

“Since When Do *Gos* Speak Francanglais?”: Youth Slang and Gender Ideologies in a Cameroonian YouTube Series

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the semiotic representations of gender through the language practices of Cameroonian youth observed in *Tu Know Ma Life* (You know my life), a YouTube series popular among the French Cameroonian diaspora that follows the daily life of nine young middle- and upper-class Cameroonian immigrants (five women and four men) living in Paris. This series is regarded by its audience as an authentic representation of Cameroonian identity, partly due to its remarkable use of Francanglais, a hybrid youth slang spoken in Cameroon. I analyze how the mediatized representation of Francanglais practices in the first season of the YouTube series contributes to the linguistic construction of gender differentiations. I argue that through the highly gendered use of Francanglais and French by women and men, the series reproduces hegemonic gender ideologies while reinforcing the ideological association between Francanglais and hegemonic heterosexual masculinity.

Scholars of feminist and gender media studies (Sunderland 2010; Richardson 2014) have analyzed the media as a key site for the discursive construction of gendered identities and the maintenance of dominant gender ideologies. This article builds on feminist research and linguistic scholarship on gender (Bucholtz

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and Hall 2012) to analyze the semiotic representation of gender through Cameroonian youth language practices in a YouTube series called *Tu Know Ma Life* (You know my life). The series, which follows the daily life of nine young middle- and upper-class Cameroonian immigrants (five women and four men) living in Paris, is highly popular among the Cameroonian diaspora in France. It is regarded as an authentic representation of Cameroonian identity, partly due to its remarkable use of Francanglais, or Camfranglais, a hybrid urban youth slang spoken in Cameroon. Like many other youth languages or slangs, Francanglais is ideologically associated with urban street masculinity, while women, or *gos*, are not socially recognized as legitimate speakers of this language due to normative ideologies that prohibit them from speaking a language perceived as too “obscene” or “vulgar” (Telep 2018).¹ In this article, I adopt a semiotic approach to analyze the multimodal representations of men and women in the series through the use of Francanglais in relation to discursive, visual, and other nonlinguistic signs. I describe the metasemiotic schemes (Agha 2007),² meaning the recurrent clusters of co-occurring semiotic elements, including Francanglais slang features and other linguistic and nonlinguistic resources, in which Francanglais is constructed as a gendered register of the French language that is ideologically associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell [1995] 2005). I also describe the voicing contrasts produced between masculine and feminine personas in the series through the differentiated use of Francanglais and French. I argue that by reinforcing the ideological association between Francanglais and masculinity, the YouTube series contributes to reproducing hegemonic gender ideologies.

This article has three goals. First, it aims to integrate gender into the theoretical discussion on “tropes of slang” (Agha 2015), following previous works on gender and youth slang in various ethnographic contexts (Billiez et al. 2003; Bucholtz 2009; Maribe and Brookes 2014; Tetreault 2015). Second, by focusing on the semiotics of gender in the Francophone African diaspora, it fills an important gap in the literature on language and gender, given that work published in relation to sub-Saharan African and African diasporic contexts “remains scarce . . . or

1. I have reproduced here the statement made by one of the characters in the series, Medjo, in a love scene where he tries to seduce his girlfriend Laëtitia by singing her a rap song with a few slang words. Laëtitia insinuates that she has understood him (although she doesn't utter any Francanglais words herself). Then, Medjo replies, “Depuis quand les gos parlent le francanglais ?” (Since when do *gos* speak Francanglais?). The male character explicitly makes a metapragmatic stereotype that ideologically associates Francanglais slang with masculinity, an ideology that underlies the representation of language practices throughout the entire YouTube series.

2. The concept of “metasemiotic scheme” (Agha 2007) refers to the fact that in all social interactions, linguistic signs, and behaviors are linked to a wide variety of nonlinguistic signs that are comparable and belong together.

infrequently achieves international circulation” (Atanga et al. 2012, 1). Third, by adopting a semiotic approach to African youth slang, this article goes beyond the traditional focus on lexicosemantic and phonological manipulations that remains dominant in the scholarship on “African youth languages” (Nassenstein and Hollington 2015).

Context of the Series

The first season of the Cameroonian series *Tu Know Ma Life* series was launched in 2014 on YouTube by YouTalk Arts, a Paris-based production agency and recording studio for French-language African films and series.³ The YouTalk Arts YouTube channel has more than 11,000 subscribers to date. Season 2 of the series was released in 2015, and season 3 in 2018–19. The series was produced by Wilfried Ebene, a Cameroonian man who holds a master’s degree in digital marketing from the University of Yaoundé 2 and works as a multimedia designer, computer scientist, and movie director in Yaoundé. His project *Tu Know Ma Life* was conceived to “valoriz[e] African culture worldwide,” as indicated on the project’s KissKissBankBank (a crowdfunding platform) page. The actors in the series are all young adults of Cameroonian nationality who have been living in the Paris region for about 5–6 years, like their characters, except for one actress, Carisse, who plays the role of Faith, and who was born and raised in France by Cameroonian parents. The series’s target audience is Francophone Africans of the diaspora but also includes Cameroonians and other Africans living on the continent.

The web series *Tu Know Ma Life* is recognized by its commentators as an authentic representation of Cameroonian ways of talking. Through authenticating discourses (Lopez and Bucholtz 2017) published in African diaspora webzines, those commentators describe the series, for instance, as “highly reflective of Cameroon, with its multilingualism and variegated cultures.” Particularly, the use of Francanglais (Camfranglais) in the series is described as its main identifiable features: it is referred to as *l’argot du mboa*, or country slang (from the word *mboa* ‘country’ in the Duala language) in an article on the series published in *Je Wanda*, a highly popular webzine of the Francophone African diaspora. It is also defined in another African diaspora webzine as one of the main languages of the series, along with French, and as “a lingua franca which at once unites and alienates Cameroonian youths, but remains immensely popular.”⁴

3. YouTalk Arts, <https://www.youtube.com/@YouTalkArts/featured>.

4. “*Tu Know Ma Life*: TV Comes to the Web,” review, *Bakwa*, June 8, 2015, <https://bakwamagazine.com/uncategorized/review-tu-know-ma-life-tv-comes-to-the-web/>.

