

Linguistic Alterations and Language Alternation as Mediating Bridges in Cameroonian Sports Commentary

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ABSTRACT

Cameroon is a multilingual society, with over 285 languages. Sport commentary is one of the common arenas for examining how linguistic alterations and language alternation contribute to national identity and cohesion. This study examines how commentators utilise official, unofficial, and indigenous languages to engage audiences, construct inclusive narratives, and foster national unity. Guided by the research question, which interrogates how linguistic strategies in sports commentaries promote inclusivity and reflect Cameroon's sociolinguistic realities, the study pursues four objectives: to identify patterns of language alternation, examine their communicative functions, explore how they construct inclusive narratives (how they shape audience engagement), and assess their symbolic significance in representing Cameroon's linguistic diversity. Drawing on selected televised and radio broadcasts and using a qualitative discourse analysis, the study reveals that strategic shifts between languages heighten excitement, broaden audience reach, and reflect the nation's complex sociolinguistic landscape. Particular attention is given to the use of Pidgin English, franc anglaise, and indigenous expressions as markers of immediacy and solidarity. At the same time, alternation between English and French underscores Cameroon's official bilingualism. The findings demonstrate that live sports commentaries create a symbolic space where linguistic diversity functions as a bridge rather than a barrier, consolidating national unity and fostering shared identity. The study concludes that linguistic alterations in sports commentaries are not merely stylistic choices. They are also critical mechanisms that connect communities, promote cohesion, and reflect the nation's efforts toward progressive realisation of unity in diversity.

Keywords: Linguistic alterations, Language alternation, Sports commentary, Multilingualism, National cohesion, Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon is among the most linguistically diverse nations in Africa, often described as a microcosm of the continent's cultural and linguistic richness. This diversity has deep historical roots. Before colonial intrusion, the territory was home to hundreds of indigenous languages associated with distinct ethnic and cultural communities. The colonial encounter layered new linguistic dimensions onto this pre-existing diversity. German occupation, followed by the division of the territory between Britain and France after World War I, institutionalised English and French as the dominant languages of governance, education, and administration. Today, Cameroon is officially bilingual, recognising both English and French; yet, this bilingualism coexists with widespread informal use of Pidgin English, known as franc-anglais (also referred to as Camfranglais), and more than 250 indigenous languages (Pütz, 2020; Tabe, 2023). These languages are not only practical tools for communication but also powerful symbols of solidarity, belonging, and identity. As such, Cameroon's sociolinguistic reality is both complex and

dynamic, characterised by constant negotiation between the official, unofficial, and indigenous repertoires that together shape everyday interactions.

Within this context, sports, particularly football, emerge as a significant cultural force. Football is not merely a recreational activity in Cameroon; it is a passion that binds communities, transcends ethnic and regional differences, and generates collective moments of pride and unity. Matches involving the Indomitable Lions, for instance, often suspend existing tensions and divisions, providing symbolic moments where the nation comes together in pursuit of a common cause. Sporting events thus serve as both cultural rituals and political metaphors for national cohesion.

The media plays a crucial role in extending the unifying power of sport from the immediate arena of the stadium to audiences nationwide and beyond. Radio and television broadcasts of football matches transmit not only the athletic performance but also the linguistic practices through which the excitement of the game is communicated. Sports commentary, in particular, has become a fertile site of linguistic creativity and negotiation. It is through commentary that the spontaneous energy of the game is transformed into a collective national experience. Commentators frequently alternate between official, unofficial, and indigenous languages to sustain drama, evoke humour, and connect with diverse audiences. In doing so, they reproduce Cameroon's sociolinguistic complexity while simultaneously shaping how audiences perceive and engage with it.

This study argues that sports commentary is uniquely positioned to demonstrate the bridging role of language in a multilingual society. Unlike scripted media genres, live commentary is spontaneous, fast-paced, and emotionally charged. It allows commentators to draw on a multiplicity of linguistic resources, enabling them to make deliberate and symbolic choices about inclusion, identity, and representation. These choices are not merely stylistic flourishes but carry social significance in affirming Cameroon's national motto of unity in diversity.

