Online Multilingualism in African Written Conversations: Local, Global Identity and Alignment

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The objective of this research is to analyse current written practices within the global South. Specifically, we examine language mixing phenomena in written online texts publicly displayed on the official Facebook page of one of the two most important football players in the history of Cameroon, Samuel Eto'o. By means of a quantitative and languaging analysis proposed by Androutsopoulos (2014), we see that indigenous Cameroonian languages are now being written in public spaces. Instances of lexical items in these languages are sometimes inserted in Facebook comments to establish local/national identity, to emphasise the fact that the player is a Cameroonian. However, Cameroonian national identity still is usually constructed through the exclusive use of English and French. Interestingly, the study shows that code-switching (CS) to a particular language may function as a distancing technique, an impoliteness strategy towards the player.

Keywords: identity; language mixing; code-switching; social media; multilingual texts; football; indigenous Cameroonian languages; politeness.

1. Introduction

Football has been played for centuries and now is the most international of sports, played in more than 140 countries, as Ferguson (1983) said in his seminal article about the language of sport. In the case of Cameroon, the importance of football in the everyday lives of its inhabitants is significant, it is the "king sport", the most popular sport not only in the country but also on the whole continent (Vidacs, 1999; Pannenborg, 2012). Also important in the country is the popularity of Facebook: 10% of the population had a profile on this social medium in December 2017, which is a very high percentage considering the small penetration rate of the Internet in Cameroon, with only a poor 24.8% of the population having access to this technical medium.[1] Consequently, Facebook pages and football may offer a magnificent example of how Cameroonians are really communicating at the moment.

In the early stages of Computer-mediated Communication (CMC), some studies focused on the analysis of online language mixing and code-switching (CS), but it is not until recently that these phenomena have taken centre stage, in Androutsopoulos' (2013) opinion. Studies such as those carried out by Tsiplakou (2009), Kytölä (2014) and Lee (2016) have explained and acknowledged these phenomena. However, academic research on multilingual online exchanges has nearly exclusively had an Anglocentric and Northern European orientation. Few studies have dealt with multilingual practices within the global South (López, 2007) perspective of online discourse analysis. The research we present here tries to fill this gap in linguistic research by analysing the multilingual written texts exchanged by interactants of a highly multilingual country, Cameroon.

Language is central to "…how people construct their belonging to a place, a collective entity or a group" (Anchimbe, 2016:514). Simpson (2008:12) affirmed that, with a small number of exceptions, language has not played a prominent role in identity construction in African countries,

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[1] Data taken from: https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm May 2018.

unlike, for example, European countries, mainly because "…the varied ethno-linguistic character of the majority of colonies did not readily allow for a single language to be used as a fully representative symbol of an emerging nation." McLaughlin (2008) observes that the term national identity may have two different meanings. One of them refers to "…a population's relationship and sense of belonging to a nation-state, and the second is the identity of an individual nation-state within the international world order" (2008:79). In this article, we will use the term "national identity" to mean the identification citizens may make with other members of the population of a state and local identity as the sense of belonging to a local community (following Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2008). Here, we leave issues related to the external imagery of a given state for subsequent research.

Centring on the written interactions exchanged by Cameroonians, this article examines to what extent language plays a role in constructing a national identity/local identity. We will also see the pragmatic functions entailed in the use of several languages in the same text. To this end, we study the written interactions of football fans on the official Facebook page of Samuel Eto'o Fils, who, together with Roger Milla, is one of the two most international and well-known footballers of the country. We are aware that the footballer's page is followed by supporters from other African and European countries but many of the writers of the comments on this page are Cameroon nationals. To ensure that this research focuses exclusively on Cameroonian CMC, we have meticulously selected the messages from native Cameroonians, as will be explained in the corpus section, and only these messages have been examined here. Besides, we need to indicate that we know that some of the interactants on this page may not be football supporters but simply admirers of this Cameroonian celebrity.

This article starts by outlining the theoretical and methodological basis for the study. We will see how basic concepts of the field of language mixing have been adapted to the study of these phenomena in online communication. The language situation of Cameroon will then be explained together with some notes on how identity and football are intertwined. The following sections detail the research question posed, the corpus and the methodology undertaken. Then, the results and their interpretation are presented. Finally, some concluding remarks together with future research possibilities are described before the reference list.

1.1. Multilingualism on the Internet and the construction of online identity. Multilingualism in written texts has been relatively common since the beginning of literacy (see, for example Adams, Janse, and Swain, 2002). Nevertheless, it has never been so massive, as Androutsopoulos (2013) points out, and "visible" as it is now thanks to the Internet. Academia have normally taken a macro-sociological perspective to the issue and overtly focused on measuring language use on the Internet (Warschauer & De Florio-Hansen, 2003; Paolillo, 2007). Recently, other approaches have been taken to address online language mixing such as understanding and identifying online multilingualism or questioning assumptions that have dominated the field in previous years (for instance, Leppänen & Peuronen, 2012 or Lee, 2016).

As Androutsopoulos (2015) suggests, Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) is a rich site for the study of written multilingualism and language mixing phenomena such as code-switching but some of the traditional approaches towards the study of multilingual practices must be reconsidered. His definition of what must be understood by online multilingualism clearly details the scope of what he calls "networked" multilingualism. In his view, this is a cover term for multilingual practices "…that are shaped by two interrelated processes: being networked, i.e. being digitally connected to other individuals and groups, and being in the network, i.e. embedded in the global digital mediascape of the web" (Androutsopoulos, 2015:185). The coexistence of different languages or different linguistic varieties in one platform does not necessarily constitute CS, for example, when several languages coexist on a webpage (Lee, 2016). In this regard, Androutsopoulos (2013:673) emphasises that for multilingual Computer-mediated Communication Discourse (CMCD) to qualify as CS, "…evidence is required that they are in some way dialogically interrelated by responding to previous, and contextualizing subsequent, contributions."

Consequently, the simple co-presence of languages on the same page would not constitute code-switching.

