

Grammatical Features in Language Contact Setting: The Case of 3^è and 1^{ère} Students of GBHS Koza and GHS Mozogo

Sawalda Maina Dieudonne

Correspondence: Sawalda Maina Dieudonne, University of Maroua, Cameroon, Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature, Cameroon.

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Abstract

The most common way that languages influence each other is in the exchange of words. The present study deals with grammatical features in essays written by students of GBHS Koza and BHS Mozogo and their natural occurring interactions which are the empirical foundations of primary data source. The research adopted the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The corpus comprises 250 essay writing scripts collected in February 2024. The data were processed and analysed using Kachru (1983a) theory on postcolonial and/or world Englishes. Results showed a new stream of CamFE in the grammatical features found in students' essays and interactions which include haphazard relative pronouns, articles omission, object omission in nominal phrase, lack of subject-verb agreement, possessive adjectives, misplacement of adjectives, non-standard construction of interrogative sentences and adjectival reduplication.

Keywords: language contact, Standard English, CamFE, grammatical features, new Englishes

1. Introduction

According to some authors (Goebel & Nelde, 1997; Myers-Scotton & Carol 2002; Winford, 2003), the roots of contact linguistics can be traced back to the end of the eighteenth century when lexicographers, collecting material for dictionaries, encountered the problem of numerous words of foreign origin, which they were compelled to analyse and decide whether to include in their dictionaries, and to what extent. As interest in these problems grew, some authors examined borrowing (Daulton, 2008; Ogasawara, 2008; Ramat, Othman & Unin, 2019; Soh, Azman & Su-Mei, 2020) as the consequence of language contact, which in turn makes two languages in contact to influence each other (Bennui, 2019; Ferrer & Sankoff, 2004; Piller, 2004), creating a sort of bilingualism (Ayafor, 2005; Fishman, 1967; Kouega, 2018; Romaine, 1989; Sosso, 2020). Moreover, code-switching/code-mixing (Myers-Scotton, 1993a, 2008; Otundo & Mühleisen, 2022; Panhwar & Buriro, 2020; Tabe, 2023; Wardhaugh, 2010) is considered as a social dynamic in bilingual or multilingual discourse and so is language shift (Gal, 1979; Tasah, 2023). These works amongst others became frequent topics of numerous studies.

From the above mentioned works, it can be deduced that the mixture of many languages create new development of world Englishes. In this respect, future researchers are called to provide much more empirical data in order to yield appropriate answers to some questions that are deemed difficult to answer in the field of linguistics. It is worth noting that in the process of language learning, the learners' performance relies on the intellectual level, motivation, skills, interest, study habits, self-esteem or the teacher-student relationship.

New Englishes is the term used to describe the English used in English Second Language (ESL) countries (Kachru, 1983). It is common practice in Britain to draw a distinction between ESL and English Foreign Language (EFL) countries, with the label *New Englishes* restricted to countries labelled as ESL. Although language contact has been extensively investigated, there are up to date very few studies on grammatical features in students' essays in Cameroon. In addition, many other factors play a vital role during the incorporation of foreign language words or lexis into the learner's language, therefore demanding an in-depth study. From the forgone insight, this research paper seeks to examine the grammatical features in the domain of language contact from another perspective to expand the works reviewed in the literature. This study sought to answer the following questions:

- ✓ What are the grammatical features in the compositions of 3^è and 1^{ère} students in GBHS Koza and GHS Mozogo?
- ✓ What are some of the sociolinguistic reasons behind such types of performance?

2. Background to the Study

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 (1983, p.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.

