The Discourse Particle *nàa* in Cameroonian Colloquial English

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Abstract

This article explores the use of the discourse particle *nàa* – an adaptation from local Cameroonian languages – as a common feature of Cameroonian Colloquial English (CCE). In CCE, question tags and some adverbials – disjuncts and conjuncts – are widely signaled by means of this particle in the process of code-switching, as it takes a variety of semantic interpretations based on context. It is shown in the article that the use of the particle is largely licensed by a lack of adequate knowledge and understanding of relevant aspects of English, although also, to some extent, by the working of some general principle of economy. Finally, it is shown that although the preferred position of disjuncts and conjuncts in the English clause is the initial or medial position, the particle only occurs in the final position, as its interpretation at any given time depends on the context of speaking provided by the preceding clause.

Keywords: *Discourse particle; nàa; Cameroonian Colloquial English; Question tag; Disjunct; Conjunct; Code-switching*

1. Introduction

English is one of the two official languages spoken in Cameroon, the other being French. English is spoken here by Anglophone Cameroonians as a second language (L2) (debatably so) against the backdrop of a multilingual society of over 230 national languages (Grimes 2000). As it is well known (George, 1972; Bailey, Madden & Krashen, 1974; Gass & Selinker, 1983; Sinha, Niroj & Rajesh, 2009), there are always L1 interferences in the acquisition and/or learning and speaking of L2. One form of interference is the integration or adaptation of local L1 materials into L2 to be used in the place of regular L2 expressions, in a process which may go by a variety of terms, including *borrowing* (or *loan*) (Bloomfield, 1935:444; Spolsky, 1998:121), *importation* or *substitution* (Lass, 1969:58) and code-switching (moving from one language to another) or code-mixing (where pieces of a language are used when a speaker is basically speaking another) (Fasold, 1984:180; Wardhaugh, 1986:102) – following Skiba (1997), code-switching can occur in the form of word order, choice of word or mood and tense.

A clear case of such integration observed in Cameroonian Colloquial English (CCE) is that of the discourse particle *nàa* (with a long [a] sound and a low-mid tone), a non-English word which, following Mbangwana (2004:905), is widely used to satisfy various pragmatic functions.(Note 1.) Consider it in a typical CCE dialogue as in (1).

(1) A: This is the only banana left in the kitchen.

B: Eat that one *nàa*. (*nàa* = then/in that case)

In *B's* response to *A*, the particle is used in the sense of the inferential conjunct *then*, paraphrased as 'in that case'.(Note 2) As used in CCE, the particle seems to be an adaptation of the Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE) word *nòor*, whose origin stems from indigenous Cameroonian languages (see, for example, Neba, Chibaka & Atindogbe, 2006 and others cited therein for facts on CPE). In these languages, the particle surfaces in different forms, for example, *nê* in Ngamambo (Tikum A., pc), *lâ* in Bafut (Abonwi C., pc), *rì* in Lamso (Yuwung B., pc), *mbà* in Oku (Mbunda F., pc), *lê* in Kom (Ngam G., pc), *nà* in Akorse (Apuge M., pc), *zrôr* in Mokpe (Mbela J., pc), *ni* in Bassa and *la* in Ghomala (Kwesieu A., pc), and so on, but with similar functions – note that these are all Bantu languages.

Although the process is mainly known by the terms *borrowing* and *loan* (Robinson, 2006:10), following Fasold (ibid), it may be seen as borrowing only at the beginning, and it seizes to be so if the expression is used continuously

and consistently. Besides, as Crystal (1995:126) notes, neither term is appropriate, since the receiving language does not give the 'borrowed/loaned' expression back and stop using it. However, given that the particle is not a language-specific marker and has a broad linguistic currency with a wide usage in different contexts, and does not serve a narrow function to substitute one particular constituent, as it will be demonstrated in this article, the term code-switching (hence CS) is preferable. Specifically, what happens with the use of the particle can be seen as intra-sentential code-switching, following Li (2000), Myers-Scotton (1989), Woodford (1983), Poplack (1980), Auer, Moyer and Muysken (2014), as it is generally used as a tag of some sort at the end of a clause, as will be seen.

According to Yule (1996:37), a 'pervasive' aspect of communication is the Cooperative Principle, by which the parties have to fully cooperate to make the speech event successful. In the light of this, why then does Speaker B, in (1) above, choose to substitute part of the response to Speaker A with a non-English word, seemingly missing out on cooperation? There are many reasons for CS. It may stem from the desire to get the rewards in terms of cost accruing from the switch (see Myers Scotton, 1979). Another good reason is the lack of proper knowledge or understanding of one language, or the lack of the facility in that language on a particular subject, such that CS becomes necessary to fill the gaps in a conversation (Fishman, 1972; Gumperz, 1982). Specific reasons like these are necessary in discussing the question.

However, CS is a common feature in bilingual or multilingual settings (Maya, 2001) like Cameroon, even by those who have very advanced L2 skills (Poplack, 1980), such that a general answer to the question might be deduced from the background of the parties in the communication process. As indicated above, the particle has its origin in indigenous languages with a CPE form of it, CPE being widely spoken as a lingua franca in Cameroon (Tanda, 2015:19), the language of interethnic interaction used for greetings, socializing and in many other domains (Shroder, 2003). So it can be assumed that the particle is generally used for its sheer familiarity with all parties in the communication process, that is, the relevant CS takes place as long as the speaker knows that the other party understands what they mean with the switch, such that there is cooperation between the parties when it is used and the speech event is actually effective. If this generally answers the question, then it might bring us to question in what specific capacity the particle functions each time it is used and for which specific reasons. Data collected through my personal observation of natural daily life conversations (presented in the text) and a questionnaire (see appendix) administered to 100 randomly selected respondents (representing a cross-section of Anglophone Cameroonians from different walks of life, age groups, and places of origin and residence) are analyzed.

