



**HAL**  
open science

# Indigenous languages: use and attitude in anglophone and francophone Cameroon

Liliane Hodieb

► **To cite this version:**

Liliane Hodieb. Indigenous languages: use and attitude in anglophone and francophone Cameroon. *Sociétés Plurielles*, 2024, Les sciences sociales entre universalisme et différentialisme: le retour des écoles nationales ?, 8, pp.144-169. 10.46298/societes-plurielles.2024.14687 . hal-04760677

**HAL Id: hal-04760677**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04760677v1>**

Submitted on 6 Nov 2024

**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.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

# Indigenous languages: use and attitude in anglophone and francophone Cameroon

Liliane Hodieb

Postdoctoral researcher in linguistics at Inalco

*I am grateful to George Alao for his valuable comments.*

One of the aspects of African life which has been negatively impacted by colonialism is culture. Language conveys a people's culture; therefore, despoiling a people of their language is dispossessing them of their culture. If the definition given by the Oxford English Dictionary<sup>1</sup> of "culture"—"the ideas, customs and social behavior of a particular people or society"—is anything to go by, then it is precisely these elements that have been corrupted by the imposition of foreign cultures on Africans, especially foreign languages. The case of Cameroon is peculiar as the territory was colonized by two powers (France and Great Britain), each occupying a different portion of the territory. Consequently, two cultures different from the indigenous Cameroonian culture settled on the geographical space, and their cohabitation was hardly peaceful. When Richard Bjornson (1991) mentions, for instance, that Westerners are essentially individualistic, while a strong sense of community characterizes African societies, a cultural clash is highly expected. And one of the most harmful effects of this clash is the negative attitude adopted towards indigenous languages by Cameroonians, who like many Africans, are often made to believe that what is foreign is better, especially when it comes from "White" people.

---

1. Online. Accessed: 23th March 2021.

Several authors: Frantz Fanon, (1952) and Ngugi wa Thiongo, (1986) to Chika Ezeanya-Esiobu, (2019) have described this depreciation vis-à-vis indigenous culture. Recurrent terms associated with the representation of Africans as far as their languages are concerned, include “backwardness”, “savagery” and “primitiveness”. Consequently, there has been the desire to abandon African languages for English, French, German or Portuguese. In Cameroon, language attitude and use with respect to indigenous languages are not homogenous. Indeed, there is a dichotomy between Anglophone Cameroon and the practice in the Francophone region, a phenomenon which, as we will see, is the extension and the repercussion of the difference between British and French colonial systems of administration.

By revealing the complexity of the Cameroonian context, this paper sets out to shed light on the dichotomy mentioned above. To achieve this purpose, we conducted two surveys, one among Francophone Cameroonians in 2019, and the other in 2020 among Anglophone Cameroonians. The findings of the former survey were recently published<sup>2</sup>. The present paper is structured as follows: in the first part, the geographical, historical, political and sociolinguistic contexts of Cameroon are presented. In the second, the two surveys are examined, and they are discussed in the third part in light of the Social Identity Theory. The final section highlights the cultural hybridism of Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians.

## The Cameroonian context

Geographically speaking, Cameroon has a surface area of 475,642 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 27 million people<sup>3</sup>. It is often referred to as “Africa in miniature”, because of the diverse types of relief, vegetation, soils, and its cultural and linguistic diversity: mountains, valleys, basins, plateaus, inselbergs, cliffs, are all part of the panorama<sup>4</sup>. Besides, three of the four African language phyla are found in the country, namely, Niger-Congo, Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan. Also, the western region of Cameroon bordering the East and South of Nigeria constitutes the cradle of Bantu languages and their point of expansion to East and South Africa<sup>5</sup>.

---

2. HODIEB, 2020.

3. Source: The World Bank - Population, total - Cameroon | Data (worldbank.org). Retrieved on 29th January 2024.

4. FODOUOP & ATANGANA, 2010.

5. MOUGIAMA-DAOUDA, 2005.

More than 250 indigenous languages are spoken in Cameroon<sup>6</sup>, most of which under-documented, a number already extinct, and many endangered<sup>7</sup>. It is interesting to note that most of the severely endangered languages are spoken in the Anglophone region, i.e. the North-West and South-West, according to the UNESCO's *Atlas of the world languages in danger*. One explanation for this is that, for a long time, this region was neglected by linguists particularly because of the extremely mountainous relief that make access to the villages difficult. Another explanation could be that since Anglophones are the minority and moreover are marginalized, there was almost no interest in them. However, this is now changing and linguistic descriptions on languages of the Anglophone region are gradually increasing. Apart from English and French which are the official languages, and the indigenous languages which are "national" languages with no official status, Pidgin English is a major language, to the extent that it has become a *lingua franca* primarily among Anglophones and to a lesser extent in the Francophone region, where it is mostly used in informal contexts. It is not mentioned in the constitution and therefore has no officially recognized status.

It would be hard to understand the relationship between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon without making references to the Colonial past, hence the need of a brief historical account. The one that follows is taken from Albert Pascal Temgoua & Zacharie Saha<sup>8</sup>.

Before the arrival of the colonizing powers, missionaries were already present in the country. In 1843, the Baptist Missionary Society of London established itself on the coast in the southern region. The work of evangelization and literacy was undertaken in the Duala language. The British influence on Cameroonian territory diminished gradually, while it increased in neighboring Nigeria. The Duala chiefs, fearing that their relations with Britain would dissolve completely, petitioned the British Prime Minister Gladstone in 1881 for annexation to the English territories. Faced with the procrastination of the British who could not agree on a decision to annex Cameroon, the Duala chiefs turned to the Germans whose influence was growing on the coast.

On 12th July 1884, the German-Duala Treaty was signed between German traders and some coastal chiefs. This treaty placed Cameroon under the protection of the German Empire and therefore obliged the English to liberate the territory. German trade was prosperous in Cameroon until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

---

6. FODUOP & ATANGANA, 2010.

7. Source: UNESCO's *Atlas of the world languages in danger*.

8. TEMGOUA & SAHA, 2010.

The defeat of Germany put an end to her domination in Cameroon and from 1914 to 1916, the French and the British established a Franco-British condominium. A division that was first ratified by the Treaty of Versailles of 28th June 1919, then by the London Convention in 1922, which placed Cameroon under the mandate of the League of Nations. France occupied most of the territory (about 70%), while Great Britain took the rest. On 1st January 1960, French Cameroon gained independence by referendum. British Cameroon was administratively divided into two regions: Northern Cameroon and Southern Cameroon.

On 1st June 1961, Northern Cameroon became independent and voted to join Nigeria, while Southern Cameroon joined French Cameroon. On 1st October 1961 British and French Cameroon formed the Federal Republic of Cameroon and on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1972, the Federal Republic became the United Republic of Cameroon, with French and English as the two official languages.

