestion that I find worth exploring further but that is beyond the purview of my thesis.

Developing the trend set by Nyemb (2006), a number of scholars (Kenne, 2017; Siebetchu, 2016; Telep 2014, 2013; Machetti & Siebetchu, 2013) started researching Camfranglais in use by an adult Cameroonian populations in migratory contexts.

Telep focuses on 'conversations' posted on selected online communities between diasporic Cameroonians, stressing that CFrA in use in this context is linked with identity.

Machetti & Siebetchu explore a new variety of CFrA spoken by Cameroonians residing in Italy that they call Camfranglitalien (op cit, p. 5), and they highlight the increasingly widespread use of CFrA in written form, particularly on social media or in applications such as Skype. It is this same localised 'variety' of CFrA that Kenne discusses, arguing that the use of Camfranglitalien by these Cameroonian migrants is evidence of a strong "rootedness to their identity" (op cit, p.1).

However, none of these studies examines this language practice from the viewpoint of its users, with a specific focus on 'what it serves as or for', and none broaches issues of home and belonging either.

3.3.3.4 Identity in previous studies about CFrA

Only a small number of scholars have explicitly addressed potential links between the use of CFrA and questions of identity. As stated in section 3.3.2.6,

⁷² The University gave me my certificate/credential today; the German word is underlined. Fr-*italicised*; English/CPE-bold (gi=give in CPE).

Harter (2007) and Tandia & Tsofack (2009) argue (respectively) that CFrA reflects the hybrid linguistic identity of Cameroon, and that it is the token of a purely Cameroonian identity.

In a paper about CFrA on the Internet, Telep (2014, p. 27) highlights the place of this language practice as “a powerful vector of identity, a means for linguistic minority communities to exist on the Internet and to claim their language and culture”. Eloundou (2016, p. 2) also states that CFrA “expresses Cameroonian identity”. There seems to be a consensus at least among these scholars, that CFrA is indeed used to express some aspects of what ‘being Cameroonian’ entails, and a few have drawn that conclusion for Internet fora or websites where CFrA features at least in part as a medium of communication, and/or where users engage in metapragmatic discourses about the register (see Telep, 2018).

A few scholars have adopted some elements of an ethnographic approach to data collection in the study of CFrA e.g. Kamdem Fonkoua (2015), but with an emphasis on its lexicon, and Telep (2018) who also claims to have used ethnographic data collection and fieldwork methods (p. 119). However, to the best of my knowledge, none of the existing studies on CFrA have approached it with a view to elicit diasporic Cameroonians’ perceptions of, and statements about, what CFrA ‘does’ for them in their negotiations of home and belonging in Western contexts.

3.3.3.5 Home and Belonging in previous studies about CFrA

While (to the best of my knowledge) no study focuses specifically on negotiations of home and belonging in relation to CFrA, Aouici and Gallou’s aforementioned 2013 study touches on diasporic sub-Saharan Africans’ claimed identity vs the identity assigned to them and the tension between the two. Bearing in mind the two axes highlighted by the scholars, viz. individuals’ self-definitions and relative to the outside world, it is not a stretch to imagine that the

constant demand placed on them to alternate their position depending on the situation they find themselves in may create a need for coping mechanisms. It is precisely the focus of this study to observe if and how CFrA may be one part of (potentially many) coping mechanisms.

3.4 Conclusion

The studies discussed in section 3.3.3 open up new and innovative ways of seeing and studying CFrA, and a number of studies not specifically relating to CFrA (discussed below) provide further insights that constitute a solid basis for the approach adopted in this thesis.

Simo-Souop and Nyemb's insights are useful in highlighting the need to approach CFrA as a communicative practice and looking at its use in the diaspora (respectively). These two scholars' suggestions tally with Blommaert & Rampton's point (2011) that migration and superdiversity have intensified the need to approach the study of language use taking into account individuals' linguistic repertoires. These repertoires are no longer thought to be homogeneous, bounded and stable 'languages', but rather the sum of individuals' linguistic resources, i.e. "anything that people use to communicate meaning" (Blommaert & Backus, 2011, p. 7), "a plurality of differentially shared styles, registers and genres" (Rampton, 2011, p. 4). In this view, CFrA's heterogeneous, indeterminate, expansive and unstable nature is no longer problematic. Going further, Blommaert & Rampton suggest that research concerned with language use in superdiverse environments should investigate the ways in which people "take on different linguistic forms as they align and disaffiliate with different groups at different moments or stages" (p. 5). This is relevant to this project, because it started with me investigating if CFrA is part of my diasporic participants' linguistic resources, and if so, in relation to the speakers' biographical and migratory trajectories.

Blommaert & Rampton also highlight the multi-modal nature of communication in the global world, and the ways in which emigrants are now able to “retain an active connection” with their home societies “by means of an active set of long-distance communication technologies” (p. 3) but also how they “get involved in transnational networks that offer potentially altered forms of identity, community formation and cooperation” (p. 2). This focus relates to my study, as it also examines the presence and the use of CFrA on an internet-based space. Methodologically, Blommaert & Rampton propose “a combination of linguistics and ethnography” as the ideal approach to the study of language in interaction and/or texts, scrutinising “textual and discursive detail” with the aim of disclosing “ways in which widely distributed societal ideologies penetrate the microscopic world of talk and text” (p. 11).

As mentioned above, few studies broach identity in relation to CFrA. However, casting the net beyond CFrA proves useful, as valuable insights can be drawn from scholars writing about identity in relation to other diasporic minorities and their language practices. In a study on discursive construction of identities by multilingual Chinese youth living in the UK, Li (2011) argues that individuals “...consciously construct and constantly modify their socio cultural identities and values through social practices such as translanguaging⁷³” (p. 1224), adding that in the spaces where these communicative practices occur, “...identities, values and practices combine to create new identities, values and practices” (Li, 2011, p. 1223).

With specific reference to identity expressed through language (whatever the language form) for Cameroonians living outside the country, Sabater &

⁷³ However useful or not so useful I find the term, a number of studies adopt it to represent things that groups and communities of people experience and do, that involve more than one language (Leppänen & Peuronen, 2012; Georgakopoulou, 1997; Vertovec, 2007; Blommaert, 2010, Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Juffermans, 2010; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010; Blommaert, 2012; Blommaert & Backus, 2011; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011 and more). In this thesis, my position regarding such terms has been stated clearly and, apart from statements cited from other studies and that may include one or more of these terms, I purposely strive to stay away from labelling these practices.

Maguelouk Moffo's case study focuses on "the online interaction of multilingual communities formed by football supporters from one of the most multilingual countries in the world, Cameroon" (2019, p. 33). The authors assume that "discursive practices in multilingual contexts enact identity effects", "...produced in most instances of communication", and they argue that "the choice of language has an identity-related impact on both the "sender member" and their audiences" (ibid.). While the language practices considered in their case study are described as code-switching between Catalan, CPE and Cameroonian vernaculars, and even though CFrA cannot simply be equated to code-switching, the clear link drawn between language use and expressions of in-group identity, (and conversely, I argue, othering of extra-group contributors) adds to the scholarship on language use by Cameroonian diasporics as an expression of their identities. I believe the role CFrA plays for these Cameroonian diasporics is what Simpson (2008, p. 11) anticipated would happen, when he described "Camfranglais" as "one of the urban slangs [...] already observed to be used as new symbols of ethnically neutral local identity, and [which] with further growth may become significant linguistic elements in the expression of a broader national identity...".

Looking at the conversations I had with my Cameroonian participants and their statements about their identities, and drawing from my own experiences and those of close friends and family members, notions of home and belonging seem to reflect their/our lived experiences, whether or not the terminology used differs. This led me to come up with a hypothesis, a hunch, which was that the need for these negotiations of home and belonging arose, not from leaving home or from being born elsewhere, but from what I call the 'tyranny of repetition of self-justification' imposed on these participants by the repeated acts of identity calibration that involve categorisation and positioning of self and others (Hua & Wei, 2016) that they are faced with as they go about their daily lives.

I find Hua & Wei's assessment of the impact of these categorisations particularly pertinent to this case study. Building on Sacks' notion of membership categorisation device (1974), the scholars argue that "[w]hen someone displays a certain set of features, [...] typically associated with a category, she would be cast as a member of that category", and that these categories have been extended, "from activities and features to predicates such as rights, entitlements, obligations, knowledge, competences" and more (p 451). Hua & Wei go further, stating that "through these category-bound attributes, activities and predicates, participants activate the necessary and relevant contextual features and make relevant certain aspects of their own identities or those of others, intentionally or inadvertently. [...]". Hua & Wei's proposition that "[p]arallel to the process of categorisation, participants also strategically take up subject positions and engage in acts of positioning themselves", ties in neatly with my exploration of the need for strategies of negotiation of 'home and belonging'.

My participants are undoubtedly exposed to NET and other forms of micro- or macro- aggressions that often reflect "people's hidden and flawed folk theories of race, [which] reproduce [...] discourse of banal racism, and result [...] in exclusion and marginalisation of certain social groups" (ibid.). I postulate that NET and these micro- and macro- aggressions are the very triggers that create the need for negotiations of home and belonging.

These so-called diasporic Cameroonians (I argue) are "enacting diasporic belonging" (see Wagner, 2011, p. 43, mentioned in chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis) through their language practices, specifically CFrA. I postulate that they are reinforcing the sustained distancing imposed on them by host country discourses othering them.

I take 'othering' to be that which occurs when an individual or a group of people is denied a clearly defined status, is designated as 'anomalous', 'peculiar', or 'deviant', or is objectified, stereotyped, naturalized, or essentialised (Hua & Wei,

2016, p. 454, with regard to the way minority ethnic people are treated in the Western world.) Wagner's, and Hua & Wei's statements confirms my suspicion that these so-called diasporic Cameroonians enact diasporic belonging as part of an overall coping system, in a bid to regain (some level of) control of definitions of their selves. I discuss this point in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The next chapter describes the research design for this study.

Chapter 4 – Research design

4.1 Introduction and outline of the chapter

In this project, I am researching a selected number of diasporic Cameroonians' perceptions of, and stances on, the role of language, more specifically CFrA, in relation to their sense of identity, home and belonging. To do this, I recorded and analysed discussions with the participants collected through interviews, and online interactions downloaded from a Facebook Group dedicated to CFrA. The most obvious choice for a qualitative case study focusing on language, including qualitative interviews, and drawing links between language and identity, seemed to be an ethnographic lens. Hence, I initially decided to conduct my research following the principles of ethnographic research and using the methods usually associated with Linguistic Ethnography and Online Ethnography (OE).

As my project progressed, I gradually realised that my interest was tilting more strongly towards my participants' stances, perceptions, thoughts, about what language 'does' for them in relation to their identity, especially as diasporic post-postcolonials, as most of them were born roughly between 10 and 20 years after Cameroon became independent⁷⁴. The additional word 'post' appended to the initial 'post' in the word postcolonial goes beyond a sequential meaning. Its ambition is to "embody [a] restless and revisionary energy [that would] transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 6). It was (and still is) important for me to operate within frameworks that offer the option for people to define "themselves in opposition to colonial legacies" considered "not only insubstantial but self-defeating" (Narain, 2011, npn). This vision is reflected in the fact that I was more interested (for example) in the participants' own understanding of the symbolic value of the languages of their repertoire, comparatively to nation-state

⁷⁴ 1st January 1960.

hegemonic ideologies of language, and if and how some or all of these languages help them make sense of their selves as ‘othered humans’⁷⁵ living away from ‘home’. Based on my focus, I started questioning my reasons for choosing some of LE’s tried and tested ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and recording of naturally occurring interactions to be analysed using micro-discourse analysis. I took a step back and reflected further on the aims of my project and reassessed the criteria I used to select my methodology.

I asked myself *i)* whether the methodology I had decided to use was suitable to examine statements about language elicited through qualitative interviews, which are essentially narratives of people’s lives, *ii)* whether it was appropriate for the study of online data, and *iii)* whether it would be compatible with my decision not to collect interactional data and carry out fine grained analysis of that data, and not to rely on participant observation, but rather to examine discourses relating to language and identity while still carrying out some level of linguistic analysis.

In the next section, I outline the principles of ethnography and its suitability and usefulness for my project. Then I examine some of its limitations and I briefly describe how I address those limitations. The section that follows outlines the main tenets of LE and OE, and if, how and which aspects of these methodologies best serve my aims. I then discuss my decision to adopt an interdisciplinary approach combining some of the tools of LE with the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis.

4.2 What makes research ethnographic?

Since ethnography was first given a name, an identity distinct from its traditional anthropological roots, its key principles are: a lengthy period of time spent in the

⁷⁵ I discuss othering in more detail in the preceding chapter.

field, and the immersion needed to discern the depth and complexity of social structures and relations, both principles considered imperative to enable researchers to capture lived experiences of participants in social settings, to go beyond mere fact and surface appearances (Denzin, 1994, Wolcott, 1995), and avoid wrong interpretations of their observations and the inevitably resulting “misleading analyses” (Woods, 1994, p. 5). Researchers following the ethnographic traditions need that sustained immersion in the field to produce what Geertz (1973) termed 'thick description', whose richness characterises researchers' accounts of 'being there' (Geertz, 1988). To capture and report on what is observed, ethnographic researchers tend to rely heavily on participant observation (UK LEF, 2004), using qualitative research tools such as “fieldnotes, diary extracts, vignettes, interview transcripts, and participants' oral and written stories” (Creese, Takhi & Blackledge, 2015, p. 266).

The Coordinating Committee of the UK Linguistic Ethnography Group (2004, p. 2), recognising that “there is a lot of disagreement about the nature of ethnography”⁷⁶, outlined the following characteristics as being associated with ethnographic research:

- i)* “Regard for local rationalities in an interplay between ‘strangeness’ and ‘familiarity’”, which, they argue, requires of researchers that they strive to “comprehend the tacit and articulated understandings of the participants in whatever processes and activities are being studied, and [...] to do justice to these understandings in its reports to outsiders”;
- ii)* “Anti-ethnocentricity and relevance”, which implies questioning “the oversimplifications in influential discourse, and interrogat[ing] prevailing definitions”;
- iii)* “Cultural ecologies”, described as a focus on “a number of different levels/dimensions of socio-cultural organisation/process at the same time”, and the assumption “that the meaning and significance of a

⁷⁶They cite Hymes 1996, p. 3; Bloome & Greene, 1997.

form or practice involves an interaction between these (and other) levels/dimensions”;

- iv) “Systems and particularity” whereby “ethnography looks for patterns and systematicity in situated everyday practice, but recognises that hasty comparison across cases can blind one to the contingent moments and the complex cultural and semiotic ecologies that give any phenomenon its meaning”;
- v) “Sensitising concepts, openness to data, & worries about idealisation”, which are self-explanatory;
- vi) Close “attention to the role of the researcher”, recognising “the ineradicable role that the researcher’s personal subjectivity plays throughout the research process” and considering this subjectivity as crucially needed to make sense of what is being observed; and finally,
- vii) “The irreducibility of experience”, arguing that, thanks to its “commitment to particularity and participation [and] its concerns about idealisation”, ethnography is able to “produce a strong sense of what is unique and ‘once-only’ in situated acts and interactions”.

On the question of the time that needs to be spent in the field, Wolcott (1995, p. 77) argues that two years were considered as an ideal length of time for fieldwork. However, in many cases, the financial constraints and time limitations of academic research and funding bodies in our post postmodern era, have limited the time that researchers can afford to spend in the field. These and other factors have led researchers to find creative ways of working around the requirements of long-term engagement, such as Wolcott’s solution that consists in linking “brief visits that extend over a long period of time, so that the brevity of the periods is mollified by the effect of long-term acquaintance”.

This concept of brief periods of engagements with the field reflects my experience to a certain extent, as I initially visited the Facebook group many times over a period of four months, then I would read posts, observe any

changes in the activity on the Group for over a year, and use my observations to inform my understanding of group members' behaviours, and in some cases to narrow down unclear points (such as the location of one particular member). Moreover, as a diasporic Cameroonian researcher, while maintaining an awareness that people's experiences are individual, I believe the considerable common ground I have with the participants in my study works to my advantage, acting as compensation for the fact that I did not engage with my interviewees for the sustained two-year period recommended for ethnographic study.

I came to the conclusion that an ethnographic lens was indeed the right choice, so long as I made it clear that I did not approach this project as an ethnographer in the traditional sense; I merely chose to draw on tools and methods that seemed useful for the focus of my project.

Ethnographic approaches attract similar criticisms to those often directed against qualitative approaches in general, and these criticisms relate to access, and the validity of ethnographic studies. The chapter that follows outlines some of these and ways in which I addressed them.

4.3 Main issues linked to ethnographic approaches

4.3.1 Access

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 5) argue that "the problem of obtaining access to the data" weighs heavily on ethnographic studies, is very acute in the early days of studies (e.g. when negotiating access to people and locations), and "persists throughout the data collection process". These issues are exacerbated when researchers require "participants to consent to prolonged research encounters that can be invasive or disruptive of their social lives" (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). The authors advocate finding ways of gaining the trust of potential participants.

For this project, once contact had been established, the participants seemed quite keen on taking the opportunity to share their experiences; the subject did not seem particularly controversial. I initially anticipated that the gravity and the impact of access issues would be minimal because I already knew some of my informants, whom I first selected from my personal network. This proved successful as I was able to chat to a few acquaintances, who then recommended the other participants.

In the context of online fora, Wilson and Peterson (2002, p. 460) argue that “access [...] also involves some knowledge of technology itself, as well as a facility and experience level, not just in a technical sense but in the sense of the social context of Internet-based media and the implications of the technology on a wider scale.” They add that access to and knowledge of technology impacts “the makeup of online communities” such as the Group from which I downloaded written interactions, as its members can only be “those who have access” (ibid).

Another factor that complicates online research is the fact that on the Internet, people write what they want, and this includes misleading information about their identity and location. Wilson and Peterson (2002, p. 459) feature Peter Steiner’s illustration published in the *New Yorker* in 1993, which shows a dog sitting at a desk in an office armchair, in front of a computer, with one paw on the keyboard, saying to another dog staring at him from the ground, “On the Internet, nobody knows you are a dog.” This brilliantly illustrates how difficult it is to sift through the multiplicity of “participatory frames and identities” put forward by Internet users (such as and including their profile information) in order to gain meaningful and productive access.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ There is a more in-depth discussion on privacy on the Internet and how that affects qualitative studies involving online data in the literature review chapter.

None of the aforementioned issues relating to access impaired my study in a significant manner, as they were relatively minor, but this aspect of research requires resilience and determination.

4.3.2 Subjectivity and reflexivity

Another problematic area commonly associated with ethnographic studies is the question of subjectivity and reflexivity. Hammersley (1992, p. 2) questions the extent to which ethnographic accounts can “legitimately claim to represent an independent reality” and argues that the data used by ethnographers are “a product of their participation in the field rather than a mere reflexion of the phenomenon studied and/or [are] constructed in and through the process of analysis and the writing of ethnographic accounts” (ibid). Hammersley’s statement raises a question: should the capacity to “legitimately claim to represent an independent reality” be what researchers conducting qualitative studies seek to achieve? One wonders how independent reality can really be, and if so, independent from what exactly. As attested by many scholars (e.g. Bott, 2010; Dowling, 2005; Ratner, 2002 and more), qualitative research recognises that the subjectivity of the researcher guides everything, from the choice of topic to the hypotheses that are formulated, the methodologies that are chosen, and the interpretation of data. Other scholars question the validity of the objectivity/subjectivity dichotomy, challenging the idea that they are opposite, that subjectivity is always problematic (see for example Siegesmund, 2008 and Latour, 2000). Roulston & Shelton (2015) highlight the fact that inexperienced researchers and also more established scholars, tend to equate subjectivity with bias, and Hammersley’s statement seems to suggest a similar framing of the issue. Haskell, Linds & Ippolito (2002, p. 2) astutely deconstruct the problem with this perspective:

“The researcher's personal histories, preferences, cultural proclivities, and linguistic patterns, among other dimensions, are seen to be so rooted as to

skew the research undertaking and, thus, to require constant epistemological vigilance. The irony in this frame of mind is that while it considers all knowledge creation or knowing to be partly a reflection of the researcher's subjectivity, the template against which the researcher's partiality is gauged is purely objective.”

The scholars draw from the above that the application of this frame of mind is unproductive because it measures the process of knowing through qualitative research against a "logic of objectivity". In this framework, the researcher's partiality can only be understood to be a failing or, at least, a concern, because it inevitably achieves something less than complete objectivity.

There is no question that researchers' values are part and parcel of qualitative research, that they feed into the researchers' ontological and epistemological positions, which in turn influence the way studies are conducted. But rather than seeing subjectivity and bias as one and the same and letting questions of subjectivity and reflexivity “induce paranoia around what the researcher brings to the research” (Haskell, Linds & Ippolito, 2002, p. 1), as stated by Ogden (2008, p. 61), it is imperative for researchers to embrace their own subjectivity, to be aware of their values and predispositions, and to acknowledge them as inseparable from the research process. So, I postulate that the answer to my question above is no; researchers conducting qualitative inquiry do not need to pursue the production of independent reality, if such a thing exists at all. Going further, I would argue that making no such claim is absolutely crucial for the survival and of course the success of any respectable qualitative case study such as this one hopes to be.

I find Haskell, Linds & Ippolito's proposition (op cit., para. 2) particularly useful. The authors propose a sweet middle ground, arguing that on the contrary, researchers take their partiality, the fact that their work is in many

ways an expression of who they are and who [they] are becoming, as necessary and beneficial to their research. They believe this will enable researchers to interact with their “connection to the research not as a liability to be guarded against, but as an opportunity to make the research more meaningful by more fully appreciating [their] part, as researchers, in it.” Seeing our partiality as an integral aspect of our methodology and data, letting go of objectivity as unattainable and constraining, enables us to see our connection to the research as an asset. When researchers attune themselves to “the kind of scrutiny that questions of subjectivity and reflexivity introduce into qualitative research”, they are then free to explore the ways in which the researcher, the research participants, and the research setting [are] shaping each other”, whether they are “distinct entities, or only possible in relation”, how their mutual interaction can be understood, and if this interaction can be qualified as research, as knowing, or as experiencing (Haskell, Linds & Ippolito, 2002, para 2). These (and many other) scholars’ answer to issues of subjectivity in qualitative research appears to be reflexivity. As Berger (2015, pp 1-2) puts it, “reflexivity is a major strategy for quality control in qualitative research, understanding how it may be impacted by the characteristics and experiences of the researcher is of paramount importance.” I find this position useful, and a brief discussion relating to my project follows in section 4.4 below.

Another aspect of importance often raised as an area of risk with qualitative ethnographic studies is the credibility, the plausibility and the relevance of findings, which I discuss in the next section.

4.3.3 Plausibility, credibility and relevance

In addition to his warning about the subjectivity of ethnographic approaches, Hammersley (ibid., pp. 70-72) suggests that researchers using them need to confront issues of plausibility and credibility in order to make their research valid. This implies that “sufficient evidence” needs to be provided when

making claims to “establish findings as sufficiently plausible and credible” for the reader of the research. “The assessment of validity”, the author argues, “involves identifying the main claims made by a study, noting the types of claims these represent, and then comparing the evidence provided for each claim with what is judged to be necessary, given the claim’s plausibility and credibility”. Hammersley also discusses the importance of the relevance (ibid, pp 72-73), supported by two criteria: the importance of the topic (i.e. its relevance to an audience and the significance of said audience) and the contribution to the literature.

My research project is a case study about a very specific community of practice, and I do not intend to claim that this case is typical. However, as argued by Mitchell (1983, pp. 199-200), I can “draw conclusions about the essential linkage between two or more characteristics” and make “theoretical propositions”, by comparing my findings to similar phenomena involving other communities.

For example, theoretical conclusions have been drawn about the use of what Rampton (2011) calls “contemporary urban vernaculars” by adults who used those forms as adolescents in relation to their expressions of identity, Binaiisa (2013) writes about the challenges faced by diasporic Ugandans and their negotiations of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ within their everyday lives in Britain, and Carnet (2011) discusses the idea of belonging for sub-Saharan African migrants in Spain in relation to political and media-led official discourses highlighting illegality, insecurity and more. Pre-existing literature amply supports the relevance of the topic this project focuses on, and also the plausibility of my claim that language is a key part of these negotiations of home and belonging for diasporic sub-Saharans living in the Western world. As for the credibility of my conclusions, as suggested by Brewer (2004, pp. 405-407), I identify and state clearly the grounds on which any knowledge claims I make are justified, and empirical generalisations are made. Further, the use of the interview data and the online chats as a means

of triangulating findings helps support them as they can be confirmed via these different channels.

With regard to online research, as mentioned above, text is the medium of communication, rather than speech, so this raises the question of “the extent to which people can and do express themselves well, truly, or fully in text” (Markham, 2005, p. 337). Firstly, this determines their ability to convey what they really mean. Secondly, whether they choose to do so is as much an issue as is the case for verbal communication. As argued by Derrida (in James & Busher, 2009, p. 77), “speech is as much a form of constructed text as is writing”. The authors add that in both contexts “individuals will review and rewrite their histories and perspectives in the light of developing experiences”, and highlight the fact that people have always engaged in “identity play”, on- and offline. This suggests that issues of credibility and plausibility of the data in online contexts are not necessarily much more complex than they are for face-to-face research, because even in the latter, participants can choose to conceal parts of their lives that could be crucial when it comes to gaining insights that will enhance the validity of the study. James & Busher also argue that “the emergence of patterns of interactivity and narrative by and between participants online can help build confidence in the projected identities of participants in their online texts”, and that the researcher can rely on the fact that “Internet users produce relatively consistent performances of their identities online” (Hine, 2000, p. 119, with *identities* being understood here to mean ‘who they are’ - male/female/living here/there/age etc). James & Busher suggest clearing any doubts by comparing participants’ “textual representations” with their “physical personae”, “such that any one aspect of their lives can be properly contextualized in others” (Miller & Slater, 2000, p. 21). This said, some Internet group members are masters at the art of dissimulation; they are able for example, to create the illusion that they live in a Western capital such as Paris, by exclusively posting Paris-based content.

There is undoubtedly an element of risk when conducting this type of research, but there are also ways of alleviating this risk and solidifying the findings.

In the section that follows, I describe in greater detail some of the ways in which I addressed the issues mentioned in section 4.3 with relation to my project.

4.4 Ways in which these issues affected my research process

4.4.1 Issues of access

As outlined by Hammersley, issues of can access persist throughout the data collection process. Two of the people I contacted to be interviewed suddenly disappeared without letting me know that they weren't interested or available anymore. My case study only includes eight participants, so having two people drop out, especially without warning, could have had drastic consequences. I spent some time chasing them, in vain, and I ended up contacting other people.

With regard to people's computer and Internet literacy, while this was unlikely to be a major challenge in the context of my research project (because most diasporic Cameroonian higher education graduates or professionals can be assumed to have access to a computer and the Internet and to be comfortable using the technology), choosing to use a Facebook Group excludes those diasporic Cameroonians who engage with CFrA who do not use Facebook, and amongst Facebook users, those who are not members of this group. However, given the written data collected on this space, and the fact that this project is a case study, and hence by nature, has a small focus, (see for example Schoch, 2020), and that it makes no claim to be representative, this restriction did not pose any significant problems.

Finally, another issue was the fact that some group members dissimulate their identities and locations on the Internet. This impacted my ability to access the relevant data quite significantly.

In an effort to ensure some consistency with my interviews, I initially only planned to use and analyse data from diasporic Cameroonians living in the UK, France, or North America, including the Facebook Group members. As anticipated, accessing information about their locations proved challenging, so I changed this part of my research design, and ended up selecting and analysing five threads from the large numbers of chats that I had downloaded. I selected threads initiated by diasporic Cameroonians living anywhere in the Western world. I believe the exact location is unlikely to change their likelihood to be othered, hence, to face the same issues of home and belonging that France, UK and US-based diasporics face. I drew this conclusion as I realised while reading through related literature, (e.g. Hua and Wei, 2016), that these issues are a reality not only for Blacks, but also for other non-White people living in majority White Western countries.

4.4.2 Issues with subjectivity and reflexivity

The subjectivity of my approach in this research project is something I admit upfront; no claims of value-free and objective research are made here, and I have strived to maintain a reflexive attitude throughout my project. In practical terms, this translates as the obligation to include in my report issues and effects of power relations that I faced (that I became aware of), and to reflect critically on my positioning as a researcher/member of an academic body, as a woman, as a Cameroonian (insider and outsider), and how these aspects might have affected the participants and the findings of the study.

Berger (2015, p. 1) gives examples of three types of insider positions that highlight some of the issues linked to reflexivity: *i*) reflexivity when the

“researcher shares the experience of the [...] participants”, *ii*) reflexivity when the researcher “moves from the position of an outsider to the position of an insider in the course of the study”, and *iii*) reflexivity when the researcher “has no personal familiarity [with] or experience” of what is being studied.

I relate well with Berger’s first case scenario, where she highlights the fact that the familiarity and shared knowledge enables better understanding of implied content, discerning of potential sensitivities, hearing the unsaid (e.g. terms like ‘White people’ which I felt my interviewees sometimes avoided using), and the fact that this helps the researcher to probe more efficiently, and spot hints that others might miss, to know what to ask and how to ask it and understand the nuances of participants’ responses (and more). She also warns of the risk of blurring boundaries, imposing one’s own values, beliefs, and perceptions, and taking for granted similarities or overlooking certain aspects of participants’ experiences.

Conversely, she argues, participants are more likely to withhold information they assume to be obvious to the researcher, or to compare their situation with that of the researcher, and potentially even be intimidated. I experienced most of Berger’s points, including moments when I felt that participants may have made the assumption that their position was obvious, I made every effort to probe, inviting them to clarify what they meant (see for example Copland & Creese, 2015, and Berger, 2015).

I drew on Berger’s statement that the researcher needs to reflect on and find ways of drawing from their sense of familiarity with the participants, while being careful not to impose their experience on the participants, and I found the latter caution particularly useful and relevant to my research.

4.4.3 Issues with plausibility, credibility and relevance

I considered asking some group members whether the medium used in some

interactions is seen as CFrA; this type of verification, referred to as member checks (see Bryman, 2004, Barbour, 2001, Byrne, 2001 and more), is used as a means of strengthening the plausibility and credibility of findings, and in principle, this seemed quite easy to achieve. However, at data collection stage, I attempted to contact some of the group members to interview them as well, and none came back to me, even after several attempts.

Even if I had been successful, this process of identification is likely to yield at least two different 'realities', namely that *it is CFrA* or *it isn't*, both substantiated by the metalinguistic knowledge of the members and their perceptions of what constitutes CFrA, which are subjective and personal. None of them are professional linguists, and even experienced linguists have struggled to draw clear characteristics of what CFrA is or isn't. Fortunately, some metacommentary on the Facebook chats that I downloaded already addresses the question of 'what it is' that is being typed, and one of my downloads was labelled by the initiator of the thread as an exercise in CFrA composition. That helped alleviate any potential doubts I might have had about the question of whether (any of) the chat users identified what I deemed to be CFrA as CFrA. I decided not to pursue member checks, because I believe these checks were not necessary for my findings to be valid.

With regard to the relevance of my study, I expected that examining questions of language and identity, home and belonging, by studying diasporic Cameroonians' use of CFrA would yield insights that have yet to be exposed about the symbolic value of CFrA to these people, because this line of enquiry addresses a gap in the research on CFrA. Broader findings on the relation between home and belonging, and language use can be linked to existing academic work on questions of nationality, ethnic origin, identity, othering and foreignness (e.g. Hua and Wei's 2016 study mentioned above). I quite confidently assumed that this project would add to this body of work. Furthermore, my approach can be linked to core interests that tie into emerging research on language, migration and mixed speech, and to the

body of work on language and identities, globalisation, immigration and superdiversity.

Having discussed some of the criticisms of ethnographic methods and ways in which I have taken them into account in my study and addressed them, in the sections that follow, I outline Online and Linguistic Ethnography, and their usefulness for my research project.

4.5 Online ethnography

4.5.1 Introduction

As argued by Postill & Pink (2012, p. 126), “when methods associated with conventional ethnographic practice, such as interviews or participant observation, are engaged, they allow us to refigure social media as a fieldwork environment that is social, experiential and mobile”. There is no question that Internet-mediated communication, specifically interactions in so-called virtual spaces, deserves research adapted to suit these modes of communication. The word *virtual* is used here to refer to all interactions that take place via the Internet without visual or audio contact, as opposed to those that take place in *physical spaces* (including via the telephone or Skype).

What we have here is real people participating in virtual communities of practice, which makes it clear that the real vs. virtual dichotomy is too simplistic and that it fails to capture the complexities of the interconnectedness of both realities. Having said that, how then is an ethnographic lens useful for research in these spaces, (if at all)? What are the challenges linked to research on online communication that focuses on the intersection between language and identity?

4.5.2 Nomenclature

A broad range of studies with an ethnographic perspective has been and is still

being dedicated to the study of internet-mediated communication, and scholars' interest in online and offline practices shaped by digital culture has given rise to a variety of names for these studies. The naming seems to depend on whether the research focuses purely on linguistic phenomena, specific aspects of identity, on the specificities of the different spaces and the opportunities (and limitations) they offer to users, and more. Varis (2014) lists the following names for such research: internet-related ethnography (Postill & Pink, 2012), digital ethnography (Murthy, 2008), cyberethnography (Robinson & Schulz, 2009), netnography (Kozinets, 2010), discourse-centred online ethnography (Androutsopoulos, 2008), ethnography of virtual spaces (Burrell, 2009), ethnographic research on the internet (Garcia et al., 2009), internet ethnography (Boyd, 2008; Sade-Beck, 2004), ethnography on the internet (Beaulieu, 2004), and virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000). Beyond the fact that these studies all include some online data and all rely on an ethnographic approach, they appear in different disciplines and use a range of different data collection methods. They also all "provide researchers with opportunities for accessing and examining people's communicative repertoires – the complexities of the 'global', the 'local' and the 'translocal', and the ways in which people make (globally) circulating semiotic materials part of their own communicative repertoires..." (Varis, 2014, p. 2⁷⁸).

One of the fundamental assumptions about ethnographic approaches is that the physical displacement of the ethnographer going to 'meet the people in the field' they intend to observe, is necessary for the research to qualify as ethnography. This raises the question, what is the field here?

4.5.3 The online field, its context, and privacy

Albeit twenty years old, Christine Hine's publication on the topic (2000, p. 44) makes a point that is still relevant today; she argues that the field **is** the virtual

⁷⁸ Varis also references Georgakopoulou, 2013; Leppänen et al., 2014; Rymes, 2012; Varis & Wang, 2011.

space, that online ethnographies include ‘travelling’ to interact with the people on the virtual space in a manner reminiscent of a physical displacement. Online ethnographies, she adds, require adaptation to virtual spaces, which can be likened to the period of familiarisation faced by every ethnographer travelling to a distant and unfamiliar location. However, where home and abroad are much more clear-cut when it comes to ethnographic study in a physical location with different culture and language from the home ones, recent studies highlight the fact that the apparent separation between physical and virtual fields is too simplistic to accurately reflect the reality ‘on the ground’. As argued by Varis (2014, p 5), “It is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to make clear-cut distinctions between what is ‘online’ and what is ‘offline’, especially with the [...] emergence and increasing popularity of mobile technologies [...] with internet access.” Varis further comments that these “vehicles of mobility” allow their users to be mobile without necessarily having to physically go anywhere, to experience a change of context without physically changing context (op cit., p. 5). It follows that what researchers collect online “can thus be shaped not only by the immediately observable online context, but also by the offline context in which the digital activity has taken place” (Varis, op cit., p. 7). Thus, the researcher will most certainly have to attend to further layers of context than what is visible on the screen. The fluidity of our notion of what is online/offline alters our understandings “of space and place – and indeed, understandings of what constitutes ethnographic ‘field’” (Varis, op cit., p. 6).

My personal knowledge of the offline context has helped me better understand some of the Facebook group members’ comments. For example, when they discussed the impact of the presence of large numbers of people of sub-Saharan African origin in certain neighbourhoods of Paris on the rise of far-right sympathies amongst the White majority Parisian population, I knew immediately and exactly which neighbourhood they were referring to and what that African presence looks like on the ground (as I have walked those streets and I have seen the looks of some White French Parisians). I was also able to empathise with, the ‘sympathy shame’ some of the group members felt, as one of them

expressed that he understands “why members of the *Front National*” (the French far-right anti-immigration party) “are so upset”. The offline world clearly influenced this thread, from the image posted to prompt group members’ reactions, to the comments made in response to this image.

While online ethnography certainly seems to be an ideal tool to “capture the shape and nature of communicative practices” online (Varis, 2014, op cit. p. 2), the investigation of contexts recommended for an ethnographic lens⁷⁹ poses a different set of challenges compared to on-the-ground research based on an ethnographic approach. For example, Marwick & Boyd describe one of these challenges as “context collapse”, arguing that “social media collapse diverse social contexts into one” (p. 124), as they “flatten [...] multiple audiences into one, thus leading “social network site users [to] adopt” tactics to circumvent “the requirement to present a verifiable, singular identity”. They explain that social network users are connected to “groups of people they do not normally bring together, such as acquaintances, friends, co-workers, and family...” which puts them in a position where some of them resort to creating “multiple accounts, pseudonyms, and nicknames...”, (2010, p. 122), or even false profiles (Varis, 2014), in an attempt to maintain some level of privacy⁸⁰ and some control over who accesses what content. In a sense, social media networks appear to be even more performance-inducing than offline life in which the presentation of self has to be managed on a daily basis, in collaboration with others⁸¹.

However, as argued by Blommaert & Szabla (2017, p. 255), the assumption that dyadic and spoken face-to-face interactions are clear, transparent, authentic, and that in these more habitual forms of interaction, verifiable singular identity positions are deployed, is quite simplistic. In her study focusing

⁷⁹ E.g., see Clifford Geertz on “thick description” (1973), and Blommaert, 2007’s recommendation that contexts be investigated rather than assumed.

⁸⁰ The apparent efficacy of privacy settings on social media networks online is nuanced by the authors, hence the use of ‘some level of’; the authors argue that “Privacy settings alone do not address this...” (p 122).

⁸¹ See Goffman (1959) and Markham (2005) on the central nature of discourse as the means of constructing one’s identity and communicating with others in virtual communities.

on the ways in which identity is discursively constructed within Facebook, Georgalou (2017, p. 4) argues that “the social network site (SNS) of Facebook is a dynamic online socio-cultural arena which gives users ample and unprecedented opportunities for self-presentation through the meshing of language with other semiotic modes.” Social networks do give the impression that people can present different versions of themselves than they do offline, because on the Internet they have access to a broader variety of multimodal signs than they do in real life (e.g. memes, images, music etc.). The Internet also seems to afford them the opportunity to wilfully hide or disguise background personal information to a greater extent than in non-virtual spaces, and this may be seen as limiting access to the ethnographic complexity. This said, I find Georgakopoulou’s (2013, p. 21) point very pertinent: there is indeed no need to ‘exoticize’ online data, as “something untamable and uncontainable by any analysis as well as unnecessarily complicating the analytical task.” especially, as argued by Varis (2014, p. 9), “if we take it as our goal to understand and explain people’s life-worlds and communicative practices comprehensively, and not just taking ‘digital slices’ of them.” Plainly put, context still exists and is accessible within the space in which observable communication occurs; “social media and other online environments are not seen as separate contexts, detached from other spheres of life, and digital communication practices are seen in the wider sociolinguistic context.” (Varis, 2014, p. 9).

More recent studies highlight other aspects that contribute to making online research even more contextually multi-layered, such as algorithms, which increasingly “determine what we like, want, know, or find.” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 37). The author adds that these “Defaults are not just technical but also ideological maneuverings [...] that profoundly shape the cultural experiences of people active on social media platforms.” (ibid, p. 32) They alter the way people connect, create and interact online, imposing social behaviours such as ‘sharing’ and ‘following’ as social values which affect users’ cultural practices (p. 20). However, the main principles of research conducted with an ethnographic

lens still apply. As is the case with on-the-ground research, the contexts of communication need to be examined.

4.5.4 Insights from useful online ethnographies

As stated by Markham, (2005, p. 794), “meaningful and significant relationships and social structures [can] thrive in text-only online environments”, not unlike offline communication, the interaction that provides the space for negotiations of self is a two-way process initiated by “the production of [a] message” (ibid.). The success of the second part of the interaction, however, depends on whether the initiator (on Facebook) receives “a [written] reply message”, a ‘Like’ or any other ‘reaction’ (i.e. love, sad, wow, angry, laughing and care icons), or is able to “track [...] a virtual footprint of a visitor...” (e.g. the ‘Seen’ feature that appears when a message has been viewed in Facebook Messenger). Apart from the ‘Seen’ feature, online, the “perception of another’s attention is only known by overt response.” As Markham puts it, “I am responded to, therefore I am” (ibid, p. 795), and reliance on these responses is crucial to gain an understanding of the interactions and of the wider social context referred to or evoked through these interactions.

Kozinets’ (2010) recommendation for *netnography* is useful in that the author highlights the importance of coming up with a trustworthy interpretation, and making sure one follows ethical research standards, which supports the idea that the principles of ethnography apply, on- and off-line. In line with Rybas & Gajjala (2007) and Wittel (2000), Kozinets recommends focusing on people’s behaviour rather than on the way they present themselves, which can be presumed to be more carefully cultivated and controlled, and considering the posting of computer text as social action that is relevant observational data in itself.

In the section that follows, I outline some of the principles of LE and how these principles are useful to my study.

4.6 Linguistic ethnography (LE)

4.6.1 What is LE and how is it useful to my study?

Linguistic Ethnography (LE) is an umbrella approach that blends elements of linguistics with an ethnographic foundation, a dialogue between the two perspectives (Copland & Creese, 2015; Snell, Shaw, & Copland, 2015; Rampton, 2007b; Rampton et al., 2004, and more). This approach is very often applied to qualitative case study research (Maybin & Tusting, 2011; Rampton, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) on language use in a specific social context using both ethnographic methods and linguistic analysis. An offshoot of the traditions, theories and methods of the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1974), social interaction (Goffman, 1959, 1974, 1981), interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1999), linguistic anthropology (Duranti, 1997), conversation analysis (Ten Have, 2007; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson., 1974), LE focuses on the ways in which language is used to create social meaning in specific social settings.

According to Rampton (2007, p. 585) LE is characterised by the following two key assumptions:

firstly,

“That contexts of communication should be investigated rather than assumed. Meaning takes shape within specific social relations, interactional histories and institutional regimes, produced and construed by agents with expectations and repertoires that have to be grasped Ethnographically.”

and,

“That analysis of the internal organisation of verbal (and other kinds of semiotic) data is essential to understanding its significance and position in the world”.

In LE research, the extent to which the researcher orients towards ethnography or linguistics often depends on her background, expertise and interests, and the focus of the study. LE brings together “linguistically sensitive Discourse

Analysis” (Rampton, 2007b, p. 596) and ethnography. Conversely, Rampton argues that “linguistics (and linguistically sensitive discourse analysis) ties ethnography down, pushing cultural description towards the analysis of clearly delimitable processes...”.

As social scientists from various disciplines seek to investigate the interconnectedness of language and social life, an increase in interdisciplinarity across the social sciences has been noted (Tusting & Maybin, 2007). Under the LE umbrella, principles of ethnographic research have been combined with Conversation Analysis (Rampton, 2005, in his study of language crossing in adolescent talk), Classroom Discourse Analysis (e.g. Lefstein & Snell, 2019; Creese et al, 2008; Maybin, 2006), Critical Discourse Analysis (see Wodak & Savski, 2018, for a discussion on an integrated approach combining both), and more, so long as the approaches have some key assumptions in common and align with the general principles of ethnographic research.

The eclectic methodological and analytical flexibility of LE helps researchers to get a more accurate sense of what is hidden behind the subtle, fluid and indetermined linguistic and social realities of late modernity. Like Rampton (2007, op cit.), Blommaert, (2005, p. 16) argues that “Ethnography sees the analysis of small phenomena as set against the analysis of big phenomena”, and that “both levels can only be understood in terms of each other”. As Normand (2014) puts it, “combined through the emerging field of Linguistic Ethnography, all [...] of these approaches share certain properties and assumptions. Firstly, they all understand language to be a form of social practice; secondly, they tend to be led by practitioner concerns; thirdly, they think of language and other semiotic systems as key resources for meaning making, and fourthly, they see investigating context as shaping each event.”

I was grateful to discover that “Researchers using LE tend to draw on conceptual and methodological resources of relevance to them, from a range of different yet complementary disciplines and embrace interdisciplinarity, even

where conceptualisations and assumptions have been slightly at odds” (Normand, 2014, pp 37-38).

As highlighted by Normand, this ‘picking and choosing’ of what best serves my perspective is not a new practice in social science and research on language. LE has been designated by Creese (2008, p. 229) as “a particular configuration of interests within the broader field of socio- and applied linguistics [with] a theoretical and methodological development orientating towards particular, established traditions but defining itself in the new intellectual climate of poststructuralism and late modernity.” Thanks to its interdisciplinary nature, LE has historically combined ethnography with principles of CDA. Vertovec’s (2003) recommendation that researchers consider disciplinary borrowing if it strengthens their theoretical and conceptual frameworks is also taken into account in my research design.

I also found LE useful for its 15+ year long association with social actors’ negotiations of meaning and identity through language use, especially in the context of late modernity (Pérez-Milans, 2016; Creese, 2008; Rampton et al, 2004), characterised by “instability, difference and mobility”, which stand in opposition to “long-standing binaries in the study of language, culture and identity [...] such as that of ‘micro/macro’ or ‘local/global’” (Pérez-Milans, op cit., p. 84).

Taking into account my two data sets, I needed a toolset comprising a combination of methods suitable for richer linguistic (content) analysis adapted to both data sources. As suggested by Langer & Beckman (2005, p. 193), “it appears [...] more legitimate to classify or position content analysis of online communication in between [critical] discourse analysis, content analysis, and ethnography”, viz. what van Dijk (2008) terms Critical Discourse Studies.

On the basis of the above, I chose to combine the principles and tools of LE that best served my study, with a CDA perspective. For the data collected both on- and off-line, my study focuses on the way the participants and group members

communicate, the devices they use, the way they represent themselves and others in their narration of their life experiences, all metadiscursive statements about language, and all references to their status as ‘diasporics’, home, and belonging. I purposely chose to adopt a bias toward ‘what the participants say that CFrA does for them’, its role, how it serves them in the diasporic context, and the ways in which they weave language with elements of their biographies

The next section provides an overview of CDA and its usefulness to my study.

4.7 Critical Discourse Analysis

4.7.1 What is CDA and how is it useful to my study?

CDA is a critical approach to discourse analysis that highlights the complexity of the relationship between language and society, drawing a link between discourses and social contexts, processes, and situations, that makes it a valuable and powerful tool for studying social phenomena (Wood & Kroger, 2000; van Dijk 1997). It is not a “discrete academic discipline [...] with a fixed set of research methods or clearly defined tools” (Wodak, 1999, p. 186), neither is it a dedicated method for doing discourse analysis. As van Dijk (2015, *ibid*) puts it, “it is a critical *perspective* that may be found in all areas of discourse studies, such as [...] Conversation Analysis, [...], multimodal discourse analysis [...] sociolinguistics, and ethnography of communication [...] among others.” CDA offers similar flexibility as LE.

As stated by van Dijk (2015, p. 466), CDA “primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context”, with the aim “to understand, expose, and ultimately challenge social inequality.” Thus, CDA actively examines language to expose taken-for-granted assumptions, making it clear that discourse is never value neutral, but rather influenced by social context and

produced in interaction with society, with the assumption that power relations are transmitted through discourse (Van Dijk, 2008).

Secondly, CDA's critical nature enables researchers to distinguish complexity and deny easy, dichotomous explanations, to make contradictions transparent, and it emphasises researchers' commitment to being self-reflective while doing research about social problems. In CDA, researchers "choose objects of investigation, define them, and evaluate them" without separating "their own values and beliefs from the research they are doing, recognizing that their interests and knowledge unavoidably shape their research." (Wodak, 1999, *ibid*).

Thirdly, because of CDA's focus on "the way specific discourse structures are deployed in the reproduction of social dominance, whether they are part of a conversation [...] or other genres and contexts" (van Dijk, 2015, p. 468), notions such as power, (language) ideology, discrimination, inequality, hegemony are central to research conducted with a CDA lens. CDA's overall perspective of solidarity with dominated groups and its critical nature help reveal entrenched, taken-for-granted assumptions. Thus, the lens has been frequently associated with postcolonial theoretical perspectives (Van Dijk, 2008). Demas (2022, p. 17) mentions CDA's growing track record of use in decolonial research, aiming (for example) to "unveil Whiteness or Eurocentrism under the guise of universalism." Accordingly, Piller, Zhang, & Li (2022, p. 1) note that "The decolonisation of knowledge is increasingly high on the agenda of applied and sociolinguistics."

Decolonial approaches, most prominently developed in Latin American contexts, as argued by Soler (2009), aim to "uncover coloniality and provide new ontological and epistemological lenses to" help critique and deconstruct "the persistence of global coloniality at different levels of individual and collective life" (Ballestrin, 2013, p. 89). Lima, Capelle & Pereira (2019, p. 175) explain that "although a vast body of literature considers that the colonial period

has ended and that we now live in a postcolonial reality, colonial vestiges still mark postcolonial societies, operating within their legal, institutional, governmental and decision-making systems". The authors add that in these approaches, the term decolonization extends beyond notions of political sovereignty and transfer of power from colonial administrations to independent states; they argue that, rather, it is about resisting and breaking with colonial institutions and ideologies, and questioning their legitimacy. This 'coloniality', they add, is perpetuated and legitimised at various levels and language use is one of the means through which these structures of power are made apparent. CDA's association with decolonial research makes it relevant to my study's focus on language use by diasporic (post postcolonial) language users.

Another useful approach to CDA is Souto-Manning's focus on narrative analysis, and her emphasis on the importance of challenging the view that the influence of institutional discourses on ordinary people's lives is unidirectional (Souto-Manning, 2012, p. 159). Her focus resonates well with my approach, as an important part of my study examines participants' narratives. I also find pertinent the author's statement that "...the system linguistically colonizes everyday lives through institutional discourses", but as is always the case with power, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance, is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." (Foucault 1978, pp. 95-96). Power is emmeshed with everyday resistance, as people leading "everyday lives can appropriate the system – or at least the language it uses – to their varied concerns and objectives" (Souto-Manning, 2012, 160⁸²).

