

# When the Blind Lead the Blinds - Analysing the Written English Productions of Francophone Primary School Teachers' in Far-North Cameroon and the Need for Pedagogic Reforms

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**Abstract:** This study assesses the English written productions of francophone primary school teachers in the Far-North Region of Cameroon. The sample population was made up of 61 francophone primary school teachers in 19 schools in the Far-North region of Cameroon. They were administered an essay, and some lessons were scanned from their preparation books. The theoretical framework used for this study is Error Analysis theory. The study addresses some graphological, lexical and grammatical features in the written productions of the respondents. The results show that francophone primary school teachers make many errors in their written productions related to the use of some signs of graphology, lexical items, and grammatical constructions. As far as the origin of these errors is concerned, the interference of their official L1 language (French) was to be pointed at in the first place since they use it to fill their gaps in English grammar, lexicology, and graphology. Besides, the respondents display weaknesses as far as the graphological, lexical, and grammatical rules that govern English written productions are concerned. The results show that francophone primary school teachers are not proficient in English and consequently cannot teach that subject efficiently to pupils in primary schools.

**Keywords:** Written Productions, Francophone, Graphology, Lexical, Grammar

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## 1. Introduction

The spread of English from the inner to the outer circle has made it a global language. Used as a second language in some countries and as foreign language in others, English is mostly learned through the process of teaching in schools. Cameroon as a bilingual French-English country also promotes the teaching of English in schools, from primary to tertiary level of education. According to the curriculum that is being implemented, the teaching of English as a second official language in primary schools seeks to: provide learners with skills that they will use at the end of their primary school education in daily life; establish a basis for further work in English for those who will go to secondary education; expose learners to some aspects of the English-speaking culture;

foster bilingualism and national integration. The general objectives of teaching English in primary francophone schools are to enable pupils to “acquire an elementary mastery of the language, that is, the aptitude to understand oral and written messages and to express themselves orally and in writing at school and out of school” [17]. In order to achieve all those objectives, there is a need for teachers who are capable and proficient enough in English in order to properly help those pupils in their process of acquiring fundamentals in English. It is for this purpose that the assessment of the written productions of francophone primary school teachers in the Far-North region of Cameroon has been undertaken to see the quality of their linguistic productions and the efficiency of their teachings.

Since reunification of French Cameroon and British

Cameroon in 1961, the country has adopted French and English as its official languages and recommended the promotion of bilingualism in these two foreign languages in official domains. [14]. Since then, the implementation of the teaching of English in schools has become a goal for the Cameroonian education sector. Many researchers investigated on the language that English learners use in their productions. Researchers like Bobda [6]; Kouega [15]; Safotso [22-25]; Atechi [3] have carried out studies related to issues concerning English language used in francophone and anglophone subsystems of Cameroon education. Their purposes were to assess the language that is used by the learners and to improve the learning condition in order to enhance the effectiveness of bilingualism in the country. To this effect, the study of errors in the English productions of learners is being carried out at the level of phonology, grammar, lexicology, and some other aspects. The focus of these studies was to bring out the problems that English learners are facing in different learning settings in order to propose remedial strategies and to improve on the pedagogy. Teachers, researchers, stakeholders of education are all working for perfection of the quality of English throughout the educational milieu.

Cameroon Francophone English is an upcoming variety of English, according to Apuge and Faissam [2], Faissam [10] for the domain of pragmatics. That variety has been spreading during the last two decades in Cameroon. This variety of English results from the rushing of francophones in the learning of English. The investigation of the grammar and lexis of that variety of English is still under study. [25].

Safotso's [25] findings reveal that neologisms and Cameroonisms are present in the English used by francophones. This is due to the interference of French and other national languages in their English. This shows the dynamism of this variety. In the same line, Kouega [15] investigated on the influence of French on English L2 language. Findings reveal that all over the country where English is used as second language, its lexicon is enriched by various lexical innovations which result into various processes like compounding, borrowing, functional shift, clipping and others.

Ngefack [19] investigated on Aspects of Cameroon Englishes and found that there are many varieties of English in Cameroon and each variety is characterised by different describable aspects and trends. In that volume, the editor shows some variety-specific peculiarities. Also, some aspects of Cameroon francophone English in the speeches of francophones are originally from French and some local languages influence.

Still in exploring francophone Cameroon English, many authors like Atechi [3], Safotso [22], Kouega [17] identified some salient features in the pronunciation of francophones. Some features originated from the influence of French pronunciation on English. Kouega and Onana [16] investigated on the pronunciation of teachers and their pupils of Cours Moyen Deux in order to sort out how much level in pronunciation has been acquired by the time they leave

primary school. Their results uncover that many deficiencies are found at the level of sound rendition of students as well as teachers.