Another significant issue that has frequently arisen in the field is the analysis of CS and language mixing phenomena in CMC as resources that imply pragmatic, discourse and social functions (Lee, 2016). Among the functions identified so far are switching for formulaic discourse practices, to perform culturally-specific genres, to convey reported speech, etc. Tsiplakou (2009:385) specifies that "…language alternation … is used emblematically to signal (or construct) symmetrical participant alignments and in-group solidarity, and, concomitantly, to index overarching in-group rapports." A pragmatically informed micro analysis of CS in CMC can show how the use of different languages by the members of a group may serve these pragmatic functions and identity values. For instance, as stated by Hinrichs (2006), ethnic identity is frequently signalled by the inclusion of instances of minority languages, normally associated with "we" codes, in greetings, closings, slogans and the like. Research on CMC has emphasised that negotiation of language choice is important for self-presentation and identity performance (Georgalou, 2017; Pérez-Sabater & Maguelouk-Moffo, 2019), mainly because other identity markers such as gender, race or social class are not "visible" on the Internet. Hence, language plays a key role in constructing online identities (Warschauer & De Florio-Hansen, 2003). In this article, we understand online identity to be the ways we want to be in our social interactions (Lee, 2017); online identity is understood as a dynamic concept "…always open for reappropriation, recontextualization and transformation" (Lee, 2017:55).

Of importance in the construction of online identities is the distinction between local and global self-presentation through language choice. Literature in the field has confirmed that English is usually preferred to construct a person's or group identity as cosmopolitan, whereas local languages project local identities in online environments (Leppänen & Peuronen, 2012). Apart from local and global identities or localisation/globalisation, Lee (2016) indicates that new kinds of self-presentation strategies can be enabled by online participants, thus performing glocal identities in translocal online spaces; glocal being defined by Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou (2007: 143) as a "…dynamic negotiation between the global and the local". In many studies, research illustrates that social media glocal identities are constructed by mixing English and local languages (Lee, 2016).

Some of the most relevant research on language mixing phenomena and online communication explaining the relationship between language choice and language mixing phenomena with online identities include explanations of how the mixed-code Cantonese-English is used to develop a collective ethnic identity (Lam, 2004); how in Jamaican emails and discussion fora, Patois is employed as a resource to create humoristic identity (Hinrichs, 2006); in Tsiplakou's email study (2009), language alternation between Greek and English is the mechanism deployed par excellence to construct that group's online communicative identity; in Nigeria, Taiwo (2010) identifies instances of *Nigerianisms* in SMSs and on online fora for identity construction and online affiliation; Adegoke (2012) explains how an online community formed by English-Yoruba bilinguals on Facebook employs Yoruba in texts written basically in English to show a sense of relationship or ties in Nigeria; in a fan fiction story published online, multiple language choices are functional and meaningful to construct the cosmopolitan identity of the writer in blogs (Leppänen & Peuronen, 2012); Lengyelová (2019) identifies how code-switching to English establishes in-group solidarity in her group of Slovak colleagues working in an international hospitality company.

Despite this wide range of studies, we have not found any purely linguistic analysis of multilingual discourse in online written conversations in Cameroonian contexts, a gap in the literature that this study attempts to fill. Section 2 gives some information about the context of the study.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Multilingualism in Cameroon. A typical Cameroonian person switches daily between three or more codes. This country is one of the most multi-ethnic and multilingual countries in the world and one of the most linguistically complex countries in Africa (Atanga, 2012; Green & Ozón, 2019). More than 240 living languages coexist with the two official languages, English and French, the ex-colonial languages, and the main Lingua Franca, Pidgin English (Echu, 2004; Green & Ozón, 2019). These languages, as Ngefac (2010) asserts, have distinct statuses and functions in society. Sociolinguistic factors such as occupation, gender and ethnicity are decisive in speakers' choice (Ngefac, 2010). The co-existence of these languages, as in similar multilingual environments, creates many language contact situations such as CS, interference, linguistic borrowing, diglossia, translation, etc. (Nkwain, 2010).

English and French are the only languages of instruction in Cameroon. Official language policies have excluded the linguistic realities of the community from the public sphere (Nkwain, 2010; Anchimbe, 2006). This is the reason why most of the local languages spoken in Cameroon are not fully standardised, or taught at school, and are rarely written, as is the case in many other African countries. In general, traditional educational practice in multilingual Africa forbade the use of the students' linguistic repertoires in the classroom and centred on teaching/learning the ex-colonial languages exclusively (Atanga, 2012; Wolff, 2018). Also, code-switching has been traditionally excluded from written practices and punished in African learning environments "…obsessed with purity and normative standardisation" (Wolff, 2018:8).

Regarding the role of indigenous languages as identity establishers, Bird's (2001) study on the orthographical standardisation of indigenous Cameroonian languages says, citing Robinson (1996), that the speakers of indigenous languages in Cameroon, as well as in other parts of Africa, often have two conflicting sets of identities: the official/national/imported (English-French) versus the personal/local/indigenous. As this author puts forward, this sociocultural dichotomy affects Cameroonians in their everyday life decisions such as the use of local languages versus European languages or, in other words, the reference to oral versus written tradition. In a different vein, however, Biloa and Echu (2008) maintain that the indigenous languages of Cameroon have never played any role in national identity issues. English and French are the languages involved in the projection of the two main national groups: the Anglophone community and the Francophone. These authors point out that, in spite of this official bilingualism, the public sphere is occupied mostly by French, which has caused many political problems in the English-speaking part of the country.

