



HAL
open science

”Slang is for Thugs”: Stereotypes of Francanglais among Cameroonian immigrants in Paris

Suzie Telep

► **To cite this version:**

Suzie Telep. ”Slang is for Thugs”: Stereotypes of Francanglais among Cameroonian immigrants in Paris. SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics, 2018, 19, pp.119 - 131. hal-02127664

HAL Id: hal-02127664

<https://hal.science/hal-02127664>

Submitted on 13 May 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

“Slang is for Thugs”: Stereotypes of Francanglais among Cameroonian immigrants in Paris

Suzie Telep
suzielaetitia@hotmail.fr

Abstract

This article aims to describe some of the recurrent stereotypic indexical values that a group of young Cameroonian immigrants in Paris assign to Francanglais, a lexical register of French associated with informal and casual interactions, among young people, in urban settings in Cameroon. I analyse their metapragmatic discourses about this register, which were collected through interviews and based on ethnographic fieldwork in a pan-African association during my PhD research. These discourses are imbued by recurrent ideologies of slang, whereby speech repertoires are evaluated as deviant with respect to one or more presupposed standards when brought under slang formulations (see Agha 2015: 308). Therefore, I show that, through the opposition they make between *language* and *slang*, and through the recurrent metaphor of the hood, which is associated with the social figure of the thug, speakers tend to depreciate Francanglais by categorising it as a slang and thus by evaluating it as a sub-standard variety of the French language. They create symbolic boundaries between different and contrastive social types of speakers (young people vs. grown-up people, boys vs. girls, thugs vs. well-mannered people, rude people vs. polite people, competent French speakers vs. incompetent French speakers), and they associate these personae with contrastive social spaces and values.

Keywords: Register, youth language, French, language and migration, language ideologies.

1. Introduction¹

Francanglais (or camfranglais²) is a lexical register of French associated with informal and casual interactions, among young people, in urban settings in Cameroon (Féral 2006: 257).

¹ Many parts of this working paper were published in July 2017 in an article entitled “Le “parler jeune”, une construction idéologique: le cas du *francanglais* au Cameroun”, in *Glottopol, revue de sociolinguistique en ligne*.

² Most of the speakers use the name *francanglais* to refer to the same register named *camfranglais* by many linguists and journalists (Harter 2000; Feussi 2006; Féral 2009). Speakers also use other names like: *français du kwatt* ‘hood French’, *français des jeunes* or *français des yors* ‘youth French’, *français à la mode* ‘fashionable French’ (see Féral 2013). In my corpus, the proper name *francanglais* on the one hand, and the common noun *argot* on the other hand, are the most used to refer to this register. Therefore, adopting an emic approach, I have chosen to use the name *francanglais* (rather than the name *camfranglais*) in the following analyses.

It consists of the insertion, in French discourse, of borrowed words mainly from pidgin-English or English, or from different ethnic languages spoken in Cameroon like Duala and Ewondo, and also words which have undergone semantic and formal processes (Féral 2006: 257). Nevertheless, francanglais, like any other language register, cannot be reduced to “a closed and bounded set of forms” (Agha 1999: 216). First, semantic and formal processes which condition the formation of new words, the use of which will allow social actors in Cameroonian society to categorise discourse as francanglais (truncations, abbreviations, semantic processes, etc.), are, in fact, not at all specific to this register. For example, the general processes of neologism are used not only in “everyday French” (“français ordinaire”, Gadet 1992), but also in any other register of French and in youth languages spoken in inner cities and in the suburbs of Paris (Goudaillier 2001; Gadet 1992), or in vernacular varieties of French spoken in African countries (see Lafage 2002 for the Ivory Coast). Secondly, many words that could be categorised as belonging to francanglais/camfranglais by Cameroonian people can be seen by French speakers in France as belonging to inner cities’ French, or even to familiar French. They can also be perceived as belonging to the French commonly spoken in Cameroon, as many words which are originally perceived as slang words finally cross repertoire boundaries over time, so that they are integrated into the standard language (Agha 2015: 307). For instance, I noted in a previous study (Telep 2014) that words or phrases like *go* ‘girlfriend’ or *c’est chaud* ‘it’s complicated’, ‘it’s difficult’, are listed in the *Cameroonian spoken language dictionary*³, and therefore are perceived by some Cameroonians as belonging to the standard French spoken in Cameroon or to francanglais. The same words could also be categorised as belonging to inner city French by French speakers in France. Similarly, according to C. de Féral (2006: 261, translated from French):

