

Digital Identity Construction: The Case of Cameroon Anglophone Youths

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Abstract

This paper examines digital identity construction among Anglophone youths in Cameroon, with particular attention to language choice on social media platforms. Using a questionnaire, interviews, and online observation of social media posts, the study reveals that language use in the digital space is a powerful tool through which the Anglophone youth expresses his/her identity, resistance, belonging, and modernity. The findings of the study reveal that the English language, Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), the French language, and code-switching are strategically used depending on context, audience and purpose. The English language is mostly used to project education, formality, and global identity, while Cameroon Pidgin English serves as a marker of solidarity, intimacy, and Anglophone cultural identity. Code-switching emerges as a dominant practice, reflecting the complex sociolinguistic reality of Cameroon and the hybrid identities of youths navigating multiple linguistic worlds. The study further reveals that the Anglophone crisis has significantly influenced digital identity construction. Many English-speaking youths use social media to assert marginalized Anglophone identity, express political opinions, and construct a collective sense of belonging. Emojis, hashtags, slang, abbreviations, and non-standard spellings equally play an important role in shaping digital identities, making online communication creative and identity-driven rather than linguistically rigid. Overall, the findings confirm that the digital space is not a neutral platform but an active sociolinguistic arena where Anglophone youths negotiate identity, power, resistance, and social positioning through language choice.

Keywords: Digital identity, hybrid identities, Anglophone youths, code-switching, code-mixing

Introduction

The rapid proliferation of digital technology and social media platforms across Africa has catalysed the emergence of novel spaces for identity articulation, particularly among younger demographics. In Cameroon, a nation characterized by a profound and enduring socio-political and linguistic schism between Anglophone and Francophone populations,

social media has evolved into a critical arena for self-expression, resistance, and the negotiation of both personal and collective identities. This dynamic is especially salient for Anglophone youths, whose identities are frequently forged within a context of linguistic hybridity and political marginalization. This paper is motivated by the pressing imperative to comprehend how language choice functions as a pivotal mechanism in the construction of digital identities among Cameroonian Anglophone youths. As digital platforms increasingly become primary conduits for communication, self-representation, and socio-political activism, they offer an indispensable lens through which to examine the underlying sociolinguistic realities and identity formations of their users. Within this milieu, language transcends its basic communicative function to become a potent symbolic resource for negotiating visibility, solidarity, authenticity, and political resistance (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Despite a growing corpus of research on digital identity and sociolinguistics within global contexts, a significant scholarly lacuna persists concerning the African, and more specifically, the Cameroonian experience. Insufficient empirical attention has been paid to the nuanced ways in which Anglophone Cameroonian youths navigate and negotiate their linguistic repertoires online. This includes the strategic deployment and blending of multiple codes—such as Standard English, Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE), Camfranglais, French, and various home languages—and how these deliberate choices correlate with complex issues of belonging, power, and identity in a postcolonial state (Anchimbe, 2006). Consequently, this paper is propelled by two interconnected concerns. First, elucidating how Anglophone youths in Cameroon architect their identities through linguistic practices on social media carries substantial implications for national cohesion, digital policy formulation, and educational pedagogy. The paper also enriches broader theoretical conversations surrounding youth agency, digital citizenship, and sociolinguistic justice in multilingual, often politically fractured societies (Blommaert, 2010). Second, while the fields of digital sociolinguistics and identity studies continue to expand, there remains a dearth of rigorous, empirically grounded research investigating how youths in multilingual states leverage language online to construct hybrid, fluid, and dynamic identities that respond to both local pressures and global flows.

The ascendancy of digital media has fundamentally reconfigured the processes through which individuals, particularly youths, construct and articulate their identities. In multilingual and politically segmented

societies like Cameroon, social media platforms serve as critical discursive arena where language is mobilized as a powerful instrument for identity negotiation, self-presentation, and socio-political commentary (Blommaert & Varis, 2015). For Anglophone youths in Cameroon, whose linguistic and cultural identity is deeply inflected by the historical legacy of British colonialism and the ongoing, violent Anglophone Crisis, social media provides a vital space for articulating resistance, fostering in-group solidarity, and performing belonging.

Historical context

The intersection of digital communication, linguistic diversity, and identity formation represents one of the most compelling areas of contemporary sociolinguistic inquiry. In postcolonial African contexts, where colonial legacies often dictate official language policies that exist in tension with complex multilingual realities, the advent of social media has introduced a transformative dimension to how individuals, particularly youths, negotiate and articulate their sense of self. Cameroon, often described as “Africa in miniature” due to its remarkable cultural and linguistic heterogeneity, presents a particularly instructive case study. The nation’s official English-French bilingual policy, a direct inheritance from its colonial partition between British and French administrations, overlays a landscape of over 250 indigenous languages (Ethnologue, 2025) and vibrant lingua franca such as Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE) and urban vernaculars like Camfranglais. This intricate sociolinguistic mosaic is further complicated by a profound and enduring political schism between the Anglophone and Francophone populations, a divide that has escalated into a violent separatist conflict known as the Anglophone crisis since 2016 and which has lasted to date. Within this charged environment, digital platforms have emerged as crucial arena where Anglophone youths, a demographic experiencing political marginalization and identity precocity, actively construct and perform their identities through deliberate linguistic choices.