In addition, viewers of the series do not hesitate to use Francanglais words when commenting on episodes in YouTube chat, showing that the use of this youth slang in the series is recognized by them and that the series is generally much appreciated, as seen in the following comments:

@hibiskus1410: “cest troooooop mohhh, je veux aussi jouer dedans lol” (this is so good, I also want to play in that series lol);

@SuperMisslady25: “ah ah ah Malep tu fimba à un dragueur international lool” (ah ah ah Malep you look like an international flirt); and

@choukettte92: “Je suis ivoirienne mais franchement je kiff grave la série là! (I’m from the Ivory Coast but frankly I really like this series!).

Viewers frequently praise the series for its realism:

@cassidywtrmn5316: “Wow what a superb sytcom. C’est really la vie des Camer ordinaires” (Wow what a superb sitcom. This is the real life of ordinary Cameroonians);

@manuellaprincesse304: “même now je kif encors grave wairrrr du vrai produit” (even now I really like that, this is the real thing);

@flora6489: “enfin une serie qui ne part pas chercher dans les etoiles c la vie des jeunes kmer tel quel et c la gima” (finally, a series that doesn’t reach for the stars, this is the real life of young Cameroonians and it’s amazing);

@larichou25: “Hahahahahahah j’adore trop. J m sens direct o bled!!!” (Haha I love that so much. I feel like I’m back to my home country!); and

@tiana2767: “J’adore le fait que vous utilisez des noms typiques Kamer pour les garçons. En plus de differentes provinces :) . . . Ca change vraiment” (I love that you use typical Cameroonian names for the boys. Plus from different provinces:) . . . It’s really different).

Another viewer even criticizes the actors’ pronunciation by underlining the importance of Cameroonian slang in the series:

@femtch1: “articulez bien quand vous speakez le francamglais” (articulate well when you speak Francanglais).

Several viewers of the series also recognize its gender bias revealed through its highly stereotyped representation of male characters:

@Lilylalionne: “Je viens seulement de découvrir votre série. . . . Bien qu’elle soit orientée testostérone, j’adore l’esprit. Ça permettra peut être aux go

de comprendre les gars" (I've only just discovered your series. . . . Although it's testosterone-oriented, I love the spirit. Maybe it'll help chicks understand guys).

Another female-identifiable viewer ironizes the sex-centric conversations of the male characters:

@estelleolivianintidem449: "Mince les grandes conversations des garrsss !! c'est 'six' que les gars call 'sexe' heinmn mdrfff faut k je m'entraîne aussi au ludo oooh loool" (Damn the guys' great conversations!! it's "six" that guys call "sex" hey lol. I need to practice ludo too).

Finally, some viewers seem to identify with the depiction of the everyday problems faced by those young African heterosexual couples living in *mbeng*, a Duala word referring to any Western country:

@lydiaewande8813: "Ah yes!!!!!! Mbeng!!! egalite entre homme et femme . . . voila le Resultat" (Ah yes!!!!!! The West!!! equality between men and women . . . Here's the result);

@richellesaounde5929: "vie de couple en mbeng c'est parfois chiant mais on va seulement rester ensemble . . . bonne continuation pour la suite, j'aime la manière donc vous presentez notre quotidien" (life as a couple in the West is sometimes boring but we're only going to stay together . . . good luck for the future, I love the way you present our daily life).

These comments demonstrate the authenticating power of Francanglais slang in African viewers' reception of the series. Francanglais is widely identified as a central element in the construction of the series that significantly contributes to its authenticity effect, in relation to the realistic themes addressed (male-female romantic relationships among Cameroonians of the diaspora living in a Western country). A few comments also reveal that the construction of gender differentiation is perceived by members of the audience as a structuring element of the series.

Gender and Youth Slang Ideologies

Francanglais, or Camfranglais, can be defined as slang with a French syntactic base that is predominantly spoken by urban youth in Cameroon in informal communication situations (Féral 2006; Feussi 2008; Telep 2014). It is characterized by the insertion of foreign words from English, pidgin English, and, to a lesser extent,

other Cameroonian languages, as well as French words that have undergone morphological or semantic changes. This youth slang is socially perceived as a typically masculine language associated with normative and virile heterosexuality. Its use therefore contributes to differentiating between speakers from the point of view of gender and sexuality (Telep 2017, 2018). In the metapragmatic discourses of many speakers in both Cameroon and its diaspora, Francanglais is very often described as a hypermasculine language that is spoken in marginalized urban spaces such as the “street” and the “ghetto” and is associated with violence, vulgarity, and even obscenity. Consequently, young girls and women should not speak this language out of fear of appearing too vulgar or even too masculine (cf. Telep 2017, 2018). This language register is often associated with stigmatized masculine personhood, referring to hypervirile and marginalized forms of masculinity such as the “bandit,” “vagabond,” or “thug,” all figures that are ideologically associated with slang (Agha 2015). Thus, Francanglais has become recognized as a register of French that indexes an urban (and somewhat marginalized) youth masculinity in Cameroon and its diaspora through processes of enregisterment that link repeated performances to social categories of young men via metapragmatic stereotypes (Agha 2007).