2. The Particle as a Question Tag

2.1 A General Question Tag

One of the ways in which the discourse particle *nàa* is most frequently used in CCE is as a general question tag.(Note 3) Following Downing and Locke (2006:187), for example, a question tag may be appended to a declarative clause as in (2a), an exclamatory clause (2b), or to an imperative clause (2c), of which the declarative is the most common.

(2) a. The boat hasn't arrived, *has it*?

   b. How quiet it was in the hall, *wasn't it*?

   c. Be quiet for a moment, will you?

The facts in (3), taken from observation, show the particle *nàa* occurring in CCE as a question tag – it is generally used with declarative and imperative clauses, but never with exclamatory clauses.

(3) a. You saw the books *nàa*?

     (= 'you saw the books, *didn't you*?')

   b. The man has not returned *nàa*?

     (= 'The man has not returned, *has he*?'

   c. Just wait for a moment *nàa*?

     (= 'Just wait for a moment, *will you*?')

Compare the following friendly true-life exchanges observed in a neighborhood between two women *X* and *Y* – *X* starts by calling out 'hay':

(4) a. X: Hay!

b. Y: (*Y turns round to face X*)

c. X: I didn't know you are also called 'Hay' (*amusingly*).

d. Y: No! You are the one giving me that name.

e. X: But you responded to it *nàa*? (*with a smile*)

f. Y: No, I didn't!

g. X: You turned when I called.

h. Y: (*Y smiles in defeat*)

In (4), Speaker Y was able to predict that the particle *nàa* is used as a question tag.

The use of *nàa* in (3-4) is clearly as a general question tag which is not derived from the structure of the main clause, and it is used in any environment irrespective of the operator and the subject. This is evidenced by the fact that such constructions always trigger a response as question tags normally do, and the response is usually of the required type. Note that general question tags are quite commonly used in standard varieties of English – see Achiri-Taboh (2015) for instance.

2.2 Raison d'être

2.2.1 Lack of Knowledge and Understanding

Whatever guides the hearer to construe the use of *nàa* as a question tag as in (3-4) and provide an appropriate response to it certainly originates in its L1 source, what goes beyond the scope of this article. However, it is not difficult to see why it occurs in CCE as a general question tag. One reason for this is the lack of proper knowledge or understanding of the grammatical structure of English question tags, and this is adequately captured in the results of the administered questionnaire indicated in Section 1. For Question 1 which requires respondents to indicate the answers they will normally give to tag questions with the particle (but without being told that the latter are used as question tags), the expected responses of the type in (4f) came up to 97%, implying that only 3% of the respondents found the particle nonsensical. Corresponding to Question 1 are Questions 3-6. For Question 3 which seeks to find out how often such tag questions in Question 1 (with *nàa*) are used by the respondents, the expected response (i.e., either *often*, *very often*, or *extremely often*) came up to 82%; while for Questions 4 and 5 which respectively seek to find out what age groups and classes of people are often heard using the expression *nàa* in the respondent's community, the expected responses (i.e., *all ages* and *all classes*) came up to 86% each. It is not expected that many people use normal Standard English question tags in CCE. So finally, for Question 6 which seeks to find out how often the respondents use normal Standard English question tags, the expected response (i.e., either *not often* or *not at all*) came up to 76%, with 13% for *not at all*. These amazing results show that, to a very large extent, normal Standard English question tags are suppressed for the particle *nàa* in CCE. To avoid appearing antagonistic and risking dishonesty in the responses or a lack of cooperation, a follow-up question, 'if your answer to Question 6 is *not often* or *not at all*, why not?' was deliberately avoided, but I conjecture that the high 76% result for the lack of Standard English question tags in CCE follows from an equal lack of proper knowledge or understanding of them. One fact that corroborates my conjecture here is that even when people get to use real question tags, it is usually only the general tag 'isn't it?' that is used across the entire inflectional paradigm of English question tags (see Achiri-Taboh, 2015).

2.2.2 Economy

Another possible reason why the particle is used for a question tag has to do with economy of speech. The conversation in (4) above confirms that the particle flexibility functions in different roles with required interpretations. The responses to Questions 1 and 6 of the questionnaire suggest that respondents understand what question tags are, even if they lack proper knowledge of how they work in English. As already suggested, therefore, switching codes to the use of *nàa* in the place of question tags could also be taken for a cost saving strategy.

Economy is quite common in natural language (see Chomsky, 1981, 1995; Rizzi, 1982, 1986; Jaeggli & Safir, 1989; Haegemann, 1991). Thus, it is possible to imagine that, in CCE, a speaker may actually have adequate knowledge of Standard English question tags, but simply switches to the particle (in colloquial speech) purely for economic benefits – economy of speech where the speaker switches whenever possible to use a single L1 word to represent large chunks of L2 materials with varying morphological, phonological and syntactic forms. In other words, as a cost saving strategy, the use of the particle allows the speaker to spare the extra effort of going through longer and phonologically variant stretches of words and the subject-auxiliary inversion and negation operations involved in

regular question tags.