“some Cameroonian linguists and speakers perceive as camfranglais some words like *mec* ‘buddy’, ‘guy’, *gonzesse* ‘chick’, *K.-O.* ‘K.O.’ and even *bachot* ‘baccalauréat’ (in French, a degree equivalent to A-levels), whereas a French observer will spontaneously consider them as familiar or coarse French words⁴”.

Moreover, many other words which can be perceived as francanglais words are in fact borrowed from other languages, mainly from Pidgin-English (Féral 2006: 260). Therefore :

“camfranglais does not exist [...] as a code. Its existence must be found elsewhere: in the speakers’ representations, in their discourses and in the perception that Cameroonian listeners have, whether they are Camfranglais speakers or not” (Féral 2007: 272).

In other words, “what is *Francanglais* is what is recognised as such by French speaking Cameroonian” (Féral 2010: 55). Thus, the existence of francanglais as a distinct register

³ On *etounou.free.fr*. This website was last consulted on 31st March 2017.

⁴ All translations from French are author's own.

results not just in the association of a specific lexical repertoire with particular social groups and practices, but also “in the creation of social boundaries within society, partitioning off language users into distinct groups through differential access to particular registers and to the social practices that they mediate; through the ascription of social worth or stigma to particular registers, their usage or their users; and through the creation and maintenance of asymmetries of power, privilege and rank” (Agha 1999: 217-218). Francanglais does exist as a social formation, an ideological framework, which is the result of processes of *enregisterment*, “processes whereby its forms and values become differentiable from the rest of the language (i.e., recognisable as distinct, linked to stereotypic social personae or practices) for a given population of speakers” (Agha 2007: 168). According to A. Agha (2005: 57, footnotes 1 and 2):

“the term *enregisterment* is derived from the verb *to register* (‘recognize; record’); the noun form *a register* refers to a product of this process, namely a social regularity of recognition whereby linguistic (and accompanying nonlinguistic) signs come to be recognized as indexing pragmatic features of interpersonal role (persona) and relationship.”

The inscription or the sedimentation of habits of perception, evaluation and speech production are social processes which are “mediated largely by metalinguistic processes, i.e. by discursive events that typify and assign values to speech, though sometimes in ways that are highly implicit” (Agha 2007: 229). Therefore, the notion of *enregisterment* contrasts with any “top-down” approach to the formation of language distinctions, like the notion of *habitus* as has been theorised by Bourdieu. Indeed, it focuses on the reflexivity of social actors and their abilities to act with cultural models and to construct them through their (meta)semiotic activities.

Francanglais, as the result of *enregisterment* processes, is the product of a cultural project in the Cameroonian “symbolic market” (Bourdieu 1991) where francanglais and French have been constructed and differentiated as two contrastively valued linguistic styles in a symbolic “system of distinction” (Irvine 2001: 22). Thus, francanglais words or expressions “are not differentiable from the rest of the language without using native metapragmatic judgments of norm and deviance as data on identification”, and these data are not to be found in francanglais words or expressions but “in discursive and other metasemiotic activities that differentiate such expressions from others and typify their social indexical values” (Agha 2015: 307).