This language ideology associating youth slang with urban youthful masculinity is not specific to Francanglais: it is frequently found in many other youth languages in different sociocultural contexts, notably in France (Billiez et al. 2003; Auzanneau and Juillard 2012; Tetreault 2015), the United States (Kiesling 2004; Bucholtz 2009), and South Africa (Hurst and Mesthrie 2013; Brookes 2014; Maribe and Brookes 2014). Scholars showed that the frequent use of urban youth slang words and phrases in actual language practices is primarily a male phenomenon and that this performative practice is enacted mostly in specific in-group activities as “part of male sociality: negotiating and maintaining social status within one’s immediate peer group and in relation to male social networks in local neighborhoods” (Brookes 2014, 87). The ideological association between youth slang and masculinity thus corresponds to an enregistered “trope of slang” (Agha 2015), a metapragmatic stereotype that associates this language register with masculine figures of personhood. While the ideological association between youth slang and masculinity results from both the metapragmatic discourses of speakers and their uses of this register based on the modes of sociability between young male peers, the frequent ideological association between slang and social marginality, vulgarity, or even obscenity in these discourses refers more to a social construction of gender relations through language as found in many societies in Africa and Western

countries. In fact, the use of swear words or language socially perceived as vulgar or deviant, such as slang, represents a socially accepted way of constructing a masculine identity associated with aggressiveness or immodest forms of expression (Coates 2015). Conversely, women's use of profanity and language socially perceived as vulgar or obscene is frequently viewed "as transgressing cultural stereotypes and expectations about femininity, hence the fact that [women] are variably positioned as deferential, polite, caring and oriented to the needs or feelings of others" (Stapleton 2003, 22). As a result of this social construction of gender identities, female speakers of nonstandard language forms tend to be perceived more negatively than male speakers and are more easily assigned a lower social position and moral status (22).

To understand how youth slang comes to be associated with masculinity and other gendered social figures, the concept of double indexicality (Ochs 1992) is fundamental. According to Ochs, "*few features of language directly and exclusively index gender*" (1992, 340). Indeed, the indexical relationship between language and social meaning involves two levels. At the level of direct indexicality, linguistic forms mostly index interactional stances, meaning "subjective orientations to ongoing talk, including affective, evaluative, and epistemic stances" (Bucholtz 2009, 148; cf. also Du Bois 2007). At the level of indirect indexicality, these same linguistic forms become associated with particular social personas believed to adopt such stances or subjective orientations. Through the ideological process of erasure (Irvine and Gal 2019), the relationship between these social personas and their stances becomes viewed as permanent, as if the stances were inherent traits of the people. For example, an interactional stance expressing self-assertiveness may be ideologically associated with men, and thus the linguistic forms used to project a dominant, confident persona may come to be seen as inherently masculine. Therefore, "knowledge of how language relates to gender is not a catalogue of direct correlations between particular linguistic forms and sex of speakers, referents, addressees. Rather, such knowledge entails tacit understanding of (1) how particular linguistic forms can be used to perform particular pragmatic work (such as conveying stance and social action) and (2) norms, preferences, and expectations regarding the distribution of this work *vis-à-vis* particular social identities of speakers, referents, and addressees" (Ochs 1992, 342).

Drawing on this theoretical framework, I analyze the representation of contrastive masculine and feminine identities through the differentiated use of Francanglais slang in the first season of the YouTube series *Tu Know Ma Life* in relation to gendered discursive patterns and other nonlinguistic features. I explore the gendered representation of Francanglais in two main contexts: first

in same-sex conversations and then in intersex conversations about sexual desire in a heterosexual couple.

Same-Sex Conversations

The series centers around alternating scenes of intimate conversations between people of the same sex (exclusively between men or exclusively between women), which creates a mirroring and contrasting effect between these different moments. This effect of parallelism contributes to the construction of “voicing contrasts” between typified masculine and feminine figures of personhood “that are juxtaposed within structures of entextualization composed of many types of signs, including linguistic signs . . . and non-linguistic ones” (Agha 2005, 39). At the linguistic level, the main contrast manifests between men’s frequent and systematic use of Francanglais in conversations and women’s use of Cameroonian French with some occasional slang words or expressions. This linguistic differentiation is constructed in relation to gendered differentiations at the discursive and interactional levels and through nonlinguistic signs that are part of contrastive metasemiotic schemes contributing to the differentiation between masculinity and femininity. I next analyze an excerpt from a conversation between men followed by another taken from a conversation between women in order to show how the two main metasemiotic schemes oppose each other in the series.

Conversations between Men

This conversation shown in figure 1 is taken from the opening scene of the second episode of season 1, a discussion between male friends Malep, Wafo, Medjo, and Priso. The scene takes place in Priso’s living room. The men are sitting on a sofa, discussing their love affairs with girls. They are playing checkers and drinking



Figure 1. Conversation between men

beer while talking. Malep, Wafo, and Priso are initially alone before Medjo joins them. The friends exchange advice and confide in each other about their romantic relationships. Medjo becomes the center of the discussion, receiving advice from his friends about his relationship with Laëtitia. All the other speakers line up to warn Medjo about his behavior with his girlfriend, as he boasts that he is in total "control" of his relationship with her:

Transcript 1.