Essentially, since the semantic level of any natural language construction should only contain words (or phrases) that contribute to its semantic interpretation (Chomsky, 1986), we can assume that the particle simply picks up the intended semantic content from context to function as the intended question tag, and this is evidenced by the fact that it triggers a response appropriate to a question tag as demonstrated in (4) above. How this happens is explained in the next subsection.

2.3 Code-switching by Association

The answer to the above question seems to lie in the very nature of whatever is substituted in the switch by the particle. Let us take the case of question tags as described by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1973:194) – also see Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999) and Huddleston and Pullum (2005). A question tag may require the listener to either confirm or deny the assertion the speaker makes in the anchor. Looking at (5) below, for example, what happens is that the speaker asserts a proposition (through the anchor) and then invites the listener (through the embedded question tag) to respond to it, by either confirming the positive/negative assertion or denying it.

(5) a.   Paul eats fish, *doesn't he*?

  b.   Paul doesn't eat fish, *does he*?

Thus, following ideas from Chomsky (1986, 1991), we can say that the particle is associated with an unpronounced form of the relevant question tag of the Standard English types in (5) (like *doesn't he?*, *does he?*, etc) that are derived from the structure of the anchor clause, and that such forms are *associates* of the particle. To therefore formulate a mechanism by which the particle gets its interpretive content from the associate, two options are available: one is that the associate semantically replaces the particle as in (6a), and the other is that the associate is adjoined to the particle as in (6b).

(6) a.   Jane will come [~~nàa~~ = *won't she*]?

  b.   Jane will come [*won't she* [*nàa*]]?

Thus in CCE, when we say 'Jane will come *nàa?*', either of the two operations is at play at the level where the particle is given semantic interpretation: it is either replaced by the associate or the associate is simply attached to it, again evidenced, as said before, by the fact that the listener responds accordingly.

In a question tag, the nature of the questioner's expectation is signaled by the main tone of the tag – high or low – which is borne by the operator (Quirk et al., 1973:194; Algeo, 1990:445–6). With a low tone (L), the speaker expects the listener to confirm the assertion made, whether it is positive or negative; with a high tone (H), the speaker expects the listener to give a neutral opinion, either confirming or denying the assertion. Thus, the semantic difference between the assertion and the expectation is that, unlike the assertion which can only be either positive or negative, the expectation can, in addition, be neutral. This is schematized in Quirk et al (ibid) as follows:

Table 1. The Interpretation of Question Tags

	H: NEUTRAL EXPECTATION	L: POSITIVE / NEGATIVE EXPECTATION
POSITIVE ASSERTION + NEGATIVE TAG	Paul eats fish, *dóesn't he?*	Paul eats fish, *dòesn't he?*
NEGATIVE ASSERTION + POSITIVE TAG	Paul doesn't eat meat, *dóes he?*	Paul does't eat meat, *dòes he?*

Since the speaker's expectation is signaled prosodically by the tonic stress on the operator, the question that also arises is how such expectation is transmitted through the particle *nàa* in CCE. To start with, observe that the use of the low tone in regular question tags by the speaker (to secure a confirmation) is usually accompanied by some body language which requires the speaker to look directly at the listener with raised eyebrows, head tilted forward towards the listener and lower jaws retracted towards the voice box and the vocal cords, thereby forcing the latter to produce a deep sound. In actual fact, therefore, it is possible to say that it is this exacting body language that actually urges the listener to confirm the speaker's assertion. Interestingly, the particle does portray a confirmatory expectation by means of the same kind of body language, signaled by the same tonic stress. Thus, it is clearly observable in CCE that, when the speaker expects the listener to confirm the positive or negative assertion made, the intonation on the

particle becomes deeper and emphatic, with a syllabification of the initial nasal probably triggered by the retraction of the lower jaws; otherwise, the tone remains neutral with no initial nasal syllabification. Consider the paradigm in (7).

(7) a. Jane will come *nàa*? Neutral Expectation

  b. Jane will not come *nàa*? Neutral Expectation

  c. Jane will come `*n-nàa*? Positive Expectation

  d. Jane will not come `*n-nàa*? Negative Expectation

Note that standard general question tags in standard varieties of English include *right?* as in 'You are (not) coming home, *right?*' (Downing & Locke, 2006), and a similar kind of emphasis is used on it when the speaker wants the listener to confirm the assertion made.

In sum, it has been demonstrated, in this section, that one of the ways in which the particle *nàa* is most frequently used in CCE is as a general question tag. Thus, we can say that in a typical CCE conversation, a normal question tag is usually traded for *nàa?*. In Section 3 that follows, we see that the use of the particle extends to cover other pragmatic needs, with its semantic interpretation derived through the same mechanism outlined here.

3. Other Uses of the Particle

The results from the questionnaire clearly show that, apart from being used as a general question tag, the particle is also commonly used in CCE to fill other discourse pragmatic gaps which in standard varieties of English are signaled by certain words and expressions. Asked in Question 7 if the respondents hear the particle used in contexts other than that of question tags, the expected 'yes' answer came up to 90%; asked in Question 8 to rate the number of different contexts in case of a 'yes' answer for Question 7, the expected response (of either *many*, *very many*, or *extremely many*) came up to 77%, while the rest 23% of respondents all responded *not many*, recognizing that there are at least other contexts.