CDA portrays the macro- and micro-levels in everyday interaction and experience as one unified whole. This view of the micro-macro elements in language use as interconnected and almost inseparable, arises out of van Dijk's critical analysis which considers language users that engage in discourse as

⁸² Souto-Manning cites Archer, 2000, 2003; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Habermas, 1987.

members of social groups, organisations, or institutions, and, conversely, groups as acting “by” or “through” their members; social acts of individual actors as constituent parts of group actions and social processes, such as legislation, or the reproduction of racism; language users as social actors with personal and social cognition (personal memories, knowledge, and opinions) as well as those shared with members of their group or culture as a whole (2015, p. 468-469).

The ‘critical’ aspects of CDA that most underpin my analysis are the awareness “that [my] own work is driven by social, economic and political motives like any other academic work and that they are not in any superior position”, and my determination to “make [my] position, research interests and values explicit and [my] criteria as transparent as possible” (Leeuwen, 2006, p. 293). I also find particularly useful the fact that the CDA paradigm requires a constant balancing between theory and empirical phenomena, which implies abductive analyses in which analysts are explicit about what they are doing. This means that analysts will work to understand their own culture and propose interpretations and solutions to perceived problems (rather than pronouncing truths). This is one of the perspectives my thesis is built on.

4.8 Conclusion

My conversations with diasporic Cameroonians are centred on narration of the parts of their life histories that they chose to share, looking at language, the languages of their repertoire, the ways in which their identities are expressed through language use, language as a ‘homing device’ i.e. one that enables them to find or recreate a sense of home where they are located. In these narratives, one can find evidence of the impact of hegemonic language ideologies influenced by nation-states, side-by-side with accounts of participants’ use of counter-hegemonic language practices. While it is important that I acknowledge this ambivalence, the interdisciplinary and flexible nature of CDA affords me the option of focusing on what these individuals deem

important and relevant to them in terms of the role of language in their perceptions of home, belonging, and of what constitutes their identity.

The overarching aim of this study is consistent with one of the foundational concerns of CDA: to “challenge social inequality” (van Dijk, 2015, p. 466), specifically with regard to issues to do with being ‘foreign’, belonging or not belonging, othering and more, and the interplay of these issues and language use.

My study is also concerned with the way these diasporic Cameroonians make sense of their experiences in society through language, with an awareness of the impact of power and language in the society they live in and its effect on them. I draw on CDA’s ability to “investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language in use (or in discourse)” (Wodak 2001, p. 2), whilst giving a platform to my participants to share their stories, as they seek to “make sense of what [they] know, what [they] feel and experience in the world in which [they] live”, as they (re)construct and (re)conceptualise their personal identities as they share their narratives (Souto-Manning, 2012, p. 162). Through these narratives, microevents are connected to broader discourses and contexts (Souto-Manning, 2012, van Dijk, 1993), and the narratives help me understand if and how my participants attempt to self-define their selves through their language choices. In Souto-Manning’s view, “when individuals make sense of their experiences through narratives, they bring together the micro (personal) and the macro (social or institutional) situations in place”; this view enables me to stay away from the separation of “the particular (personal) and the general (social or institutional), the parts (micro) and the whole (macro) in research” (ibid, p. 163). These conversations also seem to benefit the participants, because as they speak, critical meta-awareness seems to develop or rise to the surface⁸³.

⁸³ This is consistent with Souto-Manning’s point that “CAN [Critical Narrative Analysis] is a tool to identify, understand, and highlight the processes of language colonization and appropriation. It is a tool for the development of critical meta-

Where one would be tempted to question the validity of these narrative conversations on the grounds that such stories are by nature subjective, several scholars have recognised such data as no less valid than so called naturally-occurring interactions; they recommend that discursive and interactional analyses be conducted on 'life narratives' (Nossik, 2011; Canut, 2007; Mondada, 2001; Béaux, 1996; Bertaux, 1997).

Both LE and CDA allow me to be more open about the assumptions that I brought into the research project before I started investigating my research questions. Also like LE, CDA advocates the investigation of contexts of communication, but offers more room for a back-and-forth journey between my postulates, the theory and my empirical observations.

In light of the above, drawing from LE and CDA traditions, I chose a number of methods for data analysis. A discussion of these methods, their advantages and limitations, and ethical considerations, follows.

awareness, which may allow individuals to be less discursively colonized, thus using the language of power for appropriation purposes." (2012, p. 165)

Chapter 5 – Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is an overview of the methods of analysis used in this study to address the research questions.

The exploration took place in two phases. In the first phase, I conducted loosely structured interviews with eight diasporic Cameroonians, asking them about their language practices, if those practices evolved over time and how they were woven with their biographies as people who came from one location to another. The exact wording of the prompts varied depending on what the participants opened with after the initial greetings, and also depending on their clarification questions when I asked them about their language practices. As a result, every conversation was different after the first introductory minutes as I sought to follow the lead of the participants. This allowed them the space to have more agency as regards the turn of the conversation, and also to highlight what they deemed most important. Some of the participants spent more time on their personal stories and the different phases of their lives, while others highlighted the importance of the different languages of their repertoire and their emotional significance. As a result, in this first phase of data collection, the mutual shaping of the narratives became quite obvious to me and I found that very positive, as I was precisely looking to let them ‘tell their story’ as much as possible while still bearing in mind the aims of my study.

In the second phase, I collected chats from the aforementioned Facebook Group dedicated to CFrA, selected based on the location of the initiators of threads of chats, in order to align as much as possible with this study’s focus on diasporic Cameroonians. I outline below the rationale guiding my choice of methods to address my research questions. I also discuss ethical considerations, and finally, the process of sourcing and selecting participants,

the selection of chats to be downloaded (in greater detail), and the data collection and analysis process for both datasets.

The aim of my study is to examine CFrA as a socially-situated linguistic phenomenon, in (online) interaction and through the stances of its users, outside its 'natural' environment, viz. in France, in the UK, and in the US, as used by adult educated professionals from a middle class/upper class background, and focusing on emblematic changes the speech form is likely to have undergone as a result of its relocation to Europe.

I initially chose to conduct my research in Paris and London for several reasons. First, both megacities have 'superdiverse' populations, and Paris holds the highest concentration of diasporic Cameroonians (Evina, 2009, p. 15)⁸⁴. I had easy access to networks of users of CFrA in both cities, and I was interested in adding a comparative element to my study by collecting and analysing data from both cities and countries. Furthermore, I chose this population because it does not neatly fit the most frequent (past) characterisation of speakers of CFrA (i.e. 'youth', unemployed or lacking in education etc.), and allows me to research this speech form with Central African origins, commonly practised by people with educated middle-class backgrounds⁸⁵, which distinguishes my study from the usual British and French focus on working class youth varieties that involve urban language mixing and the influence of popular culture and/or kinship linked to the Caribbean, USA, South Asia and/or North Africa. I ended up casting a wider net in terms of the regions I was looking at as a result of conversations with people met online or who were introduced to me by other participants in my study. I have now included insights from participants living in Nantes, Paris, London, Davis, Ruston, New London, and Kansas City.

With the aim of examining the place of CFrA in the linguistic repertoire of the participants and the Facebook Group users, here are the research questions

⁸⁴ IOM 2009 report.

⁸⁵ This assertion is based on the testimonials of my participants and my personal experience.

that guide this study.

5.2 Research questions

The main research question is:

What are the functions (if any) that CFrA performs for Cameroonians in the diaspora?

This question can be subdivided as follows:

- i) Do my participants engage with CFrA? If they do, in what form, when, where and with whom?
- ii) How far has CFrA's emblematic significance changed in its move from a Cameroonian context to a diasporic one? What does it do for its diasporic speakers? What do they 'use' it for?
- iii) How (if at all) is CFrA a part of negotiating belonging for its diasporic speakers online and offline, and how do they enact their Cameroonian identity in these contexts using CFrA? What role does it play (if any) in their reconstructions of home away from home?

The question of what role CFrA plays in its diasporic speakers' lives is a complex one which cannot be answered accurately just by asking speakers. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, my investigation focuses on the participants' perceptions of what CFrA does for them and examines similar statements highlighting a relationship between CFrA on one hand, and an expression of Cameroonian identity on the other, in online chats involving diasporic Cameroonians on a Facebook Group dedicated to CFrA. It might be worth noting at this stage that I am aware that in many scholars' views people shape language as well as being shaped by it. I purposely choose to focus here on CFrA as a tool in these diasporic Cameroonians' linguistic repertoires and the ways in which they draw on this resource in the context of their diasporic lives.

I am aware of the subjective nature of this line of investigation, and I believe the subjectivity of the data that emerges from this lens does not diminish the validity of the findings of this study, because it is about people's lived experiences, narratives and perceptions, and not about a solid theory about what language does for everyone, not even for every Cameroonian.

In light of my experience and as confirmed by many researchers (e.g. Gray, 2009; Corbin and Morse, 2003; Mason, 1994; Dean & Taylor-Gooby, 1992; Labov, 1973), unstructured or semi-structured conversational interviews put participants at ease and are more likely to yield answers that come closer to the reality of the participants' experience and perceptions than other methods. Central to Linguistic Ethnography, (see Copland and Creese, 2015; Heyl, 2007; Denzin, 2001), unstructured interviewing is suitable for my study as its conversational nature positioned me well to hear about the role *they believe* CFrA plays in their lives and the reasons why they started engaging with it and still do. Similarly, the critical examination of (online) interaction between users of CFrA along the principles of CDA and LE proves to be a window into the users' engagement with CFrA on the Facebook Group, and brings to the fore interesting insights about their language ideologies.

In the next section, I discuss the ethical considerations applied to this study to help safeguard participants' interests, then I delve into my methodological choices, the reasons for these choices and their implications.

5.3 Ethical considerations

5.3.1 Introduction

One of the most obvious drawbacks of the ethnographic lens is the intrusive nature of interactional and observational research, and thus, carrying out this type of research raises the question of the researcher's moral obligation to

conduct research in a way that purposely seeks to protect participants and not to harm them.

Hultgren, Erling, & Chowdhury (2016), writing about ethics in Language and Identity research, remind the reader that it is crucial to think critically and constructively about ethics when doing language and identity projects. They highlight the fact that a focus on quality and integrity is at the heart of ethical literacy, that researchers are expected to reflect carefully about themselves, their relationships and responsibilities to each stakeholder directly or indirectly involved in or affected by their research: from research participants and collaborators to colleagues, the discipline, society itself.

Accordingly, I believe that at the core of ethical behaviour in research is the awareness that working with human beings can be damaging to them, and that safeguarding participants should take precedence over other aims of the research.

As I reflected on my study, there did not seem to be an obvious risk of danger resulting from our conversations or from the analysis of the data posted on the Facebook Group. I also knew that the participants would not be selected from particularly vulnerable populations, and that I would not ask them to share any sensitive data that could be detrimental to them down the line. The fact that I wasn't working with populations easily identified as being vulnerable meant that I was forced to purposely ask myself a number of questions in order to identify what constituted risk and establish the best ways of safeguarding the participants in my study. Questions such as "What is my responsibility to the people taking part in my research?" or "Is my project ethical enough if I make sure they come to no harm?" or even "How much must I reveal to participants in my project?" came to mind. In light of the above, this study was conducted in keeping with the requirements of, and approved by, the ethics committee at

Lancaster University, and BAAL's general guidelines about procedures to follow for ethical behaviour in research⁸⁶.

Working with the online data that I collected involves using people's conversations written on Facebook while communicating with other group members. Facebook is public, so one would assume that users are aware that anything they type on the platform is accessible to the company itself but also to swathes of other people. It is also reasonable to assume that people would tailor their contributions accordingly. Unfortunately that is not the case, so as a researcher using this medium, I realised very quickly that it fell to me to use the data responsibly, and beyond the minimal legal obligations and expectations applicable to data posted publicly on Social Media platforms. I took steps to protect the contributors' anonymity and safeguard their privacy (e.g. I blurred their names and photographs as needed, I avoided personal details and information that would make them easy to trace).

Similarly, especially given the conversational and biographical nature of the interviews, and the fact that most participants connected with me when they were comfortable and relaxed, often from the privacy of their homes, the likelihood that personal information that would make them easy to identify would be included in the chats was very high. I started by sharing an information and consent form with the participants, making them aware that some parts of our conversations would be included in this thesis in anonymised form.

We discussed their upbringing and family backgrounds, and their personal trajectories as well as their experiences as migrants, so when selecting the excerpts to be analysed in the thesis or writing their profiles, I had to make sure they did not contain too much information that would make them easy to identify.

Secondly, deciding how much needed to be revealed to the participants and

⁸⁶ Recommendations on Good Practice In Applied Linguistics (1994) British Association for Applied Linguistics

what could be kept from them while still conducting ethically responsible research (Mack et al., 2005, pp. 13-15) was also a point I reflected on. For example, when discussing participants' language practices, I was aware that direct questions about these practices were not the best way of obtaining the information I am interested in. The reasons for people's choices in terms of language use are not evident to them or to others, and sometimes discussing one's upbringing for example, the language policies of one's country of origin or the type of school attended as a child, can bring people much closer to discovering the reasons behind their choices. For this reason, after reflecting on ways of sharing enough information with them without volunteering details that could impede the spontaneity of their answers, I chose to invite the participants to broadly share their experiences about their language practices and their personal story. I found that in every case, the conversations eventually narrowed down to the relationship between their language use and their self-definitions, and for most cases, CFrA was first mentioned by them.

5.3.2 Obligations of researchers

According to BAAL's general guidelines for ethical behaviour in research, the obligations of ethically responsible researchers include:

5.3.2.1. "Respect[ing] the rights, interests, sensitivities, and privacy of [...] informants."

Researchers should be careful "to try to anticipate any harmful effects or disruptions to informants' lives and environment, and to avoid any stress, undue intrusion, and real or perceived exploitation" (BAAL, 1994 p. 4). Practically, I strove to be attentive to participants' attitudes and reactions, sometimes altering my planned course of action when I perceived some reluctance to respond when discussing a specific point (e.g., Freddy's parents' profession). I anonymised my transcripts by using neutral identifiers (pseudonyms) instead of the participants' real names and hid the Facebook group members' names

and photographs.

I also restricted strictly to my supervisors and other academic staff access to the data from my interviews and from the online chat data, and I password-protected the data stored on computer.

I communicated to the participants that I would take precautions, and this appeared to make them confident about giving their consent.

As issues of privacy are particularly sensitive in the context of online ethnography, Jacobson (1999, p.139) highlights the need for an awareness on the part of the researcher that the users whose data they publish can easily be identified. He also highlights the difficulties associated with obtaining informed consent, and the applicability of copyright laws. However, in the case of the CFrA group, Facebook's legal terms apply, and they stipulate that content or information published using the 'Public' setting automatically grants everyone, "including people off of Facebook" the right "to access and use that information, and to associate it with the member's name and picture" (Facebook, 2017). Beyond Facebook's statement of rights, disclosure of participants' personal information in a way that would make them easily identifiable is considered unethical in academic research, and thus online group members' privacy has been protected in this research project.

5.3.2.2. "[O]btaining informed consent" from participants

Having touched on this point with regard to the interviewees, I comment here only on the online part of my study.

Obtaining informed consent means that the aims of the study need to be explained as openly as possible and participants should be made aware of "the objectives of the research, its possible consequences, and issues of confidentiality and data security", prior to them giving their consent to take part in the study (BAAL, *ibid.*). As mentioned in the previous section, Facebook users automatically and irrevocably relinquish their copyright when they post on

a Public group, and this means that informed consent is not needed in this case.

This policy is consistent with BAAL guidelines (ibid., p. 7) about research conducted on the Internet which suggest that for fora with publicly archived contributions, it is reasonable to assume that informants might regard their contributions as public and that individual consent is not required (provided the data is not transformed and repurposed, especially for commercial usage).

5.3.2.3 Respecting the participants' decision to refuse to take part or to withdraw

As discussed in the previous chapter and in section 5.4.1.1 below, my position as a researcher was not insignificant to the participants in my project. Some participants also reacted to their perception of my social background (which they thought was upper middle-class based on my late parents' income and social status)⁸⁷.

With regard to the interviews, I made every effort to bear in mind that (real and perceived) power relations would come into play, and to be careful not to "pressurise people to participate". I was careful not to insist when participants expressed their reluctance, and when one of the people that I contacted who had agreed to take part, suddenly went silent, I followed up a few times and then I did not pursue contact as he stopped communicating after having initially expressed interest.

5.3.2.4 Not resorting to covert research

"Covert research and deliberate deception are unacceptable to the extent that they violate the principle of informed consent and the right to privacy" (BAAL,

⁸⁷ One interviewee first claimed that CFrA was not a language and that he didn't speak it, and once the ice had thawed, he stated that he did speak it. This could be linked to the negative perceptions of CFrA that were widespread in educational circles for Gen Xers.

ibid., p. 5). This said, as discussed in the guidelines, complete disclosure about certain topics can affect participants' responses, as they may wish to present a certain image of themselves based on their understanding of what is expected of them. CFrA was presented to my generation of Cameroonians via official and educational means as a very negative language practice, one associated with low proficiency in French and low respectability. Some of my respondents showed signs of reticence to openly express the fact that they regularly used CFrA as teenagers (let alone as adults).

The BAAL guidelines suggest several ways round this, including the fact that researchers can “withhold the specific objectives of the research without deliberately misleading or giving false information”. I believe asking participants about their biographical trajectory and their language practices with the initially unconfessed aim of eliciting their opinions and feelings about CFrA, is distraction rather than deception.

The online ethnography part of this research project was covert (apart from the involvement of the Facebook Group administrator); it did not need to be overt as discussed above. Moreover, I downloaded large amounts of data, and only used a relatively small proportion of those data.

As highlighted by Angrosino (2005, p. 173), ethical considerations need to be taken into account, and appropriate precautions put in place knowing that the researcher does not, “...and cannot, know all possible elements in any given human social interaction”, and cannot predict or prevent all harm.

However, the researcher can “admit to errors once they have occurred, [...] correct the errors so far as possible, and [...] move on”, seeking the support and advice of supervisors and peers, to discuss unanticipated ethically sensitive questions that may come up. This is what I have strived to do throughout this project.

In the sections that follow, I discuss the data collection and analysis methods

that I have chosen to use in this project.

5.4 Fieldwork methods

LE offers a variety of methods of data collection including those are suitable for this research project and consistent with the project's framework, namely participant observation, informant interviewing, field notes, and downloads of online chats.

5.4.1 Participant observation

Participant observation is defined by Marshall & Rossman as "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (1989, p.79), a means of answering the question 'What is the individual doing?' (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p. 9). Both Marshall & Rossman (op. cit., p. 92) and DeWalt & DeWalt (op. cit., p. 110) recommend this method as a means of increasing the validity of a study and argue that it helps researchers gain better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study.

While this data collection method often presupposes co-presence in the field over extended periods of time, and is thought to be what leads to ethnographic interviews (Allen, 2017), I have drawn from this method as a complement to my interviews, as "part of [research] design that tests my hypotheses" (DeWalt and DeWalt, *ibid.*), as this method is thought to offer ways of checking "for nonverbal expressions of feelings" (DeWalt & DeWalt, *op cit.*, p. 74) .

Defined as above, participant observation enabled me to have a heightened attention to pauses and hesitations before a specific word is used, rephrased statements, laughter and other non-verbalised attitudes or feelings during my conversations with the participants. As I later listened to the recordings of the

interviews before and during transcription, those instances came to mind and they proved useful at analysis stage.⁸⁸

I propose that this method is particularly useful in that doing the observation compelled me to step back and maintain greater awareness of what was going on before me. This gave me greater opportunity to be surprised, to notice linguistic behaviours I had not anticipated, and to correct erroneous preconceptions I may have had. This was particularly important to me as a diasporic Cameroonian researching diasporic Cameroonians, as I believe one of the biggest risks (which is the other side of the coin of a very strong advantage) was that my knowledge of the community could blind me to the discovery of unexpected phenomena that I would assume are easier to spot when researching a community that one is not a part of. These discoveries later helped me achieve more accurate interpretations of the interview data and the online group downloads.

5.4.1.1 The researcher as a participant

According to Hammersley & Atkinson (2007, p.16) participant observation “involves participating in the social world [...] and reflecting on the products of that participation”. Researchers in this role of a participant observer have an acute awareness of the fact that their presence cannot be ignored and has an impact on the people observed, but also that they are also observed and take part in an activity of some sort *with* the participants. They undertake the “observation of participation” and must “reflect on and critically engage with [their] own participation within the ethnographic frame” (Tedlock, 2005, p. 467). As participant observers, researchers thus juggle constantly between an insider and an outsider position, as they are physically, emotionally and intellectually involved in whatever is taking place, all the while striving to stay focused on their academic activity that always underlies

⁸⁸ I discuss this in greater detail in the profiles of the participants and in the analysis chapter.

their interactions with the participants.

Hammersley & Atkinson argue that this juggling act is delicate and necessary, stating that "...there must always remain some part held back, some social and intellectual 'distance'. They argue that it is in the 'space' created by this distance that the analytical work of the ethnographer gets done." (2007, p. 103).

This "delicate balance between participation and observation" (Stocking, 1983, p. 8) may be an "ideal" to strive for, but is it really achievable and is it desirable? As stated by Abu-Lughod (1991, p. 468) the illusion of a 'distance' that it is possible and desirable to maintain when relating with the participants becomes irrelevant once one recognises that "the outsider self never simply stands outside [...] but stands in a definite relation with the Other of the study".

5.4.1.2 Online (background) observation

According to Kozinets (2010, p. 75), some researchers have adopted purely observational (or 'passive') approaches in which they are members of an online community who do not openly or actively participate. In this type of observation, the Internet users have no awareness of being observed 'professionally', and one can argue that this eliminates or at least reduces the observer effect. However, Bowler (2010, p. 1271) states that other researchers have argued for "a more participative approach in which the researcher fully participates as a member of the online community" and which is "closer to traditional ethnographic standards of participant observation, prolonged engagement, and deep immersion".

For the online part of this research project, I chose to observe from the background in order to enhance my understanding of what was going on in the group. I am not fluent in CFrA, so I felt that it would struggle to 'fully participate'

as the Group guidelines specify that interactions are expected to be in CFrA. I did not want to resort to mimicry or other subterfuges to post contributions that would seem authentic. Such dissimulation and pretence, I felt, would have adversely affected my integrity as a researcher and might have been detected by group members. So, I decided to familiarise myself with the Group by observing silently for a few months, as I felt that participant observation in that setting was a matter of 'hanging around' the group, familiarising myself with its modus operandi and its members' behaviours, the topics discussed, the general atmosphere of the interactions. I moved back and forth from the chats to the content and discourse analysis of the transcripts, with the aim of spotting data that might inform this study. I thus identified the most active members on the group, and 'got to know' some of the members' profiles quite well, which would enable me later to identify the ones who were based in Cameroon (or in the Western world) and thus narrow down the list of chats I would download.

Before starting data collection, I suspected that observations do not always unfold the way researchers hope them to, so I approached this stage of research, prepared to discover that it may lead to something different from what I anticipated. I embraced the likelihood that my observation of the Group could have yielded data that was in contradiction with the statements of my interviewees, and I knew that this possibility would yield equally rich insights, as the aim of my study was not merely to confirm my hunches, orienting ideas and foci (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I was fully aware that I did not come with a "completely clean slate" (see Erickson, 2004); indeed I believe no researcher is able to, as discussed previously. I observed the Group to see what was going on, and report on it within the framework of my study and my research questions.

Overall, as stated by Adler & Adler (1994, p. 389), I found the observation of the Group and the familiarisation that ensued, used as part of a "methodological spectrum" alongside other methods, to be a "powerful source of validation", as my first-hand observations enhanced my understanding of other data.

5.4.1.3 Skype interactions

Copland and Creese (2015, p. 38) state that “Observations are generally used to build rapport and develop trust in the field and so usually precede audio, video or interview recordings.” I also observed the participants during the Skype-mediated interviews, even though interviews are not generally thought to be included in participant observation. As participant observation **is** joining in a practice, and interviews imply asking people about things that they do, I realised that there was some overlap.

During the course of my conversations with my participants, I gradually came to the same realisation as did Abu-Lughod (op cit.) and embraced the fact that I could not really fully ‘stand outside’. I thus decided to approach the interviews with the participants both as method used to record their statements, and as conversations, and I concluded that the data transcribed from these interviews is also to be considered as interactional and it is to be included in the analysis as such. I elaborate on the interview data in the relevant section below.

I initially aimed to keep my researcher’s hat on as much as possible, especially during conversations with the participants that I knew prior to the interviews. However, in light of my reflexive realisation that I was very much part of the conversations, my dual role became less of an issue to me, so long as I maintained an awareness of my position without compromising the aims of my research (to the best of my ability).

In order to minimise the effect of my involvement in the conversations and as an observer, I sought to reflect on the way I positioned myself, how I approached these interactions, to ‘stand out’ as little as possible, to make it easier for the participants to be ‘natural’. I purposely looked out for clues and signs that a participant may have tailored some of their responses to make

them more aligned with their perceptions of my status as a researcher. Some contradictory statements made by a participant with regard to his engagement with CFrA highlighted this effect, and I made a note of what was happening, and trusted that as we continued to chat and as familiarity increased, the participant would be able to self-censor less and be more open about his actual position. I also noticed when listening to the recorded conversations that sometimes my Cameroonian accent intensified without me being aware. I discuss this further in the analysis section.

5.4.1.4 Limitations of participant observation

One of biggest limitations often associated with participant observation is the fact that it is difficult for researchers to determine to what extent they can get involved in the activity without affecting their findings. Another limitation is researcher bias, and both issues could cause researchers to make unintended errors in the research process or to misinterpret results as their observations are filtered through their interpretive frame (see for example Lashley, 2018; Kawulich, 2005; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

As discussed above, I reflected on my involvement in the conversations, and where I felt that the line between my position as a researcher and my involvement as a participant was blurry, I stated that ambiguity clearly, and addressed it as best I could. As for researcher bias, I have reported all findings as transparently and neutrally as possible, including observations that did not unfold the way I thought they would. A more detailed discussion on these aspects is included in the analysis chapters.

5.4.2 Participant interviewing

5.4.2.1 Active listening and interviewing

According to Hammersley & Atkinson (2007, p. 3), the ethnographic interviewer must be “an active listener” i.e. one who “listens to what is being

said in order to assess how it relates to the research focus and how it may reflect the circumstances of the interview” (ibid., p. 118). Here, what is being said is a narrative, the participants’ version of their experiences and life stories.

Holstein & Gubrium (1995, p. 4) argue that active listening and interviewing is a collaborative activity in which the respondent “constructs his or her experiential history as the interview unfolds, in collaboration with the active Interviewer”. “Meaning and its construction” are brought “to the foreground” (p 73) and the Interviewer “may interject him- or herself into the interview in various ways” to encourage the interviewee in their narration, also adopting selected positions to encourage the interviewee to “shift narrative positions” during the interview, in order to tap into the interviewee’s “stock of knowledge” (p 77).

I find Holstein & Gubrium’s interpretation very pertinent, and reflective of my experience. Coming to this part of the project with an awareness of the ways in which I was likely to help construct what was being said was very useful to ‘get the participants speaking freely’. I conducted all my interviews as informal or conversational biographical interviews, and this helped the informants relax and gave them the lead. It also allowed me to capture the way they speak. This proved useful as the respondents were narrating their story, interesting anecdotes and elements of their biographical trajectories. Most of them seemed comfortable enough to speak as closely as possible to their usual style, using the linguistic features they would use in similar private conversations (see Labov, 1972 on the Observer’s paradox). As a result, the interviews were very close to ‘spontaneous’ talk, thus yielding useful insights about their language practices.

Adding to Holstein & Gubrium and going further, several scholars in the last 25 years recommend carrying out discursive and interactional analyses of ‘life narratives’ (e.g. Bertaux, 1997; Béaux, 1996; Mondada, 2001; Canut,

2007; Nossik, 2011). They consider these “semi-directive” or “narrative” interviews as interaction (Bertaux [1997] 2005, p. 11; Bres, 1999, p. 68), which implies that the data collected can and should be analysed as interactive data, with no lesser value than so called naturally-occurring in-situ interactions, the primary focus being on content, with the researcher being part and parcel of said interaction. The analysis of the data in this study draws heavily on the above approaches.

I conducted most interviews via Skype, (which I chose for convenience and because all participants were very comfortable using it), and one face to face. The aim of these interviews was to ascertain how/if language in general and CFrA in particular was woven in their life story and daily experience, and to what end they engaged with CFrA (where relevant). I tried to ‘ask’ as little as possible and to listen as much as possible, even though this proved difficult for some interviews, and when I did ask, my questions were framed by my personal knowledge and previous conversations, and also by what the participants deemed important. However, even the interview during which I was least in control produced valuable data that has enriched my project and helped me refine my findings.

5.4.2.2. Limitations of interviewing and key points

One of the dangers with interviewing is the fact that nowadays “the interview is an accepted speech event”, and due to the normalisation of this mode of communication, “we take for granted that we know what it is and what it produces” (Briggs, 1986, p. 1).

Secondly, the data captured using interviews are often considered as representations that do not fully reflect reality. However, while “participant perspectives” are by nature subjective, personal, and co-constructed (Hammersley, 2006, p. 9), I draw on Bertaux’s stance which views these narratives as “a source from which objective, factual data about the object of

analysis can be extracted ([1997] 2005, pp 12-14)⁸⁹, and which enables the researcher to “study one particular aspect of a socio-historical reality...”. As argued by Mondada (2001), historical facts can be verified against participants’ factual statements on the contemporary social practice at the time of the events being narrated.

In the course of the interviews, participants made reference to broader historical events happening in the backdrop of their story, or to practices that were common in Cameroonian families as they were growing up. Their stories confirmed events and practices I had witnessed, heard of, or was familiar with.

Beaud (1996, p. 241) argues that one can assume that in such narratives, subjective data will be obviously evaluative judgements (for example indicating personal feelings or perceptions of events). Thus, Beaud adds, the researcher can draw a distinction between the factual elements and the subjective statements in the narratives and validate the latter through triangulation with other methods and other means.

Some might argue that the subjectivity of the participants’ statements is likely to affect even the more factual elements of the conversations, and that these narratives are in fact distinct events that are transformed, into a plot constructed as a coherent story, a mimesis of real life. Indeed, my participants’ life stories **are** reconstructions of social reality within the narrative, so they do not interfere with the aim of my research (which is not to ascertain the exactitude of each fact narrated). More importantly, they help outline the link between the broader socioeconomic and historical factors, and aspects of the participants’ lives, specifically with regard to language ideologies, their effect on the participants, the role and place language plays and holds in the participants’ lives and in their representation

⁸⁹« un entretien narratif [...] contient nécessairement bon nombre d’informations factuelles généralement exactes », permettant « d’étudier un fragment particulier de réalité sociale-historique, un objet social »([1997] 2005 : 12-14).

of themselves. Through the social categories that are referred to in the narrative, the participants make sense of their social world and this process informs the researcher, as has been my experience.

Finally, as stated by Briggs, (op cit., p. 42) reflecting on the nature of the data produced by interviews in essential. When listening to/setting out to interpret responses, it is crucial to bear in mind that they depend “on the questions that precede them, previous question-answer pairs, the social situation, the relationship between the Interviewer and Interviewee, and a host of other factors”. I held these aspects at the forefront of my mind because most of the participants are from a similar background to mine, and are either highly educated, lead successful professional careers, or both. We also have in common our Cameroonian origin and our diasporic status. During the interviews, some of the participants’ statements seemed to signal specifically calculated social positioning, but nothing that was so strong that it impeded the conversation. I expand on this point in the analysis chapter.

5.4.3. Field notes

5.4.3.1 Ethnographic field notes

Field notes are used by researchers to record behaviours, activities, events and more, during observation, and they are intended to be read later to produce meaning and an understanding of the situation or phenomenon being studied (Schwandt, 2015). At the start of data collection, I chose to write field notes to supplement interview and online download data.

Field notes cannot be evoked without a reflexion on the related ‘field’; for this research project, my field is composed of the **people**, selected diasporic Cameroonian speakers of CFrA, the (on- and off-line) **places** where the observation of and the participation in the interactions in CFrA took place, and the **encounters** with the participants (via Facebook and a posteriori, and via Skype).

Furthermore, field notes are not a neutral tool of data collection, but rather they are a particular representation of what is taking place in the field and they include personal interpretations and subjective impressions about the events witnessed. As has been argued by Lederman (1990, p. 72), field notes are “[s]imultaneously part of the “doing” of fieldwork and of the “writing”, [and they] are shaped by two movements: a turning away from academic discourse to join conversations [...], and a turning back again”. Researchers write them ‘to and for themselves’.

Papen (2019, p. 141) states that “Field notes are inseparable from participant observation”. Being actively involved meant that my ability to observe and write notes was limited, so I recorded what I had observed as field notes, immediately (or as soon as possible) after each conversation. These notes were useful at analysis stage as they allowed me to recollect what was happening during the conversation beyond what was said, including particularly meaningful (or confusing) statements or attitudes that I wanted to explore further. This in turn helped correct erroneous preconceptions and make more accurate interpretations, which helped when analysing other data. I also wrote in my notes “emotions, feelings, values and beliefs” (Copland and Creese, op cit., p. 39) that emerged during and from the interviews, and I used these notes to refine my interpretations at analysis stage.

My field notes provided me with “information not only about *what* [I] witnessed in the field, but even more importantly about *how* I witnessed it” (Blommaert & Dong, 2010: 37, sic). They were useful as they have helped tie my observations together and fill in gaps.

5.4.3.2 Limitations of field notes

The first downside of field notes that I experienced was the fact that while observation is taking place a great deal can be written down, but not

everything will be useful. As a result, they can be time-consuming to write and to analyse. Secondly, it can be awkward and distracting to manage 'participating' in the activity taking place and at the same time document what is happening. Another limitation is the fact that participants observing field note-taking are reminded of the fact that the interviews are part of an academic endeavour, which can make it more difficult to establish 'natural' interactions.

In order to minimise loss of information, as mentioned above, I chose to mainly record them as soon as possible after each interview. On the rare occasions when I took notes during the interviews, none of the participants seemed affected or made any comment regarding this.

Whatever their limitations, field notes remain crucial in studies such as this one; they proved a very good tool to recall everything noteworthy once I had left the field.

5.4.4 Online (netnographic) data collection

The characteristics, advantages and limitations of netnography have been discussed at great length above. In this section, I only briefly explain why I have chosen this method.

5.4.4.1 Collecting data online

Data from online communities offer interesting possibilities; interactions in CFrA posted on fora on the Internet constitute interactional data even though they are not *spoken* interactions, and these data are available in large quantities in the Group I used, named 'Ici on topo le Camfranglais! le speech des vrais man du Mboa'.

I decided to include written interactional data from an online community as a means of adding validity to the findings from my interviews, and my focus on

diasporic Cameroonians meant that I was purposely looking for chats whose content addressed my focus.

Having reflected on the fact that research is always inherently skewed towards the researchers' interests, I hope my openness about these choices levels the playing field, as specifying the parameters within which I am conducting this study implies that the conclusions drawn are valid within these parameters, provided the reasoning, analysis and the argumentation are conducted in a scientifically sound way.

5.4.4.2 Availability of the data and ease of use

The Facebook Group that I used is public and easy to access; joining it can be done in one click and immediate membership is granted. There is no confidentiality agreement on the Group which means the data are considered available for use and there is no requirement for any authorisation. This greatly facilitated my work as a researcher engaging with these data (even though I took precautions to conceal Facebook Group members' identifiable information).

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the rationale behind the choice of the study's methods. I used a mix of two data sources, and this enabled me to verify pre-existing hunches and triangulate the content from the Skype conversations against the online chats. Thanks to the cross-referencing, I was able to draw insights that I believe are likely to apply to a broader spectrum of diasporic populations, and the role of language in defining their diasporic identities. Drawing from two different data sources also increased the internal validity of the study, as some of the methodological limitations were compensated for as the findings could be cross-validated against each other. In the following

chapter, I briefly outline the tools and criteria that I chose to transcribe and analyse my data.

Chapter 6 – The data: Skype conversations

6.1 Introduction

In the sections that follow, I provide an overview of the interviews that I conducted, and vignettes of the people interviewed.

As argued by Hammersley & Atkinson, (2007, p.158), the analysis of data in ethnographic studies is an ongoing and iterative process that "... begins in the pre-fieldwork phase, in the formulation and clarification of the research problems and continues through the process of writing reports [...]", that "starts to take shape in analytic notes and memoranda" and is "...embodied in the ethnographer's ideas and hunches".

This ethnographic lens offers a variety of analytical resources useful to observe and understand the "linguistic forms, rhetorical strategies, semiotic materials and institutional genres" (Rampton, op. cit., p. 4) used by participants when communicating, and the discourses underlying their statements and choices.

In keeping with my decision to combine an ethnographic lens with the principles of CDA, I carried out textual and discourse analysis, of transcribed interactional interview data (see Rampton 2007b, p. 2), drawing from Conversation Analysis, but without adopting its close focus on "the fine grain of interaction". I aimed to be attentive to what was going on in the episode under scrutiny, to help me "to gain purchase on more general cultural, social and political processes" (ibid.), whilst privileging participant perspectives, being suspicious of a priori theory, taking description very seriously, dwelling on particulars (with transcripts used as vignettes), and emphasising open-ended immersion in the situation being investigated, making room for the unpredictable" (ibid.).

All textual and linguistic analysis depends heavily on the availability of recorded material that can be played repeatedly, and the identification of specific episodes relating to issues being explored. The interactions were

transcribed and analysed in detail, which implied “stepping back for ‘constant comparison’ across episodes, for discrepant case analysis, gradually building up descriptive generalisations about the topic, and initial interpretations of its wider significance” (ibid., p. 2).

These interpretations have been supported by cross referencing my data from interviews and online chats, but also using my field notes and background knowledge of the topic. As mentioned above, I chose to focus on meaning and insights that were likely to help provide answers to my research questions.

6.2 Reaching out

When I decided to speak to diasporic Cameroonians about their language practices, I started by selecting people in my close network who spoke CFrA. I asked these first contacts to recommend others. After the first few interviews, based on the length of the conversations and the richness of the content related to language and identity in these conversations, I concluded that I had recruited just enough people through these recommendations. I reflected on the fact that using snowball methods of contact would probably increase the likelihood of my participants coming from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, but because representativeness was not a priority for my study (which as a case study, makes no such claim), I decided to prioritise the participants’ engagement with CFrA in Western diasporic contexts. I also chose to include more men than women, because in my personal experience (and as confirmed by Machetti & Siebetchu, 2013, and Echu, 2008), males were more likely to engage with CFrA in spoken and in written form. I believed speaking to more males was likely to produce more realistic data.

When I initiated contact with people about their language practices, I initially sent an explanatory message. My plan was to have an initial chat via Skype with them to explain what I wanted to do and the role they were to play, and

then set up an appointment for a face-to-face interview (for those in London) or organise travel to meet those who lived outside the UK.

My first interview was conducted in person in London. During my first introductory chat via Skype, the participant suggested Skype as a good medium for the interview, and said he was available straight away. This solution proved ideal for me because I no longer needed to travel to meet participants, and because Skype was widely used by diasporic Cameroonians to communicate with people in Cameroon and in different Western countries, so I decided to conduct the rest of the interviews using Skype. Skype had the advantage of enabling me to see the participants (and to be seen by them) which made the conversations richer, and I could spot non-verbal reactions and gestures that audio-only media would not allow. Even though I am not including videos (for reasons explained in section 6.3 below), my notes ended up including impressions and reactions that I picked up visually.

In the section that follows, I introduce the participants and the overall experience of using Skype to conduct the interviews, and I delve in greater detail into the profiles of the participants.

6.3 The conversations

6.3.1 Introduction

The estrangement of sub-Saharan Africans from their family members and friends on the continent, the cost of international communications by telephone, and the human need to connect with loved ones, resulted in Skype becoming a very important means of intercontinental communication for diasporic Africans over the last 20+ years (Hampshire et al, 2018, Atekmangoh, 2017; Nyamnjoh, 2014; Machetti & Siebetchu, 2013). I am, of course, now aware of the popularity of WhatsApp, the instant messenger application, but when I conducted my interviews, in my close networks, Skype was the tool people

used. It became very significant to me that it was one of my interviewees who suggested Skype as the ideal tool for the interviews. This detail tied in very well with my desire to offer the opportunity to diasporics to share their experience, to show them in my small way, that their stories, their lives mattered.

Once the initial messages had been exchanged to arrange an interview date and time, connecting via Skype was fairly smooth, except for one interview during which the communication got interrupted a few times due to poor Internet connection. I asked my contacts to activate their camera so I could see them, and they readily agreed to turn on their camera when I explained that I would only keep the audio recording. I chose to do so because a few of the interviewees asked whether video recording would be used, and some mentioned that they would prefer not to be video recorded.

Skype proved to be the ideal tool for data collection because it was easy to audio record and save the conversations. The main limitation was its reliance on high quality continuous Internet connection.

After the interview during which we experienced Internet connection problems, I resorted to recording all the conversations using Skype **and** using my mobile phone's in-built recording capability. For analysis, I ended up using the recordings collected on my mobile phone, because they were easy to upload immediately to my computer, whereas Skype recordings needed to be downloaded, and the audio needed to be extracted from the video, then saved.

I interviewed eight people, four men and four women. I initially intended to have conversations with twelve participants, seven men and five women. I wanted a relatively small number of participants, because I anticipated that each chat would last at least 30 minutes, and I wanted to take the time to listen to them again and again and analyse them in detail.

In terms of reliability, I quickly noticed that my female contacts were more consistent; either they agreed to take part, were responsive and showed up on the scheduled day and time, or they declined from the start. Only one of the five women that I contacted didn't respond. In contrast, of the seven men that I contacted, one declined and two stopped responding to my attempts to set up an appointment. I then had to start over and find another male interviewee.

I tried to follow my initial plan and thought about contacting more people, but I eventually gave in to the natural unfolding of this part of the project, because at least two of the interviews lasted over an hour instead of the anticipated 30 to 45 minutes, and they yielded a rich variety of insights. Thus, I decided that eight informants would suffice.

I now give a short description of each participant, a summary of the conversation, and key points from my field notes with interpretations and comments about these points.

6.3.2 Vignettes of participants

Having reflected on the best way of contacting people for my study, I decided that I would start with a personal connection and ask them to suggest other potential interviewees. I felt that this means of making contact would enable me to avoid selecting people based on my perception of their likelihood to engage (or to have engaged in the past) with CFrA. I wanted to allow the possibility that some of my interviewees might not engage with CFrA at all. For this reason, I also chose not to mention CFrA to those of my contacts who suggested others, but rather to give succinct information highlighting the fact that I wanted to discuss their journey from Cameroon to the Western city they lived in, and the languages they spoke.

Once I was in contact with the interviewees, I explained the project by email, and I sent them the information sheet, which mentioned 'Camfranglais', as the

title of my project at the time was 'Camfranglais in the Diaspora', and the consent form. The form stated, "*The study aims at examining the language practices of Cameroonians living in Paris, France and London, UK. This will be done using interviews, which will be recorded at a convenient location and time for you. This will be an opportunity to talk about your experience as a Cameroonian living abroad, especially with regard to your language practices.*" Most participants seemed to draw from this description in their conversations with me, even though they obviously noticed the word Camfranglais at the top of the form. I purposely used the vagueness of the phrase 'language practices' to keep the conversation as open as possible. I told them to simply tell me their story and what languages they spoke at different times in their lives.

Most of the interviews ended up being about identity construction; the interviewees spent a lot of time speaking about their personal lives, the way they grew up, what makes them who they are.

I felt comfortable letting them express themselves, giving them the opportunity to self-represent, particularly because they live in a context where imagined representations of who they are, are imposed on them by the general public, by colleagues, in the media and through micro (and macro) aggressions and different 'othering' incidents, often on a daily basis.

I selected below the excerpts that most closely related to the topic of this thesis and included in the vignettes details that give a broad understanding of who the participants are linguistically and the place of language in their lives.

6.3.3. Adam

At the time of the interview, Adam was 43 years old. Born in France, he lived in Cameroon from infancy to the age of 21 when he was sent back to France to study music. His father is a retired academic and his mother a retired secondary school headteacher. Adam was eager to leave Cameroon as a young adult,

because there were no educational institutions offering music studies. Adam studied jazz and classical music and holds a classical music teaching certificate. He taught classical music in a French conservatoire. At the time of the interview, he had been living in London for 11 years. I witnessed him speaking CFrA in person and over the phone or on Skype, mainly with friends he knew in Cameroon who now live in Europe. Adam describes himself as a French speaker, stating that French was the most frequently spoken language in his family home. He mentions at some point in the conversation that he understands Duala, his mother tongue, but that he does not speak it fluently. I start the conversation by asking about his language practices.

Extract 1:

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| I: | <p>quelles sont tes pratiques langagières,
[...]⁹⁰ les langues que tu as utilisées
(.), si elles ont (.) une signification
particulière (.), si elles n'en ont aucune
(.) voilà quoi//</p> | <p>what are your language practices
[...] the languages you have used (.),
if they have (.) any particular
significance (.), if they don't have any
(.) that's it//</p> |
| 1 | <p>[bon] disons que hmm (...) ma
première langue parlée c'est le
Français (...)// parce que humm j'suis
né en France et puis j'ai des parents
qui étaient (.) influencés par- la société
moderne en F-française, donc euh⁹¹
qui ont fait des études euh en France</p> | <p>[so] let's say hmm (...) my first
spoken language is French (...)//
because hmm I was born in France
and I had parents who were (.)
influenced by modern society in F-
French society, so err who studied err
in France</p> |

⁹⁰Omitted text – repetitions etc.

⁹¹'euh' is an "onomatopée d'hésitation", an onomatopoeia of hesitation, indicating that the member or speaker is looking for the appropriate term to express their thought – see Seoane, 2016, p. 9

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| 2 | je pense que c'est pour ça que le Français était (.) p-plus parlé chez nous hein je veux dire à la maison quoi (.)// et hmm (.)= | I think that's why French was (.) spoken more at home eh I mean in our house basically (.)// and hmm (.)= |
| I: | =pourquoi (.) pourquoi (.) qu'est-ce que l'influence de la France a à voir (.) là-dedans ? (.) pourquoi tu dis ça (.) ? pourquoi (.) ? | =why (.) why (.) what does the influence of France have to do (.) with this (.)? why do you say that (.)? why (.)? |
| 3 | parce que c'était (...) je pense que ap-disons qu'après (...) les (.) les-les l-euh (.) indépendances (.) tous les enfants de ma génération (.) je veux dire (.) entre parenthèses <i>middle-class</i> hein (.) qui sont nés en France (.) | because it was (...) I think aft-let's say after (...) the (.) the-the t- err (.) independence (.) all the children of my generation (.) I mean (...) quote unquote <i>middle class</i> eh (.) who were born in France (.) |
| 4 | très peu de ces enfants parlent euh (...) parlaient autre langue que le français quoi (.)// | very few of these children speak err (.) spoke other language than French basically (.) |

Adam explains this pattern by saying Cameroonian middle-class parents at the time thought that learning to speak vernaculars would impede the children's ability to master French⁹²; he comments that those who were only proficient speakers of vernaculars were perceived as being backward, and also, that living in the cosmopolitan capital of Cameroon which was inhabited by people from various ethnic groups whose mother tongues differed hugely, meant that French was the language of communication. His use of 'quote unquote' before he mentions social class indicates some level of discomfort that he experiences

⁹² This is confirmed by most participants, and it is something I experienced personally, albeit from the vantage point of a linguistically 'woke' upper middle-class family, i.e., one where all language forms were valued and where children were taught to speak, read and write their vernaculars as well as English and French.

when spelling out his privileged status comparatively to the social status of more economically deprived children.

Extract 2:

- I: donc tu disais que tu parlais français ? so you were saying you spoke French?
- 1 oui j'étais à Messa où on (...) parlait yes I was in Messa where people (...) (...)
 (...) que (...) français (...) et puis hmm spoke (...) French (...) and hmm (...)
 (...) je me rappelle dans les années I remember in the (...) 70s- between
 (...) 70- entre 79 et 80 (...) 79 and 80 (...)
- 2 un jour on était à Messa et on a vu one day we were in Messa and we
 hmm (...) un groupe de de (.) de (...) saw hmm (...) a group of of (.) of (...)
 de ce que nous on appelait les voyous what we called ruffians (.)
 (.)
- 3 c'était des enfants qui étaient pas they were children who were not like
 comme nous (.) des enfants (...) d'un us (.) children (...) from a (.) very very
 milieu (.) très très pauvre hein très poor background eh really und- (...)
 dép- (...) de hmm (.) défavorisé qui und hmm (.) underprivileged which
 était la Briqueterie was la Briqueterie
- 4 ils sont venus on était dans la piscine they came we were in the pool (.)
 (.) on (...) on nageait à la piscine de we (.) we were swimming in the pool
 Messa et ces enfants en fait (.) in Messa and these children actually
 voulait (...) prendre nos habits (.) (.) wanted to (...) take our clothes (.)
 prendre tout ce qu'on avait mis de côté take everything we had put aside
- 5 parce que nous on se (...) on (...) on se because we were (...) we (...) we
 baignait quoi et (...) et ils parlaient (.) were bathing basically and (...) and

en une langue on ne comprenait pas
ils di- il y avait des mots de français
(...) et du- mélangé avec une autre
langue quoi (.) on-personne de nous
ne comprenait quoi (...)//

they were speaking (.) a language we
didn't understand they s- there were
words in French (...) and some-
mixed with another language
basically (.) we-none of us
understood basically (.)//

In Extract 2, Adam gives a brief chronology of the appearance of CFrA, stating that he first heard it spoken by teens from poor backgrounds, drawing a distinction between these children's economic status and the status of the families in his neighbourhood. His hesitation to describe them as poor (that I identified because he was repeating himself and taking more time to choose his words, see turns 3, 4 and 5 under Extract 2 above) is noteworthy, especially in light of his use of the term « ces gens-là »⁹³ in the extract that follows. This term signals a clear social distinction between Adam and his friends on one hand, and the children from poorer neighbourhoods on the other. When narrating his first encounter with CFrA, he refers to it as “their language” (Extract 3, turn 1 below). Extract 3, turn 4 illustrates another change of function of CFrA, from the language used when one ‘did not want to be understood’, to one that *has* to be used, that cannot be avoided, when communicating with close friends (see Extract 5, turn 2).