Recently, however, this ethnic identification with the former colonial languages has become slightly blurred (as in other parts of Africa) by the emergence of a second set of mixed languages, mainly in urban environments (Simpson, 2008). In Cameroon, we have Pidgin English (PE), English Pidgin or Kamtok (from Cameroon-talk), the three terms that refer to an English-based creole, spoken in some form by around 70% of the population (Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2016). PE is predominantly an expression of Cameroon's multicultural and multilinguistic milieu. As Nkengasong (2016) explains in his book about the creole, its grammar and vocabulary are derived from English, French and indigenous Cameroonian languages. In spite of its almost exclusively oral nature, PE is widely used and understood throughout Cameroon, and is one of the three most widely spread languages of the country together with French and English (Anchimbe, 2013). Spoken mainly in the Anglophone provinces of the country, PE also serves as the lingua franca in many regions of Cameroon, on the radio and in the churches (Nkengasong, 2016). It functions as the language of daily interaction in informal situations and is one of the preferred languages of popular music, often used to make jokes and to express certain taboos (Echu, 2003). However, despite its popularity, scholars such as Nkwain (2010) indicate that PE is characterized as a corrupt form of the English language, a "bastardized English" that is sadly contributing to lowering the standard of English in the country.

Another popular creole is Camfranglais or Francanglais. "[Camfranglais] is a created mixed language variety whose syntax follows the French language pattern and whose lexical

elements are drawn from French, English, Pidgin and other widespread languages in Cameroon" (Kouega & Aseh, 2017:101). This language emerged in the early eighties when bilingualism in education was fully implemented by teaching English as a subject in French-medium secondary schools. Camfranglais is generally spoken by educated youths in big cities throughout the country.

A third creole, which is less widely used than the other two languages, is Mbokotok (from *mboko* 'irresponsible person', and *tok* 'talk'). Mbokotok has a structure that is neither French nor English but borrows from the two official languages and indigenous languages to form a type of invented slang. It is spoken by unemployed people, and is frequently identified with people of doubtful moral backgrounds (Ngefac, 2010). One fundamental difference between Mbokotok and the two other creoles is that it is extremely coded and its intelligibility is mainly limited to in-group members (Ngefac, 2010).

The role of indigenous Cameroonian languages and creoles seems to be in a process of change. Concerning the development of these urban slangs, Simpson (2008) explains that Camfranglais has become a new symbol of ethnically neutral local identity. In his opinion, this language may emerge in time as an important linguistic element "…in the expression of a broader national identity alongside longer established pidgins and creoles" (Simpson, 2008:11). Moreover, Anchimbe (2016: 513) specifies that in multilingual contexts, like those analysed in this article "….Cameroonians now build multiple linguistic identities around the multitude of indigenous, ethnic and official languages they speak, and feel obliged to defend those identities each time they are challenged by competing groups". People now use their multilingual repertoires to switch from one language and, hence, identity group to another depending on the contexts of interaction, participants and challenges.

As we mentioned above, regarding national identity and language choice, we would like to emphasise that, although it is true that in certain genres of Cameroonian music, families of indigenous Cameroonian languages like Beti, Douala or Duala, Bafut, Bamileké and Bamoun, among others, may contribute to a national identity construction, and many Cameroonian music genres are identified using Cameroonian languages (Ubanako, 2015), people define their identity with one of the colonial languages instead of exploring the potentials of multilingualism (Ngefac, 2010). In this vein, Anchimbe (2013; 2016) and Atanga (2012) assert that Cameroonians still tend to identify themselves first as Anglophone or Francophone. Indigenous Cameroonian languages do not play any relevant role in the construction of Cameroonian identity at the moment.

In this article, we hope that the analysis of Facebook, the most popular social medium in Cameroon, and football, the most popular sport in the country, can provide good examples of the role of language mixing phenomena in African multilingual societies, which often implies the insertion of lexical items from these indigenous languages to construct a sense of belonging and alignment among interactants.

2.2. Football as a vehicle for national integration in Cameroon. The case of the national idol Samuel Eto'o Fils. Online communities and football. In Africa, the role of football as a vehicle for national integration seems to play a bigger part than in other places because African countries are young and their inhabitants lack a long tradition of collective identities (Simpson, 2008). This author maintains that the national identities of many African countries are stimulated by national symbols, either naturally available or simply constructed. Apart from factors such as the sharing of a bordered territory, national football teams are strong symbols of collective identities. In general, the king sport plays a role as a unifying factor in Africa, as in many other parts of the world. In Cameroon, all the approximately 250 ethnic groups support the Indomitable Lions, the name given to their national team, the clearest symbol of the country's national unity and identity (Pannenborg, 2012). Football and the national team are the few things that really unite the Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians (Anyefru, 2011).

Also important in the study of African football and footballers is the fact that the identification with a football team may be dynamic. In Africa, some scholars say that it is frequently seen that fans switch allegiance, that is, football fans may support Africa's last remaining team at

the World Cup regardless of the country. Pannenborg (2012:82) gives another example of identity shifting: when "…Coton Sport Garoua reached the 2008 CAF Champions League final, it instantly represented the whole of Cameroon." Nevertheless, despite what Panneborg (2012) says, instead of shifting identities, this is more likely to be related to a continental or pan-African movement of identification (Vidacs, 1999), pan-Africanist sentiments against those national squads from South America or Europe that have habitually won international championships.

As for sport stars, Fumanti (2012) explains that African footballers playing in European and South American clubs are role models for passionate African football fans; they are what these people aspire to be: young, rich and famous. These football players are national or continent idols. One of these superstars is Samuel Eto'o Fils, an idol in many countries (Mathure, 2010; Youmbi, 2016). Loyalties are divided between supporting national teams and supporting stars like Eto'o. For example, in the African Cup of Nations played in Ghana in 2008, Fumanti (2012:273) illustrates these divided loyalties: "…during the crucial semi-final between Ghana and Cameroon friends wanted Ghana to win, but also wanted 'Eto'o to do well.'"

In Cameroon, Eto'o has been a national idol for many years, a role model in his own country (Mbuagbaw et al., 2012). In a study of the similarities between the Anglophone and Francophone communities in the country and the national idols, Anyefru (2011) showed that more than three quarters of students in their questionnaire responses chose Samuel Eto'o as the national idol from the national football team. For many, he is not a superstar only on the pitch but also in his personality (Mathure, 2010).