To fully appreciate the significance of digital language choice among Anglophone youths, one must first understand the extraordinarily complex sociolinguistic terrain of Cameroon. The country is a textbook example of “super-diversity,” a term describing societies characterized by a multiplicity of migration flows, legal statuses, and linguistic repertoires (Vertovec, 2007). *Ethnologue*, an authoritative reference on world languages, documents over 250 living indigenous languages within Cameroon’s borders, which belong to the Niger-Congo, Afro-Asiatic,

and Nilo-Saharan language families (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2023). This indigenous mosaic includes major languages like Beti-Fang, Fulfulde, and Medumba, alongside countless others spoken by smaller communities. This foundational multilingualism is a core feature of daily life for most Cameroonians, who often speak at least one home language in addition to other vehicular languages.

The demographic and political weight of the two official languages is heavily skewed. While precise census data on language use is contentious, scholars estimate that Francophones constitute roughly 80% of the population, while Anglophones make up about 20% (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003). This demographic disparity translates into tangible political and economic marginalization. Power is concentrated in Yaoundé, the capital city (situated in the Francophone region), and the civil service, military, and para-statal sectors are widely perceived as dominated by Francophones. The Anglophone regions (the Northwest and Southwest) have historically complained of underinvestment, neglect, and the systemic imposition of Francophone administrative and legal procedures. This perception of “second-class citizenship” is at the heart of the Anglophone crisis. Linguistically, the dominance of French is evident in officialdom, national media, and many spheres of public life. The English language, though official, often operates in a subordinate position; its use is frequently confined to the two Anglophone regions and in specific domains like the common law courts and Anglophone subsystems of education.

In the interstices of this official bilingual hierarchy thrives a vibrant ecology of non-official languages and hybrid codes that fulfil the daily communicative needs of most Cameroonians. The most significant of these is Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE), an expanded pidgin that functions as a nationwide lingua franca, particularly in urban areas and within the Anglophone zone. CPE is not a simplified or “broken” form of the English language but a fully-fledged linguistic system with its own grammar, lexicon, and social meanings. It is the language of the market, the Taxi Park, Pentecostal churches, popular music, and informal socializing. Scholars such as Alobwede (1998) and Ngefac (2013) have documented its robust vitality and its role as a powerful marker of Cameroonian, and particularly Anglophone identity. Its use often signals solidarity, informality, and a connection to grassroots culture, standing in symbolic opposition to the formality and perceived elitism of Standard English and French.

Another crucial component of the urban youth linguistic landscape is Camfranglais, a dynamic and creative hybrid that blends lexical and syntactic elements from French, English, Pidgin, and home languages. Originating in the cosmopolitan cities of Douala and Yaoundé, Camfranglais serves as a potent identity marker for urban, networked youths, indexing modernity, street smarts, and a savvy navigation of Cameroon's cultural pluralism (Kouega, 2003). Its use is a performative act of linguistic bricolage, reflecting the hybrid realities of its speakers. Furthermore, home languages continue to play vital roles in home domains, cultural rituals, and as markers of ethnic identity, though many are under pressure from the dominant national and global languages.

The digital identity work of Anglophone youths cannot be divorced from the specific historical and political context of the Anglophone Crisis, a conflict that has politicized language and identity to an unprecedented degree. The crisis has its roots not in 2016, but in the foundational grievances stemming from the incomplete and problematic union of the two Cameroons. As detailed by historians like Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003) and Awasom (2004), the seeds of discontent were sown during the colonial partition and germinated after reunification. The 1961 federation was a marriage of two territories with different colonial experiences: the French Republic of Cameroon experienced direct, centralized rule and assimilationist policies, while the British Southern Cameroons experienced indirect rule and a slower pace of political development. The federal constitution was meant to protect the distinct identity and institutions of the Anglophone region.

However, the federal arrangement was short-lived. In 1972, President Ahmadou Ahidjo organized a referendum that replaced the federal state with a unitary one, the United Republic of Cameroon. This move centralized power in Yaoundé and began a process of assimilating Anglophone institutions into a Francophone-dominated mould. The Anglophone educational subsystem (modelled on the British GCE system) and the English common law courts came under increasing pressure and were gradually marginalized. The symbolic "coup de grace" for many Anglophones came in 1984, when President Paul Biya changed the country's name from the United Republic of Cameroon back to the Republic of Cameroon—the exact name borne by the former French territory at independence. This act was widely interpreted in the Anglophone regions as a final erasure of their political heritage and a confirmation that the 1961 union was not a partnership but an annexation (Takougang & Krieger, 1998). This historical narrative of betrayal and

marginalization became a core component of Anglophone political consciousness.