Regarding the colonial practice, French colonial administration adopted the *politique d'assimilation* for all its colonies, which was totally different from the "Indirect Rule" applied by the British. The "Indirect Rule" was a system of indirect administration through which Great Britain entrusted the indigenous authorities with the task of administering the local population. However, it was the British authorities who determined the main guidelines. In addition, they kept control over trade and the exploitation of economic and mineral resources. On the other hand, France applied the *code de l'indigénat* which implied the use of forced labor. Also, given that they were subjected to a special justice, Cameroonians only partially benefited from fundamental freedoms and had to obey a police regime controlled by the French authorities. Apart from these direct or indirect political domination of the colonized populations, there was also a strong will on the part of France and Britain to spread their culture, so much so that the official use of indigenous languages was forbidden in the French territory, particularly, to the benefit of French, which was the only language allowed in the educative system<sup>9</sup>. Michael Crowder emphasizes that the two colonial administrative systems were of different *kind* rather than *degree*<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, even though both of them made use of "chiefs", they were used in different ways. Moreover, "the nature of the position and power was totally different, and as a corollary, so were the relations between the chief and the political officer who was inspired in each case by very different ideals"<sup>11</sup>. Crowder

---

9. TEMGOUA & SAHA, 2010, p. 84-86.

10. CROWDER, 1964, p. 197.

11. *Ibid.*

further suggests that “[t]he British [...] believed that it was their task [i.e. that of the chiefs] to conserve what was good in indigenous institutions and assist them to develop on their own lines. The relationship between the British political officer and the chief was in general that of an adviser [...] [On the other hand,] the French system placed the chief in an entirely subordinate role to the political officer”<sup>12</sup>. In the same line, Félix Nicodème Bikoï<sup>13</sup> describes British colonialism as less harsh (“*moins rude*”) than French colonialism. Thus, although both colonial powers shared the same objective of making the most of the colonies’ resources while expanding their civilization, their methods were fundamentally different. Therefore, we can assume that the effects of the two colonial systems equally differ. This is precisely what our two surveys reveal.

## The surveys

Two surveys were created and submitted online through Google forms by the author of this paper. The first survey was conducted in 2019 among Francophone Cameroonians, some of whom live in France, but were all raised in Cameroon. The second targeted Anglophone Cameroonians. The aim of the two surveys was to gain a better knowledge and understanding of the contrast between young English-speaking and French-speaking Cameroonians, in terms of their use of and attitudes towards language.. All respondents met the primary requirement which was that they had to have grown up in Cameroon. The average age of the participants was 31 for Francophones and 26 for Anglophones. Thirty-two people responded to the first survey and 35 to the second. Although these are not huge numbers, the results are quite interesting and meaningful. A selection of the most relevant questions and responses (from both surveys) can be found in the appendix. They allow for a comparison between the reactions of Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians. Questions in English were addressed to Anglophones and in French to Francophones. In the following section, we analyze the findings and propose an interpretation of them. The reader may refer to the appendix for a detailed presentation of both questionnaires.

---

12. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

13. BIKOÏ, 2008, p. 5.

## Discussion

### Findings

Right from the response to the first question [*“What is your Mother Tongue?”*], the difference between Anglophones and Francophones is striking. When the responses are added together in the Francophone survey, 51.4% claim to have a Cameroonian language as their mother tongue, while the rest, that is 42%, consider French as their mother tongue. This contrasts sharply with the responses given by the Anglophone participants, of which the vast majority, i.e., 91.4% consider a Cameroonian language as their mother tongue. However, one fundamental question pertains to the definition of mother tongue. For some respondents, it is the language of their parents even if they themselves know only two or three words in the language. For others, it is the language they feel the most attached to even if they do not speak it. Generally, it is the first language they have grown up hearing but not necessarily speaking. It is indeed difficult to give a single definition to the term “mother tongue”. Carol Benson<sup>14</sup> has stressed that “there is a need to pluralise the Skutnabb-Kangas<sup>15</sup> definitions of mother tongues:<sup>16</sup> [...] such that they are languages that one: (a) has learnt first; (b) identifies with or is identified with by others; (c) knows best; and/or (d) uses most [...] We can add (e) languages that one speaks and understands completely enough to learn age-appropriate academic content”.

Admittedly, given the plurality of definitions of the term, there is some ambiguity in the responses to the first question that would be impossible to clear unless a single definition was given at the beginning of the investigation to which the participants had to adjust. But that is actually what we tried to avoid, i.e., responses that were too much controlled. We rather wanted the participants to be themselves and as spontaneous as possible. And although we do not know which definition(s) of mother tongue their answer to the first question was based on, the rest of the survey provides more information.

The second question reveals that only 12.5% of the Francophone respondents can speak a Cameroonian language very well, while 68.6% of Anglophones do so. These results are directly linked to those of the fifth question, concerning the language that was used the most at home when they were younger. The responses are more

---

14. BENSON, 2014, p. 15.

15. SKUTNABB-KANGAS, 2000, p. 105-108.

16. The characters are originally in italics.

astonishing, particularly when we compare the two groups: French was the mostly used language for 93.8% in the Francophone group while for the Anglophones a Cameroonian language was mostly used for the majority, i.e., 57.1%; for 37.1% of them it was English. This gives us a clearer idea of the place of indigenous vs. European languages even in homes. It has been pointed out in previous research (for example, Julia Messina<sup>17</sup>, cited by Alliance Fidèle Abegue<sup>18</sup>) that French is drastically supplanting Cameroonian languages in the Francophone region, to the extent that even the last sphere where indigenous languages could still exist, i.e., the family circle, is also being taken over by a “foreign” language. This is particularly the case in urban areas. However, in rural areas the situation is less tragic, as indigenous languages are still dominant there. For example, in the Oumrayi village in the Adamawa province which is geographically close to the north, Wawa, a Mambiloid language, and Fulfulde are spoken by all the villagers, while “French is only spoken by few who have attended or are attending school”<sup>19</sup>. Thus, the domination of the French language seems to be a phenomenon specific to urban areas, where the influence of Western culture, especially through TV and social media, is considerable. As Regina Acholonu<sup>20</sup> emphasizes it, mass media in developing countries foster the transmission of Western culture and hence the subjugation of the black race. In many of these countries, foreign programs dominate. The author gives the example of Nigeria where over 50% of television programs are imported. An inescapable consequence is the perpetuation of cultural imperialism, which was described by Ngugi (1993)<sup>21</sup> as extremely dangerous.

It is also interesting to see from the responses to the fourth and fifth questions that the Anglophone community has this peculiarity: besides a Cameroonian language and a European language, Pidgin English is another major component of their linguistic repertoire. Thus, we have here a ternary configuration instead of a binary one. The majority of Francophone Cameroonians speak French with their parents (90.3%), while the majority of Anglophone Cameroonians use an indigenous language (71.4%). Only 9.7% Francophone respondents use an indigenous language with their parents. For Anglophones respondents, 20% use English and 8.6% Pidgin English with their parents. Interestingly and conversely, with siblings,

---

17. MESSINA, 2013.

18. ABEGUE, 2018.

19. MARTIN, 2012, p. 35.

20. ACHOLONU, 2011, p. 1.

21. NGUGI, 1993.



Pidgin English is used by 28.6% while 40% use English and 31.4% a Cameroonian language. For Francophones, there is almost no difference between the language used with parents and the one used with siblings: the vast majority speaks French in both cases. These results show that French indeed prevails by far in the Francophone community, whether with parents or siblings, whereas the indigenous language is nearly nonexistent in the family. On the other hand, for Anglophones, the indigenous language is largely preferred with parents; it is quite used with siblings too, although to a lesser extent, together with English and Pidgin English. It is necessary to mention that Pidgin English is the *lingua franca* across the Anglophone region. In other words, it is the language of wider communication. It is spoken by everybody, while English is spoken only by the educated ones, i.e., those who went to school and those with a high socioeconomic status.