Extract 3:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | <p>donc et a-au contact de ces gens-là
on a commencé à apprendre la
langue (...) b- ok (.) gi moi (.) gi lui (.)
non gi lui gi lui (...) [inaudible] après</p> | <p>so and i- in contact with those people we
started learning the language (...) b- ok
(.) give me (.) give him (.) no give him
give him (...) [inaudible] afterwards we</p> |
|---|---|--|

⁹³This terminology has been written about in the context of France as a symbol of the stigmatisation by mainstream White French citizens, of the disenfranchised, those who live in the banlieues, the migrants etc. as bad parents, alcoholics, violent, lazy, generally ‘unfit’ etc. See Wittner L., 1992; Pétonnet, 2017; Ritaine, 2015 and more.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| | on a commencé à comprendre comment fonctionnait un peu (...) leur langue// | started to understand a bit how (...) their language worked (...)// |
| 2 | (.) et (...) du coup (...) c'est devenu un peu une langue qu'on parlait comme ça pour s'amuser en fait (.)// | and (...) as a result (...) it became a bit a language we spoke just like that to have fun basically (.)// |
| I | mhmm | <i>mhmm</i> |
| 3 | et (...) on a compris que c'était juste un mélange de français (.) un mot (...) de français avec euh (...) un peu de vocabulaire (.) anglais quoi// | and (...) we understood that it was just a mixture of French (.) a word (...) in French with err (...) a bit of (.) English vocabulary basically// |
| I | mhmm | mhmm |
| 4 | ce qui fait que hmm (...) nous aussi à la maison maintenant quand on ne voulait pas se faire comprendre par les parents (...) on (...) on parlait aussi cette langue euh (...) qu'on avait appris (...) dans la rue par (...) ces enfants-là quoi// | which means hmm (...) now when we were at home when we did not want our parents to understand us (...) we (...) we also spoke that language err (...) we learnt (...) in the streets from (...) those children basically// |

Extract 4:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | et (...) ça c'est (.) cette langue-là est devenue ma l- (.) ma langue nationale quoi (...)// | and (...) that is (.) that language became my l- (.) my national language basically (...)// |
| I | ah bon ((laughter), | is that so ((laughter), |

- 2 ouais ça (...) tous les jeunes de ma yeah that (...) all the young people of my
 génération (...) ne parlaient que ça generation (...) only spoke that in fact in
 en fait à l'école c'était pareil quoi school it was the same basically (.)//
 (.)//

Adam's love for CFrA and his attachment to the register is apparent in his comments. Not only does he say the register symbolises his familiarity with the people he speaks CFrA with, but his attitude changes remarkably as he says it became his "national language" (Extract 4, turn 1), after an initial adjustment period when he had trouble understanding what this language was, as mentioned in Extract 1 above.

Overall, I mostly stuck to neutral reactions (e.g., hmm, ok, yes etc.) and only resorted to participating more actively when I needed to probe specific points further, or when the participant seemed reluctant to share spontaneously. In some cases, however, it seemed almost obligatory to react in a more pronounced way. Adam and I both know the significance of (former colonial) national languages, and also know how illegitimate CFrA is in official discourses in Cameroon, so to call CFrA 'his national language' was counterhegemonic, anti-establishment, irreverent, especially for someone from Adam's socioeconomic background. It is all this shared knowledge that gave weight to his statement.

The extract illustrates meaning being co-constructed by me as the interviewer and him as the interviewee. By laughing with him, I signalled that I accepted his declaration as an amusing paradox and showed alignment with him. Had I not laughed at this point, he would have known that the effect he wanted to create had been missed completely, and this might have sent the interview in a different direction. This communicative event illustrates the importance of taking into account an understanding of the interview as co-constructed discourse.

Adam's statement about what CFrA means to him resonates with some scholars' statements about the symbolic value of CFrA in a highly linguistically diverse country (Harter, 2007; Schröder, 2007; Kießling, 2004) and Stein-Kanjora's (op cit., 2009) claim that CFrA might be the only Cameroonian language capable of becoming a national language. CFrA's importance in Adam's linguistic repertoire can also be explained by the fact that the other languages of his repertoire are either 'formal' – standard French and English – or one that he does not speak fluently, Duala.

Extract 5:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | avec ceux que (.) av-avec ceux que je connais depuis des années (.) des enfin (.) les amis de- des de longue date euh (.) dès que je les vois euh c'est automatique hein (...)// | with those that (.) w-with those I have known for years (.) I m-I mean (.) fr- old friends err (.) as soon as I see them err it's automatic eh (...)// |
| 2 | on peut pas (.) tenir une conversation sans parler (.) cette langue// | we can't (.) have a conversation without speaking (.) this language// |
| l | mais comment ça se fait parce que tu m'as dit que vous parliez ça= | but how come because you told me that you spoke it= |
| 3 | =parce que si on parle (.) si on parle cette langue euh (...) si on parle que le français c'est comme si on crée une petite distance entre nous quoi (...) | =because if we speak (.) if we speak that language err (...) if we speak only French it's as if we are creating a distance between each other basically (...) |
| 4 | donc (.) pour être un peu plus proches (.) nous sommes les gens de là-bas (.) nous sommes en France (.) allez voilà notre langue euh (.) qu'on parle// | so (.) to be a bit more close (.) we are people from there (.) we are in France (.) so this is our language err (.) that we speak// |

In the 5th extract, Adam explains that French creates a distance that CFrA doesn't. In saying this, he aligns with Cameroon's nation-state language ideologies, which portray standard French as a language of formality. Conversely, his statement about CFrA in the above extract supports the idea that the register signals a bond between its users, a sense of community belonging (marked for example by the repeated use of the inclusive pronouns *nous* and *notre/we* and *our*). This, he says, is the reason why he automatically speaks CFrA with old friends from Cameroon who live abroad – see Extract 5, he says, “*on peut pas/we can't have*” a conversation without speaking this language, as he argues that CFrA is the language they have in common and which originates from the environment they grew up in. He explains the paradigm shift undergone by CFrA between its appearance and the present day, stating that he and his friends now speak it for different reasons.

Adam's statement that CFrA is 'our language' confirms Beck (2010)'s point that the *raison d'être* of urban languages such as CFrA is the fact that they seem to be able to overcome ethnifying differences and have a unifying effect for speakers, as they are neither the colonial language, the language of the postcolonial elites, nor the language of one particular ethnic group.

6.3.4 Freddy

At the time of the interview, Freddy had been living in France for 7 years; he was 30. He was born and grew up in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon. His father is a retired driver and his mother a tradeswoman. He is the first one in his family to travel to Europe. He got a scholarship for excellence after his *Maîtrise* in Quantitative management to do a master's degree in France. He graduated the following year, worked for a year and a half, and then was admitted to Sciences Po with another scholarship. He then graduated from Sciences Po in 2009 with a Master's degree in Finance and works as a consultant in banking risk management. When asked about his linguistic repertoire, he initially says

he speaks French from childhood, and English at work, and that he does not speak his vernacular, Baleng. He also states that he only spoke “Francanglais” as a teenager living in Cameroon for ‘two, three or four years’, but as the conversation evolves, Freddy says he still remembers CFrA and speaks it with old friends from the same background who live in France.

Extract 1:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | <p>et euh (.) voilà j’ai été (.) bien-sûr influencé par (.) les langues en fait par les (.) le verlan avec les dialectes (.) qui sont construits autour du français et de l’anglais</p> | <p>and erm (.) that’s it I have (.) of course been influenced by (.) languages actually by the (.) verlan and dialects (.) which are built around French and English</p> |
| 2 | <p>(.) et qui se parlaient (.) en (.) en (.) comment vous dire ça (.)? euh c’est pas (.) pas les langues officielles mais qui se parlaient entre (.)</p> | <p>(.) and which were spoken (.) in (.) in (.) how can I say this (.)? err they’re not (.) not official languages but they were spoken between (.)</p> |
| 3 | <p>entre amis euh (.) entre adolescents (.) au- au Cameroun qui s’appellent Francanglais (.) que j’ai appris (.) entre amis euh (.) entre adolescents (.) au- au Cameroun</p> | <p>between friends erm (.) between teenagers (.) in- in Cameroon= which are called Francanglais (.) which I learned (.) between friends erm (.) between teenagers (.) in- in Cameroon</p> |
| I | <p>-hmm</p> | <p>-hmm</p> |
| 4 | <p>que j’ai appris (.) dans mon quartier au Cameroun (.) et euh que j’ai pas- que j’ai pratiqué pendant (.) on va dire euh deux trois quatre ans//</p> | <p>that I learnt (.) in my neighbourhood in Cameroon (.) and err that I’ve not- that I practised for (.) let’s say err two three four years//</p> |

I	oui	yes
5	ici (.) en France (.) j'ai arrêté d'en parler (.) ben j'ai arrêté de (.) de parler le Francanglais comme on l'appelle au Cameroun (.) donc voilà je garde quelques notions (.) je parle avec des anciens amis (.) qui ont le même parcours que moi//	here (.) in France (.) I stopped [speaking it] ⁹⁴ (.) well I stopped (.) speaking Francanglais as they call it in Cameroon (.) so that's it I still remember some of it (.) I speak it with old friends (.) who have the same background as I do//

In this extract, Freddy states that he “was influenced” into speaking these registers that he labels as Verlan and dialects, as they “were spoken” in his neighbourhood. Canut (2000, p. 53) argues that “the study of participants’ epilinguistic descriptive categories such as ‘language’ as opposed to ‘dialect’ [...] can reveal the appropriation of (or on the contrary, distancing from) “prior discourses legitimising these categories socially”⁹⁵. Freddy’s metalinguistic comments seem to signal that he aligns with the Cameroonian nation-state’s language ideologies, or at least that he wishes to portray himself as doing so, by distancing himself from non-standard registers. However, his statements became less prescriptive later on and he finally admitted to having spoken these registers.

He first uses the verb <*pratiquer*> for <to practise>, which is not the one usually associated with the idea of speaking a language, rather than <*parler*>, to speak. Freddy subsequently switches to *parler* when he finally states that he does speak CFrA in France⁹⁶. His statements about CFrA reveal some contradictions and his relationship with the register seems complex. His description of the

⁹⁴ He uses the wrong French word, so he literally says ‘discussing it’.

⁹⁵ “L’étude des catégories descriptives épilinguistiques émergeant au fil des discours des enquêtés, telles que « langue » s’opposant à « dialecte » ou « bien parler » s’opposant à « mal parler », peut révéler l’appropriation (ou au contraire la mise à distance) de « discours antérieurs légitimant socialement ces catégories »”.

⁹⁶ This was one of the points I would have liked to clarify with Freddy but he never got back to me.

context of use of CFrA confirms my earlier hunches about the functions of CFrA for diasporic Cameroonians, as he states that he speaks it with former friends who have experienced a similar life story to his. After roughly 20 minutes of conversation, I ask Freddy to remind me what he said about his use of CFrA in France and this time round, he makes a much stronger statement about CFrA and what it means to him in the context of France.

Extract 2:

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| I: | vous parliez un peu (.) ce (.) Francanglais comme vous l'avez appelé (.) mais qu'en France vous ne le parlez pas sauf si vous voyez (.) des amis (.) quelque chose comme ça je sais plus | you spoke a bit of (.) this (.) Francanglais as you called it (.) but that in France you don't speak it except if you meet (.) friends (.) something along those lines I am not sure anymore |
| 1 | oui (.) sauf si je rencontre des (.) des amis qui ont le même profil que moi (.), et qui l'ont appris euh (.) qui l'ont appris aussi au Cameroun (.)// | yes (.) except if I meet (.) friends who have the same profile as me (.), and who learnt it err (.) who also learnt it in Cameroon (.)// |
| 2 | mais et si- mais ici on n- on n'en parle pas hein (.) simplement entre nous (.) quand on se (.) on se rencontre en soirée (.) ou bien euh (.) des messages euh (.) | but and if- but here we d- we don't speak it eh (.) just amongst ourselves (.) when we (.) we meet up on nights out (.) or err (.) messages err (.) |
| 3 | on essaie de rentrer deux ou trois mots, parce que c'est euh (.) ça reste euh (.) euh ça reste quelque part une euh (.) euh c'est un peu quand (.) | we try and put two or three words in, because it is err (.) it is still err (.) err in a sense it is a err (.) err it's a little bit when (.) |

- 4 quand vous rencontrez votre euh (.) je when you meet your err (.) I dunno your
sais pas vot' sœur ou votre (.) votre sister or your (.) your brother (.) if you- if
frère (.) si vous- si (.), si vous avez la (.), if you have the same language well if
même langue 'fin si vous parlez (.) le you speak (.) the vernacular (.) you will
patois⁹⁷ (.), vous aurez tendance à always tend to speak to each other simply-
vous parler tout- tout simplement en simply in [the] vernacular (.)//
patois (.)//
- 5 donc c'est la même chose (.) quand je so it's the same (.) when I meet a friend
rencontre un ami avec qui euh (.) ben with whom err (.) well you grew up with (.)
on a grandi (.) c'est une façon de it's way of preserving a bond that we had
conserver un lien qu'on avait (.), (.),
- 6 donc on se retrouve euh (.) dans un so we find ourselves err (.) in a world that
monde qui n'est pas le nôtre (.) et euh is not ours (.) and err [to] show once more
[pour] montrer encore notre euh (.) our err (.) well our common err (.)
ben notre appartenance euh (.) belonging, show that we (.) we err come
commune (.), montrer le fait qu'on (.) from the same background from the same
qu'on euh vient du même milieu du area (.)
même coin (.)

Freddy compares CFrA to one's vernacular, the register one would speak with a sibling, a symbol of the fact that people have the same origin, that they belong, that they are from the same background and area. Similar statements have been made by all the other participants except one, which indicates that CFrA does indeed seem to play an important role in their negotiations of home and belonging outside Cameroon.

Another interesting point in terms of the relationship between language and identity that Freddy raises is the question of assimilation into French culture

⁹⁷The word *patois* is used in Cameroonian working-class families to refer to vernaculars.

through one's accent. To my question about ways in which he had to adapt to his new environment, if at all, he mentions that as a speaker of French with a Cameroonian accent, he felt that France does not leave any other choice than to change one's way of speaking. He had very good knowledge of French and was often complimented about it. As he explains in the following Extract, one of the challenges he faced was the speed at which people spoke and their accents. Freddy did not want to change his accent because (as he argues) he was already established in his cultural identity when he arrived in France, and he did not want to lose it, even though he did want to be understood; his solution was to alter his pronunciation as needed without losing too much of his accent.

Extract 3:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>I: alors vous arrivez dans ce nouveau pays bien-sûr vous parlez français avant donc euh (.) c'est toujours le français (.) quelle est- quelle est votre expérience au niveau de la langue (.) qu'est-ce qui change (.) ou bien ça change pas comment (.) que- est-ce que ça que- est-ce que ça a un impact quelconque sur vous (.) le changement de pays quoi ?</p> | <p>so you arrive in this new country (.) of course you already speak French before so (.) it is still French (.) what is- what is your experience with regard to the language (.) what changes (.) or how do things not change (.) does that- what- does- does it have any impact at all on you (.) you know moving to a new country?</p> |
| <p>1 le changement de pays euh (.) au niveau de la langue fin (.) hormis des aspects euh (.) d'adaptation 'fin (.) euh au climat à la façon de (.) de faire les choses aux us et coutumes du pays</p> | <p>moving to a new country erm (.) with regard to the language well (.) apart from issues erm (.) of adaptation (.) erm to the climate to the way (.) people do things to the customs and traditions of the country</p> |
| <p>I: oui</p> | <p>yes</p> |

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 2 | <p>donc plus que (.) plus que dans
d'autres pays je pense qu'en France on
a besoin (.) de rentrer dans
l'environnement français (.) ça reste
euh (.) euh ça reste quelque part une
euh (.) euh c'est un peu quand (.) je
trouve pas que (.) la France soit le
meilleur (.) meilleur exemple (.) [en
termes] euh (.) d'adaptation et
d'assimilation</p> | <p>so more than (.) more than in other
countries I think in France you need to (.)
try to get into the French environment,
because it is err (.) it is still err (.) err in a
sense it is a err (.) err it's a little bit when
(.) I don't think (.) France is the best (.)
best example [in terms of] (.) adaptation
and assimilation</p> |
| 3 | <p>il a fallu s'adapter (.) euh (...) [...] ⁹⁸
s'habituer à la manière (.) de parler (.)
de former les phrases (.) euh (.) à- un
certain rythme (.) un débit (.) qu'on n'a
pas forcément quand on a (.) quand on
arrive (.)</p> | <p>I had to adapt (.) erm (...) [...] to get used
to the way (.) of speaking (.) of forming
sentences (.) err (.) a certain rhythm (.) a
pace (.) that you're not necessarily able to
have when you (.) when you arrive (.)</p> |
| 4 | <p>euh je n'ai pas envie de parler
d'accents (.) parce que c'est un
problème qu'on a
énormément ici en (.) en France</p> | <p>err I don't want to talk about accents (.)
because it's a huge problem that
we often face here in (.) in France</p> |
| I | <p>oui</p> | <p>yes</p> |
| 5 | <p>j'ai (.) j'ai pas voulu changer mon (.)
mon accent du tout</p> | <p>I (.) I didn't want to change my (.) my
accent at all</p> |
| I | <p>d'accord</p> | <p>yes</p> |

⁹⁸Here Freddy repeats the same thing he said just before about adapting to customs and traditions.

- 6 --mais (.) il fallait (.) parler avec (.) plus de (.) de ferveur (.) pour articuler se faire comprendre (.) donc voilà ç'a été euh (.) euh le (.) le principal problème que j'ai eu hein (.) donc voilà// --but (.) I had to (.) speak with (.) more (.) enthusiasm (.) to enunciate to make myself understood (.) so there that was err (.) erm the (.) the main problem I had (.) so that's it//
- I: mais pourquoi vous (.) ça m'a vraiment intéressée ce que vous avez dit (.) vous avez dit je n'ai pas voulu changer mon accent du tout (.) est-ce qu'il y a une raison particulière pour ça ? but why did you (.) I was really interested by what you said (.) you said I didn't want to change my accent at all (.) is there any particular reason for that?
- 7 euh simplement parce que euh je (.) j'ai eu la chance d'arriver en France étant déjà constitué (.) en tant que personne en tant que (.) euh en tant en tant qu'être humain (.) j'avais déjà ma constitution culturelle erm simply because I (.) I was lucky enough to arrive in France fully formed (.) as a person as (.) erm as as a human being (.) I already had my cultural constitution
- I --oui --yes
- 8 --ce qui veut dire que je ne voulais pas perdre mes (.) mes origines (.) et j'avais compris tout de suite que ce qui allait faire ma particularité dans ce monde ci (.) c'était le fait que (.) euh je garde une certaine (.) une chose qui pourrait me caractériser (.) qui pourrait me reconnaître --which means I didn't want to lose my (.) my roots (.) and I understood right away that what would differentiate me from others in this context (.) was the fact that (.) erm I keep a certain (.) something that might characterise me (.) that might [make me recognisable]
- 9 euh (.) et euh je pense que les gens erm (.) and I think people notice that as

aussi le voient (.) euh (.) cette espèce
 de (.) euh de je veux dire (.)
 d'assimilation ou bien (.) de (.) copie (.)
 entre guillemets de copiage (.) de la
 façon dont les autres parlent n'est
 qu'une façon de perdre son être son
 être culturel (.)//

well (.) erm (.) that sort of (.) erm I mean
 (.) assimilation or even (.) of (.) copy (.)
 quote unquote of copying (.) the way other
 people speak it is just a way of losing
 one's being one's cultural self//

Where Lovely (below) for instance, switches accents depending on the context she finds herself in, without that causing her any internal conflict in terms of her cultural integrity, Freddy feels quite strongly that this 'performance of Frenchness' which implies letting go of his Cameroonian French accent or adopting an accent that would be more aligned with a standard 'French from France' (or rather Parisian) accent, symbolises the loss of some of his Cameroonian identity. Freddy also appears to make word choices that tone down his thoughts or make his comments seem less controversial. Like Adam and Thalia, he precedes his criticism of what he calls 'copying the way other people speak' with 'quote unquote'.

Every criticism of France was very cautiously and diplomatically expressed, such as his mention of the challenges posed by French (dominant) language ideologies and folk attitudes to language in France (such as negative perceptions of African accents). In contrast, Freddy seemed to show less hesitation when it came to criticising certain choices made by Cameroonians, such as his claim that changing one's accent is losing one's Cameroonian identity.

With regards to CFrA, the conversation highlights the complexities of negotiating between one's personal experience and enjoyment of a language practice, and the weight of the ideologies of language one grows up with, what van Dijk (1998, p. 8) refers to as "the shared framework(s) of social beliefs that organize and coordinate the social interpretations and practices of groups and

their members”. Freddy seems to orient to different normative centres, which allow for different speech forms depending on the context he finds himself in, which brings to mind the notion of polycentricity (Blommaert et al., 2005). His statements about the languages of his repertoire indicate that each register has its place, the ‘market’ where it is the most desirable currency.

I suspect that Freddy’s perception of our conversation as being part of academic research, and his ideas about the ‘appropriate’ language forms to be used in formal contexts, affected his statements.

6.3.5 Lovely

Lovely is a 35-year-old woman who had been living in France for 14 years at the time of interview. She originates from the south of Cameroon and she grew up in Douala, where she lived until she was 18, and then she moved to France. Her mother was a flight attendant and her father was the CEO of a Cameroonian national company. Like Adam, she spoke French at home with her parents and siblings. Her parents sent her to France to finish secondary school and continue her studies. Lovely mentions that when she arrived in France, she adopted a ‘white-sounding’ local French accent to be easily understood (see Telep 2019, Telep 2018, Chun 2011, Preston 1992, for references to this practice), and used a Cameroonian accent with Africans. Like Freddy, she believes this accent-switch is essential for any foreigner who lives in France to be well integrated in French society. However, when asked whether she sees herself as a Francophone, Lovely replies that she doesn’t, but says she has a double culture, French and African. Like Adam, Lovely describes CFrA as *la langue nationale*.

Extract 1:

I: et alors (.) donc tu viens (.) tu es and so (.) so you arrive (.) you are a
francophone en fait (.) tu es- ou- ou- ‘fin Francophone actually (.)you are- or-

	(.) ça c'est mon interprétation (.) toi tu te définissais 'fin tu te définirais comment (.) quand tu es arrivée ? tu te voyais comment ? comme une francophone ?	well (.) that's my interpretation (.) you how did you define well how would you define yourself (.) when you arrived? did you see yourself as a Francophone?
1	francophone c'est-à-dire ? ⁹⁹	Francophone meaning?
I	j'en sais rien (.) si on te disait euh (.) tu sais comme euh (.) certains disent euh (.) peut-être je suis anglo (...) je suis anglophone je suis (.) toi tu- tu aurais dit quoi=	I don't know (.) if someone said to you err (.) you know like err (.) some say err (.) maybe I am an Anglo (.) I am an anglophone I am (.) you-what would you have said=
2	= franchement je ne me suis jamais vue comme une francophone par contre j'ai toujours dit que j'ai une double culture la culture (.) française et la culture (.) africaine	=frankly I've never seen myself as a Francophone on the other hand I've always said I have a double culture the (.) French culture and the (.) African culture
I	ok (.) ok	ok (.) ok
3	mais francophone ça ne m'a jamais traversé l'esprit//	but Francophone that never crossed my mind//
I	d'accord c'est intéressant (.) et au niveau des langues (.) tu parles (.) français bien-sûr	ok that's interesting (.) and with regard to languages (.) you speak (.) French of course
4	oui	yes

⁹⁹ Lovely's question is surprising because the Anglophone/Francophone dichotomy has been a much-debated reality in Cameroon for over 30 years.

- 1 et les langues du pays ? est-ce que tu en parles ? and languages from home? do you speak any?
- 5 alors au niveau des langues je parle le français alors les langues du pays (.) je patauge (.) entre (.) le basaa, le duala, le bulu (.) un p- non l'ewondo je ne parle pas mais je comprends mais je patauge je [vraiment] je (.) **patauger dans la mare**¹⁰⁰ (laughter) so with regard to languages I speak French so the languages from home (.) I flounder (.) between (.) Basaa, Duala, Bulu (.) a bit of- no Ewondo I don't speak but I understand but I flounder I [really] I to **flounder in the pond**

Extract 2:

- 1 pourquoi je me suis intéressée à d'autres langues ? (.) tout simplement parce qu'à la maison on ne parlait pas (.) au Cameroun on ne nous a pas appris à parler le bulu why did I develop an interest in other languages? (.) simply because at home we didn't speak (.) in Cameroon we weren't taught to speak Bulu
- l: anhan¹⁰¹ hm hmm
- 2 et je trouvais- et je trouvais que c'était une perte énorme (.) et cela a fait que j'ai eu a- envie d'apprendre d'autres¹⁰² langues et je me suis dit comme je suis novice (.) je vais me battre et je vais arriver à les parler//¹⁰³ and I thought- and I considered that a great loss(.) and because of that I became keen on learning other languages and I said to myself since I am a beginner (.) I will make every effort and I will learn to speak them//

¹⁰⁰Said in a sing-song tone with laughter.

¹⁰¹Cameroonian onomatopoeia signifying acknowledgment, "I hear you".

¹⁰²Accentuated.

¹⁰³Lovely then gives details of the languages she is learning – not transcribed.

- 3 et (.) et du fait que je ne parlais pas Bulu and (.) and because I didn't speak Bulu (.)
 (.) quand j'étais au Cameroun en fait je when I was in Cameroon actually I spoke the
 parlais beaaauucoup¹⁰⁴ la langue national language a loooooot ¹⁰⁶//
 nationale//
- l qui est (.) ? which is (.)
- 4 du pays (.) qui est le fran-can-glais¹⁰⁵ of the country (.) which is Fran-can-glais

Lovely then explains specifically what 'Francanglais' entails, then stating that it is the only language or dialect in Cameroon that everyone can speak, and that she is extremely proud of this register. She says about the other languages, "those aren't languages everyone can speak" (« *ce ne sont pas des langues que tout le monde peut parler.* »)

Lovely started speaking CFrA in her 2nd year of secondary school, where (like Freddy and Boris) she explains that all social classes rub shoulders and where upper middle-class kids pick up CFrA. She commented that it was mostly boys who spoke CFrA. Like most participants, she spoke CFrA only with siblings, peers, people from the same generation, because she described it as familiar language, not to be spoken with parents for example, as she feels that this would not be respectful. She also insisted on the fact that it belonged to her generation, it was theirs, and that they didn't want parents to understand. It was also something she could call hers because she didn't learn to speak her Cameroonian vernacular. This echoes Essono's aforementioned point about CFrA being a sort of appropriation of language for a generation raised solely with the former colonial French official language.

¹⁰⁴Sic

¹⁰⁵Lovely made a point of separating the syllables.

¹⁰⁶French word order affects the translation – the national language which is ...

In the 3rd extract, Lovely explains her accent switch strategy and why it is needed for easy integration in French society.

Extract 3:

- l: et au niveau de (.) tu disais que tu venais en France souvent donc euh (.) euh par exemple certaines personnes peuvent avoir des difficultés d'adaptation (.) à l'accent (.) euh français (.) donc si toi tu venais souvent j'imagine que c'était (.) ça se passait comment (.) c'était naturel ?
- and with regards to (.) you said you often came to France err (.) for example some people can find it difficult to adapt (.) to the accent (.) err the French accent (.) so if you often came I can imagine that it was (.) how did it go (.) was it natural?
- 1 ben écoutes euh¹⁰⁷, quand je suis arrivée en France j'avais pas du tout de problèmes d'adaptation hein pour euh ce qui était de m'exprimer, ce qui était de parler euh
- well listen err, when I arrived in France I had no trouble adapting err for err everything to do with expressing myself, for speaking err
- 2 je n'avais aucun problème, aucun accent ils me comprenaient très bien (.) je les comprenais très bien euh (.) j'arrivais à parler comme eux quand c'était nécessaire sachant que quand j'étais avec les miens, mon accent changeait automatiquement mais euh (.) quand je suis avec les Français je parle comme les Français (.)=
- I had no problem, no accent they understood me very well (.) I understood them very well err (.) I was able to speak like them when necessary bearing in mind that when I was with my people, my accent changed automatically but err (.) when I'm with the French I speak like the French (.)=
- l: =oui oui
- =yes yes

¹⁰⁷ Lovely slips naturally into a Parisian accent when saying this.

- 3 et quand je suis avec les Africains (.)¹⁰⁸ je parle à l'africaine and when I am with Africans (.) I speak in the African style

Lovely demonstrates her ability to switch accents as needed by slipping from one accent to the other, shifting from the standard African-French accent she had been using from the start of our conversation to an accent and intonations that lean very closely towards a standard Parisian accent, thus illustrating that this is a way of speaking, an identity she can summon at will. She also uses <ben euh>, with <ben> being a coherence marking device similar to “well”, and <euh>, a marker of hesitation. She also drops the French pre-verbal negative *ne*, saying *j'avais pas* vs *je n'avais pas*. These devices are used very widely in France and of course by teenagers like the ones she went to school with, and they are not used in Cameroonian French. The tendency to drop the pre-verbal negative particle *ne* in informal spoken French, especially frequent in young people's communications, has been documented by numerous scholars (Reyner, Nadasdi & Mougeon, 2010; Rowlett, 2009; Ashby, 1981). Not all diasporic Cameroonians (or other Africans for that matter) are that successful in switching from one accent to the other, as evidenced by the infamous *chocobit*¹⁰⁹, called *whitisage* by Telep (2015) frequently observed in France-based Africans' speech.

Like Freddy, Lovely says she does switches accents to be understood easily, arguing that the French (i.e. White French people) are very closed and unwilling to adapt to foreigners' ways, comparatively to other populations she has been in contact with in her travels.

¹⁰⁸ She switches back to an African French accent for this part of her statement.

¹⁰⁹ This term refers to the clumsy accent that results from botched attempts to pronounce words like French speakers born, educated, and raised in the *Hexagone*. It is difficult to understand those who speak that way, and it has been the object of derision in numerous stand up comedians' sketches and amongst the general population in Africa and abroad. Also spelt *shokobi*, *shogobi* etc. see Quéffelec, 2007.

In the 4th extract, Lovely describes a WhatsApp-based community that she is a member of and in which communications are exclusively in CFrA.

Extract 4

I	et maintenant tu es en France depuis quoi (.) euh (.) plus de 15 ans non ?	and now you have been in France for what (.) err (.) over 15 years isn't it?
1	non (.) 14 ans//	no (.) 14 years//
I	14 ans donc j'étais pas loin (.) et (.) et qu'est devenue ta langue nationale alors maintenant ? [laughter] tu vois ? (.) ou bien c'est le français qui est devenu ta langue nationale quoi (laughter)	14 years so I wasn't too far off (.) and (.) and what has become of your national language then? [laughter] you see? (.) or French has now become your national language
2	non	no
I	non hein ?	no eh?
3	ma langue nationale est là elle demeure (.)	my national language is there it endures (.)
I	ouais	yeah
4	elle s'accroît même	it even grows
I	comment ?	how?
5	parce que je suis au courant de nouveaux mots (...) je suis en contact régulier et permanent avec le Cameroun	because I am aware of new words (...) I am in regular and permanent contact with Cameroon

1	par téléphone (.) non ?	by phone (.) no?
6	non (.) pas par téléphone (.) via une application (.) via WhatsApp et du coup en fait sur WhatsApp on a créé un groupe euh nous sommes (.) un groupe d'anciens (.) camarades et euh qui (.) sont un peu partout dans le monde et tout et euh (.)	no (.) not by phone via an app (.) via WhatsApp and basically on WhatsApp we created a group err we are (.) a group of former (.) classmates and err who (.) are scattered around the world and err (.)
7	donc dans le groupe (...) on a- il y a- il y en a qui sont au Cameroun il y en a qui sont aux États-Unis (.) qui sont au Canada (.) qui sont (.) voilà un peu partout (...) et donc quand on se retrouve pour discuter ce n'est surement pas pour parler le français soutenu	so in the group (...) we have- there are- there are- some who are in Cameroon some are in the United States (.) in Canada (.) some are (.) that's it scattered everywhere (...) so when we come together again to chat it is certainly not to speak formal French

Lovely's description of the WhatsApp group, its function and its importance to the group members, points to my earlier postulate that diasporic Cameroonians such as my participants are likely to reconstruct home away from home in dedicated (physical or virtual) spaces with others who share a similar experience of displacement from their home of origin, and whose integration in the host society poses the challenges discussed above. While the other participants turn to CFrA in the context of episodic encounters with friends from Cameroon, Lovely and her friends have proactively created such a space, in a manner similar to the Facebook Group studied in this project. Her final statement that they 'certainly won't' speak French in this space confirms other participants' statements that CFrA is a 'language' of closeness and familiarity and conversely, standard French is a language that signals distance and

formality. This statement clarifies at least partially the role or the function of CFrA for these diasporic Cameroonians.

6.3.6 Craig

Craig arrived in the suburbs of Paris in his late teens. He chose not to disclose his exact age at the time of the interview, but it is safe to assume that he was in his mid-forties (based on his former classmates' ages). He describes himself as a Bamileke aristocrat (from the west of Cameroon). He and his siblings grew up in his parents' home in Yaoundé, in a neighbourhood mainly populated by European expats amongst other upper middle-class families, where he lived until he left Cameroon to move to France. His mother was a businesswoman and an executive secretary, and his father was a director of foreign trade and later got involved in politics. Like all the participants, Craig spoke French at home with his parents and siblings. His parents sent him to France to finish secondary school and continue his studies. After secondary school and a few months studying law in a Paris university, he went to another university in Montreal, Canada where he got involved in music. This would lead him to become a professional musician and tour the world. Craig speaks French and his parents' Cameroonian language, which he calls his mother tongue. In the first extract below, to my question about which language(s) define him, Craig mentions that apart from his mother tongue, it would have been good for him to learn English¹¹⁰.

Extract 1

I	ce que tu dis- ce- ce que tu dis est intéressant (.) le français c'est la langue du colonisateur (.) tu dis	what you are saying- what-what you are saying is interesting (.) French is the language of the coloniser (.) you said
---	---	---

¹¹⁰We had technical issues during this chat so I ended up not getting round to asking why English was important to him. I chose to let him carry on once we were connected again.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | <p>ouais voilà c'est la langue du- mais bon
je veux dire quand même il faut (...) je dis
que ça ne sert à rien de vivre en autarcie
tu vois</p> | <p>yeah that's it is the language of- but
well I mean anyway we must (...) I am
saying there is no point in living in
autarchy you see</p> |
| I | <p>oui</p> | <p>yes</p> |
| 2 | <p>moi je pense que-quand même que
l'anglais (.) c'est tu vois c'est (.) c'est-
c'est- la langue- la langue qui est parlée
partout (.) la langue internationale (.) pour
le business (.) pour beaucoup de choses
(.) tu vois un peu ? (.) je pense que (.)
hormis ma langue maternelle euh (.)
l'anglais aurait été quelque chose de de
de de de de de (.) de super à apprendre</p> | <p>I think that- anyway English is you see it
is (.) it is- it is the language- the language
that is spoken everywhere (.) the
international language (.) for business (.)
for many things (.) do you see what I
mean? (.) I think (.) apart from my mother
tongue err English would have been
a a a a a a (.) very good [language] for
me to learn</p> |

When asked whether he defines himself as a francophone, he states that his national language (i.e. his Cameroonian vernacular) is important, to the extent that he teaches it to his children. Craig is the only participant who mentions the next generation. His reply (and especially the repetition of <c'est> for "it's", and the fact that he says his children find his Cameroonian mother tongue funny) suggests that he may not be that confident about his children's interest in their father's mother tongue. He never even mentions its name. One would assume that their attitudes to language and identity would differ from their father's because unlike him, they have only known one home: France.¹¹¹

Extract 2

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| I: | <p>donc toi tu es défini (.) par ta langue</p> | <p>so you are defined (.) by your mother</p> |
|----|--|--|

¹¹¹ It would have been interesting to explore this further, but it falls slightly beyond the scope of this thesis.

	maternelle mais le français est important aussi (.) d'accord	tongue but French is also important (.) ok
1	non mais (.) re ¹¹² - non mais évidemment parce que regarde déjà on vit dans un pays (.) bon même si on a la nationalité de ce pays c'est pas notre pays (.) on vient de quelque part	no but (.) lo- no but obviously because see well we live in a country (.) well even if we have citizenship of that country it's not our country (.) we come from somewhere
I:	oui	yes
2	bon ben je crois que c'est ¹¹³ la racine comme on (.) j'sais pas c'est important (.)	well I think it's it's the root as we (.) I dunno it's important (.)
I:	oui	yes
3	et d'ailleurs (.) à mes enfants j'essaie de (.) de parler quand je leur dis viens to ¹¹⁴ (...) viens (.) des trucs comme ça (.) je parle à (.) et quand nous sommes ensemble (.) et tu vois j'essaie de (...) et je sens que (.) elles s'intéressent à ça	and besides (.) with my children I try to (.) to speak when I say to them come to (...) come (.) stuff like that (.) I speak to (.) and when we are together (.) and you see I try to (...) and and and I feel that (.) they are interested in that
I:	bien-sûr	of course
4	en fait (.) elles trouvent que c'est c'est c'est marrant	actually (.) they think it's it's it's funny

¹¹² I assumed that Craig was going to say, <regarde> for "look", as he (and other Cameroonians) tend to say, "non mais regarde" when chatting animatedly about a topic that they are passionate about.

¹¹³ Craig doesn't specify what 'it' refers to; line 2 above follows directly after turn 1 and my 'yes' response. He seems to make the assumption that I understand what he means, which I do, his Cameroonian vernacular.

¹¹⁴ 'Come' in Craig's Cameroonian language.

I:	oui	yes
5	mais comme (.) [laughter] (.) mais mais c'est important je veux dire (.) notre langue je veux dire comme bon (.)	but as (.) [laughter] (.) but but but it's important I mean (.) our language I mean as well (.)

To the question 'is French also important to you?', Craig replies that French is obviously important to him, because he lives in France and is a French national. He adds that being a French national doesn't mean France is "our country". He draws a clear distinction between functional citizenship and belonging. His use of the inclusive 'our' points to his and my Cameroonian origin, indicating that he believes this gives us something in common, and defines our identity more legitimately than our legal status as French nationals.

This evokes Freddy's comment about living 'in a world that is not ours', and what he calls 'our common belonging' summoned at will by simply speaking to another Cameroonian in their vernacular (or in CFrA). This is noteworthy and not surprising in the context of France, as brown-looking people are frequently asked what their origin is¹¹⁵ in ordinary, day to day conversations (see for example Dumitru, 2015). In his awareness of this subtle yet insidious form of microaggression, Craig concludes his argument by saying that 'we come from somewhere', one would wager, almost as a way of legitimising his worth as a brown Frenchman. His statement brings to mind well-known French songwriter Maxime Le Forestier's autobiographical song '*Né quelque part*'¹¹⁶ which claims that people do not choose their place of birth nor their family and that it is thus unfair to mistreat them for something they had no choice about.

Craig explains that "our language" is important. Adam uses that same phrase, but in reference to CFrA as opposed to a Cameroonian national language. Craig then explains that French and English are "the languages of the

¹¹⁵ « Vous êtes de quelle origine ? »

¹¹⁶ Born somewhere.

coloniser”, that knowing French is an obligation, something that must be dealt with, almost like a necessary evil. In making this statement, Craig seems to distance himself from the hegemonic language ideologies of the Cameroonian nation-state, at least more so than the other participants.

Extract 4¹¹⁷

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1 | je ne suis pas en train de <i>shit</i> dans la soupe tu vois ce que je veux dire ? | I am not shitting in the soup you see what I mean? |
| l: | tout à fait | absolutely |
| 2 | c'est vrai que le français et l'anglais c'est la langue du colonisateur (.) mais (.) quand même euh on vit dans un pays où voilà oùùùùù (...) et même mondialisation oblige hein (.) on est obligé hein on est obligé de composer avec ça | it's true that French and English is the language of the coloniser (.) but (.) still err we live in a country where well whhheerre (...) and even globalisation doesn't leave us any other choice eh (.) we have to make do with it |

When I ask Craig if he has the opportunity to speak CFrA, he confirms that he does speak CFrA. Where most of the other participants highlight the importance of language (for example CFrA) as a means of signifying closeness and their shared Cameroonian background, Craig responds quite differently, stating that the longer he lives in France, the more “the country calls him”. He says he cannot let a day go by without making a call ‘home’, to the point where he has set aside a budget for those calls. This increasing longing for ‘home’ suggests that, because Craig has resigned himself to the idea that France is not his home but a place where he needs to be at this point in time (similarly to his portrayal of French as a ‘make-do’ language), his sense of belonging comes from Cameroon rather than from one particular linguistic register.

¹¹⁷ This comes straight after dialogue 5 in Extract 2 above.

Extract 5¹¹⁸

I	oui (.) um	yes (.) hm
1	tu vois mais bon ça n'empêche pas que euh (.) voilà on soit de quelque part et tu vois et qu'il faille euh (.) garder euh des traces	you see but anyway that doesn't discount the fact that err (.) we are from somewhere and you see and that we must err (.) retain err traces
I:	tout à fait (.) et euh (.) tu appelles ça le <i>broken English</i> ou (.) ce que les gens appellent Camfranglais// est-ce que tu parles ça alors maintenant ? tes amis sont au pays	absolutely (.) and err (.) you call that broken English or (.) what people call Camfranglais// so do you speak it now? your friends are back home
2	oui	yes
I:	est-ce que tu as l'occasion de parler ça maintenant ou bien (.)	do you have the opportunity to speak it now or (.)
3	non ben puisque je les appelle tout le temps tu vois je suis devenu un peu (.) comment on dit (.) euh (.) dire plus le temps passe (.) plus je me je (.) je me sens at- c'est-à-dire que j'aime (.) le pays m'appelle//	no well since I call them all the time you see I've become a bit (.) how do you say that (.) err (.) say the more time goes by (.) the more I I (.) I feel at- that means I love (.) the country calls me//
I:	d'accord//	ok//

¹¹⁸ This comes straight after the previous extract; the question about CFrA was asked during our first attempt at recording.

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 3 | je ne peux pas passer une journée (.)
sans passer un coup de fil au pays// | I cannot spend a day (.) without making
a phone call home// |
| I: | ah bon ? | is that so? |
| 4 | ça je [te jure]- non (.) c'est (...) d'ailleurs
j'ai même budgétisé ça c'est-à-dire que
par mois je vais sur (.) comment on
appelle ça sur internet j'achète des (.)
des unités je peux appeler à tout
moment// | that I [swear]- no (.) it's (...) by the way I
even budgeted it that means every
month I go on the (.) what do you call it
Internet I buy (.) credit I can call at any
time// |

Like Adam, Craig confirms that he does speak CFrA in his conversations with his contacts in Cameroon, French is reserved for more formal matters. He calls CFrA 'broken English', which I ask him about, and he says Pidgin English is the real broken English (spoken on the market by mothers, which he also speaks).

Extract 6

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | voilà et quand j'appelle c'est (.) on ne
parle ni français ni c'est le camfranglais
qu'on parle | that's it and when I call it's (.) we speak
neither French nor it's
Camfranglais that we speak |
| 2 | le gars me (.) il me dit ce que je veux
entendre (.) mais toujours en en en (.)
<i>broken English</i> | the guy (.) tells me what I want to hear (.)
but always in in in (.) broken English |

Craig's interview stands out from most of the other participants' interview, in that he emphasises his bond with Cameroon more than he does with any language of his repertoire. His sense of identity seems to stem from his Cameroonian origin. He is more open about the hostility experienced as a diasporic Cameroonian, and his five-word statement about 'us being from somewhere'

epitomises a choice often made by diasporic Cameroonians living in France, as they come to the conclusion that they will never be fully accepted in French society, even as French nationals: they tend to claim their Cameroonian origin as their genuine and indisputable culture, identity etc. While this may lead slightly outside the scope of this thesis and into the politics of identity, I find it relevant to the issues raised in this study, because I believe this sense of rejection is key to diasporic Cameroonians' desire to find or create other ways of 'belonging', including and of course, not limited to, their use of CFrA.

6.3.7 Thalia

Thalia is 38 at the time of the interview; she is based in the US. She is a native French speaker, and she also speaks Bulu, English, German, CFrA, and has some knowledge of Spanish. She states her need to “dominate” the “languages of the colonisers”, because she views them as historically loaded because of Cameroon’s colonial past, and this feeling is strongest with regard to German¹¹⁹. Mastering French was mostly important for her as a tool that would make her come across as professional and place her on an equal footing with white/ethnically French speakers. She feels the same for English but to a much lesser extent. Bulu is the language of her repertoire that she is the least fluent in, and even though she is not really proficient in CFrA, she is more relaxed when speaking it because it is more emotional for her as it is linked with communication with family, siblings, and friends. She argues that this is because she perceives CFrA as not having set rules, which means (to her) that mistakes matter less.

Thalia describes herself as being born three times, physically in France, culturally (primarily) in Cameroon, and her third birth, she argues, occurred when she moved to the US. Linked with her move to the US and with English becoming a key language of her repertoire, this birth is the one she values the

¹¹⁹ Cameroon was colonised by Germany; France and the UK had a protectorate relationship with Cameroon.

most, because it was in this English-speaking nation that she learnt to say 'No' more freely and readily, to enforce strict boundaries to safeguard herself.

Thalia's parents spoke French to their children at home and highly valued Western education. At the same time, she was taught that her traditions were very important (including speaking "the language of the tribe", sic, see Extract 1 below, respecting elders...). Her parents regularly took their children to their village – where they had to speak Bulu – to ensure that they would master the language and the values. The extract below is a free-flowing narrative from my first prompt asking Thalia to tell me about her life story and the place of language in that story; that is why I am 'silent'.

Extract 1:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | (.) mais en même temps euh nos traditions étaient très importantes pour eux c'est-à-dire parler la langue euh (...) de la tribu tu vois (.) et dans mon cas c'est bulu | (.) but at the same time err our traditions were very important to them that is speaking the language err (...) of the tribe (.) and in my case it is Bulu |
|---|--|--|

Thalia ranks the languages of her repertoire as French and Bulu, in that order. This is hardly surprising as French was the language she and her siblings most frequently spoke at home with their parents, and it was also the language most visitors spoke and that was most often spoken on the radio. French is the first language she remembers speaking. This prominence of French amongst the languages of Thalia's repertoire is consistent with all the other participants' statements.

Extract 2

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| I: | et tu parlais de toutes ces langues donc vous étiez obligés | and you mentioned all those languages so you were forced to |
|----|---|---|

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| | de parler bulu (..) j'imagine entre vous les enfants comme tu disais le soir= | speak Bulu (...) I imagine with the other children as you said in the evening= |
| 1 | en fait mes deux premières langues c'est le français et le bulu// | actually my first two languages are French and Bulu// |
| I: | ok (.) dans cet ordre-là ? dans l'ordre français et bulu ? | ok (.) in that order? in the order French and Bulu? |
| 2 | oui dans ce- dans cet ordre-là parce que le premier langage dont je me souviens c'est le français et après le bulu// | yes in that- in that order because the first language I remember is French and after Bulu// |

Thalia mentions that a few words derived from English and French, mainly foreign concepts, have been adopted in Bulu as they didn't have equivalents in precolonial Bulu. She remembers being taught the correct Bulu word as a child by family members, but comments on the fact when she returns home now, the same people increasingly mix in French words when they speak Bulu. She blames the influence of the media and smartphones (with Internet access), widely available in Cameroon, which constantly expose Cameroonians to content in "the colonial language", for the dilution of Bulu. This contrasts quite starkly with her earlier statement that French is her first language, stated previously without any sense of regret about the loss of her Cameroonian language.

Extract 3

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | et moi j'ai l'impression que le fait d'avoir (.) de plus en plus une | and I get the impression that the fact that (.) there is greater and greater |
|---|--|--|

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| | exposition à ce que je vais appeler la langue coloniale quoi (.) on va dire le français par exemple tu vois le (...) | exposure to what I will call the colonial language well (.) let's say err French for example you see the (.) |
| 2 | par rapport à quand je grandissais où j'ai l'impression qu'on e- on arrivait à passer plus de temps entre nous dans notre communauté euh bulu etc. | comparatively with when I was growing up where I feel like we w- we were able to spend more time amongst ourselves in our err Bulu community etc |
| 3 | donc je me dis que (...) même sans qu'on s'en rende compte peut-être que ce qui se passe un des phénomènes c'est que on pense plus en français (.) que en- qu'en bulu comparé à avant (.) comparé à il y a vingt ans | so I personally believe that (.) even without realising it maybe what is happening one of the phenomena is that we think increasingly in French (.) more than- than in Bulu compared to the way we were before (.) compared to twenty years ago |

I then ask her if she thinks in French, and if she used to think in French in pre-Internet and smartphone times, and she says she used to think in French at the time and still does, and she argues that books were the reason why she did, as she was an avid reader and she had no access to books in Bulu other than the Bible and her hymn book.

She also mentions the fact that in Douala (where she grew up), most of her friends spoke other national languages, and that she was not able to learn any of her friends' languages, so they had only French in common which made French their dominant language.

As Thalia mentions secondary school, another (unnamed) language suddenly makes its appearance in her narrative without any prompting, but she will only name it much later in the conversation.

Extract 4¹²⁰

- 1 mais très rapidement on a eu but very very quickly we had our own
 notre langage à nous quand il language when it came to French
 s'agissait de du français

Thalia seems to have inherited from her parents' ideologies of language a sense that slang or more familiar forms of language are improper. I mention that many people use different registers of language depending on the person they are talking to, but Thalia says she doesn't do that. However, a short while later, she contradicts herself, saying that when she is chatting with her mother, she uses either formal French or Bulu, thus acknowledging that she does draw from different registers of language depending on her interlocutor.

Extract 5

- 1 je crois aussi que l'éducation que I also believe that the education my
 mes parents m'ont donnée a fait parents gave me meant that I didn't
 que j'ai pas (...) même si je (...) even if I understood what they
 comprenais ce qu'ils disaient je were saying I didn't speak in the
 ne parlais pas de la- je ne same- I couldn't speak in the same
 pouvais pas parler de la même way//
 façon//
- l: comment= à quel niveau ? how= how so?