For decades, this discontent simmered, expressed through political opposition, intellectual critique, and civil society activism. The situation reached a tipping point in late 2016. What began as peaceful, professional protests by Anglophone lawyers and teachers against the appointment of Francophone judges, who did not understand English common law in the North West and South West Regions, and the imposition of Francophone-trained teachers in Anglophone schools, was met with a heavy-handed government response. Security forces used violent means to suppress protests, leading to deaths, arrests, and a rapid radicalization of the population. The protests transformed into a widespread popular uprising demanding federalism or outright independence for the Anglophone regions, dubbed “Ambazonia” (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this paper is deliberately pluralistic, integrating two complementary theoretical perspectives that together provide a robust scaffold for analysing the sociolinguistics of digital identity. This dual framework is necessary to adequately capture both the fluid, constructed nature of identity in digital spaces and the strategic, interactional motivations behind specific linguistic choices. The Postmodernist Theory of Identity offers a macro-level, philosophical lens for understanding the nature of the self being constructed in late modernity, while the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) provides a micro-sociolinguistic, social-psychological lens for explaining the specific linguistic manoeuvres through which that construction is achieved in interaction. Together, they form an integrated analytical toolkit that connects broad epistemological questions about identity in the digital age with concrete, observable language practices.

Literature Review

The theoretical link between language and identity is well-established in sociolinguistics. The seminal work of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) proposed that "acts of identity" through language are how individuals both signal their group affiliations and gradually change the language itself. This performative view aligns with the postmodern perspective reviewed earlier. In the African context, the work of scholars like Blommaert (2005, 2010) has been transformative. His concept of

"sociolinguistic scales" explains how linguistic resources gain or lose value as they move across different social and geographic scales (local, national, global). A local Pidgin utterance may have high value on a local scale (indexing authenticity) but low value on a national bureaucratic scale. Digital spaces, Blommaert argues, create new, complex scale dynamics, where a local political grievance expressed in Pidgin on Facebook can be instantly projected to a global scale via shares and hashtags. This scalar analysis is crucial for understanding the amplified power of digital language choice in contexts like Cameroon.

The specific field of digital sociolinguistics or "language online" has grown exponentially. Androutsopoulos (2006, 2014) is a central figure, advocating for the study of online language practices as situated social action. His concepts of "networked multilingualism" (2015) and "language policing" in online communities are particularly relevant. Networked multilingualism describes how individuals deploy their multilingual repertoires across networked digital spaces, a perfect description of the practices of Anglophone Cameroonian youths. "Language policing" refers to the meta-commentary and correction of language use online, which can be observed in debates about "proper" English versus Pidgin on Cameroonian social media threads. Other key digital communication theorists include Danah Boyd (2014) on networked publics and the architecture of social media platforms, and Papacharissi (2010) on the "affordances" of different platforms for self-presentation. These works provide the general framework for analysing how digital environments shape communication, which must then be applied to the specific sociolinguistic context of Cameroon.

A small but growing body of literature directly addresses the intersection of youth, digital media, and language in Cameroon, particularly in relation to the crisis. Fombad and Tazo (2018) examined social media as a tool for political participation and mobilization among Anglophone youths, noting the strategic use of the English language and visual symbols to build a cohesive "Ambazonian" identity. Their work, while valuable, focuses more on political communication broadly rather than on a fine-grained sociolinguistic analysis of everyday language choices.

Recent studies have started to narrow in on linguistic practices. Tabe's (2023) work on code-switching in digital communication provides empirical data on patterns in emails and social media posts, identifying topic and audience as key triggers. Ojong Diba (2021) specifically looked at Pidgin as a digital lingua franca among urban

youths, affirming its central role in informal, peer-to-peer online interaction. However, these studies often treat language choice as a dependent variable to be catalogued, rather than as the primary engine of identity construction.

Methodology

The chosen methodology for this paper provides a coherent framework for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of empirical data to address the research problem. A mixed-methods approach is employed, integrating quantitative measures to identify broad patterns of language use with qualitative depth to uncover the meanings, motivations, and social functions underlying these patterns.

A total sample of 50 participants was targeted, distributed across the different data collection methods to balance depth and breadth. A cohort of 25 participants responded to the online questionnaire. This number is considered sufficient to detect initial patterns and trends in language use frequency and attitudes. From the pool, a subset of 5 participants will be purposively selected for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These interviewees will be chosen based on their questionnaire responses to represent a range of linguistic practices (e.g., heavy Pidgin users, frequent code-switchers, those with strong political expressions online). The criterion for the number of interviews is informational saturation—the point at which new interviews yield diminishing returns of novel insights (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Concurrently, digital discourse analysis is conducted on the social media outputs of 20 participants. This includes 5 of the interviewees and 15 additional participants from the questionnaire pool, selected to ensure diversity in platform use (e.g., Facebook, Whatsapp, TikTok). This multi-pronged sampling approach ensures the study captures a wide spectrum of digital linguistic behaviour while allowing for deep dives into individual experiences.

Three primary instruments are developed and deployed to collect complementary forms of data, aligning with the mixed-methods design. The first instrument is a structured online questionnaire, administered via the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire comprises several sections: demographic information (age, gender, region of origin, current residence, education level); social media habits (platforms used, frequency, types of engagement); and a core section on language use. This core section utilizes Likert-scale items and multiple-choice questions to elicit self-reported data on the frequency of using Standard

English, Cameroonian Pidgin English, French, and home languages across different platforms (e.g., Facebook posts vs. Whatsapp chats) and for different communicative purposes (e.g., joking, arguing, discussing politics).