Concerning the attachment issue raised in the seventh question, the complexity of the relationship between the languages involved on one hand, and between the speakers and these languages on the other hand, is revealed. The majority of the Francophone respondents (59.4%) felt more attached to French than to any other language. This is directly linked to the fourth and fifth questions whose responses inform us that French was used by at least 90% in homes and in everyday life, since French is the language of wider communication in Francophone Cameroon. It is also linked to the third question, which affirms that only 12.5% spoke a Cameroonian language well. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the attachment was stronger with French than with any indigenous language, which was totally absent from home and barely used in their daily lives. However, what is disconcerting is the fact that although the majority felt more attached to French than to a Cameroonian language, paradoxically, they considered a Cameroonian language as their mother tongue, even though they did not speak it. A more intriguing fact is that some were not even able to answer the question as they did not know which language they were attached the most. I discuss and try to explain this paradox in<sup>22</sup>.

Among Anglophone Cameroonians, the presence of Cameroonian Pidgin English in addition to English and indigenous languages makes the picture a bit more complex. First, one interesting difference with their Francophone compatriots is that none of them chose the answer “I don’t know” to the question related to attachment. This suggests that, unlike with Francophones, there is no confusion. Nevertheless, the competition between the three languages is no less delicate. Forty percent have the same attachment with both English and a Cameroonian language, 20% with

---

22. HODIEB, 2020.

both Pidgin English and a Cameroonian language, 20% with Pidgin English and English, 17% feel mostly attached to a Cameroonian language only, while the rest, very few, felt a stronger attachment with Pidgin English. Another remarkable difference between the two groups is that no Anglophone respondent felt attached to English only whereas the majority of Francophones (59.4%) felt mostly attached to French only. It should be noted that most participants were educated Cameroonians, which may explain the strong identification with English. However, for both groups the dominant feeling is shared between two languages. Two possible interpretations could be that they are divided between the two languages in a more or less confused way, or that they are implicitly acknowledging a cultural hybridism to which they belong. Richard Bjornson already pinpointed this cultural hybridism among Africans, resulting from the contact between African and European values<sup>23</sup>. He added that, while it is not unusual to find hybrid cultures, they can produce serious identity conflicts, especially if the two cultures involved are poles apart.

In the last two questions, it is obvious that almost all the participants, both Anglophones and Francophones, would like their children to learn and speak a Cameroonian language, the most recurrent reason being linked to identity and culture preservation. While 100% are in favor of this idea among Anglophones, a tiny yet significant minority (3.2%) among Francophones did not find it necessary, therefore rejected the idea. This and other evidence earlier stated allows the conclusion that there is a stronger attachment to Cameroonian indigenous languages within the Anglophone community than is the case within the Francophone community. In other words, in the contemporary Cameroonian context, most Francophones identify more with French than with indigenous languages; indeed, most of them cannot speak any indigenous language and even consider French as their mother tongue. The reverse is observed for Anglophones: the majority speaks an indigenous language very well and consider it their mother tongue. They also strongly identify with indigenous languages. It would be difficult to understand this dichotomy unless we go back to the colonial era, where, as discussed in the first part, because the French and British systems which were of different kinds, they resulted in different cultural and linguistic heritages, and ultimately in a hybrid culture. Each shaped the community they found themselves in (Francophone and Anglophone) differently. The respective colonial background of each region as well as the postcolonial context has somehow perpetuated this dichotomy. As Anne Schröder suggests<sup>24</sup>, cultural hybridism represents a challenge to theories of social

---

23. BJORNSON, 1991.

24. SCHÖDER, 2009, p. 50.

identity, especially for Francophone Cameroonians who are more likely to have built their identity on the colonial model rather than on indigenous languages.

## Social Identity Theory

Each individual belongs to one or more groups, based on their nationality, ethnic background, race, or on their interests like sports, music, etc. Thus, one's identity is also determined by the group(s) one belongs to. Indeed, no one exists out of groups and, even though some groups, like race and ethnicity, can be totally independent of our will or choice, they are inherently part of us. Others can be intentionally chosen, for example, the type of sports club or the political party one belongs to. Daan Scheepers and Naomi Ellemers stress that we are not only part of groups but these groups are also part of us. In other words, "group membership (partly) defines [our] identity and tells us who we are (and who we are not). Relatedly, groups also partly determine our feelings<sup>25</sup>". Henri Tajfel, who introduced the Social Identity Theory (henceforth SIT) in the 1970s, argues that "[t]he thoughts and feelings that arise when you think about the groups you belong to form your social identity". SIT consists of two parts:

- a psychological part that "describes the cognitive processes underlying social identity definition and the motivational assumption that people strive for a positive social identity";
- a socio-cultural part describing "how people cope with negative social identity<sup>26</sup>".

In this section we will assess these two points as far as the Anglophone and Francophone communities of Cameroon are concerned, and in the light of the above discussions.

It is well known, and it is also a principle of SIT, that the mother tongue is intimately linked to identity. As mentioned above, although the notion of mother tongue is generally presented as something that can only be single, i.e., one mother tongue, the plurality of mother tongues is also a reality. As far as Anglophone Cameroonians are concerned, the majority considers a Cameroonian language as their mother tongue. At the same time, a certain number of them feel equally attached to their indigenous language and to English. In other words, English is their second mother tongue, even

---

25. SCHEEPERS and ELLEMERS, 2019, p. 129.

26. TAJFEL, 1978, p. 63, cited by SCHEEPERS & ELLEMERS, 2019, p. 129.

though they did not explicitly state this in the survey. This means that they equally identify with both languages. On the other hand, the majority of Francophones claim to have a Cameroonian language as their mother tongue —even though they do not speak it— yet they feel more attached to French. This is because they actually speak French fluently, more than any other language. This clearly portrays the close relationship between mother tongue and identity, and also the variety of meanings attributable to the notion of mother tongue. Apparently, for Francophone Cameroonians, mother tongue is more about identity, culture, origin and heritage, than linguistic competence or skill. Thus, they claim to have a Cameroonian language (they yet do not speak) as their mother tongue precisely because it is what represents their cultural heritage. As a matter of fact, as Ngugi<sup>27</sup> explains:

Every language has two aspects. One aspect is its role as an agent that enables us to communicate with one another [...] The other is its role as a carrier of the history and the culture built into the process of that communication over time [...] The two aspects are inseparable; they form a dialectal unity. However, either of these two aspects can become more pronounced than the other, depending on the circumstances surrounding the use of a language.

