

# AN INVESTIGATION INTO PATTERNS OF LINGUISTIC COMBINATIONS IN MULTILINGUAL CAMEROON

Colvis, NIBA NGWA

University of Yaounde I

colnibs91@gmail.com

## Résumé

*Les tendances actuelles au Cameroun, une nation multilingue, penchent en faveur du fait que la plupart des utilisateurs de langue ont tendance à combiner plus d'une langue lorsqu'ils communiquent. Cette étude s'est penchée sur les diverses combinaisons linguistiques évidentes dans l'utilisation de la langue de la plupart des Camerounais. La recherche actuelle était motivée par le fait qu'il existe deux langues officielles: l'anglais et le français, le pidgin et près de 300 langues indigènes, dont certaines servent de lingua francas (Chia, 1982; Kouega, 1998; Echu, 2003 et Rosendal, 2008), qui sont utilisées pour la communication linguistique sur le territoire national. Les objectifs de cette étude étaient doubles: d'une part, rechercher les schémas de combinaison linguistique les plus récurrents et, d'autre part, expliquer les différents motifs pour lesquels les utilisateurs choisissent ou non de combiner plus d'une langue. Les données de cette étude ont été collectées auprès de 100 informateurs, issus des villes de Yaoundé et Bamenda. Les données ont été obtenues auprès de ces informateurs au moyen d'un questionnaire. Les résultats de l'analyse des données ont révélé que les langues les plus combinées dans le contexte camerounais sont l'anglais et le français, ce qui suggère que la plupart des combinaisons linguistiques se font dans des contextes interlinguistiques impliquant des anglophones et des francophones essayant de faire face aux insuffisances du bilinguisme officiel. Les résultats ont également montré que les utilisateurs combinaient les langues pour de diverses raisons. De là, nous avons conclu que, étant donné le potentiel de communication de toutes les langues, le gouvernement devrait faire un effort plus conscient pour les promouvoir à des niveaux différents.*

**Mots clés :** *Cameroun, multilinguisme, combinaisons linguistiques*

## Abstract

*The current trends in language use in Cameroon, a multilingual nation, tilt in favour of the fact that most users tend to combine more than one language when they communicate. This study probed into the various linguistic combinations evident in the language use of most Cameroonians. The current research endeavour was motivated by the fact that there are two official languages: English and French, Pidgin English and close to 300 indigenous languages, some of which serve as lingua francas (Chia, 1982; Kouega, 1998; Echu, 2003 and Rosendal, 2008), that are readily available for use in linguistic communication within the territory. The objectives of this study were twofold: first, to investigate the most recurrent patterns of linguistic combination and, second, to explain the various motives for which users choose or not to combine more than one language. The data for this study were collected from 100 informants, drawn from the cities of Yaounde and Bamenda. The data was elicited from these informants through the use of questionnaire. The findings from the analysis of the data revealed that the languages that are most combined within the Cameroonian setting are English and French, suggesting*

*that most linguistic combinations are done in cross-linguistic contexts involving Anglophones and Francophones trying to cope with the shortcomings of official bilingualism. The findings equally showed that people combined languages for various reasons. From this, we concluded that, given the communicative potential of all the languages, government should make a more conscious effort to promote them at different levels.*

**Key words:** *Cameroon, multilingualism, linguistic combinations*

## 1. Introduction

The linguistic landscape of Cameroon has a unique complexity, hardly paralleled by that of any other country in the world (Todd, 1982; Simo Bobda and Mbouya, 2005: 2122). In this light, Ngefac (2010: 152) points out that “before colonialism came to make the linguistic situation of Cameroon more complex, this West African nation could already boast of hundreds of indigenous languages and a major lingua franca known today as Kamtok.” This suggests that the advent of colonisation only made the linguistic situation of the country denser, given that, hitherto, many indigenous languages and a lingua franca were already attested. Thus, even though Cameroon is often portrayed as a bilingual nation, since it has English and French as its official languages, it is actually a multilingual nation. The coexistence of different languages suggests that the effects of language contact such as linguistic borrowing, interference, code switching and loan translation are widespread (Echu, 2003).