Against this background, the study investigates how linguistic strategies in Cameroonian sports commentaries promote inclusivity and reflect the nation's complex sociolinguistic realities. To address this, the study seeks to identify the dominant patterns of language alternation that characterise Cameroonian sports commentary and examine the communicative functions of these patterns in shaping meaning, sustaining excitement, and engaging audiences. In addition, it examines how commentary constructs inclusive narratives that reflect Cameroon's linguistic heterogeneity and evaluates the symbolic significance of linguistic alternation in sports commentary as a representation of Cameroon's multilingual identity and as a means of fostering national cohesion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The linguistic landscape of Cameroon offers a rich context for examining the role of language in sports commentary. This literature review situates the study within four interrelated domains: the multilingual environment of Cameroon, language alternation in media and sports commentary, the relationship between linguistic diversity and national identity, and gaps in existing research that justify this study.

Multilingualism in Cameroon

Cameroon is often described as "Africa in miniature," reflecting both its ethnic diversity and linguistic richness. The country hosts over 250 indigenous languages spanning Bantu, Semi-Bantu, and Adamawa language families, alongside the colonial languages English and French (Pütz, 2020; Tabe, 2023). This multilingualism is both historical and functional. Precolonial linguistic diversity supported local trade, intercommunity relations, and cultural expression, while colonial rule imposed English and French as languages of administration, formal education, and governance. Today, these languages coexist with informal repertoires, such as Cameroonian Pidgin English and franc-anglais (Camfranglais), which thrive in urban spaces, popular culture, and the media (Awah, 2021).

Multilingualism in Cameroon is not merely a matter of coexistence; it is dynamic and adaptive. Individuals navigate between languages fluidly, employing different repertoires depending on context, audience, and purpose. For example, formal domains such as education and government primarily use English or French, whereas everyday interactions, markets, music, and media often incorporate Pidgin or hybrid languages. Scholars have noted that such linguistic fluidity serves symbolic functions, including signalling group membership, fostering social solidarity, or resisting linguistic hierarchies (Pütz, 2020). For this study, this multilingual competence provides a conceptual lens for analysing how sports commentators strategically employ multiple languages to engage audiences and construct inclusive narratives.

Language Alternation in Media and Sports Commentary

Language alternation, encompassing code-switching (the shifting between two languages in separate utterances) and code-mixing (the blending of multiple languages within a sentence), is a prominent feature in Cameroonian media, particularly in sports commentary. Commentators switch between official languages, indigenous languages, Pidgin English, and Camfranglais to appeal to diverse audiences, maintain excitement, and convey culturally nuanced meanings (Akpan, 2024; Pérez-Sabater, 2020). For instance, a commentator may begin a description of a goal in French, add a Pidgin exclamation for humour and immediacy, and conclude with an English phrase to appeal to bilingual audiences. These linguistic manoeuvres not only heighten dramatic tension but also create a shared communicative space where diverse linguistic groups feel included.

Recent research highlights that language alternation in media serves multiple communicative functions: it amplifies emotional intensity, generates humour, establishes rapport with audiences, and signals solidarity (Ambele & Todd, 2022; Pérez-Sabater, 2020). In sports commentary, these functions are particularly salient because commentators must deliver real-time, high-energy narratives that maintain audience engagement and interest. Alternating between languages allows commentators to craft expressive, performative discourse that simultaneously communicates, entertains, and socially integrates the audience.

Linguistic Diversity and National Identity

The interplay of languages in sports commentary holds symbolic significance beyond mere communication, as it constructs and negotiates national identity. Cameroon's official bilingualism, combined with the widespread use of informal languages, creates a landscape in which inclusion is linguistically mediated. By alternating among English, French, Pidgin, and Camfranglais, commentators produce narratives that reflect the nation's heterogeneous makeup while fostering a sense of unity (Pütz, 2020). The commentary thus functions as a site of "symbolic nation-building," wherein linguistic diversity becomes a performative expression of the national ideal of unity in diversity.

Studies in African multilingual contexts suggest that language choice in media not only reflects social realities but also actively shapes them. Strategic alternation and inclusion of multiple linguistic forms can promote a sense of shared belonging, strengthen collective identity, and reduce perceptions of marginalisation among minority language speakers (Akpan, 2024; Tabe, 2023). Sports commentary, with its live, emotionally charged, and participatory nature, is efficient at enacting these processes because it simultaneously entertains and communicates cultural values.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite extensive research on multilingualism and media discourse in Cameroon, very few studies have explicitly focused on the role of sports commentary as a site of linguistic innovation and nation-building. While studies on code-switching and translanguaging in social media, education, and urban communication are abundant, live sports commentary remains under-explored (Ambele & Todd, 2022; Pérez-Sabater, 2020). This gap is significant because sports commentary uniquely combines real-time spontaneity, audience interaction, and performative expression, making it an ideal context to study the intersection of language, identity, and social cohesion.