Medjo: non non non non + perso je n'ai pas de pression je maîtrise ma nga . . .	no no no no + personally there's no pressure I control my girlfriend . . .
Priso: [en souriant] regarde-moi les divers d'un gars	[smiling] just listen to a guy's stories
Medjo: non comment ?	but how?
Priso: non mais gars + franchement entre nous quand tu kém ici gonflé devant nous que tu contrôles une nga tu es dans le ndem + sérieux	no but guy + frankly between us when you come here puffed up in front of us that you control a woman you're in the shit + seriously
Medjo: XXX—	XXX—
Priso: —c'est pas bon + parce qu'il suffit que la baby -là soit un peu censée + elle va te jongler comme le ballon +	—that's no good + because if the woman has any sense at all + she'll play you like a ball +
Medjo: [<i>murmures inaudibles</i>]	[<i>inaudible murmurs</i>]
Priso: moi je te dis + tu crois que + tu crois qu(e) tu maîtrises le système + mais c'est elle qui te maîtrise + popoh ++ parce que—	I'm telling you + you think that + you think you've controlled the system + but SHE's controlling you + really ++ because—
Wafo: [à Malep] —pousse mon pion un peu [ici mon frère + XXX]	[to Malep] —push my pawn a little [here brother + XXX]
Priso: [non seulement] + tes allers-retours lui font comprendre que tu fia le sevrage + mais: elle know surtout que le do est dur + gars tu vas lui speak même comment tu vas lui dire quoi	[because] + not only + you come and go + she understands that you're scared of weaning + but: she knows that the situation's hard + man you're going to speak to her but how you're going to tell her what//
Wafo: gars + c'est vrai	man + it's true
Medjo: gars c'est pas: + j'ai pas: j'ai pas de pression gars je know + ta théorie là-bas je know ma nga + donc sur le terrain je know comment ça se passe + regarde je go je viens je go je viens + si elle accepte toujours c'est qu' elle me ya mo non + . . . + tu crois que je vais stresser quoi je vais stresser quoi mon frère + je suis sur le wé// + je suis sur le wé// mon frère//	man it's not: + I don't: I don't have any pressure man I know + your theory there I know my girlfriend + so in reality I know how it goes + look I come and go I come and go + if she still accepts it it's because she's completely into me right + . . . + you think I'm going to stress what I'm going to stress about bro + I manage the situation// + I manage the situation// my bro//

Note.—Transcription conventions: XXX = inaudible passages; : = lengthening; / \ = intonation rise or fall; + / + + = short or long pause; ' = emphatic stress on the next syllable; [XXX] = overlaps; — = latching. Francanglais words in this and the following transcripts are in bold.

In this context, Francanglais is used as an index of a nonintimate friendship and “cool solidarity” (Kiesling 2004, 282; Bucholtz 2009, 150) between masculine friends. This stance of cool solidarity is linked to a masculine heterosexual persona via indirect indexicality. At the linguistic level, an accumulation of words and expressions is ideologically associated with Francanglais and Cameroonian French:

- many borrowings from English or pidgin English, which constitute 80 percent of the Francanglais lexicon, including nouns such as *dos* ‘money’ (> English slang *dough*) and *baby* ‘girl, woman’ (> English); verbs like *kèm* (> pidgin English, from the English *came*, past tense form of the verb *to come*), *fia* (> pidgin English, from the English verb *to fear*), *know* (English *to know*), and *go* (*I go* > English *to go*); and verbal syntagms like *ya mo* ‘to like something/someone very much, to love’ (> pidgin English *ya*, from the English verb *to hear* + pidgin English *mo* from the English word *much*);
- French words that have undergone a semantic transformation: *les divers* ‘the diverse things’ (meaning “stories” in Francanglais) and *sevrage* ‘weaning’ (meaning “being single” in Francanglais);
- phrases in spoken Cameroonian French: *être sur le wé* ‘to be on the way’ (to be in the loop, to manage the situation), *être dans le ndem* ‘being in trouble’, and *le do est dur* ‘the situation is difficult’.

The accumulation of words and expressions associated with Francanglais slang and Cameroonian French is associated with other linguistic, prosodic, and paraverbal markers of affective connivance and “cooperation” between peers (Cameron 1997);

- use of appellatives indicating strong connivance between friendly interlocutors: *gars* ‘dude, man’ and *mon frère* ‘brother’;
- very high voice intensity;
- frequent intonation peaks, often at the end of utterances, indicating excitement and cooperation between peers;
- loudness;
- very fast speech rate;
- numerous overlappings;
- latching with a rapid succession of turns between speakers;
- repetition/recycling of one speaker’s words or expressions by another speaker from one turn to the next (here, the verb *maîtriser* ‘to control,

master' used by Medjo is then used by Priso with the reversal of gender roles);

- laughter;
- bodily gestures: frequent clapping as a greeting or marker of approval of what the other is saying. This gestural code is socially codified as typically masculine, signaling cool solidarity between male peers.

All these linguistic, prosodic, and interactional markers contribute to the constitution of a "play frame" (Coates 2007), a marker of solidarity and intimacy between male peers.

At the discursive level, the discourse is marked by cooperation and alignment between male peers in this joint performance of dominant masculinity as well as by a series of monologues that usually characterize interactions between male peers, where the speakers tend to play the expert and take their turn to "hold the floor" (Coates 2013, 2015). One character in particular, Medjo, adopts a discourse indexing his male dominance, which contributes to his performance of hypermasculine and virile heterosexuality, along with the intense use of the Francanglais register. His discursive performance is characterized by:

- dominance of the epistemic modality, with the frequent use of verbs of knowledge (*to know*, in "je know ma nga," repeated twice) and verbs and verbal phrases referring to physical or moral power and to the complete mastery of the male subject over the female other (*maîtriser*, in "je maîtrise ma nga"; the idiomatic expression "je suis sur le wé" 'I'm in the loop, I'm managing the situation'; the expression "je go je viens" 'I come and go', indicating the masculine subject's mastery of the art of playing with the feminine other);
- grammatical and semantic opposition between the active subject (man) and the passive object (woman): the female subject is always the grammatical object of verbs of action or knowledge, where the male character, Medjo, is the grammatical subject of the sentence (e.g., "je maîtrise ma nga" 'I master my girlfriend'; "je know ma nga" 'I know my girlfriend').
- use of the pawn game metaphor, which runs throughout the entire interaction between the male friends in this scene, as a metaphor for the love relationship between men and women: for Medjo, this metaphor refers to the male subject's total control over the female subject, who is reduced to a pawn on the chessboard manipulated by the man at will.