It is in this sense that for Francophones, particularly the younger generation, the second aspect is undoubtedly dominant. As for the older generation, namely their parents, they speak one or more indigenous languages fluently as their mother tongue(s), not with their children though but with other family members especially their own parents. Although young Francophone Cameroonians are not able to communicate in indigenous languages, they acknowledge the latter as part of their identity and cultural heritage. This ambiguous situation referred to as the “Cameroonian paradox” in the paper entitled “Multilingualism and language attitude: the ‘Cameroonian paradox’”<sup>28</sup>, could more precisely be called the “Francophone Cameroonian paradox”, since in fact this is much less evident in the Anglophone community.

The first assumption of SIT is that people strive for positive social identity, that is “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from knowledge of membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value or emotional significance attached to that membership”<sup>29</sup>. In the Cameroonian context, Anglophones

---

27. NGUGI, 1993, p. 30.

28. HODIEB, 2020.

29. TAJFEL, 1978, p. 63, cited by SCHEEPERS & ELLEMERS, 2019, p. 129.

strive for positive social identity as members of the Anglophone community while Francophones do so as members of the Francophone community. However, the latter's positive social identity is not as much as the Anglophones', since they are the dominant group and are in many ways privileged over the Anglophones who constitute a minority group (less than 30% of the inhabitants) and are discriminated against, a discrimination rooted in the nation's historical background. For example, Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle and Hans De Marie Heungoup highlight the inequity manifested during the unification of the two Cameroons in 1961 and grounded on the Federal Constitution which "did not meet the Anglophone leaders' expectations of federalism"<sup>30</sup>.

Some of the major disadvantages with regard to Anglophone Cameroonians include the centralization of power; the exclusive use of French in military training even though many Anglophones do not speak French; the hiring of Francophone lecturers in Anglophone universities to teach a diversity of disciplines like law, linguistics, etc., whereas Anglophone lecturers in the Francophone region are only allowed to teach English. Mireille Razafindrakoto and François Roubaud also mention the adoption of the CFA Franc (currency) as another sign of contempt against Anglophones and their British colonial legacy<sup>31</sup>. Since the independence, Anglophones have been feeling marginalized and frustrated. A frustration that gave rise to the "Anglophone crisis", a civil war that broke out in 2016, opposing Anglophone secessionists —who want to break away and form their own State— and the predominantly Francophone federal government. This civil war has already caused thousands of deaths and thousands of people have been seeking refuge, especially in Nigeria which shares its eastern border with the Anglophone region of Cameroon. Because Anglophone Cameroonians are the marginalized minority, a negative image and a low status are consequently attached to their group. Emmanuel Kambaja speaks of an asymmetric relationship between the dominant Francophones and the underprivileged Anglophones<sup>32</sup>. He also cites the *Washington Post* newspaper of 2nd June 2017, illustrating one of the stereotypes suffered by the Anglophone community: "Anglophones have historically seen themselves as the big losers from the national distribution of resources". In other words, this suggests that there are "losers" on one hand and "winners" on the other.

According to Tajfel, "there is good deal of evidence [...] that members of groups which have found themselves for centuries at the bottom of the social pyramid some-

---

30. POMMEROLLE & HEUNGOUP, 2017, p. 527-528.

31. RAZAFINDRAKOTO & ROUBAUD, 2018 p. 6.

32. KAMBAJA, 2021, p. 25-26.

times display the phenomenon of 'self-hate' or self-depreciation. The self-depreciation relating to social comparisons with the outside world leads to a variety of internal conflicts<sup>33</sup>. For example, Tajfel mentions the explosion of violence which shook Soweto during the 1970s as undeniably linked to a psychological conflict. The same applies to the Anglophone crisis, however not out of self-depreciation but rather as a strategy to cope with negative social identity. Such strategies concern the second part of the SIT, the socio-structural part. The theory describes three options in case of negative social identity<sup>34</sup>:

- individual mobility, which involves “trying as an individual to seek entrance to a higher status group”;
- collective action, which involves “working as a group for status improvement”;
- to be “socially creative and to change the comparison group”, i.e., the dimension of the comparison.

Violence is a strategy commonly adopted to cope with negative social identity. In this case, it is manifested through the Anglophone crisis. This could further be related to the second option of SIT, namely, the collective action, although such violent actions rarely involve the entire community in question; instead, they are usually carried out by a few people.

Another strategy observed among the Anglophone community is individual assimilation. As the first option stated above shows, trying to access the dominant group through assimilation is also a way for a low status group to deal with its disadvantages<sup>35</sup>. This is reflected in the increasing use by the Anglophone youth of “Camfranglais”, a mixture of local and foreign languages used by young people and which appeared in the Francophone region of the country in the 1980s. As Ojongnkpot<sup>36</sup> puts it, “[it] is recently making its inroads in the Anglophone part”. Camfranglais is characterized by “code-switching, language mixing and extensive borrowing based on French, English, African national languages, Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), Spanish and German<sup>37</sup>...”. Furthermore, it is “a medium of urban

---

33. TAJFEL, 1982, p. 12.

34. SCHEEPERS & ELLEMERS, 2019, p. 133.

35. TAJFEL, 1982, p. 26.

36. OJONGNKPOT, 2017, p. 287.

37. *Ibid.*

identity for the youth<sup>38</sup>. The extensive use of Camfranglais by Anglophones is a likely evidence of their desire to be accepted and integrated into the dominant group, thereby upgrading their status and image. In the example below (1), Ojongnkpot examines the use of Camfranglais by University of Buea students on social media [the translation in Standard English is provided in the square brackets]:

- [...]put sa off de ma tête [keep me out of that]
- tell moi alors le pb now [tell me what the problem is]
- ok no pb [no problem]
- tu as school morrow ? [do you have school tomorrow?]

In the same note, Biloa (n.d.) points out the influence of French on English in Cameroon as fostered particularly by the demographic weight of French speakers, the predominantly francophone administrative and political discourse. Due to the minority status of the Anglophones, there is a strong tendency to gallicize or “francize” Cameroonian English through the increasing borrowing of lexical items, acronyms, and even typical French affixes. According to Biloa, the creation of English neologisms based on French lexical items is significant, and this is the inevitable result of language contact. Below we mention some of his examples<sup>39</sup>.

Cameroonian French	Cameroonian English	Standard English
convoquer	convoke	summon
(in)civisme	(in)civism	(lack of) sense of civic responsibility
fanatisme	fanatism	fanaticism
doléance	doleance	grievance
planification	planification	planning

**Table 1:** Neologisms observed in the Cameroonian Anglophone community (source: Biloa 2006)

It appears from the previous discussion that Cameroonians’ identity is complex. It has been shaped to a great extent by two foreign cultures and different kinds of colonial administration that were led to the formation of an Anglophone community on the one hand, and a Francophone community on the other hand with different

38. *Ibid.*

39. BILOA, 2006, p. 124.

mindsets and ultimately different attitudes towards indigenoussness. Although the attachment to indigenous languages is stronger in the Anglophone community than in the Francophone community, both groups are clearly involved in a complex interplay between their indigenous language, culture and identity, and those inherited from the colonial past.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the surveys conducted on the Cameroonian Francophones and Anglophone communities reveal a significant contrast in language use and language attitude, especially regarding indigenous languages. I assumed that the stronger attachment to indigenous languages in the former group, and the weaker attachment in the latter, are a reflection of the different kinds of colonialism put in place by the British colonial administration who allowed their colonies to develop their local resources, and on the other hand, by French colonialists who were more violent and exclusive, aiming at mentally turning Africans into French people, hence the abandonment of indigenous languages by most Francophone Cameroonians as opposed to their extensive use in the Anglophone community. Also, given the minority and marginalized status of Anglophones, they strive for positive social identity which, according to the Social Identity Theory is a basic need for any group as well as any individual. I submitted that this is done particularly through a continued borrowing of French linguistic expressions, the increasing use of Camfranglais, a mixed language of the urban youth that originated in the Francophone region, and also through violence, portrayed by the Anglophone crisis. Finally, despite this dichotomy, it appears that the identity of both Anglophones and Francophones in Cameroon is profoundly complex.