Cameroon belongs to those sub-Saharan countries which have the highest number of African languages and a far-reaching fragmentation. Gordon (2005) holds that Cameroon counts 279 ‘living’ languages among which three second languages which are endangered languages and about 4% of the population do not use them as local languages. Central Intelligence Agency (2006) maintained that languages in Cameroon can be grouped as follows: Cameroon Highlanders, also called semi Bantu or Grass-Field. They are composed of languages such as Bamileke, Bamoun, Tikar, Northwest Plateau dialects. Another group has Equatorial Bantu and Eastern Nigritic which are Beti-Pahouin and Fang-Pahouin, languages such as Bulu, Ewondo, Eton, Mfang, Mpangwe. In addition, Mandara and Toupouri are the languages of the Kirdi or Fula. Fulani languages count Fulfulde or Pulaar or Peul, Tukolor in Senegal. Besides, the Northwestern Bantu or Forest Bantu or Coastal Bantu are related to Duala, Bass-Bakoko, Akoosé and Baia. Some African languages like Shuwa or Choa Arabs, and Chadic which comprises Kanuri and Hausa, the Ejagham or Ekoi, and Pygmies are also viewed. Other are non-African languages, which are in effect small minority of Europeans of English, French and German backgrounds as well as of Asian, mainly Lebanese expatriates.

Echu (2003) refers to 247 languages, claiming that some of the languages in Ethnologue are varieties of the same language. Furthermore, Essono (2001), finds the SIL figures to be too high. For him, the number is likely to be around 250 languages instead of nearly 300. Despite uncertainty about the exact number of languages in Cameroon, the prevailing opinion is that Cameroon has between 250 and 300 languages represented in three of the four language phyla of Africa-Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo. Only the Khoisan family is not represented at all. *Ethnologue* (As cited in Gordon, 2005) claims that there are 38 languages with less than 1000 speakers, 13 of these are considered nearly extinct. The informants of this study are CamFE speakers, which is the new stream of new Englishes spoken in Koza and Mozogo.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section develops Kachru (1983a) theory on postcolonial and/or world Englishes which was used in the analysis of data. Kachru (1983b, p.99-127) suggests contextualisation and lexical innovation as a framework for new Englishes analysis. Based on the concepts put forward in this theory which falls in line with the items found in the data and its characteristics, it is deemed to be very relevant to the study. His approach to World Englishes media incorporates important structures related to styles of mass media, national identity, linguistic structures, and functional uses. Kachru (1983a) opines that, due to both the number of English users and the level of English usage are increasing, non-native English varieties are emerging. Models of non-native Englishes are presented through the *types*, *development* and *functions* framework. Talking about the global of English as a non-native language, the non-native uses of English can clearly be divided in types, which are the performance varieties and the institutional varieties.

The performance varieties of English are restricted functionally in specific contexts. Instances include tourism, commerce, and other international transactions (Kachru, 1992a, p.55). The nativised types of discourse and style and functionally defined sublanguages (registers) are also used in diverse genres as a linguistic device for media studies. Such kind of English are spoken in the countries like Nigeria, Kenya, the Republic of South Africa, and Ghana in Africa; Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in South Asia; and the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia in Southeast Asia (Kachru, 1990, p.19). Kachru (1992a, p.55-56) sees that an institutionalized variety always begins as a variety of performance, with unique features gradually offering it another status.

Two systems can be said to be operating concurrently and yield non-native models, which are the attitudinal system as well as the linguistic system. Attitudinally, a majority of L2 speakers should identify with the modifying label that marks a model's non-nativity. Moreover, Kachru (1992b) explained that non-native institutionalised varieties of English have developed through several phases. There is a non-recognition of the local variety at the initial level and conscious identification with the native speakers. Another stage concerns extensive diffusion of bilingualism in English, which can slowly lead to the development of new varieties within a variety. Furthermore, there is a stage which starts when the non-native variety is slowly accepted as the norm, thereby reducing the division between linguistic norms and behaviour. Moreover, a stage of recognition that could have two way manifestation, that is, attitudinally and teaching materials are *contextualised* in the native sociocultural milieu.

4. Literature Review

Various works on Cameroon English (hereafter CamE) have been done in the Cameroonian research sphere (Kouega, 2005, 2006; Mangwana, 1989; Meutem, 2011; Ngefac, 2010; Sala, 2006; Simo Bobda, 1994, 2001; Tabe, 2015, 2018, 2023). Literature also shows that Francophone Cameroonians have developed keen interest in English in both local and international contexts which has yielded the construct of Cameroon Francophone English (CamFE) as mentioned by (Anchimbe, 2006 & Kuchah, 2016). While this relates a picture of how the majority of francophone Cameroonians are struggling to catch up with global trends, the necessity is imposed to provide further information which concerns the paramount quest for English.