From observation, the particle is also commonly used as an adverbial.(Note 4). Adverbials are traditionally classified as being adjuncts, disjuncts or conjuncts (Quirk et al., 1973:207). According to Quirk et al. (ibid), the functions of the adverbial are realized by adverb phrases like *there* and *as well as he could*; noun phrases like *last week*; preposition phrases like *with great skill*; finite verb clauses like *although he was very tired*; non-finite verb clauses with an infinitive verb like *to win*, or with an *-ing* participle like *wishing to encourage him*, or an *-ed* participle like *if urged (by our friends)*; and verbless clauses like *unaware of the danger* (p. 207).

Adverbials may either integrate within the structure of the clause or stay peripheral (Quirk et al., ibid:207). Adjuncts are optional constituents that typically integrate within the clause to tell time, place or manner of an action or a state of affairs – they are integrated in the sense that they are affected by such clausal processes as negation and interrogation (as in 'When did they arrive?'). Disjuncts, on the contrary, are not integrated within the clause; semantically, they express an evaluation of a proposition with respect to form (as in '*Frankly*, I am tired.') or content (as in 'They are *probably* at home.'). Conjuncts are also not integrated within the clause; but they differ from disjuncts in that the former primarily have a connective function that indicates the link between what is being said and what was said earlier. Conjuncts include *yet* (as in 'The child is ill, *yet* Mary does nothing about it.'), *then* (as in 'If you open all the windows, *then* I'm leaving.') and *because* (as in 'John can't come home tonight *because* it's raining heavily.'). Conjuncts and disjuncts are both not integrated within the clause since, unlike adjuncts, they are not affected by such clausal processes as negation and interrogation – for example, for a construction like '*actually*, I am tired.', we can neither question nor intensify the disjunct *actually* (i.e., '*How actually are you tired?*' or '*Very/quite actually, I am tired.*').

From the discussion that follows, the CCE discourse particle *nàa* is not used as an adjunct, and so it never gets integrated into the structure of the clause to tell time, place, or manner. It rather features mainly as a disjunct (Section 3.1), and to a lesser extend as a conjunct (Section 3.2).

3.1 The Particle as Attitudinal and Style Disjuncts

Disjuncts are mostly prepositional phrases and clauses, and they occur as either style disjuncts or attitudinal disjuncts (Quirk et al., 1973:242). Style disjuncts convey the speakers comment on the form of what he is saying (as in '*Strictly speaking*, nobody expected us to be here today.'), while attitudinal disjuncts rather convey the speaker's comment on the content of what he is saying (as in '*Obviously*, nobody expected us to be here today.').(Note 5) As we see in the following subsections, the particle *nàa* features both as attitudinal and style disjuncts.

3.1.1 An Adverbial Finite Verb Clause

According to Quirk et al. (1973:207), one of the units that realize adverbial functions is the finite verb clause. It is usually with conjuncts such as *although*, *as* and *since*. As shown in Quirk et al. (ibid), we have the concessive clause as in '*Although he hadn't eaten for* days, he looked very fit.' and 'Peter was playing *although he was very tired*.' (p. 324); the reason/cause clause as in '*Since/as Jane was the eldest*, she looked after the others.' (p. 327); and the manner/comparison clause as in 'Please do it *as I instructed*.' (p. 328). As an attitudinal disjunct, the particle *nàa* usually functions in CCE as the manner/comparison adverbial finite verb clause with the conjunct *as* in the sense of *naturally* or *of course*. Consider the use of it by the husband in the following 'husband-wife' conversation one morning:

(8)   Wife: You say the children shouldn't take breakfast?

      Husband: Yes.

      Wife: Why?

      Husband: Because they have to take the warm medicine now, and they don't have to eat
                       prior to it; that is why we didn't give them last evening *nàa*.

                       [*nàa* = as you know/as you can imagine/of course]

As already pointed out, the interpretation of the particle as the adverbial finite verb clause with *as* is clearly contextual. In this respect therefore, there is no strict predictability as to what specific expression the particle stands for as it is with tag questions where the interpretation of the particle depends on the form and content of the anchor clause (within the same complex sentence). Thus, in the context of (8), the particle may stand for *as you know*, *as you can imagine* or simply *of course*.

The particle also frequently functions in CCE as the concessive disjunct finite verb clause with the disjunct *although*, with the interpretation *despite the fact that*. Consider the following dialogue about *Mary* who has left the house against her parents' advice.

(9)   Mother: Where is Mary?

      Father: She has left *nàa*. [*nàa* = although we advised her not to/despite the warning*]

What this means is that, anyone within the context of (9) (who is aware of the advice or warning to Mary) would be able to interpret the use of *nàa* accordingly.

3.1.2 Of Course

One way of responding 'yes (i.e., agreeing with something or giving someone permission to do something)' to a *yes/no* question in Standard English when the answer is obvious is by saying 'of course.' This may be said in isolation to mean *yes*, or as part of a larger construction as in 'of course, you can' to mean *Yes, you can*. In Subsection 3.1.1, we have seen adverbial finite verb clauses with *as*, as attitudinal disjuncts, interpretable as *naturally* or *of course*, and reducible to *nàa* in CCE. The particle is also often used in the place of *of course* in CCE, within a larger construction in the sense of *yes* as in the B-type response in (10) and understood from the context.