¹²⁰ This follows directly from Extract 3 above.

2	des mots qui (.) qui ne sont pas propres (...)	words that (.) that are not clean (...)
I:	comme=	such as=
3	tu vois des (.) une certaine façon de parler parce que si- je sais que la manière dont ils parlaient je ne pouvais pas parler à mes parents comme ça//	you see some (.) a certain way of speaking because if- I know that the way they spoke I could not speak to my parents like that//
I:	jurer et tout ça tu veux dire ?	swearing and all that you mean?
4	[inaudible] comment ?	[inaudible] pardon me?
I:	les gros mots (.) et tout ça ?	swear words and all that?
5	les gros mots (.) ou des expressions un peu vulgaires (.) donc par exemple quelque chose comme ça fait chier (.) un truc comme ça// ¹²¹	swear words or expressions that are a bit familiar (.) so for example something like it sucks (.) something similar//
I:	c'est intéressant parce que beaucoup de gens euh (.) ont divers registres de langue selon les personnes auxquelles ils parlent	that's interesting because many people err (.) have several registers of language depending on the people they're talking to
6	oui oui	yes yes

¹²¹ Thalia reiterates similar notions in different ways. I have omitted those repetitions.

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| I: | mais pas dans ton cas ? | but that's not the case for you? |
| 7 | non (.) non non (.) mais par
contre ce qui est intéressant à
noter c'est que quand je parle
avec ma famille (.) quand je
parle avec ma mère (.) c'est un
français soutenu// | no (.) no no (.) but however what is
interesting to note is that when I am
speaking with my family (.) when I'm
speaking with my mother (.) it is
formal French// |
| I: | alors attends quand tu parles
avec ta mère c'est un français (.)
soutenu ? | so wait when you're speaking with
your mother it is (.) formal French? |
| 8 | [...] c'est un français soutenu (.)
ou alors on se parle bulu// | [...] it is formal French or we speak
Bulu/ |

Thalia states that formal French is also the most frequent form of language that she used with her older sister, but with her younger brother and sister, it's a different story. She "lets loose" with them (see Extract 6 below) and uses whatever "Camfranglais" she is able to. She describes her level of proficiency in CFrA as "pathetic", explaining that after she left Cameroon, she spoke it much less.

Thalia's contradictory statements about her use of different forms of language, including ones that will have been considered unacceptable by her parents seem to point to deeper issues. I suspect that Thalia witnessed and lived the ridicule and rejection that African background people often experience, first in Europe, then in the States. It feels to me like her status in Cameroon, her 'acceptability level' if that makes sense, and her family's values, education etc. are linked to the time when she was most accepted. I believe this is why she

seems to hang on to that part of her history, and I suspect that she also romanticises it quite a bit.

Extract 6

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | et quand je parle avec mon petit frère et ma petite sœur (.) aaahh (...) là c'est autre chose | and when I speak with my younger brother and my younger sister (.) aaahh (...) that is a different story |
| 2 | avec eux je me lâche (...) avec eux je me lâche (.) c'est (.) mon camfranglais est vraiment (.) il est il est minable hein parce que c'est (.) une fois que j'ai quitté le Cameroun j'étais (.) tu vois (...) je j'avais (.) | with them I let loose (.) with them I let loose (.) it's (.) my Camfranglais is really (.) it is it is pathetic eh because it's (.) once I had left Cameroon I was (.) you see (.) I I had (.) |
| 3 | je l'utilisais beaucoup moins quoi et donc et là c'est (.) c'est (.) c'est entre guillemets un langage qui n'arrête pas d'évoluer (.) qui n'arrête pas d'évoluer de changer de se développer | I was using it much less and so and then it's (.) it's (.) it's quote unquote a language that constantly evolves (.) that constantly evolves and changes and develops |

Thalia's use of the now familiar 'quote unquote' before describing CFrA as "a language" indicates her alignment with official Cameroonian nation state language ideologies regarding informal language forms, which will have been reinforced at home by her middle-class parents. She also expresses her joy when speaking CFrA with her siblings. I believe this tension between what seems 'acceptable' and her actual use of language may be the reason why she did not initially mention CFrA as one of the languages of her repertoire. I asked her why she didn't mention it at all and didn't get a straight answer.

Thalia said CFrA appeared when she was in primary school, when the language forms that she and her classmates used went from being exclusively formal to including more creativity, but more so when she started secondary. As she spoke, I realised that she seemed to subsume all “linguistic games” in the same playful experience of drawing from their collective repertoire of languages – she mentioned using the odd Latin word here and there (e.g. pater, mater), calling the neighbourhood the informal Cameroonian French term ‘kwatt’, Verlan, and ‘pig Latin’ type linguistic games.

Thalia states that her friends and siblings had no desire whatsoever to include parents when speaking CFrA. She says it was coded language for insiders. She only speaks CFrA with her younger siblings and some close friends, even though she admits that her creativity and limited proficiency means that she coins her own terms that defy all rules of CFrA which regularly causes her siblings’ hilarity.

Even though she says she is not a regular speaker of CFrA, in the last Extract below, like Lovely and Adam, Thalia says CFrA makes a great difference to her experience as a diasporic Cameroonian, because it brings comfort when they are homesick as it creates a safe and warm space, always linked to good memories especially with family (see turn 5 in Extract 7 below). Thalia loves the fact that it is creative and full of humour, and, she says CFrA puts her in a good mood, and creates a connection that is not as stilted as the one created when speaking formal French.

Extract 7

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | et j’ai une petite question par rapport à donc ce-ces codes (.) tu as appelé ça des codes (.) je parle donc euh (.) de ce que tu as appelé le camfranglais toi- | and I have a short question regarding this-these codes (.) you called them codes (.) I am talking err (.) about what you yourself called Camfranglais (...) do you err (.) use |
|---|---|--|

- même (...) est-ce que euh (.) tu utilises ce code aux États-Unis ? this code in the United States?
- 2 je l'utilise avec ma famille (.) uniquement c'est ça que je trouve intéressant (...) avec ma famille non (.) avec mes (.) amis proches aussi je l'utilise avec ma petite sœur mon petit-frère (.)// I use it with my family (.) only and that's what I find interesting (.) with my family no (.) with my close friends also I use it with my younger sister my younger brother//
- 3 nous quand on se parle français on se parle jamais un français (.) euh comment dire littéraire// when we speak French with each other we never speak French (.) err how can I say [that is] literary//
- I: ah (.) c'est intéressant [...] la question que j'ai posée à pas mal de personnes (.) euh hier (.) c'était (.) est-ce que ça fait une différence de parler camfranglais ? (.) le fait d- dans ton (.) ton-ton état de (.) de camerounaise diasporique (.) comme j'appelle ça (.) est-ce que ça fait une différence ? ah (.) that's interesting [...] the question I asked a number of people (.) err yesterday (.) was (.) does it make a difference to speak Camfranglais? (.) the fact that y- in your-your your state of (.) diasporic Cameroonian (.) as I call it (.) does that make a difference?
- 4 ça fait une différence euh très grande (...) déjà ça (.) parce que bon quand on vit à l'étranger euh (.) on a toujours des moments où on a un peu le mal du pays it makes a difference err a very very big one (.) first it (.) because well we live abroad err (.) there are always times when we are a bit homesick
- I: oui yes

5 [inaudible-loud noise] etc. c'est (.) [inaudible-loud noise] etc. it (.) it is
ça fait chaud au cœur (.) et (.) le heart-warming (.) and (.)
camfranglais fait partie de cette Camfranglais is part of this
expérience (.) c'est vraiment c'est experience (.) it is really it's err (.) it's
euh (.) c'est comme si ça crée un as if it creates a space that both
endroit à la fois chaleureux (.) et warm (.) and (.) safe//
(.) et *safe*//

I: ah bon ? oh really?

6 oui oui// c'est (.) puis ça rappelle- yes yes// it is (.) because it reminds-
c'est toujours toujours toujours lié it's always always always linked (.)
(.) en tout cas dans mon cas et at least in my case and that of the
celui de la famille (.) lié à de bons family (.) linked to good memories
souvenirs (...) (...)

As Thalia shares her linguistic journey from one continent and country to another, she highlights the relation between the way people speak, their perceptions of themselves as a result, and the effect of their linguistic choices on others. She also stresses the importance of representation, specifically of Black people in the US and the registers of language usually associated with them in popular culture. She adds that this is another reason why she prizes more formal and polite forms of communication. She feels the need to filter and protect herself from what she considers to be negative influences especially through media such as cinema, TV etc.

As is the case for all participants in this study, it is obvious from the discussion with Thalia that language is woven within the fabric of her daily life. In her narration, she zooms in on her linguistic experience in relation to all other lived experiences where she finds herself at specific moments in time. As a teenager and later as a young adult, CFrA was clearly used as a generational code and a

means to keep the outsider (including parents) “out”. Thalia also describes a deliciousness in “defiling” the colonial languages, re-appropriating them, showing off their knowledge of Latin (as they used the words “pater” and “mater” for example), forcing those languages to coexist with African vernaculars, but on their terms. As a diasporic Cameroonian, she believes and states that her lived experiences inform her linguistic choices, and conversely, that the languages she speaks shape her identity.

6.3.8 Manuela

Manuela was born in France and is a French national. Her Cameroonian parents took her back home when she was 1, and she returned to France at 13, where she completed secondary education (in boarding schools) and university in Paris. She also spent weekends at her aunt’s and at her uncle’s. She initially struggled to integrate in secondary school and says she lost her bearings, as she was finding it difficult to cope with the separation from her parents and the new environment, the cultural differences and isolation, and loneliness became a reality in her life. She had to learn to be intentional about opening up to others. However, she never faced any difficulties being understood or understanding others, quite the contrary. Like Freddy, Manuela recalls comments from a young White French teenager about how well she spoke French. When I asked her to explain why she thinks she spoke French that way, she mentioned her love for books, and her passion for French and the fact that this gave her an advantage.

Manuela studied humanities and management, HR and psychology, and she holds two Master’s degrees, one in HR and the second one in the psychosociology of organisations. At the time of the interview, she had been working in HR for four years including a year in Canada, was working as a HR officer at Goldman Sachs, and was thinking of studying towards a PhD. Manuela worked as an independent contractor for various companies – she stated that she liked the flexibility and the variety of contexts in which she

worked and the freedom her status afforded her. She was 26 at the time of the interview.

When Manuela returned to France, her sense of identity was still being constructed, and she says as a result, even though she likes going back to Cameroon on holiday, she is as deeply attached to France as she is to Cameroon. However, she argues, she did not feel the same attachment to Canada, and during the year that she spent there, she realised that France was the place that she identified as her home, a place where she felt comfortable, where everything was familiar, where she had built a life.

This stated allegiance to France distinguishes Manuela from the other participants. When I ask her what she thinks of the fact that many non-White residents in France describe the country as a place where it is very difficult to feel at home, she responds that she doesn't identify with that position at all; she believes people struggle to find their place in France because in their heads, they already have this barrier in their minds linked to an idealised other home, and not because the French aren't welcoming. This barrier, she argues, is a very strong attachment to their country of origin, and she believes that is precisely what stops them from feeling at home elsewhere. Manuela does agree with Freddy, however, about the fact that the French encourage others to integrate, to assimilate, and for her, integration is *not* losing one's culture, it is being capable of accepting another one, and she feels that it is possible to accept a new culture or identity without losing the other.

Our conversation steers back to Manuela's own story, and she explains that her she grew up in a family where education was really important, where the children were engaged in many extracurricular activities (cultural and educational activities, English classes at the British Council etc.), they had academic tutors and a very stable family life. Manuela's first visit to her parents' village took place when she turned 17. Her family lived in the capital Yaoundé when she was little, then they moved to Douala, and in both cities, they lived in residential areas with very little contact with neighbours. Their parents

monitored their contacts with other children very closely, and she said she and her only childhood friend¹²² communicated exclusively in French.

Manuela describes herself as a lover of languages but explains that her interest in other languages is linked more to their economic value in formal professional settings, hence her interest in English. She kept steering the conversation towards broad issues, professional ambitions etc. so I purposely asked about her childhood experiences to bring her back to a more personal narrative.

Extract 1:

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| I: | donc les voisins comment (.)
comment ça se passe quoi (.) au
quotidien ? | so (with) the neighbours how (.) how
is daily life? |
| 1 | les voisins (.) quand j'étais petite
à Yaoundé j'avais une copine
c'était la voisine c'est (.) je crois
que c'est ma seule copine
d'enfance euh (.) de voisine que
je connaisse y avait qu'avec elle
et son frère qu'on jouait euh (.)
parfois parce qu'on avait
vraiment les maisons collées
l'une à l'autre quoi donc voilà | the neighbours (.) when I was young
in Yaoundé I had a friend she was
the neighbour she (.) I think she was
my only childhood friend err (.)
neighbour that I knew we only played
with her and her brother err (.)
sometimes because our houses
were really close together so that's it |

I asked Manuela what the French that they spoke sounded like, whether any other language seeped in, slang etc. Manuela replied that the only other language she heard was her parents' Cameroonian languages (when they spoke to each other or with friends or family members who originated from the

¹²² This level of social isolation would be quite unusual. I would wager that her parents wanted to shield their children from more working-class influences. My experience growing up was very similar.

same village and spoke the same language). The fact that her parents were from different regions and had mutually unintelligible mother tongues seems to have reinforced the prominence of French in Manuela's life – she says she does not speak any of those two Cameroonian languages. Her neighbours spoke yet another language. Their parents never taught them their Cameroonian languages. She also mentions needing her father to translate for her when her grandmother (who didn't speak French) would visit.

Extract 2:

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| I: | est-ce que tu entendais d'autres langues comment (.) quel souvenir tu as ? | did you hear other languages how (.) what memories do you have? |
| 1 | ben en fait (.) euh les (.) langues que j'entendais c'était peut-être mes parents qui parlent dans leur dialecte et- ou- mon père ou ma mère en fait ou euh (.) | well actually (.) err the (.) languages I heard were maybe my parents speaking their dialect and- or- my father or my mother actually or err (.) |
| 2 | avec des frères des amis des cousins euh (.) du même village en fait et qui ont la euh (.) le même euh patois en fait si on va dire comme ça | with brothers friends cousins err (.) from the same village actually and who speak the err (.) the same err dialect actually if we can call it that |
| I: | d'accord | ok |
| 3 | et (.) au niveau de mes amis de mes fréquentations on parlait vraiment absolument français | and (.) with regard to my friends my acquaintances we absolutely spoke French |

Like Thalia, Manuela comments on the fact that people in Cameroon, including her parents when she was growing up, increasingly tend to mix in French a lot when speaking their Cameroonian languages. She attributes this dilution of national languages to the prominence of French.

Extract 3:

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| I: | <p>donc vous parlez français et (...) la langue de maman ou papa quand la famille vient (...) c'est ça hein ?</p> | <p>so you speak French and (...) the language of mum or dad when the family visits (...) that's it right?</p> |
| 1 | <p>c'est eux qui parlaient en fait (...) mais nous on comprenait rien</p> | <p>actually they spoke (...) but we didn't understand anything</p> |
| I: | <p>[laughter] ha ha c'est pratique pour les parents ça [laughter] parce que du coup ils peuvent dire tout ce qu'ils veulent euh (...)</p> | <p>(laughter) ha ha that's practical for the parents that (laughter) because that means they can say everything they want err (...)</p> |
| 2 | <p>(laughter) voilà//</p> | <p>(laughter) that's it//</p> |
| I: | <p>du coup ils peuvent dire tout ce qu'ils veulent vous ne saurez même pas de quoi ils parlent quoi//</p> | <p>that means they can say everything they want you won't even know what they're talking about//</p> |
| 3 | <p>mais quelque chose que j'ai observé (...) c'est qu'en fait et euh (...) de plus en plus les personnes qui parlent (...) les patois utilisent beaucoup (...) un mélange avec le</p> | <p>but something I have noticed (...) is that actually and err (...) increasingly those who speak (...) the dialect use a lot of (...) mixture with French//</p> |

français//

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1: | ah bon ? comment ça ? | really? how so? |
| 2 | parce que j'entendais ma mère
mettre des mots de français
quand elle parlait basaa | because I would hear my mother use
French words when she spoke
Basaa |
| 1: | umhm ok | umhm ok |
| 3 | donc voilà et puis bon (...) même
mon papa (.) un petit peu moins
mais oui (.) mais je vais dire je
pense que le parler est un peu
moins pur (.) | so that's it (...) even my dad (.) a little
less but yes (.) but I will say I think
the language is a little less pure (.) |
| 4 | si on peut dire ça comme ça que
peut-être à l'époque des grands-
parents qui euh devaient parler
100% sans un seul mot de
français là-dedans quoi// | if we can put it that way that maybe
in our grandparents time who err
certainly spoke 100% without a
single word of French mixed in// |

Manuela argues that this comes from the fact that French is increasingly widely spoken, and that people are used to speaking more French, and French thus becomes the language in which they think, their language of reference. She believes this causes a gradual loss of vocabulary in people's vernaculars.

As Manuela reminisces about her boarding school years, she mentions that most of the young people around her were white. The few Black students she was in contact with were older teenagers, mainly from various African countries, and mostly from upper middle-class backgrounds, apart from a few Cameroonian students from a different socioeconomic background. Manuela

explains that this second group of students used expressions she had never heard and initially didn't understand.

Extract 4:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| I | donc tu es en France et tu es dans un milieu vraisemblablement (.) avec une majorité de (.) blancs c'est ça hein ? | so you are in France and you are in an environment presumably with a majority of (.) white (people) that's it right? |
| 1 | oui il y avait quand même un groupe de noirs (.) qui venaient de partout il y en avait des Ivoiriens des Gabonais (.) des Camerounais aussi (.) mais ils étaient pour la plupart plus âgés que moi// | yes however there was a group of black (people) from everywhere there were some Ivorians some Gabonese (.) some Cameroonians as well (.) but most of them were older than me// |
| I | ok (.) et avec le même genre de vécu (.) ou ? | ok (.) and with a similar experience (.) or? |
| 2 | oh je pense que c'était oui pour la plupart tous (.) des personnes qui venaient de familles assez euh (.) aisées voilà (.) euh voilà un petit peu voilà c'était un peu les mêmes profils quoi// | oh I think it was yes for most they were all (.) people who came from families that were quite err (.) affluent really (.) err that's it a little bit that's it it was the same type of profiles basically// |
| I | oui (.) oui (...) donc euh oui vous aviez des choses en commun (.) euh | yes (.) yes (.) so err yes you had things in common (.) err |

- 3 oui mais on n'était pas proches yes but we weren't close (.)
(.)
- I ah bon comment ça ? really how is that?
- 4 ben en fait euh (.) ils étaient déjà well actually (err) they were first
plus âgés (...) il y avait déjà la older (...) so there was already the
barrière de l'âge (.) moi mes (.) age barrier (.) me my [inaudible] 16
[inaudible] 16 17 ans donc j'étais 17 years old so I was a little bit
un peu vraiment petite euh par young err compared to them
rapport à eux
- I: oui yes
- 5 y avait pas tellement de sujets there weren't that many topics err (.)
euh (.) de débat et puis bon par for debate and also however there
contre il y a eu quand même were still a few people in fact who
quelques personnes en fait qui were (.) Cameroonians with whom I
étaient (.) Camerounais avec qui had had discussions but actually err
j'avais discuté mais en fait euh it wasn't (.)
c'était pas (.)
- 6 à la différence des autres c'était unlike the others it wasn't the same
pas le même (.) comme (...) (.) like (.) I don't know if this is the
j'sais pas si le terme est adapté right term but they cam- we weren't
mais ils ve- on n'était pas (.) on (.) we didn't grow up in the same
n'avait pas grandi dans les type of environment if I may say so
mêmes types d'environnements in Cameroon//
si on va dire au Cameroun//
- 7 donc voilà et c'est avec eux que so that's it and it was with them that

	parfois euh bon ben euh (.) c'est avec eux qu'en fait il y a des expressions du Cameroun comme j'ai découvert//	sometimes well err (.) it was with them that actually there are some expressions from Cameroon as I discovered//
I	comment ça ? alors comment ça se passe ? raconte (.) c'est intéressant ça//	how so? so what happened there? tell me the story (.) it's interesting//
8	ben au début tu comprends pas (.) et puis en fait ben tu trouves tu découvres un petit mot par ci par là et puis tu trouves que c'est (.) original (.)	well at first you don't understand (.) and then actually well you find you discover a little word here and there and then you find it (.) creative (.)
9	et tu copies et tu l'adoptes et puis tu adoptes et tu adoptes et (.) [laughter] tu commences à te faire un petit dictionnaire//	and you copy and you adopt it and then you adopt it and you adopt it and (.) [laughter] you start putting together a little dictionary//

When asked what she thought of this way of speaking when she first heard it, Manuela replies that she was a bit lonely so she thought it was great that there were other Cameroonians. At first, many of their expressions weren't easy to understand because they used what she called 'local terms' and there was no way of guessing what these words meant. When they used words derived from English, she gradually found it easier to understand these words because she was studying English. Her main hurdles were pronunciation and word contraction which was very different from standard English.

I purposely avoid naming this speech form that Manuela is describing, and at one point she mentions that she had heard of "Pidgin" in her environment, and when she was about 18 years old she realised that it consisted of contractions

of words in French and English. She describes a journey of discovery that seems to have entertained her.

Manuela mentions the fact that this way of speaking is not well regarded in certain environments (like the one she grew up in) in Cameroon, and she says the reason is that it is used more by less educated people (who couldn't speak English or French correctly), and that it may have been a more "commercial dialect". She calls this speech form Pidgin, giving specific examples.

I quote a few of her examples (e.g. <je wanda> for "I am surprised"; <abeg> for "please") and I ask her if both examples are Pidgin. Manuela replies that she now considers this speech form to be a type of Creole, a bit like the one spoken by people from the French Caribbean. I check again with her that she is indeed referring to the mix of French and English terms, and she finishes my sentence, saying it also includes "local expressions".

Manuela says she cannot understand a full conversation. She believes there must be a rich vocabulary, but she says she has not found herself in a position to learn or use this speech form, because none of her friends in France or back home speak it. When I ask her if none of her friends speak this mixture, she says some of them use what they call "Camfranglais or Francanglais".

Like Lovely, Manuela says boys tend to speak and understand it more than girls. She argues that boys tend to pick it up in events taking place in areas where she wouldn't set foot because she isn't familiar with those places. She then explains that she does not despise anyone, which makes it clear that she associates this speech form to less affluent populations and neighbourhoods, (hence her felt need to specify that she doesn't despise anyone). When I point out that her friends who do speak it are educated, she explains that some people from affluent families sometimes go "slumming" (<*s'encanailler*>), to come across as adaptable, hence their use of this speech form.

Manuela ends up saying she is not sure that Pidgin is the same thing as CFrA, but she has a sense that Pidgin is more like a full language, whereas CFrA is more like what she calls a Creole (which seems to mean something different from the meaning of the word in Linguistics). She also mentions her anglophone Cameroonian friends and says they speak only standard/formal French or English.

6.3.9. Trish

Born in Paris in 1977 when her parents were students there, Trish went back to Cameroon at the age of 3. Her primary school was a French school with the same curriculum as schools in France. At home she watched the same TV programs as children living in France. She went to a Cameroonian school after the devaluation of the CFA franc¹²³ and only then was she exposed to a more Cameroonian curriculum. Trish lived without any interruptions in Cameroon until the age of 17. She would frequently travel to France for holidays, and she spontaneously mentions that she was not aware of any racism. Her maternal grandfather was a highly educated man who worked as a bank manager and spoke French, and her maternal grandmother spoke French and Duala. Trish was able to understand pretty much all that was said in Duala but with time and being away from those of her family members who spoke Duala, she finds it difficult to speak now. She lived in the north of the country where French was the lingua franca, and the vernacular was Fulfulde, the Fulani language. Her family felt no desire to speak Fulfulde – as a child she acquired enough linguistic skills to detect hostile language for example, which she calls “self-defence”. She wonders whether her knowledge of Duala would have been better had she lived in her parents’ region of origin. After her baccalaureate, she returned to France to study Modern literature and humanities, did a Master’s Degree, then a postgraduate degree. She decided to continue her studies in the US. In the US, she quickly realised that rather than being bilingual, Cameroon

¹²³By the IMF as mentioned in previous chapters. This had a direct impact on school fees which doubled immediately as a result.

was actually monolingual, particularly for the French speaker that she was, as she found out that her English language foundations were shaky, especially for postgraduate study. She had to take compulsory language lessons on arrival in the US.

Regarding her Cameroonian vernacular language, Trish states, “my parents are the product of the French colonisation policy of assimilation”¹²⁴, and that her parents considered it appropriate to teach their children a language they never spoke with one another; they spoke Duala to each other, but exclusively spoke French with their children. She wonders at what point they made that decision which to her, equates to devaluating their cultural heritage. She comments that this is the case for many of her friends from what she terms a “pseudo-bourgeois” background. Trish considers that she does not speak Duala because to her, when one speaks a language, it has to flow smoothly. When her parents tell her she can learn to speak it, she says she cannot learn it like she learnt English. She feels that it is impossible, that there is a barrier.

Extract 1:

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| 1 | <p>donc je ne parle- pour moi je ne parle pas Duala parce que pour moi parler une langue c’est qu- c’est être- i- déjà il faut que ce soit naturel</p> | <p>so I don’t speak – I don’t consider that I speak Duala because in my opinion speaking a language is alm- it’s being- i- first of all it must flow naturally</p> |
| I: | <p>ouais (.) hum</p> | <p>yeah (.) uhuh</p> |
| 2 | <p>et il faut (...) par exemple euh (.) y a trop d’efforts (.) dans l’action de parler (.) mes parents me</p> | <p>and one must (...) for example err (.) there’s too much effort (.) when it comes to speaking (.) my parents</p> |

¹²⁴ “Mes parents sont le produit de la colonisation française d’assimilation.”

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| | disent toujours ah mais tu peux apprendre | always tell me ah but you can learn |
| 3 | je dis mais c'est ça le problème
(.) je ne peux pas apprendre le Duala comme j'ai appris l'anglais
(.) | I say but that's the problem (.) I cannot learn Duala the way I learnt English (.) |
| 4 | c'est impossible (.) il y a une barrière | it's impossible (.) there is a barrier |

Trish says her mother and her sisters have such a sense of familiarity when they speak “this infamous alleged African language”, Duala (see Extract 2 below), that there is something in them that has completely disappeared in her. She says there is some sort of mental block to her speaking, but that she understands the language and listens to the audio bible in Duala on an app. Interestingly enough, she states that she often dreams of conversations with her grandparents during which she is fully fluent. Trish also mentions that when she is saddened by news or when she gets hurt physically, she often exclaims in Duala, which leads me to reflect on the role that the unconscious/subconscious mind plays in her reluctance to speak Duala.¹²⁵

Trish states that she discovered Cameroon as a historical concept quite late in her development. She accepts the ‘loss’ of her African language as part of the (postcolonial) historical process and she concludes that if one day she had children, it may well be that they will only speak French, English, Spanish and maybe Chinese. Trish then explains that her mother tongue is French, and she thinks in French and since more recent times, in English, and of course, she writes in both languages. This said, she finds it easier to speak English

¹²⁵ She states, « je pense que c'est une langue qui est en moi, mais quelque part dans l'inconscient, dans l'enfoui et dans la perte et la quête en même temps. » – I think it's a language which is in me, but somewhere in my unconscious mind, in what is buried, and simultaneously in the loss and the quest.

nowadays because English is the language she uses the most on a daily basis. Her penchant for English is also amplified by the fact that most of the philosophical, theoretical and academic materials she works with and is interested in are in English, and that texts about Afrodiaspora and African-American studies (which are her areas of specialisation) are rarer in French.

Trish states that she feels most comfortable in the US. Cameroon, she argues, represents a cocoon, her life with her family as a child, an Eden of sorts, as she did not experience Cameroon as an adult. France was the place where she became mature, where she learnt to take care of herself, where she became a woman. She claims that these factors all play a very important part in the construction of people's identity.

Extract 2:

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 1 | c'était pour parler de cette fameuse prétendue langue africaine | I was just talking about that infamous alleged African language |
| I: | ouais | yeah |
| 2 | moi ma langue maternelle c'est le français c'est la langue que je parle avec ma mère | me my mother tongue is French it's the language that I speak with my mother |
| I: | ouais (.) | yeah (.) |
| 3 | c'est la langue dans laquelle je pense et pour moi je pense même en anglais | it's the language in which I think and for me I even think in English |
| I: | oui | yes |

- 4 donc c'est des langues qui pour so those are languages that for me
 moi s-m'arrivent plus s-are more natural
 naturellement

Trish's relationship with the languages of her repertoire is reminiscent of Adam's rapport with his. She mentions some of her younger cousins from a less affluent socio-economic background and suggests that their fluency in Duala might be linked to their family's social class, the assumption being that the less affluent the background, the more likely the family is to communicate using the vernacular. Trish highlights what seems to be a pattern: where the Cameroonian vernacular(s) were not spoken during the participants' childhood, there seems to be a distance from those languages and difficulty speaking them (ranging from no knowledge to some basic or intermediate level of proficiency). She concludes on this point that colonialism never really ended, and states that when asked if she loves France, she replies that she has no option but to love France.

Extract 3:

- 1 c'est pour ça que pour moi that's why for me colonialism never
 l'histoire coloniale n'est jamais ended eh
 finie hein
- I: non (.) ben non no (.) well no
- 2 donc quand je vois les gens se so when I see people debating on
 débattre sur (.) l'identité (.) the French identity err
 française euh
- I: ouais (.) yeah (.)
- 3 les gens demandent est-ce que people ask do you love France err

vous aimez la France euh (.)	(.) I have no other option but to love
mais je suis obligée d'aimer la	France otherwise that would be
France sinon c'est me haïr moi-	hating myself
même	

I:	n- c'est impossible	n- that's impossible
----	---------------------	----------------------

4	c'est-à-dire c'est une partie de	that means it's a part of me (.)
	moi (.) que je le veuille ou non	whether I like it or not

For Trish, the effort required to “return to her alleged culture of origin” is not worth her time. She argues that many diasporic Cameroonians struggle in terms of their identity precisely because they hold on to an imagined version of the country they left behind a long time ago (which is reminiscent of Manuela’s point regarding the nostalgia that some diasporic Cameroonians experience).

Her attitude to language seems quite independent from Cameroonian and French nation-state ideologies of language, as she comments on the fact that she switches to some level of AAVE¹²⁶ when she attends a majority Black church where some of the church members use that register of language, because she wants to be understood and to blend in. At university, she sticks to a more standard version of English. This adaptability echoes that of most of the participants, and Trish argues that this attitude to language was already one she had in Cameroon with regard to the language she spoke in the classroom, and the language spoken outside the school environment. Trish’s relationship with CFrA is different from most of the other participants. She mentions that her sister spoke a form of slang, and when I probe her on that, Trish replies that it is CFrA but she doesn’t remember it.

¹²⁶African American Vernacular English

Extract 4:

- I: je voulais juste savoir si l'argot dont tu parlais (.) dont ta sœur parlait (.) si tu peux me dire brièvement ce que c'est et si toi tu as eu contact avec (.) si oui non pourquoi I just wanted to know if the slang that you mentioned (.) that your sister mentioned (.) if you could tell me briefly what it is and if you came into contact with it (.) if yes no why
- 1 ah non mais écoutes moi l'ar- c'est pas l'ar- l'argot de ma génération c'était le Camfranglais donc je ne m'en souviens plus (...) Oh no well listen me- the sl- it's not sl- the slang of my generation was Camfranglais so I don't remember it (.)
- I: comment ça how so
- 2 je- c'est-à-dire je ne peux plus faire de conversation- j'peux plus avoir de conversation I- that means I can't have a conversation anymore- I can't have a conversation anymore
- I: ouais (.) yeah (.)
- 3 c'est-à-dire- a- a- (.) quand j'étais en quatrième (.) ou en (.) en troisième (.) ou en cinquième je pouvais te parler comme on parle là that means at- at- (.) when I was in quatrième¹²⁷ (.) or in (.) in troisième¹²⁸ (.) or in cinquième¹²⁹ I was able to speak like we are speaking now

¹²⁷3rd year of secondary school

¹²⁸4th year of secondary school

¹²⁹2nd year of secondary school

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| l: | ouais | yeah |
| 4 | alterner les phrases | switch sentences around |
| l: | ouais | yeah |
| 5 | maintenant je n'ai plus que des trucs bêtes (.) que personne n'utilise | now I only have silly stuff (.) that nobody uses |

Trish comments on her lost ability to draw from these linguistic resources, and also mentions her mother's ability to understand various forms of slang and informal varieties of Cameroonian French. Her awareness of and relaxed attitude to various language forms, and the fact that she seems to stay away from value judgements, is an interesting reflection of her mother's attitude to language.

Unlike most of the other participants, Trish embraces her heritage as a post-postcolonial person from a Cameroonian background with its linguistic and cultural complexities, without feeling the need to experience regret or any sort of frustration linked to the loss of something she never actually knew. That may explain why she doesn't feel the need to adopt another 'language' that she would be able to appropriate and reframe as 'hers'. She describes herself as being culturally hybrid with no particular strong Cameroonian roots.¹³⁰

6.3.10 Boris

Boris is the main administrator of the Facebook Group ' *Ici on topo le Camfranglais* '. Twenty-five at the time of the interview, Boris was born in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon, he grew up in a tranquil neighbourhood on

¹³⁰Trish's position with regard to her sense of identity and home is the one I most closely identify with.

the outskirts of the city. After completing primary school in a private establishment, then public (i.e. state) secondary school and earning a scientific baccalaureate, he started university in Cameroon. He first decided to study Physics, then Law, then he applied to study electrical engineering in the US. At the time of the interview, he had been living in Louisiana for five years.

His father is an engineer and his mother a businesswoman and he explained that they wanted their four children to speak (standard) French well and to be well educated. Like most participants, Boris states that when he was growing up, he spoke only French at home and with his primary school mates. His parents only spoke Ghomala, their Cameroonian vernacular, with each other. Interestingly enough, he mentioned that he had basic notions of Bulu, one of the majority vernaculars spoken in Yaoundé. Boris stated that he did not speak Camfranglais as a child or during his first years of secondary school.

Extract 1:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | <p>donc euh disons que (.) en grandissant (.) en grandissant (.) je connaissais juste le français (...) donc euh j'ai grandi comme ça jusqu'au cours moyen 2 (...)</p> | <p>but (.) so let's say that (.) when I was growing up (.) when I was growing up (.) I only knew French (...) so err I grew up that way until cours moyen 2¹³¹ (...)</p> |
| 2 | <p>et (.) c'est quand je suis arrivé dans la classe de sixième (.) ou cinquième (.) parce que je suis allé (.) dans un lycée à partir de la cinquième (.) j'ai rencontré des personnes (.) des camarades (.) qui parlaient</p> | <p>and (.) it's when I got to sixième¹³² (.) or cinquième (.) because I started (.) secondary school in cinquième (.) I met people (.) classmates (.) who only spoke Francanglais when we were (.) together basically</p> |

¹³¹ Last year of primary school.

¹³² First year of secondary school.

qu'en Francanglais donc
lorsqu'on était (.) ensemble quoi

l: oui yes

Extract 2:

l: donc dès que tu es arrivé au lycée qu'est-ce qui s'est passé tu es arrivé— so as soon as you arrived in secondary school what happened you arrived--

1 --c'est là que j- (.) c'est là que j'ai vu vraiment (.) comment les gens mélangeaient les langues le fran-fran- (.) le camfranglais --that's where I- (.) that's where I really saw (.) how people mixed languages Fran-Fran (.) Camfranglais

l: umhmm umhmm

2 comment les gens parlaient en (.) en francanglais (.) les **tu know** (.) les trucs comme ça quoi how people spoke in (.) in Francanglais (.) things like **tu know**¹³³ (.) stuff like that basically

Boris discovered CFrA in secondary school and initially had a very negative perception of CFrA, aligned with the Cameroonian nation-state's language ideologies. To him, it was the language of crooks, of people who were idle, didn't go to school, and were poorly educated. He started speaking it much more when he went to university. For him the languages one speaks depend on the people one spends time with.

¹³³ You know/you understand.

Extract 3:

- 1 eh bien (.) il y avait des mots ah well (.) there were words that I
 que je comprenais pas (.) parce didn't understand (.) because I was
 que moi je n'avais pas l'habitude not used to speaking that language
 de parler cette langue le Francanglais
 Francanglais là
- l: oui yes
- 2 et d'ailleurs (.) d'ailleurs même and by the way (.) by the way I didn't
 je n'aimais pas ça parce que really like it because for me (...) this
 pour moi (...) cette langue le language Francanglais was only for
 Francanglais ce n'était que pour thugs (.) I (.) for me [inaudible] only
 des bandits (.) moi je (.) thugs spoke it//
 [inaudible] c'est seulement les
 bandits qui parlaient ça//
- l: ah bon really
- 3 parce que d'abord (.) tu (.) c'était because first of all (.) you (.) it was
 (.) pour moi c'est ce que je me (.) for me that was what I told
 disais// myself//
- l: oui c'est ce que beaucoup de yes that is what many people say
 gens disent oui (.) oui (.) yes (.) yes (.) mhmm
 mhmm
- 4 parce que j'avais l'habitude (.) because I was used to (.) because
 parce que la plupart du temps (.) most of the time (.) those who lived
 ceux qui étaient qui étaient dans in the neighbourhoods (.) who did
 les quartiers (.) qui ne faisaient nothing who spoke- who used to

	rien qui parlaient- qui avaient l'habitude de parler ce le Francanglais (.) ce genre de langue-là	speak that Francanglais (.) these types of languages
I:	oui	yes
5	donc alors que euh (.) quand tu quand tu vas à l'école (.) tu n'as pas le temps de de (.) commencer à parler et surtout quand tu es une personne euh (.) toujours à la maison et qui ne marche qu'avec des écoliers (.) qui vont à l'école comme toi et puis vous parlez en français//	so whereas err (.) when you when you go to school (.) you don't have time to (.) start speaking and especially if you are the type of person err (.) always at home and who only spends time with pupils (.) who go to school like you and you only speak French//
I	d'accord	right

He adds that the popularity of CFrA in secondary schools stems from the fact that most secondary school pupils were in public primary schools, and that they picked up these language practices in their working-class neighbourhoods. When I asked Boris how his socioeconomic background differentiated him from the children who spoke CFrA when he arrived in secondary school, he replied that his family was “middle class” (sic). This corroborates Adam’s statement that he and his friends first heard CFrA spoken by kids from less affluent backgrounds, and Lovely’s statement that secondary school was propitious for the development of CFrA because that was where children from all socio-economic backgrounds rubbed shoulders.

Extract 4:

- 1 --bon (.) bon (.) moi pour moi --well (.) well (.) for me it was in (.) to
c'était dans (.) déjà (.) un c'était start with (.) it was first of all a
d'abord déjà dans un lycée (.) 'lycée' (.)
- l: oui (.) oui yes (.) yes
- 2 donc je m'attendais à (.) trouver so I was expecting to (.) find that
cette (.) cette langue-là that (.) that language
- l: oui yes
- 3 et (...) donc euh ça m'a pas trop and (...) so err I wasn't that
surpris quoi quand je l'ai s- je l'ai surprised well when I s- when I
parlée spoke it
- l: ah bon p- (.) pourquoi tu dis (.) oh yes w- (.) why do you say (.) why
pourquoi tu dis que tu t'attendais do you say you were expecting to (.)
à (.) puisque dans (puisque dans because in (.) because in
- 4 (.) puisque dans un lycée (.) because in a 'lycée' (.) in a lycée
dans un lycée la plupart (.) la most (.) most (pupils) are from (.) as
plupart viennent des (.) comme I was telling you most are from
je te disais la plupart viennent public (primary) schools and most
des écoles publiques (.) et la lycées also (.) err (...) everything
plupart des lycées aussi (.) euh that is public you see you get all
(...) tout ce qui est public tu vois sorts of people
tu reçois toutes sortes de
personnes
- l: oui les personnes de la (.) rue (.) yes people from the (.) streets (.)

comment and express their amusement. I got an overall sense that Boris is dedicated to upholding Cameroon, and to him, this CFrA group is a good means of doing that. It is, to him, a very good way of bringing Cameroonians together.

Extract 5:

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| 1 | tu sais quand tu es aux États-Unis tu ne parles que l'anglais (.) le français aussi | you know when you are in the United States you only speak English (.) French as well |
| I: | oui | yes |
| 2 | donc (.) tu sais à un moment (.) tu as aussi (.) ça te manque hein quand tu vois un groupe comme ça où les (.) jeunes du Cameroun parlent (.) une langue (.) qui te manque un peu parce que tu sais quand j'ai fait l'université à Soa on parlait on parlait beaucoup ça (.) et avec des (.) avec tous ceux qui étaient autour | so (.) you know at some point (.) you also have (.) you also miss it eh when you see a group like that where the (.) young people from Cameroon speak (.) a language (.) that you miss a bit because you know when I was at university in Soa we spoke we spoke it a lot (.) and with (...) with all those who were around |
| I: | oui oui | yes yes |
| 3 | mais (.) quand je suis arrivé là s- (.) j'ai f- (.) quand je suis arrivé aux États-Unis c'est après peut-être deux ans que j'ai adhéré à ce groupe donc (...) | but (.) when I arrived there s- (.) I f- (.) when I arrived in the United States it was after about two years that I joined that group so (...) |

I:	et ça te manquait (.) l'ambiance de Soa te manquait donc (.) voilà quoi	so you missed (.) the atmosphere at Soa you missed it then (.) that's it
4	ouais ouais	yeah yeah
I:	d'accord (.) mais comment t'as fait pour changer de mentalité tu vois comme (.) euh comme je t'ai dit au début et tu n'es pas le seul (.) beaucoup de gens considèrent que c'est pas vraiment (.) une langue en- à vrai dire hein (.) c'est pas utile c'est pas (.) je sais pas ils ont souvent des critiques (.) comment tu es passé de ah c'est la langue des bandits ou un peu bizarre jusqu'à vraiment aimer ça (.) soutenir un groupe euh (.) tout ça quoi	ok (.) but how did you manage to change your mindset you see as (.) err I mentioned at the start and you are not the only one (.) many people don't really consider it to be (.) a language in- as a matter of fact eh (.) it is not useful it's not (.) I don't know they often have negative things to say (.) how did you go from ah it's the language of thugs to a bit strange to really loving it (.) supporting a group err (.) all of that basically
5	(.) en fait euh (.) tu sais que quand tu (.) quand tu grandis (.) tu euh (.) quand tu grandis tu prends conscience (.) tu vois (.) tu vois que (.) finalement ce n'est pas (.) souvent ce que l'on pense parce que (.) tu te rends compte que (.) ceux qui parlent même ça aussi sont des personnes qui ont fréquenté euh	(.) actually err (.) you know that when you (.) when you grow up (.) you err (.) when you grow up you realise (.) you see (.) you see that (.) finally things are not (.) often the way we think because (.) you realise that (.) those who speak that as well are people who also went to school err or who (.) are well off (.) and who are able to speak French (.) good

- ou qui (.) sont bien situées (.) et qui peuvent parler français (.) bon français comme ils veulent French as they want to
- I: oui yes
- 6 et (.) parfois quand tu parles le Francanglais comme ça c'est pour [te] sentir à l'aise (.) auprès des jeunes (.) et pour que vous puissiez vous bien vous comprendre (.) et quand je voyais aussi euh (.) des parents parler comme ça ou bien disons (.) ils disaient mais (.) mais (.) cette langue-là peut-être (.) on avait une mauvaise idée de ça mais tout le monde (.) emploie déjà (...) euh euh des mots (.) francanglais and (.) sometimes when you speak francanglais like that it is to feel more comfortable (.) with young people (.) and so that you know you can understand each other well (.) and when I also used to see err (.) parents speak like that or let's say (.) they would say but (.) but (.) this language maybe (.) we had the wrong idea about it but everyone (.) is now using (.) err err words of Francanglais
- I: oui c'est devenu plus courant (.) mhmm yes it has become more common(ly used) (.) mhmm
- 7 oui oui c'est devenu plus courant donc euh bon (.) yes yes it has become more common(ly used) so err well (.)

I probed to try to understand why (in Boris' opinion) many Group members choose to communicate in CFrA as opposed to just communicating in French. Like the majority of the participants who use CFrA, he claims that it creates a sense of greater closeness, warmth even, the sense that they have something

in common, they belong to a community built around this particular expression of their Cameroonian identity.

Extract 6:

- I: mais pourtant vous parlez tous but yet you all speak French (.) you
français (.) vous pouviez bien could continue to (.) speak French
continuer à (.) parler français
- 1 oui on parle tous français (.) yes we all speak French (.) but err=
mais euh=
- I: =comment ça vous rapproche =how does it bring you closer then
alors
- 3 tu parles euh (.) tu te sens plus à you speak err (.) you feel more at
l'aise (.) quand tu parles (.) ease when you speak (.)
Francanglais Francanglais
- I: je sais que ça fait un moment I know it's been a while I hope you
j'espère que tu as encore un peu still have a bit of time (.) I also
de temps (.) je voulais aussi un wanted to ask you a little
peu-
- 4 oui je suis là yes I'm here [free]
- I: oui super (.) je voulais ainsi-p- yes great (.) I also wanted to ask
un peu te demander (...) par you so- p- ask you a bit (...) about
rapport au (.) au blog quoi (.) au basically (.) the blog (.) the
(.) Camfranglais blog là Camfranglais blog¹³⁵

¹³⁵I chose to use the term blog because that was what Boris called it.

	fait qui ressentent le besoin de parler cette langue-là	who feel the need to speak that language
I:	d'accord	ok
10	donc euh ils ressentent ils ressentent le besoin de (.) donc (.) la plupart disent toujours waouh (.) ça m'a manqué (.) tu vois un peu donc (.) le fait de parler (.) en francanglais j'ai été dans (.) tel pays et (.) je n'ai pas eu l'occasion de parler encore donc ça me fait plaisir de parler (.) de venir reparler encore comme ça (.) dans notre langue oui oui (.) donc les gens ils ont une passion par rapport à cela	so err they feel the need they feel the need to (.) so most of them always say wow (.) I missed this (.) do you see what I mean (.) speaking in Francanglais I have been in (.) this country and (.) I didn't have the opportunity to speak anymore so I'm really pleased to speak (.) to come and speak it again like this (.) in our language yes yes(.) so people are passionate about that
I:	d'accord (.) ah c'est intéressant	ok (.) that's interesting

I spent a bit more time on Boris' interview, because I felt that his viewpoint as an administrator of the Group gave him a dual vantage point on the importance of CFrA to diasporic Cameroonians, first, as a diasporic Cameroonian speaker of CFrA, and secondly, as one who manages other people's interactions in and reactions to CFrA. The conversation with him was very interesting because he smoothly shifted from one position to the other depending on the question I was asking, which was led by his narrative. This interview displayed another aspect of co-construction of meaning by me as the interviewer and Boris as the interviewee. I also got a sense that Boris' subjective choices about what he perceived to be the appropriate direction to head to in the discussion,

compensated for my subjectivity as a researcher leading this project, which I believe adds to the validity of the conclusions I draw from the analysis of the interviews.

6.4 Conclusion

The eight interviews above confirm the importance of language in the participants' life histories and trajectories from Cameroon to the Western city they live in. None of the participants have a neutral or detached relationship with the languages of their repertoire. Rather, language seems to play a significant part in the construction and expression of their identities and is intricately woven in their narratives. Most of the participants indicate that each language practice has a specific role or function, and for most of them, CFrA emerges as an important contributor to the success of their lived experience as diasporics in the Western world. Themes of home and belonging are hinted at or in some cases, expressed overtly in relation to language. Further, clear patterns emerge from their statements about the languages that have punctuated the different stages of their lives, which are described in detail in the analysis section (8.2).

The chapter that follows outlines the reasons why I chose the Facebook Group, followed by a description of the group, the community and the activity, and some extracts of interactions analysed to address the aims of this study.

Chapter 7 – The data – Group 'Ici on topo le Camfranglais! Le speech des vrais man du mboa'¹³⁶

7.1 Introduction

I chose to focus on this Facebook-based group as my source of online data, because the other CFrA-related websites available tended to teach CFrA rather than encouraging interaction in CFrA, and also because this group was the largest group focusing on CFrA with visible profiles of contributors¹³⁷. Secondly, this group was created by a diasporic Cameroonian, which made him a suitable match for my project. I contacted him several times to hear his story and to ask for his assistance to access to data about group members' locations and age groups, social and occupational categories etc. He never got back to me, so the Group administrator was the one I interviewed. Thirdly, many group contributors were based in Paris, London, and North America, so they fell within my target.

The next section provides a brief description of Facebook, followed by the structure and activity of the Group.

7.2 The network and the Group

Facebook, now called Meta, is an American online social media and social networking service based in California founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and others¹³⁸. The social network is in a good position to impact communities around the world, with its 2.85 billion monthly active users (as of the first quarter of 2021), as that makes it the biggest social network worldwide. Facebook is widely known and used by most, so I do not provide here a description of the detailed sections available to users or the layout of Facebook profiles or pages.

¹³⁶ Here we speak Camfranglais! The speech of the genuine people from home.

¹³⁷ This means that these contributors could be more easily identified than on other fora where posts displayed no information about the person posting other than a name/pseudonym.

¹³⁸ <https://investor.fb.com/resources/default.aspx> and <https://about.facebook.com/meta/>

This said, I briefly touch on what Facebook offers its users that is relevant to this study.

It is common knowledge that Facebook is a platform for communication, used to share and/or read, thoughts, information, content and more. The network affords its users a range of opportunities to engage with others. Before delving deeper into those opportunities, I start by highlighting the fact that “much of Facebook users’ activity consists of creating (and commenting on) written posts” (Franz et al, 2019, npn) even though there are other sources of data that can be useful for qualitative research studies such as this one. Furthermore, the type of post can affect page or group members’ reactions; for example, photos and status updates, and conversational posts tend to receive more likes and comments than other types of posts (Kwok & Yu, 2013). Posts that include call to action are also known to increase involvement (Peruta & Shields, 2018; Lee, 2012). Accordingly, most of my discussion and analysis centres around the Facebook posts downloaded from the Group, the description and analysis of these posts (in Chapter 8 of this thesis) suggests that the members selected (mostly) seem aware of, and confident using the above devices to attract engagement.