This article aims to describe some of the recurrent stereotypic indexical values that a group of young Cameroonian immigrants in Paris, who are about twenty-five years old, assign to francanglais, by studying their metapragmatic stereotypes⁵. These metapragmatic stereotypes are imbued by language ideologies (Irvine & Gal 2000) through different tropes of slang, that is to say, through “(meta)semiotic processes [...] whereby speech repertoires

⁵ Metapragmatic stereotypes are the “typifications of the pragmatics of language use and associated signs” (Agha 2007: 279).

come to be evaluated as deviant with respect to one or more presupposed standards when brought under slang formulations” (Agha 2015: 308). Thus, I will show how, through the opposition they make between *language* and *slang* (argot), speakers create symbolic boundaries between different and contrastive social types of speakers, which are associated with contrastive social spaces, and between two registers, French and francanglais, to which they assign contrasted social values. First, I will briefly describe the social and political issues of the process of naming languages, and the interactional positionings implied by the act of naming languages or registers. Secondly, I will describe how, by stigmatising francanglais, speakers create symbolic boundaries between different social groups like children and parents, or males and females. Finally, I will show that, by refusing to categorize francanglais as a language, some speakers conjure up the ideology of the standard language in their discourses.

2. Naming languages: *langue* or *argot* ‘language or slang’

The act of naming ways of speaking (styles, registers, languages) has a performative effect: it tends to construct and to freeze this construct, to bring it into existence as if it were a real object in the world (Canut 2001: 445). Indeed, the choice of giving a language one name rather than another, or the choice of categorising a way of speaking as a *language* in itself, or as a *slang*, is highly significant because it is suffused with social, political, aesthetic and moral issues. Most of the time, this choice is based upon a value judgment on the language in question, and it implies an implicit or explicit value hierarchy between languages, particularly when the act of nomination is made in the French language: indeed, “[t]he implicit connotations involved in choosing how to call a language in French reveal the perpetual *hierarchisation* between languages which is part and parcel of the language itself” (Canut 2001: 447; translated from French).

Therefore, the process of nomination is a crucial issue in the act of categorising language practices. It expresses a more or less conscious desire among the subject to trace boundaries between different languages or different varieties within a language. When they have to name and to describe *francanglais*, speakers generally alternate between the names *francanglais*, *argot*, and more rarely, *camfranglais*. The names *francanglais* and *camfranglais*, as nouns come from the two language names *français* ‘French’ and *anglais* ‘English’, and create “apparently well bounded linguistic objects”, distinct from French, which is socially and linguistically valued because the name is a mixture of the two officially recognised languages in Cameroon, French and English (Féral 2007: 258). On the contrary, the noun *argot* refers to a sub-standard linguistic variety, which can be socially stigmatised and depreciated. Indeed, “slang is an ideological framework for reasoning about language that defines a class of deviant registers of language” (Agha 2015: 306). Therefore, “[a]lthough the term *slang* describes speech repertoires, its usage indexes relationships between social groups. To say that some utterance is slang, or contains a slang expression, is to inhabit a metapragmatic stance that evaluates its speaker as deviating from a presumed standard” (Agha 2015: 307). Thus, by evaluating the social values of francanglais, speakers take on different interactional positionings vis-à-vis this register and its users. I will now describe some of the symbolic boundaries speakers draw through the opposition between *language* and *slang*.

3. “Francanglais is for *thugs*”: drawing boundaries between social groups

As francanglais is socially recognised as a youth language in the Cameroonian linguistic community, speakers often associate this register with the youth. Thus, they create a boundary between this social group on the one hand and adults, or parents, on the other. Besides, this boundary coincides with the distinction between language and slang, which implies a value hierarchy between French and francanglais. For instance, in the following extract, I ask the speaker, Christian, if he speaks francanglais with his parents. He explains that this can happen, but usually, when he tries, they do not understand him:

(1)

Christian⁶: *non on se comprend pas + on se comprend pas parce que ils ont pas cette richesse de mots + [...] + ils parlent un francanglais basique + bon avec ma mère je peux échanger quelques mots vite fait déjà on ne parle pas entre parents ça c'est: + parce qu'encore une fois il vaut mieux parler le français avec ses parents [...]*