This study seeks to address these gaps by analysing the patterns, functions, and symbolic significance of language alternation in Cameroonian sports commentary. By focusing on televised and radio broadcasts of football matches, it examines how linguistic strategies construct inclusive narratives, foster engagement across linguistic communities, and contribute to national cohesion in a multilingual society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study primarily draws on sociolinguistics, Translanguaging Theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). These frameworks collectively enable a distinct understanding of how linguistic strategies in Cameroonian sports commentary construct meaning, foster inclusion, and reflect national identity in a multilingual context.

Sociolinguistics and Language Alternation

Sociolinguistics provides the foundation for analysing language in its social context, highlighting the relationship between language, identity, and society (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2020). In multilingual societies like

Cameroon, language alternation is a common sociolinguistic phenomenon, encompassing both code-switching and code-mixing. These alternations are not random; they reflect social factors such as audience composition, speaker identity, cultural norms, and communicative goals (Gumperz, 1982). In the context of sports commentary, sociolinguistic theory helps explain why commentators switch between English, French, Pidgin, and Camfranglais, and how these shifts function to engage diverse audiences, signal solidarity, and assert cultural relevance.

Translanguaging Theory

Translanguaging theory conceptualises language use as a fluid and dynamic practice in which multilingual speakers draw on all available linguistic resources to communicate effectively and construct meaning (García & Li Wei, 2014). Unlike traditional views that treat languages as separate systems, translanguaging recognises the seamless integration of multiple languages within speech or text. In Cameroonian sports commentary, translanguaging explains the strategic blending of official and unofficial languages, including English, French, Pidgin, and indigenous terms, to produce inclusive narratives and foster audience engagement. Translanguaging also positions language alternation as a performative tool that constructs both social and national identities in real-time communicative contexts.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2015) offers a framework for understanding how language reflects and shapes power relations, ideologies, and social structures. CDA is particularly relevant in multilingual settings where language use is both a communicative and symbolic act. In Cameroonian sports commentary, CDA allows for the examination of how linguistic choices promote inclusivity, negotiate identity, and reinforce national cohesion. By analysing patterns of alternation, tone, and thematic emphasis, this study interprets the symbolic and social meanings embedded in commentary discourse.

In sum, the analytical framework for this study is shaped by the intersection of the three complementary theoretical approaches, each offering a distinct lens through which to examine language use in Cameroonian broadcasts. While sociolinguistics provides the foundational context by situating language alternation within Cameroon's richly multilingual society and enables an understanding of how different languages function socially, shedding light on the roles they play in various communicative settings and the meanings they convey within specific communities, translanguaging offers insight into the dynamic and fluid blending of languages as a deliberate communicative strategy highlighting how speakers draw from their full linguistic repertoire to foster inclusivity, enhance audience engagement, and navigate complex social interactions with agility and creativity. Moreover, finally, critical discourse analysis (CDA) deepens the inquiry by interpreting the ideological and symbolic dimensions of language use, connecting linguistic practices to broader themes of national identity, unity, and social cohesion, revealing how language can serve as a tool for constructing collective narratives and reinforcing cultural values. By combining these theoretical perspectives, the study provides a robust lens for examining how live sports commentary functions not only as entertainment but also as a mechanism for social integration and nation-building in Cameroon.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach of this study is designed to examine how linguistic strategies in Cameroonian sports commentary function to promote inclusivity and reflect the nation's multilingual realities. A qualitative research design was adopted because it allows for in-depth exploration of language use, meaning-making, and social interaction within naturalistic contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specifically, this study employs discourse analysis to investigate patterns of language alternation, their communicative functions, and their symbolic significance in televised and radio football commentary.

A qualitative research design was deemed appropriate given the study's exploratory nature, which seeks to uncover how linguistic resources are mobilised to construct narratives of inclusion and national identity. Discourse analysis provides tools to examine language beyond surface structure, considering context, function, and social meaning (Gee, 2014). In this study, critical discourse analysis (CDA) and sociolinguistic discourse analysis are combined to analyse the commentary, enabling attention to both linguistic patterns such as code-switching, code-mixing, and translanguaging, and their broader social implications.