In the section that follows, I outline what Facebook has to offer its users, and next, how the Group members whose chats are part of the data in this study engage with Facebook posts.

Georgalou (2017) aptly describes what she calls Facebook’s ‘framework of affordances’, viz. affordances of participation, of space, of personal expression, and of connection, what the network facilitates, hinders and inhibits (Adami and Kress 2010, p. 185). As Georgalou (op cit., p. 67) argues, “we should neither view technology as determining uses nor people as determining the technology, but instead [...] look for an interaction between the member and a complex technology that both facilitates and impedes what we wish to do”. The lens of

Georgalou's affordances yields insights that help to better understand this interaction between the technology and its users.

The author states that affordances of participation are to do with creating profiles and setting them to private or public; affordances of space, to the environment that users face when they log in to Facebook; affordances of personal expression to profile customisation; and affordances of connection, to friending, contacting and linking with others (ibid). I briefly discuss the affordances that are most relevant to this study.

7.2.1 Facebook affordances of participation

In this category, Georgalou lists the 'About' section where Facebook users present the personal information they choose to share, such as location, contact details and more. This is also where users upload their profile photo (a thumbnail visible to all) and their cover photo (a wide image at the top of the member's profile). The 'About' section is key when trying to establish what aspects of users' identity is being put forward by them. As highlighted by Georgalou (p. 68), the information in this section should be taken as evidence of users' communicative intentions and indices of the attributes of the member's identity (Yus 2011, p. 118; Livingstone 2008, p. 399). See below my About section, showing my Facebook name, photo, and the top portion of my list of Friends.

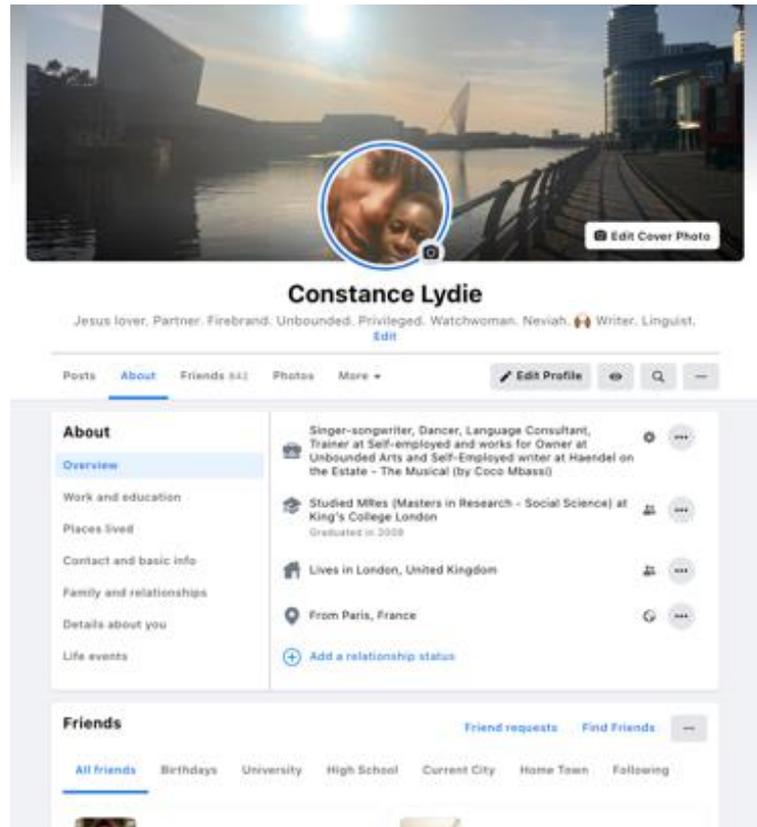


Image 3: My About section, showing my Facebook name, profile photo, my information and the top portion of my list of Friends

7.2.2 Facebook affordances of space

Georgalou (op cit., pp 69-72) describes these as including the News Feed, the Timeline Notifications and Check-ins¹³⁹. The Timeline is where users' content is posted and displayed, and posts on this space can be accessed by anyone depending on the profile member's privacy settings. Content appears on the Timeline in chronological order (unless a post is 'pinned' to the top of the Timeline).

¹³⁹ See an example on page 337.

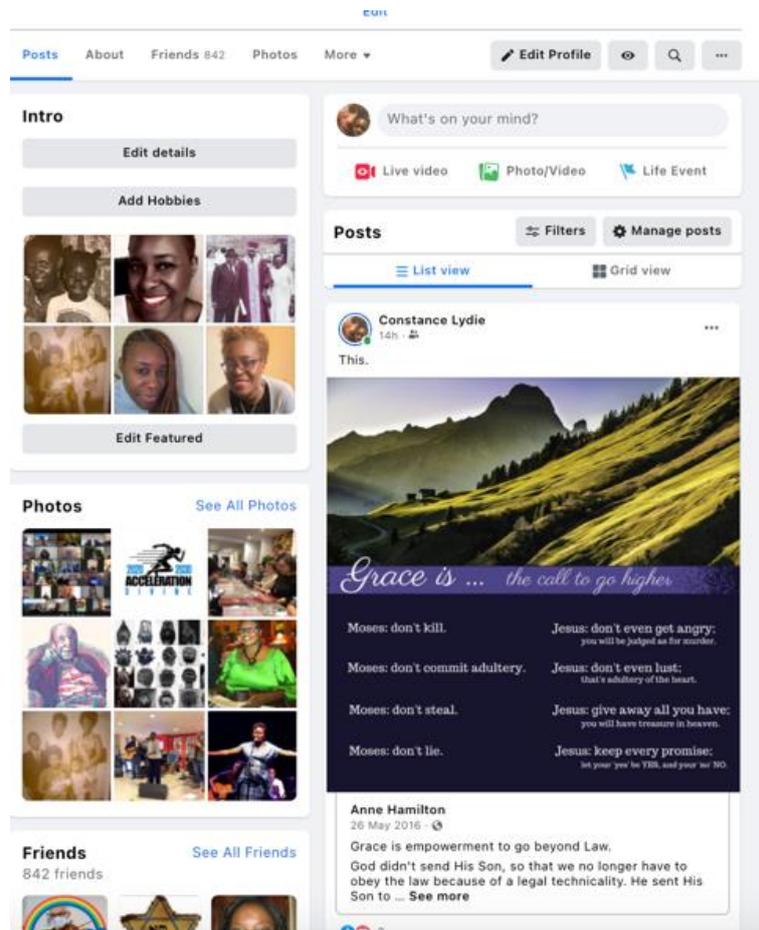


Image 4: My Timeline

7.2.3 Facebook affordances of personal expression

The key feature central to all communications on Facebook is the post. In this research project, as on Facebook, a post refers to a single written proposition, contribution or comment, either initial or in reaction to prior posts.

Another term that recurs frequently in this study is a 'thread' of posts – the written equivalent of a conversation, i.e., a series of posts, all typed in as comments to an initial post. In most cases, the posts in a thread are interrelated (as are most offline conversations), can be bounded by greetings or introductions and parting words (or not) – see Image 5.

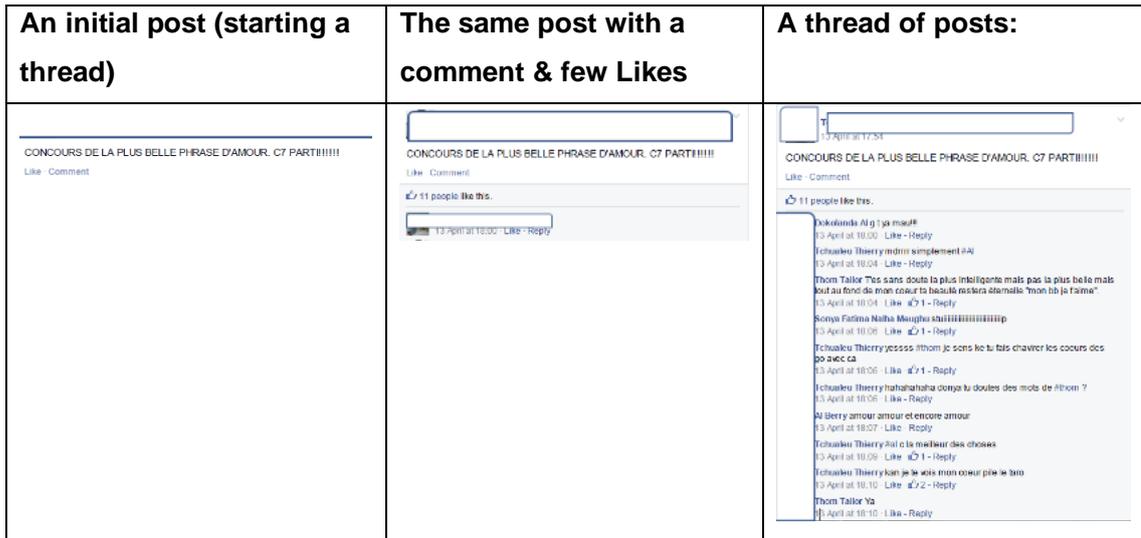


Image 5: Posts with reactions - Facebook Group

7.2.4 Facebook affordances of connection

They include Friends, Comments, Tagging, Sharing, Messaging, and Groups (Georgalou, op cit, pp 76-84). I focus mainly here on the Group and the Comments in the threads.

Groups (such as the CFrA Group) enable members to share information and discuss a range of topics with other members with whom they share common interests.

Members can interact with other members by Commenting on their posts for example, or by posting text (or other types of reactions) to status updates or uploaded content. Comments underneath an initial post appear in chronological order or by relevance, as the order can be tailored. Members can also react to comments using emoticons such as Likes (thumb up emoji), Haha (laughing emoji), Wow (surprised emoji), Sad (emoji shedding one tear) and more. ‘Likes’ added to a post or a thread do not impact its position. Emojis and Comments, however, move Facebook threads to the top every time they are added to the

conversation¹⁴⁰, giving threads a new ‘lease of life’ and keeping the chat going. Threads also (re)appear in the Newsfeed of users who are ‘following’ them (i.e., those who have posted a Comment, added an emoji, or elected to receive notifications for that thread).

As discussed in the next section and as confirmed by Georgalou (op cit, p. 77), Comments indicate “attention to and engagement with a post”. One may assume that Likes are used by Facebook friends to signal one or more of the following: that they have seen a post, they agree with it, they are interested in it, they empathise etc.

The aforementioned ‘affordances’ paint a picture and serve as the background setting on which the CFrA Group is built and that determine the interactional activity on the Group.

In the section that follows, I outline certain features of Facebook that have affected access to the data and thus, my analysis and conclusions.

7.2.5 Facebook features and their impact on this study

Facebook displays users’ posts in a manner that determines the interactions visible on the page, with algorithms being used as a content editor determining what is worth ‘pushing forward’ (see Cooper, 2021, npn; Pócs et al, 2021; Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018). As Cooper puts it, “The Facebook algorithm decides which posts people see every time they check their Facebook feed, and in what order those posts show up.” Cooper also highlights that the prioritisation of posts that receive comments only dates from 2018. This selection based on the popularity of posts determines what is visible, and thus makes it more likely to attract interaction. It’s a case of a cat biting its own tail. Even though users have agency in what they choose to

¹⁴⁰Thanks to Facebook algorithms, see <https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-algorithm/> for more details.

interact with (as the filtering also depends on users' choices), the dice seem piped in favour of more visible interactions, as some chats are pushed so far down that they are not displayed anymore, unless a comment brings them to the top of the page again.

The 2018 version of the ranking signals seems to be the one that was the most prominent at the time of my data collection, as the chats that were visible were indeed the ones that received the most interaction (as I learnt at my expense when I would return a few days after a visit, to find that the latest chat of interest to me had 'disappeared'). This feature had a direct impact on the posts I was able to access, acting as an additional and unsolicited filter, a further means of selection of the data I ended up downloading.

Finally, my personal knowledge of technology came into play, the fact for example, that I was not able to write a computer script to extract the data that I needed from the group, or a simpler issue such as the fact that downloading threads of posts dating from over a week proved an uphill battle because the page kept crashing (due to the size of the download). As a result, it took me at least ten attempts before I was finally successful, and this had a strong impact on the pace of my progress.

7.2.6 Facebook privacy features and their impact on my study

Finally, another significant issue (which is not new, of course) was the fact that some group members dissimulate their identities on the Internet. This aspect (discussed in Chapter 4) impacted my ability to access the relevant data quite significantly. To ensure some consistency with my interviews, I initially planned to include in this project data from diasporic Cameroonians living in the UK, France, or North America. Thus, I needed to ascertain whether Group members active in the chats I looked at were indeed in these locations.

As anticipated, accessing information about their location proved challenging, so I changed this part of my research design, and ended up selecting and analysing five threads initiated by diasporic Cameroonians living anywhere in the Western world. I felt comfortable doing so because I believe it is improbable that the exact location would reduce their likelihood of facing similar issues of home and belonging to the ones France, UK and US-based diasporics face. I drew this conclusion while reading through related literature, (e.g., Hua and Wei, 2016), that made it clear that these issues are a reality not only for sub-Saharan Africans, but also for other non-White people living in pretty much every (majority White) Western country.

In the section that follows, I start with a brief presentation of the Group and its aims, my selection process, and the activity in the Group.

7.3 General description of the Group

7.3.1 Introduction

Wilson and Peterson (2002, p. 449) argue that online groups “might be mobilized to further particular political agendas or to bring together dispersed members of familial or ethnic groups”. The stated vocation of the Group seems to confirm their statement: to “Promote through this language, the culture of true Cameroonians, the true people from Mboa”. The claims of authenticity and inclusion contained in the Group name and linked specifically to CFrA and being Cameroonian, made the Group noteworthy to me and convinced me that it was the perfect online community to examine, especially as this study focuses on CFrA as a means of bringing together diasporic Cameroonians who, I purport, experience othering in the Western cities they live in.

The general description of the Group is in French and CFrA, as are the rules of conduct. Based on this mission statement, one would expect at least some

group members to be Cameroonians living in Cameroon and abroad. All the members whose profiles I looked at in detail (at data collection stage) had Cameroonian surnames, so I could safely assume that they were of Cameroonian origin.

The bulk of my data comes from the previous version of the group (pre group deletion), and the description and the discussion that follow are based on my observation of that version.

Like every other Facebook page or group, the Group has a timeline-type (central) section where all the posts appear in chronological order, based on the last comment added (except for pinned posts). This section is visible only to members, as membership is required to access Group posts. Once members have been accepted, they can type messages, post photographs or videos to the Wall, comment on other members' posts, or add emojis and other graphic reactions to posts.

7.3.2 Membership

My discussion with the Group's administrator revealed that it hosts a heterogeneous mix of people from a wide range of backgrounds, age groups, social statuses etc. To become members, people must apply to join or be added by existing members. There are several sections in the Group, the most relevant for this study being the Files section which contained a CFrA dictionary and the Rules of procedure. It is also possible to search for a name in the list of members, and this is the function that I used to examine members' profiles to access background information and context about them.

7.3.3. Selection process

Most of the chat data from the Facebook Group comes from 30 days' worth of posts (i.e., 742 screenshots) downloaded from this group, which at the time

counted 65294 members¹⁴¹, which, to the best of my knowledge, made it the largest Facebook group created by and intended for members of Cameroonian origin until it was taken down on August 28th, 2014. On August 29th, when I tried to click on the link to open the group, an error message appeared. I typed the Boolean search: "Facebook" + "Ici on topo" in the Google search bar, and one of the results was the message below¹⁴²:



Image 6: Closed Facebook Group

The group was closed by Facebook because it 'violated their terms of use'. Recreated within a few hours on that same day, the new Group¹⁴³ is very similar to the initial one. One aspect that differentiates this version from the previous one, is the fact that its terms and conditions (posted in the section named 'About' – see Image 7 below) are written in CFrA rather than in standard French and English, and that these terms and conditions are nowhere nearly as formal as the previous ones.

¹⁴¹Figures accurate on August 10th, 2014.

¹⁴²Translation of the heading in French: Group closed. What can be done? Who should I ask? Help.

¹⁴³<https://www.facebook.com/groups/iciontopolecamfranglaisnewstyle/> - URL of the new group.



Image 7: New Facebook Group

Here is the text in the (new) About section and its translation:

<p><i>ICI NOUS ON TOPO LE CAMFRANGLAIS, comot les diva du kwatt, se helep, lap, se koch mbindiment j'ai dis mbindiment hein...euuuh bon... on est entre nous quoi... se gui les tuyaux de la life, si tu nyè les mbérés qui came tu cries seulement AWARAAA...on emballe les kako... on ne flo pas le njap ici...le centre jamot n'a pas de local ici... les mamesatan c'est pas ici non plus...c'est dans la joie et le respect. . Ici on topo NEWSTYLE emergence 2034 on aura un an d'avance...c'est déjà ça hein...Dans les easy cam chou ta dose de camfranglais dis donc ! :p</i></p>	<p>HERE WE SPEAK CAMFRANGLAIS, get the natter/gossip¹ of the neighbourhood out, help each other, laugh, insult or tease each other just a little, I said just a little ... errr well, we are amongst friends, give each other tips for life, if you see the military/police coming, you just shout AWARAA², we'll wrap all the stuff [we are selling], we don't sell drugs³ here, Jamot hospital⁴ doesn't have a room here, satan-women⁵ aren't here either ... it's with joy and respect.</p>	<p>Notes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Divers, diva, gossip, idle chat in CFrA – see https://fr.wiktionary.org/wiki/Annexe:Camfranglais for many of these terms 2. Name used for the patrols of the Urban Community of Yaoundé, the municipal police, who look for and send away people selling goods on the sidewalks of the city. These petty traders have illegal roadside stands, so the practice of wrapping one's goods swiftly to run before being fined would be very familiar to Cameroonians who live or lived in Cameroon.
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	<p>Ici on topo NEWSTYLE emergence 2034⁶ we will be a year early... that's something at least eh... Nice and easy come and show your dose of Camfranglais come on! :p⁷.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The word 'ndjap' most probably means marijuana. 4. A well-known psychiatric hospital in Yaoundé. 5. In Beti-Fang languages and in Duala languages, calling someone 'satan' means they are annoying, irritating, difficult. 6. This is a reference to the Cameroonian president's plan for economic emergence, the target date being 2034. 7. The symbol :p represents the emoticon that shows a tongue protruding, which can be cute or disrespectful (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=%3AP).
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Even though the tone is light and playful, the instructions communicate rules of conduct, which can be summarised as 'use the Group in a friendly, fun and inclusive manner without too much profanity and nothing illegal'.

7.3.4 Downloading the data

I downloaded written interactions from this group with the intention of analysing them. I hoped to find in this data wider insights that would (or would not) enable me to draw links between the use of CFrA and diasporic contributors' experiences of living away from Cameroon, including references to culture, identity, integration in the society they find themselves in, being Cameroonian, their socio-economic background etc.

At first, I downloaded posts that appealed to me in a non-systematic manner. I later decided to collect data more systematically, so I set a start and end date for this task (March 16th, 2013 to April 16th, 2013), and I downloaded threads

daily as screen grabs, making sure all additional contributions to existing posts were included. I chose to download the data in this way to increase my chances of accessing posts by a range of contributors as randomly as possible, to avoid conscious choices linked to content or characteristics of contributors (such as their name/pseudonym) or the topics displayed on the chats. I also downloaded additional data a month later with the hope of accessing more posts written by diasporic Cameroonians (based on the principle that the more data I collected, the greater the probability of gathering data including diasporic users). I stopped after that additional month because by then, I had gathered a sufficiently large number of chats.

7.4 Activity in the Group

7.4.1 Introduction

As is often the case in online fora (Regadera, Gárgoles, & Pérez, 2021), the Group features multimodal linguistic and social interaction between its members, and practices, meanings and identities intermingle. Group members engage in communicative events around and using the medium of a (language) practice (CFrA), and using other language forms.

During these 'conversations' or 'chats', meaning is exchanged, some implicit and some explicit, and group members can also choose to put forward the identity or identities that position them in particular ways.

7.4.2 Engaging with the Group

The Group was simultaneously my field, an instrument for obtaining data (Wittel, 2000) and a potential gateway to the wider, physical field. As a member of the group, it was relatively easy for me to take part in the interaction, as a means of establishing relationships in the virtual field. One of the most prominent issues associated with research on online spaces is thought to be

access. As argued by Wittel (*ibid*), in traditional ethnography, a gate keeper would facilitate access to a physical group, to information about their background, their stories, their location, etc. As is the case offline, access to this information is key to gaining deeper understanding of what is going on in terms of identity construction and production in the online group, beyond what the members choose to post. My 'gate keeper', the Group's administrator was not able to facilitate access to more privileged information. Regadera, Gárgoles, & Pérez's (2021) proposition that studying the offline interactions between individuals could be a solution was not an option for me, mainly because the members interacting on the posts I downloaded were not necessarily in the same part of the world as me. I ended up searching for and finding clues in the group members' profiles to select those who were based in Europe or in the US.

Group members are quite active, seemingly regularly reacting to posts, but interacting with members outside the Group is not as easy or straightforward. I was fairly new to the Group when I started collecting data. I remained a member of the Group for three years. In that time, I sent numerous messages to three group members selected because certain clues suggested that they were Paris-based (as later confirmed by the administrator), but they did not respond. They were active on Facebook, so this indicates that their non-response was deliberate. I gave up and decided to cast a wider net, as explained in detail in section 8.3.1 below.

In the next section I discuss the types of communicative events that take place in the Group, how the Group operates, and how the fact that the Group is hosted on Facebook (and thus subject to Facebook's rules) impacts the posts.

7.4.3 The activity in the Group

7.4.3.1 Introduction

In the Group, members start threads daily. Once the post has been submitted or an image/a video has been uploaded, group members either interact or don't. Depending on group members' reactions to posts and thanks to Facebook's algorithms, each visit to the Group is likely to show a different and ever-changing array of threads at the top of the page, which means that the posts that generate the largest number of written contributions are more likely to be seen.

Group administrators also have the option of prioritising some posts over others by pinning them to the top, which they did (as mentioned previously) for the post reminding all group members that the Group is open to all, and that they should be aware of the image they send to the world when communicating, and of the risk of being shut down.

7.4.3.2 Member interaction

There are male and female members whose ages seem to fall in a range between 15 and 45 (based on their profile photos). Many of the group members' personal information is not accessible. To gain more information, I drew from Markham's proposition for data analysis, which involves "seriously examin[ing] certain practices of Othering which, despite efforts to be reflexive, hide in everyday, embodied ways of knowing" for those whose "gender, name, body type, age, ethnicity, class, and location remain inexplicable" (2005, p. 795). I discuss these 'practices of othering' in section 7.4.3.3.

Some of the threads follow relatively traditional formats, i.e., members might start with a greeting of some sort, and if the initial contributor 'leaves', they might post a parting message, but this does not seem to apply to the majority of

cases. Generally, members interact and then they stop 'abruptly', but the thread remains implicitly 'open' as other members may choose to pick up the 'chat' again.

The members generally use a great deal of humour and inventiveness, adopting various 'tones of voice' that can be chatty (e.g. telling a story, real or fictitious, or a joke); playful (e.g. posting games or enigmas to be solved); confidential (like a psychoanalyst's couch or a close friend's ear); seeking advice; lonely/reaching out; flirty; seeking physical validation from group members; didactic (proposing mathematical problems or riddles to be 'solved' by fellow group members, and in one case, setting a task for other members which consists in translating French into CFrA) and more.

Some offer linguistic meta-commentary about CFrA, about what linguistic forms are acceptable in the Group or not, or political commentary about events or issues, encouraging group members to discuss the points raised. Societal issues affecting Cameroonians back home (and more rarely) abroad are also discussed. Photographs of people engaging in activities that are recognisably located in Africa/Cameroon are often used to start threads.

By engaging in these communicative events and by making specific linguistic choices, the members can co-construct language that I postulate falls broadly under the term 'Camfranglais', and/or fits the aims of the Group.

7.5 Conclusion

Most of the members whose posts I came across in the Facebook Group use language that signals commonality of (Cameroonian) origin including terms similar if not identical to those used offline, such as the Cameroonian expression '*On est ensemble*' (which means 'we are together'), '*le ledge/letch*'

(the village)¹⁴⁴, '*le mboa*', and other references largely familiar to Cameroonians. They put forward, I postulate, and orient themselves as being part of, an imagined felt CFrA-speaker identity (or at least an imagined uniquely 'felt' Cameroonian identity), a collective 'Self' vs. an 'Other', which would presumably point not only to non-Cameroonians, White host country majority, but also non-CFrA speakers.

Strategies such as these can be taken as markers of 'togetherness' as they signal a real or imagined diasporic Cameroonian common ground (which means they would have to set aside, at least temporarily, other intra-Cameroonian ethnic and linguistic differences to be meaningful and effective). These strategies, I argue, are used to reinforce the Group members' (re)creation of their selves. They make it possible to say, 'We are us', and this statement only holds if Others are 'they' or 'them'. They stand in (conscious or unconscious) opposition/reaction to discourses of othering or other forms of rejection these diasporic Cameroonians can be assumed to be the target of. It wouldn't be a stretch to see these strategies as being part of resistance against oppressions in the offline world (such as daily micro-aggressions, hostile media discourses, and more) in the context of Western society that often portray them as 'not the norm', 'deviant' (as migrants, ethnic minorities etc.).

The 'standard' status CFrA holds in the Group contrasts with Cameroonian nation-state official language ideological views labelling the register as being deviant relatively to standard languages. The Group affords the members the opportunity to operate in a space where they are no longer deviant, and conversely, here there is an opportunity to portray the non-CFrA speaker as deviant (on- and offline).

In the first profile of Group members analysed, such explicit characterisations of the 'Other' appear, signalled by the use of they/them vs. we/our, associated with

¹⁴⁴ Members are addressed as '*les gars du letch*' or '*les ngas/gos du letch*' (respectively 'the blokes of the village' and 'the chicks of the village').

discourse that clearly highlights differences between one ethnic group and another, references to the colonial history of Africa etc.

See this extract from the first chat below (section 8.3.4.1), for example:

*[M6] how the French perceive what? when **they** came to **our** (home) in africa, with the bible and other things... did **we** call **them**, today **we** are here with bobolo. Too bad. 😊 (sic)*

The presence of such markers of togetherness suggests that CFrA may indeed symbolise a form of Cameroonian-ness that brings together the diasporics who are active in this community of practice, and that beyond the Group, the use of these strategies may be linked to negotiations of home and belonging. A more in-depth discussion follows in Chapter 8.

The next chapter presents the analysis of the Skype interviews followed by the analysis of the data downloaded from the Facebook Group.

Chapter 8 – Data Analysis

8.1 Framework of analysis

When reflecting on ways of analysing the data I collected, I found the idea of 'letting the data speak for themselves' quite appealing, if slightly delusional. After researching this concept, I realised that Gould (1981) had written a paper titled exactly like my idea, and of course, I had no choice but to agree with him that "inanimate data can never speak for themselves, and we always bring to bear some conceptual framework, either intuitive and ill-formed, or tightly and formally structured, to the task of investigation, analysis, and interpretation" (p.166). I then asked myself what conceptual framework led me to formulate my data analysis plan in that way. How was I going to select the statements and chat downloads that I would focus on in greater detail? (Gibbs, 2007) argues that in qualitative research, coding is "how you define what the data you are analysing are about", "a process of identifying a passage in the text or other data items (such as photograph, image), searching and identifying concepts and finding relations between them".

Taking my research questions as the framework on the basis of which data excerpts would be selected and analysed, I engaged in listening to and reading the data collected, and I would return to specific extracts as and when necessary.

I realised a posteriori that I had started analysis as soon as I started collecting data, which is many researchers' experience (as confirmed by Creese & Copland, 2015), and that the process unfolded iteratively throughout, as I navigated between collection and analysis, which enabled me to "identify avenues [to] be explored further and seek explanations for unexpected results." (Schneider et al., 2017, p. 372). While Schneider et al. discuss this *modus operandi* in the context of grounded theory, my project merely followed the principle which consists in drawing (in my case) loose descriptors from the data,

such as the themes and topics that interviewees and/or the group members brought up, seeing if and how they intersected with my research questions, and making every effort to stay away from a model of coding in which analytical codes are “predetermined and “imposed” on the data” (ibid.). I had a suspicion (for example) that pre-establishing which keywords suggest that one topic or another is being evoked could be really misleading, and my suspicion was confirmed as data collection progressed. In so many instances, interviewees would suddenly evoke questions of identity, of what constituted home, without any prior indication in their communication that they were about to do so.

The Skype interviews were my first data set. My introductory question, formulated in various ways because it often segued after an informal ice-breaker type chat, focused on interviewees’ language practices. This was an intentional choice, aiming at “orienting the discussion to topics that [...] attracted [my] analytical attention” (Copland & Creese, 2015, p. 31). As suggested by Copland and Creese, I proceeded as follows:

- i) I labelled the audio recordings (totalling over 9 hours of data) with details including the date and time of the interview, and stored them in three different memories to avoid data loss.
- ii) I wrote field notes and memos, the former as soon as possible after the interview, sometimes even while the interview was taking place as I wanted to be able to remember non-verbal reactions, points that I thought would be worth enquiring further about, and other details that would later aid analysis.
- iii) I transcribed the recordings of the interviews in ‘intelligent verbatim’ mode (i.e., reserving the right to omit certain elements, such as errs, repetitions and false starts), if they added no meaning to the script (though I did include many of those as I felt that they signalled meaningful hesitations on the part of the participants). I transcribed the discussions as soon as possible to ensure that the memory of the interview was still fresh. My transcription conventions are loosely

based on Gumperz & Berentz (1992). I included pauses (short or long, no more detailed than that), and I only marked intonation or repetition in cases where they provided added meaning to the interpretation and analysis of what was being said. I marked turns in conversation, overlap and interruptions, where relevant, but I only included in this thesis, sections of the interviews that related to my research questions or that provided background information relevant to the study.

- iv) I marked utterances my initial (I for interviewer) for easy reference and numbered turns marking the interviewees' statements).
- v) I repeatedly read the transcripts (and listened to the interviews), and where relevant, jotted down more memos. Themes that I would later examine in greater detail emerged from this repeated engagement with the data, and I used these themes to analyse the data in relation to my research questions.

8.2 Analysis of Skype interviews

8.2.1 Introduction

During the interview process, I became increasingly comfortable along the way (after initially feeling as if I was intruding in the participants' lives), as I later realised that most of them relaxed after the first 5 minutes of interviews or so, and were happy to share their story). This said, I found that there was a spontaneous adaptation on my part (such as toning down my French accent, downplaying my French nationality and my sense of affiliation to France or playing up my Cameroonian-ness), and this (uncontrolled) switch proved useful as I believe it put interviewees at ease.

The discussion that follows delves in greater detail into their statements and outlines the general trends.

The main themes raised by the participants were (in no particular order):
i) the languages of their repertoire (mainly French, English, Cameroonian vernaculars, CPE, CFrA), *ii)* home and identity, *iii)* language ideologies, and *iv)* other themes such as social class, accent adaptation and switch, integration and more.

In all but one of the interviews, two overarching elements stand out:

- the apparent erasure of agency when discussing their use of Cameroonian national languages, and the limited or inexistent proficiency in their Cameroonian vernacular language;
- discourses of belonging (marked by terms such as closeness, warmth, comfort, safe) and affiliation to an alleged transnational Cameroonian community and identity, enacted through the use of CFrA.

Beyond these two broad lines, the analysis of the data shows that there are clearly at least three different types of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) relevant to the different 'markets' the participants find themselves in, namely:

- i) standard French or English (depending on their country of residence),
- ii) their vernacular language and/or CPE (where relevant), and
- iii) CFrA.

Moreover, the participants appear to navigate between three main axes:

- a) hegemonic host country discourses about 'foreigner' status and 'integration', which lead some of them to use 'White French sounding' accents for example;
- b) hegemonic language ideologies of the Cameroonian nation-state, generally pertaining to English, French, CPE, and of course CFrA, which allow them the freedom to decide that the register signals informality, familiarity, friend- or kinship, belonging etc. but still weigh enough on them to influence their view that it is not a 'language' and is not appropriate for 'serious' discussions;
- c) the space in between, where they deploy linguistic resources to enact their chosen positioning and self-constructed and appropriated identities in the social world they find themselves in, a space in which CFrA seems to fit very well.

A more detailed and comparative look at the participants' statements about the languages of their repertoire reveals the following trends:

- i)* French is their first language, and most of them exclusively spoke French at home as children;
- ii)* six out of eight say they speak CFrA or at least understand it very well and say that it signals closeness between people from the same background and plays a key role in their diasporic lives;
- iii)* seven out of eight speak English fluently;
- iv)* five out of eight say they speak their vernacular or at least understand it;
- v)* five out of eight consider Cameroon their home;
- vi)* six out of eight are aligned (closely or at least loosely) with the Cameroonian nation-state's ideologies of language, in terms of the value of standard languages, especially the former colonial, official languages of Cameroon.

There are also few outliers:

- one out of eight of the participants has never spoken CFrA and doesn't spell out a need for it, or its value to diasporic Cameroonians;
- two out of eight are most comfortable in their Western nation and call it home; they say their sense of identity is hybrid, a combination of the influences of the country of origin, the country of birth, and the country where they live now;
- two out of eight openly state that they switch accents or at least alter the way they speak, in order to be understood better and to aid integration; and,
- one participant only clearly distances himself from the hegemonic language ideologies of the Cameroonian nation-state, openly stating that he considers the former colonial languages necessary evil, an obligation.

This preliminary look at the participants' statements shows that it is possible to align with the ideologies of language of the Cameroonian nation-state that saw

no value in non-standard varieties of language and discouraged the use of vernaculars in school, and to appreciate and engage with CFrA. Most of the interviewees' statements highlight a tension between their adherence to hegemonic language ideologies (of Cameroon and the host country) and their use of CFrA as an icon of identity and an emblem of authenticity in their project of self-construction, marked by utterances such as 'our national language', 'creates a sense of greater closeness, warmth', 'something in common' (in reference to CFrA. This tension points to a need for what I can only call 'coping mechanisms' that I venture to postulate, emerge as a reaction to overtly or covertly hostile environments (such as negative discourses about 'foreigners' in the media and in politicians' statements, day-to-day racism and discriminatory practices, and any other pressures placed on them because of people's perceptions of/reactions to the fact that they are non-White and non-European). Some of the interviewees' statements provide evidence that these post-postcolonials do come under the pressures of discourses, institutions, traditions, and socio-political practices that impose a social construct of race in which notions such as "blackness" (or being a migrant, African, illegal, a visible minority) are constructed intentionally and unintentionally (Nielsen 2013). They live in a society in which non-White and especially people of sub-Saharan African origin constantly find themselves having to justify their presence (see Marchetti, 2020, on migrants in Italy, Tyerman, 2021, on migrants in Calais), and to answer the infamous question, verbalised, hinted at, or just felt, "Where are you (really) from?". As further argued by Nielsen (op cit.), these post-postcolonials can (and do) use their agency to live creatively in resistance to those pressures, self-constructing themselves (for example) through the practice of and engagement with CFrA.

In her interview, Thalia (section 6.3.7) labels CFrA <*notre langage à nous*> for <our own language> (as opposed to French, the colonial language), and Adam and Lovely (sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.5) call it <*la/ma language nationale*> for <the/my national language>. Particularly for people of Cameroonian origin, often identified as Francophone or Anglophone, their statements indicate the

sense of agency CFrA confers them and suggest that their positioning regarding the status of CFrA participates in their self-construction.

As suggested by De Féal, (2003), considering the above, it is not a stretch to see the use of CFrA as one aspect of a reappropriation of their self-definition, snatched out of the hands and control of the former coloniser, and also acknowledging that they are no longer what they were before colonisation.

8.2.2 Language and identity

8.2.2.1 CFrA

In terms of identity in relation to the languages of their repertoire, what emerges from most participants' statements about their use of CFrA is an ever-evolving and changing sense of affiliation. It is one that they come to through the use of CFrA in their discursive activities which (I postulate) are a subset of various similar strategies. They 'set aside', I argue, the identity expressed through the use of CFrA once they are 'done', to return to their daily activities as diasporic Cameroonians, beyond the community/ies of practice in which CFrA is the currency with the highest market value. This Cameroonian-ness that is available through the practice of CFrA appears to be a complex, hybrid identity or rather a set of identities to which/from which they (choose to) align or 'disalign' themselves, depending on the context, the market. This is what Dellwing (2012) describes as 'Janus work' (in reference to the two-faced Roman idol), or face-work. Dellwing states, "Little dramas of discomposure are thus important elements of face-work that can be analyzed as such: They allow for a negotiation of identity through reaction to ascriptions made by others, but reactions that remain on the back stage and thus avoid negotiations of rank and hierarchy that would usually accompany communications of judgment." (p. 146) I would add that this switching is often in reaction to self-imposed ascriptions. Their turning towards one set of ideologies, then towards another (opposed) one, is like a piece of clothing that they wear for the right occasion and remove

as and when they need to, identified by Goffman (1981, p. 128) as “a change of footing”, which “implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production and reception of an utterance”.

Such changes of footing transpired during the interviews, marked for example by metalinguistic labels applied to CFrA by some of the participants, e.g., “quote/unquote a language” (Thalia), “not a language” (Freddy), “not respectful” (Lovely). Further evidence of this turning towards/away movement is when Freddy said he didn’t speak CFrA at the start of the interview, then subsequently confessed that he did, or when Manuela chose to gradually reveal her awareness of CFrA as the interview progressed, initially referring to CFrA as “local terms”, and later in the conversation, giving a specific example and naming the speech form accurately. This shift of footing is also very well expressed by Lovely as discussed above, not to do with CFrA, but rather with regards to accent switch. While many might not adapt their intonation and pronunciation as drastically as Lovely does, most France-based Africans that I have met adjust to a certain extent, if only by restricting their use of CFrA to their community of practice and by softening their accent to make it more intelligible to locals (see Telep, 2015 on ‘whitisation’).

8.2.2.2 Frenchness and Cameroonian-ness

Unlike Lovely and though they both seem to draw their sense of home and belonging from Cameroon, Craig’s disalignment from his French identity could be considered surprising, given that he is a French citizen and has been working as a civil servant for over two decades. His statements and positioning suggest an underlying practical and compartmentalised way of seeing life. He portrays former colonial languages as useful, indispensable even, in a globalised world. Craig says it is his mother tongue (a Cameroonian vernacular language) that defines who he is. He states that Cameroon has an increasingly strong pull on him, hinting at a potential return home in the future. Like the

others, Craig understands the advantages of fluency in Western languages and ways, as attested by his financial and social success, and his integration in French society. However, he is under no illusion about how difficult it is for people labelled as part of the 'visible minority' (a label historically applied to Black and brown people) to truly be integrated and accepted as legitimately belonging to French society. Moreover, he seems to have made the decision to not expect this society's approval, but rather chooses to align intentionally with his Cameroonian (locus of) origin.

The other participants mention several strategies that they use to position themselves in ways that make them more acceptable to the different ecosystems they evolve in. In contrast, Craig seems to say, 'It is what it is. I have a home elsewhere. I may be a citizen of France, but France is not my home. I know what I came here to do.' This does not exclude the fact that he too probably resorts to several strategies aimed at making him, if not invisible, more palatable to his White French neighbours and colleagues, but he seems to be freer from the constraints of his host society. This positioning, I propose, empowers Craig in a way that undoubtedly makes life as a diasporic Cameroonian living in a White majority city, easier. It sounds like he would almost expect micro- (and other) aggressions linked to his skin colour and ethnicity, and thus be more immune to these daily disturbances.

Craig classifies the languages of his linguistic repertoire in a way that again differs from the other participants' views. He places his Cameroonian vernacular at the top of a linguistic ladder, followed by French and English, and then surprisingly, gives more legitimacy to Pidgin English, that he calls broken English, dubbing CFrA a derivative of Pidgin English. He also proudly claims to speak Pidgin English, saying anyone who speaks a bit of English **must** speak Pidgin English.¹⁴⁵ He mentions that it is the language spoken in the markets by 'the mothers', which suggests that he recognises its value to society as the

¹⁴⁵« Si tu parles un peu anglais, tu es obligé de parler ça. » ; « ... le vrai [broken English] c'est le Pidgin. »

language of commerce (Nkengasong, 2016; Abongdia, 2014; Schröder, 2003), whereas he mentions that CFrA emerged more because “it sounded good”. Craig’s statements indicate his choice in terms of reacting to the pressures imposed by life in a Western majority White society. He claims to still consider Cameroon his home, the place where he belongs, whilst benefiting from his life in France and making a positive contribution to it. He is the only interviewee who adopts this position.

In comparison, Manuela’s allegiance to France, her claim that her French identity is the strongest, that France is the country where she feels most at home, and her disaffiliation with all other languages of her repertoire suggest that she has carved out for herself a way of (re)constructing her sense of belonging away from her locus of origin. She says she is a French speaker, that her mother tongue is French, and that French is part of her identity. Unlike Craig, Manuela does not mention any pull in relation to Cameroon. Her story is similar to Thalia’s and Lovely’s, but for the fact that Manuela’s parents did not teach their Cameroonian vernacular to their children, and they didn’t take them to their respective villages from a young age. Regardless, Manuela’s views of non-standard varieties are closely aligned with the hegemonic language ideologies of the Cameroonian nation-state. She also seems to have integrated some of the hegemonic host country discourses, specifically the importance of integration and the role language plays in that integration. She does not seem to be perturbed by the fact that French and English are former colonial languages.

Unsurprisingly, Thalia (who seems to be the most deeply rooted in Cameroonian culture and traditions), is also the one for whom French and English need to be dominated, conquered almost, because they were introduced in Africa by the coloniser. She feels guilty because she is not fluent in her Cameroonian vernacular, and greatly values CFrA as a bonding speech form connecting her to fond memories of family and friends, even though she does not speak it fluently. Nevertheless, Thalia ranks French first in her

personal hierarchy of languages, before Bulu, her Cameroonian vernacular. This tension between what she believes and states about language, and her reality highlights the complexity of matters of language and identity for post-colonial Africans. The ideals they may have about their identities expressed through language often contrast starkly with their day-to-day lived experiences, and the languages they use in private and professional settings.

Adam, who also grew up exclusively in a large city and does not speak his parents' mother tongue very well, is far more attached to Cameroon than he is to France, probably because he spent his childhood and teenage years in Cameroon and only returned to France as an adult.

8.2.2.3 Conclusion

The differences in the participants' upbringing and stories, and the way these differences impact their relationship with the languages of their repertoires and their sense of home and belonging, suggest that greater rootedness in one's culture of origin may be one of the factors that make it more difficult to adapt and integrate in a new Western culture. This is a point highlighted by Manuela, who evokes an attachment to a long-lost and imagined Cameroon, which, she argues, may hamper diasporic Cameroonians' ability to successfully integrate in French society. The notion of an 'imagined' Cameroon is also raised by Trish, who claims that this 'looking back' causes them to struggle in terms of their identity.

The interviews conducted using Skype unilaterally emphasise the impact of French being the main official language of Cameroon, its use as medium of instruction, and its place as the lingua franca for Cameroonians from different ethnic groups. Downstream, the impact of decisions from colonial times still weighs heavily on the language practices of these diasporic Cameroonians, over 50 years after independence. Further, most of the participants define themselves in terms of a dual identity with French being their strongest

language, and the Cameroonian roots of their forebears. None of them really questions her or his legitimacy as an inhabitant or a citizen of hexagonal France. However, most of them are also acutely aware that this legitimacy can be called into question by White indigenous French people. Their statements about the place of CFrA (for those who engage with it) leave no doubt that the speech form fills a gap in terms of their sense of community, belonging, home, closeness and more. Whether their use of CFrA is rooted in the desire to fill that gap, namely the tension between their self-perception as legitimate dwellers of France, and the rejection they can face in society on a daily basis, or whether their interaction in and with CFrA started as a form of entertainment, a playful language form, and eventually took on a more prominent role in their lives, helping them make sense of their position in France, remains unclear. What emerges from these conversations without the shadow of a doubt is that CFrA, the unexpected offspring of the Cameroonian nation-state's bilingual policy, has taken on a significant place in these diasporic Cameroonians' language practices, and that these language practices are clearly linked to their sense of identity.

In the chapter that follows, I analyse the data downloaded from the Facebook group dedicated to CFrA.

8.3 Analysis of Facebook Group data

8.3.1 Introduction

As mentioned previously, I set out to select group members based on information suggesting that they live in the UK, France, or the United States. On realising that most of the members kept their profile settings on quite high privacy, I broadened my criteria to include diasporic Cameroonians living abroad. I ended up including below people living in Europe, North Africa

(Tunisia)¹⁴⁶ and in the United States. I then filtered my downloads further according to topics posted, focusing on discussions about immigration, CFrA, being Cameroonian, and other themes that relate to my research questions. The profiles of the initiators of the five threads analysed indicated that they were based in one of the above locations. Using crosschecked data (such as some of their posts, their contacts, photographs where accessible, and hints from their communications), I was able to conclude that their location information was reasonably reliable.

However, the group members commenting on the chats are based anywhere, and most of them seem to be based in Cameroon. I gradually realised that it was impossible to find a whole conversation involving only diasporic Cameroonians, so I decided that the (often estimated) geographical location of the initiator and (mostly) the topics discussed would be my final criteria of selection.

Having built familiarity with the Group over my period of observation and presence, I approached the analysis bearing in mind that the general tone of the overwhelming majority of the posts is likely to be comical or satirical.

Some threads, like the one in section 8.3.4.1, aim at denouncing vices in society, with the underlying desire to correct society, directly or indirectly, through the comical, the ridicule or the absurd. Pedrazzini (2010, p. 88) argues that laughter is the key tool of the persuasive strategy of the satire, and Duval & Martinez (2000) highlight the fact that satirical content generally aims at unmasking hypocrisy. Both points are relevant here, with the comical being the main currency in most reactions, and the hypocrisy of descendants of former

¹⁴⁶ While most Westerners would consider Tunisia to be culturally part of Africa, sub-Saharan Africans who emigrate to North Africa face very similar challenges as the ones they face in Europe and in the United States, such as hostility linked to racial discrimination, cultural shock, distance from family and home, and the need for connection with other Africans living abroad for support.

colonial powers (for example) being mentioned in one of the reactions of group members in this thread.¹⁴⁷

Looking at the chats downloaded from the Facebook Group, one aspect that stands out is the desire to entertain audiences on social media and the performativity, often present on similar internet fora (highlighted by scholars such as Boyd, 2008, Androutsopoulos, 2007, Bauman, 2004, Georgakopoulou, 2003, and others) which is also obvious here. As such, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the use of CFrA in the Facebook Group corresponds to offline use of CFrA, not the least because this desire to entertain seems to have led to the use of forms crafted specifically for effect (as evidenced by the surprised reactions and comments to some of the group users' contributions to the chats). This said, the Facebook Group chats selected are consistent with CFrA in use offline in terms of the jocular nature of the communications, the use of non-standard grammar and syntax, calques from Cameroonian vernacular languages, and the humour, playfulness and lightness that have been associated with CFrA from its emergence, both in Cameroon and abroad (see for example Meuteum Kamtchueng, 2016; Machetti, 2013; Echu, 2005; Chia, 1990; Tiayon-Lekobou, 1985).

I had to translate the group members' posts for presentation in my thesis, so this led me to make choices about how best to represent their communications, even though my analysis is based on the original rather than the translation. The first point to consider before translating the posts was how to handle Netspeak¹⁴⁸, "a type of language displaying features that are unique to the Internet", (Crystal, 2001, p. 18). In Crystal's words, "'speak' involves writing as well as talking, and [...] any 'speak' suffix also has a receptive element, including 'listening and reading'" (op cit., pp.17-18). Would this translation reflect the use of nonstandard spellings and varieties of language, and of course, features often classified as CFrA? I ended up translating the posts

¹⁴⁷ "[M6] how the French perceive what? when they came to our (home) in africa, with the bible and other things....did we call them, today we are here with bobolo. Too bad."

¹⁴⁸ A term coined by Crystal (2001) for written communications on the Internet.

using standard English spellings where possible (to aid understanding and clarity), in a table including numbered turns, signalling the members posting, highlighting all instances of deviation from standard language use, and providing explanations for terms that are not (standard) English and terms in other 'languages'.

In order to analyse the interactions, I focused my attention on the content, but also on the style used, *i*) bearing in mind the questions of language and identity/home and belonging that are central to this thesis, *ii*) taking style to be a resource in the active creation, presentation, and re-creation of the group members' identities (Schilling Estes 2002, p. 388), and building on the idea that style is organically related "to a group's culture and its social identity" (Kallmeyer & Keim 2003, p. 29).

When looking at the data collected from the Facebook Group as a whole, given the fact that there is no fixed convention regulating written CFrA offline or online, broad patterns emerge from the chats (see De Féral, 2006 for more on this). Variations range from the language forms used by different members to a variety of spelling choices often for the same word, e.g., English spellings for words of 'Anglo' origin including borrowings from CPE, or Francophone spellings for CFrA neologisms. As discussed below in greater detail, the most consistently recurring feature is a preference for non-standard grammar and informal Netspeak forms.

8.3.2 Framework of analysis

I chose to explore the interactions in the five threads by combining two distinct approaches:

a) The framework of LE interaction analysis, focusing on the linguistic resources in play, such as instances of Netspeak, CFrA, spelling styles that are most recurrent, patterns, similarities, instances of stylisation highlighting specific

identities etc. In this, I draw from LE's tilt towards Interactional Sociolinguistics' analytic perspective on language and identity (developed by Gumperz), that "allow[s] me to look at the role that language plays when humans interact together in situations where (a) discourses of race and ethnicity have currency [...], (b) these discourses are potentially relevant to the participants [...], and where (c) the participants may want or happen to activate these associations, but where (d) they might also have other things on their minds, or have come to an understanding that neutralizes the personal impact that these discourses can have, potentially generating alternative forms of local solidarity." Rampton (2019, p. 3).

This is particularly valuable to me as a researcher with significant ties to "the Global South" (Rampton 2019, p. 3). I am committed to decolonial research for "its caution about 'truth[s] applicable everywhere'; its ethnographic focus on situated interactional practices, not 'peoples' and 'cultures' [...]" . Research on contemporary urban vernaculars in the UK, (Rampton 2011, p. 289) has revealed that local multi-ethnic vernaculars are readily identified as emblems of community, and this ties in neatly with the stated role of the Group for its members.