Suzie: *pourquoi ?*

Christian: *parce que c'est ça qui est : une langue correcte + le francanglais n'est pas une langue correcte c'est un argot + vaut mieux parler le français et: en tant que parent chaque parent fait tout pour que son enfant parle bien le français + le francanglais on te le demandera jamais à l'école + toi je sais pas ce que tu fais mais au Cameroun y a pas un cours de francanglais c'est pour le ghetto + voilà c'est ça en fait c'est aussi simple que ça le francanglais c'est pour le ghetto [...] + avant c'était pour les bandits et tout ça + mais c'était pour le ghetto tu vois + donc heu moi je parlais pas vraiment ça avec mes parents*

Christian: *no + we don't understand each other + we don't understand each other because they do not have a rich vocabulary + [...] they speak a basic francanglais + well with my mother I can quickly exchange a few words + first people do not speak that with their parents + because one more time you'd better speak French with your parents*

Suzie: *why ?*

Christian: *because that is a correct language + francanglais is not a correct language it's a slang + you'd better speak French and as a parent parents will do anything so that their children can speak proper French + you will never be asked to speak francanglais at school + as for you I don't know what you're doing but in Cameroon there is no francanglais class it's for the ghetto + it's for the ghetto + and that's it,*

⁶ Here is the transcript code used for the extracts:

+ : short pause; ++ : longer pause; [XXXX]: segments which overlap; [:] or [::]: lengthening of vowels or syllables.

actually that's as simple as that + francanglais is for the ghetto [...] + in the past it was for thugs and all that + but it was for the ghetto you see + so I didn't really speak that with my parents

Christian justifies first the difficulty of speaking francanglais with his parents because it makes communication more difficult. As they have a more limited vocabulary than him, his parents do not always understand what he says when he speaks francanglais. But quickly, the speaker shifts from a personal and subjective experience, to a more general and impersonal point of view (“*bon avec ma mère je peux échanger quelques mots vite fait déjà on ne parle pas entre parents ça c'est: + parce qu'encore une fois il vaut mieux parler le français avec ses parents*”). At the enunciative level, this change is marked by the shift from the personal pronoun *je* ‘I’ to the generic pronoun *tu* ‘you’, which introduces a collective and normative voice and draws a symbolic boundary between two social roles, that of the child and that of the parent. Then the speaker explains this interactional norm, which conditions the children's communication with their parents by introducing a moral justification, with the use of the phrasal verb *tu ferais mieux de* ‘you'd better’. He adopts a normative and purist point of view that he develops later in this extract, when I ask him to explain his statement: he opposes the “correct language” to francanglais, which he defines as a kind of slang, that is to say, according to him, an “incorrect language” (“*le francanglais n'est pas une langue correcte c'est un argot*”). The linguistic boundary between language and slang coincides with a spatial boundary: the speaker opposes the norm of the “proper language”, which is transmitted by the family and institutionalised by the school system and institutions which impose and reproduce the “legitimate language” (Bourdieu 1991), to the practice of *francanglais*, which is excluded from schools and confined to the marginalized space of “ghettos”. This normative judgement, which implies a hierarchy of values between two varieties is very common in standardised regimes, where

linguistic variation is visualized [...] as an abstract space in which the standard language “covers” other varieties, is superimposed on them, and therefore is imagined to be located “above” them. Other forms are not simply different, or typical of different geographical regions and social strata. They are seen to be “lower”, and therefore worse.

(Gal 2009: 38).

This act of spatial and social stigmatisation is reinforced by the pejorative judgment of the speaker who associates francanglais with a marginalised social group, the thugs. This stereotype stems from the supposed origins of francanglais: indeed, around 1970, C. de Féral observed some practices similar to *francanglais* or *camfranglais*, which was named *makro* French (‘thug French’; *makro* is a Duala word) and described as a slang at this time, because it was spoken by marginalised groups in Duala's streets (Féral 2007). Therefore, the speaker's argumentation is marked by a dialogic speech and produces a typifying judgement: the use of the impersonal pronoun *tu* ‘you’, the gnomic present and the absence of subjective markers show that the speaker has incorporated the monoglossic ideology of the standard language. In his argumentation, he depreciates the use of francanglais by essentialising the relationship between francanglais and ghettos or thugs, through the

process of “iconisation”, according to which “linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence” (Irvine & Gal 2000: 37). We can identify in this discourse a common ideology of slang, according to which this register indexes deviant social personae (Agha 2015: 312).