Community or collectivity in football is defined based upon the assumptions of being relational, negotiable and, more significantly, their definition includes notions of similarity and difference according to Clark (2006). Communities are constantly being reinvented and re-imagined in the face of new developments (Hobsbawm, 1990). Nowadays, communities of football supporters and fans of football superstars gather not only in stadiums but much more frequently on social media (Jackson, 2014). Thus, online affinity groups on Facebook resemble online neighbourhoods, where groups of friends meet up to talk about their favourite superstar or football team.

Generally, participants in online communities identify themselves as members of specific and distinct groups by showing their competence in "…making appropriate linguistic, semiotic, and discursive choices across different communicative situations" (Peuronen, 2011:155). Specifically in online communities of football supporters or superstars' admirers, participants usually resort to these choices, which also entail mixing languages to perform their fandom, supportership and special interest in a player (Kytölä, 2014). However, not all language mixing phenomena are ways to manifest membership in these environments. A shared identity is based on shared linguistic and cultural contexts; sharing knowledge about the background of players is crucial in these communities (Chovanec, 2009).

3. Research Objectives

Atanga (2012) indicates that, since Cameroonians grow up speaking two or more languages, language choice and code-switching can show how they want to portray themselves or what identities are highlighted by the individual. Taking this into account, this article examines comments posted on Facebook that use more than one language in order to see the functions of language mixing strategies in Cameroon, following Atanga (2012), with a clear focus on how language mixing is devoted to index alignment and to establish personal and shared identities. Moreover, drawing on Lee (2016), we will distinguish between local and global self-presentation through language choice. Consequently, the research question of this study is:

> What language mixing pattern is preferred by these communities to index local, global identity and alignment?

The examination of the corpus will show the role of indigenous Cameroonian languages in establishing national identity on Facebook.

4. The Study

4.1. Corpus For this research, we formed a corpus with 400 public comments posted by followers of the football star Samuel Eto'o Fils on his official Facebook page. Some aspects need to be clarified regarding the corpus gathered.

First, it is necessary to explain that the comments were compiled in the second half of 2017, and those comments formed entirely by emoticons, pictures or videos were not considered for the corpus this time; further research could examine the interplay between emoticons and identity. For ethical purposes, only publicly displayed messages were gathered for the corpus. These will be shown in the examples below as they appeared on the screen, including graphic symbols and grammatical and orthographical mistakes, but excluding personal information such as surnames.

Second, we need to point out that our main objective was to analyse Cameroonian online discourse and to this end, the texts displayed on Eto'o's public page were carefully selected to represent the interactions of Cameroonian people, since football fans from many countries participate actively on his page. The selection was based upon the language used in the texts: English or French with Cameroonian particularities and/or lexis in indigenous Cameroonian languages (for example, by following the indications of the project IFACAM II.[2] *Inventaire des particularités lexicales du français en Afrique-Cameroun*). In addition, we checked the "about" section on these people's pages to corroborate where they live and their place of birth. However, it is publicly known that Facebook allows interactants to create false profiles, thus we do not know whether the virtual identities displayed on this technical medium by Eto'o's fans belong to "real" Cameroonians. We also do not know the writers' real age, name or nationality for certain, but for this study, we do not question these data: we accept the information and pictures shown in the person's profile as "real".

4.2. Methodology The analysis started with a brief quantitative study to shed light on the preferred language in this online community. The quantitative examination was carried out not by assigning a comment to one or more languages but by assigning the corpus as a whole to different languages. The percentages of words in the languages used in the commentaries are shown in Chart 1 below.

Leppänen and Peuronen (2012) indicated that in addition to quantitative studies, we need more research into online multilingualism from a variety of perspectives and methodologies to document the specificities and differences between the languages chosen and their functions and meanings on the Internet. Consequently, in a second phase of the study, we selected the comments that include more than one language in order to carry out a detailed online discourse analysis; around 88% of the texts forming the corpus included some instance of language mixing. The methodology undertaken is based on the languaging analysis proposed by Androutsopoulos (2014:8). This analysis assumes that utterances are not "….being cast 'in' a particular language but as drawing on resources ('features') that are associated with one or more languages, registers, genres, etc." In his view, a languaging analysis examines how online written texts index alignment and association by means of language mixing and other resources such as expressive use of punctuation and spelling variation. In this article, we will focus exclusively on language choice and language mixing strategies.

Code switches and code choice are contextualisation cues that give writers context information (Hinrichs, 2006). We will explain how these cues are used in multilingual virtual communities. As for functions, this research draws on Hinrichs (2006), Tsiplakou (2009), Androutsopoulos (2013) and Georgalou (2017) to consider some of the pragmatic functions and identity values of the use of linguistic heterogeneity by the members of this online community. We

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[2] The list of the lexical peculiarities of the French language in Cameroon compiled by a team of scholars that have been working on the topic since the late 1970s (Echu, 2003).

focus our exploration on switching for emphatic purposes, for good wishes, as formulaic expressions of affection, alignment or distancing techniques. Frequently, code-switching also indexes local/national identity, localisation or globalisation (Pérez-Sabater & Maguelouk-Moffo, 2019). The coding of functions was carried out by both authors separately, but when some conflict or doubt arose, decisions were taken by the two researchers.