Virtual spaces similar to the Group tend to feature apparently anarchic language processes connected to 'polylingualism', described as "a sociolinguistic dynamic associated with situations of social change where [...] linguistic forms can be hard to link to designated source languages, where we-code/they-code (or minority/majority language) interpretations over-simplify, and where the linguistic combinations often stand out to participants as non-routine, not just to analysts" (Jørgensen, 2008, p.169; Møller, 2009, in Rampton op cit., p. 291). Like Southallian in Rampton's 2011 study, CFrA *i*) is seen as connected-but-distinct from its members' traditional non-standard dialects, its national standard language styles, and from the prestige counter-standard styles circulating in (sometimes global) popular culture; and *ii*) it is often widely noted and enregistered beyond its locality of origin, represented in media and popular

culture as well as in the informal speech of people outside.

b) The lens of critical discourse analysis, watching out for: *i)* signs/markers of constructions of ‘home away from home’; *ii)* instances where group members use language as a reality-creating device, as a device constructing society (Philips, 2008); *iii)* statements pointing to ways in which these members may be anchored in translocal social networks and cultural diasporas (Werbner, 1997); *iv)* markers of alterity, specifically pointing to othering, us vs them discourses; *v)* ‘signs’ (in the Saussurean sense of *signified*) pointing to ways in which group members “consume and produce transnational ties and enactments” (Binaisa, 2014, p. 599); *vi)* solidarity discourse in reaction to ‘racist rejections’ that engender self-help, community building and mutual support for their culture, beliefs, etc.

Finally, I examined each of the chats bearing in mind my research questions, to ensure that I would give sufficient attention to the threads that I selected and draw conclusions that are relevant to the aims of this research project. More specifically, this translated as refining my observations with three criteria, viz. noting Facebook group members’ engagement with CFrA; noting references to CFrA’s emblematic significance and function for group members; and looking out for anything that suggests negotiations of belonging and/or reconstructions of home away from home, for diasporic members, and if and how they may enact their Cameroonian identity in the Facebook Group using CFrA.

Accordingly, I sought to analyse the language used in the discursive events on the chats, looking at the characteristics, style, features, whether the word choices or spellings pointed to different language forms, and what was being communicated through those choices. On the other hand, I strove to analyse the thought behind opening statements, asking myself (for example) according to what (most probably loose and not overt) ‘rules’ opening statements were posted, why particular phrase or image was posted, what was unique to it. I also asked myself Foucault’s much quoted question of “what was being said in what

was said” (1972, p. 29), in an attempt to uncover the broader context and “the intention of the [initiators of the chats, their] conscious activity, what [they meant], or, again, the unconscious activity that took place despite [them], in what [they] said or in the almost imperceptible fracture of [their] actual words” (ibid., p. 27). I was aware that there was a danger of extrapolating my analysis into “the half-silent murmur of another discourse” (ibid.), but I committed to *i)* narrow down insights from the initiators’ posts based on group members’ comments, and *ii)* later, triangulate findings against the conversations I had with participants over Skype.

Given the limited information about Facebook Group members, it was clear that focusing on ‘what they say and how they say it’ would yield much more fruitful insights than attempting to start from what tenuous information I was able to uncover about the initiators of the posts. Hence, the chats are organised thematically below.

8.3.3 Overall content and style

In the Group, the most frequently occurring pattern is the use of non-standard orthography, understood here as spellings that diverge deliberately (or not) from “standard (codified) orthography and/or do not occur in formal writing” (Androutsopoulos 2000, p. 514). The Group is indeed “an unregulated literacy field, which uses the distance from orthographic norm to contextualize attitudes or to index cultural affiliations” (Androutsopoulos, 2007, p. 14). This informal style, illustrative of what Sebba (2003) terms “spelling rebellion”, has been recognised as being characteristic of social media communication, and it is safe to assume that these group members are aware of forms that are considered appropriate to the “computer-mediated discourse field” (Androutsopoulos, 2007). As highlighted by Sebba (1998, p.2) the spelling choices made for non-standard varieties of language (e.g., CFrA) point to broader ideological and cultural practices, “practices” taken here to mean “patterns of choices that

writers make about what to do with the alphabetic means at their disposal” (Sebba, *ibid.*).

In light of the above, I classified:

i) as Netspeak (see Androutsopoulos, 2007, p. 7), the words, expressions and jargon typically used on Internet chats, informal spellings, omission of accents and non-standard French or English grammatical choices that are repeatedly used in the Group, e.g. <vs> for <vous> “you” (French, plural).

ii) as CFrA, words or expressions, features usually associated with CFrA and recorded in CFrA dictionaries (or known from personal experience), identifiable by what I call ‘spelling markers of CFrA’, while making note of choices such as Francophone vs Anglo spellings (e.g. <ao> for <how>), Cameroonian vernacular vs Francophone spellings (e.g. <kankan> for <cancan>) and phonologising spellings.

iii) as Other, CPE words, and other non-standard grammatical and syntactic choices than the ones mentioned in the previous categories.

Selected chat downloads follow, separated thematically, with a pseudonym for the initiators and the main theme or focus for each chat, brief descriptions of the initiators, the contents of posts, and a transcription and translation of posts with general comments on unusual features or terms that require an explanation to be fully understood. A broad conclusion on the overarching focus of the thread and how it relates to my research questions concludes the analytical discussion. The screenshots downloaded from the Group are also provided for reference.

8.3.4 Selected cases from the Facebook Group

For this analysis, I selected five sets of chats from the Facebook Group. After detailed analysis of the language forms used and discourses relevant to this study in the first thread, to avoid redundancy and repetition, I only highlight outliers, new forms, or new discourses in the subsequent ones.

8.3.4.1 BAB – Diasporic migrant identity

BAB's profile information indicates that he lives in London UK, that he hails from the north majority Muslim part of Cameroon, and that he is a businessman. He started a thread of posts about immigration, using a photograph of Château-Rouge, a market in the 18th district of Paris specialising in African foods. On this photograph, the market traders are selling food made by Cameroonians, likely to be eaten mainly by Cameroonians, which validates the idea that those particular traders are likely to be Cameroonian. The caption superimposed on the photograph says, "You are right in the centre of PARIS." BAB then gets the chat going with the phrase "*Impossible ne pas Kmer...*", which translates as 'Nothing is impossible to Cameroonians'. He then refrains from adding comments to the thread, thus conveying a sense that he may just be a catalyst in this instance. As expected, his post generates interest, and some group members post reactions commenting on African presence in the Western world and its impact on Western society. Some reactions express irritation and even anger at racism, commenting on the hypocrisy of Westerners' hostility towards African migrants when their ancestors invaded and colonised African countries.

Transcript

Bold: Initiator of the chat

M: member

Turns	Members	Original post	Translation	Linguistic notes	General comments
1.	BAB	<i>Impossible ne pa Kmer</i>	Nothing is impossible to Cameroonians...	<p><ne> for <n'est>; most probably Netspeak abbreviation/grammar</p> <p><Kmer> – from the German spelling of the country's name, Kamerun - CFrA</p>	<p>The spelling Kamerun was adopted by Cameroonian patriots in the 50s as a symbol of a unified nation at a time when the country was still split into French and English Cameroons (Welch, 1966, p. 179). The abbreviation Kmer has a patriotic connotation to this day.</p> <p>A Google search yields 25k+ results for the phrase 'impossible n'est pas camerounais' – this now famous and much used statement is inspired by Napoleon's famous saying, 'Impossible n'est pas Français'.</p> <p>The initiator of the thread makes this comment in relation to the image he posted, as if to introduce the photo and the overlay text mentioned below, to get the chat started.</p>

2.	Caption	<i>Vous êtes ici en plein PARIS</i>	You are right in the centre of PARIS		This text is on the photo; it overlays the photo of a street market, and it seems to have been taken from somewhere else, or it could have been overlaid by BAB.
3.	M1	<i>chato rouge!le piment du marché!!</i>	chato rouge! the pepper/chili of the market!!	<chato> for <château> is a typical Netspeak abbreviation.	It stands for Château-Rouge which is a station on Line 4 of the Paris Métro in the 18th arrondissement, known for its numerous African vendors, restaurateurs, and tradesmen. The area is especially associated with sub-Saharan African immigration
4.	M2	<i>mmm!</i>	mmm!		
5.	M3	<i>Château rouge, Barbès....krkrkr</i>	Château rouge, Barbès....krkrkr	Krkrkr is similar to teehee, indicates suppressed laughter, amusement at something outrageous, a derisive giggle, mockery. Netspeak See: https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=krkrkr	Barbès is the abbreviation of <i>Barbès-Rochechouart</i> , a station also located on Line 4 of the Paris Métro, also partially in the 18th arrondissement, known for its relatively high proportion of non-White French nationals and migrants (mainly North African Maghreb origin).
6.	M4	<i>On dirai barbes...le marche noir</i>	That looks like barbes...the black market	Should be <i>dirait</i> (grammar).	

7.	M3	<i>c pire que mokolo...on y trouve de tout. Mm la rue est pleine de blacks, les blancs qui y vont sont ceux issus des couples mixtes...loool</i>	it's worse than mokolo...you can find anything there. Even the street is full of blacks, the white people who go there are those in mixed race couples... loool	<Mm> for <même> – Netspeak. Lool -> 'lol' accentuated by the additional 'o' letters added for emphasis, 'laugh out loud' (Netspeak)	Mokolo is an outdoor market in Yaoundé, capital of Cameroon 'blacks' in EN in the chat – perceived as a more trendy/more politically correct/less taboo way of referring to Black people in France ¹⁴⁹ that using the term <i>noir</i> .
8.	M5	<i>les cam mon deja gagné defrom...g compren maintenant pourquoi les gens du FN sont vexé comme come ca</i>	the cam defeated me a long time ago... now I understand why FN members are so upset	<i>cam</i> here stands for Cameroonians <gagné> for <beat me / defeated me> – Cameroonian French <de from>, often written as 'depuis from' (lit. 'since from' – CFrA)	FN is Front National, far-right openly anti-immigration party. <i>me gagner</i> , the form used here, is grammatically incorrect in standard French) meaning left me speechless etc – informal

¹⁴⁹ See https://www.francetvinfo.fr/france/je-n-aime-pas-qu-on-me-dise-black-pourquoi-en-france-le-mot-noir-reste-tabou_4003111.html

9.	M6	<i>ahh ceee , c vrai ca ?? megde !! hein pere</i>	ahh ceee, is that true?? Shit !! eh man	Probably 'ah say' meaning 'I say' – exclamation of surprise <c> for <c'est >, "it is" – Netspeak. <i>Merde</i> , written as <mege> <i>hein pere</i> - literally, eh father, CFrA	The spelling <i>mege</i> is used to reflect Bamileke origin populations' (alleged) pronunciation of the word; this pronunciation is associated with people with limited Western education. 'Hein père' is a popular expression in Cameroonian, indicating amusement, astonishment for comical effect etc. CFrA
10.	M7	<i>perso j'prefere celles ki vendent à la sauvette que celles qui se vendent !!!</i>	perso I prefer those who sell on the sly to those who sell themselves !!!	<i>perso</i> - personally <i>j'prefere</i> – typical Parisian French schwa deletion <ki> for <qui> – Netspeak	

11.	M6	<p><i>Daccord avec toi [M7], Mais là on est pas ds ce contexte, mais celui où on toum en pleince chaussée ds le big paris coe o kmer (lol). Je me demande cmt les conservateurs francais concoivent cela !! Une coe Marie le Peine doit etre vex grav</i></p>	<p>I agree with you [M7], But here we're not in that context, but in one where people sell_s in the street in the great Paris as in kmer (lol). I wonder how the French conservatives perceive that!! Someone like Marie le Peine must be so vexed</p>	<p><on n'est> for <on est> – Netspeak <ds> for <dans> – Netspeak <toum> CFrA for <sell> le big – CFrA <coe> for <comme>, “as, like”, Netspeak <cmt> for <comment> – Netspeak.</p>	<p>Marine Le Pen, leader of French nationalist National Rally party (formerly named National Front). ‘Peine’ (meaning heartache, trouble etc.) and ‘Pen’ are homophones... this could very well have been spelt this way on purpose.</p>
12.	M8	<p><i>[M6] coment les francais consoivent koi ? quand ils venaient chez nous en afrique ,avec la bible et autre...on les avaient apelè , today on nè là avec le bobolo. balok :) J</i></p>	<p>[M6] how the French perceive what? when they came to our (home) in africa , with the bible and other things....did we call them , today we are here with bobolo. Too bad</p>	<p>apelè instead of appelés (FR- participle) – Netspeak or typo ‘on nè’ instead of ‘on est’ – homophones, Netspeak bobolo - fermented cassava root wrapped sticks <balok> - CPE for <bad luck> – also used in CFrA</p>	

13.	M9	<p><i>je tiens a vs dire cè un market et ke mem les français eux mem souvent buy les tchop la...en + cè po nimporte ki pe se taper le luxe de manger africain en mbeing et ces matèr ke vs voyez la on les dos ds ce business dc respect</i></p>	<p>let me tell you¹⁴ it's¹⁵ a market and even the French themselves often buy the food sold there... and in addition it's not everyone who can afford the luxury of eating african food in the west and these mamas that you see there make money from this business so respect</p>	<p><vs> for <vous> – Netspeak <cè> for <c'est> – Netspeak <mem> for <même> – Netspeak <tchop> is CPE for <food> or eat – also used in CFrA <po> for <pas> <i>mbeing/mbeng</i> from <i>Mbenge</i>, meaning 'the West' in Duala – CFrA <matèr> (from Latin) means <mother> – CFrA <ke> for <que> – Netspeak 'les dos' – CFrA, thought to be linked to the slang term 'dough', means money</p>	<p>po vs pas – this reflects the pronunciation of vowels typical of the North of France (see https://omniglot.com/writing/picard.htm or http://cinelog.fr/repliques_bienvenue_chez_le_s_chtis)</p>
14.	M2	<p><i>il y a le gros bobolo</i></p>	<p>there are big bobolo</p>		

15.	M10	<i>les MBOUDA vont nous souillé partout</i>	the MBOUDA will ruin us everywhere	<i>Mbouda</i> - a city and a people in/from the West of Cameroon, one of grassfields peoples, reputed for their commercial acumen <i>souillé vs souiller</i> – grammatical mistake or Netspeak	
16.	M11	<i>mon ami, l'argent dabord, peu un port comment et ou on lobtien. si je go labas je buy le pousse immediatement.</i>	my friend, money first, however and where we get it. if I go there I will buy a rickshaw immediately.	' <i>peu un port</i> ' instead of ' <i>peu importe</i> ' – approximate homophones, probably a reflection of the contributor's own pronunciation of/knowledge of French	Rickshaws in Cameroon are used to carry merchandise and deliver it to shops or private customers.
17.	M7	<i>Tu sais [M6] si ça ne dépendait que de ces facho il ne resterait plus d'africain en France alors elle peut bien aller se faire foutre cette Conne de la famille lepen qui est aussi moche que son géniteur !!!</i>	You know [M6] if it was only up to these fascists there wouldn't be any African left in France so fuck that idiot from the lepen family who is as ugly as her spawner!!!		
18.	M11	<i>megde. le francais est gros hein?</i>	shit. that French is complex eh?		
19.	M2	<i>[M7]...mm!</i>	<i>[M7]...mm!</i>		

20.	M12	<i>Pourkoi vs pensez que ces vendeuses sont camerounaises</i>	why do u think those vendors are Cameroonian		
21.	M7	<i>[M12] tou ne sais pas que le bobolo est une mark déposée made in Cameroon ??? krkrkrkr</i>	[M12] you don't know that bobolo are a trademark made in Cameroon???	lolololol	
22.	M12	<i>hein père tu en est sure pakdon donne moi les references</i>	eh father really are you sure of that please give me the references	'est' instead of 'es' - grammatical mistake or Netspeak <pakdon> for <pardon>	Like 'megde' above, 'pakdon' is spelt that way to reflect what is popularly considered the pronunciation of the word by people from the West of Cameroon with little Western (European) education.
23.	M2	<i>Tre Tre tu es deriere juskaaaa!</i>	very you are reeeeeally out of touch!	<juskaaa> for <jusqu'à>	The repetition of the 'a' reflects emphasis on how strongly this person is thought to be out of touch.
24.	M3	<i>Bcp de batons en france sont conditionnes par les chinois...lol</i>	a lot of the sticks in France are packaged by Chinese people...lol	<batons> vs <bâtons>	'Bâtons' here is short for <i>bâtons de manioc</i> , a generic name used by Cameroonians for bobolo and miondo, both cassava sticks

25.	M13	<i>Oooh château Rouge c'était encore quel métro là ?? Weeh les prunes me manquent, ainsi que le top grenadine L !!</i>	Oooh château Rouge what tube station was that again?? Weeh I miss plums, and top grenadine.	<i>Weeh</i> - Duala exclamation that can express frustration, sadness, fatigue...	'Prunes' refers to the African (bush) plums called safou or sao, <i>Top grenadine</i> a red fizzy soda produced by Les Brasseries du Cameroun, Cameroonian national breweries
26.	M7	<i>[M12] go auprès de l'OAPI tu seras fixée krkrkrkr</i>	[M12] go to the OAPI you will get what you need krkrkrkr	'go' in English in the chat, juxtaposed with the French word <i>auprès</i> – CFrA	OAPI is the African Intellectual Property Organization
27.	M14	<i>yé yé voilà la combi de ma mater !!!</i>	oh oh there is my mom's mates!!!	' <i>kombi</i> ', sometimes spelt 'combi' is thought to be derived from the German word Kumpel meaning 'friend, colleague'	
28.	M2	<i>krkr..yaaaa Du Camer!</i>	krkr..yaaaa From Camer!	<i>Camer</i> - Cameroon	
29.	M15	<i>quand on va vous déporter vs allez crier au racisme, vs ne pouvez pas ouvrir de vraies boutiques et comptoirs, l mm desordre que vous causez ds nos marches</i>	when they will deport you u will scream racism, you can't open real shops and kiosks, the same mess that you create in our markets	<vs> for <vous> – Netspeak	

30.	M16	<i>combi came alors niè le market de yabassi hein</i>	mate just come and see the market of yabassi eh	<niè> – CFrA term, means <see, look at>	
31.	M7	<i>hééé [M15] déporter kon life enkor à l'epok d'Hitler ? abeg hein dis toi qu'il faut de tout pour faire un monde !!!</i>	hééé [M15] deport us that we still live in Hitler's time? please eh it takes all sorts to make a world!!!	<life> meaning <live> – CFrA <kon life enkor'>- a turn of phrase that is common in informal Cameroonian French, written in Netspeak style, <kon> for <qu'on> <epok> for <époque> – Netspeak 'abeg' – CPE	
32.	M17	<i>yess ohhhhhh.mn cameroun,chapeau</i>	yesss ohhhhhh.my cameroon, hats off		

33.	M18	<p><i>g sui sur qe qant on va trouver les civilisation extra terrestre on va mite qe parmi eux il ya les cam sui sont parti o front apres le deluge de sodome et gomore</i></p>	<p>I am sure that when they will find alien civilisation we will discover that there are cam amongst them who went to the front after the flood of Sodom and Gomorrah</p>	<p><g> for <je> – Netspeak</p> <p><sui> for <suis> – grammar</p> <p><qe> vs <que> – Netspeak</p> <p>'trouve' vs 'trouver' – Netspeak</p> <p>'civilisation'- plural but the 's' has been omitted</p> <p><mite> for <meet> -> find/discover – CFrA</p> <p>'cam' - Cameroonians</p> <p><o front> for <au front> - reference to the battlefront, to go ahead</p> <p>'deluge' - accent missing/grammar and Sodom and Gomorrah misspelt</p>	
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34.	M7	<p>ya alors [M18]!!! donc toi de from là tu wait kon win des extra terrestres hein ? pourquoi ps le père tant que tu y es krkrkrkr</p>	<p>ya oh wow [M18]!!! so all this time you have been waiting for us/people to defeat/conquer aliens eh? why not man while you are at it krkrkrkr</p>	<p>'de from' – CFrA 'tu wait' – CFrA <kon> for qu'on – Netspeak 'win' – CFrA <pourkoi ps> for <pourquoi pas> – Netspeak 'le père' lit. 'the father' – informal Cameroonian French/CFrA</p>	
35.	M19	<p>Asssssssssssséééééééééééé éééééééééééé mama sarah en afrik?</p>	<p>I saaaaaayyyyyyy mama sarah in africa?</p>	<p>'assssééé' – could be a Gallicised spelling of the Pidgin 'a say' meaning 'I say' <afrik> for <Afrique> no caps and 'k', Netspeak</p>	<p>'Mama Sarah', Cameroonian popular expression/CFrA, indicating amusement, astonishment for comical effect etc.</p>

36.	M20	<p><i>ca c chateau rouge à Barbès ! J'aime cet endroit, tu y trouves tt ce q tu veux et oci tu ne peut ne pas rencontrer o moin une personne w tu know du bled</i></p>	<p>that is chateau rouge in Barbès! ! love that place, you find everything you want there and also you cannot go there without meeting at least one person that you know from home</p>	<p><ca c> for <ça c'est> "that is" – Netspeak 'chateau rouge a barbès', accent missing in the word 'château' (which should be capitalised and hyphenated with Barbès), on 'à' and in the word Barbès – Netspeak / grammar <peut> for <peux> (2nd person present tense verb ending) grammar <tt> for <tout> – Netspeak <oci> for <aussi>– Netspeak <o moin> for <au moins> "at least" – grammar/Netspeak <w> for <que>– typo - I believe the contributor intended to type 'q', (right next to w on the French keyboard), abbrev. for 'que' – Netspeak 'know' – CFrA 'bled' - meaning the back of beyond, used to refer to 'home', Cameroon</p>	<p>'bled' draws on Verlan I believe as this word is Arabic and was very commonly used in Verlan in France (in the banlieues) especially in the 80s and 90s before it became more widely used.</p>
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Analysis

There are several linguistic features in the above chat (and in most of the other chats) which align with the descriptions of Netspeak and CFrA, and we also see a contribution from CPE and other informal written forms.

Table 1: Language forms in the first chat

	Netspeak	CFrA	Other
Initiator	1	1	
Group members	38	20	CPE – 3 Non-standard grammar – 8 regional French features – 1

So, Netspeak appears to dominate in this exchange, as it is twice as frequent as CFrA features. One could argue that because CFrA is also characterised by informality and defiance of the rules of standard language forms, Netspeak would naturally be the device of choice on online groups dedicated to CFrA.

Table 2: Examples of linguistic resources in play

	<i>Netspeak</i>	CFrA	Cameroonisms /CPE	Hexagonal French/verlan
Initiator	Impossible <i>ne pas</i> Kmer	Kmer		
Group members				
<i>Turn 5</i>	Krkrkr			

Turn 7	Mm loool			
Turn 9		heinnn pere	megde	
Turn 10				j'prefere
Turn 13	ke tt	matèr		
Turn 22	vs	go	pakdon	
Turn 23		de from tu wait	juskaaaa	
Turn 30	epok			
Turn 31		niè	abeg	
Turn 33		mite		
Turn 36	oci			

At first look, the first thread reveals quite a varied mix of linguistic elements involving features associated with Netspeak, standard French (from France and from Cameroon), informal Cameroonian French, CPE, and of course, CFrA. Although this might create the initial impression of a messy assortment of language forms, the language used ‘makes sense’ as it points to reasonably coherent and consistent markers of the presumed identities of the group members (Cameroonian, French-speakers, familiar with CPE and some Cameroonian vernaculars). The group members reacting to this post seem to operate loosely within what appears to be a more or less fixed set of spelling rules using recurring Netspeak-type abbreviated forms, such as <ki> for <qui>, “which/that/who”. This is a spelling that recurs frequently on the Group.

Within this loose framework, a range of choices are made with regards to 'spelling markers of CFrA' (see 'global' style markers, Androutsopoulos, 2007),

e.g. <buy> vs. <baï> for example, i.e. Anglo spelling vs Francophone phonologising spelling. There are also 'Cameroonisms' such as the emphatic 'juskaaa' expressing the extent to which the issue being highlighted is prominent or significant (turn 23 above) which is frequently used in speech and is represented here with "repeated vowels to indicate prolonged sound in speech" (Lyons, 2014, p. 173), part of what Crystal, 2001 (p. 37) terms "emphatic conventions". As mentioned above, there is a strong presence of Netspeak-type abbreviated spelling e.g., <c> for c'est "it is", or <cmt> for comment "how" (see Turns 9 and 11, respectively). Internet slang is also present e.g., 'lol' (Crystal 2001, p. 18), and so is borrowed French banlieue slang/Verlan vocabulary e.g., 'bled', from Arabic (see Turn 36 above).

There appears to be a "melange of understanding and expectations regarding [the communicative] activities that serve as guides to their conduct and interpretation." (Goodenough, 1994), as evidenced by the fact that none of the group members posting in the chat expresses surprise or even comments on the language forms used. Group members are able to interpret meaning accurately within this framework. So, it is safe to say that the varied nature of language use in this thread is one identifiable element in a structured repertoire of styles. This suggests that there may be an element of conventionalisation in the combination of forms; the mix reflects the members' identities, and if it didn't, one might expect some remarks about the variety of language forms being odd or out of place.

Further, in my conversations about CFrA with the participants in this study, they all commented on the creativity and the informality that characterises the register and stated that certain features were recognisable as CFrA. The participants also all identified the contexts of use of CFrA, and their metacommentary about CFrA seems to match the practice on this Group. This suggests that the group members' engagement with CFrA in this chat is quite predictable.

The image and the caption: In this thread, BAB uploaded a photograph with an overlay text, and added written a phrase, a reaction to the photograph and text, to get the chat going.

The opening statement: The statement (*Impossible ne pas Kmer...*) posted by the initiator is a reinterpretation of a phrase that is thought to have been written by Napoleon in 1813 to a commandant defending the city of Magdeburg during the war, in response to the officer's confession that it was impossible to defend the city. This reappropriation by Cameroonians of a statement made by one of the strongest symbols of French power, which is quite familiar to the French-speaking world, is likely to have been chosen to generate vivid reactions from readers. These are post- postcolonials, most likely to have been born between one and two generations¹⁵⁰ after Cameroon's independence from France in 1960.

This statement sends a very strong message, highlighting the idea of Cameroonian/French "us vs them" dynamics which conveys a sense of the initiator of the post othering the French. It's not a far stretch to see in this post an ideologization from the initiator suggesting a form of reverse colonisation, particularly in association with the image of Cameroonian market women 'taking over' a central location in Paris. This specific interpretation is mentioned by at least one of the commentators. The image and the initial caption could also be inviting the Group members to comment on the far-right fearmongering theory of the Great Replacement (Grand Remplacement, see Camus, 2011), a conspiracy theory popularised by *replacist* elites, arguing that the White French population (and beyond France, White European populations at large), are being demographically and culturally replaced by non-European peoples. While this theory mainly targets Arab, Berber, Turkish and sub-Saharan Muslim populations, it is still relevant to all non-White people living in France, including Cameroonians.

¹⁵⁰ Taking a generation to be 20-30 years.

One cannot help but wonder whether this is part of the subconscious mind of the initiator of the post, or part of a collective subconscious understanding common to all Cameroonians that doesn't need to be spelled out because it is implicitly understood. This common ground would invite group members to position themselves with regard to the statement and would leave them virtually unable to remain neutral... and they don't remain neutral.

Moreover, this phrase is so familiar to Cameroonians (at home and abroad) that it is identified as 'real talk' – it creates an effect of oracy that invites group members to a dialogue, a response, and encourages ideologies of resistance to the hegemonic host country majority discourses relative to immigration, politicised discourses around the invasion of France by 'visible minorities' and the alleged threat to 'Whiteness' or 'Frenchness' that this represents.

As detailed in the transcript, the initial phrase is written in French, using non-standard grammar / Netspeak-type spelling for one word (<ne> for <n'est>), and ends with a three-dotted ellipsis. The ellipsis is the device that highlights the presence of external, anterior and interdiscursive data feeding into the statement (see Seoane, 2016 for more). It also acts as virtual metacommentary, signalling what is yet unsaid. Thirdly, the ellipsis opens up the dialogue, inviting the members reading this statement to 'fill in the blanks', implying that it is their responsibility to state what has not been or is yet to be, stated, to complete the statement. What is written, what is to be written, and what precludes the statement, underpins the communication between the initiator and those reacting. It is beyond the visible communication, ¹⁵¹[OBJ] I argue that the initiator uses this grammatical device to signal to the reader that his statement has formally ended, but that it highlights a matter that requires further thought and consideration, inviting group members to comment. The initiator thus creates a dynamic of unveiling introduced by this ellipsis, with the unveiling being the

¹⁵¹ See Pavault, 2006, Dahlet, 2003 and Rault, 2015 for more on this. See Maingueneau, 1999 & Seoane, 2016, on ellipses being used to create a dialogic and even performative reaction at the post-discursive level of what is actually written.

responsibility of the group members who will react. Thus, the statement encourages the interpretative abilities of group members, as it suggests a silent 'what have you got to say about this?'.

How could the group members not respond? Not reacting would position them either in connivance with the statement posted by the initiator of the thread, or in indifference or resistance. As expected, several members react.

Analysis of the chats

The people involved in this thread are reacting to the phrase and the image posted by the initial contributor, communicating in writing, 'vertically' i.e. conveying their feelings about the original image and text and the message it conveys, and 'horizontally', i.e. communicating with each other, reacting to other group members' comments. They are engaged in what I would call 'community speak' around the questions raised, linked with their shared interest in CFrA, their interest in using it, refining their knowledge, performing it, having fun, being part of the community via the use of CFrA, doing 'being Cameroonian' online within the community of practice that the Group represents. They play the game, they get involved in the discussion, reacting to each other's posts (see for example Turn 9 ("ahh ceee, is that true?? Shit !! eh man") or Turn 11 ("I agree with you [M8]", in this case with the previous member tagged in the response). They challenge one another when they disagree (see Turn 12, where M8 replies to M6's post, typing in his name). They also offer the usual comical responses (see Turn 15, where the post suggests the exact Cameroonian ethnic group these vendors originate from, based on national preconceptions) using the absurd (Turn 24, slotting a random statement about the Chinese packaging Cameroonian food), and sometimes satire (Turn 33 for example, suggesting that Cameroonians are so intent on migrating abroad that they are likely to be found having migrated into alien civilisations). The responsivity of the members involved in this chat keeps it going and contributes to its dynamism. Group members bounce off each other's comments, and

several members punctuate their comments with typical Netspeak reactions such as 'krkrkr' or 'lol', or Cameroonian-French interjections such as 'hein' to keep the chat going. Whether these comments challenge, align with or confirm previous posts, they prompt further discussion, keeping the chat going, and the members thus show solidarity and/or build consensus.

Colloquial styles dominate the chat, some typically Cameroonian (with features usually associated with CFrA, informal Cameroonian French, or CPE), and others, typical of Netspeak communication or even informal Parisian French (see Table 2 above for a few examples and the discussion that follows). A typical Parisian schwa elision stands out: *j'prefere* (Turn 10), positioning the member as one who has lived in Paris or still does, or who is familiar with typical Parisian ways of speaking. From their profile pictures (assuming that their profile picture is actually theirs), all group members reacting seem to be adults. Yet many of them use linguistic features generally associated with teenage transgressive language styles including CFrA, which is evidence amongst many that CFrA extends beyond the traditional teenage slang label frequently associated with it.

The chat has a specific rhythm; it is organised in four sections which seem to have arisen organically as the group members interact with each other. From the start of the chat to Turn 7, we see a focus on commenting on the market, the image, what is going on there. In Turn 7, which acts as a transition, the group member starts by comparing the market on the photograph with a market in Cameroon and brings up skin colour for the first time in the chat, stating that the only White people who frequent that area of Paris are the ones who are married with Black people. In Turn 8, the issue of the perception of this Black presence by the White French is evoked, if/how it caused or explained racism and far-right nationalist sentiments. Turn 11 is liminal, as the group member commenting argues that there may be some justification to irate reactions to the way these markets sellers have imported Cameroonian market practices into "the great Paris". In Turn 12, the member responding comments on anti-African

nationalistic sentiments, either explaining (or almost justifying) them, or claiming that those who harbour such sentiments have no right to do so given what France as a former colonial power took from Cameroon, and hence that the French have no right to complain. From Turn 17 to Turn 31, comments are made on the potential consequences of this Black presence in the market, viz. deportation.

The message conveyed and the questions raised by the opening phrase and image are not news to most Group members taking part in this chat, as evidenced by the sections of the chat that centre around racism, what is perceived as 'acceptable behaviour' for Black people living in France, and what sense of entitlement (earned through colonisation) Africans may (or should) have with regard to acceptance or reparations in France. Not one of them questions the reasons why the initiator posted this message, not one of them challenges its appropriateness on the Group. This suggests that themes such as immigration and its effects on so-called migrants, and on the 'White native' population are familiar topics to group members.

Some adopt the viewpoint that the White French have no right to complain because their ancestors ('they') came to Africa without asking for permission, thus aligning with the subtext of conquest and the hints conveyed by the statement attributed to Napoleon, as some sort of 'revenge/reverse colonisation' (see Turn 12 for example), including one group member who expresses anger at 'French fascism' (Turn 17). Others express some sense of understanding for the far-right tendencies they feel may have been prompted by the behaviour of these market vendors, by the large numbers of Black people living and/or trading in that neighbourhood of Paris. Yet others, a small minority, argue that such behaviour is unacceptable and that rejection by White French nationals is justified or at least understandable in these circumstances (Turn 29). Whatever the group members' viewpoint, there is a clear sense of 'us' vs 'them', and this time round, the focus is on othering experienced by Black people living in France. Throughout the chat, the group members comment about hypothetical

White French nationals, presumed to be hostile towards places like this market and/or Black populations living in France, or worse, to be intent on getting Black people deported.

There is a clear assumption that everyone posting on this thread knows not only the stylistic and linguistic 'rules', but also the accepted tone and communication style. Most commentators draw from a similar range of linguistic features of their repertoire, so there seems to be an understanding of the Modus Operandi and the linguistic currencies of high value in this community of practice. Also obvious is a common understanding of the historical background, of the relationship between Cameroon as a former French protectorate, and more broadly, of the history and relationship between Africa and Europe. Every group member posting seems to understand who is represented by the spoken or unspoken 'us/we' and conversely, 'them/they'. While 'they' are obviously primarily the French, it is safe to assume that 'they' can also refer to the descendants of other former colonial powers, as the reaction to this post (Turn 31) makes a reference to 'Hitler's time'.

Most members seem to focus on discussing the content of the initial post, and there is only one instance of metacommentary on the register of language used, expressing surprise at its formality (see Turn 18) which further supports the idea that informal language is expected in this group.

This first chat is the only one that clearly pinpoints from the start issues relating to negative perceptions of and attitudes to sub-Saharan diasporic people living in France, the tension that these attitudes create, and ways in which this tension affects diasporic Cameroonians. Taking this tension as the backdrop of these diasporics' lives, the members' comments on the chat highlight a range of emotions, amusement at the reverse colonisation suggested by the image, and to some extent, by the presence of large numbers of Africans in the neighbourhood portrayed on the image, embarrassment or even shame at the behaviour of these sub-Saharan African market traders, and anger at the

rejection and hostility experienced by many Black people living in France. I find it particularly telling that a group member started this thread using an image that highlights the challenges linked to living in a White majority city as a Black person, that the members reacting perceived what was being portrayed and discussed, and that the main medium of communication used is CFrA. This suggests that they associated that image with the potential reaction such a scenario would draw from White inhabitants of the city (Paris).

Based on the posts in this thread, it is not a stretch to recognise the likelihood that CFrA may be used as a coping mechanism to help create a sense of acceptance, home and belonging, in a hostile environment.

8.3.4.2 LOKO – A community-builder

LOKO lives in Paris, as indicated by his profile information and as confirmed by Boris, the Facebook group's administrator. When the Group reached 25000 subscribers, he started a thread of posts by welcoming the 25000th member "au nom du letch" ("on behalf of the village"), tagging him in his post. Even though he gets tagged a few times by other members, this 25000th member does not respond in the chat so he does not appear in the downloads. LOKO also uses a visual of a caricature of Cameroonian president Paul Biya, on a football field, dancing with an overlay (that looks like it may have been added by him) saying, "*25000 CAMFRANGLEUR BEBELA IL FAUT KOSSA ÇA*" (which translates as '25000 Camfranglais members/speakers, truth we must celebrate this by dancing'). This is a reference to now retired Cameroonian footballer extraordinaire Roger Milla who engaged a celebratory dance near the corner flag during the 1990 World Cup after his winning goal against Colombia. This image and memory are very familiar to most Cameroonians and certainly to group members.

LOKO is one of the early members of the Group. He knows the tricks that attract reactions, he taps into the performative side of CFrA to capture other

group members' attention, using familiar CFrA tropes such as 'tout le letch', and an obvious grammatical mistake for comical effect. The members who comment on this post play the game well, picking up on the message conveyed by the visual and spurring others to join in, quite often tagging others on the thread. Unlike the previous chat, most of the interaction is driven by LOKO, and members M1, M3 and M4.

This chat starts with a deliberate focus on the Group as a community of practice bringing together Cameroonians who engage with CFrA, but the conversation frequently shifts towards the realities and challenges of life in Cameroon, and the president. The chat is a lot more interactive than the previous one, as members frequently post responses clearly addressed to other members' posts. Unsurprisingly, satire and humour are also present here, as this aspect recurs in the Group and in most of the downloaded chats.

The posts reflect the same kaleidoscopic linguistic features including Netspeak spelling but has a greater proportion of 'Cameroonisms' than the previous one, and more standard Cameroonian French. All features commented on and explained in the previous chat have been omitted.





Image 9: LOKO – Screen grabs

MX: Member X, the 25000th Group member

UM1, UM2, UM3 etc.: other members who are tagged and didn't respond for a while

Turns	Members	Original post	Translation	Linguistic notes	General comments
1.	Caption	25000 CAMFRANGLEUR BEBELA IL FAUT KOSSA ÇA	25000 Camfranglais members/speakers, truth we must celebrate this by dancing	'Camfrangleur' – neologism that suggests that the word means members of Camfranglais 'bebela' – truth in Beti-Fang languages 'kossa' – from 'makossa', a musical style from the coastal region of Cameroon; the term kossa is used broadly to mean 'dance' throughout Cameroon	This overlay text signals the chat initiator's purpose here: to draw the community together around the 25000 th member (whether or not that member was genuinely the 25000 th member). This is reminiscent of the previous chat initiator's modus operandi, which leads me (well after my engagement with the Group) to wonder whether this practice of adding text to images may be a strategy that is common in the Group. It would not be surprising as that is the way memes operate and they are very popular on social media (see for example Marwick, 2013 on memes).
2.	LOKO	[MX] tu es notre 25000 ème membre au nom de touut le letch sois le bienvient ooooooh	[MX] you are our 25000 th member on behalf of the whole village welcome ooooooh	touut – additional 'u's emphasise his statement, the 'whoole' village <soit le bienvient> for <sois le bienvenu> – the initiator posts an	Vowel repetition for emphasis, which is common in Cameroonian speak (in all languages, vernaculars and French/English alike).

				obvious grammatical mistake most certainly for comical effect	
3.	M1	<i>[MX] vien te presenter ichiii</i>	[MX] come and introduce yourself here	<vien> for <viens> – Netspeak elision <ichiii> for <ici> – comical effect	
4.	M2	<i>ne lui menacez pas alors heinnn!!!!</i>	do not threaten him ehrrrrrr!!!!	<ne lui menacez pas> vs <ne le menacez pas> – Cameroonism	This is a reference to a familiar grammatical mistake commonly made by people from backgrounds with limited Western education, it is often used by Cameroonians for comical effect.
5.	M1	<i>kie tu vois les menaces ou noh</i>	wow where do you see threats eh	'kie' - from Beti-Fang 'ekie' – exclamation of surprise or irritation <noh> for <non> – placed as it is in non-standard Cameroonian French (at the end of sentences).	'noh' - its spelling online has moved from the original 'non' to a range of spellings including 'nor' or 'noh' with a variable number of 'o's and 'r's. The meaning of this 'non' has nothing to do with the French 'no'; its impact on communications vary from adding emphasis, reinforcing what is being said, to meaning 'isn't it?' or 'right', or even just an interjection ('eh').
6.	LOKO	<i>Krkrkrkr il est un honorable hein</i>	Krkrkrkr he is a(n) honourable eh		'an honourable' – incomplete sentence, missing word probably, unless the word

					'man' (for example) has been omitted for comical effect
7.	M3	<p>#LOKO na ao???!!! g reconai le mbom si kelke part il ressembl a mn ancien camaradeuh de classs.... aaaaaaaaaa... #Coupe_de_la_honte wi mdr</p>	<p>#LOKO what's up???!!! ... I recognise this guy from somewherehe looks like one of my old classmates aaaaaaaaaa... #Cup_of_shame ratherlol</p>	<p><na ao> for <na how> – CPE inspired with a Gallicised (phonologising) spelling</p> <p><reconai> for <reconnaît> – non-standard grammar</p> <p>'le mbom si kelke part' – CFrA features with non-standard grammar and spellings (<si> for <ci>, <kelke part> for <quelque part>)</p> <p><ressembl> for <ressemble> – Netspeak</p> <p><camaradeuh> for <camarade> – exaggerated emphasis for comical effect</p>	<p>Group members will have picked up on the joke about 'this guy' who has obviously been recognised on the image by all.</p> <p><camaradeuh> – this pattern of extending the final 'e' in French words, which is generally silent in standard Parisian French (and in most of France), is not uncommon amongst Cameroonians¹⁵².</p> <p>'Coupe de la honte' is a reference to football matches gone wrong (with over 100K results for a Boolean search of both terms together) and potentially also refers to wrong governance as the expression has been associated with the president in the media.</p>
8.	M4	<p>ahhhhhhhhhhhhaaaaaaaaaa hhhhhhhhhh</p>	<p>Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhaaaaaaaaaah hhhhhhhh</p>		

¹⁵² See https://www.reddit.com/r/linguistics/comments/gvgme5/cameroonian_centralafrican_french_differences/ for some comments on differences between Cameroonian (Central-African) French and Parisian French

9.	M1	<i>on mange ca? lol kil se presente il es kan meme a lhonneur</i>	why should we care? lol let him show his face after all he is in the spotlight	'on mange ca' (with the cedilla omitted) – literally 'is that what we eat' which stands for 'who cares' – popular Cameroonian expression <il es kan meme> for <il est quand même> – Netspeak <a lhonneur> for <à l'honneur> – Netspeak	
10	M1	<i>ou il vole le wifi ooh?</i>	or is he stealing WiFi ooh?		A reference to people in Cameroon using a neighbour's Wi-Fi illegally.
11	M3	<i>#Rosy_bush tu lap koi coe chat??!!...ti te mokeuh d mn ancien camaradeuh de classeuh hein!!! ...hayaaaaaarrrrrr</i>	<i>#Rosy_bush</i> what are you laughing about??!!...you are mocking my former classmate eh!!! ...hayaaaaaarrrrrr	<tu lap koi coe chat> –CFrA, Netspeak-type spellings seen in the previous thread. <chat> for <ça> – comical effect <ti te mokeuh> for <tu te moques> – mimicking a regional Cameroonian accent (Basaa) for comical effect, and prolonged final e sound again for exaggerated emphasis	M3 replies to M4, using a relatively well-known Cameroonian artist's name (Rosy Bush) to address her (because M4's first name is also Rose). This adds to the comical nature of the communication.

12	LOKO	<i>il y a le délestage aujourd'hui hein krkrkrkr</i>	there is a rolling blackout today eh krkrkrkr		This refers to electrical off-loading which is a frequent occurrence in Cameroon as the provision in electricity is insufficient to cover the needs of the population in most urban areas. This is very familiar and a reference that Group members will have immediately related to.
13	M4	<i>ahahahahahahhahahaha let me laugh tché quoi tcha???? krkrkrkrkr</i>	ahahahahahahhahahaha let me laugh what is that? krkrkrkrkr	The first part of that post is in English in the original. <tché quoi tcha> for <c'est quoi ça> – exaggerated mispronunciation for comical effect.	
14	M3	<i>aaaaa #Paulo sorry C pa'a #Pom_biya heinaaaaa mais di dc il a deuja un big bele coe xa????!!!...mdr</i>	aaaaa #Paulo sorry it's pa'a #Pom_biya ehaaaaa but say does he already have such a big belly????!!!...lol	<C> for <c'est> – Netspeak 'pa'a' meaning 'papa/daddy' – affectionate and respectful form of address for an older person of authority – mock respect in this case <di dc> for <dis-donc> – Netspeak abbrev <il a deuja un big bele coe xa> for <il a déjà un big bele comme ça> –	'Pom Biya' is a pseudonym given to the president Paul Biya by Cameroonians – it is a close homophone to the pronunciation of his name, and it means 'bag of peanuts' in one of the languages of West Cameroon.

				CFrA, comical exaggeration, <big bele> for <big belly>, drawn from CPE, 'coe xa' – Netspeak	
15	M1	<i>haha javai forget</i>	haha I had forgotten	<javai forget> for <j'avais forget> – CFrA	
16	M3	<i>aaaaaa #M4 n'te mokeuh plus d sn big ventre hein ...ft kil C burge mm nor</i>	aaaaaa #M4 don't mock his big belly anymore eh...he needs to get moving isn't it	<n'te mokeuh> for <ne te moque> – exaggerated comical pronunciations <d sn> for <de son> – Netspeak <ft kil C burge mm nor> for <faut qu'il se bouge même non? – Netspeak and comical exaggerations (burge for bouge for example)	
17	M4	<i>mdrr et je vois même que c'toi qui se mokeuh même plus que moi. krkrkrkr pitié pour lui vraiment, c'est le béri? le rachitisme? kwachorkorrrrrrrrr? Krkrkrkr c'quel symptome ça??? mameeeeh</i>	lool and I see that you are the one mocking even more than me. krkrkrkr sorry for him really, it is beriberi? rickets? kwashiorkor? krkrkrkr what symptom is that??? wow	<c'toi> for <c'est toi> – Netspeak <pitié pour lui> for <pitié de lui> – wrong preposition used probably for comical effect 'kwachorkorrrrrrr' – misspelling and exaggeration for comical effect	

				'mameeeeh' – exclamation meaning wow or expressing sadness, derived from 'mama'.	
18	LOKO	<i>Popol célèbre le 25000 ème hein krkrkr c'est lui qui a lancé le recrutement Kiakiakiakiakia</i>	Popol is celebrating the 25000 th eh krkrkrkr he was the one who launched the recruitment Kiakiakiakiakia		Popol is another nickname for the president. The initiator of the chat seems to moderate it with humour, suggesting here that it is the president who recruited Group members. He draws members back in, to ensure that the chat stays 'on track', aligned with the purpose of celebrating the community, whilst still leaving room for the usual creative, comical and satirical tone.
19	M4	<i>Paul je t aime!</i>	Paul I love you!	<je t aime> for <je t'aime> – as above, informal spelling and grammar	It is unclear which Paul M3 is addressing this to, LOKO or the president.
20	LOKO	<i>Hein ?</i>	Eh?		
21	M3	<i>aaaaa #rosy ... ptdrrrrrrr</i>	aaaaa #rosy ... pmslllllllll	'pmslllllllll' is pissing myself laughing – Netspeak	
22	LOKO	<i>Je lui transmets le message krkrkrkr</i>	I will pass on the message to him krkrkrkr		LOKO seems to pass on the compliment to the president.

23	M4	<i>mdrrrrrrrr [M3] parle pour moi nrrr abeg. ékié tu lap même quoi? mouff tsioum ;,,</i>	loool [M3] speak for me please. eh what are you laughing about? get outta here	'parle pour moi nrrr abeg' – CFrA, featuring French, Cameroonian colloquialisms ('nrrr' which stands for non/nor/noh), and CPE 'abeg' 'ékié tu lap même quoi?' – CFrA: Beti Fang, French, CPE 'tsioum' – most probably from tsum, to get out in Medumba, a language from West Cameroon	This post is a very good example of the complexity and rich variety of 'CFrA utterances'.
24	LOKO	<i>Qu'on a coupé ta bouche ? krkrkrk</i>	That your mouth has been cut? krkrkrk	'qu'on a coupé ta bouche ?'- typical informal Cameroonian French turn of phrase, especially starting the statement with 'que'	
25	M3	<i>va laba #LOKO elle dit a #tw..kil ta combien de #Paul ichi??!! ...@@@@@@@@@</i>	get outta here #Paulo she says to #you..how many #Paul are there here??!!...@@@@@@@@@	<va laba> for <va là-bas> – typical informal Cameroonian French turn of phrase, Netspeak <tw> for <toi> – Netspeak	The mystery about who is the object of M4's love gets elucidated by M3. This exchange is typical of the playful communications that characterise the Group.
26	M1	<i>ya paul biya</i>	there's paul biya		Another interpretation of the love declaration is offered here.