The evidence of CamFE was studied by some scholars in the perspective of phonological aspects of the English language spoken by francophone Cameroonians. In this respect, aspects of English pronunciation of French-Speaking Cameroonians showing the appearance of the variety of New Englishes are revisited (Safotso, 2012; Atechi, 2015). Safotso reported that, “although some features of this variety of New Englishes are common to all Cameroonian learners/speakers of English as well as to many other world Englishes, there are some hallmarks proper to CamFE”. While Kouega considers “the renderings of the sequence -UI- by Cameroonian, Gabonese, and native French users learning English with the view to finding out whether French users speaking different L1s pronounce this sequence in different or similar ways. He hypothesised that Francophone speakers tend to draw more from French when they speak English than from their respective L1s. Atechi finds out that “now a very large number of CamFE speakers are found all over the country teaching English both as a second and as a foreign language” and “Cameroon Francophone variety of English seems to be charting its own separate course from the mainstream variety of CamE”.

In the English Second Language Acquisition perspective, Krashen (1981) noted that acquisition is the spontaneous process of “meaningful interaction in...natural communication” and “is based on what we have “picked up” through active communication”, while learning is the conscious process of obtaining “formal” knowledge of the second language” (p. 2). Ellis (1986) summarised Krashen’s theory and defined second language acquisition as “the subconscious or conscious processes by which a language other than the mother tongue is learnt in a natural or a tutored setting” (p. 6). Mother tongue, or first language plays a very important role in second language learning. And the precondition of people learning a second language is based on if “they have acquired their mother tongue” (Ellis, 1986, p. 6). In the process of second language learning, “learners were strongly influenced by their L1 (first language)” (Ellis, 1994, p. 43). So the study on first language transfer has always been a popular topic in second language acquisition research. According to different criteria, the transfer can be categorised differently. Fries (1945) thought that learners’ native language strongly influences their second language learning, and the form and structure of native language will influence their language learning unconsciously, especially for the beginners of second language. The forgone literature review has shown that research done on grammatical features in Cameroon are not many. The majority of these works addressed the semantic, the lexical and the phonology perspective. This work focuses on the grammatical features in students’ essays in Koza and Mozogo on the topic ‘you have attended a wedding ceremony held in the Koza city council, narrate the event’ and their natural occurring interactions.

5. Methodology

The current work applied qualitative and quantitative research approaches in an effort to obtain accurate outcomes and sufficient information from the respondents. Students’ written tests are the empirical foundations of primary data source. Additionally, data were also based on the past experience of the students’ informal interactions. The respondents were purposefully sampled based on their levels of education and age. The students were informed by the teachers of Anglais in the selected classes that they would have an essay writing and the best essays will be rewarded. The data were processed and analysed using Kachru (1983a) theory. The corpus comprises 250 composition scripts, that is, 150 informants from Government Bilingual High School Koza and 100 informants from Government High School Mozogo. For ethical consideration, the researcher reiterated that their identity will be hidden in the development of the paper. The data were also exclusively collected for the purpose of this study.

6. Analysis

This section presents some of the most distinctive grammatical features in English written by the informants. Furthermore, it provides possible explanations for the different grammatical traits discovered from the data, with regards to the contact component that clearly plays an essential role in this variety. There are many important aspects about CamFE that need to be highlighted in order to provide a deeper analysis. Most English contact varieties have resulted from a population shifting from their first language to English for a number of reasons including colonial pressure or prestige (Siemund, 2013). The variety resulting from this contact undoubtedly shows the influence of the language(s) spoken by participants. Below is presented a detailed statistics of the types of features in the corpus.