Another element is rather systematic in the conversations between men: beer, a typical emblem of hegemonic masculinity (see, e.g., Bucholtz [2009] for the United States; Milani and Shaikjee [2013] for South Africa). Indeed, in the series, men routinely consume beer when in each other's company, but they also frequently drink it even when interacting with women. Conversely, women never drink beer. This contrasting drinking practice between men and women helps reinforce the ideological association between beer and masculinity, on the one hand, and between Francanglais and hegemonic masculinity, on the other (fig. 2). Through this analysis, we may observe how the use of Francanglais in men's conversations takes on its full meaning within a complex metasemiotic scheme that directly associates the systematic and intensive use of this youth slang with a whole set of discursive practices and social activities that are exclusively practiced by the male characters in the series (playing games, talking about girls, talking openly about sex, bragging about one's exploits with women, drinking beer). The recurrence of this metasemiotic scheme helps to register the indirect ideological association between Francanglais and dominant heterosexual masculinity.

In the following section I analyze the language and discursive style of the women in a comparable scene involving a conversation between friends. I also describe the voicing contrasts constructed between masculine and feminine personas.

Conversations between Women

The scene from episode 4 of season 1 depicted in figure 3 features a discussion between Carine, Dianne, and Laëtitia. The girls are sitting in Carine's living room. Carine and Laëtitia recount their love affairs with their boyfriends, while



Figure 2. Men drinking beer



Figure 3. Conversation between women

giving advice to single Dianne about how to manage her relationships with men:

Transcript 2.

Dianne: Laëtitia + tu entends ce que Carine te raconte là + au sujet du père Priso + est-ce que c'est normal ça	Laëtitia + do you hear what Carine's now telling you about father Priso + is that normal?
Laëtitia: normal + est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose de normal dans les relations ici dehors maintenant	normal + is there anything normal about relationships here and now
[Geste de Carine avec ses mains, paumes levées vers le ciel]	[Carine makes a gesture with her hands, palms turned upward]
Laëtitia: non + parfois tu vois seulement le feu hein	no + sometimes you only see fire no
Carine: merci maman + tu connais ++ le do est pas facile	thank you mamma + you know ++ the situation's not easy [clapping her hands]
Dianne: dis donc + ah easy	tell me about it + ah easy
Laëtitia: Medjo me montre seulement le feu je te jure	Medjo only shows me fire I swear//
Carine: maman + XXXX	mom + XXXX
Dianne [l'air interloqué]: quoi/ ++ Medjo ++ quel Medjo	[expression of surprise] what/ ++ Medjo ++ what Medjo
Laëtitia: ton frère-là non	your brother no
Dianne: [hi::://] ^a	[oh Go::d//]
Laëtitia: [tu sais] comment le djo -là aime les femmes	[you know] how this guy likes women
Dianne: oh::: non	oh::: no
Laëtitia: dernièrement j'ai trouvé un préservatif + [fait des parenthèses avec ses doigts de la main] perdu dans son tiroir à chaussettes	recently I found a condom + [makes quotes with her fingers] lost in his sock drawer
Dianne: oh non::: + ne me dis pas que::	oh no::: + don't tell me that::
Laëtitia: si si je te dis + il a commencé par nier non + tu connais les gars de 2014	yes yes I'm telling you + he started by denying it + you know the 2014 guys

Transcript 2. *(Continued)*

Carine: [en regardant Dianne] elle n'ignore rien [bois du jus de fruit]	[looking at Dianne] she knows everything [she's drinking fruit juice]
Laëtitia: en tout cas vraiment + moi j(le) suis dépassée	in any case really + I feel overwhelmed
[Dianne pose sa main sur la main droite de Laëtitia et hoche la tête, en signe de compassion]	[Dianne puts her hand on Laëtitia's right hand and nods in sympathy.]
Laëtitia: j'ai saigné la face + j'ai crié j'ai retourné la maison	I bled in the face + I screamed I turned the house upside down
Dianne: assia	oh my God
Laëtitia: quand t'étais là XXX + il a avoué non + que ça c'était passé pendant notre séparation + en tout cas ++ après il s'est excusé il a supplié ++ ouéh j'ai seulement eu pitié	when you were there XXX + he said no + that it happened during our separation + in any case + after he apologized he begged + ooooh I just felt pity

^a This is a frequent interjection in Cameroonian French, usually enunciated with a lengthening of the vowel and a raising intonation to express surprise, astonishment, or connivance with the interlocutor.

At the linguistic level, in contrast to the practices analyzed in male friends' conversations, we can note the low frequency of words and expressions ideologically associated with Francanglais. There are nevertheless a few Francanglais and Cameroonian French words or phrases:

- interjections such as *assia*, *pardon*, *wanda*, and *maman* (mom, mother);
- borrowings from English or pidgin English, including *easy* and *go*; and from French, including *père* 'father', used as an affective familiar term referring to a man (in *le père Priso* 'father Priso' to denote Carine's boyfriend);
- French intensifiers such as *mal vite* 'badly quickly', as in "ça transporte mal vite" (it ends up badly quickly), *vraiment* 'really', and *là* 'there' as an optional punctuator, also used by male speakers, whose function is to highlight one of the terms in the statement or to emphasize the overall content: *toi là* 'you there' and *leur petit truc-là* 'their little thing there';
- common French slang, including *gos* 'women', *gars* 'boyfriend';
- vernacular idiomatic expressions such as "le do est pas facile" (the situation is difficult).