This process of personification and essentialisation, which naturalises the values of francanglais in the attributes of its stereotypic deviant speakers, the thugs or other marginalised social groups, is very recurrent in the discourses of other speakers. For instance, in this extract, Matthieu uses this argument in order to justify the fact that girls and women speak francanglais less frequently than boys and men. Thus, he draws another social and symbolic boundary between men and women, a spatial boundary between the ghetto or the neighbourhood and other implicit spaces, and an implicit moral boundary between rudeness and politeness or social distinction:

(2)

Matthieu: *le hans et le gue ouais c'est elles qui faisaient ça + parce que nous + parce que nous justement + il faut dire que [...] l'argot c'est pour les vagabonds*

Suzie : *ah ouais*

Matthieu: *les gars du quartier + c'est pour les gars du quatt + c'est vraiment ça + l'argot + et donc du coup les filles + non je suis pas une fille du quartier + ouais donc elles ont trouvé leur code à elle + le tu gue veux gue*

Matthieu: the hans the gueu yeah THEY spoke that + because we + because we actually + it must be said that [...] francanglais is for thugs

Suzie: ah yeah

Matthieu: the guys from the hood + it's for the guys from the hood + that's really that + slang + so girls + no I'm not a girl from the hood + yeah so they found their own code + the you gueu want gueu

Matthieu refers to specific secret codes of languages (the hans, the gueu) that girls have invented, according to him, in order to distinguish themselves from the social space of the neighbourhood, and to project a positive image of themselves as opposed to the stigmatised social personae of the thug and of the boy of the hood, which are associated with francanglais. The use of the generic plural forms “the thugs” and “the boys” and of the gnomic present creates this iconic link between stigmatised social groups and francanglais. Besides, the use of the phrasal verb *il faut dire que* ‘it must be said that’ and of the adverb *vraiment* ‘really’ reinforces not only the speaker's assertion but also “the implication of necessity” (Irvine & Gal 2000: 37) for the conventional connection between francanglais and these stigmatised social groups. This “attribution of cause and immediate necessity” to this connection is characteristic of “the iconicity of the ideological representation” (Irvine & Gal 2000: 37).

Therefore, through the opposition between two registers, francanglais and French, and between the social groups which are stereotypically associated with them, the speakers tend to depreciate the practice of francanglais in their discourses by referring, implicitly or explicitly, to a standard. Because of this social stigmatization of francanglais, some people adopt a normative stance vis-à-vis this register by refusing to categorize it as a language in itself.

4. “Francanglais is not a *language*, because it has no rules”

The opposition between *language* and *slang* in the definition and in the description of francanglais can be found in many other discourses, for which the speakers also adopt a normative stance and position themselves as speakers of the “proper” (or standard) variety of French. Thus, they distance themselves from the group of francanglais speakers, and they often refuse to categorise francanglais as a language in itself. This is the case for Emmanuel who explains what, according to him, francanglais is:

(3)

Suzie: *et du coup tu considérerais que c'est une langue pour toi + le francanglais ou le camfranglais*

Emmanuel: *c'est quoi une langue + comment on définirait une langue + est-ce que je dirais que c'est une langue + non*

Suzie: *pourquoi non*

Emmanuel: *je sais pas + je me demande ce que c'est une langue + donc la langue officielle c'est le français et l'anglais + ma langue maternelle c'est le bamoun + et ce truc-là ça a quoi comme statut + + on peut en faire une langue mais non + c'est pas une langue c'est: + si on dit langue moyen de communication entre les gens + mais une langue ça a des règles + ça a pas de règles*

Suzie: *y a pas de règles*

Emmanuel: *non y a pas de règles + je peux mettre ça dans une phrase en anglais complète + ou je peux mettre ça dans une phrase en anglais + ou je peux euh je peux commencer en français et finir avec ça + je peux commencer avec ça et finir en français + ça n'a pas: + non c'est pas une langue + non + c'est un truc [rires]*

Suzie: *so would you consider that it is a language according to you + francanglais or camfranglais*