Table 1. Distribution and percentage of the types of grammatical features

N° Grammatical features of CamFE	percentage
1. Haphazard relative pronouns	44(22%)
2. Articles omission	37(18.5%)
3. Object omission in nominal phrase	31 (15.5%)
4. Lack of subject-verb agreement	28 (14%)
5. Misuse of possessive adjectives	22(11%)
6. Misplacement of adjectives	16(8%)
7. Non-standard construction of interrogative sentences	12(6%)
8. Adjectival reduplication	10(5%)
Total	200

Table 1 presents the different grammatical features of CamFE and their frequencies. It can be observed that 200 features have been discovered in the data collected. Statistics show that haphazard relative pronouns has registered the highest number of the informants' grammatical features with 22%. Articles omission stands at 18.5%, followed by object omission in nominal phrase, which gives 31 occurrences. Lack of subject-verb agreement amounted to 14 % as the fourth features which is recurrent in the data, misuse of possessive adjectives appear to be 11% in terms of grammatical features. The last three, which are not also negligent are respectively misplacement of adjectives with 8%, non-standard construction of interrogative sentences 6% and adjectival reduplication with 5%. Details on the analysis of each grammatical feature, as they appear in Table 1 are respectively given in the following subsections.

6.1 Haphazard Relative Pronouns

It is worth noting that all pronouns in Standard English are useful to form relative clauses. Notwithstanding their importance in sentences, students of 3^e and 1^{ère} from GBHS Koza and GHS Mozogo tend to use them haphazardly. Series of features of new Englishes are obtained from the data among which those contained in the samples (1), (2), (3) and (4) below.

Non-Standard English

(1) how about your friend?

(2) The car who my father bought

last year is very nice

(3) this is the boy who father is looking for

(4) the girl to who I spoke is a nurse

Standard English

what about your friend?

the car that my father bought

last year is very nice

this is the boy whose father is looking for

the girl to whom I spoke is a nurse

From sample (1), the relative pronoun *how* mismatches this interrogative sentence in the standard form. The correct relative pronoun that is required in this context should be *what* as provided above. In the example number (2), *who* is also wrongly used in the sense that it should be replaced by the correct relative pronoun *that*. In addition, the relative pronoun *who* in example (3) is incorrectly used in this clause because the clause itself expresses the belonging of the specific father to the boy. Normally, it should be supplemented by *whose*. In sample (5), the relative pronoun *who* is also incorrectly used. *Who* functions as a subject and it is normally used when the subject is performing an action. Whereas in this sentence, the subject which is the target is receiving the action. Therefore, *whom* should be used as in indicated in Standard English above, since it functions as an object. These misemployment of the relative markers seem to have been imposed by the elements of language transferred from French or the informants' local languages. Kachru (1983a) holds in this case that non-native uses of English can clearly be divided into two broad categories, namely, the performance varieties and the institutional varieties. The performance varieties are the varieties used as *foreign* languages. This work falls under the performance varieties. The following subsection presents and analyses the various articles that were omitted by the population of the study in their various written test and interactions.

6.2 Articles Omission

The syntactic features appear to follow the characteristics of bilingualism and second language acquisition by the learners of second language. When the participants are found in the situation of two or more languages in contact, it affects them to sometimes neglect some constituents such as definite or indefinite articles in the clauses. Below are

some excerpts in which, definite article as well as indefinite articles are neglected:

Non-Standard English

- (5) I have to return book
 (6) I write letter of apology
 (7) There is danger here
 (8) I am man

Standard English

- I have to return the book
 I am writing a letter of apology
 there is a danger here
 I am a man

In the preceding examples, the definite article 'the' in (5) and the indefinite article 'a' in (6), (7) and (8) are missing in the positions in which their occurrence would be obligatory in standard varieties of English language. This confirms Burt and Kiparsky (1972) who opine that omissions are characterised by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance. This phenomenon can be resulted from non-mastery of English as Second Language or simply the influence of the first language. If this situation continues, it will undoubtedly lead to new varieties of English. The subsequent subsection presents and analyses the omission of nominal phrase.

6.3. Omission of Object in Nominal Phrase

The syntactic constructions in the informants' essays show that object with transitive verbs is often omitted as examined here. In the corpus, many informants tend to leave out the objects which are normally not permitted because the sentences are left incomplete, and thus full of truncated sense. Let's consider the following instances:

- (9) Do you like this fresh milk? Answer: *I like Ø.
 (10) They are able to fascinate and delight Ø.
 (11) There are four children Ø.
 (12) Because of the rain Ø.