Findings from the works of many researchers in Cameroon (Ayafor [5], Sokeng [28], Apuge and Vagana [1], Nkongoh and Mbaionom [20], Sawalda [27]) reveal some of the errors that are common in the written productions of francophone learners/users of English. Those errors are related to issues like grammar including the structure of sentences, the use of tenses, the use of articles and many other issues. The analyses show that the origin of most of those errors are linked to the French background of all the learners/users and their failures to cope with the constructions that English language requires. Also, lack of exposure and practice constitute a source of their errors.

Eddine [9] finds out from an investigation on interlanguage prepositions that French learners of English use in their writing some prepositions from French. They misuse English prepositions due to their previous knowledge of French prepositions and that hinders their proficiency in English.

An investigation of lexical features in some academic texts by Imami and Habil [12] shows how academic writing texts are characterised by some distinct lexical features. Lexical density, lexical complexity and lexical formality appear to be the main measurement tools of academic texts. This expresses the fact that lexical features can reflect the setting, context and purpose of the production of given texts.

Wannakan [30] demonstrated how online news headlines in English language are characterised by some distinct grammatical and lexical features. Those grammatical features (short phrases and sentences, use of ellipsis, abundant use of simple present tense) and lexical features (beautiful and attractive lexicons) are purposefully used to make the news headlines attractive, shorter, alive and beautiful. This shows how some written productions are characterised by distinct grammatical and lexical features to achieve some goals.

Nforbi and Douanla [18] found that the counter-performance of the proficiency of pupils in the written English production at the end of their training in primary schools are due to the poor-training of teachers and their lack of proficiency in producing well-written texts. This investigation suggests as implication for the improvement of the quality of training of primary school leavers in writing, the improvement of the quality of the training of those teachers; because the proficiency of pupils in writing is closely dependent on the proficiency of the teachers in producing texts.

## 2. Research Problem and Questions

### 2.1. Research Problem

The scrutiny of some investigations reveals that for a long period of time, learners have been blamed for the type of language they produce in their spoken or written productions. Many reasons are therefore given to justify the origins of

language errors they make. These reasons according to some researchers include: the interference of their first official language or the interference of their mother tongue, lack of knowledge about the rules that govern the target language, and lack of input from teachers. However, following the investigation of Kouega and Onana [16], we realise that teachers play a critical role in the learning of second or foreign languages by learners. In this respect, the quality of the language that is used by teachers has to be known because it determines the efficiency of the input that students will receive from them. Also, no teacher can teach what he/she does not know and masters enough. Consequently, the assessment of the written productions of francophone primary school teachers in the Far North region of Cameroon helps us to determine the real issue behind the matter of teaching-learning ESL/EFL in that area of the country.

## 2.2. Research Questions

The current study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are some graphological, lexical, and grammatical errors that underlie the English written productions of francophone primary school teachers in the Far North region of Cameroon?
2. What are some pedagogical implications and suggestions for remedial strategies?

## 3. Methodology

This qualitative study analyses some aspects of the written productions of the respondents. The sample population

consists of 61 francophone primary school teachers in 19 schools in the Far North region of Cameroon. These teachers were administered an essay writing question on a blank sheet of paper, they were asked to produce an essay on the topic given to them. They took a number of days to write the essays and the researcher collected them. In addition to those essays, more than 20 English lessons from their preparation books were scanned using an android phone. Data were therefore analysed with respects to their variance with the normal English graphological, lexical, and grammatical features. The elicited data are analysed on the basis of Corder's [8] Error Analysis theory. To this effect, the framework of error analysis was adopted throughout the analysis. In order to give the study some linear visibility, some works were reviewed.

## 4. Findings and Discussions

This section is organised according to major aspects of data analysis including some graphological, lexical and grammatical features.

### 4.1. Elements of Graphology

The written productions of francophone primary school teachers in the Far North region of Cameroon are characterised by different errors at the level of graphology. They include spelling errors, capitalisation errors, and errors in the use of punctuation signs. The following table captures some examples of such errors.

*Table 1. Some graphological errors.*

Aspects	Examples	Corrections
Spelling	If we wont to improve the conditions	If we want to improve the conditions
	Chearch the answer to the questions	Search the answer to the questions
	The government sends unly teachers that speak English	The government sends only teachers that speak English
	The governement most organise	The government must organise
	The hierachy should multiply	The hierarchy should multiply
	The pupils tray to get	Pupils try to get
	Ask pupils to comme to the front	Ask pupils to come to the front
Capitalisation	We have the probleme of pronunciation	We have the problem of pronunciation
	They are new to english	They are new to English
	They confuse the letters in french with the letters in english	They confused the letters in French with the letters in English
	Our pupils speak fulfulde and other quarter languages and french	Our pupils speak Fulfulde, other quarter languages and French
Punctuation	In the far-north	In the Far North
	Secondly lack of materials for the children	Secondly, lack of materials for the children
	Why are students not learning English easily	Why are students not learning English easily?