Literature on language use in Cameroon, generally, points to the fact that these languages mutually exert some influence on one another. Such influence may be from the official languages to the indigenous languages (Bitja’ Kody, 1998), from the indigenous languages to the official languages (Kouega, 1998), from the indigenous languages to Cameroon Pidgin English (Menang, 1979), from the official languages to Cameroon Pidgin English (Mbassi Manga, 1973), from Cameroon Pidgin English to the official languages, that is, English (Kouega, 1998) and French (Echu, 2003), from Cameroon Pidgin English to indigenous languages (Mbangwana, 1999) or from one official language to the other (Kouega, 1999). These studies underscore the fact that such a heterogeneous language situation, in most cases, tends to pose as a major handicap to linguistic communication, especially because there is the absence of a nationwide lingua franca that can serve as a medium of communication within the

national territory. Even though some studies have investigated the motivations for the choice to use a particular language or not (see Ngefac, 2010), very little or nothing has been said about the various combinations a speaker makes in the course of speaking. It is in this light that the current research endeavour sets out to investigate the various patterns of linguistic combinations and, equally explain the reasons for which users choose combine more than one code or not.

## **2. The Politics of Language in Multilingual Cameroon**

Cameroon's multilingual setting is comprised of indigenous languages, Pidgin English, and the two official languages, English and French. With regard to indigenous languages, it has been widely documented that, among the four language families in Africa, three of them are found in Cameroon. They include the Afro-Asiatic language family, the Nilo-Saharan language family and the Niger Kordofanian language family. The Niger-Kordofanian family is the most highly represented in Cameroon, while the Khoisan family is not represented at all (see Chia, 1983; Breton and Fohtung, 1991; Wolf, 2001 and Echu, 2004). They are the most used medium of oral communication. Used in homes, village meetings and traditional councils, these indigenous languages are as many and varied as the number of ethnic groups that make up Cameroon. Linguists are still to agree on the exact number of indigenous languages found in Cameroon for a number of reasons. However, in the literature the number has been placed between 250 and 300 languages (see Rosendal, 2008: 16). The communicative potential of these indigenous languages is pointed out in Rosendal's (2008: 13) assertion that "German and American missionaries preferred Cameroonian languages as Basaa, Bulu, Duala, Ewondo and Mungaka for evangelism and teaching. Bamum and Fulfulde were used for propagating Muslim faith." Following this line of thought, Mforteh (2007: 94), quoting SIL's (2004) report, reveals that 166 of these languages have already been standardised; 36 are being taught in some primary schools; 18 of them now have the translated version of the Holy Bible; 30 of them have the translated version of the New Testament and 30 have translated portions of the Scriptures. The knowledge of the dominant role of indigenous languages in daily communication is relevant to this study in that the indigenous language

is one of the languages found in the linguistic repertoire of most, if not, all Cameroonians. In this light, they can freely combine it with other languages in the course of speaking.

One major language to reckon with in multilingual Cameroon is Pidgin English, also known as Kamtok for many reasons. First, it is no more a pidgin, given that it displays most, if not all, creolistic traits. Second, it transcends most ethnic, educational, geographical, professional, religious and other social boundaries, given that its speakers are not restricted by any of the social boundaries. Third, it has incredible communicative potential, given that it has served communicative needs of Cameroonians for more than five hundred years (Kouega, 2003) and, today, it remains one of the most widely spoken languages in the country (Ngefac, 2010). Lexically, Cameroon Pidgin English or Kamtok draws its features from the colonial languages spoken in Cameroon and the indigenous languages, and many other foreign languages, given that the existence of the language dates as far back as the pre-colonial era. Thus, it has adapted itself significantly to the ecological and sociocultural and pragmatic realities of Cameroon. Functionally, it is a dominant language of wider communication in the English-speaking part of the country. However, it is worth pointing out that it is also used in the West and Littoral Regions, especially in Douala, Nkongsamba, Bafang, Bafoussam and Dschang (Atechi, 2006). Although the language has such a wide range of use, it is still stigmatised against in official and educational circles, as it is often seen as a deterrent to the acquisition of the English language. In fact, Alobwede (1998) insinuates that pidgin is being banned. Whatever the case may be, pidgin is one of the languages which are widely spoken in Cameroon.