27	LOKO	<i>Wait je les tag hein krkrkrkr</i>	Wait I will tag them eh krkrkrkr	'wait je les tag' – CFrA, featuring English, French and Netspeak	
28	M3	<p><i>aaaaa #[M4] g pakkkle from il me dis #maffffffff...aaaaa...il ma chaC coe la #poule ...aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa aa...mdr</i></p>	<p>aaaaa #[M4] I have been saying this forever he says #maffffffff...aaaaa...he sent me away me like the #hen ... aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa...l ol</p>	<p><pakkkle> for <parle> – 'pakkkle' is spelt that way to reflect what is generally considered the pronunciation of the word by people from the West of Cameroon with little European education.</p> <p><g pakkkle from> for <je parle depuis longtemps> – CFrA</p> <p>'il me dis' vs 'il me dit' – grammar 'maff' often written as 'mouf', derived from 'move' – typical informal Cameroonian interjection used in CPE and CFrA</p> <p><chaC> for <chassé></p> <p>#lapoule – standard French rules would mean it should be 'une poule', a hen, as opposed to 'la poule' meaning 'the hen' – this reflects the use of articles in informal Cameroonian French</p>	

29	M4	<i>je decide de tous laisser pour te suivre comme un disciple dissiple diciple diçiple... je ferai de toi mon seigneur et de moi ta servante</i>	I have decided to leave everything to follow you like a disciple... I will make you my lord and I will be your servant	'tous' vs 'tout' – grammar 'disciple' is spelt in 4 different ways, only one being accurate, for comical effect and emphasis	
30	LOKO	<i>esseuh tu as alors moh speak toi aussi... tsuiip [M3] tu hambok krkrkrkr</i>	did you love it speak come on...tsuiip [M3] you cause trouble krkrkrkr	'esseuh tu as alors moh speak toi aussi' – CFrA 'tsuiip' represents teeth sucking to express frustration, irritation, disagreement, disgust, etc. – informal, an oral communication device reproduced in writing here 'tu hambok' – CFrA, French and CPE	
31	M5	<i>Mdr le bèlè du power alrrrr!!!</i>	Lol the belly of power hats off!!!	<alrrrr> for <alors> – in this post, there is CFrA/French with Netspeak spelling; 'alors' used in this way expresses mockery, irony, false admiration	
32	M3	<i>Euuuuhhh #rosy ya osi #jean_PAUL_vandamne... ou enkor #Paul_Barack_Obama...</i>	errrrr #rosy there's also #jean_PAUL_vandamne... or	<ya osi> for <il y a aussi> – Netspeak	M3 to M4

		<i>mais ils st a nombreux hein....DDL</i>	even #Paul_Barack_Obama... there are so many of them...LOL	<ils st a nombreux> for <ils sont nombreux> – Netspeak and non- standard French turn of phrase 'DDL' or 'die de lap', CFrA for lol	'#jean_PAUL_vandamne' – play on the famous actor's name Jean-Claude Van Damme; middle named swapped with Paul (Biya)
33	M1	<i>krkrkrkr</i>	krkrkrkr		
34	LOKO	<i>[M1] tu lap meme quoi ?</i>	[M1]what are you laughing about?	'tu lap même quoi ?' – lap means laugh in CPE, CFrA	
35	M1	<i>haha pa pol que tu sera le Seigneur de ki? ayaa [UM1] ma coo u es kou [UM2] ya les declaration ici ooo</i>	haha pa pol whose Lord will you be? ayaa [UM1] my mate where are you [UM2] declarations are being made here heyyy	'ma coo' meaning 'ma copine' – in informal Cameroonian French	'pa pol' (Pa Paul) is a reference to president Paul Biya, and again a play on the fact that LOKO's first name is also Paul.
36	M3	<i>dion g spik mo nor #[M4] ???krkrkrkr...tva sof k la take mm par #forceuh.....kiakiakuikio</i>	come on I speak/spoke well right #[M4]???....krkrkrkr... you'll take her even by #force.....kiakiakuikio	<dion g spik mo nor> for <dis-donc j'ai/je speak moh non> – CFrA and Netspeak <tva sof ke la take> for < tu vas sauf que la take> – CFrA <forceuh> for <force> – exaggeration for comical effect	It is unclear whether the first sentence is in the present tense.

				'kiakiakuikiiio' – krkrkr spelt differently for comical effect and emphasis	
37	LOKO	<i>Bon [M4] lèp alors comme ça on va s'arranger krkrkrkr</i>	Ok [M4] let it slide then we will come to an agreement krkrkrkr	'lèp alors comme ça' – CFrA: CPE <lèp> from leave/let), and French	
38	M1	<i>si c moi je ne lep pas hein</i>	if it were me I wouldn't let it slide eh		
39	M4	<i>hein? parle fort j'entends pas. ta qui ??? tsioumm apel donc ts soeurs krkrkrkr sinon moi-même je ls apel avec ds fouets al'appui</i>	eh? speak louder I can't hear. your who? get outta here call your sisters then krkrkrkr or else I'll call them myself with whips	<j'entends pas> for <je n'entends pas> – exaggerated spelling for comical effect.	The elision of the 'ne' is very Parisian and not at all Cameroonian, so that indicates that the member responding may be based in France.
40	LOKO	<i>Donc [M4] tu es sauf que sur ça hein krkrkrkr</i>	So [M4] you're on top of this eh krkrkrkr		
41	M3	<i>aaaaaaaa #[M4] tes gravvvvv dey!!!!...aaaaa avk kel genr de #Fouets???! waaaaaaaaarrrrrr g deuja trop #riz #[M4]!!!!</i>	aaaaaaaa #[M4] you're badd!!!!...aaaaa with what type of #Whips???! waaaaaaaaarrrrrr I have already #laughed too much #[M4]!!!!	<gravvvv> for <grave> – Parisian expression meaning 'you're too much' 'dey' is an exclamation used by people originating from the Ivory Coast, popularised in France amongst Africans from various origins	

				<p><avk kel genr> for <avec quel genre> – Netspeak</p> <p>'riz' meaning 'rice' is used here for comical effect instead of 'ri' (past participle of the verb to laugh)'; the two words are homophones.</p>	
42	M4	<p><i>je ne lep pas. je ne lep rien. je ne leperai guere. ékié, tu conè témérèr? bien ce n'est qe le cmncemnt du debut ooh</i></p>	<p>I'm not letting it slide. I'm not letting anything slide. I will not let it slide. ékié, have you heard of foolhardy? even though this is only the beginning of the start ooh.</p>	<p><leperai> – the CFrA term 'lep' is conjugated in the formal 'futur simple' tense with the ai- ending for dramatic effect; for even more comical effect, the very formal word 'guère' which means 'hardly', is used here to express the negative, rather than the simple 'pas' which means 'not'</p> <p><tu conè témérèr> for <tu connais téméraire> – the sentence sounds as absurd as its English translation, and it is obviously there for comical effect. This effect is exacerbated by the fact that témérèr rimes with guère'</p>	

				<p><ke> for <que>; the whole sentence is absurd and obviously used to prompt laughter;</p> <p><cmncemnt> for <commencement> and <debut> for <début> – the usual characteristics of Netspeak are present here (e.g. non-standard punctuation, grammar etc.)</p>	
43	M4	aaaaaa	aaaaaa		
44	M1	lool	lool		
45	M4	<p><i>je t'aimes, je t'aimais et je t'aimerais</i></p> <p><i>yessssssssooooooh...suis avk tw la go...Ayeeeeee</i></p>	<p>I love you, I loved you and I will love you</p> <p>yessssssssooooooh..am with you lady...Ayeeeeee</p>	<p>'je t'aimes' vs 'je t'aime' – non standard grammar</p> <p>'suis avk tw la go' vs 'je suis avec toi la go' – Netspeak</p>	<p>The term 'la go' is thought to have originated in the Ivory Coast and has been adopted in CFrA.</p>
46	LOKO	<p><i>j'ai dis qu'on allait s'arranger non ? krkrkr euuuh wait d'abord [MX] came on fait sa fête afta on s'arranger</i></p>	<p>I said we would come to an agreement right? krkrkr errr wait first [MX] to come we will celebrate him after we'll come to an arrangement</p>	<p>'wait d'abord' – CFrA</p> <p>'came on fait sa fête afta on s'arrange' – CFrA – come is always used in the past tense form 'came' in CFrA to express both the present and the past tense.</p>	<p>LOKO brings up the '25000th' member again here, gently steering the chat back to his original theme.</p>

47	LOKO	<i>ya alors [M3] et [M1] vous aimez caaaaa.....</i>	so [M3] and [M1] you love that.....	<caaaa> for <ça> – comical effect	LOKO acknowledges the ‘disruption’ M4 and M1 bring as they create a parallel chat about M4 loving LOKO etc. Of course, this way of communicating, bringing in humour and facetiousness is what makes the Group live.
48	M3	<i>krkrkr</i>	krkrkr		
49	M4	<i>sûr! il et el se retrouvent là...</i>	‘course! he and she come together here...	<il et elle> for <lui et elle> – use of the wrong prepositions for comical effect	
50	M1	<i>[M4] tu le yah depui kan nor la go?</i>	[M4] since when you love him then girl?	‘yah’ – CFrA	The full expression ‘ya mo’ or ‘yah moh’ which means to love, to have feelings for.
51	LOKO	<i>Tu es OPJ ? Krkrkrkr</i>	Are you an officer of the judicial police? Krkrkrkr		
52	M1	<i>hahaha tu ignore koi</i>	hahaha what do you know	<tu ignore koi> for <tu ignores quoi> – colloquial Cameroonian expression spelt in Netspeak style	
53	M4	<i>depuis tt’ àlheure</i>	for a while	<depuis tt’ alheure> for <depuis tout à l’heure> – non standard spelling, Netspeak	The spelling choice here reflects a very Parisian way of pronouncing “tout à l’heure”, again this could be an indication that this member is based in Paris (or was in the past).

54	M1	<i>ayaa cetai slt le coup de foudre hein?</i>	ayaa that was just love at first sight eh?	'ayaa' – exclamation (onomatopoeia) expressing surprise	
55	M3	<i>il et el????...krkrkr</i>	he and she????...krkrkr		
56	M3	<i>hummm il et el????..kiakiakia</i>	hummm he and she????..kiakiakia		
57	M3	<i>bon @+...bn wkld</i>	ok later...have a good weekend	<@+>' for <à plus> – the @ sign is pronounced 'à' in French; Netspeak abbreviations <bn wkld> for <bon weekend>' – Netspeak	
58	LOKO	<i>tu go ou....?krkrkrkr</i>	where are you going...? krkrkrkr	<tu go où> for <tu vas ou> – CFrA	
59	M1	<i>bon ou es meme ce gars</i>	so where is this guy		M1 acknowledges the fact that the member UX, tagged by LOKO at the start of the chat has still not responded.
60	LOKO	<i>je wanda... il ne va pas nous faire le coup de [UM3] hein krkrkrkr</i>	I am surprised... he is not going to play us like [UM3] eh krkrkrkr	'je wanda', from 'wonder' – very widely used in CFrA.	'Je wanda' has become a symbol of CFrA and is also the name of magazine for young people that features a lot about/in CFrA
61	M1	<i>krkrkrkrkr</i>	krkrkrkrkr		
62	M1	<i>aparement mais lui p. moins il ne parle meme pas</i>	it appears so but at least he doesn't speak	<aparement> for <apparemment> – Netspeak (non standard spelling)	
63	M3	<i>kel gar #[M1]</i>	which guy #[M1]????!!...krkrkrkr...		

64	M3	.	.		
65	M1	<i>[MX] noh</i>	[MX] right		
66	M3	<i>mdrrrrr #[M1] cmt tme do trop lap avk le #soleil la...ddl</i>	lol #[M1] how come u make me laugh so much with that #sun ... lol	<cmt tme do trop lap avk> for <comment tu me do trop lap> – Netspeak and CFrA	
67	M1	<i>ekie jai do koi la go</i>	ekie what did I do girl		
68	M1	<i>ce djo a lhonneur decre le 25000 camfrangleur il doit se presenter</i>	this bloke has the honour of being the 25000 th camfrangleur he must present himself	'ce djo' – 'djo' CFrA <decre> vs <d'être> –wrong pronunciation that is frequent in neighbourhoods where people have little Western education, used for comical effect here	
69	UM1	<i>l'affaire ci hummm, [M4] tu yamo mn pater heinn? pr ça faut passer par moi!</i>	this situation hummm, [M4] so you love my dad eh? for that you have to go through me	'ya mo' – CFrA	One of the unknown group members finally responds; she joins the chat, slotting in her comment logically so it seems she has caught up on what was posted by the other members on the chat.
70	M6	<i>c'est roger mila?</i>	is that roger mila?		Another group member joins the chat, and recognises the image and the football player depicted in it.

71	M7	<i>Paaaaa pol, un grd checkeur...</i>	Paaaaa Paul, a great dancer....	<check> for <shake> – to dance in CFrA	Reference to Paul Biya, who is caricatured in the image ‘father of the nation’ hence the ‘Paaaa’. This is a reply to M6.
72	M8	<i>C le vntr la k hein...Krkkrq</i>	It’s that belly that is eh ... Krkkrq		
73	M8	<i>On dirai Roger Biya...</i>	Looks just like Roger Biya		Mix of Roger Milla & Paul Biya – comical effect
74	M9	<i>krkrkrkrkrkrkr l’amour est bien hein! ahahaahahaha</i>	krkrkrkrkrkrkr love is good eh! ahahaahahaha		Another group member joins the chat, again displaying evidence that he has read the previous posts.
75	LOKO	<i>Minkok, salauds, ezezeg krkrkrkr</i>	Sugar, bastards, sweet krkrkrkr		‘Minkok’ and ‘ezezeg’ (Beti-Fang language/Cameroonian vernacular) both convey the idea of sweetness.
76	M9	<i>ahahahaha! mince ma cote est fall i beg! mdr</i>	ahahahaha! damn my rib fell off please! lol	‘ma cote est fall i beg’ – CFrA	
77	LOKO	<i>Ramasse seulement krkrkrkr</i>	just pick it up krkrkrkr		‘Ramasse seulement’ – typical informal Cameroonian French expression (with the use of ‘seulement’ for emphasis, implying ‘what else can you do?’)
78	M8	<i>il fo un fou pr akrapé 2fou</i>	one madman is needed to catch two madmen	<il fo un fou pour akrapé 2fou> for <il faut>, <2 fous> – Netspeak	Comical effect created with this random comment.

				<akrapé> for <attraper> – reference to mispronunciation often associated with people with little Western education	
79	LOKO	<i>Hum [M8] Esseuh tu suis même l'affaire ci ?</i>	Hum XYZ... are you actually following this matter?	<Esseuh> for <est-ce que> – informal Cameroonian French pronunciation	LOKO highlights the random nature of M8's comment
80	M9	<i>le ndolo là massah! Il faut dia qu'on apprèt pa'a Paul on go avec lui en mariageuh! krkrkrkrkrkr</i>	that love massah! we must get pa'a Paul ready so we can go and get married with him! krkrkrkrkrkr	'le ndolo là massah' – CFrA (French, Duala, CPE)	
81	M8	<i>Bn mw o6 g djoum dn ls lape alr Krkrkr</i>	Well I too will jump into the laughter in that case Krkrkr	<je joum dans les lap? – CFrA (French, altered English, CPE)	
82	LOKO	<i>Krkrkrkrkr préparez d'abord la dot</i>	Krkrkrkrk first prepare the dowry		
83	M9	<i>massah! là il reste encore juste les restes de damé du deuil hein ! mdr</i>	massah! all we have left now are the leftovers from the wake eh! lol	'damé' from damer/dammer – to eat in CFrA	This is a cultural reference that all Cameroonians will be familiar with, as wakes involve large amounts of food for guests, of which there are always leftovers the next day (which are likely to attract family members or friends wanting to enjoy free food)

Analysis

Much like the previous chat, this very lengthy exchange presents several linguistic features often associated with Netspeak and CFrA, as well as CPE and other informal language forms.

Table 3: Language forms in the second chat

	Netspeak	CFrA	Other
Initiator	2	11	8 (Non-standard grammar, regional French, CPE)
Group members	75	31	CPE – 2 Non-standard grammar – 7 Regional French – 16

In addition to the features mentioned above, many comments display ‘insider’ knowledge of Cameroonian society (for example rolling blackouts in Turn 12, which occur relatively frequently in Cameroon), football (the image itself and play on names such as ‘Roger Biya’, Turn 73), and allusions to Cameroonian politics (‘he needs to get moving isn’t it’, Turn 16, or ‘the belly of power’, Turn 31), and a sense of togetherness and commonality transpires throughout the chat. Many of the comments have double meanings and hint at a great deal more than the caricature. This makes for an extremely creative and performative exchange, with frequent obvious misspellings, common grammatical mistakes and deformation of words in ways that reflect exaggerated and erroneous pronunciations that most (if not all) Cameroonians will be able to detect, all for a comical effect.

Table 4: Examples of linguistic resources in play

	<i>Netspeak</i>	CFrA	Cameroonisms/CPE	Hexagonal French/verlan
Initiator	Krkrkrrr	le letch	oooohhh	
Group members				
<i>Turn 7</i>	g	le mbom si kelke part	camaradeuh de classeuh na ao	
<i>Turn 9</i>	il est kan meme			
<i>Turn 15</i>	d sn			
<i>Turn 23</i>		ékié tu lap même quoi		
<i>Turn 27</i>		wait je les tag		
<i>Turn 35</i>		tva sof ke la take	ma coo	
<i>Turn 39</i>				j'enttends pas
<i>Turn 60</i>	Je wanda			

The group members engaging with this image and the initial post comment on the content of the stimuli, and also react to each other's reactions to the stimuli. Chat contributors are tagged or named over 25 times, and most of the contributions are direct replies to the previous post (see for example Turns 3, 4 and 5: "come and introduce yourself here" → "do not threaten him ehrrrr!!!!" → "wow where do you see threats eh"). One member laughs in Turn 8, and in Turn 11, another one asks her why she is laughing at her friend, to which she responds in Turn 13, "let me laugh...". The usual comical posts are abundant, including a sudden fictional story of love at first sight that is rather ambiguously addressed to LOKO and/or the president of Cameroon (thanks to their shared first name, Paul) that starts at Turn 19, is reacted to until Turn 30, and is picked up again and alluded to from Turns 32 to 56. This back-and-forth turn-taking punctuated with Netspeak laughter acronyms creates an atmosphere not unlike face-to-face conversation, enhanced by references to offline experiences.

Examples are Turn 66 that says, “how come u make me laugh so much with that #sun”, to which the person addressed responds, “what did I do girl”, or in Turn 76, one of the group members’ hilarity at the previous post, expressed as, “ahahahaha! damn my rib fell off please! lol”. Some comments convey a sense of being together in the same location, such as “where are you going...?” in Turn 68, in reaction to a member wishing other members a good weekend. In this chat, the more outrageously erroneous, innovative, or exaggerated the posts are, the better. This creates enjoyment, fun, performance, with a strongly Cameroonian flavour in terms of the topics discussed, the language used, and the cultural references drawn upon. The chat is characterised by its dynamic rhythm, the vivacious and creative/reactive posts convey a sense of quasi-orality stemming from the way members pick up on each other’s posts and vie with each other in creativity.

Again, predictably, colloquial styles dominate the chat, most either using features usually associated with CFrA, informal Cameroonian French, or CPE, and/or typical of Netspeak communication. The very Parisian ‘depuis tt’ alheure’ (Turn 53) suggests that the member who posted it may have been or may still be living in Paris.

Topics discussed vary, from references to the length of Paul Biya’s presidency, some of the ways in which Cameroonian society fails to meet the members’ standards, to the running reference to the elusive 25000th members who is tagged a few times but fails to show up, for the entertainment of the others.

There is very little evidence of othering in this chat, except potentially the description of the Group as ‘this village’ which signals a community of practice where Cameroonian identities are performed through language. It would be very difficult for someone who has never lived in Cameroon and who has no knowledge of the Cameroonian cultural context to join in and fit in. In this respect, this chat seems to align with the exclusionary agenda of CFrA as it was used at its conception. The knowledge of the Cameroonian context is further enhanced by references to Roger Milla and Paul Biya who are two major

representatives of the Cameroonian nation and are familiar to the Group members and to all Cameroonians. Not only that, but references to local traditions are posted and picked up on, one example being the mention of “the leftovers from the wake” (Turn 83).

The members chatting ‘get’ the styles and tone that are tacitly ‘expected’ here, and once more, they play the game very well. They know the rules, as evidenced by the fact that there is no comment highlighting any faux pas or expressing misunderstanding or confusion. They seem to adhere seamlessly to what Goffman (1959) calls the social scripts, willingly collaborating to perform communication in the tone and style of the Group, in order to keep the momentum going. Whilst they do that, of course, they are also entertained; they are both the performers and the audience.

The initiator of the chat and the members responding all use CFrA, informal styles and typically Cameroonian turns of phrases and grammatical mistakes that are undoubtedly picked up by the others and bring the element of ridicule so valued in the Group. This suggests that they seem to have adhered to the mandate of the Group, centred around the use of CFrA that makes the Group a ‘letch’.

What stands out (comparatively to the other chats analysed in this thesis) is the way the initiator regularly steers the chat back to the topic of the 25000th Group member, but he does so in subtle ways, leaving room for the other contributors to enjoy the chat as they see fit. He also posts a great deal more than the other chat initiators.

The ‘ending’ of the chat feels quite temporary, and at the time, I wouldn’t have been surprised if I had returned a few days later to find that the conversation had continued to grow.

8.4.3.3 PRINCE – A patriotic outlier

PRINCE’s profile seems to have quite high security settings, as very little information is visible to me because I am not his ‘friend’ on Facebook. His profile indicates that he lives in Doncaster, UK, that he is originally from Mbanga, a town in Western Cameroon that also happens to be the hometown of Lapiro de Mbanga, the now deceased singer-songwriter whose hits were thought by some scholars to have inspired CFrA. PRINCE starts a thread of posts about a documentary on Lapiro’s life, broadcast on Canal 2, a Cameroonian cable TV channel that can be accessed abroad, commenting that the story brings him to tears. His post generates a few reactions, including comments about what constitutes an appropriate emotional response for a man. PRINCE concludes the threads with an emotional tirade about the fact that he considered Lapiro a mentor and a role model, and about his love for any public figure working for the benefit of Cameroon.



Image 10: PRINCE – Screen grabs

Turns	Members	Original post	Translation	Linguistic notes	General comments
1.	PRINCE	<i>un documentaire de lapiro sur canal 2 actuellement me do couler les larmes</i>	a documentary of (sic) Lapiro on Canal 2 now is making me shed tears	'un documentaire de Lapiro' – should be 'sur' (about) Lapiro <me do couler les larmes> for <me fait pleurer> – CFrA (French, English) – non-standard syntax	
2.	M1	<i>É p8 kw !!!</i>	And so what!!!	<É p8 kw' for <et puis quoi> – 'p8' and 'puis' are loose homophones, and 'kw' is a typical Netspeak abbreviation – Cameroonian (non-standard) French	
3.	M2	<i>je wanda. tu ve dire ke tu laimai plus ke ki</i>	I am surprised. you are saying that you loved him more than who	<tu laimai> for <tu l'aimais> – Netspeak + the typically Cameroonian expression 'tu l'aimais plus que qui'	
4.	M3	<i>Je wanda seulement</i>	I am just surprised		
5.	PRINCE	<i>Ayaaaa</i>	ayaaaa	onomatopoeia/exclamation indicating distress	
6.	PRINCE	<i>Je pleure mn mentor ca vous bitam ou?</i>	I am mourning my mentor why does that bother you?	<bitam> – thought to be derived from <beat' am> which is CPE for	

				beat her/him – ‘ça vous bitam où?’ is literally ‘where does it beat you?’ The mix of CPE and FR could be considered as CFrA.	
7.	M4	<i>Assiaaa</i>	Sorry	Assia is a Duala word indicating sympathy and commiseration, emphasised here with added vowels	
8.	PRINCE	<i>merci tw o moins tu a cmpris ma douleur pr lui [M4]</i>	thank you at least u understood my pain for him [M4]		
9.	M5	<i>weh eskun hoe cry pr another man?</i>	wow does a man cry for <i>another man?</i>	<eskun> for <est-ce qu’un>; <hoe> for <homme> – Netspeak, CFrA, and codeswitching from French to English	The mix of languages here is a bit confusing because the group member uses French (homme) and in the same phrase, switches to English (man) to express the same concept. I haven’t yet observed this sort of discrepancy when examining CFrA practices, except when people who have little or no knowledge of/proficiency in CFrA try to create it artificially. What adds to the confusion is ‘another man’ which again does not sound like CFrA.
10.	M5	<i>courage ca va passer ok men</i>	be brave it will get better ok man		

11.	M6	<i>situ pleure c'est pace toi tu know kil était et le combat que LAMBO SANDJO PIERRE ROGGER alias lapiro de mbanga a mener cette terre... mon frere assiaa</i>	If you cry it's because you know who he was and the struggle LAMBO SANDJO PIERRE ROGER alias Lapiro de Mbanga was engaged in on this earth ... my brother sorry	Informal Cameroonian French with some Netspeak-type spellings	
12.	M7	<i>Assiiiiiaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa aaaaa oooooooooooooooooooo</i>	Sorry		
13.	M8	<i>tsuipppppppppppppp</i>	tsuipppppppppppppp	Teeth-sucking onomatopoeia	Expresses exasperation.
14.	M9	<i>#Prince dnc u cry svnt ?????</i>	#Prince so u often cry?		
15.	PRINCE	<i>#[M9] jai perdu mes parents ki mnt mis o mond, jnétai pa encor mature pr cmprendr ce ke cè k la mort.dc jap pa été touché,mai kan jvoi des gens ki meurt pr ntr patrie,ce st lè feuille d labre cameroun ki sèche et meurt sans kon ne voient dè jeunes fleures pousser pr leur remplacé. jvs di k cète pw mw un parrain un grand</i>	#M9 I lost my parents who gave birth to me, I wasn't yet mature (enough) to understand what death was. so I wasn't moved, but when I see people die for our homeland, those are the leaves of the tree Cameroon that dries up and dies without us seeing young flowers grow to replace them. I am telling u that he was for me a mentor a great one like ateba. listen to his	This lengthy post is filled with non-standard grammatical forms e.g. <ki sèche> for <qui sèchent> plural), Netspeak (<ki mnt> for <qui m'ont>), and informal Cameroonian French including mistakes that are frequent in low-income neighbourhoods (e.g. <pr leur remplacé> for <pour les remplacer>).	PRINCE mentions in his diatribe artist Lapiro de Mbanga's allocution at the World Conference on Artistic Freedom of Expression in Oslo in 2021. He compares the artist to the now deceased Charles Ateba Eyene, a Cameroonian author, politician and lecturer, who was very popular among young Cameroonians for his public statements against tribalism and elitism in Cameroon. See https://mobile.camerounweb.com/CameroonHomePage/people/person.php?ID=1265 –

		<p><i>coe ateba.suivez son discours ki ne fait k passer ds plusieurs chaines ou il è a la conférence de la liberté dexpression a #oslo vs cmprendrez prkoi jai les larmes.et jaurai tjr lè larmnes o yeux pr tt ceux ki oeuvrent pr le bien d ntre cher pays a tous.merci.</i></p>	<p>speech which is being broadcast on repeat on several channels when he was at the conference about freedom of expression in #olso u will understand y I am crying. and I will always have tears in my eyes for all those who work for the good of our dear country. thank you.</p>		
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Analysis

Unlike like the previous two chats, this rather succinct exchange is mostly written in standard French. There is no standalone use of CPE. Non-standard/ Netspeak spellings dominate the chat, and there are a few features usually associated with CFrA and informal Cameroonian French.

Table 5: Language forms in the third chat

	Netspeak	CFrA	Other
Initiator	20+	2	3 (Non-standard grammar, regional French)
Group members	7	6	CPE – 0 Non-standard grammar – 2 regional French features – 1

Looking a bit closer at the way language forms are used here, PRINCE mainly uses Cameroonian standard French (frequently using Netspeak spelling), but group members' posts in this short chat still align with the resources that recur in the Group.

Table 6: Examples of linguistic resources in play

	<i>Netspeak</i>	CFrA	Cameroonisms/CPE	Hexagonal French/Verlan
Initiator	<i>actuelment</i>	me do/ ça vous bitam où?	couler les larmes	NA
Group members Turn 2	É p8 kw			
Turn 3			tu laimai plus ke ki	

Turn 4		<i>Je wanda seulement</i>		
Turn 9	eskun hoe			
Turn 14		dnc u cry svnt		

The content of the chat is deeply rooted in the Cameroonian cultural context, from the mention of a well-known Cameroonian artist to a few references to expected male behaviour. The comment asking whether men are meant to cry for other men (Turn 9), further emphasised by another member's question to PRINCE, asking whether he often cries (Turn 14), evokes the traditional macho image of men that is still quite prevalent in Cameroon. PRINCE concludes the chat with a lengthy, emotional and patriotic monologue about the deceased artist and the importance of his legacy and work for Cameroon. He explains that his tears are not only for the artist, but that he would always mourn those who have worked for the advancement of the nation.

PRINCE's 'speech' contrasts starkly with the general tone of the Group, staying away from the light, sarcastic and playful style that characterises it. This deviation from the expected tone prompts surprise and even mockery from some of the members.

As usual, the group members engaging here are commenting on the content of the stimulus (PRINCE's initial post), and on only two instances, they are reacting to each other's reactions (Turns 3 and 4). Two members reacts with compassion and commiseration (Turns 7,10,11 and 12), two others with irritation (Turns 2 and 13), but most express surprise at the initiator's topic and tone (Turns 2,3, 9 and 14). One member rejects PRINCE's contribution, responding with indifferent hostility (Turn 2).

As a result, the dynamic is quite different from the other chats. There is little opportunity for laughter or exuberant creativity here, and this may explain why

the chat lacks the usual sense of enjoyment, entertainment and performativity that characterises the Group.

The group members' reactions suggest that PRINCE has failed to discern, may be aware of, or has chosen to ignore the overt and implicit rules and the expected style and content of the Group. Thus, it is the initiator who is othered here, to the extent that he finds himself explaining and even justifying his statement (in his monologue, Turn 15). PRINCE fails to abide by what Goffman (1955) describes as essential to successful human interaction, namely self-monitoring and self-correcting. Consequently, PRINCE experiences other-monitoring and other-correcting from the members reacting to his post. PRINCE's deviation is not surprising, even though he is clearly Cameroonian, as CFrA is not spoken or valued by every Cameroonian.

The reactions of surprise and rejection of PRINCE's post (see Turns 2, 3, 4 and 13), show how, having picked up on his deviance from accepted content and language forms, the other members act as guardians of the values of the Group. This is really interesting given that CFrA was born out of resistance to officially expected and accepted norms of linguistic behaviour propagated through the educational system by the Cameroonian nation-state. This deviance creates a sense of awkwardness and confusion that stands out from the other chats. From memory, this is the only chat where I observed this specific dynamic, confirming the idea that even though CFrA is often described as a rule-less speech form, it may be as normative and codified as standard language forms, and infringement of its rules generates the same anti reactions from members as CFrA did (from proponents of 'standard language' use). These anti reactions nuance the projected image of the Group as a relaxed informal space characterised by freedom of speech.

8.3.4.4 TEBO – Cameroonian identity and patriotism

Based in Genoa, TEBO's profile indicates that he studied in Cameroon and migrated to Italy after graduating from university. He has quite high security settings, so very little information is visible to me because I am not his 'friend' on Facebook. A few of his check-ins indicate specific places he has visited in Genoa, and he appears to be a football coach or referee there.

On his personal Facebook page, the odd phrase in Italian crops up here and there, e.g., <la potenza c'est comment norr> meaning (literally) <power how is it going?> or <La potenza piu> for <Power more>, which suggest that his Cameroonian friends, most likely the only ones who understand CFrA, speak Italian and expect him to understand what those phrases mean.

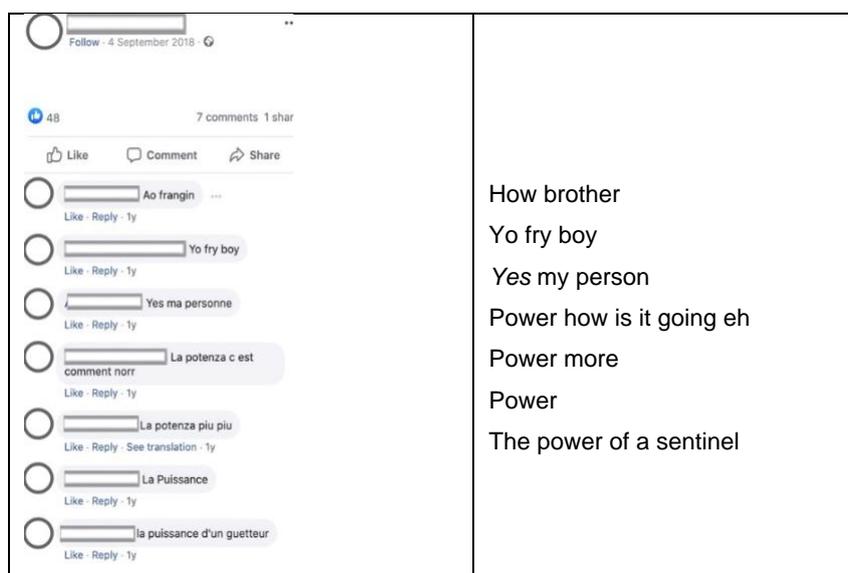


Image 11: TEBO's Check-in

TEBO starts a thread with an easily recognisable aerial photograph of a centre point of Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon, with the comment "Imaginé cette ville" and he captions it with the question "Ici sè kel ville????". Like BAB in the first chat, TEBO seems to restrain himself to only play the role of a catalyst as he refrains from posting any comment on that thread.

Reactions vary from members simply stating what city is on the photograph, to other members indicating completely different cities in Cameroun or abroad using the performative and playful tone that characterises the Group. Most city names posted that are not Yaoundé are in the west of Cameroon. It is unclear whether these statements are suggesting that the capital of Cameroon should be in one of these other locations, or just part of the playfulness of the Group, or even an expression of the weight of the ethnic diversity of Cameroon. Either way, this short, vivacious chat is consistent with other chats on the Group.

<p>1</p> <p>shared Les Ways Kankan's photo. Imaginé cette ville</p>  <p>ici où kel ville????</p> <p>Like · Comment · 14 March at 01:28</p> <p>8 people like this.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Ydé(ongola) 14 March at 01:33 · Like</p> <p>yde 14 March at 02:16 · Like</p> <p>Ongola 14 March at 02:49 · Like</p> <p>béroule 14 March at 02:54 · Like</p> <p>béroule 14 March at 02:55 · Like</p> <p>Campo town 14 March at 04:28 · Like</p> <p>goola 14 March at 04:29 · Like</p> <p>c le sou kate de mon village baham 14 March at 04:40 · Like</p> <p>Ou à baham poudze 14 March at 04:41 · Like</p> <p>la ville des choa man(choa city) 14 March at 05:02 · Like</p> <p>balombo 14 March at 05:14 · Like</p>
<p>3</p> <p>balombo 14 March at 05:14 · Like</p> <p>yaoun hotel hilton 😊 14 March at 05:26 · Like</p> <p>Djelen trois 14 March at 05:27 · Like</p> <p>BOUDA 14 March at 05:27 · Like</p> <p>gola... 14 March at 05:31 · Like</p> <p>gola... 14 March at 05:31 · Like</p> <p>Yaoundé 14 March at 05:34 · Like</p> <p>Dischang 14 March at 05:54 · Like</p> <p>Yaoundé(#Rond_Point_Etoile) 14 March at 06:37 · Like</p> <p>Foumbot 14 March at 06:39 · Like</p> <p>le.bled c i ch.nous les.munas d popol rond point hilton 14 March at 06:52 · Like</p>	<p>4</p> <p>le.bled c i ch.nous les.munas d popol rond point hilton 14 March at 06:52 · Like</p> <p>non mon lapin c le rond point de la primature 14 March at 07:12 · Like</p> <p>C la cité capitale du kmer 14 March at 07:12 · Like</p> <p>lessa nga hon?,,, 14 March at 07:23 · Like</p> <p>bonjour 14 March at 07:40 · Like</p> <p>ydel et la phte ress de #Manich? 14 March at 08:00 · Like</p> <p>Enod 14 March at 08:01 · Like · ❤️ 1</p> <p>Foubot 14 March at 08:19 · Like</p> <p>Yaoundé la capitale 14 March at 08:38 · Like</p> <p>Ici 7 ngo 14 March at 08:49 · Like</p> <p>Évod bonamengue mrel avenue 14 March at 09:16 · Like · ❤️ 1</p> <p>ici c'est ngola 14 March at 09:19 · Like</p>

5

ici c'est ngola
14 March at 09:19 · Like

C'est ça même
14 March at 09:44 · Like

nous sommes à ngo je nyai le ngola hiton hotel
14 March at 10:01 · Like

non c'est douala...rue de la joie..
14 March at 11:38 · Like · ♡ 1

yokadouma
14 March at 11:45 · Like

laisse ça bachir...il peut avoir une rue comme ça à yokadouma l c'est douala je te dis....
14 March at 11:53 · Like

Cette rue n'a rien de Subliminal gar
14 March at 12:11 · Like · ♡ 1

ses yaounde hotel hiton
14 March at 12:17 · Like · ♡ 2

com tu dis la mon frère
14 March at 12:34 · Edited · Like · ♡ 1

if fo y vivre pr connaitre les realités de cette ville
14 March at 13:00 · Like

En tout cas moi j adore cette ville
14 March at 14:07 · Like

6

En tout cas moi j adore cette ville
14 March at 14:07 · Like

Yaounde Cameroun le rond point le boulevard.
Du 20mai
14 March at 15:30 · Like · ♡ 1

Eh wii la rose c vré u a rezon
14 March at 16:44 · Like

Voila aussi quelque chose dont le Cameroun peut être fier
14 March at 16:52 · Like · ♡ 1

Mamy (USA)
14 March at 18:02 · Like

ca le + laid quartier d banfangte. vvvxi un. aperçu du centre ville de bangangte



14 March at 21:20 · Like

7

Avec la poussière partout ????

4 hours ago · Like

sa c à perja vous ndemez ou koi
4 hours ago · Like

n'importe ki va kame avec xa part de reponse
3 hours ago · Like

sans bandits et poussieres
about an hour ago · Like

enfinn un # le surgi j croyai k j eyai seul
about an hour ago · Like

Image 12: TEBO – Screen grabs

UM: Unknown member

Turns	Members	Original post	Translation	Linguistic notes	General comments
1.	TEBO	<i>Imaginé cette ville</i>	Imagine this city		
2.	TEBO	<i>Ici sè kel ville????</i>	Which city is this????		
3.	M1	<i>Ydé (ongola)</i>	Ydé (Ongola)		Ydé is the official abbreviation of Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon. Ongola is the traditional name of the capital and its close region.
4.	M2	<i>yde</i>	yde		
5.	M3	<i>Ongola</i>	Ongola		
6.	M4	<i>béroule</i>	béroule		
7.	M4	<i>béroute</i>	béroute		I believe this stands for Beirut (misspelt) – homophone
8.	M5	<i>Campo Town</i>	Campo Town		Campo is a town in southern Cameroon close to the border with Equatorial Guinea
9.	M6	<i>goola</i>	goola		Ongola misspelt
10	M7	<i>c le sou katie de mon village baham</i>	it's a poor neighbourhood in my village baham	<katie> for <quartier> - reflects informal Cameroonian pronunciations of the word – Netspeak	

11	M5	<i>Ou à baham pouldze</i>	where in Baham Pouldze		Pouldze is a town in Western Cameroon, in the traditional chiefdom of Baham.
12	M8	<i>la ville des choa man(choa city)</i>	the city of Choa people (Choa city)		Choa Arabs are a people who live in Northern Cameroon – see https://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/cameroon/society
13	M9	<i>balembo</i>	Balembo		A town in Western Cameroon.
14	M10	<i>yaoun hotel hilton J</i>	Yaoundé Hilton hotel J		
15	M5	<i>Djelen trois</i>	Djelen 3		A city in Bafoussam
16	M11	<i>BOUDA</i>	Mbouda		Mbouda is the capital of the Bamoutos department of West Province, Cameroon
17	M12	<i>gola...</i>	gola...		Ongola
18	M13	<i>Yaoundé</i>	Yaoundé		
19	M14	<i>Dschang</i>	Dschang		Dschang is the capital of the division of Ménéou in Western Cameroon.
20	M15	<i>Yaoundé(#Rond_Point_Etoile)</i>	Yaoundé (#Etoile_Roundabout)		
21	M5	<i>Foumbot</i>	Foumbot		Foumbot is a town and commune in Western Cameroon
22	M16	<i>le.bled c l ch.nous les munas d popol rond point hilton</i>	The village/home this is our home the children of Popol Hilton roundabout		Popol is a nickname given to President Paul Biya.

23	M17	<i>non mon lapin c le rond point de la primature</i>	No my darling it's the roundabout where the prime minister's offices are		
24	M18	<i>C la citè capitale du kmer</i>	It's the capital city of kmer		Kmer is a popular abbreviation of Cameroon.
25	M19	<i>lassa nga how ?,,,</i>	lassa girl how?	'lassa' - from the English word 'last', meaning useless/worthless – CFrA 'nga' - woman, lady, girlfriend, Beti-Fang languages	As confirmed by private contacts and by Tekwa, 2013 (p. 16).
26	M17	<i>[M19] bonjour</i>	[M19] hello		
27	M20	<i>yde! #[M16] t la petite ress de #UM?</i>	yde! #[M16] u are #UM's younger sis?		
28	M21	<i>Éwodi</i>	Éwodi		A region and people from the coast and southwest of Cameroon
29	M22	<i>Foubot</i>	Foumbot	Typo	
30	M23	<i>Yaoundé la capitale</i>	Yaoundé the capital		
31	M24	<i>Ici 7 ngo</i>	This is Ngo		Ongola
32	M25	<i>Éwodi bonamengue nvel avenue</i>	Éwodi Bonamengue new avenue	<nvel> for <nouvelle> – Netspeak	
33	M26	<i>ici c'est ngola</i>	this is ngola		
34	M21	<i>C'est ça même [M25]</i>	That's exactly it [M25]		

35	M27	<i>nous sommes à ngo. je nyai le ngola hilton hotel</i>	we are in ngo. I see the ngola Hilton hotel		
36	M28	<i>non c'est douala...rue de la joie..</i>	no this is Douala... rue de la joie		A popular area in Douala with many street restaurants and bars that are open all night.
37	M29	<i>yokadouma</i>	Yokadouma		Town in south-eastern Cameroon
38	M28	<i>laisse ça [M28]... il peut avoir une rue comme ça á yokadouma ! c'est douala je te dis....</i>	leave off [M28]...can there be a street like that in yokadouma! it is douala I am telling you....		
39	M29	<i>Cette rue n'a rien de Subliminal gar</i>	there is nothing subliminal about that street man		I believe they meant sublime, rather than subliminal.
40	M10	<i>ses yaounde hotel hilton</i>	it's yaounde hotel hilton		
41	M30	<i>com tu dis la mon frère [M29]</i>	as you said my brother [M29]		
42	M31	<i>il fo y vivre pr connaitre les réalités de cette ville</i>	you have to live there to know the realities of that city		
43	M32	<i>En tout cas moi j'adore cette ville</i>	In any case I adore that city		
44	M33	<i>Yaounde Cameroun(le rond point le boulevard. Du 20 mai</i>	Yaounde Cameroon(Boulevard du 20 mai roundabout		
45	M34	<i>Eh wi [M33] c vré u a rezon</i>	Oh yes [M33] it's true you are right		
46	M35	<i>Voila aussi quelque chose dont le Cameroun peut être fier</i>	This is also something Cameroon can be proud of		
47	M36	<i>Miamy (USA)</i>	Miami (USA)		

48	M37	<i>cai le+ laid quartier d bafangte. vwxu un. aperçu du centre ville de bangangte</i>	it's the ugliest Bafangte neighbourhood. Here's a view of the city centre of Bangangte.	<cai> for <c'est> – Netspeak	Bafangte: a combination of Bafang and Bangangté – 2 towns and communes in Western Cameroon.
49	M38	<i>Avec la poussière partout ????</i>	With dust everywhere????		A reference to Yaoundé infamous and invasive red dust.
50	M39	<i>sa c à penja vous ndemez ou koi</i>	this is in penja are you missing the point or what	'ndemez' – second person plural French verbal end -ez + 'ndem', CFrA term meaning mess, trouble, failure, disorder etc.	Penja is a town and commune in the coastal Region of Cameroon.
51	M10	<i>n'importe ki va kame avec xa part de reponse</i>	anyone will just come with their own answer		
52	M40	<i>sans bandits et poussières</i>	without thugs and dust		
53	M16	<i>enfinnn un #[UM1] ki surgi j croyai k j eyai seul</i>	finally a #[UM1] who appears I thought I was alone		M16 comments on the fact that M40 has the same surname as her.

Analysis

This chat is in line with the aim and style of the Group, entertaining, creative, using several linguistic features often associated with Netspeak, CFrA, typically Cameroonian expressions, and some standard French, and subtly critical of certain aspects of the status quo in the Cameroonian capital. It starts with a stimulus from the initiator who posts a photograph of a central point in the capital of Cameroon and writes, “Imagine this city” and “which city is this?”. It is quite a fast-paced exchange, because many of the reactions are short, as group members mainly confirm other group members’ responses, with the odd one posting a longer reply.

Table 7: Language forms in the fourth chat

	Netspeak	CFrA	Other
Initiator	2	0	2 (Non-standard grammar, regional French)
Group members	23	6	Non-standard grammar – 2 Regional French – 1 Verlan – 1

In addition to the usual features mentioned above, the group members reacting to the stimulus purposely offer many obviously incorrect responses, and a few of those provocative replies prompt derision and mock disagreement, all consistent with the light and playful style of the Group.

Table 8: Examples of linguistic resources in play

	<i>Netspeak</i>	CFrA	Cameroonis ms/CPE	Hexagonal French/ Verlan
Initiator	<i>ici sè kel ville</i>	NA	ici sè	NA
Group members			c le sou	
<i>Turn 10</i>	c le sou katie		katie	
<i>Turn 22</i>				le bled
<i>Turn 27</i>				la ptite ress
<i>Turn 48</i>	cai			
<i>Turn 51</i>		n'importe ki va kame		

Netspeak dominates the chat, and a few features usually associated with CFrA are also used, as well as the odd informal Cameroonian French expression. As in the previous chats, the Group members react to the image and the initiator's two posts, and a few of them react to each other's posts. The group members seem to enjoy the simple challenge: to identify the landmark on the photograph. It is a recognisable landmark, and they play along, posting all sorts of incorrect responses (e.g., Miami, Campo, Douala, various towns in other regions of Cameroon), which keeps the momentum going. None of the members express surprise at the initiator's stimuli, and only one reacts with slightly scornfully at other members' posts (Turn 51). Most outrageously outlandish propositions (e.g., Turn 10) prompt little to no reaction, which indicates that the group members consider these types of post to be consistent with the rules of the game. Where a member highlights the absurdity of an impossible proposition (e.g., in Turn 37), the reaction also aligns closely with the style of the Group (see Turn 38, where the member judges the proposition impossible, only to offer another incorrect answer). The chat seems to come to a natural end after one of the members comments on the fact that another member is her namesake.

This chat relies on members having good knowledge of the capital of Cameroon and of several regions, so once again, it's a pre-requisite to know Cameroon well to be able to participate successfully in this exchange.

Operating within the framework of what is understood to be acceptable behaviour in the Group, the members reacting make use of their creativity as they participate in the communicative event. This ensures that the sense of entertainment and performativity so valued by the Group administrator is prevalent in this chat.

What stands out here are posts that communicate a sense of pride for this achievement, a well-built monument that has stood the test of time (see for example Turn 46), or those that express love for the city and by extension, for the country (e.g., Turns 22 or 46). From memory, I do not recall coming across any other posts that are patriotic in this way. One post is also markedly an outlier, as it highlights the fact that a namesake has appeared in the chat (Turn 53). There could be several explanations this deviation from the common thread in the chat. What seems most likely to me is the fact that the purpose of the stimuli had been addressed fully, and the member posting that final and apparently unrelated response, may have been aiming to bring the chat to an end.

8.3.4.5 JOZA – Status and form of CFrA

Like most group members, JOZA's profile is on high privacy settings so it is difficult to access much personal information as I am not his Facebook friend. I did manage to see that he studied in Tunisia when I was collecting the data from the CFrA group. His post is one of the few posts that spark a metalinguistic discussion on CFrA. He asks group members to help him translate a sentence from French into "Francanglais". The people involved in this thread of posts try to rewrite the sentence provided by the initial contributor as per his instructions, so this goes beyond mere translation as each contributor translates the general message conveyed by the initial sentence, but also brings a personal touch, a display of creativity that makes each post unique. There is eventually a winner, i.e., one contributor is considered by a few others to be the creator of 'the most authentic CFrA translation'.

The initiator of this thread wrote the sentence in French, with non-standard French grammar, spelling mistakes, and Netspeak-type spellings for some words, but he uses none of the features generally associated with CFrA, which leads me to suggest that he deems French more appropriate for instructions. this sentence with as much CFrA as possible. His wording (“the max of francamglais that you know”) is very interesting as it seems to suggest that CFrA does not always/often have the same ‘density’ in terms of the presence of markers often associated with the speech form. His request also presupposes that contributors are likely to have the expertise needed to translate French into CFrA, and equally that the initiator of the post has the expertise required to assess the quality of the translations.

This post provides insights into the nature of CFrA that greatly contrast with studies that described the register as elusive, some even questioning its mere existence. Here, we have an event that displays lay metalinguistic knowledge. All contributors but one post translations with significant content in common. This demonstrates enregisterment, as defined by Agha (2005, p. 38, op cit.). Not only is the Group evidence that there is a distinct linguistic entity that some call Camfranglais, but here is more specific and detailed evidence that CFrA is also clearly identifiable to members. These members are also able to differentiate it from other linguistic registers to the extent that they are able to create it, and that there is some measure of consensus on what constitutes CFrA.