Before displaying the results, we need to reiterate that multilingualism in this study does not refer to the simple coexistence of multiple languages on the same online page: this does not qualify as a language mixing phenomenon such as code-switching (Lee, 2016). Here, we analyse the coexistence of more than one language in the same communicative act, the same comment posted to the page, disregarding other information on this Facebook page. The news posted on the wall are sometimes multilingual: Eto'o publishes mainly in French but frequently uses English and Spanish for his posts (see Figure 1). At the moment, translation facilities on Facebook make this information available to everyone, regardless of language and ethnicity (Lee, 2016), therefore increasing the audience and the community. However, most of the local languages of Cameroon lack these translation facilities, either on Facebook, online or on paper, principally because most of them have not been fully standardised yet (Biloa & Echu, 2008).
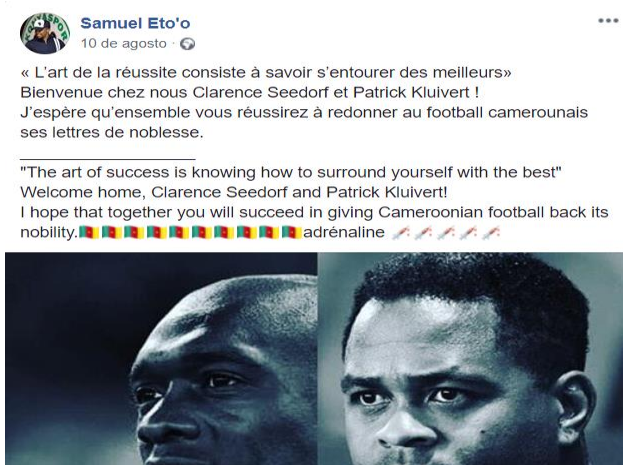

Figure 1. Example of post on the Facebook wall in French and English.

5. Results and Their Interpretation

The study of the comments posted by the collective fandom of the Cameroonian superstar shows that French is the preferred language of interaction. The quantitative analysis demonstrates that this multilingual community initially seems to be practically monolingual on Facebook.
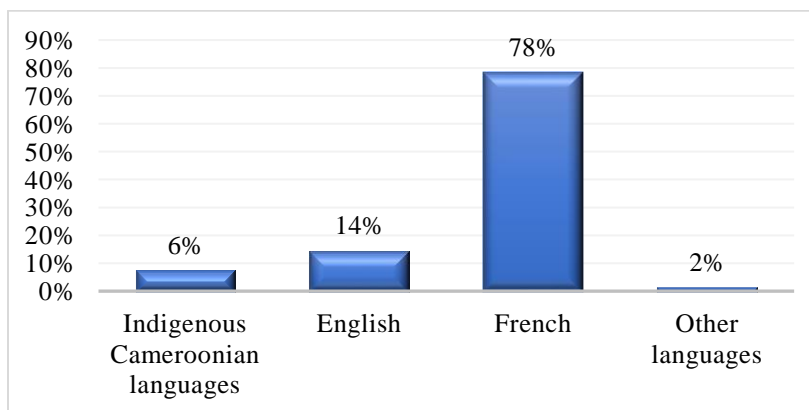
Chart 1. Percentage of the several languages used in the commentaries of the corpus[3].

In general, the Cameroonian fandom community studied, formed largely by young educated[4] interactants, identifies itself by means of the majority language of the country, probably because indigenous languages are not taught in school and have not been fully standardised yet. This is one of the reasons why these languages are mainly oral in nature, rarely written (Biloa & Echu, 2008) and excluded from formal discourse such as, for example, the speeches of the Cameroonian Parliament (Atanga, 2012). The examination shows that the users of this technical medium need to communicate in the language they know how to write best since they are likely to fear being considered non-educated by the other members of the community if they write in non-standardised indigenous languages. Moreover, there are no translations available into or from indigenous Cameroonian languages on Facebook and some interactants from other ethnic groups or countries may not be able to understand these languages. All in all, despite this apparent monolingual panorama, a closer look at the comments reveals instances of language mixing phenomena: 78% of the comments included words in more than one language.

The examples below are representative of the language mixing strategies found in the corpus and the functions implied in their use. These texts generally show a very clear oral style. They look like written conversation (Maynor, 1994) where the abundance of misspellings and grammatical errors increases the informal tone of the message. This informality and oral character may be the reason for including some lexis in indigenous languages in public domains, since code-switching has been traditionally related to conversations between bilingual speakers (see, for instance, Li, 2011) and, as explained above, Cameroonian languages are restricted to the private oral domain (Biloa & Echu, 2008; Anchimbe, 2013).

5.1 Switching to English for formulaic discourse purposes In many examples, 47% of the cases of language mixing, we find code-mixing, French and English,[5] the two official languages of the country. The texts are mostly written in French while English is usually employed for formulaic discourse purposes. Writers generally switch to English to express good wishes as well as for an emphatic purpose, as Comment 1 below illustrates:

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[3] The composition of "Other languages" is reviewed in a later section.
[4] Following Penard et al. (2015:71) we assume that "…young and educated individuals are more likely to use the Internet in Cameroon".
[5] We do not write them in alphabetical order because French is the preferred language in this corpus as it is explained.
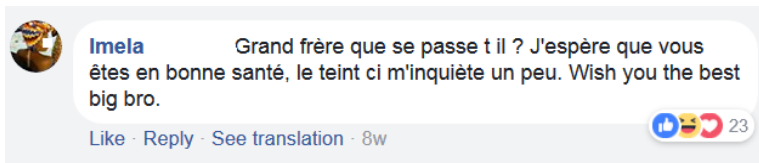
Comment 1.[6] Big brother what is happening? I wish you were in good
health, the colour worries me a bit. Wish you the best big bro.

This author is worried about the colour of Eto'o's skin; its tone is becoming much whiter.
He is believed to be skin bleaching and his fans talk about it on Facebook. Imela expresses her good
wishes again in English to emphasise her deep affection for the star. Probably, English is included
to globalise her affection. In this way, the author can share her good wishes with the whole online
community of the player, since some of the star's community members may not fully understand
French. Another interesting issue here is that Imela politely calls Eto'o *Big brother*. These popular
forms of address in Cameroon have the function of showing respect, while establishing in-group
solidarity and cohesion (Anchimbe, 2013).