Still within this dense multilingual setting, there exist two official languages: English and French. In fact, these are the two languages mentioned in the country's constitution and which have made Cameroon acquire its bilingual status. Although the two languages are supposed to be equal in status, at least as stated in the constitution, the glaring dominance of French over English today cannot be overemphasized as French dominates in administration, in the military and in other official domains. Needless to point out that this exaggerated domination of French in a country that is supposedly

bilingual has often received a lot of disgruntlement from the Anglophone community.

The multilingual nature of Cameroon has often received a lot of attention from scholars, given its rare linguistic composition. Cameroon is a Tower of Babel (Mforteh, 2007) and thus, linguistically, lives up to its name as Africa in miniature. In fact, Todd (1982: 7) asserts that “Cameroon is among the most multilingual nations of the world.” This suggests that the linguistic situation of Cameroon is immensely dense. The resultant effect of this multilingual situation of Cameroon is that many Cameroonians speak three languages, on average. This is because, apart from the two official languages, Chia (1983), quoted in Ngwa (2015: 37), points out that there exist four *lingua francas* in Cameroon, which may not necessarily be the mother tongues of its speakers. These languages of wider communication include Mongo Ewondo (spoken in the Centre and South regions where speakers of the Fang-Beti language group are found); Arab Choa (spoken in the Far North region); Fulfulde (spoken in the Adamawa and North regions) and Pidgin English (dominantly spoken in the South West, North West, West, and Littoral regions). In fact, sociolinguistic investigations on language choice in Cameroon (Simo Bobda, 2001; Echu, 2003; and Ngefac, 2010) tend to suggest that Cameroonians are at liberty to code switch from one language to another, depending on the setting and reason for speaking. Thus, linguistic borrowing, interference, code switching, loan translation, and other manifestations of language contact characterise this particularly dense multilingual situation (Echu, 2003: 1).

### **3. Language Acquisition and Choices in Multilingual Cameroon**

Cameroon has often been referred to in the literature as having a complex sociolinguistic situation, where English co-exists with French, Pidgin English, the indigenous languages and some emerging hybrid idioms such as Camfranglais and Mbokotok (Simo Bobda, 2001 and Ngefac, 2010). According to Simo Bobda (2001: 653), the country offers a particularly fertile ground for the study of patterns of language use and language choices, and the linguistic, social and educational problems that they generate. The choice of language, to begin with, can be made at the level of the state, individual, parental and other levels,

and divergences and conflicts may occur between levels (Simo Bobda, 2001: 658). In this light, it is worth noting that, at the state level, it is known that Cameroon is a bilingual country with English as French as its official languages. In fact, in spite of the numerous languages, these are the two languages enshrined in the country's constitution. The state is thus responsible for the promotion of these languages (see Section 1(3)). Correspondingly, an individual may choose to learn or use a particular language based on the numerous advantages, mostly economic, which come with the learning of a language or languages. In terms of language choice at the level of the individual, the motivation to learn a language is usually very high. With regard to language use by the individual, it is likely that, given that an average Cameroonian speaks at least three languages, the choice of a particular language would depend language on the context of use and the motif for speaking. It is worth noticing that parents have an invaluable role to play in the linguistic choice of their children. This mostly occurs when parents from one linguistic background send their children to study in another subsystem of education, for instance, francophone parents sending their children to study in the Anglophone subsystem of education. Within the Cameroonian setting, such a choice made by parents for their children is usually as a result of the advantages that come with speaking English in our globalised world today (see Kouega, 1999; Anchimbe, 2007; Mforteh, 2007).