Emmanuel: *what is a language + how would you define a language + would I say that it is a language ? + no*

Suzie: *why not ?*

Emmanuel: *I don't know + I wonder what a language is + so the official language is French and English + my mother tongue is Bamoun + and that thing what is its status ? ++ you can call it a language but no + it's not a language it's + if by language you mean a means of communication between people + but a language has rules + that has no rule*

- Suzie: there's no rule
Emmanuel: no there's no rule + I can put it in a full English sentence + or I can put it in an English sentence + or I can start euh I can start with French and end up with that + I can start with that and end up with French + it has no: + no it's not a language + no + it's a thing [laughter]

Here, the speaker refers to “a set of naturalized beliefs about the standard language” (Gal 2009: 38). While trying to define what a language is for him, the speaker starts naming standardised languages: French and English, the two official languages in Cameroon. He includes in his definition his mother tongue that he explicitly names (Bamoun). He employs the pejorative denomination *truc* ‘thing’ to refer to francanglais, and he refuses to categorise this register as a language. He justifies this pejorative categorisation by a grammatical criterion: “a language has rules + that has no rule”. Besides, the use of the demonstrative “ça” ‘that’ implies that the speaker distances himself from this register. He adopts a purist discourse, which brings discredit upon “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin 1981) and the mixture of languages, which characterises language practices in francanglais. He interprets this “heteroglossia” as a linguistic and irrational disorder, as a lack of rules (‘I can put it in a full English sentence + or I can start in French and end up with that + I can start with that and end up with French’). Therefore, according to Emmanuel, the functional criterion which defines a language as a communicative tool between people, and which could be applied to francanglais, does not allow him to categorise francanglais as a language. The structural criterion (the syntax or the grammar of a language) is the only one that is valid for this speaker. This normative stance reveals the *feedback* effect of the common discourses on those of individuals (Canut 2001): indeed, the speaker incorporated the ideology of the standard language, which circulates among standardised societies in the Western world and in many African countries where French, Arabic, English or any other standardised official language are spoken. In these societies, the official languages have been normalised and codified, and “the confusion between syntax and written grammar is vividly entertained in this process of depreciation of oral speech, of variation and movement” (Canut 2001: 448; translated from French). Therefore, the speaker aligns himself with a scientific and essentialising discourse on languages, which is marked by the ideal of unity, of the pure and homogeneous language. This judgment is exclusively based on linguistic criteria and hides the reality of language practices: indeed, as Bakhtin argued (1981), “heteroglossia (that is to say, the diversity of varieties, the proliferation of styles, registers and languages) is the ordinary condition of linguistic life” (see Gal 2009: 37-38).

Later in the interview, the same speaker adopts the same normative stance when he has to comment on a text written in francanglais, which he reads out loud. This text is an extract from a discussion forum on the internet, which is aimed at the Cameroonian Diaspora:

- (4)
Emmanuel: *c'est un bon exemple de n'importe quoi mais : [rires]*
Suzie: *de n'importe quoi + comment ça de n'importe quoi*
Emmanuel: *le camfranglais + ben quand je lis ça, ça le [l'auteur du texte] force*

à faire des fautes [...] "je lui ai seulement + seulement tell" [...] en fait tu vois "ils vont te louk bizarrement" + tu vois "ils vont te louk" + c'est "to look" + pourquoi lui il écrit euh + avec O.U. [...] + "ils vont me spik" + pourquoi il est obligé de faire une faute sur "spik" alors que "spik" c'est + c'est "to speak" [...] c'est de l'anglais [...] + mais lui il écrit + "quelqu'un me spik" S.P.I.K. "pour me ask" + "ask" c'est bien mais "spik" [...] + moi j'aurais écrit "me speak" S.P.E.A.K. [...] + "vous ne vous speaké pas" + moi j'aurais mis E.Z.