The second instrument is a semi-structured interview guide. This guide is flexible, allowing for probing and follow-up questions based on participant responses, while ensuring key themes are explored across all interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The guide is organized around thematic areas derived from the theoretical framework and research questions. Key areas include: personal history and relationship with Anglophone identity; meta-cognitive awareness of language choices on different platforms and for different audiences.

The third instrument is a Digital Discourse Analysis (DDA) protocol or checklist. This systematic tool guides the collection and initial coding of digital texts. For each participant included in the discourse analysis component, the protocol specifies the collection of a corpus of digital texts over one month. The checklist directs this author to record metadata for each text unit (e.g., platform, date, type of post/comment, visible audience).

Discussion and analysis of findings

The administration of the questionnaire was done in order to provide extra explanations where the respondents could have difficulty answering the question. The questionnaire was designed according to the research needs and objectives. Data obtained are presented with reference to the questionnaire's questions subsequently.

1. Response on Ages

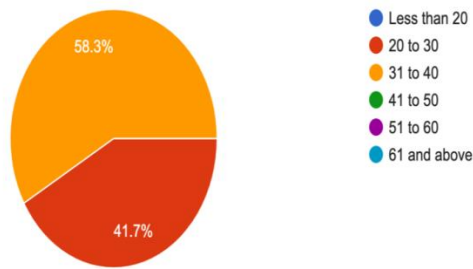
The age of participants is important in this study because it helps to understand how language choices and digital identity construction vary across different stages of youth development. Table 1 and Chart 1 below present the responses to this question.

Table 1: Ages

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
20-30	10	41.7%
31- 40	14	58.3%
42 +	0	0

1. Select your age group

24 responses



The data revealed that participants are concentrated within two primary adult age brackets. Specifically, a majority of the respondents (58.3%) fall into the 31 to 40 age group, while the remaining 41.7% are aged between 20 and 30.

2. Gender

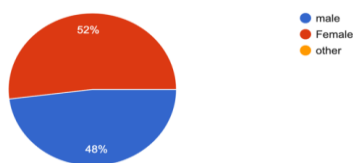
The gender of participants is important because it equally helps to understand how language choice and digital identity construction vary across different stages of youth development. This question was asked because it is important to know the gender of the youths who participated in the study.

Table 2: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	13	52%
Male	12	48%

2. Select your gender

25 responses



The chart illustrates that women (52%) represent the majority of the respondents, slightly outnumbering men (48%) among the 25 individuals surveyed. This distribution indicates a near-equal representation of both primary genders, suggesting that the research findings are inclusive of both male and female perspectives.

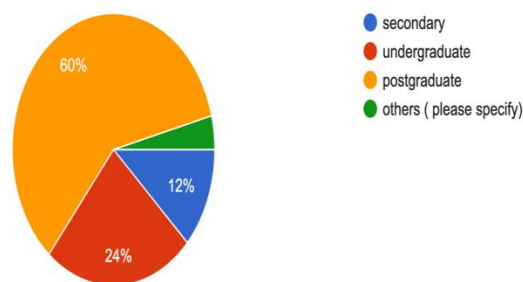
3. Level of Education

Youths were asked to indicate their educational background. This question aims to understand language competence, particularly in English, Pidgin, and French. Their responses are presented in the table and chart below.

Table 3: Level of education

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary	3	12%
Undergraduate	6	24%
Postgraduate	15	60%
Others	1	4%

3. What is your educational level
25 responses



The chart reveals that 60 % of Anglophone youths are postgraduate, 24% are undergraduate, 2% are at the secondary level, and 4% (1) are unspecified.

4. Place of residence

The reason for this question helps to understand how geographical location influences the language choices and identity construction of Anglophone youths on social media. Different towns in Cameroon have distinct linguistic and cultural environments that shape language behaviour online. Their responses are presented below.

Table 4: place of residence

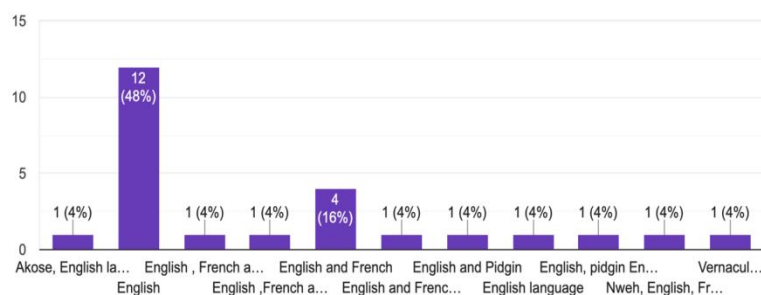
Town of residence	Frequency	Percentage
Yaoundé	12	48%
Buea	7	28%
Douala	1	4%
Limbe	2	8%
Bamenda	2	8%

5. Main spoken Languages

Youths were asked to list their main spoken languages. The aim of this question was to know the youths' linguistic ability, that is, the range of languages they command and how often they use them. Their responses are presented as follows:

5. What are your main spoken languages?

25 responses

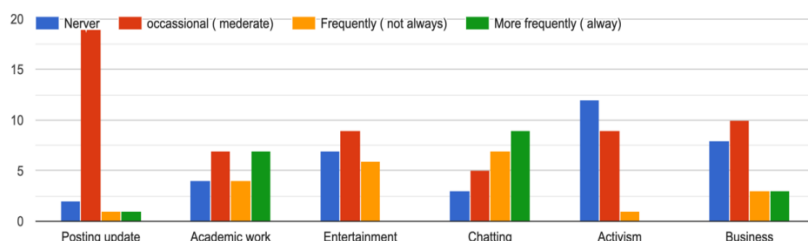


The chart above indicates that English is the dominant spoken language among Anglophone youths. Out of 25 youths, 12 (48%) respondents reported that they speak only English, 4 (16%) respondents speak both French and English, indicating the bilingual nature of the country, and 9 (36%) respondents reported using English together with Pidgin English and other home languages.