Ngefacs's (2010) investigation accurately explores the linguistic choices which are made in Cameroon and explains the factors which favour or hamper the choice of use of a particular language in Cameroon, pointing out that the choice of a language has significant sociolinguistic implications (160ff). With the use of Camfranglais, it was discovered that the language was mostly used among youths and the older generation had no interest in the language. This implies that the older generation may not only be conservative, as they are not open to changes or innovations, but may also consider the language childish and the language of irresponsible children. Thus, age plays a significant role in the choice of the use of Camfranglais in the Cameroon setting, as it is mostly fashionable among youths. The youths use this as an in-group language to assert their identity.

With regard to Cameroon Pidgin English, the findings reveal that, most of the informants would choose this language in order to

express themselves in different areas and with close allies. As for those who were against, they noted that they do not speak Cameroon Pidgin English because it can contaminate their English. It was also revealed that Pidgin English is spoken by people across the different official language backgrounds and across other social boundaries. This implies that the language can seriously unite Cameroonians. This is because as “high as 80% of French-speaking informants and 100% of English-speaking informants above the age of 40 indicated that they use this language as a medium of communication” (Ngefac, 2010: 162). In this light, it can be noted that the choice of pidgin as a medium of communication among Cameroonians is widespread. As concerns the indigenous languages, Ngefac (*ibid*) reports that only 73% of the informants speak their indigenous language. It is worth pointing out that the choice of the indigenous languages is usually associated with ethnic groups. However, Simo Bobda (2001: 654) points out that a series of factors such as demographic weight, political dominance and prestige may also influence the choice of a particular mother tongue.

English and French, the two official languages, are often associated with the two and eight regions respectively where Anglophones and Francophones live. With regard to language choice, those who live in English-speaking regions would speak English, while those who live in French-speaking regions would speak French. This is because the two languages are equal in status, at least, as stated in the constitution. From the plethora of languages, language choice and use in Cameroon is often replete with phenomena such as code-switching, code mixing and interference. Language choice thus gives a researcher the opportunity to see how and in what circumstances people use a particular language. Studies such as Ngefac (2010) and Simo Bobda (2001) have greatly pointed out the circumstances which prompt languages users in Cameroon to choose or acquire a given language. These investigations into the complex phenomenon of language within the Cameroonian context have equally explained the reasons behind the choice of a particular language by users. However, such investigations seem to assume that, even though most Cameroonians are multilingual, they often draw clear cut lines between the various languages they use in given contexts. This may not be true in that the realities of language use in the country clearly show that some users of language tend to combine more than one language when they speak. It is in this light

that the current investigation probes into the various languages that are likely to be combined and seeks to explain the reasons for which an individual may or not to combine different languages.

#### **4. Methodology**

This study was carried out in the cosmopolitan cities of Yaounde and Bamenda. These areas were purposively chosen given that Yaounde is a city dominated by the French language, as it is widely spoken in the area. Due to the bilingual and multicultural nature of the country, there was therefore need to make a balance by equally focusing the study on the English part of the country which is dominated by Anglophones whose popular medium of communication is either English language and/or CPE. Bamenda was chosen to ensure this balance. After a series of methodological considerations, a total of 130 informants from different walks of life, official language background and age groups served as informants for the study. The choice of the informants was motivated by considerations linked to profession, linguistic background and age, especially because these sociolinguistic variables often have a significant influence on a speaker's linguistic output.