The use of colloquial French with a few Cameroonian French or slang words and expressions is associated with other linguistic and prosodic markers of affective connivance and cooperation between female peers in sharp contrast with the linguistic practices of men:

- use of appellatives indicating strong connivance between friendly interlocutors: *ma chérie* 'darling' and *ma soeur* 'sister';
- very moderate and sometimes low voice intensity;
- a few intonation peaks, often at the end of utterances, indicating excitement and cooperation between peers but much less pronounced than in male voices;
- moderate or close to normal voice volume corresponding to everyday conversational volume;
- slower speech rate than in male conversations, with pauses of 3–5 seconds between certain turns of speech;
- use of overlaps but little less frequent than in men's conversations;
- conniving smiles;
- conniving pats (on the thigh) as signs of emotional closeness.

At the discursive level, women's speech is more focused on narrating, sharing feelings, and showing empathy toward the other. Physical markers of affection and empathy such as patting on the right thigh or placing one's hand on another hand as a sign of compassion are accompanied by linguistic markers of empathy and cooperation between peers ("oh no," "don't tell me that," "if I tell you"). This attitude indirectly refers to a normative construction of femininity that is ideologically associated with activities such as establishing trust and intimacy and discussing topics from a personal or relational perspective. These gendered practices are opposed to the social behaviors ideologically associated with hegemonic masculinity, with its more distanced and impersonal approach to topics and competition within the group to hold the floor (Coates 2015). Thus, in this extract, we may note numerous markers of the affective modality and many words belonging to the lexical field of emotion, particularly in Laëtitia's discourse such as "I'm overwhelmed," "I felt sorry for him," "I always touch him affectionately," and "I always look at him affectionately." Thus, the female speaker projects a caring and affectionate feminine persona, still in love with her man despite feeling deception.

Finally, at the nonlinguistic level, in mixed and unmixed conversations, women exclusively consume soft drinks such as fruit juice or water but never beer or any other alcohol, with the exception of a bottle of wine that is placed on the table in a scene of a meal involving men and women. This recurring metasemiotic scheme in the series associates the feminine persona with the consumption of nonalcoholic and mostly sweet drinks, which is constructed as an emblem of normative femininity: according to hegemonic gender norms,



Figure 4. Women having soft drinks

drinking is construed as problematic for women, who must avoid being associated with the stigmatizing image of the “woman drinker” in order to protect their moral status as “good women” (Rolfe et al. 2009). Therefore, the consumption of “girly drinks” (Day 2003, 293) or “girl drinks” (Manning 2012, 6), such as fruit juice, soda, or water, is perceived as socially acceptable behavior for women (fig. 4), while the consumption of brightly colored and sweet alcohol, such as wine or a cocktail, is tolerated because of the ideological association between sweetness and normative femininity. The indirect ideological association between youth slang and masculinity is thus reproduced in the YouTube series through the construction of contrasting metasemiotic schemes in same-sex conversations, which combine the intensive or low use of Francanglais words with distinct discursive patterns, contrastive linguistic and prosodic markers, and differentiated drinking practices. These distinctive metasemiotic patterns tend to reproduce hegemonic gender ideologies. I now analyze an intersex interaction to illustrate how gendered differentiation takes place through the differentiated use of Francanglais and French in this interactional context in the series.

Intersex Conversations

During discussions between men and women in the YouTube series, the characters usually speak Cameroonian French, with a recognizable Cameroonian accent and a few vernacular words and phrases. This is the unmarked and gender-neutral interactional norm in the series. The avoidance of slang in interactions between lovers or in flirtatious situations corresponds to a linguistic ideology according to which it is not decent for a woman to talk with a man in Francanglais, and vice versa, in the context of a romantic relationship. This linguistic ideology is the subject of recurrent metapragmatic discourses that associate Francanglais with vulgarity (Telep 2017, 40–41). Therefore, the use of

Francanglais in a romantic relationship is usually marked and serves specific pragmatic goals. This is the case in the first scene of episode 8 of season 1, an intimate conversation between two lovers, Malep and Faith (fig. 5). The two lovers are in their bedroom, in bed. Malep reproaches Faith for not having had sex together for some time and expresses his sexual desire in a crude way by using many Francanglais words. Conversely, Faith is evasive, saying she is tired and not in the mood and wants to talk more about their relationship. She speaks only in French. Here is the extract:

Transcript 3.

<p>[Malep est allongé dans le lit et regarde son portable. Faith entre dans la chambre, enjambe Malep sur le lit et s'allonge à côté de lui.]</p> <p>Malep: bonjour bébé + tu aimes bien dormir + hein tu m'avais l'air tout agitée euh pendant la nuit là</p> <p>Faith [sourit et embrasse Malep sur la joue gauche]: ça va [tourne le dos à Malep et s'allonge pour s'endormir]</p> <p>Malep: je dis hein: + ça va ah oui + comme ça va même hein + ça veut dire qu'on peut heu: [se rapproche de Faith]</p> <p>Faith [en repousse Malep]: oh Malep + je suis pas d'humeur là franchement + en plus je suis très fatiguée</p> <p>Malep: comment ça tu es fatiguée + tu es encore fatiguée c'est ça + depuis hier tu me tournes tu me tournes je dis hein + on est à Disneyland ici là c'est un nouveau manège ?</p>	<p>[Malep lies on the bed and looks at his cell phone. Faith enters the room, straddles Malep on the bed, and lies down next to him.]</p> <p>hello baby + you like sleeping + eh you seemed all restless uh during the night there</p> <p>[smiles and kisses Malep on the left cheek]: it's okay [turns her back toward Malep and lies down to sleep]</p> <p>I say huh + you're good yeah + 'cause you're good huh + it means we can [approaches Faith]</p> <p>[pushing Malep away]: oh Malep + I'm not in the mood right now + plus I'm really tired</p> <p>what do you mean you're tired + you're still tired that's it + since yesterday you've been turning me around you've been turning me around I say + we're at Disneyland now is this a new ride?</p>
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Figure 5. Two lovers, Malep and Faith, in bed