6. Social media type frequently used

Youths were asked the type of social media they regularly use and for how many hours. This question is to identify the platform youths use the most, so as to identify where their digital interactions and identity performances are frequent. The number of hours spent online helps to measure youths' engagement.

How often do you do the following on social media ?



The chart above shows that social media use among Anglophone youths is mainly centered on communication, academics, and entertainment. For posting updates, 72% of the youths do so occasionally, while 12% post frequently, 8% always post, and 8% never post, indicating limited regular self-posting.

In terms of academic work, 28% use social media occasionally, and 28% others always use it, while 20% use it frequently, and 16% never use it. It is evident that nearly half of the youths 48% rely heavily on social media for academic purposes.

Regarding entertainment, 36% use social media occasionally, 24% frequently, and 12% always use it, while 28% never use it for entertainment. Chatting is the most dominant activity, with 36% youths who always chat, 28% who frequently chat, 20% who occasionally chat, and 12% who never chat. Thus, 64% youth regularly chat on social media platforms. In relation to activism, which recorded the lowest participation, 12 (48%) of the youths never engage in activism online, 9 (36%) occasionally do so, and only 4 (16%) frequently engage in activism online.

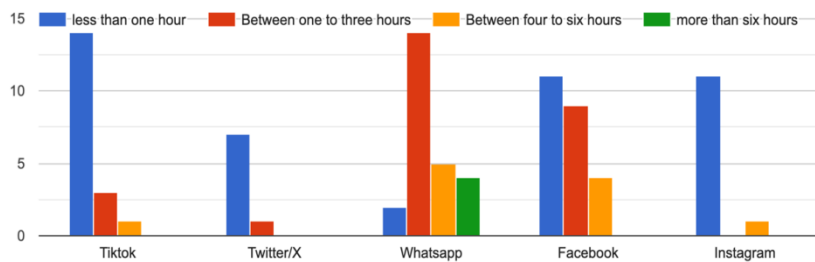
Platforms	Less than 1 hour	1-3 hours	4-6 hours	More than 6 hours
TikTok	14 (58%)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)	0
Twitter	7 (28%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	0
WhatsApp	2 (8%)	14 (56%)	5 (20%)	0
Facebook	11 (44%)	9 (36%)	4 (36%)	0
Instagram	11 (44%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	0

7. Number of hours spent on social media

Youths were asked to say the number of hours they spend on social media platforms. This question helps the research to know how much social media is part of the youth's daily life, and how it affects the way youths use language and show their identity online. Their responses are indicated in the table and chart below.

Table 5: Number of hours spent on social media

On average, how many hours do you spend on the following social media daily



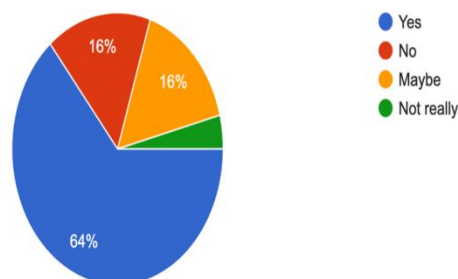
The chart shows that a majority of the youths, 56% and 44% respectively, use TikTok and Instagram 1 hour daily; 56% use WhatsApp for 1-3 hours, while 16% use it for 6 hours daily. 44% use Facebook for 1 hour, while 36% use it for 1-3 hours.

8. Does the language used on social media reflect who the youths are?
 Youths were asked to answer by ticking one of the following: *yes*, *no*, *maybe*, or *not really*. The aim of asking this question was to know if the way youths write and speak online shows who they really are. Their responses are presented on the chart below.

Table 5:

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	16	64%
No	4	16%
Maybe	4	16%
Not really	1	4%

Do you think your language use on social media reflect who you are?
 25 responses



The chart above reveals that 45% of youths strongly agreed that the way they write and speak on social media reflects who they are, while 30% agrees, 15% disagreed, and about 10% strongly disagreed with the view. This indicates that about 75% of the youths (strongly disagree + agree) believe that their language use on social media reflects their identity, while about 25% (disagree + strongly disagree) do not share this view. This indicates that most Anglophone youths see social media language as an important way of expressing who they are.