A close look at the different samples above enables to see clearly the absence of specific referential objects. This kind of omission flout the syntactic construction of Standard English which in turn makes the meaning of the sentences biased. For these different samples to be complete in meaning in standard English, 'I like Ø' in example (9) must be written 'I like it', 'it' here is the object pronoun referring to fresh milk; 'they are able to fascinate and delight Ø' as observed in example (10) can raise some questions by the hearer(s) or the reader(s). However, one may ask 'they are able to fascinate what?' and 'delight in what?'. The appropriate form can be therefore, 'they are able to fascinate the audience and delight in their job'. The expression 'there are four children Ø' in sample (11) is an affirmation with an incomplete thought, to be clear in meaning, it would be 'there are four children in the garden'. In addition, 'because of the rain Ø' in sample (12) does not seem to form a complete thought, it leaves the reader(s) or the hearer(s) wondering what happened because of the rain. To complete it, further explanation is needed such as 'because of the rain, many students came late to school today'. The next subsection proffers and analyses subject-verb agreement issues.

6.4 Lack of Subject-verb Agreement

In Standard English, time and aspectual information are conveyed lexically. Due to language contact, that is, French and local languages come into contact with the learning of English, the informants are often tempted to leave out the inflectional morphemes on the verb and subject-verb agreement as the extracts (13), (14), (15) and (16) below display:

Non-Standard English

- (13) My mother love me
 (14) He eat plantain yesterday
 (15) I eat already
 (16) I am write

Standard English

- my mother loves me
 He ate plantain yesterday
 I have already eaten
 I am writing

From the preceding sample (13), the inflectional morpheme (-s) in the verb 'love' is left out. Instances (14), (15) and (16) show the absence of subject-verb agreement. The cause of such weaknesses could be naturally the non-mastery of English learned in this circumstances as foreign language. The right forms of subject-verb agreement in Standard English are provided as seen in the above instances. An observation from these samples show that a lot is still needed to enhance the learners' performance in English, especially with regard to their levels which refer to the examinations classes. The following subsection presents and analyses the misplacement of adjectives.

6.5 Misplacement of Adjectives

Adjectives are words that modify a noun within a noun phrase. A misplaced adjective is an adjective that is out of position. When they are out of place, the sentence will be awkward or confusing because in most cases, modifiers should be near the words that they modify in Standard English. It is revealed in the data collected that GBHS Koza and GHS Mozogo students have shown their weaknesses in such aspects of grammatical features as the following samples (17), (18), (19) and (20) portray:

Non-standard English	Standard English
(17) A lot of things necessary	a lot of necessary things
(18) His bananas ripe	his bananas is ripe
(19) There are many trees big in Mozogo	there are many big trees in Mozogo
(20) See this man tall	see this tall man

Following Kiparsky (1972), mis-ordering are characterised by the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance. For example, the adjectives 'necessary' in sample (17), 'ripe' in example (18), 'big' in example (19) and 'tall' in (20) show clearly that they are respectively mis-ordered. In Standard English, the right way of putting these adjectives in the sentences are done above. These types of grammatical features could be still influenced by the informants' local languages or French. In addition, it could be a result of the fact that those students do not go through their essays when they have finished writing. The next subsection presents and analyses misuse of possessive adjectives cases.

6.5.1 Misuse of Possessive Adjectives

In Standard English, possessive adjectives are words that come before a noun to show who or what owns the noun. They are also used to indicate a relationship with someone or something. It has been found in the corpus that learners often used the possessive adjectives wrongly in the essays and interactions. Such aspects of grammatical features are illustrated below:

Non-Standard English	Standard English
(21) She is with his father	she is with her father
(22) The cat like it's food	the cat like its food
(23) My mother like his thing	My mother likes her thing

The examples (21), (22) and (23) display facts about some common grammatical features of secondary school learners in their compositions. They usually tend to use 'his' instead of 'her' as in (20) and (22), when the subject is in the third person singular, notwithstanding the gender of the subject. They are also tempted to put apostrophe in the possessive adjective 'its' as showed in sample (21). In this case, it becomes easy to confound it with the contracted form of 'it is' which does have in fact an apostrophe. The Dynamic Model of Postcolonial English (foundation, exonormative stabilization, nativization, endonormative stabilization and differentiation) by Schneider (2007), which describes clearly a fully-fledged substitute to the three circles of Kachru (1992a) follow a consensual path to new Englishes are shown in this analysis. The subsequent subsection proffers and analyses adjectival reduplication.