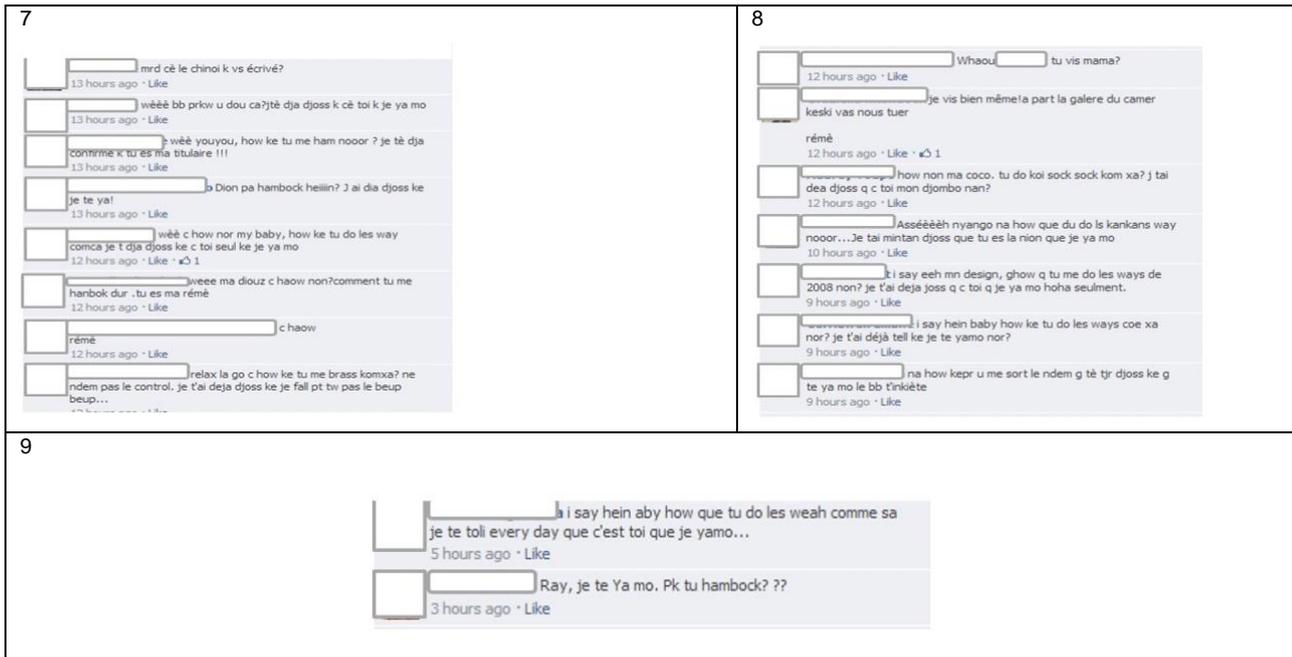


Image 13: JOZA – Screen grabs

UM: Unknown member

Turns	Members	Original post	Translation	Linguistic notes	General comments
1.	JOZA	<i>traduisez moi cette phrase avec le max de francanglais que vous connaissez :wè bb,pourquoi tu comporte ainsi,je t'es déjà dis quif c'est toi que j'aime. à vos claviers,prêt et commentez</i>	translate this sentence for me with the max of Francanglais that you know: wè baby, why are you behaving like this, I have, already told you that it's you that I love. on your keyboards, get set and comment	<p>'wè': exclamation of distress, sadness, regret, reproach, borrowed from the Duala language and commonly used by Cameroonians of all ethnic groups.</p> <p><bb> for <baby> - expression of tenderness, Netspeak</p> <p>'comporte' - the 's' is missing here from the 2nd person singular form of the verb 'se comporter' (to behave)</p> <p><je t'es> for <je t'ai> – the verb to be is used here erroneously, instead of the verb to have, as 't'es' and 't'ai' are homophones</p> <p><quif> for <que> – typo</p> <p>'à vos claviers, prêt et commentez' – the form used here is the one use for races ('on your marks, get set, go')</p>	

2.	M1	<i>waahh bby girl ao k tu me do ca nooh je ta deja tell k c toi k yah moh nang</i>	waaah baby girl why are you doing this to me I have already told you that it's you that (I) love right	'nang' is the same as 'noh/nor' – CFrA	
3.	M2	<i>easy hein baby how q tu me do lè way coe ça nor. je tè dja dioss q gte yamoh barat seulemn.</i>	easy eh baby why are you doing these things to me eh I have already told you that I love you just chat me up.	<lè way> for <les way> – CFrA <dja djoss> for <déjà dit> - reflects another Cameroonian pronunciation of the word – CFrA 'barat'- from the French word 'baratin' which means claptrap, spiel, rubbish, etc. – CFrA	Les –FR plural article) – this is an instance of “spelling rebellion”. In Cameroon, 'baratiner' is also used to mean sweet talk, charm, court.
4.	M3	<i>assez hein ma go c how qe tu do la noh . je tai dja djoss qe je yamo qe toi noh. u est le sucre de mon taps</i>	I say eh my girlfriend how are you behaving eh I already told you that it's only you that I love, you are the sugar in my tapioca	'tu' (you) is spelt 'u' – unclear whether this is an omission of the letter 't' or mimicry of the English 'u' (Netspeak-style)	Tapioca is eaten with sugar and water in Cameroon (amongst other ways) and it would be unthinkable to eat it without sugar as it would taste horribly bland. The idea here is that tapioca does not make sense without sugar.
5.	M3	<i>assez hein ma go c how qe tu do la noh . je tai dja djoss qe je yamo qe toi noh. u est le sucre de mon taps</i>	I say eh my girlfriend how are you behaving eh I already told you that it's only you that I		Posted again.

			love, you are the sugar in my tapioca		
6.	M4	<i>yo bb prkw u make coe sa je té dja djoss ke cè tw ke je yamo ou ke je kiff</i>	yo baby why are you acting this way I have already told you that it is you that I love or that I really love	'yo' – influence of American hip hop culture <yamo> for <love> – CFrA (see above) <kif> for < to love very much> –Verlan, French 'banlieue' argot; kif comes from Arabic.	
7.	M5	<i>bb how que tu te comporte ainsi je t'ai déjà tell q c toi que je ya mo</i>	baby why are you behaving like this I have already told you that it is you that I love		
8.	M4	<i>yo bb prkw u make coe sa je té dja djoss ke cè tw ke je yamo ou ke je kiff</i>			Posted again.
9.	M6	<i>asseey hein!!! mama je tai dja djoss ke c'est tw ma lovebby nan!!!</i>	I say eh!!! mama I've already told you that you are my love baby right		'Mama' here signals respect.
10	M7	<i>i say hein la go ao k u me do ca noooooon?!! gtai deja joss k c toi k g yamo....lol</i>	I say girl why are you doing this to me eh I have already told you that it's you that I love ... lol		

11	M8	<i>i say ptite soeur how ke depuis from tu me do les way façon façon non pourtant u know bien je die seulement sur ton model</i>	I say younger sister why is it that for ages you've been making a fuss eh yet you know very well that I am just dying (from love) for you		Literally 'your model' – 'younger sister' here is a typical Cameroonian expression used to address young ladies.
12	M9	<i>bb how que tu te comporte so je t'es deja djoss que c'est toi que je love</i>	baby why are you behaving this way I have already told you that it's you that I love		
13	M10	<i>assej hein la go !na ao k tu me ficham nor ressé?jte joss k dan all I kwata si ya k tw k MW j yamo hein confiance!!!</i>	I say eh girl! why are you drawing attention to me like this sister? I have been telling you all over this neighbourhood that it is only you that I love eh trust (me)!!!	'ficham' means draw attention to someone which brings shame on them – CFrA <kwata> from <quarter>, meaning a particular area of town, a neighbourhood – from CPE capitalised (MW) for emphasis - <mw> for <moi> – Netspeak	Ficham probably comes from 'afficher' which in French slang means bringing shame, exposing.
14	M11	<i>How noo bb how que tu do les ways tchèlè so? j'ai dia tell que je te ya mal mauvais</i>	How are you baby why are you acting like a homosexual like this? I have already	'tchèlè' - homosexual man – CFrA 'mal mauvais' – literally 'badly bad' – Cameroonism	

			told you that I love you real bad		
15	M12	<i>bb hao k u me do les wes un genr prtan u know k c u k j yamo</i>	baby why are you behaving so strangely even though you know that that it's you that I love	<prtan> for <pourtant> – Netspeak	
16	M13	<i>assey nyango i ya mem kel kankan palaba j tes deja diva ke ce toi ke je yamo</i>	I say lady what kind of real palaver is there I have already told you that it's you that I love	<nyango> means <lady, woman, mother> in Duala – CFrA <diva> from the French word 'divers' – in CFrA 'divers' means gossip, latest news etc. Here it is used as a verb.	
17	M14	<i>Asay hein a mininga c'est encore quel style de ways que tu me do comme ça? Je t'ai déjà djoss que c'est toi que je ya mo</i>	I say eh young lady what kind of behaviour are you adopting with me I have already told you that it's you that I love	'mininga' means young woman/lady in Beti Fang languages – Cameroonian vernacular/CFrA	
18	M15	<i>azèèh! ma zopine zourkw zu ze zompoete ainzi? ze t'es zéja zis zè zw ke z'aime.</i>	I say my friend why are you behaving like this I have already	'azèèh' is a very unusual spelling, unsure whether it is 'enough' or 'I say' – the rest of the post is in French, but all 'z's are replacing different letters (c, p, t, etc.,.)	

			told you that it's you that I love		
19	M16	<i>asséh baby il ya koi k tu me dou tous se ke tu dou la tu no k je te yamo non!!!!</i>	come on baby what's making you do all these things that you are doing you know that I love you right!!!!!!		Dschang is the capital of the division of Ménoua in Western Cameroon.
20	M17	<i>hao bb il yakoi k u m do ls ways kankan gtai dja joss k je te yamo</i>	what's wrong baby why are you causing real trouble I have already told you that I love you	kankan – 'les ways kankan' means bad, useless etc. – Cameroonism/CFrA	
21	M18	<i>Nann merci!!!</i>	No thank you!!!		This contributors strongly states that he doesn't want to take part.
22	M17	<i>hao bb il yakoi k u m do ls ways kankan gtai dja joss k je te yamo</i>	what's wrong baby why are you causing real trouble I have already told you that I love you		Posted again.
23	M15	<i>assèé! bb ao ke tu me put dans le ndem norrr? alor ke tu no ke je te ndolo.</i>	I say! Baby why are you bringing bad luck	here, for 'love', the contributor has used the noun 'ndolo' which means 'love' in	

			to me eh when you know that I love you	Duala but which is not used as a verb in Duala.	
24	M18	<i>Et [M17] remporte la palme d'or!!!!</i>	and [M17] wins the award!!!!		'Palme d'or' is a reference to the Cannes Film Festival - it is the highest prize awarded to films.
25	M19	<i>Je d'accorise avec toi [M17] est la kankan bb pour le moment</i>	I agree4 with you [M17] is the real baby for now	'd'accoriser' is a neologism - this verb doesn't exist in standard French. It is drawn from 'd'accord' which indicates agreement – Cameroonism	
26	M20	<i>Didonc Tuve ya mm koi?,qtu joue les done nga,pourtant tume ya grav le feu comot.ndèm moi tè kankan way là hein!!.</i>	say what is it that you want to hear? When you are acting like a 'done' girl when you love me so much that fire comes out. Stop your bad ways eh!!	<didonc> for <dis donc> – the term is used to draw people's attention, to indicate that the speaker is about to say something, for emphasis – Cameroonism	
27	M21	<i>mn freeeerrrr vs aussi aretez nor.c est déjà bon.</i>	my brother you can all stop. That's enough.		
28	M22	<i>hé izi la go . tu me do encore les alo way comme ça je vai te chandaliser . tu me noo non?</i>	Hey easy girl if you act in this fake way again I will sweep you	<alo> or <allo> for <lie/lies>	

			to the floor. you know me right	'chandaliser', another neologism, literally means to sweep someone to the floor with one's leg, to make them fall to the ground. Also spelt 'chandéliser' – Cameroonism <tu me noo non?> for <you know what I am capable of> – Cameroonism /Netspeak spelling	
29	M17	<i>mxii [M18] et [M19] c kan mem moi</i>	Thanks [M18] and [M19] it <i>is</i> me	<c kan mem moi> lit. <it is me after all>; 'quand-même' is used here to emphasise that it is not just anyone.	
30	M15	<i>zzzzz</i>	<i>zzzzz</i>		
31	M19	<i>Ekiéééééééééé [M22],chandéliser a? lbeg ne bring pas le ndem dans la traduction de JOZA, i beg ooooooooo</i>	<i>Ekiéééééééééé,</i> sweeping the floor really? please don't bring bad luck in JOZA's translation please	the 'a' added here after 'chandéliser' is added for emphasis (hence the choice of the adverb 'really' for the translation)	
32	M23	<i>Bb how que tu do les wè façon comme un enfant comme ça nonn or from je t'ai déjà tell que c'est toi que ya mo.</i>	Baby why are you behaving in such a childish way eh when a long time ago I		

			already told you that it's you that I love.		
33	M22	<i>[M19] wèèè la go nessa ol le moto tel le wé comm il yaa . heheh DDL</i>	wèèè girl doesn't every person say things the way they understand them. heheh LOL		
34	M17	<i>[M19] g wanda mm sr lui</i>	[M19] he even surprises me		
35	M22	<i>wéé [M19] est ce que je lai alor chandalisé cest seulement le sissia pour kel ne mimba pas les kankan nohh. wèè je mexcuse alors</i>	wéé [M19] did I sweep her to the floor it's only intimidation to stop her for bragging/from having silly thoughts eh wèè I apologise then		
36	M19	<i>excuses acceptées, tu no que nous les nguess là nous yavons mo les kankans quand chandéliser là arrive on nyongo easy</i>	apology accepted you know that we prostitutes we love the real deal when sweeping appears we disappear quietly	'nyongo' means to disappear in Duala.	

37	M22	<i>ééh la go [M19] il ya les nga ke si tu ne la sissia pas comme ça elle te tchah pour un mboutmann hein. elle mimba cest tu lui gui les boss ke tu la yamo bobé seulement . francho je ne te lom pas</i>	ééh girl [M19] there are some girls if you don't intimidate them this way they take you for an idiot eh they think if you give them bumps that means you really love them bad. frankly I am not lying to you.	'give them bumps' i.e. if you hit them	
38	M24	<i>wê c how non béé! je jure ke g ya toi seulement!</i>	wê how are you baby I swear that I love only you	'wê' – another spelling for 'wè'	
39	M24	<i>c con tout ça!</i>	this is all silly		
40	M25	<i>Vraiment con mola,bête mm à la limite</i>	really silly man borderline stupid		
41	M26	<i>assééé baby how you di make that thing noor? a don tell you you di ma only love</i>	I say baby why are you doing this thing eh I have told you that you are my only love	'how you di make that thing noor?' – this post is in CPE apart from 'noor'; the contributor also writes 'you di' (which is used as an auxiliary, see Todd & Jumbam, 1992 for more) instead of 'you be' which seems to indicate that she/he may be a French speaker/not proficient in CPE.	

42	M27	<i>How ma baby! How ke tu do les way un genre un genre alors ke xè tw ke je ya mo noor?</i>	what's up my baby! why are you acting strange when it is you that I love eh?		
43	M27	<i>How ma baby! How ke tu do les way un genre un genre alors ke xè tw ke je ya mo noor?</i>	what's up my baby! why are you acting strange when it is you that I love eh?		Posted again.
44	M28	<i>mrd cè le chinoi k v écrivé?</i>	shit is it Chinese that you are writing		
45	M28	<i>wèèè bb prkw u dou ca?jtè dja djoss k cè toi k je ya mo</i>	wèèè baby why are you doing this I have already told you that it's you that I love		
46	M29	<i>wèè youyou, how ke tu me ham noor ? je tè dja confirmé k tu es ma titulaire !!!</i>	wèè youyou why are you bothering me eh I have already confirmed that you are my official girlfriend		'youyou' seems to be a pet name, a mark of affection

47	M27	<i>Dion pa hambock heiiiiiin? J ai dia djoss ke je te ya!</i>	say stop bothering eh I have already told you that I feel you	<dion> is <dis-donc> pronounced faster	See previous notes.
48	M30	<i>wèè c how nor my baby, how ke tu do les way comca je t dja djoss ke c toi seul ke je ya mo</i>	wèè what's up eh my baby why are you acting like that I have already told you that you're the only one that I love		
49	M31	<i>weee ma diouz c haow non?comment tu me hanbok dur .tu es ma rémè</i>	weee my sweet (lady) what's up eh why are you bothering me so much you're my mother	'diouz' – it sounds like 'douce' hence my translation, but I found no evidence either way.	See previous note about the respect shown to women when calling them 'mama' or 'mother'
50	M31	<i>[M27] c haow rémè</i>	[M27] what's up mother		
51	M32	<i>relax la go c how ke tu me brass komxa? ne ndem pas le control. je t'ai déjà djoss ke je fall pt tw pas le beup beup...</i>	relax girl why are you scolding me like this don't lose control I have already told you that I fall for you I mean it...	'beubeup' or 'beup' means 'boasting', bragging, saying things that are not true or that are inflated.	

52	M27	<i>Whaou [M31]. tu vis mama?</i>	Wow [M31]. are you ok mama?	'tu vis', literally 'are you alive'.	
53	M31	<i>je vis bien même!a part la galère du camer keski va nous tuer rémè</i>	I am fine apart from the hardships of Cameroon what will kill us mother	'bien même' is added for emphasis (lit. well indeed).	
54	M33	<i>how non ma coco. tu do koi sock sock kom xa? j tai dea djoss q c toi mon djombo nan?</i>	what's up my coco what are you fighting so much about? I have already told you that you are my lover eh?	'djombo' – seems to be a mistake; the word is 'djomba' (adulterous lover in Duala).	
55	M34	<i>Asséèèèè nyango na how que du do ls kankans way noor... Je tai mintan djoss que tu es la nion que je ya mo</i>	I say lady/mama why are you acting this way eh... I have told you that you are the drink/beverage that I love	'nion' – CFrA for drink	
56	M35	<i>I say eeh mn design, ghow q tu me do les ways de 2008 non? je t'ai déjà joss q c toi q je ya mo hoha seulement.</i>	I say eh my design why are you behaving 2008-style eh? I have already told you that	2008 here refers to being out of date <hoha> for <without go-betweens> – CFrA term; the origin of the word is unknown to me	

			it's you that I love you 'without go-betweens'		
57	M36	<i>i say hein baby how ke tu do les ways coe xa nor? je t'ai déjà tell ke je te yamo nor?</i>	I say eh baby why are you behaving like this eh? I have already told you that I love you right?		
58	M37	<i>na how kepr u me sort le ndem g tè tjr djoss ke g te ya mo le bb t'inkietà</i>	why are you bringing me bad luck I have always told you that I love you baby don't worry		
59	M38	<i>i say hein aby how que tu do les weah comme sa je te toli every day que c'esty toi que je yamo...</i>	I say eh aby why are you behaving like this I keep telling you every day that it's you that I love	'aby' - presumably a typo (baby).	
60	M39	<i>Ray, je te Ya mo. Pk tu hambock? ??</i>	Ray, I love you why are you bothering me	Ray – none of the members in this thread is named 'Ray' so this is unclear.	

Analysis

This chat conforms quite closely to most of the chats analysed in this thesis, and to the stated aims and styles recommended for the Group. Members draw from the usual linguistic features associated with Netspeak and CFrA, CPE and other informal language forms.

Table 9: Language forms in the fifth chat

	Netspeak	CFrA	Other
Initiator	1	0	10 (Non-standard grammar, regional French, CPE)
Group members	30	48	CPE – 1 Non-standard grammar – 2 regional French features – 7

The contributors choose to use forms, a style that they consider relevant to the task ‘translating into CFrA’, one that they consider linguistically, socially, culturally relevant. They rewrite the sentence provided by the initial contributor per his instructions, i.e., with as much CFrA as possible. One contribution is dubbed ‘the winner’, as the member is considered the creator of ‘the most authentic CFrA translation’, which earns him *<la Palme d’or>*, “the first prize”. The posts are characterised by a pattern of one-upmanship, with most members trying to offer more original and innovative translations of the phrase given by the initiator, which enhances the dynamism of the chat.

Table 10: Examples of linguistic resources in play

	<i>Netspeak</i>	CFrA	Cameroonisms/CPE	Non-standard forms/grammar/Verlan
Initiator	bb	NA	NA	connessez
Group members				

Turn 2	k			
Turn 5	c	how que tu do la dja djoss yamo		
Turn 6	coe			
Turn 11			ptite soeur	
Turn 13		ficham		ressé
Turn 14			mal mauvais	
Turn 18	MW		Je d'accorise	
Turn 33	DDL			
Turn 41			how you di make that thing noor	
Turn 51			beup beup	
Turn 52				tu vis
Turn 53				bien même
Turn 55		nyango		
Turn 58		le ndem		

There is a strong performative element bordering on the comical; see for example: <tu es le sucre de mon taps>, meaning “you are the sugar in my tapioca” (see Turn 5 in the transcript). ‘Taps’ is a characteristic Cameroonian diminutive formed by shortening the word and adding -s to the first syllable, “a display of communicative virtuosity” for the other contributors (Bauman 2004, p. 9).

Most contributors offer a version that differs from the previous ones, even though this expectation of originality isn’t stated explicitly anywhere, and most seem to have looked at the previous versions before offering a new one, which is noteworthy. This contrasts with my observation that on social media, people frequently reply to original questions that have been answered long ago, often giving the exact same answers already given by others. Their careful and attentive engagement suggests that contributors are trying to be creative and original while still conveying the message as requested. Androutsopoulos, 2007, p. 7 says about this:

However, there is a considerable degree of freedom in the individual realization of (at least some) online genres. Users may shape and transform genres in order to construct individuality and originality or to express a particular stance vis-à-vis other users.

The users posting on this chat seem to engage in both options: constructing individuality and originality, and expressing particular stances vis-à-vis other users, within a broad understanding of what constitutes CFrA.

I find it essential to discuss the reasons behind the initiator's decision to make this request, even though my suggestions can only be propositions, as I did not connect with JOZA to ask him. Given the described official purpose of the Group, it is fair to assume that JOZA posted his stimuli to have fun, to get the community going, to see what propositions other members come up with, to prompt the activity that is expected and encouraged here, viz. to entertain and be entertained, to communicate, to 'do being Cameroonian online using CFrA'. His prompt seems to make sense to the other members, as most comply with the exercise, which signals common ground, a sense of belonging, an understanding of, and agreement on, the community's ways of connecting.

This chat is the one that aligns most closely, not only with the Group's mission, but with the idea that CFrA is used by diasporic (and other) Cameroonians to create a sense of home and belonging. The chat also confirms some statements made by my Skype interviewees, such as Lovely who says she and her friends proactively created a community on WhatsApp, in which they *purposely* choose to use CFrA as a symbol of closeness and familiarity, the sense that they belong to a Cameroonian community.

8.3.5 Conclusion

The observation of, engagement with, and download of chats from the Facebook Group yielded insights about what makes CFrA CFrA (to its users as opposed to, researchers). While there is no explicit characterisation of the criteria to be met for an utterance to be classified as CFrA, it is obvious from the chats that CFrA is about community, enjoyment, playfulness, creativity and performativity, within relatively loose bounds of what aligns with the expectations of this community in terms of communication. In the downloaded data, most members play by the rules, and deviations are sanctioned by comments, disapproval, or at the very least some level of confusion. The Group functions like an ecosystem with an optimal temperature that guarantees that what is produced within that space remain intelligible and acceptable to the members. Within this broad framework, the subtext is always linked to Cameroon, being Cameroonian in Cameroon or abroad, using language that is familiar to Cameroonians. A level of insight and knowledge of CFrA and Cameroonian culture is therefore required to be able to operate well within this space, and of course, to communicate in ways that are easily understood by other group members. While the chats do not contain a clear statement highlighting the place of CFrA for diasporic Cameroonians in terms of filling a gap needed to rebuild a sense of community, belonging, home, closeness and more, it is not a stretch to extrapolate that this is the case, at least for some of the group members.

Building community and home, and a focus on a Cameroonian identity are part of the stated missions of the Group, so it follows that all members knowingly or unknowingly, actively or passively adhere to these missions when they join. Triangulating this data, the Skype interview data, research that has focused on the use of CFrA by diasporic Cameroonians (e.g. Telep, Machetti & Siebetcheu and others' research), and similar studies on language use by diasporics from other origins, should yield more specific insight into the role of CFrA for diasporic Cameroonians.

In the chapter that follows, I share the findings from the Skype interviews and from the Facebook group data, and I discuss the overlap between these two sources against the aims of my study. Each question is answered by presenting overall conclusive findings from the analysis of the Skype interview data and the Facebook download data, and by discussing how the data analysed supports the findings.

Chapter 9 – Findings

How is the overarching aim of this study, viz. to shed a light on the links between language use and the (re)construction of a Cameroonian identity in White majority Western diasporic contexts, linked to my research questions outlined in detail in Chapter 5, the main one being:

What are the functions (if any) that CFrA performs for Cameroonians in the diaspora?

The sections that follow provide a brief response to each sub-question, based on the findings from the data analysis.

9.1 Skype interviews

Sub-question 1:

i) Do the interviewees (or members of their networks of diasporic Cameroonians) engage with CFrA? If they do, in what form, when, where and with whom?

The short answer to this question is ‘yes, they do’. Based on their statements, CFrA seems to play a significant role in the lives of all but two participants. All participants recognise that they themselves or their family members, friends, peers, engage with CFrA outside Cameroon, in the Western countries where they reside, either face to face, or via messaging apps such as WhatsApp, or on social media platforms. Some engage with the register remotely through virtual community groups organised around CFrA, others during one-to-one conversations with friends from their teenage years or family members, abroad or in Cameroon, always around informal topics and in relaxed settings. All communications in and around CFrA seem to be with/between people from a Cameroonian background.

Sub-question 2:

i) Has CFrA's role and significance changed in its move from Cameroon to the Western world?

Most of the interviewees seem to agree that CFrA is no longer spoken only by youngsters to avoid being understood, and that they or their adult, professional, socially successful family members and friends use the register to connect with each other. A minority of participants – two out of eight – state that CFrA is not as important to them because they did not engage with it when they lived in Cameroon or when they migrated to Europe or the United States, but even these participants recognise the distinctly Cameroonian nature of CFrA, the fact that the register signals something unique to Cameroon and its history, and also its creativity. Those participants who initially had a negative perception of CFrA seem to have experienced a change in their attitude to the register once they had lived abroad for a number of years, becoming much more enthusiastic about it.

ii) What does CFrA do for its diasporic speakers?

These diasporic Cameroonians state that they view CFrA as a device that enables them to maintain a bond with other Cameroonians, a reminder of the fact that they share the same origin, that they are from the same background. They add that the register symbolises familiarity and friendship, creates a sense of community and commonality, safe and welcoming spaces; CFrA helps them create small enclaves of Cameroonian-ness in the diasporic settings they find themselves in. CFrA comforts them, as they link it to good memories of their country of origin (or rather the extinct and romanticised version of Cameroon that they remember). While some participants turn to CFrA in the context of occasional communicative events with other Cameroonian background contacts, others purposely create and join spaces dedicated to communications in and around CFrA.

Sub-question 3:

i) How is CFrA a part of negotiating belonging for its diasporic speakers online and offline, and enacting their Cameroonian identity in these contexts? What role does it play (if any) in their reconstructions of home away from home?

Some of the participants' statements highlight the complexities of negotiating between their personal experience and enjoyment of CFrA, and the weight of the Cameroonian nation state's (and the host country's) ideologies of and attitudes to language. Most of the participants orient to different normative centres in different contexts, sometimes appropriating official language ideologies relative to non-standard registers, describing CFrA as slang or a dialect (versus a language), and at other times admitting to having spoken, and/or to being familiar with, CFrA. This flexibility allows them to feel comfortable using different speech forms depending on the context they find themselves in, thus making the effort required to maintain good relationships (Bourdieu, 1986) by aligning with the (changing) expectations in the specific contexts.

This, I argue, is one aspect of negotiating belonging, recreating a sense of home away from home, which depends on what some have called integration (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2017; Long, Hylton & Spracklen, 2014; Fokkema & De Haas, 2015; Pelican, Tatah & Ndjio, 2008; Bahoken, 2005) others embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985; Ryan, 2018), different and slightly nuanced ways of expressing the idea of finding acceptance as part of the community one finds oneself in. Some of the participants go so far as to call CFrA their/the "national language", which adds weight to Stein-Kanjora's claim that CFrA might be the only Cameroonian language capable of becoming a national language (2009, p. 136).

Whether this statement supports the idea that CFrA could be considered a form of reappropriation of French by a generation raised mainly (and even solely in

some cases) on the former colonial French official language (Feussi, 2008; De Féral, 2003 and more) or indeed a unifying tool that transcends intra-Cameroonian ethnic divides, remains to be seen.

The comparison of CFrA to their vernacular as the register one would speak with a sibling or a close friend, does indicate, however, that CFrA seems to play an important role in their negotiations of home and belonging outside Cameroon, in a world that is 'not theirs' as stated by Craig (section 6.3.6 extract 2). Furthermore, all the participants who use CFrA in written or spoken communication claim that using CFrA signals belonging and a sense of community and commonality between diasporic speakers online and offline, and is an important tool used to enact their Cameroonian identity in these contexts. On the basis on their statements and the online communications analysed, I believe it is safe to argue that CFrA *is* used in diasporic contexts in its users' reconstructions of home away from home, as it helps them to find a space they can fit in and be accepted often much more easily than in the Western context they find themselves. It is almost as if they are able, within these spaces, to bring to the fore this 'other' (Cameroonian) part of their identities without needing to erase, reduce or otherwise adapt it to make it more palatable.

The data downloaded from the Facebook Group dedicated to CFrA provides further insight on ways in which diasporic Cameroonians engage with the language form. The section that follows is a discussion on the findings from that data set.

9.2 Facebook Group

The Facebook chats analysed display a great deal of consistency in the forms of language used (mainly Netspeak and CFrA) but also in the performative and creative language choices made by Group users (as described in detail in chapter 5.3 above). This confirms the group administrator's statement that most users join the Group to entertain and to be entertained. The members posting in

the threads included in this thesis all seem to be adults living outside Cameroon in a Western country¹⁵³.

Sub-question 1:

i) Do the Facebook Group members engage with CFrA? If they do, in what form, when, where and with whom?

With relation to the research questions posed in this thesis, there is ample evidence that the group users engage with CFrA, and on occasion, that they are comfortable enough with the register to post metacommentary on the terms used, and even in one thread, to translate a statement in French into CFrA.

Sub-question 2:

i) Has CFrA's role and significance changed in its move from Cameroon to the Western world? What does CFrA do for its diasporic speakers?

It seems to be the case that the group users primarily engage with CFrA in this online community to bond with one another whilst entertaining and being entertained. The exclusionary role of CFrA is irrelevant here, as this is a space where all are assumed to be familiar with it. This is an in-group, a space of celebration of what users have in common, namely the ability to communicate using CFrA as Cameroonians (diasporic or not).

Sub-question 3:

i) How is CFrA a part of negotiating belonging for its diasporic speakers online and offline, and enacting their Cameroonian identity in these contexts? What role does it play (if any) in their reconstructions of home away from home?

Many users define themselves as a community, an 'us', in chats. In the first thread of Facebook downloads, every group user reacting seems to understand who is represented by the spoken or unspoken 'us/we' and conversely,

¹⁵³ Apart from one thread initiator who appears to be based in Tunisia.

'they/them'. While 'they' obviously primarily refers to the French in this thread, 'they' is also used to refer more broadly to the descendants of former colonial masters. This differentiation points to 'othering' of whoever does not fit in the 'us/we' category. It also highlights a sense of belonging to a group that is united in their understanding of the perspectives these 'others' have of them, and of the implications of these perspectives on their daily lives in the Western context – the threat of deportation, racial discrimination, the rise of the far right and its anti-'non-White' policies, to name only a few.

In the second and also the longest thread, the users display insider knowledge of Cameroonian society, politics, football and the current president, and they communicate using CFrA and typical Cameroonian French expressions. Their use of language conveys a strong sense of being Cameroonian, and performing this particular aspect of their identities in fun ways seems to be the main focus. This second thread is the one that most highlights the sense of the Facebook group being a community of Cameroonian background users, which undoubtedly acts as a snippet of 'home away from home' for its diasporic members who are active in this chat.

There isn't much use of CFrA in the 3rd and 4th threads – the former evokes patriotic sentiments, and the latter is a display of the knowledge of the capital of Cameroon, knowledge which highlights a sense of being 'from there', which in turn suggests that Cameroon is seen as 'home'.

In the 5th thread, the users demonstrate how Cameroonian they are through their knowledge of CFrA, and also assess each other's performance. Again here, the performative aspect is key as a means of bringing the users together, and of course, or being community via language use.

Overall, the chats downloaded from Facebook demonstrate the fact that diasporic Cameroonians engage with CFrA online within communities of practice such as this Group which is dedicated to communications in and/or around CFrA. One of the reasons why they engage with CFrA is the fact that

the register and the community represent a link to their country of origin, and that the Group offers them the space to reconstitute bits of home in the current location which is physically distant from home and all that home represents for them.

The next chapter is the concluding chapter of the thesis, bringing together all the elements discussed in the previous chapters. After a brief introduction follows an overall summary of the findings of the study, also considering other studies on the subject or related subjects. A section outlining the limitations of the study follows, and next, a brief section on suggestions for further research on the relationship between language and negotiations of home and belonging in migratory contexts, and the thesis ends on succinct final comments.

Chapter 10 – Conclusions of the thesis

10.1 Introduction

When I initially decided to study ‘Camfranglais in the diaspora’, the initial working title of my thesis, I was confident that I would unearth fascinating linguistic creativity and playfulness, given the richness of Africans, of Cameroonians specifically, when it comes to language use. With Cameroon’s 250+ languages and dialects, I knew that this hyper abundance of linguistic variety could only produce fascinating insights into language use. Little did I know that the interviewees would start referring to what has been described in the past as a non-language or a form of youth slang, as their national language, one that defines them, one that helps them feel that they belong, that they are seen, heard, as exiles from their original home.

I realised that the diasporic Cameroonians I spoke to, or whose chats I analysed, seemed to place deeper value in CFrA than the purely ludic experience they drew from engaging with the language form. As I did, the link between CFrA and their sense of identity and belonging started becoming more evident to me and as a result, the aim of my study changed, and accordingly, so did my research questions.

The Skype interviews and the Facebook data gave rise to a number of observations, examined in detail in the previous chapter, filtered through each research question.

10.2 Overall findings

The first sub-question tackled whether diasporic Cameroonians engage with CFrA (i.e., whether they have an awareness of its existence, speak, or write it, on- or off-line), and the findings from both data sets confirmed that they do. The Facebook Group (which counted over 65K members when I downloaded the data) provided evidence that large numbers of people joined a page dedicated

to CFrA, and that many of those members communicated using the language form. However, even though the chats were filtered based on group members' locations, the nature of the data published on Facebook means that there is always a certain measure of risk of being misled about the members' locations. Further, this Facebook data triangulated with the individual interviewees whose location in the Western World is verified, and who use CFrA in spoken and/or written form, confirms that there are indeed Cameroonian background inhabitants of European and North-American cities who engage with CFrA. This is also confirmed by previous studies about CFrA in use by Cameroonians outside Cameroon (see for example Telep, 2018 for CFrA in France ; Machetti & Siebetchu, 2013 for CFrA in Italy ; Kenne, 2017 for CFrA in Germany and Italy).

It is also evident from both the Skype interviews and the Facebook chats that the role of CFrA *has* changed in its move from Cameroon to the Western world. In the Western context, CFrA is no longer used to exclude non-speakers. The interviewees who engage with CFrA all highlight the fact that it creates between them a sense of greater closeness, that they have something in common, that they belong to a community of (diasporic) Cameroonians, and that it brings back happy memories of home. The interviewees evoke the nostalgia of Cameroon and the fact that these groups or spaces where they communicate using CFrA recreate a sense of home. This suggests that CFrA bridges a gap for its diasporic speakers, offering them spaces where their legitimacy is not questioned, at least not on the basis of their locus of origin and their skin colour. Further, CFrA points to the uniqueness of its diasporic speakers' Cameroonian identity. Machetti and Siebetchu argue,

“in Italy [Camfranglais] constitutes the expression and the regaining of sociocultural and identity values. Through the use of Camfranglais, we observe a strong awareness as regards to the national and cultural origin of Cameroonians. Camfranglais [...] is looked to as a tool and an ambassador of the Cameroonian plurilinguistic identity in Italy.” (2013, p. 5).

Confirming the observations drawn from the Facebook and Skype data used in this study, the authors highlight the fact that for diasporic Cameroonians based in Italy, Camfranglais has become “an instrument of unity and identity, a claim of linguistic, cultural and national identity” (ibid, p. 12).

Telep (2014) writing about CFrA in use on the Internet, confirms the role CFrA plays in identity construction and affirmation of its diasporic members' Cameroonians-ness:

“Thus, in our corpus, Camfranglais is constructed by epilinguistic discourses as a "language" specific to Cameroonians, which transcends ethnic boundaries [...]. It also appears as **a distinctive practice of the Cameroonian francophone diaspora on the Internet [...]** **The use of Camfranglais thus indexes, among other things, the Cameroonian identity of the speakers,** within the space of the forum and the blog, **which make it possible to recreate an atmosphere of relaxation and provide a substitute for the informal and convivial space of the 'quartier'.** The forum or blog is thus conducive to the use of Camfranglais and the establishment of a relationship of **familiarity, playfulness and complicity** with the interlocutor, within the virtual community of French-speaking Cameroonians.”¹⁵⁴

Telep's statements highlight the clear link between CFrA as a 'practice', and the Cameroonians-ness of these members of the diaspora in France, spelling out that, as observed in her study, CFrA enables the recreation of informality, conviviality, familiarity, complicity. This ties in clearly with most of the Skype

¹⁵⁴ Emphasis mine – my translation. « Ainsi, dans notre corpus, le camfranglais est construit par les discours épilinguistiques comme une « langue » propre aux Camerounais, qui transcende les frontières ethniques [...]. Il apparaît aussi comme une pratique distinctive de la diaspora francophone camerounaise sur Internet [...] L'usage du camfranglais indexe donc, entre autres, l'identité camerounaise des locuteurs, au sein de l'espace du forum et du blog qui permettent de recréer une atmosphère de détente et se substituent à l'espace informel et convivial du “quartier”. L'espace du forum ou du blog est ainsi propice à l'usage du camfranglais et à l'instauration d'une relation de familiarité, de jeu et de connivence avec l'interlocuteur, au sein de la communauté virtuelle des Camerounais francophones. »

interviewees' statements relayed in my study, as they equally clearly stated that the spaces where diasporic Cameroonians practice CFrA on- and off-line offer a sense of home, comfort, belonging. Based on these observations, I can confidently argue that these are spaces where CFrA, one of these "practices of 'home' and 'belonging'" (Binaisa, 2013, p. 553) is deployed by diasporic Cameroonians to make sense of their (often challenged) position in the host country, and this behaviour is not just restricted to Cameroonian diasporics.

Unlike mine and Telep's study, Binaisa's study focuses on Ugandan diasporic people living in Britain, but the principles and patterns remain. Providing evidence that the issue also affects diasporic people from other backgrounds (i.e., not sub-Saharan African), Hua & Wei's 2016 study hones in on what they describe as "banal yet rampant racism against Asians" in the UK (p. 2), making the point that the micro-aggressive question "where are you really from" itself may not per se contest immigrants' entitlement. They add,

"What makes a difference to the perception whether one is an "interloper" - someone who is not wanted or **considered not to belong** - is the "tangled" history, memory and expectation imbued and fuelled by power inequality [...]. The seemingly harmless question puts the addressee instantly at a disadvantage and [...] occurs more often to someone who looks "out of place". [...] Precisely because these visible minorities feel discriminated against in general, they impute to the question "where do you really come from?" an intention to challenge their entitlement to the place where they live and to having an authentic and legitimate identity despite visible differences."

Whether or not the sense of rejection experienced by the different ethnic groups mentioned above is linked to a *perception of rejection* rather than actual rejection (which is highly unlikely, as racist acts and talk, micro and macro aggressions, institutional racism and more are widely and frequently documented in the Western host countries where sub-Saharan and other non-White peoples find themselves), the findings discussed above and observed by

various scholars confirm the plausibility that negotiations of home and belonging are recurring coping and sense-making devices for people from various backgrounds and origins, caught in-between a former and original home, and a new one that resists their settling, integration, embedding. Likewise, there is significant evidence in the literature about CFrA and in this study, that the register is used (or viewed) as one of those devices by diasporic Cameroonians, on and offline, in communities of practice where CFrA is the most-valued currency.

Moreover, the findings from this study also provide evidence that CFrA's emblematic significance has changed from intragroup (youth) language unintelligible to outsiders, to unifying language drawing together diasporic Cameroonians and helping them create physical and virtual 'spaces' where they belong and where they can safely evoke and reconstitute a sense of home. Further, however questionable the homogeneity of Cameroonians and the concept of Cameroonian-ness, CFrA enables these diasporic Cameroonians to reminisce about a time when they did belong, when they were at home, when they were perceived as insiders rather than outsiders, same rather than other.

Whilst the symbolic value of CFrA is amply demonstrated by the above discussions, this study raises more questions and presents some limitations that I broach in the next section.

10.3 Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, but before discussing these in detail, I start by acknowledging that there is always room for more exploration, always a rationale to examine theories with a much finer lens. This said, this thesis represents where I am at this stage of my research.

First and foremost, this small-scale qualitative case study investigates the language practices of a limited number of diasporic Cameroonians, eight people

to be precise, and the study also draws on five sets of online interaction from a Facebook group dedicated to CFrA. However valid and relevant these data sources and the experiences of these people, it is important to specify that what is discussed in this thesis and its findings, could or could not be representative (and to varying degrees) of the experience of all diasporic Cameroonians. This is especially relevant taking into account the ongoing tensions and conflict between the Cameroonian government's security forces and the so-called Anglophone Cameroonians, who as mentioned previously, do not tend to engage with CFrA, and whose experience of being Cameroonian, in Cameroon and abroad, is likely to be radically different and far more complex than that of so-called Francophone Cameroonians.

Secondly, my positioning and my analytical choices as a diasporic Cameroonian are very likely to have had an impact on all stages of the study and thus affected the conclusions I have drawn. As mentioned previously, however, my insider perspective facilitated my access to the participants and made it easier for me to access the Facebook data, and further, to bring specific insights to the interpretation of that data. Furthermore, some of the participants may have responded differently because they were aware that the project was an academic endeavour and that they were being 'studied' by a researcher. This said, triangulating the data from the interviews with the Facebook downloads and my personal experience and knowledge of the issues and the context, as well as aforementioned conclusions from other research on similar phenomena experienced by other diasporics from other backgrounds, lends much credibility to the findings of this study.

Thirdly, another limitation of this study is the scarcity of previous research examining diasporic Cameroonians' (or other populations') language practices in relation to questions of negotiations of home and belonging. It is important to recognise that the paucity of relevant data limits the scope of the findings.

However, despite these limitations, I believe this study makes a significant contribution to the field, both in terms of the widely observed connections between language and identity construction, but also with regard to the experience of post postcolonial diasporics of sub-Saharan and other backgrounds.

10.4 Further areas of research

This study also opens up potential areas worth exploring further, such as the observed and purported lack of agency that transpired from these interviewees' statements about their limited proficiency in their Cameroonian vernaculars. Their statements on this point indicate that their sense of disconnect from home may at least partially predate their relocation to the Western world. It was, indeed, in Cameroon that they failed to learn their vernacular. It is highly likely, therefore, that the impact of hostile media discourses about migrants, the othering from the majority White populations in the host countries and other experiences singling them out as deficient and undesirable, found its roots in the alienation inherited from their grandparents and caused by colonialism and slavery. This suggests that their need for homing devices may originate from their post-postcolonial reality. Further, literature, film, and other media of dissemination of 'culture' that shape our perceptions of self and of others are very likely to have reinforced their sense of rootlessness. I believe the roots of this sense of disconnectedness are worth investigating if we are to help alleviate these issues.

One suggestion for future research may be, exploring ways of helping migrants to live a more positive experience of being diasporics, one of the benefits being better rootedness in the host country, which I believe would enhance their sense that they belong, thus enabling them to engage more positively with, and make more positive contributions to their new home. I suspect that this line of enquiry could be of great benefit to all in a world that is becoming increasingly multi-ethnic, diverse, and mixed and that is likely to continue to be so, whether

or not the White majority indigenous populations see this reality as being desirable. At the very least, migration is portrayed as such a problematic reality that anything that is likely to enhance lived experiences of migration both for the new(er) citizens and the old ones is worth investigating.

Linked to the sense of rejection described above is the reverse of the sense of CFrA being used as a means of creating home and belonging away from home, namely the idea that diasporics (may) use language as a tool of resistance to the alienation imposed on them because of the perception the White majority have of their skin colour and continent of origin. This is hinted at, alluded to, for example by Craig who highlights the importance of CFrA but mostly, of his Cameroonian vernacular, that he tries to pass on to the next generation, because France is “not his home”.

This study has provided no strong evidence to support this theory, because it was not the focus of this study. However, the way these diasporic Cameroonians use CFrA to navigate their situation and to adapt to the context they find themselves in, ties in with Foucault’s proposition that:

“subjects are not simply constructed by power; they themselves partake in that construction and modify themselves through practices of the self. They are not just docile bodies, but actively refuse, adopt and alter forms of being a subject. One way of contesting normalizing power is by shaping oneself and one’s lifestyle creatively: by exploring opportunities for new ways of being, new fields of experience, pleasures, relationships, modes of living and thinking.” (Gutting & Oksala, 2019).

Language, I believe, is one of those tools of self-(re)construction, of resistance which is particularly relevant to post-post colonials. CFrA, I argue, offers some level of agency to its users, more acutely so in diasporic settings where their Cameroonian heritage is presented by default as deficient against the backdrop of a majority White population speaking one of these post-post colonials’ official language. Their Cameroonian vernaculars have been historically devalued or

negated, and still are, (especially due to the French colonisation policy of assimilation), and many Cameroonians tend to refer to themselves as ‘franco-phone’¹⁵⁵ thus erasing (or giving in to the erasure of) their Cameroonian vernacular(s).

Nielsen (2013, p. 8) comments on Fanon’s statement that Black people are scripted by the White other, and this is also the case with African languages. The Black person, he says, “first and foremost, [he] must learn to live in accord with the dominant world imposed upon him by the White other; he must embrace the other’s language, cultural values and customs as normative for him”. This negation of the postcolonial subject inherited from my participants’ parents and forebears, this colonial determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, forces the people whose identity has thus been alienated and who have thus been oppressed, to ask themselves the question constantly: “In reality, who am I?”¹⁵⁶ (Fanon (1963, p. 240).

Is it a stretch then, to postulate that these (re)constructions of self, using CFrA, are part of a reappropriation of these participants’ self-definition? Could it be argued that, even though CFrA is irreparably linked to the former colonial languages by its very nature and structure, those who use this linguistic register do so to snatch the definition of their identity/ies out of the hands and control of the former coloniser, acknowledging that they are no longer ‘what we were’ before colonisation?

This point is particularly meaningful to me as a person of African background, knowing historically how much the African continent has been despoiled through colonisation and slavery, and how little the reality of the resulting trauma is recognised publicly and overtly, particularly in Western leaders’ political discourses. One leader stands out: Nicholas Sarkozy, former French

¹⁵⁵ This is not that prominent with Cameroonians from the English-speaking regions.

¹⁵⁶ « Qui suis-je en réalité »?

president, who stated that “the African hasn’t entered fully into history”¹⁵⁷, even though there is ample evidence that complex and refined African civilisations predated contact with the Western world by centuries. What I find particularly painful and ironic about that statement, is the fact that it is highly likely that it is the brutal invasion of African civilisations through ‘explorers’ and other euphemistically named actors of various colonising endeavours of the West that arrested the development of the African continent. I propose that where Western powers may not be willing to recognise the negative implications of the (historical and current) colonial efforts of Western powers, diasporics of sub-Saharan African origin have undoubtedly developed strategies of resistance, and that language is likely to be one of the tools of that resistance.

When I started this project, I certainly did not predict that the study of the use of Camfranglais by diasporic Cameroonians would lead me back to Fanon and to the collective trauma of African psyches caused by the destruction and perversion of the continent’s cultures and languages by invaders, followed by centuries of (largely unchallenged) deprecating discourse and attitudes towards the descendants of the continent. Yet here we are. Like the proverbial elephant in the room, some issues can just not be ignored.

10.5 Final comments

The present study brought new evidence regarding the interplay of the language practice commonly described as Camfranglais, and constructions of identity, in the experience of migration for diasporic Cameroonians living in the West, and the fact that Camfranglais is used as one of their devices of negotiations of home and belonging in these diasporic contexts. Consequently, this study emphasises the importance of considering non-official language use, and by extension, other cultural practices that may very well be hidden from official spaces and/or restricted to online and offline intracommunity spaces,

¹⁵⁷ « ... homme africain n'est pas assez entré dans l'histoire » – full speech available here : https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2007/11/09/le-discours-de-dakar_976786_3212.html

and what these practices highlight and signal with regard to the lived experiences of migrants, when implementing policies relating to immigration, if Western superpowers hope to achieve what Jack Lang, former French Minister of Culture called “L’Immigration Positive” (Lang & Le Bras, 2006).

Appendix

Si tu vois ma go

(Blick Bassy, Koppo)

Si tu vois ma go, dis-lu que

Je go je go chez les watts nous falla les do

La galère du Kamer toi-même tu know Tu bolo

Tu bolo mais où sont les do Mon frère je te jure, je suis fatigué

J'ai tout fait j'ai tout do pour chasser le ngué

J'ai wash les voitures: il n'y avait pas moyo

J'ai toum les chaussures, il n'y avait pas moyo

Le poisson, les chenilles : il n'y avait pas moyo?

Alors j'ai tchat que c'est trop, il faut que je go

Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je go

Je go chez les watt nous falla les do

Si tu vois ma go

Dis-lui que je go (si tu vois ma go)

Si tu vois ma nga, dis-lui que je pars

La galère du Kamer toi-même tu know

Tu bolo, tu bolo mais où sont les do

Le pater, la mater et les mbindi ress

Ont deny que je go, mais je go vitesse

Il ne faut pas qu'ils know que j'ai envie de go

Je veux seulement qu'ils know quand je suis déjà go

Dès que je go, va leur tchat à tous les gars du kwatt

A toutes les gos du kwatt que ça gate ça gate

Quand tu such la télé tu vois que chez les watt

Est-ce qu'on suffer même du ngué

Tout le monde est bad!

Dès que je tombe là-bas je hold un bolo

N'importe quel bolo qui peut me gui les do

Promener les chiens, moi je vais bolo Laver les cadavres,

Moi je vais bolo Même épouser les veuves hein! Moi je vais bolo
Fait quoi fait quoi j'aurai les do Foumban-Foumbot je vais go
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je go
Dis-lui qu'il n'y a plus le mponda de lui dire adieu
Parce que les go aiment djoss, c'est le mponda qu'elle loss
Or c'est le mponda c'est les do, il faut que je go
Entre les do si je go et le ndolo de ma go je
Tcha le ndolo mais sans les do y a pas ndolo
Il nous faut les do, il faut que je go
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je go
Dis-lui qu'il n'y a pas pb
Je vais jamais la forget
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je go
Je vais toujours mimba qu'elle a un large Debar
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que Je vais toujours te garder la sape
Les sacs des sapes
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je go
On va faire comment? Le Kamer a les dents
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je go
Et tous ceux qui me pleurent
Et tous ceux qui me pleurent, Ils me pleurent à quelle heure?
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je go
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je toum
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je poum
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je lance
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je nyong
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je trace
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que c'est fort
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je pem
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je go
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui que je lance
Si tu vois ma go, dis-lui tout ce que tu veux

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