The data comprise televised and radio broadcasts of selected Cameroonian football matches. These matches were selected for their national significance, encompassing international qualifiers, CAF competitions, and domestic championship finals. The rationale for selecting football commentary was twofold. Firstly, football is the most popular sport in Cameroon, attracting diverse linguistic audiences, and secondly, live commentary is

spontaneous, rich in linguistic creativity, and highly performative. Both Anglophone and Francophone media outlets were included to ensure representation of the official bilingual context.

To ensure a rich and varied representation of language use, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select broadcasts. This approach prioritised diversity and relevance by applying three key criteria. First, linguistic diversity was paramount. Selected broadcasts featured a range of languages, including English, French, Pidgin English, Camfranglais, and indigenous language inserts, reflecting the region's diverse linguistic landscape. Second, audience reach was considered essential; only channels and radio stations with substantial national listenership were chosen to ensure broad impact and resonance. Finally, the significance of the events themselves was crucial. Broadcasts were selected from matches that generated intense national interest or highlighted regional rivalries, thereby capturing moments of heightened public engagement and emotional investment. This strategic selection process aimed to capture the dynamic interplay between language, media, and national identity.

A total of 12 broadcast recordings (six televised and six radio) from the 2022–2024 football seasons were collected, providing a balanced dataset for analysis. Data were collected by recording live broadcasts and accessing archived footage from official media outlets. Transcriptions were produced verbatim, capturing all linguistic alternations, paralinguistic features (such as intonation and emphasis), and relevant audience interactions where possible. Each utterance was coded to indicate the language, type of alternation (such as switching, mixing, or insertion), and communicative function (such as emphasis, solidarity, or excitement).

The analytical process underpinning this study unfolded in two distinct yet complementary stages, each designed to uncover both the structural and symbolic dimensions of language use in broadcast commentary. The first stage involved a descriptive analysis in which the linguistic features of the commentary were systematically identified and categorised. This entailed classifying language types, such as English, French, Pidgin English, Camfranglais, and indigenous languages, while also mapping patterns of alternation and tracking the frequency of each linguistic occurrence. This step provided a foundational overview of the multilingual landscape present in the broadcasts. Building on this foundation, the second stage employed an interpretive analysis guided by principles of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2015). Here, the focus shifted to understanding how language choices contribute to the construction of inclusive narratives, stimulate audience engagement, and reflect broader themes of national identity. Special attention was given to the thematic functions of language, such as generating excitement, invoking humour, expressing solidarity, and creating immediacy, thereby linking linguistic forms to their deeper social and symbolic roles within the Cameroonian context.

As the study utilised publicly accessible broadcasts, consent from commentators was not required. Nonetheless, ethical guidelines were adhered to by anonymising any private or sensitive comments and ensuring that media outlets were acknowledged correctly. The research also ensured transparency in transcription and analysis to avoid misrepresentation of the linguistic practices observed (Orb et al., 2001). Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of data sources (television and radio), peer debriefing with colleagues familiar with Cameroonian sociolinguistics, and reflexive journaling to monitor researcher bias. The analysis was iterative, involving repeated listening, coding, and thematic verification to ensure credibility and confirmability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the analysis of televised and radio football commentary in Cameroon. The findings are organised around the study's four objectives: identifying patterns of language alternation, examining their communicative functions, exploring inclusive narrative construction, and assessing their symbolic significance for national identity. The analysis is informed by sociolinguistics, translanguaging theory, and critical discourse analysis (CDA), which together illuminate both the structural and symbolic dimensions of language use in sports commentary.

Patterns of Language Alternation

Analysis of the 12 selected broadcasts reveals frequent, systematic, and context-sensitive patterns of language alternation. Commentators alternated between English and French to reflect Cameroon's official bilingualism and to engage Anglophone and Francophone audiences simultaneously. For example, the data shows that commentators had the tendency of describing the movement of a player in English, and immediately followed in French, as in *"He is breaking through the defense!"* (English), *"Quelle opportunité incroyable!"* (French), which allows multiple audience segments to participate in the narrative (Akpan, 2024).

In addition, Pidgin English and Camfranglais were often deployed for emphasis, humour, and immediacy, particularly during dramatic moments such as goals, fouls, or near misses. Expressions like *"Na goal ob!"* or *"Dem no go fit stop am!"* create shared excitement and give voice to a local, culturally resonant identity. This aligns with

translanguaging theory, which emphasises how multilingual speakers utilise all available linguistic resources to convey meaning effectively (García & Li Wei, 2014).