## References

- ABEGUE Alliance Fidèle, 2018, « Politique éducative camerounaise de promotion des langues locales » in BESSALA Gaston & BISSAYA Euloge (eds.), *Les langues maternelles dans les couples exolingues*, Nouvelles Éditions Numériques Africaines, Sénégal, p. 80-104.
- ACHOLONU Regina, 2011, "Mass media and cultural imperialism: the African experience" in *Madonna International Journal of Research*, vol. 4, n° 68, p. 1-8.

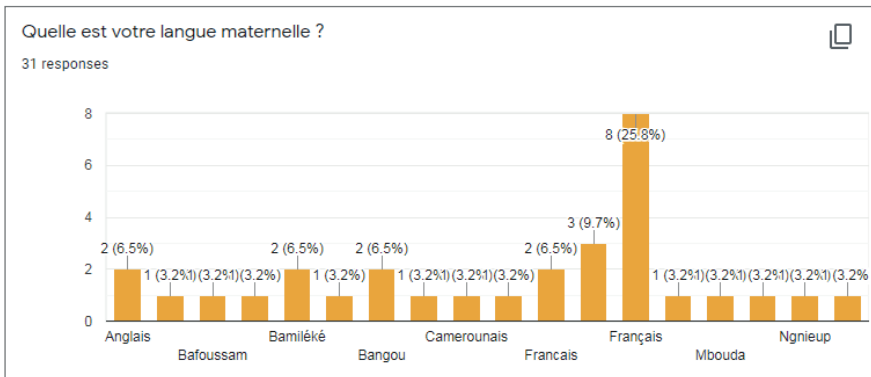
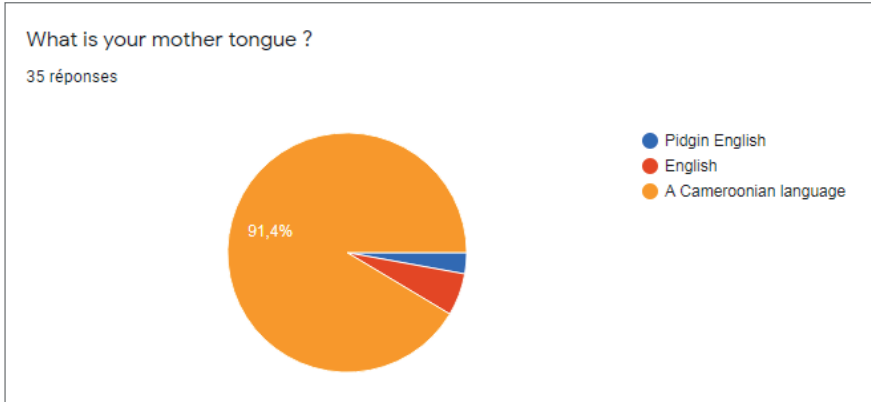


- FENSON Carol, 2014, "Adopting a Multilingual Habitus: What North and South Can Learn From Each Other About the Essential Role of Non dominant Languages in Education" in GORTER Durk, ZENOTZ Victoria & CENOZ Jasone (eds.), *Minority Languages and Multilingualism Education. Bridging the Local and the Global*, Dordrecht, Springer, p. 11-28.
- BIKOÏ Félix Nicodème, 2008, « L'aventure ambiguë d'un pays bilingue. Le cas du Cameroun » in *Documents pour l'histoire du français langue étrangère ou seconde*, n° 40/41, p. 231-240
- BILOA Edmond, 2006, *Le français en contact avec l'anglais au Cameroun*, Lincom Europa, 194 p.
- BJORNSON Richard, 1991, *The African Quest for Freedom and Identity*, Indiana University Press, 528 p.
- CROWDER Michael, 1964, "Indirect Rule: French and British Style" in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 34, n°3, p.197-205.
- EZEANYA-ESIOLU Chika, 2019, *Indigenous knowledge and education in Africa*, Springer Verlag, Singapore, 115 p.
- FANON Frantz, 1952, *Peaux noires. Masques blancs*, Paris, Les éditions du Seuil, 239 p.
- FODOUOP Kegne & ATANGANA Pierre, 2010, « Une diversité du milieu biophysique exceptionnelle » in FODOUOP Kengne (ed.), *Le Cameroun. Autopsie d'une exception plurielle en Afrique*, L'Harmattan, p. 25-44.
- HODIEB Liliane, 2020, "Multilingualism and language attitude: the 'Cameroonian paradox'" in *Ideação. Revista do Centro de Educação, Letras e Saúde*, vol. 22, n° 2, p. 83-96.
- HURST Ellen, 2017, "Rural/Urban Dichotomies and Youth Language" in EBONGUE Augustin Emmanuel (ed.), *Sociolinguistics in African Contexts. Perspectives and Challenges*, Springer, p. 209-224.
- KAMBAJA Emmanuel, 2021, « Stéréotypes sociaux et perturbation des niveaux de communication dans le contexte diglossique camerounais » in HODIEB Liliane (ed.), *Plurilinguisme et tensions identitaires : discours, représentations et médiations*, Éditions des archives contemporaines, p. 19-34.
- MARTIN Marieke, 2012, *A grammar of Wawa. An endangered language of Cameroon*, Thèse de doctorat non publiée, University of Kent, 516 p.