9. Do youths sometimes use different online personas?

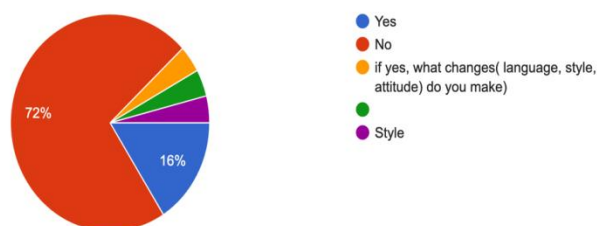
Youths were asked to answer *yes* or *no* if they sometimes use a different online persona; if yes, they should give the reason for doing so. The

reason for asking this question was to help the researcher understand how, why, and to what extent youths consciously construct their digital identity. Their responses are presented on the table and chart below.

Table 6:

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
No	18	72%
Yes	4	16%
It depends	3	12%

Do you sometimes use a different "online persona" than your offline one?
25 responses



The chart shows that a majority of the respondents, 72%, said No, which means they always present themselves online in the same way as their real-life identity. This means that most youths prefer authenticity and consistency in their online self-presentation. However, 16% said Yes. This means that a minority sometimes adopts a different online persona, possibly to fit into certain online spaces, avoid judgment, or express aspects of themselves they may not show offline. The remaining number, 12%, represents respondents who may do so rarely or under specific circumstances. Overall, the findings show that while most youths maintain a stable digital identity, a few strategically adjust their online persona depending on context, audience, or purpose, highlighting the flexible nature of digital identity among Anglophone youths.

10. Have you been judged or criticized for using a different online persona?

Youths were asked to answer *yes* or *no* if they had ever been judged or criticized for using a different online persona; if yes, they should say what happened. The reason for this question was to understand how

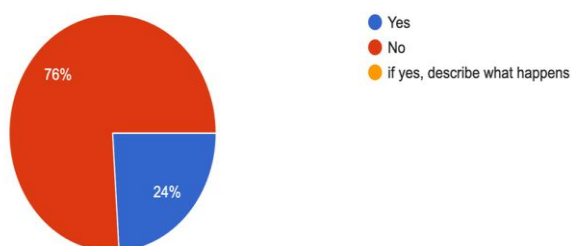
judgment and criticism shape digital identity, language choice, and online self-presentation. Their responses are presented on the table and chart below.

Table 7: Judged online persona

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Not judged	19	76%
Judged	6	24%

Have you ever been judged or criticized for your language use online?

25 responses



The chart shows that 76% of respondents reported that they have never been judged or criticized, suggesting that most youths feel free to use language online without facing negative reactions. However, 24% indicated that they have experienced judgment or criticism because of their language use online. This means that the majority have not faced challenges, while a noticeable minority still encountered social pressure and negative comments related to their language choices. These experiences of criticism may influence how such affected youths adjust their language use in online self- presentation, thereby shaping their digital identity.

11. Does language help in youth identity, digital construct?

Youth were asked to answer in their own words how language helps them construct online identity. This question aimed to help the researcher find out how youths use language to show who they are and create their identity on social media. Here are some of their responses:

“As a Cameroonian, and specifically an Anglophone, expressing myself in English immediately establishes my digital identity as an Anglophone.”

“The use of proper language serves to demonstrate and validate one’s level of education.”

“The language I choose to use at any given time reveals a lot about me; I opt for a language my audience understands to avoid appearing rude and to ensure we relate on the same social level.”

“Language allows me to be heard and to share relevant ideas effectively. As a teacher, I must be very mindful of how I use language, as it defines my professional persona.”

“My digital identity is reinforced by the content I receive; for example, I frequently receive educational posts because they are in my primary language.”

12. Youths’ response on whether they think the use of language on social media is changing

Youths were asked to say whether or not the language used on social media was changing or not. The reason for this question was to help the researcher link observed changes in language use to Youths’ understanding of their digital identity and social communication patterns. Some of their responses are stated below:

I don't know.

Yes, it is changing daily due to the influence of other languages. For example, they adopt French words to replace English ones, such as saying "I need l'argent" instead of "I need money."

Yes, because they have involved themselves in research; furthermore, watching TV programs helps them become well-versed in the language.

Yes, it is changing because they try to adapt to their audience, even though those audiences may consist of people from different backgrounds.

No, I have not paid enough attention to it to provide a solid reason.

Interview responses

1. Code- switching and online self-presentation

All interviewees acknowledged switching between languages depending on the context. Some said when they are joking or want to create fun, they use pidgin. They equally said they switch when they want to reach both educated and uneducated, or use French to sound bilingual. Based on their responses, code switching allows youths to manage multiple

identities, simultaneously presenting themselves as both locally grounded and globally aware. This confirms that digital identity among Anglophone youths is fluid and context-dependent.

2. Influence of the Anglophone crisis

Participants highlighted that political tensions influence their language choice. Pidgin helps them talk about sensitive issues without sounding too direct. They said they avoid French when discussing the Anglophone problem.