Furthermore, indigenous language inserts were less frequent but strategically deployed during culturally significant moments, such as invoking local chants or celebratory phrases, as in “*Yaaay, mvet na boys!*”, which enhanced emotional intensity and fostered regional identity. From a sociolinguistic lens, these choices reflect audience composition, social affiliation, and context-specific relevance (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2020).

Again, the alternation patterns were dynamic, often responding to match intensity. Fast-paced sequences or critical plays triggered rapid shifts between languages, demonstrating the commentators' performative and improvisational skills. CDA highlights that these shifts are not merely stylistic; they construct social meaning and reflect implicit ideologies of inclusivity and national unity (Fairclough, 2015).

Communicative Functions of Language Alternation

The analysis also reveals that language alternation serves several overlapping communicative functions. Firstly, it heightens excitement and engagement. Alternating languages intensifies the match's narrative, heightening suspense and emotional involvement (Ambele & Todd, 2022). For example, the data reveals that commentators tended to narrate a sudden breakthrough in English, exclaim in Pidgin to reflect communal excitement, and comment in French for official framing, as seen in the excerpt below:

- *And here comes the Cameroon striker down the left wing, he has got pace, he has got power, he cuts inside... oh my goodness!* (English)
- *E don pass am! E don waka di defender like say na breeze! Wah! This na fire wey dey burn!* (Pidgin) – (“He has passed it! He has walked past the defender like a breeze! Wow! This is a burning fire!”)
- *Et voilà! Le ballon est dans les filets! Cameroun mène un but à zéro! Quelle frappe magnifique!* (French) – (“And see! The ball is in the net! Cameroon is leading by one goal to zero! What a magnificent shot!”)

This kind of code-switching is not just stylistic, but deeply strategic. In the example, English sets the scene with clarity, Pidgin injects raw communal excitement, and French delivers the formal punch, often used for official scoring or dramatic emphasis. This is a linguistic choreography that mirrors the cultural richness of Cameroon, keeping listeners emotionally tethered to every twist of the match.

Another key communicative function of multilingual commentary in Cameroonian football broadcasts is the deliberate expansion of audience reach through the strategic use of English, French, and Pidgin. This linguistic alternation reflects a deep sociolinguistic awareness of Cameroon's diverse audience composition and showcases the commentators' agility in navigating the country's multilingual landscape (Pütz, 2020). The data reveals that commentators describe a goal in English, “*What a sensational strike!*”, then switch to Pidgin to amplify communal excitement, “*Di boy no dey joke! Na fire wey e shoot dat ball!*” (The boy is not joking! It shot that ball with fire), and finally use French to frame the moment with formal clarity, “*Et c'est le but! Le Cameroun prend l'avantage une fois de plus!*” (And it is a goal! Cameroon has taken the advantage once more). Such transitions are not random; they are carefully timed to match the emotional and cultural rhythm of the broadcast, ensuring that listeners from varied linguistic backgrounds feel included, engaged, and represented. In this example, English conveys the core information clearly, while pidgin adds emotional intensity and a communal flavour, and French formalises the moment for broader national resonance. The example demonstrates that multilingual commentary is not merely a stylistic choice but a deliberate communicative strategy. It ensures inclusivity, reflects Cameroon's linguistic realities, and enhances the emotional and cultural resonance of the broadcast.

In addition to broadening audience reach, linguistic alternation in Cameroonian football commentary fosters a sense of solidarity and inclusivity. Expressions in Pidgin and Camfranglais serve as powerful markers of intimacy and shared cultural understanding, transforming the broadcast into a participatory experience. For instance, the commentators often use pidgin phrases that resonate deeply with local audiences and evoke communal laughter or excitement, exclaiming “*E don burst net!*” (he has burst the net) after a goal, or shout “*Na wah oh! Di keeper sleep?*” (This is terrible! Is the goalkeeper asleep?) following a defensive blunder. These informal, culturally embedded expressions signal to listeners that they are not merely passive recipients of information but active participants in the emotional rhythm of the match. By weaving in these familiar linguistic codes, commentators build rapport, affirm shared identity, and reinforce the inclusive nature of the broadcast space. CDA emphasises that such linguistic choices carry ideological weight, promoting equality and shared identity in a socially heterogeneous context (Akpan, 2024; Pérez-Sabater, 2020).