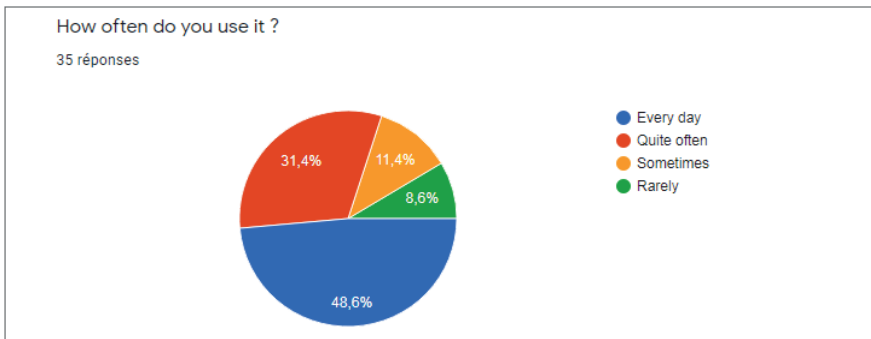
- MOUGUAMA-DAOUDA Patrick, 2005, *Contribution de la linguistique à l'histoire des peuples du Gabon. La méthode comparative et son application au bantou*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 174 p.
- NGUGI Wa Thiongo, 1993, *Moving the Center: the struggle for cultural freedoms*, James Currey, 208 p.
- OJONGNKPOT Comfort Beyang Oben, 2017, "Urban youth language use in social media in Anglophone Cameroon: a morpho-syntactic analysis of Camfranglais among University of Buea students" in EBONGUE Augustin Emmanuel (ed.), *Sociolinguistics in African Contexts. Perspectives and Challenges*, Springer, p. 286-300.
- POMMEROLLE Marie-Emmanuelle & HEUNGOUH Hans De Marie, 2017, "The 'Anglophone crisis': A tale of the Cameroonian Postcolony" in *African Affairs*, vol. 116, n° 464, Oxford University Press, p. 526-538.
- RAZAFINDRAKOTO Mireille & ROUBAUD François 2018, « Sous la crise Anglophone au Cameroun : frustrations politiques et défiance à l'égard des autorités publiques », Document de travail UMR DIAL, p. 1-22.
- TAJFEL Henri, 1982, « Social Psychology of intergroup relations » in *Annual Review of Psychology*, n° 33, p. 1-39.
- TEMGOUA Albert Pascal & SAHA Zacharie, 2010., « Un statut colonial particulier » in FODOUOP Kengne (ed.), *Le Cameroun. Autopsie d'une exception plurielle en Afrique*, L'Harmattan, p. 67-102.
- SCHEEPERS Daan & ELLEMERS Naomi, 2019, "Social Identity Theory" in SASSENBERG Kai & VLIEK Michael L. W. (eds.), *Social Psychology in Action. Evidence-Based Interventions from Theory to Practice*, Springer, p.129-143.
- SCHRÖDER Anne, 2003, *Status, Functions and Prospects of Pidgin English: an empirical approach to language dynamics in Cameroon*, Gunter Narr, 284 p.
- SKUTNABB-KANGAS Tove, 2000, *Linguistic genocide in education – or worldwide diversity and human rights?* New York, Routledge, 824 p.
- UNESCO, 2010, *Atlas of the world languages in danger*, Paris, UNESCO, 222 p.

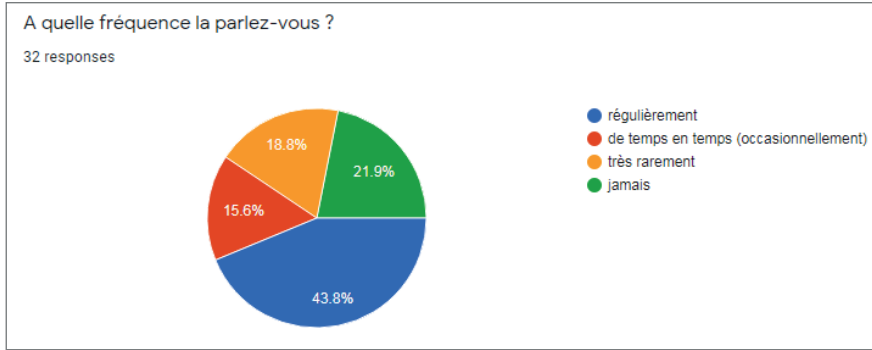
## Appendix

### 1) What is your mother tongue?

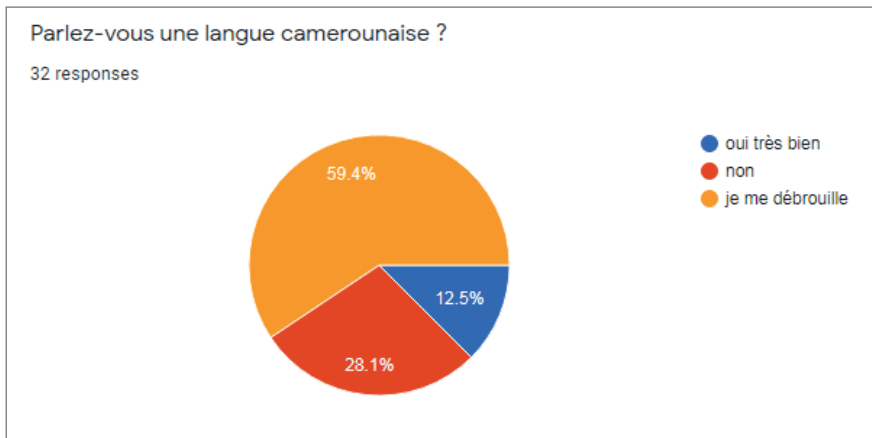
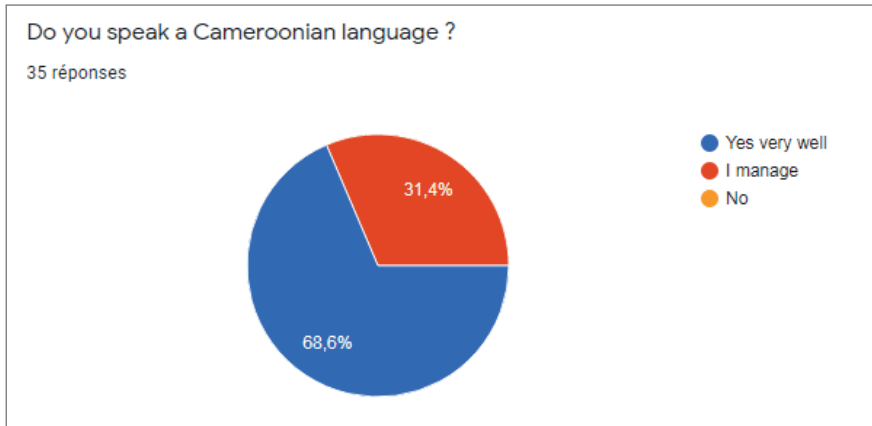


### 2) How often do you use it?

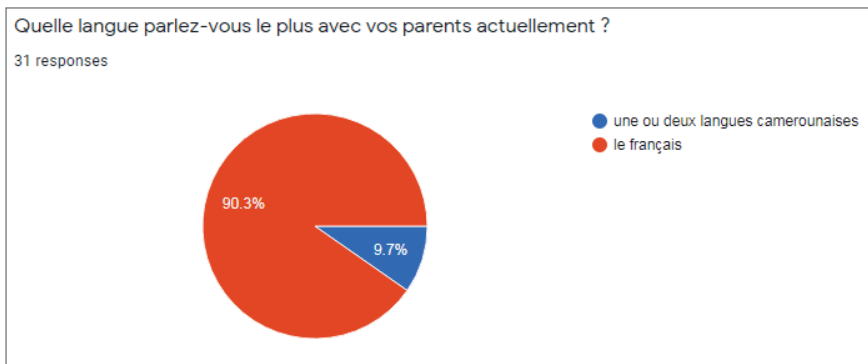
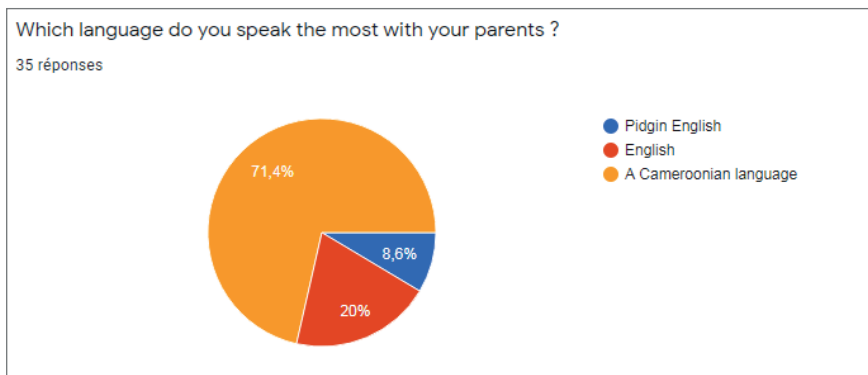