(10) A: May I come with you to the party?

      B: You can come *nàa*. (= '*Of course*, you can come.')

However, the particle cannot be used in isolation to mean *yes*. It can rather only collocate with *yes* to be interpreted as an intensifier or a mark of obviousness to the *yes*-answer as in (11).

(11) A: Do you also want some fish?

      B: Yes *nàa*.

Recall that *of course* is also used to show that something said is already known or should already be known especially in the light of the existing circumstances. The use of the particle *nàa* in (11) thus predicts that in this function, *of course* can be reduced to the particle *nàa* in CCE as in (12) and (13).

(12) A: Have you written your term paper yet?

      B: But I finished it since last week *nàa*! (*nàa* = *of course*!)

(13) A: I was going ahead, and as John was completely drunk and was staggering behind, I only
           finally heard a loud splash.

B: What do you mean by that?

A: The man had thrown himself into a pool *nàa*!

(= '*Of course* the man had thrown himself into a pool.')(Note 6)

Since other than being used to mean *yes* in Standard English, *of course* is also used to show that something said is obvious or already known, or was expected, we expect the use of *nàa* in isolation, functioning as *of course* to be possible in CCE, interpreted to mean a *yes*-answer to a preceding *yes/no* question. Since this is not possible, we need to look for an explanation, an attempt of which I make in Section 4.

Finally, it is worth observing that in standard varieties of English, the expression *of course* can be negated – it is usually used in front of the negative marker *not* to emphasize a disagreement or that an assertion is obviously not true. Like the expectation that the particle should occur as *of course* in isolation to mean *yes* in CCE, one also expects it to occur with the negative marker *not* in CCE; but again, this does not take place. It does not even occur after a *no*-answer in contrast to (11) above.

(14) A: How did you get the money? Did you steal it?

B: *Of course* not/ no *of course*.

B: *Nàa not. / *No *nàa*.

I also return to this worry in Section 4.

3.1.3 For Argument's Sake

Another way by which the discourse particle *nàa* is used as a disjunct in CCE is to put stress (i.e., emphasis) on a request or order, or to express anger over a situation as expressed in a proposition. Such emotions are commonly expressed using the *for X's sake* type *s*-genitive expression like *for God's sake* and *for argument's sake*, which are style disjuncts. They are effectively reduced to the particle *nàa* in CCE as in the following commonly-heard examples:

(15) a.   Leave me alone *nàa*!

b.   Why are you doing this *nàa*? [*nàa* = *for Christ's sake*, *for God's sake*, etc]

3.1.4 A Politeness Adverb Phrase in a Request (= *please*)

One final way in which the particle is used in CCE as a disjunct is as the expression *please*, as used in standard varieties of English to make a request either more polite or more forceful depending on the tone. Consider the examples in (16).(Note 7)

(16) a.   Remember to close the windows *nàa*. [*nàa* = *please* (politeness)]

b.   Walk faster *nàa*. [*nàa* = please (politeness/force)]

The disjunct *please* is also regularly used to make requests, in the form of *yes/no* questions, more polite like 'Could I have a cup of coffee, *please*?'. However, the particle cannot replace *please* in such a construction in CCE as illustrated below.

(17) *Could I have a cup of coffee *nàa*?

Note that, by functioning as a question tag in CCE, *nàa* also functions to turn a declarative sentence into a *yes/no* question since, as Huddleston and Pullum (2005) point out, a question tag is an elliptical *yes/no* question. It is possible therefore to account for (17) by saying that the particle cannot play a double role within the same construction, that is, it cannot function as *please* to make the request more polite and at the same time to turn the construction into a *yes/no* question, the latter function having already been performed structurally by the subject-auxiliary inversion rule in English.

*3.2 As a Conjunct – The Resultative/Inferential **Then: as a result** and **in that case***

As pointed out earlier, conjuncts, like disjuncts, are not integrated within the clause. They are mostly adverbial or prepositional phrases, and differ from conjunctions in that the latter are restricted to the initial position in a clause (Quirk et al., 1973:246). Conjuncts include enumeratives (e.g., *firstly/secondly*, *for a start*, *in the first place*), reinforcers (e.g., *also*, *furthermore*, *in addition*), equatives (e.g., *equally*, *likewise*), transitionals (e.g., *by the way*), summatives (e.g., *then*), resultatives (e.g., *consequently*, *hence*, *therefore*, *then*, *as a result*), inferentials (e.g., *else*, *in other words*, *then*, *in that case*), reformulatories (e.g., *rather*, *in other words*), replacives (e.g., *alternatively*, *rather*, *on the other hand*), antithetics (e.g., *instead*, *then*, *on the contrary*), concessives (e.g., *anyhow*, *anyway*, *besides*) and

temporal transitionals (e.g., *meanwhile*, (*in the*) *meantime*) (p. 247). Apart from being used as a disjunct, the particle *nàa* is also used in CCE as a conjunct in some situations. It frequently occurs as the resultative *then* or *as a result*, or as the inferential *in that case* as exemplified below.

(18)   A: I still don't want to come with you!

         B: Stay there *nàa*, if you don't want to come with us. (= 'Stay there *then*, …')

(19)   A: We shouldn't be here.

         B: Let's go *nàa*. (= '*Then* let's go.')

(20) If you do that, you are a hypocrite *nàa*. (= '…, *then* you are a hypocrite.')