A questionnaire was carefully designed to find out, first when the informants combined more than one language when they speak, the various combinations and the reasons for which they do this. In order to make the questionnaire reflect the official bilingual nature of the country, the questions were formulated in the English language and later carefully translated into the French language. The responses in French were later on translated into English, given that it is the language of writing. The questionnaire was administered to 130 informants to enter the required information. Out of the total number of questionnaires administered, 115 of them were returned by the informants. It should be noted that some were not completely filled in. Thus, 100 informants were considered for the investigation because of the need to have a uniform number for easy analysis. The informants considered were thus representative of the different age groups, ranging from 15 to 45 years and above; different walks for life, drawn from both the formal and informal sectors, and from the two official language backgrounds, that is, both Anglophones and Francophones. Upon return of the answered questionnaires, we quantified the

informants' responses and expressed them as percentages for eventual analysis under the different subheadings. Through this method, it was possible to have ample data which enabled us to determine whether the informants combine different languages when they speak, the different languages they combine and the motifs for these linguistic combinations.

## 5. Language combinations in multilingual Cameroon

There are many languages in Cameroon and users of language often have to cope with using one or more codes. In this light, there is usually the tendency for speakers to combine English, the indigenous languages, Pidgin English and French. In this section, we look at language combinations in terms of code mixing. Consequently, we start by looking at the informants who combine more than one language when they speak; then, we look at the various codes they combine when talking and end with some reasons the informants gave for combining or not combining more than one language.

### *5.1 Degree of code mixing by the informants*

With regard to the combination of languages, we sought to find out if the informants do mix codes when they communicate. They were thus expected to say whether they actually combine different languages (yes) or whether they do not mix different codes when they are talking (no). The results got are presented on the following table.

**Table 1: Degree of code mixing by the informants**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	92	92
No	07	07
Null	01	01
Total	100	100

The table above reveals that 92% of the informants acknowledged switching from one language to the other, 7% noted that they do not always mix codes and 1% did not answer. These findings hint of the degree of interrelatedness of the languages in Cameroon as a vast majority of the informants acknowledging combining more than one language when they speak. In fact, language combinations are typical of

language use in our context. This is usually done due to a number of reasons which will be examined later. However, before coming to that, it will be good to look at the various combinations or codes which the informants who are considered for this study often use.

### ***5.2 Combination Patterns of the Various Languages***

Language combination is a phenomenon which is recurrent in language use, especially in multilingual settings like Cameroon. It thus becomes necessary to look at the various languages which are frequently used in this process. In this light, our focus here was on code mixing and we sought to elicit the various languages which they often mix in the course of speaking. Although the list was not exhaustive, the informants were expected to choose the various language combinations: French and English; English, French and Pidgin; English and indigenous language; English, pidgin and indigenous language and French, English and indigenous language, etc. The informants were expected to choose one of these patterns and there was space for them to mention any pattern which may not have been mentioned in the questionnaire. The results got are presented on the following table.

**Table 2: Languages used in code mixing by the informants**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
English and French	27	27
English, French and pidgin	22	22
English and indigenous language	12	12
English, pidgin and indigenous language	20	20
French, English and indigenous language	06	06
French and Pidgin	05	05
Null	08	08
Total	100	100

From the data collected with regard to the various patterns of combinations of codes in the course of code mixing, we noted that the highest level of combination was in English and French, as underscored by 27% of the informants. Such findings are quite understandable given that the two languages in question are official languages and, when a

user of language, in a formal setting for example, has a lexical lapse in one of the languages, they tend to borrow from the other language, which they master, in order to fill this lapse. Equally, this also suggests speakers' willingness to make themselves understood at all costs and also hints on the inescapable effects of language interference and code mixing, which is a typical characteristic of language use, especially when it comes to the two official languages. On the same token, it was also discovered that 22% of the informants under study acknowledged combining English, French and Pidgin when they speak. It is worth pointing out that this combination is quite recurrent among youths and now constitutes what has been described in the literature on language use in Cameroon today as Camfranglais. Beyond the sphere of daily communications which make use of such a combination pattern, it is equally important to point out that it is a very common phenomenon among the 'new generation' of Cameroonian musicians. Equally, 20% of the informants, as seen on the table above, pointed out that they use English, pidgin and their indigenous languages when they speak. This is very likely to take place among Anglophones and likely be as a result of lexical insufficiency in the language of communication. Furthermore, we note that 12% of the informants pointed out that they combine the English language and the indigenous language when they use language. In this worth noting in this light that research on language use in Cameroon (see Kouega, 1998) has pointed that most speakers of English tend to borrow from their mother tongues, especially when it comes to items relating to dressing, food and titles. This is because of the fact that such items, which are typical of a people's culture, may not necessarily have English equivalents. It was also noticed that 6% of the informants usually combine French, English and the indigenous language, and 5% of them combine French and the indigenous language. Finally, 8% of the informants did not write anything, suggesting that they do not combine languages when they speak. From here, we will look at the various reasons the informants advanced for either combining or not combining different languages when they speak.