Transcript 3. *(Continued)*

Faith [se tourne vers Malep, toujours allongée]: oh: + bébé [lui caresse la joue gauche]	[turns to Malep, still lying down]: oh: + baby [she caresses his left cheek]
Malep [s'éloigne de Faith, refusant sa caresse]: bébé quoi + moi je veux le wé là aujourd'hui je veux le wé [pointe son index vers le bas, comme en direction de ses parties génitales] + ça fait trois semaines que tu: que tu me mets en attente	[moves away from Faith, rejecting her touch]: baby what? + I want the wé today I want the wé + [points his index finger downward toward his genitals] + you've been putting me on hold for three weeks now
Faith [se redresse pour s'asseoir dans le lit, et regarde fixement Malep]	[Faith straightens up to sit on the bed and stares at Malep]
[...]	[...]
Faith: on: on n'a pas eu le temps de se voir c'est tout/ + tu– [elle prend un coeur rose en peluche et le serre contre sa poitrine] tu es le seul dans mon coeur tu le sais ça	we: we didn't have time to see each other that's all/ + you– [she takes a pink stuffed heart and holds it to her chest] you're the only one in my heart you know that
Malep [lui arrache le coeur en peluche de sa main]: quel coeur + je mange ça/ [jette le coeur au loin dans la pièce] + le coeur c'est pour les copines + tu as compris + c'est pas d'un coeur moi j'ai envie de là là là [fait des gestes très insistants et explicites de ses deux mains vers son bas-ventre]	[snatches the stuffed heart from her hand]: what heart + I'm eating this/ [throws the heart across the room] + the heart's for girlfriends + you get it + it's not a heart I want there there there [makes very insistent and explicit gestures with his two hands toward his lower abdomen]
Faith [agacée, élève la voix]: donc toi pour toi là c'est sexe sexe sexe	[annoyed, raises her voice]: so for you it's sex sex sex sex
Malep [d'un ton ironique et d'une voix faussement douce, levant les yeux au ciel]: non + j'aime aussi le foot + le <i>mbongo djobi</i> + [regarde à nouveau Faith dans les yeux] + [. .] + je t'ai dit ce que moi je veux + pénis	[in an ironic and deceptively sweet voice, rolling his eyes]: no + I also like soccer + <i>mbongo djobi</i> + [he looks Faith in the eyes again] + [. .] + I told you what I want + penis
Faith [avec un signe de la tête, d'incompréhension et d'agacement]: le pinguis + c'est encore quoi ça [long bruit de bouche d'agacement. Tourne à nouveau le dos à Malep pour s'allonger]	[with a nod of the head, incomprehension and annoyance]: the pinguis + what's that again? [long annoyed mouth noise from Faith. She turns her back to Malep once again to lie down]
Malep: la nga ci + [...] + hein bon [se rapproche de Faith et glisse sa main droite sur elle, sous la couette] + on va recommencer hein bébé + hein + bébé + 'bé'bé + hein + [lui murmure à l'oreille] j'ai envie de toi + est-ce que tu peux faire quelque chose pour moi	the woman here + [...] + huh well [moves closer to Faith and slips his right hand over her, under the comforter] + let's do it again huh baby + hey + baby + 'ba'by + hey + [whispers in her ear] I want you + can you do something for me
[pause de cinq secondes]	[five-second pause]
Faith [se tourne un peu plus vers Malep]: oui + mais avant + [pointe son index de la main gauche vers Malep] on parle + je 'veux qu'on parle + [se redresse en	[turns slightly toward Malep]: yes + but first + [points his index finger with his left hand toward Malep] we talk + I want us to talk + [straightens up into a

Transcript 3. *(Continued)*

position assise] bébé/ + ça fait longtemps qu'on n'a pas parlé::://	seated position] baby/ + it's been a long time since we talked::://
Malep [élève la voix]: oui + comme ça fait longtemps qu'on n'a pas tué::://	[raises his voice]: yes + like it's been a long time since we had sex::://

Voicing contrasts between the two gendered personas are primarily constructed at the lexical and semantic levels, with an opposition between the following:

- The *register of sex* with Malep's direct expression of his sexual desire, which is directly associated with the use of Francanglais words referring to sex. For instance, the use of the French verb *tuer* 'to kill' signifies 'to have sex' in this context through the metaphoric resemantization in Francanglais. The recurring Francanglais word *wé* 'thing', an indefinite word (> English *way*) takes on its full meaning in this context with the clear signification of sex. This word is repeated several times by Malep, notably in the statement "moi je veux le wé là, aujourd'hui je veux le wé" (I want the *wé* now, today I want the *wé*). We can also note another reference to the masculine character's sexual desire in the utterance "moi j'ai envie de là là là" (I want to there there there): *là*, like *wé*, has no explicit referent outside this context. However, here it implicitly refers to sex, and the utterance is accompanied by Malep's repetitive gesture with both his hands toward his lower abdomen, which has the effect of making explicit the referent of the word *là*. Finally, the mention of the word *pénis* in "je t'ai dit ce que moi je veux + pénis" (I told you what I want + penis) marks a change in Malep's speech as it becomes increasingly explicit. This reference to penis in the mouth of the slang-speaking male character reinforces the indirect ideological association between Francanglais, sex, and hegemonic masculinity. Besides, Malep's mention of his passion for soccer refers to a typically masculine activity, sport. The entextualization of two social indexes of hegemonic masculinity—sex and sport—help reinforce the ideological association between Francanglais and the masculine persona.
- The *register of feelings*, along with the lexical field of speech, on Faith's side. Indeed, Faith's speech is dominated by the direct expression of romantic feelings, with the predominance of the affective modality: "tu es le seul dans mon coeur" (you're the only one in my heart); *bébé* (baby).