In these examples, the particle *nàa* plays a connective role between two propositions.

However, it is not in all instances where *then* is used in a resultative fashion that it can be replaced by the particle *nàa* in CCE. Consider the following paradigm:

(21)   a.   Do all your chores now; *then* you will be free in the evening.

         b.   *Do all your chores now; you will be free in the evening *nàa*.

One possible explanation here is that while *then* in (18-20) has only one reading, purely as a (resultative/inferential) conjunct, in (21a), it combines both the conjunct reading and the reading of a conjunction, a double function that cannot be borne by *nàa* as we noted earlier for (17). This is evidenced by the acceptability of (22) with the introduction of the conjunction *if/and*.

(22)   a   *If* you do all your chores now, you will be free in the evening *nàa*.

              (= 'If you do all your chores now, *then* you will be free in the evening.')

         b.   Do all your chores now, and you will be free in the evening *nàa*.

              (= 'Do all your chores now, and *then* you will be free in the evening.')

That is, (22) is possible because the introduction of the conjunction *if/and* in the construction immediately frees *then* of its role/reading as a conjunction, leaving it with the conjunct role alone that can be picked up by the discourse particle *nàa*.(Note 8) Besides, as we see later in Section 4, the particle can only occur clause finally, and since conjunctions are restricted to the clause initial position, their role cannot be usurped by the former.

3.3 A Pausing/Assuring Word (= okay)

The expression *okay* is used in many ways. It is commonly used as a predicative adjective (as in 'The quality is *okay.*') to mean *fine* or *acceptable*. But it is also used in an adverbial fashion in the middle of a long compound or complex sentence that introduces a particular story, as a way of pausing to be sure that the beginning of the story is clear and interesting enough to hold the attention of the listener. This is the case in a sentence like 'Jesus came to the city of Jericho, *okay*, and there he met a large crowd'. In CCE, this role is frequently filled by the particle *nàa* as illustrated in (23) where the speaker seeks to console the listener who missed a party.

(23) Consider that you didn't miss anything, my dear! The party was a total mess! If   you were there *nàa*,   you would have been badly disappointed.

3.4 The Use of the Particle in Collocation with Regular Adverbials

So far we have seen that, besides functioning in CCE as question tags, the particle *nàa* also functions as adverbials, especially as disjuncts. Different disjuncts and/or conjuncts can normally collocate within the same clause as in '*What is even more remarkable*, they managed, *to our greatest surprise,* to cross the finishing line.', with two attitudinal disjuncts. The construction thus suggests that the particle can collocate with a regular disjunct/conjunct, since it would be functioning in the place of another disjunct/conjunct or as a question tag, or as the expression *please*, used in a request to make the latter more polite or forceful. Consider the following CCE dialogue:

(24) A: I think you should rather cook breakfast.

         B: *Then*, you will bathe the baby *nàa*?

              (= *Then/in that case*, you will bathe the baby, *won't you/right*?)

         B: *Then*, bathe the baby *nàa*. (= *Then*, bathe the baby (*said with an urge*).)

In summary, in this section, we have seen how, apart from being used as a question tag in CCE, the particle *nàa* is also frequently used in the place of some adverbials, to perform a variety of different pragmatic functions with a

wide range of semantic interpretations based on context.

4. The Position of *nàa*

When used as a question tag, the particle *nàa* in CCE occurs sentence finally. The reason is clearly because question tags can only appear sentence finally, since they depend on the anchor for their source of semantic interpretation. Since the particle also functions as an adverbial which can potentially occur in different sentence positions, the question then arises: what position does it occupy within the clause? A language may reserve a certain position for adverbs. As Van der Auwera (1994) points out, in some languages (e.g., English), the position between the tense or finite (auxiliary/modal/linking) verb and the predicate, that is, the middle of the clause is reserved exclusively for adverbs, though the latter are not restricted to this position (cf. 'That is *actually* the situation.', '*Actually*, that is the situation.' and 'That is the situation *actually*.') and some adverbs are equally not allowed in it (compare 'That was an *extremely* funny film.' and '*That was *extremely* a funny film.').

In standard varieties of English, Quirk et al. (1973:208) distinguish four different positions of adverbials within a declarative clause. These include one initial position, two medial positions (M1 and M2) and one final position. The initial position is the position before the subject (as in '*Naturally*, they are walking.'). M1 is the position immediately before the auxiliary verb or the copula (as in 'They *obviously* will come.') or the position between two auxiliary verbs or between an auxiliary verb and a copula (as in 'He will *naturally* be at home now.'). M2 is either immediately before the lexical verb or between the copula and a subject complement (as in 'John is *certainly* paying for his deeds.'). Then the final position is the one either after an intransitive verb (as in 'John ran out *immediately*.') or after an object or subject complement (as in 'John became afraid *immediately*.'). Quirk et al. (ibid) point out that style disjuncts normally appear initially (p. 242) and that, although attitudinal disjuncts can appear in almost any of the four positions, the normal position for most of them is also the initial position, with some taking the M2 position (p. 245). The normal position for most conjuncts is also initial, with some of them restricted to it, while the medial and final positions are rare. What this means is that conjuncts and disjuncts tend to favour a position at/towards the beginning of a clause, and rarely take the final position.