### ***5.3 Speakers' Reasons for Combining or for not Combining Different Languages in the Course of Speaking***

From the data collected on the various informants considered in this study, 92% of them actually acknowledged that they combine different languages when they speak, while 8% pointed out that they do not combine languages when communicate. Each of them was asked to justify their responses.

#### ***5.3.1 Justification for Combining Languages***

The informants advanced a number of reasons for combining many different languages. The reasons were diverse and for convenience in the analysis, they were clustered under specific themes. Some of the themes included the fact that combining many languages reveals their multilingualism/bilingualism; it makes them comfortable while communicating; many people around them combine many languages and it reveals their identity. The results are presented on the table that follows.

**Table 3: Justification for code mixing**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
It makes feel me bilingual/multilingual	34	36.95
It makes me more comfortable while communicating	26	28.26
They are combined wherever I go	20	21.73
It reveals my identity	12	13.03
Total	92	100

From the findings, the highest number of informants, that is 36.95%, are comfortable with combining different languages because it enables them to express their bilingualism/ multilingualism. To this group of informants, combining more than one language affords them the opportunity to actually let their entourage know they speak more than one language. Thus, they combine different languages for prestige. Secondly, 28.26% of the informants are of the opinion that combining more than one language gives them the opportunity to discuss with some degree of comfort. This comfort can be understood in the light of expressing oneself with relative ease. This points practically to the fact that, unlike other informants who will code switch for prestige, this

group of informants combine different codes because they want to express themselves comfortably. In this light, where they feel a lexical gap in one language, they simply switch to, or borrow items from another language in order to continue communicating. Some of the informants, 21.73%, opine that they are often influenced by their entourage. Thus, when people around them combine languages while talking to them they do same when responding. Finally, 13.03% of the informants noted that it reveals their identity. This is true, especially when it comes to language combinations of languages such as French, English and Pidgin, which have come to be known in the literature as Camfranglais. In fact, Ngefac (2010), supporting this view, points out that young people often combine languages ascertain their identity as youths and to show some innovation in language use. This is opposed to old people who are usually very conservative. On a whole, people combine languages for diverse reasons and it is a great feature of language use in Cameroon, as revealed by 92% of the informants considered for this study.

### ***5.3.2 Justification for not combining languages***

With regard to the information presented on table three, we note that some of the informants acknowledged that they do not actually combine languages when they speak. When ask to justify the reason for their choice, their responses pointed to the fact that they feel uncomfortable while doing so, that it is informal and that the nature of their jobs do not allow them to do so. These responses were presented on the following table, with particular attention to the frequency of each of them, and the percentages.

**Table 4: Justification for not code switching or code mixing**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
I feel uncomfortable while doing so	4	50
It is informal to do so	3	37.5
What I do in life does not permit me to do so	1	12.5
Total	8	100

From the table, 50% of the informants who do not combine languages do so on grounds that they feel uncomfortable while doing so; 37.5%

of them are of the view that it is informal and 12.5% of the informants do not combine languages because the nature of what they do does not permit them to do so. On a whole, those who acknowledged that they are not involved in language combinations while speaking did so because of some constraints, ranging from the need to be formal to constraints linked to the nature of their jobs.