The lexical voicing contrast between masculine and feminine persona is reinforced syntactically and rhythmically by parallelism effects to underline the contrast between the register of sex associated with the masculine persona and the register of speech and feelings associated with the feminine persona. This contrast may be observed between the French verb *parler* (to speak) used by Faith and the French verb *tuer* ‘to kill’ (signifying “to have sex” via metaphoric resemantization in Francanglais). Malep employs this verb in response to Faith in an identical syntactic structure where he directly substitutes the verb *tuer* for *parler* in the following speech turn:

Transcript 4.

Faith: ça fait longtemps qu'on a pas parlé	it's been a long time since we talked
Malep: oui + comme ça fait longtemps qu'on a pas tué	yes + like it's been a long time since we had sex

There are several other syntactic parallelisms, notably in the use of verbal phrases with the verbs of will *vouloir* ‘to want’ or *avoir envie de* ‘to crave, to long for’ + object complement, which also reinforces the voicing contrast between the object of feminine desire (talking) and the object of masculine desire (having sex):

Transcript 5.

Faith: je veux qu'on parle	I want to talk
Malep: je veux le wé	I want the wé
moi je veux + pénis	I want + penis
moi j'ai envie de là là là	I want there there there

The climax of the scene results in the word game *penis/pinguis*, when Malep pronounces the word *penis* and Faith repeats the word but distorts it, explicitly indicating that she does not understand the meaning of the word—or pretending not to?—as if it were another language, when it is instead a common French word: “le pinguis + c’est encore quoi ça” (the pinguis + what’s that again?). The use of Francanglais is thus associated with a certain vulgarity with the crude expression of sexual desire and the explicit mention of male genitalia, while the female persona is symbolically excluded from the register of sex.

Finally, at the nonlinguistic level, in conjunction with contrasts at the lexical and semantic levels, the stage play with a key accessory, namely, a pink plush heart, reinforces the opposition between the masculine and feminine personas,

along with the indexical association between masculinity and the use of Francanglais. Indeed, as she expresses her feelings to Malep by saying, "tu es le seul dans mon coeur" (you're the only one in my heart), Faith picks up a pink stuffed heart lying on the bed and holds it tightly to her chest (fig. 6). This gesture, which underlines what she is saying, helps reinforce the ideological association between femininity and the direct expression of romantic feelings in a stereotypical and almost caricatured way. The "stuffed heart" object thus functions as a material metaphor for feelings of love, and the color pink, ideologically associated with the feminine, also reproduces the ideological association between heart/feelings and normative femininity. On the contrary, Malep's gesture of refusing the heart offered by the female character strengthens the contrast with the ideological association between masculinity, insensitivity, and sex (fig. 7). Through the use of linguistic, discursive, and nonverbal resources (gestures, objects, staging), this scene reproduces normative expectations about gender roles in terms of sexuality and morality in heterosexual couples, while it also recreates opposing gender stereotypes: men's direct expression of sexual desire and their use of Francanglais versus women's expression of romantic feelings and their use of French. Faith's speaking in French (and not Francanglais) reinforces the enregisterment (Agha 2007) of the indirect ideological association between French, femininity, and moral decency through avoidance of obscene language. By contrast, the use of Francanglais by the male character contributes to the enregisterment of the ideological association between Francanglais, sex, and dominant heterosexual masculinity.



Figure 6. Faith holding a pink stuffed heart tightly to her chest



Figure 7. Malep snatching the stuffed heart from Faith's hands

Conclusion

I demonstrated in this article how Cameroonian youth slang gains its gendered meanings from a range of semiotic practices in which the masculine and feminine characters of the YouTube series engage while taking stances that are indirectly related to gendered personhoods. The ideological association between youth slang and masculinity is constructed by a whole set of social activities at the linguistic, discursive, and nonlinguistic levels, which constitute a coherent semiotic complex mobilized by the masculine characters. These practices contrast with the semiotic practices associated with female characters. These inter-related signs directly signal the construction of different personae by male speakers and generally index a cool solidarity between male peers. Some lexical elements associated with this register are occasionally mobilized by female characters to achieve specific pragmatic effects. However, the recurrent association between Francanglais and other specific linguistic and nonlinguistic signs, the systematic use of this metasemiotic scheme exclusively by male characters, and the contrast between this semiotic register and the practices of mostly French-speaking female characters all contribute to the enregisterment of the indirect ideological association between Francanglais and hegemonic masculinity.

This article sheds light on the role of youth slang in the construction of gender identities and the influence of the media in the reproduction of gender ideologies through language. It also highlights the social dynamics of gender ideologies in Africa and its diaspora. Indeed, the YouTube series dramatizes the

tensions between traditional and more modern and progressive representations of gender roles in Cameroonian society as well as in the young, educated, upper- and middle-class Cameroonian diaspora living in France. The semiotic reproduction of gender relations in this series questions the sexist representations of gender roles and manifestations of male dominance, as some of the female characters seek to emancipate themselves from the traditional roles of Cameroonian femininity. However, the linguistic and semiotic analysis of gender ideologies conducted here reveals that the series fails to fully challenge the model of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. Thus, rather than deconstructing hegemonic gender norms, the series tends to reinforce them within Cameroonian society and its diaspora.

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