Given that the normal position for most disjuncts and conjuncts is the initial position, we expect the particle *nàa*, functioning as some disjuncts and conjuncts in CCE, to be able to occur in the initial or medial position. However, from our discussion of the particle so far, it is clear from all the examples used that it rather never occupies the initial (or medial) position of the clause.

(25)   a.   *Nàa* leave me alone! (= '*For God's sake* leave me alone!')

        b.   *John is *nàa* still the leader of the group.

              (= 'John is *of course* still the leader of the group.')

One way of explaining why the particle can only occur clause finally is to follow Poplack's (1980) equivalence constraint to predict that switches only occur at points where the surface structure of the relevant languages coincide. In other words, the particle *nàa*, as originally used in African languages, and the English sentence elements for which it serves as a switch in CCE coincide only at sentence final position and nowhere else.

Another way of explaining this, nevertheless, is to assume that, since the interpretation of the particle is contextual, it can only be at the end of the clause that provides or links it to the source context as is clearly the case with question tags. This idea certainly explains why the particle cannot occur in isolation as *of course* to mean a *yes*-answer to a *yes/no* question, unlike it is in standard varieties of English, since it may be taken to be in an initial position where it is banned for lack of interpretive context (cf. Section 3.1.2). This also explains why the particle can neither precede nor follow an isolated negative marker, although this particular point is intriguing, given that as seen in (11) earlier, the particle is possible after a *yes*-answer. Again this can be resolved if we follow ideas from Sells (1987:449) to assume that a *no*-answer denies the proposition it embodies, and therefore cannot give the relevant context that determines what the particle should stand for.(Note 9)

5. Conclusion

Code-switching is usually necessitated by deficiency gaps in the use of a non-native language and/or certain economic gains. By considering empirical observation of natural daily life conversations, and analyzing questionnaire responses of 100 randomly selected English speaking Cameroonians of different walks of life, age groups, and places of origin and residence, I hope that I have attempted a valid investigation into the nature of the constant switch to the Bantu derived discourse particle *nàa* in Cameroonian Colloquial English (CCE). This article

shows that the use of the particle is licensed by the need to fill deficiency gaps in the use of Standard English and some general principle of economy. Thus, it has been demonstrated that one of the ways in which the particle is most frequently used in CCE is as a question tag like *don't you?* and *do you?*, with its interpretation based on the anchor clause. We have also seen that apart from being used as a question tag, the particle frequently goes for some adverbials; specifically, it functions mainly as some disjuncts and conjuncts, the interpretation of which is determined by context. Finally, although disjuncts and conjuncts mainly occupy the initial position of a clause, we have seen that the particle only occurs at the end of a clause in the final position, arguably because whatever it stands for in any given construction is determined by the propositional content of the clause it is appended to, such that the latter must be uttered first for interpretive content.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

Note 1. Such particles with similar pragmatic functions have been reported in different varieties of English around the world. See, for example, Wee (2003) for the use of *lah* and *lor* in Singaporean English and Avis (1972), Bailey (1983), Meyerhoff (1994) and Holmes (1995) for the use of *eh* in New Zealand's Maurian English and other world varieties.

Note 2. It is not strange to find, in a given language, a discourse particle derived from a different language in functions that are normally signaled by certain syntactic devices (Trudgill & Hannah, 1994:136).

Note 3. In Standard varieties of English, a question tag functions as a subordinate clause appended to a matrix clause or anchor that may be positive or negative in polarity, the form of the tag (with tense and choice of tense) largely predictable from that of the anchor. For literature on English question tags, see, for example, Achiri-Taboh (2015), Barry (2003), Biber et al (1999), Huddleston (1988), Huddleston and Pullum (2005), Kolln and Funk (1998), Peters (2004), and Quirk et al (1973).

Note 4. Adverbials are a class of adverbs. Note that an adverb is standardly taken for a word that describes or gives more information about certain kinds of word or phrase. The term *adverb* in itself seems to suggest that it is used only with a verb, or semantically to modify a verb. Although this misconception has given way to a broader usage, namely, that an adverb typically serves as a modifier not only of a verb, but also of an adjective, another adverb, a preposition, a phrase, a clause, or a sentence, the term has generally been maintained for the category of words that perform this multi-descriptive role. Unlike adjectives, which typically denote quality, quantity or extent, adverbs express some relation of manner or quality, place, time, degree, number, cause, opposition, affirmation or denial. The descriptive role of adverbs cuts deeply into a variety of other categories that, as Van der Auwera (1994) notes, words sometimes seem to be assigned to the class of adverbs for no better reason than that they do not fit any other class.

Note 5. The difference between the two can be seen to lie in the fact that, unlike style disjuncts, attitudinal disjuncts actually form part of the content of what the speaker is saying by implying the presence or absence of a reason; thus, '*obviously*, nobody expected us to be here today' implies 'there was no reason for anybody to expect us here today'.

Note 6. The interpretation of the particle in (13) is two-fold: besides stating that it was not surprising that John had thrown himself into a pool since he was completely drunk, it also states how obvious it was that John had thrown himself into a pool with speaker A's use of the word 'splash'.

Note 7. In CCE, the particle is also commonly used on the salutation *How are you?* as in 'How are you *nàa*?', often reduced to 'How *nàa*?' also to make the salutation more polite (and perhaps to signal informality and solidarity). A majority of people I have spoken to on this point agree that simply asking 'How are you?' sounds impolite when addressing an older person or hard and too formal among friends or peers.