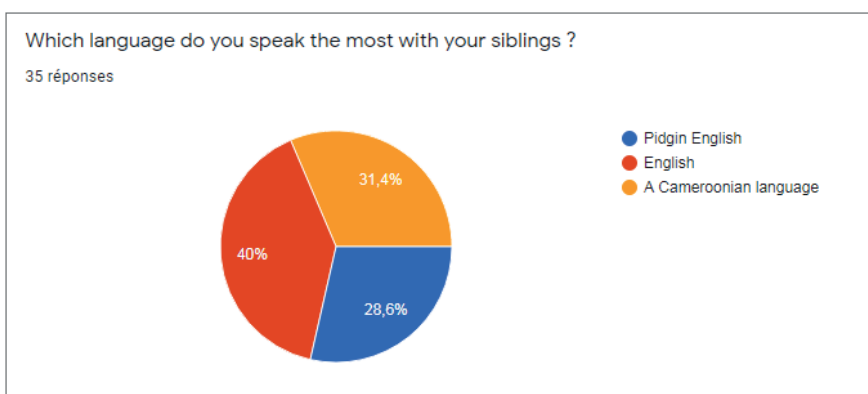
### 3) Do you speak a Cameroonian language?



4) Which language do you speak the most with your parents today?

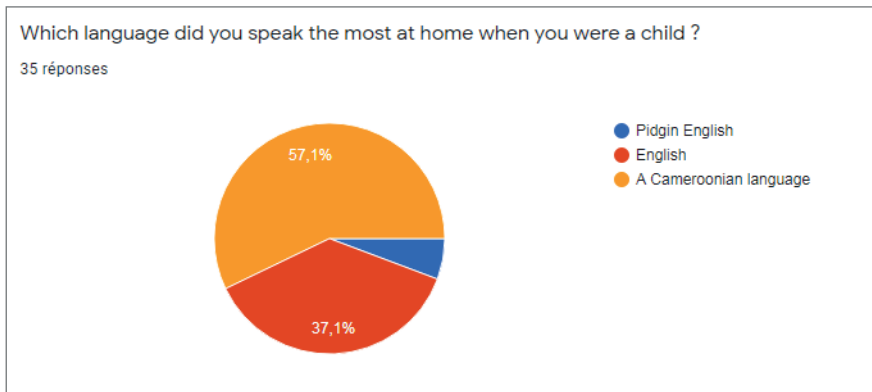


5) Which language do you speak the most with your siblings?

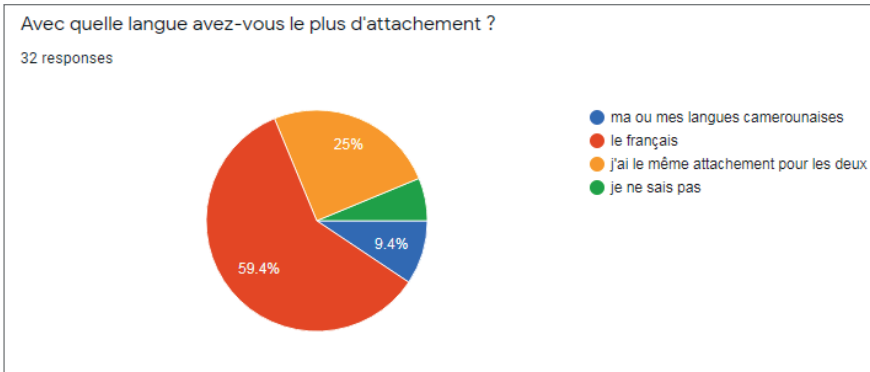
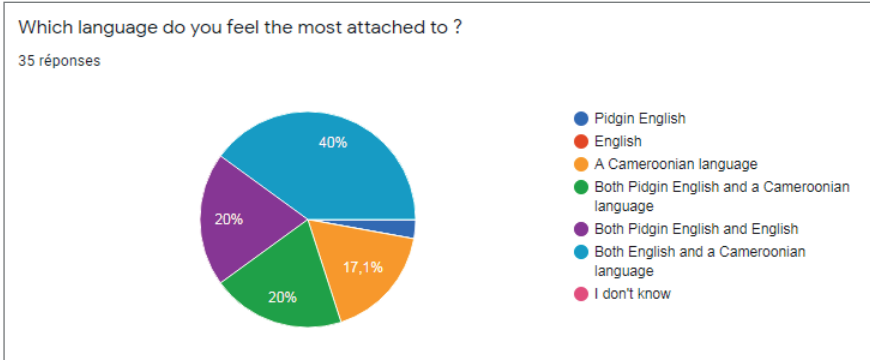




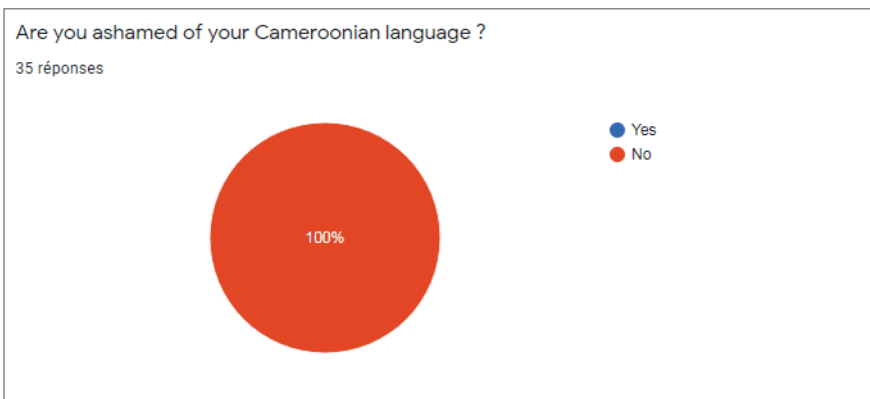
6) Which language did you speak the most at home when you were a child?