Code-switching to English can also be employed at the beginning of the comment,
frequently for thanking:
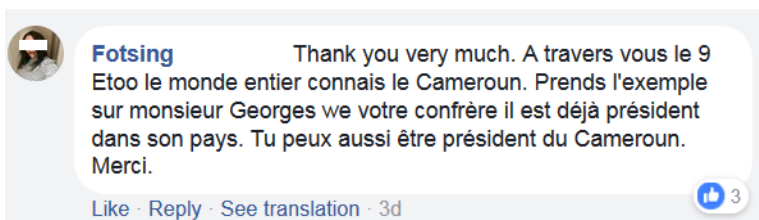
Comment 2. Thank you very much. Through you, 9 Etoo, the entire
world knows Cameroon. Take the example of sir Georges we (George
Weah, president of Liberia and former footballer) who is already the
president of his country. You can also be the president of Cameroon.
Thank you.

The politeness[7] indicator included is very formal as is the whole utterance, much more
formal than other examples in the corpus. Moreover, by starting with a thank you formula, the writer
sets the tone of the comment, and ends the comment with a politeness indicator, although this time,
in French. Thanking in a different code is common practice in online CS (Tsiplakou, 2009).

On the other hand, French and English are sometimes mixed with Pidgin English:

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[6] The examples displayed in this article have had all sensitive data and information that could lead to the
identification of authors removed. Translations into English are provided in each case, maintaining the style of
the original as far as possible. In some cases, punctuation has been added to make the text comprehensible.
[7] Drawing on Bou-Franch (2006:75), linguistic politeness is understood in this research "… not just in terms
of linguistic strategies used, among other things, to save co-participants' face in a particular social domain, but
also as nuanced discourse choices, linguistic patterns, perceived by participants as appropriate to the current
interactional requirements of the activity in which they are engaged".
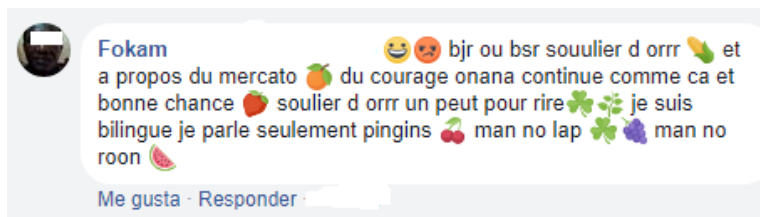
Comment 3. Good morning or good afternoon golden shoe, and as for the market, go Onana (name of player), go on like this, and good luck golden shoe, here is a little for us to laugh, I am bilingual, and I speak only pidgins, don't laugh don't run.

French is the matrix code, as in most comments, but here the author includes Pidgin English which goes beyond the ethnic borders of the country; *man no lap, man no roon* means *don't laugh, don't run*. Normally, Pidgin English is used in Cameroon in informal contexts where it is "able to cut across the linguistic and cultural barriers of the different ethnic groups of Cameroon" (Ayafor & Green, 2017); at the moment it has a wider scope than English (Biloa & Echu, 2008; Nkwain, 2010). Again CS is used at the end of the comment, probably to emphasise the informality of this very colloquial text, which is full of informal spelling, emoticons and other graphical elements. *Mercato*, from Italian *market*, also gives certain global character to the text. The establishment of local and global identification will be detailed in the next group of examples.

5.2 Mixing French, English or Pidgin English and indigenous languages. Camfranglais and other creole languages. Glocalisation and politeness. This language mixing pattern occurs in 33% of the cases of messages in more than one language. In general, the insertion of expressions in indigenous languages conveys a higher level of empathy the author has for the team or player, as Adegoke (2012) suggested in his study of apologies in Yoruba language on Facebook. In the case of Samuel Eto'o, these expressions often serve to reinforce the excessive devotion to the player, as we see in Comment 4. This text is a clear example of language mixing phenomena at play.
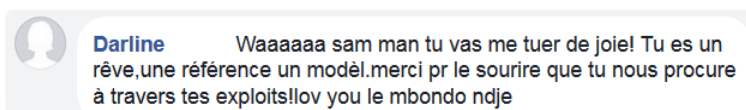
Comment 4. Truly sam you are going to kill me with joy! You are a dream, a reference a model. thanks for the smile that you give us through your achievements! I love you *my ideal man*.

Starting with an exclamation in Bassa meaning *truly*, the French matrix code is interspersed with one phrase in English, one lexical item in English, and two in Douala language with the article in French. In this text, it seems important for the writer to express her deep affection for Eto'o in English as a way of giving a global scope to her admiration for the player. Formulaic expressions of affection are frequently performed in a language different from the matrix one (Deumert & Vold Lexander, 2013). At the same time, comments in Douala that are used to qualify Samuel Eto'o as a perfect man link the player's global character as an international player to the fact that he is from Cameroon, he belongs to a shared identity.

Eto'o is the prefect man for his fandom and this is extended to his family, in this case, his wife:
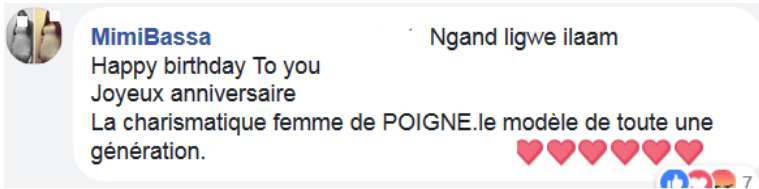
Comment 5. Miss, Happy birthday. Happy birthday. The charismatic
wife with AUTHORITY. The role model for a whole generation.