Another important function of language alternation in Cameroonian football commentary is the signalling of authority and expertise. Commentators often switch to formal English or French when delivering technical analysis, thereby reinforcing their professional credibility and balancing the informal, audience-oriented tone with authoritative narration. For example, a commentator might say in English, “Cameroon is deploying a 4-3-3 formation with a high defensive line to neutralize the opponent's pace,” or in French, “*Ils exploitent les couloirs avec*

une stratégie de possession très structurée.” These moments of formal register contrast sharply with earlier bursts of Pidgin or Camfranglais used to express excitement or solidarity, such as *“Dem dey run like say na market!”* This dual strategy reflects the multifunctionality of language in multilingual contexts, where formal and informal registers coexist and are deployed strategically to meet both communicative and social demands (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2020).

Construction of Inclusive Narratives

The study found that sports commentary constructs inclusive, emotionally compelling narratives by integrating multiple linguistic repertoires. Matches were narrated not merely as sequential events, but as collective, participatory experiences that connected audiences across linguistic and regional divides.

Alternating between English and French during goal celebrations enabled broad accessibility, while Pidgin and Camfranglais added layers of cultural intimacy and immediacy. For example, a commentary describing a goal might combine English for structural clarity, French for emphasis, and Pidgin to convey excitement:

“He passes the ball to the striker! Quelle opportunité incroyable! Na goal ob! Dem no fit stop am!” – He passes the ball to the striker! What an incredible opportunity! It is a goal! They cannot stop it!

Such narratives also highlighted shared values, including teamwork, resilience, and national pride. From a translanguaging perspective, these multi-lingual blends demonstrate how language is mobilised to construct meaning inclusively, allowing diverse audiences to participate in a unified national story (García & Li Wei, 2014). CDA analysis further reveals that these narratives symbolically position football as a microcosm of the nation, celebrating linguistic diversity as a strength.

Symbolic Significance for National Identity

Language alternation in sports commentary functions as a symbolic bridge, reflecting Cameroon’s multilingual reality while promoting unity in diversity. Alternating English and French underscores official bilingualism, while Pidgin, Camfranglais, and indigenous expressions foreground local culture and solidarity. This performative integration transforms broadcasts into a microcosm of national identity, where linguistic diversity is leveraged as a unifying force rather than a source of division.

CDA highlights that these choices are ideologically significant, subtly conveying messages about inclusion, belonging, and collective identity (Fairclough, 2015). For example, the use of Pidgin or Camfranglais during key moments signals that all linguistic communities are valued participants in the national narrative. These symbolic functions suggest that sports commentary is not merely entertainment, but a socio-political instrument that reinforces national cohesion and a shared sense of belonging (Akpan, 2024; Pütz, 2020).

Additionally, the fluid alternation between languages demonstrates how commentators act as linguistic mediators, shaping audience perceptions of unity, diversity, and cultural legitimacy. By combining sociolinguistic, translanguaging, and CDA perspectives, this study shows that live sports commentary is both a reflective and constitutive space for national identity in Cameroon.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the study's findings in relation to the theoretical framework, existing literature, and broader sociolinguistic and cultural contexts. The findings of this study reveal that language alternation in Cameroonian sports commentary is not merely a stylistic flourish but a deliberate and socially resonant communicative strategy. Operating across multiple levels, engagement, inclusion, and symbolic representation, this practice reflects the intricate interplay between language and identity in a multilingual society. Viewed through a sociolinguistic lens, commentators’ linguistic choices demonstrate a nuanced awareness of Cameroon’s diverse audience, aligning their speech with listeners’ social identities, preferences, and expectations (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2020). English and French typically convey the formal, structured, and official aspects of the broadcast, while Pidgin, Camfranglais, and indigenous expressions infuse the commentary with cultural depth, humour, and immediacy. This pattern aligns with findings from other African multilingual contexts, where language alternation is used to establish rapport with the audience and promote social alignment (Akpan, 2024; Ambele & Todd, 2022).