6.5.2 Adjectival Reduplication

Reduplication in Standard English can be divided into two broad categories, which implies derivational reduplication and infinitival reduplication. These two categories are distinct from each other both in their morphological form and their function. Adjectival reduplication intensifies the meaning of the base adjective as exemplified in (24) and (25) and (26):

- (24) I like good good (very good) plants
 (25) Fandi always eat sweet-sweet (very sweet) things.
 (26) My father sent me to buy hot-hot (very hot) bread.

It ensues from the different samples above that learners are used to double the adjective so as to emphasise the meaning. Yet, not all adjectives can be reduplicated, though the use of reduplication as adjectival meaning intensification is not exclusive in Standard English. As a matter of fact, it can be attested in other contact-induced varieties of English such as Cameroon English, in Afrikaans (Michaelis, Maurer, Haspelmath & Huber, 2013), and in many other languages. The subsequent section presents and analyses wrong construction of interrogative sentences.

6.6 Wrong Construction of Interrogative Sentences

In Standard English, it is worth noting that an interrogative sentence is a sentence whose grammatical form shows that it is a question. Apart from the use of echo-questions such as ‘you are dating who?’ and ‘she works where?’, wh-sentences occur at the beginning just like what in generative grammar is referred to as wh-movement. Most of the informants failed to apply this rule in their various essay writing and interactions. Cases of such kind of performance features are registered in the corpus as the following examples portray:

Non-standard English

(27) You say what?

(28) You go where?

(29) They go when?

(30) You have your key with you?

Standard English

What do you say?

Where are you going to?

When will they go?

Do you have your key with you?

Facts gleaned from the examples (27) to (29) show that the wh-words are placed rightly at the end of the interrogative sentences. In the example (30), the learner wrongly formed the interrogative sentence as keenly observed. Instead of ‘you have your key with you?’, it is better to say ‘do you have your key with you?’ as indicated above. This kind of English language usage can only be found in the circumstances of languages in contact, which have provided the mainstream of Cameroon English (CamE), Pidgin English (PE), Cameroon Francophone English (CamFE), Fran-Anglais, New Englishes (NE) or postcolonial Englishes (PCE). It is crystal clear that this mainstream is likely to develop other features in the years ahead as a result of language change, language contact, language sift, language practice, language choice, code-mixing/code-switching amongst other.

6.7 Limitations

Results for this researcher paper have proven beyond doubt some limitations which can draw the attention of the future scholars to fill the gap. The study could for instance benefit from more comparative analysis with other contact-induced varieties of English. The study used only two schools for data collection, making the amount of data analysed very restricted. Nonetheless, the items that were analysed are just enough to provide us with good insights into CamFE uniqueness and contact linguistics.

7. Conclusion

The current research paper has examined the grammatical features in language contact setting that emerge from 3è and 1ère students in GBHS Koza and GHS Mozogo essays and interactions. This study has shown new features of CamFE which are identifiable in their essays and interactions. They are categorised under misuse of relative pronouns, omission of articles, object omission in nominal phrase, lack of subject-verb agreement, misplacement of adjectives, misuse of possessive adjectives, adjectival reduplication and non-standard construction of interrogative sentences. It is observed from findings that a lot of reasons are responsible for these features. In this respect, the history of Cameroon and its complex sociolinguistic landscape which makes it a postcolonial multilingual nation is the primary reason behind the developed mainstream of CamFE in this work. It could also be due to the impact of French and the indigenous languages.

The researcher discovered that learners are inclined to associate their previous knowledge from their mother tongue in terms of structure and ideas in order to produce written material, supported by different theories regarding the interference of mother tongue with the foreign language learning process. Students usually tend to use the knowledge of their local language or French because they have the conception of a word by word translation having as a fact that every word in those languages can be translated into English.

As pedagogical implications for some grammatical features of CamFE, the researcher recommends that learners should be exposed to other varieties of English in Cameroon. They should also make efforts to internalise Standard English because this is the recommended variety in Cameroonian classrooms. For future insight in CamFE and contact linguistics, another study can be carried out on syntactic features and spelling in students’ written texts.

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