　　　Comment 5 is a multilingual example of how the use of the several languages known by
the author, and probably also known by the player, emphasises the local and global character of the
author's personality and the wife of the footballer at the same time. In this utterance, the codes are
separated by paragraphs, each line is written in a different language, sentences 3 and 4 in French. It
starts possibly with the author's closest language, Bassa, which is also part of her name on Facebook,
MimiBassa: *Miss, Happy birthday*, in standard form *ngònd, ligwe ii lam*. The congratulatory
messages in several languages emphasises the author's good wishes. This highly multilingual
message also serves to index the local and global character of the poster's idol, who is a local and a
global star as well.
　　　In a similar vein, Comment 6 exemplifies the role of language choice to indicate alignment.
Language choice here is a politeness resource to express affection, to idolise the player while
highlighting his local, national and cosmopolitan/global identity at the same time by means of a
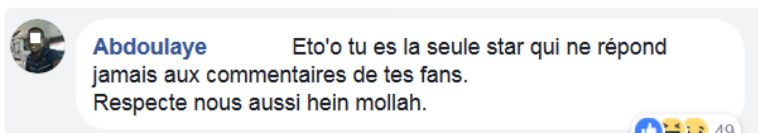particular language mix:
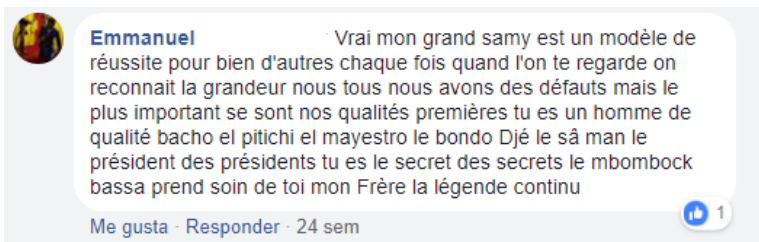
Comment 6: Truly my great samy you are a role model for others; every
time we see you we recognise the greatness; we all have faults but the
most important thing is our qualities; you are a man of quality with a
baccalaureate degree, a pichichi, a maestro, an ideal man, the president
of presidents; you are the secret of secrets, the chief of Bassa people; take
care my friend, the legend continues.

　　　Comment 6 shows how the deep affection of the writer for one of the two greatest
footballers of the country is not only represented by the compliments chosen but also by the
language or languages chosen for these compliments, affection is frequently inserted in a different
language in African online discourse (Deumert & Vold Lexander, 2013). The writer calls Eto'o an
ideal man, *le bondo Djé*, and le *mbombock*, the chief in a Bassa community, compliments in Bassa
with the article in French. He is also addressed as *le sâ man*, person of peace, with a noun in English
or Pidgin English and an adjective, *sâ* (usually spelt *sàn*), in Douala or Bassa. The inclusion of
compliments in Bassa and Douala –the former the native language of the player –is undoubtedly a
politeness strategy. He is also addressed in informal French, *bacho*, a person that holds an academic
degree, that is, with an education. It is worth noting that the text includes Spanish for prestige, which
links this section with the next: the writer's deep devotion to the footballer is shown by *pichichi*
(spelt wrongly in the text *pitichi*), the term that refers to the top scorer in the Spanish league
(Hernández Alonso, 2003) and *maestro (mayestro* in the comment*)*, meaning *master* in Italian and
Spanish. These compliments, as Nkwain (2011) explains, are clearly culture specific. The deep

admiration of the writer towards the star is expressed by giving him compliments that have an exclusive local character: he is the chief of the tribe, an ideal man and a person of peace, and his personality is praised in a local language. At the same time, a foreign code is employed to refer to his global appeal and success as an international sportsperson with *pichichi* and *maestro*. Local and national identity as well as localisation and globalisation are clearly indexed by language choice. Following Simpon (2008), this comment would be an example of Camfranglais, one of the increasingly popular codes in Africa formed from a mixture of local and foreign languages.

Finally, the shared identity is also performed in the following text through language choice albeit with a radically different function:

Abdoulaye Eto'o tu es la seule star qui ne répond jamais aux commentaires de tes fans. Respecte nous aussi hein mollah.

Comment 7. Eto'o you are the only star who never answers the comments of your fans. Respect us also, my friend.

The comment, written predominantly in French, includes *hein mollah* (my friend) in Mbokotok, a slang spoken normally by people of doubtful moral backgrounds (Ngefac, 2010). There are other comments in the corpus that include words in this slang but this example is particularly interesting because this expression is inserted in a comment written with no errors and correct use of accents and punctuation, which clearly demonstrates the literacy level of the author, surely not a person who speaks Mbokotok in his work or family. Thus, the switch to Mbokotok reinforces the writer's stance against Eto'o, who is usually addressed very politely, as being a so-called deity, as in Comment 6 above. The language itself is an impoliteness strategy, an act of aggression towards Samuel Eto'o as a marked choice to index dissent, one of the functions in Androutsopoulos' (2013) classification. In this way, by choosing Mbokotok, the international star is portrayed as a person from Cameroon but one from the lowest rank. Indeed, in the writer's opinion, he is of a much lower rank than all the other members of the player's page, generally young, educated people who can write and have access to the Internet, because Eto'o does not interact with his fan base.

5.4 Switching to foreign languages, a politeness strategy. Globalisation has allowed European clubs to be followed extensively in other parts of the world. In Africa, the regular broadcasting of European matches has enhanced the identification of many fans with these clubs (Onwumechili & Akindes, 2014)). This may be the reason why words in Catalan, Italian and Spanish are often included in the comments studied, as is the case of 15% of the comments with code-switching. Apart from the recent broadcasting of European matches, these languages are also possibly popular in Cameroon because Samuel Eto'o played for several Spanish clubs such as F. C. Barcelona, R. D. Mallorca and Real Madrid C. F., and the Italian Inter Milan. People in Cameroon who like football and, therefore, have followed Eto'o's international career, would have picked up words in the languages spoken in these countries. In this way, football lexis like *maestro* or *pichichi* in these languages go beyond the context and the community where they were created and become markers of the whole football fandom worldwide with a clear alignment purpose (Comment 6). Finally, Comments 8 and 9 show how Spanish is inserted in the texts in French to express good wishes and to thank and compliment the player for his superior quality as a person and as a sportsman, while emphasising his cosmopolitan character:
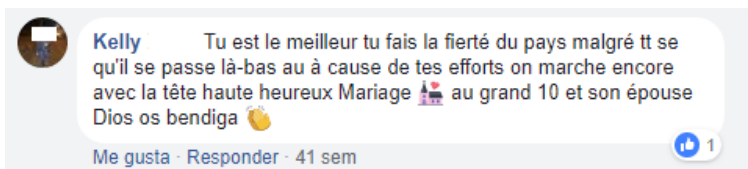
Comment 8. You are the best, you make the country proud in spite of
everything that is happening there and due to your efforts, and thanks to
your efforts, we walk with our head up high. Happy marriage to the big
10 and his wife. God bless you.