Translanguaging theory further illuminates the fluid integration of multiple languages as a strategic resource for constructing inclusive and emotionally resonant narratives (García & Li Wei, 2014). The study reveals that language alternation is not random or ornamental; rather, it is a deliberate tactic designed to maximise comprehension, foster cultural intimacy, and encourage participatory engagement. For example, goal celebrations often weave together English, French, and Pidgin in a single utterance, such as *“He scores! E don burst net! Et c’est le but!”* creating a layered communicative effect that resonates across linguistic boundaries. Such moments exemplify

translanguaging in action, showcasing the creative and adaptive use of linguistic repertoires in real-time performance.

From a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective, the study highlights the ideological and symbolic dimensions of commentary. Language choices are not neutral; they perform powerful symbolic functions, contributing to the construction of national identity and reinforcing social cohesion (Fairclough, 2015). The strategic alternation between languages, particularly the inclusion of local expressions, signals a commitment to inclusion and equality across Cameroon's linguistic communities. In this way, live sports commentary becomes a performative space where the nation's motto of "unity in diversity" is enacted and reaffirmed, transforming entertainment into a subtle yet potent vehicle for nation-building.

Moreover, the emotional and symbolic impact of language alternation is highly context-sensitive. High-intensity moments, such as dramatic goals, controversial fouls, or last-minute victories, tend to elicit more frequent and inventive switches between languages, reflecting the commentator's responsiveness to audience sentiment and the tempo of the event. Although indigenous language inserts are relatively rare, their presence carries significant symbolic weight, evoking local pride and reinforcing cultural authenticity. These findings enrich existing scholarship on multilingual media in Cameroon, extending the analytical gaze to live sports commentary as a vibrant site of both entertainment and sociocultural meaning (Pütz, 2020; Pérez-Sabater, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that linguistic variation and strategic language alternation in Cameroonian sports commentary serve as powerful tools for fostering inclusivity, enhancing audience engagement, and reinforcing national cohesion. Far from being a neutral or purely entertaining discourse, sports commentary is a socially embedded and symbolically charged practice that reflects and responds to the complex multilingual realities of Cameroon.

Several key insights emerge from the analysis. First, language alternation is both deliberate and context-sensitive. Commentators shift between English, French, Pidgin, Camfranglais, and indigenous expressions in response to the emotional intensity of the match and the linguistic composition of their audience, demonstrating a high level of communicative awareness. These shifts are not arbitrary; they are carefully timed to align with listeners' mood, tempo, and cultural expectations. Second, the communicative functions of alternation extend well beyond clarity. Language switching amplifies excitement, cultivates solidarity, and deepens audience participation, transforming the broadcast into a shared cultural experience. It allows commentators to speak not just to the intellect but to the emotions and identities of their listeners. Third, inclusive narratives are constructed through the integration of formal and informal registers. By blending the authoritative tones of English and French with the familiar rhythms of Pidgin and Camfranglais, commentators produce cohesive stories that resonate across linguistic divides and reinforce a sense of belonging among diverse audience groups. Finally, the symbolic significance of language alternation is profound. The strategic use of multiple languages enacts Cameroon's national ideal of "unity in diversity," positioning live sports commentary as a performative space where national identity is not only reflected but actively constructed and reaffirmed. In this way, commentary becomes more than a medium of entertainment; it becomes a subtle yet potent instrument of nation-building.

These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of language in multilingual media contexts and encourage a deeper understanding of sports commentary as a site of cultural negotiation, emotional resonance, and symbolic power. They carry important implications across media practice, language policy, and sociolinguistic research. In media and sports commentary, the strategic use of translanguaging is a powerful tool for engaging diverse audiences. Commentators can further harness this approach to ensure that all linguistic communities, whether anglophone, francophone, or Pidgin and Camfranglais speakers, are represented and included in real-time coverage. This not only enhances audience participation but also affirms the broadcast's cultural relevance.

From a policy and planning perspective, the study highlights the need to formally acknowledge informal and hybrid languages, such as Pidgin and Camfranglais, in public communication. These languages play a vital role in everyday discourse and media engagement, and their inclusion in broadcasting policy can strengthen national cohesion and promote cultural inclusion. Supporting multilingual media environments acknowledges the linguistic diversity of the population and promotes a more equitable communicative landscape.

For sociolinguistic and cultural studies, sports commentary emerges as a compelling site for examining the intersections of language, identity, and ideology. It offers rich insights into how multilingual societies negotiate representation, inclusion, and unity through everyday discourse. The performative nature of commentary, where language choices reflect and shape collective narratives, provides fertile ground for exploring how linguistic practices contribute to nation-building and cultural affirmation in real time.

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