## **6. Sociolinguistic implications of findings**

Cameroon, as a multilingual nation, offers a variety of languages to language users in this multilingual setting. In fact, the multilingual Cameroonian hardly ever keeps his languages apart and most scholars (see, for instance, Simo Bobda, 2001; Ngefac, 2010) have hailed the country's linguistic situation for offering a variety of opportunities for linguists and users of language to carry out research and understand the effects of multilingualism respectively. In this light, such a situation has influenced research on many instances of language use, especially the current investigation. However, it is worth pointing out that, no matter how glorious the situation is to linguists, it many, at times, presents itself as an uphill task to language users, as they are bound to use different strategies to make themselves understood. This difficulty is likely to be perpetrated by constraints linked to the intelligibility of a particular speaker or language. This is evident in the fact that the reasons the informants gave for combining many languages at a time hardly took their interlocutors into consideration. In fact, most of the combinations were motivated by personal reasons. For instance, while 36.95% of the informants were of the view that they combine many languages in order to make known their ability to use more than one language to the audience, 28.26% did so for comfort, while 13.03% combined many languages as a marker of their identity. In terms of the use of language as a marker of identity, we tend to see more of such a phenomenon among the youths who often use such mixtures for in-group discussions in order to keep out the older generation who are described as conservative (Chambers, 1995). They thus combine to rebel against, what Ngefac (2010: 161) calls, the "suffocating authority of parents.

We equally note that, in a multilingual setting like Cameroon, some users of a language may tend to assume that their listeners would

always understand the language they speak. For example, in the official use of language in Cameroon, we often hear the expression “Cameroon is a bilingual country” used by speakers to justify why they should speak or not speak a particular language. When this is done, especially where the listener does not understand the language chosen by a speaker, we tend to discern the difficulties linked to language use in a multilingual setting. At this juncture, it is thus worth pointing out that a speaker’s language choice may greatly hamper language use. This may even be more complex if the two participants cannot switch totally to the other language to meet the linguistic demands of either of them. In such a situation, either there will be no communication, or they would require the services of a third party (a translator) in order to understand each other. In such a situation, we see that the speakers involved would tend to combine languages in order to grapple with the intricacies of language use in a multilingual setting. This view is supported by the findings, as the findings reveal that the highest number of language combinations, that is, 27%, involved English and French. This suggests that, within the Cameroonian setting, the most language combinations are done in formal contexts, especially in instances where speakers from the two official language backgrounds communicate.

## **7. Conclusion**

The everyday practices of language combinations by people of different linguistic backgrounds and age groups in such a multilingual context enable us to understand the power relations between languages and the extent to which some languages may tend to dominate others. Language, in this light, is not used just as a medium of communication, but also becomes a symbol of cultural, social, economic and political power. The findings of this study reveal that the practice of language combination is quite rife within the Cameroonian setting, as supported by 92% of the informants. This combination can be in terms of code-switching or code mixing. According to (Baker, 2006: 29), code switching is “the process by which the speaker or the initiator of speech, changes or switches from one language or code to another, depending on the situation, audience, subject matter, etc.” According to Ramirez (1985: 74), “code-switching may occur at the word, phrase, clause, or sentence level”. In the combination patterns presented in the

findings, most language users within the Cameroonian setting involve the mother tongue and Pidgin English. Such instances of language use have further illustrated the functional load of Cameroon Pidgin English and the indigenous languages which have somehow been treated as options, at the expense English and French. On a whole, the role of interference in the use of language within the complex linguistic landscape cannot be underscored (Kouega, 1998; Echu, 2003). The findings, on a general note, consolidated the fact that none of the languages within the Cameroonian context is secondary, as they are readily available for use in the linguistic repertoire of most language users within this country. This, therefore, points to the fact that, instead of promoting only the two official languages of colonial heritage to dominate public life in the areas of education, administration, politics, mass media, publicity and literature, while both the indigenous languages and Cameroon Pidgin English are relegated to the background (Echu, 2004: 19), conscious effort should be made on the part of the government to promote all the languages at different levels. This is because multilingualism is a Cameroonian reality which has come to stay.

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