3. Whatsapp and Facebook excerpts from Anglophone Cameroonian Youths

Table 6: Presentation of 25 authentic Whatsapp and Facebook excerpts, showing dominant language, linguistic features, and sociolinguistic meaning

Content of Excerpts	Dominant Language	Linguistic features, Sociolinguistic meaning
If they tell Israelites them waiti Cameroonian them don suffer, them go know say pharaoh na good man	Pidgin	Critique of the Government (humor)
The full meaning of le continent is come and see ancestors ruling	Code mixing	A critique of political stagnation (humor)
Person don turn be na double IDP	Pidgin	Displacement and loss of identity
Landlord u go only Wait , we no sure if we go need house after Monday	Pidgin	political uncertainty (humor)
Bilingual country na El Wana takamFrancophonizam	Pidgin	linguistic imbalance (humor)
When case over stay palace know say narich manguity	Pidgin	Critique of class inequality
Our sweet Bamenda don turn anyhow, despite all we still love ❤️ Bamenda	Code switching	Regional pride(Solidarity)
In this country, some invitations	English	Political commentary

are warrants of arrest		(protest)
Go and make ghost town in Yaoundé, stop suffering innocent people	English	Political commentary (protest)
Issa never yet climb  chair, cok-cok them don di high for sew shoes	Pidgin	Mocking opportunist(humor)
We still dey strong despite all wahala, Bamenda still stand	Pidgin	Regional solidarity
Country hard but we go survive	Pidgin	Resilience (solidarity)
Na only for Cameroon way exam start before question paper come	Pidgin	Examination inefficiency (critique)
Education without opportunity is decoration	English	Educational relevance (critique)
Our leaders have become comedians on Tv	English	Political disappointment (critique)

Analysis and discussion based on research questions

1. Languages commonly used on social media.

The analysis of the questionnaire, interviews, and online observations of posts and comments indicates that Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) is the dominant language used by Anglophone youths in digital interactions. Most participants primarily employed Pidgin English, using it as a medium for humour, satire, social commentary, and political critique. For example, the post "*if they tell Israelites dem weti Cameroonian them don suffer, they go know say pharaoh na good man.*" The use of Pidgin English creates a humorous, yet ironic critique of governance and social conditions. English is used less frequently, primarily for reflective or formal posts and comments that address broader audiences or convey serious commentary. For instance, the post "*The full meaning of my country is, come and see ancestors ruling over the nation.*" A smaller group of participants used a mixture of English and Pidgin, reflecting a creative hybrid linguistic knowledge. These findings align with Anchimbe's (2009) and Ngefac's (2013) observations that Pidgin functions as a language of solidarity and authenticity, while the English language conveys prestige, education, and formal authority in Cameroon's sociolinguistic context.

2. Language choice and digital identity construction

Language choice on social media serves as a critical marker of digital identity among Anglophone youths. Posts, written in Pidgin, often signal local belonging, peer solidarity, humour, and resistance to socio-political challenges. For instance, the post "*person don turn be na double IDP*" metaphysically communicates the displacement and identity struggles of youths affected by the Anglophone crisis, demonstrating how Pidgin English enables the nuanced expression of local realities. Posts in English communicate a more formal, reflective identity, projecting education, sophistication, and global orientation. Mixed language posts such as "*bilingual country na ei wuna takam Francophonizam*" illustrates hybrid identities, as participants negotiate multiple cultural and linguistic influences. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identity is performative, and the digital spaces of Whatsapp and Facebook functions as a site where Anglophone youths actively perform, negotiate, and assert their social and cultural Identities through language choice.

3. Sociolinguistic factors influencing language choice

The study identified several sociolinguistic factors that influence the language choices among Anglophone youths on social media. Audience plays a central role: English is generally used when posts are intended for a broader or more formal audience, while Pidgin English is employed for close peers or group discussions. Topic and context also determine language selection, with political commentary and humorous social critique often expressed in Pidgin, while reflective, philosophical, or advisory posts tend to be in English. Social solidarity is another critical factor; using pidgin signals belonging to the Anglophone youth community, reinforcing shared cultural and regional identity. Emotional tone further shapes language use, and humour, irony, and satire are more naturally conveyed in Pidgin. Additionally, the ongoing Anglophone crisis has intensified the use of Pidgin as a resistance language, enabling youths to criticize the state and express socio-political frustration safely within familiar linguistic norms. These observations correspond to Ngefac (2010) and Bobda (2010), who argue that social function is central to language choice in Cameroon.

4. Code-switching and code-mixing patterns

Whatsapp and Facebook posts demonstrate extensive code switching and mixing, which serve both stylistic and functional purposes in digital identity construction. Participants frequently engage in inter-sentential

switching, alternating between English and Pidgin across sentences. Intra-sentential mixing is also common with English and Pidgin appearing within the same sentence. Tag-switching occurs when participants insert single English or French words into Pidgin sentences to emphasize meaning, humour, or satire. Functionally, these practices allow youths to emphasize points, create humour, index local belonging, and negotiate hybrid identities. This aligns with Myers-Scotton's (1993) model of code switching, which underscores both social and metaphorical motivation for alternating languages, particularly in contexts of cultural and linguistic tension.

5. The role of English and Pidgin in online self-presentation

English and Pidgin play a distinct but complementary role in the self-presentation of Anglophone youths on social media. English functions as a tool for projecting formality, educational, and global competence, enabling participants to address broader or international audience. In contrast, Pidgin conveys humour, solidarity, cultural authenticity, and resistance, serving as a vehicle for expressing local experiences and emotions. Mixed language posts reflect a hybrid digital identity blending local and global linguistic resources to negotiate multiple social positions simultaneously. For example, the post, "*Our sweet Kumba wey we bi know don turn anyhow, despite all, we still love kumba*" combines English and Pidgin to convey emotional attachment, resilience, and regional pride, highlighting how digital language use performs identity, communicates values, and mediates social relationships. Anchimbe (2006) and Ngefac (2016) emphasize that such linguistic hybridity is characteristic of Cameroonian digital discourse and functions as a marker of youth identity, creativity, and social critique.