Note 8. The reader can also experiment this fact using any recent version of a simple Windows Word Processor, by keying in the bracketed Standard English versions of the examples in (22) with the omission of the conjunctions *if* and *and*; in either case, *then* is immediately underlined for grammaticality, and upon a right click on it, a preceding conjunction is proposed. The same won't happen with (21a) since the semicolon already indicates that we are dealing with two independent clauses.

Note 9. Observe that the particle can however occur at the end of a negative clause as in (i); the difference is that, in (i), there is a propositional context expressed, whereas for a simple *no*-answer, there is no such context – note (ii).

i.   I will not give him the books *nàa*. (= I will not give him the books *of course*.)

ii.   No, I will not give him the books *nàa*. (= No, I will not give him the books *of course*.)

Appendix: Questionnaire

This is a questionnaire for a study on language use by Anglophone Cameroonians. Kindly respond by simply circling the letter of the appropriate answer, and, please, endeavor to maintain a high degree of honesty; be assured that whatever data you provide through this questionnaire will be treated with the highest degree of confidentiality – your identity is not required. Please, kindly devote a bit of time and do not hurry on the questions, for they require you to reflect a little on true life situations – if necessary, you may keep the questionnaire for a day.

Basic Information

Age of respondent: a. 15-25   b. 26-40   c. 41-60   d. 61+

Home town _____; Town of residence _____;

Occupation _____

Questions

(1)   Imagine you are on holiday, and you have just won a round ticket for a one-week pleasure trip to Southern Africa with your spouse who is happy about it. You have hired a taxi to take you to the Douala international airport shortly after lunch today for the flight later in the evening. How would you (potentially) respond to the following questions if any were asked? **NB. Read all the answers carefully before choosing. If you cannot figure out what 'nàa' means, as written here, please, seek clarification from the bearer of this questionnaire, and note that the aim is not to find out if such constructions (with 'nàa') are grammatical in English or not.**

　　　i.　　You'll take lunch before leaving *nàa*?

　　　　　a.　　　Yes.　b.　　　Yes, I will.　c.　　　No.　d.　　　No, I won't.

　　　　　e.　　　What do you mean?

　　　ii.　　You've hired a bus *nàa*?

　　　　　a.　　　Yes.　b.　　　Yes, I have.　c.　　　No.　d.　　　No, I haven't.

　　　　　e.　　　What do you mean?

　　　iii.　　You won't need a taxi *nàa*?

　　　　　a.　　　Yes.　b.　　　Yes, I will.　c.　　　No.　d.　　　No, I won't.

　　　　　e.　　　What do you mean?

　　　iv.　　The trip won't exceed 7 days *nàa*?

　　　　　a.　　　Yes.　b.　　　Yes, it will.　c.　　　No.　d.　　　No, it won't.

　　　　　e.　　　What do you mean?

　　　v.　　Your spouse is happy *nàa*?

　　　　　a.　　　Yes.　b.　　　Yes, s/he is.　c.　　　No.　d.　　　No, s/he isn't.

　　　　　e.　　　What do you mean?

　　　vi.　　You finished parking yesterday *nàa*?

　　　　　a.　　　Yes.　b.　　　Yes, I did.　c.　　　No.　d.　　　No, I didn't.

　　　　　e.　　　What do you mean?

(2)　　How well do you recognize the expression *nàa* as used in (1) above?

　　　a.　　　extremely well　　b.　　　very well　c.　　　well　d.　　　not well

　　　e.　　　not at all

(3)　　How often do you use such questions with the expression *nàa* in (1) above?

　　　a.　　　extremely often　　b.　　　very often　c.　　　often　d.　　　not often

　　　e.　　　not at all

(4)   What age group of people do you often hear using the expression *nàa* in your community?

    a.   school age to teenagers   b.   young adults   c.   elderly people

    d.   all ages   e.   none

(5)   What classes of people do you often hear using the expression *nàa* in your community?

    a.   employees/employers   b.   business people   c.   low scale traders

    d.   all classes   e.   none

(6)   How often do you use English question tags like the one underlined in 'John was late, <u>wasn't he?</u>'?

    a.   extremely often   b.   very often   c.   often   d.   not often

    e.   not at all

(7)   Do you hear the expression *nàa* used in contexts other than the one shown in (1) above?

    a.   yes.   b.   No.

(8)   If your answer to question (7) is *yes*, how do you rate the number of different contexts?

    a.   extremely many   b.   very many   c.   many   d.   not many

    e.   very few

One hundred randomly selected respondents were reached, and the following results were obtained:

Aged range	Number of respondent
15 to 25 years	47
26 - 40	25
41 - 60	23
61 - upwards	05

Number of different	
Towns of origin	30
Towns of residence	15
Occupations	28

RESPONSE

Question	Expected response	Percentage of response
(1)	from (i) to (vi), any answer from *a* to *d*	97
(2)	any answer from *a* to *c*	92 (7% answered *d*, and 1%, *e*)
(3)	any answer from *a* to *c*	82 (14% answered *d*, and 4%, *e*)
(4)	*d* (i.e., *all ages*)	86 (nobody answered *none*)
(5)	*d* (i.e., *all classes*)	86 (nobody answered *none*)
(6)	*d/e*	76
(7)	*a*	90
(8)	any answer from *a* to *c*	77 (23% answered *d*, and 0%, *e*)