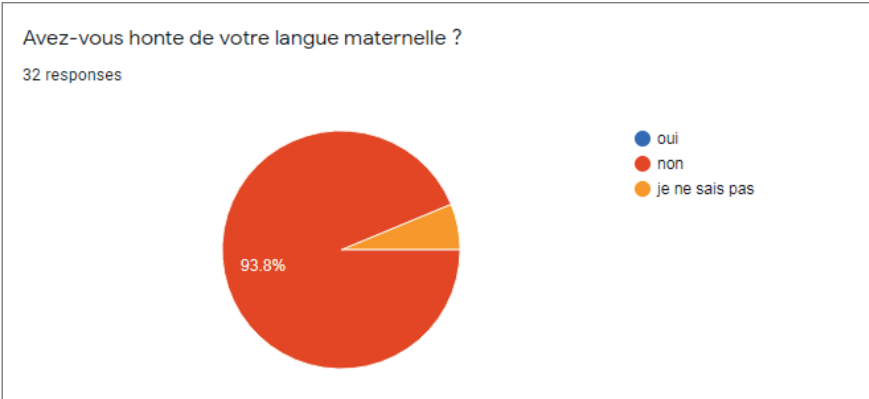


7) Which language do you feel the most attached to?

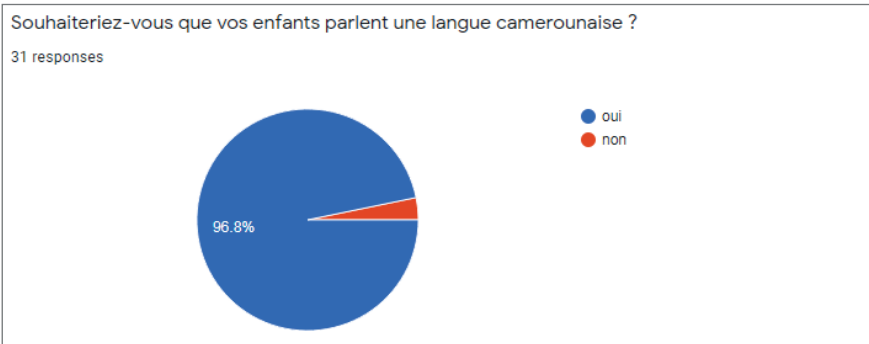
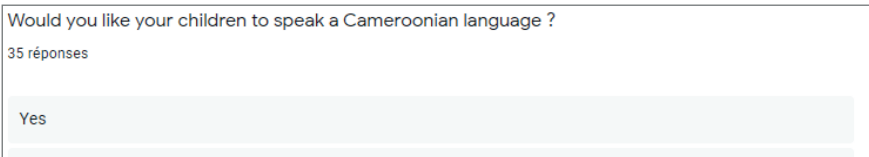


9) Are you ashamed of your Cameroonian language?

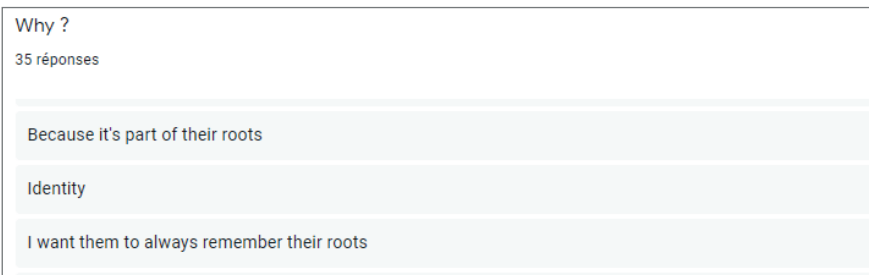




9) Would you like your children to speak a Cameroonian language?



10) Why?





I will like that so much because learning them a cameroonian language(mother tongue) is connecting them to their ancestral roots. And moreover, its very important cuz it helps in hiding information that wasnt meant for strangers

So that they and be identified with the society and the society identifies with them

for a better experience too

It can help sell my culture

a better diversity

Pourquoi ?  
29 responses

Pour apprendre une langue en plus

Parce se sont leur origine

La culture et les racines

Pas oublier leurs racines

Aucune idée

Preservation de la culture

Pour ne pas perdre les racines

C'est sa culture même si il vit en Europe. Et c'est toujours une richesse de parler une autre langue, ça ouvre l'esprit, selon moi.

Ce n'est pas une nécessité

**Abstract:** It is a truism that colonialism had a terrible impact on African indigenous languages. In Cameroon, where more than 250 of languages are spoken, the situation is more complex, as the country was shared between French and British colonial powers. The system of governing implemented during the colonial era was different from one region to the other: whereas the British opted for an “Indirect rule” under which indigenous people were encouraged to govern themselves, while following to the letter the instructions given by British authorities, the French system was stricter, promoting assimilation. Under such conditions, personal as well as collective attachment to indigenous languages was significantly diminished especially in the Francophone part of the country. After independence was proclaimed in 1960, the two Cameroons reunified in 1961, having English and French as their official

languages. However, even more than half a century later, the colonial wraith remains. Two surveys were carried out (2019 and 2020) among both young Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians, on language use and language attitude. They reveal a clear dichotomy that reflects the colonial pattern. As a matter of fact, the surveys show a much greater attachment to indigenous languages among the Anglophones, which is evident in the vigorous upholding of indigenous languages in the family circle, whereas they are alarmingly giving way to the French language in Francophone homes. The results of the surveys are discussed in the light of the Social Identity Theory.

**Keywords:** Indigenous languages, Colonialism, Language policy, Language attitude, Anglophone-Francophone dichotomy, Cameroon.

### *Langues indigènes : usage et attitude dans les régions anglophone et francophone du Cameroun*

**Résumé :** *C'est un truisme de dire que le colonialisme a eu un impact terrible sur les langues indigènes africaines. Au Cameroun, où plus de 250 langues sont parlées, la situation est plus complexe, le pays ayant été partagé entre les puissances coloniales française et britannique. Le système de gouvernance mis en place à l'époque coloniale était différent d'une région à l'autre : les Britanniques ont opté pour un « Indirect rule » qui encourageait les populations indigènes à se gouverner elles-mêmes, tout en suivant les instructions données par les autorités britanniques, le système français plus strict, suivait une politique d'assimilation. Dans ces conditions, l'attachement tant individuel que collectif aux langues indigènes s'est considérablement réduit, surtout dans la partie francophone du pays. Après la proclamation de l'indépendance en 1960, les deux Cameroun se sont réunifiés en 1961, avec l'anglais et le français comme langues officielles. Cependant, même plus d'un demi-siècle plus tard, le spectre colonial demeure. Deux enquêtes ont été menées (2019 et 2020) auprès des jeunes camerounais anglophones et francophones, sur l'utilisation de la langue et l'attitude à l'égard de la langue. Elles révèlent une nette dichotomie qui reflète le modèle colonial. En effet, les enquêtes montrent un attachement beaucoup plus grand aux langues indigènes chez les anglophones, ce qui se traduit par un maintien soutenu des langues indigènes dans le cercle familial, alors que les dans le cercle familial, alors qu'elles cèdent de façon inquiétante la place à la langue française dans les foyers francophones. Les résultats des enquêtes sont discutés à la lumière de la théorie de l'identité sociale.*

***Mots clés :** Langues indigènes, Colonisation, Attitude linguistique, Politique linguistique, Dichotomie francophone-anglophone, Cameroun*