- Emmanuel: it's a good example of nonsense but: [laughter]
 Suzie: nonsense + what do you mean by nonsense
 Emmanuel: camfranglais + well when I read that it forces him [the author of the text] to make mistakes [...] + "je lui ai seulement + seulement tell" [I just told him] actually you see "ils vont te louk bizarrement" [they will look at you weirdly] + you see "ils vont te louk" + it is "to look" + why does he write O.U. + "ils vont me spik" [they are going to speak with me] + why does he have to make a mistake for "spik" although speak is "to speak" + it's English + but HE writes "quelqu'un me spik" S.P.I.K. [someone speaks to me] "pour me ask" [and asks me] + "ask" is good but "spik" + I would have written "me speak" S.P.E.A.K. + "vous ne vous speaké pas" [you don't speak to each other] + I would have put E.Z.

The speaker makes an iconic and direct link (Irvine & Gal 2000) between the use of francanglais and the incompetence of the writer in his practice of French, as if the use of francanglais betrayed an essential (and necessarily negative) characteristic of the writer. Indeed, "[b]ecause linguistic varieties are indexical signs of those who speak them and of the situations in which they are used, devaluing a form means devaluing its speaker." (Gal 2009: 38). Thus, by evaluating this text with reference to standard languages, and by describing it as deviant from these norms, the speaker enacts another trope of slang (see Agha 2015). According to him, the lack of a standardised spelling in francanglais, resulting from the original spelling of the words borrowed from English, is both an index of the inferior status of this register and of the linguistic incompetence of the writer ("*c'est un bon exemple de n'importe quoi*", "*ça le force à faire des fautes*"). In another passage of the same interview, he explicitly says that the use of francanglais often hides shortcomings in French among the speakers ("*ça traduit la familiarité entre les gens + et souvent ça cache aussi des lacunes en français*"). Therefore, he typifies a stereotypic figure of the francanglais speaker as a bad speaker of French, which is a very common stereotype in public discourses, particularly in schools and in the media (see Féral 2012). However, the linguistic phenomena that Emmanuel interprets as mistakes can be explained by sociolinguistic factors.

First, the use of truncations and abbreviations is typical of the written language on the internet, a medium less constrained than formal texts, which therefore gives more freedom

to writers. Besides, I have described before (see Telep 2013) how Cameroonian speakers who write in some forums of the Diaspora usually simplify the spelling of words borrowed from English by reducing the English diphthongs into monophthongs. This vocalic reduction can be related to the same phenomenon in pidgin-English (*speak* > *spik*). This strategy can also be explained by the speakers' wish to transcribe the French pronunciation of vowels (*look* > *louk*). I also noticed that many speakers, who wrote on these forums regularly, wrote on other pages about intellectual, spiritual or political issues, with an excellent command of standard written French. Therefore, it seems that, for Emmanuel, what is tolerated for the oral code is not tolerated for the written code. By taking this normative stance, the speaker aligns with a firmly anchored ideology in Cameroonian society, conveyed not only by the media but also by some linguists and teachers. According to this ideology, the regular practice of francanglais could be an obstacle to the good command of standard French. This depreciating discourse is intimately related to the socio-historical power relationships between the Cameroonian people and French people. In many African French speaking countries, French is one of the official languages inherited from colonisation, and the mythical standard French language is therefore valued as the legitimate, pure and ideal language, as opposed to the other registers of French. Besides, the distance between the oral code and the written code can also explain the normative positionings observed towards the written extracts that Emmanuel, like the other interviewees, had to comment on: the written language is thus implicitly perceived as the norm of the proper language.