God bless you in Spanish is the sign-off chosen to terminate this text. Religion is present
in many of these comments, since religion is strongly embedded in African culture and language
practices (see, for example, Chiluwa, 2008; Anchimbe, 2013). By using a foreign language, the
author worships the superstar for being an international star that has been part of one of the most
followed football leagues in the world, the Spanish LaLiga. Here CS serves to index the global
character of this sportsperson while expressing good wishes.

Similarly to Comment 8, Spanish is included to highlight the cosmopolitan global identity
of the star. This language serves to terminate Comment 9, although this time, affection is extended
to other football players:
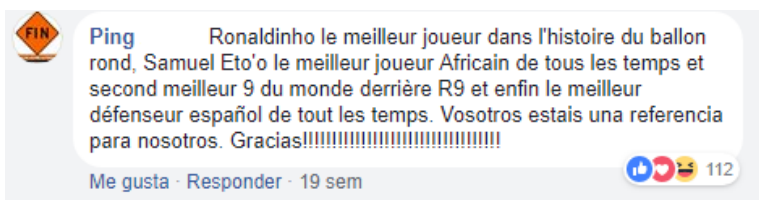
Comment 9. Ronaldinho the best player in the history of the round ball,
Samuel Eto'o the best African player of all times and the second best 9
in the world behind R9 and finally the best Spanish defender of all time.
You are a reference for us. Thank you!

Apart from a thanking formula as a sign-off in Spanish, this quite formally written text,
with accents and some punctuation, includes the word *Spanish* in Spanish and a whole sentence
praising these players. The sentence in Spanish is a clear language transfer from the French: instead
of *sois*, the author writes *estais* (*estáis* in correct Spanish) a transfer from *être* in the second person
plural, *vous êtes*; a common lexical error of Francophone learners of Spanish in Africa according to
Sossouvi (2009). Replication of exclamation marks reinforces the stance of the author, emphasising
his/her admiration for these role models and superstars even more.

6. Conclusion

Concerning the research question posed for this research regarding the preferred language mixing
pattern to index local, global identity and alignment, the results show that mixing French and English
is still the most frequent language pattern in the corpus. However, the results also illustrate the
incipient use of indigenous languages as vehicles to construct identity in public texts. There seems
to be a change in the role of indigenous Cameroonian languages. Past research has highlighted that
indigenous Cameroonian languages have never played any role in establishing identity (Biloa &
Echu, 2008). Yet, these examples have demonstrated that lexical items from the non-official
languages of the country play some role in the new written exchanges among Cameroonians. This
may constitute a novelty in the language panorama in Cameroon: the status of local languages and

the attitude towards their use in written practices seem to be starting to change at the moment, at least in online communication carried out by young, educated people on Facebook. Particularly important is also the written use of this new second set of mixed language forms (Simpson, 2008), that is, new languages such as Camfranglais, Mbokotok or Pidgin English.

It is plausible to indicate that the incipient change of paradigm in indigenous language use observed is in line with what scholars are now identifying in other African countries such as Nigeria. In this regard, Taiwo (2010) suggests that the conscious and deliberate inclusion of what he calls *Nigerianisms* in SMS and online fora (in his case) undoubtedly reveals the participants' need for identity construction in their discourse by means of what has been traditionally considered "dirty language" (Wolff, 2018). Indeed, language mixing which includes indigenous languages works predominantly as a mechanism to give an authentic *national flavour* to communicative practices. But, for the first time, as is evident from the corpus studied for this article, language mixing phenomena take place in written exchanges.

Secondly, the analysis shows that glocalisation, globalisation and localisation, often take place by means of language mixing strategies. Many of the writers of these texts code-switch and mix languages to align themselves with certain cultures, as in the study carried out by Peuronen (2011). Interactants identify themselves as cosmopolitan, worldly Cameroonians, by means of English and French, whereas their national or local character is sometimes emphasised by instances in indigenous Cameroonian lexis. The insertion of words from a language different from the matrix language of the text can also imply pragmatic effects other than alignment: choosing a specific language to address a player can be an impoliteness strategy, as we saw in comment 7. Mbokotok, only used by unemployed and uneducated Cameroonian citizens in the suburbs, is now written by young educated interactants for specific pragmatic functions, mainly to express dissent. Addressing the national idol in Mbokotok is an insult, an impoliteness strategy towards Samuel Eto'o. In this way, a specific language choice is used as a distancing technique to disagree profoundly with the way a player interacts on his Facebook page, publicly shaming the footballer for his lack of interaction.

The study also reveals that the frequent inclusion of foreign words, mainly in Italian and Spanish, serves to compliment the player and emphasise his international successful career. In these cases, not only is the compliment linguistically relevant but the language used to express it, being the language employed a politeness indicator.

Recently, Samuel Eto'o has publically supported the president of Cameroon, Paul Biya. The star's defence of the elderly leader has provoked a myriad of comments on his Facebook page talking about their close relationship, many of them full of impoliteness strategies and insults. The analysis of this new wave of comments could provide enriching conclusions and explanations of politeness and impoliteness, closely linked to language choice and language mixing in CMC in the near future.

We would like to finish with the words of Kytölä (2013: 76): "…football is a highly globalized cultural form, and studying football discourse from a sociolinguistic point of view can open gates to address larger-scale problems and issues in the world." Probably our study has not addressed large-scale problems but it has tried to document this epoch in which people have never written so much (Pérez-Sabater et al., 2008), especially in the Global South where inequalities in terms of literacy, education and access to technology have made the study of CMC linguistic research even harder.

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