6. Dominant Language used on social media among Anglophone Youths

One of the major findings of this study is that Cameroon Pidgin English and Standard English are the dominant languages used by Anglophone youths on social media. Data from the questionnaire showed that a large proportion of respondents reported using Pidgin English either alone or in combination with English. This finding was further supported by interview responses and online observation of posts, where Pidgin English appeared most frequently, especially in informal and politically sensitive discussions.

The dominance of Pidgin English can be explained by its role as a language of solidarity, familiarity, and shared Anglophone identity. Pidgin English allows youths from different educational and social backgrounds to communicate effectively without linguistic barriers. This aligns with Ngefac (2013), who argues that Pidgin English in Cameroon functions as a unifying code, particularly among youths and marginalized groups. On social media, where interaction is fast and informal, Pidgin English provides an accessible and expressive medium.

Standard English, on the other hand, was mainly used in formal posts, serious political commentary, and educational discussions. Interview participants explained that English helps them appear educated, professional, and credible online. This supports Anchimbe's (2009) observation that English in Cameroon carries symbolic value related to power, prestige, and authority. Thus, the choice between Pidgin English and English reflects not only communicative needs but also identity positioning.

7. Language choice as a tool for digital identity construction

The findings clearly showed that language choice on social media is a deliberate strategy used by Anglophone youths to construct and project digital identities. Through their language choices, youths present themselves as members of specific social, political, and cultural groups. Questionnaire responses revealed that most participants chose their language based on how they want to be perceived by others online. Pidgin English was frequently used to project an identity of authenticity, resistance, and grassroots belonging. Many online posts observed in the study used Pidgin English to express frustration, humour, and political dissatisfaction. This suggests that Pidgin English functions as a language of emotional expression and collective struggle among Anglophone youths. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identity is constructed through linguistic practices, and the findings of this study confirm that Anglophone youths actively use language to perform identity in digital spaces. English, on the other hand, was used to project an identity of education, seriousness, and global awareness. Youths switched to English when addressing a wider or more formal audience. This demonstrates that digital identity is not fixed but context-dependent, changing according to topic, audience, and communicative purpose.

8. Code-switching and code-mixing as identity negotiation strategies

Another significant finding is the widespread use of code-switching and code-mixing among Anglophone youths. Data from interviews and online observation show that many youths combine English and Pidgin English within a single post or conversation. This practice reflects a hybrid digital identity, where youths negotiate between local and global linguistic resources. Code-switching allows speakers to emphasize certain meanings, reach diverse audiences, and express complex identities. For instance, switching from English to Pidgin English often marked emotional intensity, humour, or solidarity. This supports Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model, which explains code-switching as a conscious choice that carries social meaning. The frequent use of mixed codes also highlights the multilingual competence of Anglophone youths. Rather than seeing code-switching as a linguistic deficiency, the findings present it as a creative and strategic practice that enables effective communication and identity construction in digital environments.

9. Influence of the Anglophone crisis on language use

The findings also revealed that the Anglophone crisis strongly influenced language choice on social media. Interview participants explicitly stated that they avoid French when discussing Anglophone-related issues. Online observation further confirmed that French appeared rarely in politically sensitive posts. This suggests that language choice serves as a form of political alignment and resistance. Pidgin English and English were preferred because they symbolize Anglophone identity and collective struggle. Using these languages allows youths to express grievances while reinforcing group solidarity. This finding aligns with sociolinguistic studies that view language as an ideological tool in conflict situations (Anchimbe, 2006). Social media, therefore, functions as a space where language becomes a symbol of resistance and identity affirmation. Anglophone youths use language not only to communicate but also to assert belonging and opposition within Cameroon's socio-political context.

Conclusion

Overall, the discussion shows that language choice on social media among Anglophone youths in Cameroon is socially, politically, and ideologically motivated. Pidgin English functions as a language of solidarity, resistance, and emotional expression, while English represents

education, authority, and global connection. Code-switching enables identity flexibility and digital features enhance meaning-making.

These findings support sociolinguistic theories of language and identity, and demonstrate that digital platforms are key sites for identity construction among Anglophone youths. The study focused specifically on the processes of digital identity construction as mediated through language choice among Anglophone youths in Cameroon. The empirical scope encompasses popular social media platforms, including Facebook, Whatsapp, TikTok, and Instagram, which represent key sites of daily interaction for this demographic. The study targeted individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 who self-identify as Anglophones, irrespective of their current geographical location within Cameroon. It meticulously examines their deployment of English, Pidgin English, French, and home languages, analysing how these linguistic selections index aspects of identity, social positioning, and political consciousness. The research is deliberately circumscribed to a sociolinguistic analysis of textual and discursive practices; it does not extend to other multimodal facets of identity construction, such as visual aesthetics or economic capital, except where these intersect directly with linguistic performance

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