5. Conclusion

In light of these analyses, we can say that francanglais is more than a situational linguistic variety used in specific contexts. Therefore it cannot be merely described in a repertoire-based view of registers. It is mainly a set of culturally shared language ideologies that assign specific social values to recognisably marked linguistic forms. These values are opposed to those assigned to French in Cameroon. Indeed, many tropes of slang in the discourses of my interviewees can be found in the discourses analysed by other researchers who also studied representations about francanglais in Cameroon (Shröder 2003; Ngo Ngok-Graux 2010). Therefore, we can assume that these tropes of slang index commonly shared socio-cultural stereotypes about this register, which are based on the (implicit or explicit) fundamental dichotomy between the *up* and the *down* (Bourdieu 1983: 101). This spatial metaphor coincides with other dichotomies such as bourgeois/working class, refined/vulgar, or well-mannered/rude. These oppositions are commonly associated with argot, which can be defined as “the lower class language *par excellence*” (“*la langue populaire par excellence*”; Bourdieu 1983: 101). Categorising francanglais as an argot is thus a way of indexing its lower social position in the Cameroonian symbolic market, whereas the official languages inherited from colonisation, French and English, are highly valued. This ideological dimension has consequences for the language practices of the speakers, particularly of immigrants. Indeed, I observed that speakers tend to practice francanglais less frequently in France than in Cameroon. Their discourses and their linguistic behaviour show that they feel more or less under pressure from the ideology of standard French, and that they are aware of the inequality between the social values

attached to francanglais as opposed to those attached to the French language in Cameroon and in France.

References

- Agha, Asif. 1999. Register. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. 9 (1/2). 216-219.
- Agha, Asif. 2005. Voice, footing, enregisterment. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15 (1). 38-59.
- Agha, Asif. 2007. *Language and social relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Agha, Asif. 2015. Tropes of slang. *Signs and Society* 3, (2). 306-330.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The dialogic imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Biloua, Edmond. 2003. *La langue française au Cameroun*. Berne: Peter Lang.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1983. Vous avez dit populaire ?. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 46 (1). 98-105.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and symbolic power*. G. Raymond & M. Adamson (translation). Cambridge: Polity.
- Canut, Cécile. 2001. À la frontière des langues : figures de la démarcation. *Cahiers d'études africaines*. 163-164. 443-464.
- Féral, Carole de. 2006. Décrire un "parler jeune" : le cas du camfranglais (Cameroun). *Le français en Afrique* 21. 257-265.
- Féral, Carole de. 2007. Ce que parler *camfranglais* n'est pas : de quelques problèmes posés par la description d'un "parler jeune" (Cameroun). In Auzanneau, M. (ed), *La mise en oeuvre des langues dans l'interaction*, 259-276. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- Féral, Carole de. 2010. "Pourquoi on doit speak comme les white ?" : appropriation vernaculaire du français chez les jeunes au Cameroun. In Drescher, M. & Neumann-Holzschuh, I. (eds.), *La syntaxe de l'oral dans les variétés non-hexagonales du français*, 53-64. Tübingen : Stauffenburg.
- Féral, Carole de. 2012. "Youth Languages": a useful invention ?. *Langage & Société* 141. 21-46.
- Gadet, Françoise. 1992. *Le français populaire*. Paris: PUF
- Gal, Susan. 2009. Language and political space. In Auer, P. & Schmidt, J.E. (eds.), *Language and Space*, 33-50. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Gal, Susan & Irvine, Judith. 2000. Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. In P. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of language: ideologies, politics, and identities*, 35-84. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Goudaillier, Jean-Pierre. 2001. *Comment tu tchatches! Dictionnaire du français contemporain des cités*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.
- Irvine, Judith. 2001. "Style" as distinctiveness: the culture and ideology of linguistic differentiation. In Eckert, P. & Rickford, J. (eds.), *Style and sociolinguistic variation*, 21-43. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lafage, Suzanne. 2002. Le lexique français de Côte-d'Ivoire : appropriation et créativité. *Le français en Afrique*, 16-17(2). 226-229.
- Ngo Ngok-Ngraux, Elisabeth. 2010. *Le camfranglais, un parler urbain au Cameroun : attitudes, représentations, fonctionnement linguistique pour un apparemment typologique*, PhD thesis. University of Provence.

- Schröder, Anne. 2003. *Status, functions, and prospects of Pidgin English. An empirical approach to language dynamics in Cameroun*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Telep, Suzie. 2014. Le camfranglais sur Internet: pratiques et représentations. *Le Français en Afrique* 28. 28-145.
- Telep, Suzie. 2017. Le “parler jeune”, une construction idéologique: le cas du *francanglais* au Cameroun. *Glottopol* 29. 27-51.