Source: Established from field data

From the examples above, it can be seen that francophone primary school teachers in the Far-North region of Cameroon are making different types of errors as far as the use of some elements of graphology is concerned. At the level of spelling, cases of omissions, substitutions and insertions of letters are observed in words. These errors originate from the influence of the spelling of some words in their first official language (French) and lack of exposure to English in their environment. Bobda and Mbangwana [7] found that there are some inconsistencies between the pronunciation and the spelling of

words in English. Those inconsistencies are caused by the phenomena of split and merger. In the same line, Othman [21] points out that the main reason behind spelling errors is related to the lack of knowledge about the pronunciation of words.

Also, many instances of misuse of the system of capitalisation of English is observed in the written products of the respondents. They tend to apply the capitalisation system of French while writing in English, without knowing that the capitalisation systems of those two languages display many differences.

## 4.2. Lexical Features

A look at the written productions of francophone primary

school teachers in the Far North region of Cameroon reveals that many lexical items that are used display peculiar lexical features. Those features are presented in the table below.

*Table 2. Some lexical deviations.*

Lexical deviations	Examples	Corrections
Code-mixing	They confond the letters in French. We see a manque of motivation. At the end of the seance I have not received any formation to teach English language.	They confuse the letters in French. We see a lack of motivation. At the end of the session I have not received any training to teach English language.
Deceptive cognates	If we want our infants to learn English, we must teach them well.	If we want our children to learn English, we must teach them well.
Loan words	The government should affect English teachers in schools. Big brothers Maternal language During white examinations They don't hear English.	The government should post English teachers in schools. Elder brothers Mother tongue During mock examinations They don't understand English.
Words wrongly used	As a teacher, I meet many difficulties. There is much formation centres.	As a teacher, I face many difficulties. There are many training centres.
Non-existent lexical items	To remeder those difficulties, For us as francophonians persons, He could seeding his annual teaching days and lessons.	To remedy those difficulties. For us as francophones/ For us as francophone people, He could sequence his annual teaching days and lessons.

Source: Established from field data

The items in the table above illustrate lexical errors in the written productions of these language users. The respondents make such errors due to different reasons. These deviant English constructions result from the influence of their first official language (French). These can be observed though code-mixing where the respondents mix in the same discourse words from French and in English. Also, the phenomena of deceptive cognates and loan translation result from lack of knowledge of the respondents about the natural English expressions. They have a poor knowledge of English vocabulary and are compelled to borrow from their French vocabulary stock. In the same vein, Hilu [11] investigated on the use of false friends by some Iraqi students and identified some reasons that justify these misuses. The first reason is related to wrong choice of words during the conversations.

The second one has to do with students' misunderstandings of the second language words themselves. The third reason results from the etymological misunderstanding of the expressions in the case study sample texts. The last reason resulted from borrowed words, once a word is borrowed in a language, we cannot predict or control the development or the additional connotations of that word.

## 4.3. Grammatical Errors

An analysis of the grammatical aspects in the written productions of francophone primary school teachers in the Far North region of Cameroon reveals their level of mastery of those aspects. Many grammatical errors are identified as indicated in the table below.

*Table 3. Some grammatical errors.*

Grammatical aspects	Identification of error	Corrections
Concord	In the lines that follows. She give exercises	In the lines that follow. She gives exercises
Prepositions	Listen the teacher To remediate to those difficulties	Listen to the teacher To remediate those difficulties
Articles	One of subjects I have a many difficulties	One of the subjects I face many difficulties
Plural forms	We have many problem. Many other subject	We have many problems. Many other subjects
Pronouns	It is not what you you want. Give hiself to learn English	It is not what you want. Give himself/ herself/ oneself up to learn English
Verb forms	He should be send for more training Students are usually use to laziness Teachers should stop been shy. They not want to do efforts.	He should be sent for more training Students are usually used to laziness Teachers should stop being shy. They do not want to make efforts.
Structures	We know not English is a language difficult.	We do not know English is a difficult language.

Source: Established from field data

As can be seen in the data from the respondents, many grammatical errors were identified including both

morphological and syntactic ones. The errors appear in the form of omissions, substitutions, insertions, and misuse of different grammatical aspects that were taken into consideration. The findings reveal that due to the lack of knowledge about the rules which govern the English grammatical systems, francophone primary school teachers in the Far North region of Cameroon were not able to produce good grammatical constructions. This can also be accounted for by some confusions of rules of French grammar which diverge from English ones. The findings concur those of Johnson [13], Saravanam and Lakshmikanthan [26], Tulabut et al. [29], Apuge and Vagana [1], Xiaolei and Xijiang [31], who pointed out different grammatical errors in the productions of second and foreign-language learners. These errors are due to the interference of some features from their first languages, lack of knowledge about English grammatical rules. Some point out the complexity of English grammatical rules that makes the learning very difficult.

#### ***4.4. Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Remedial Strategies***

The question of education is crucial for it involves government, teachers and parents. In the process of the education of children, they have the tendency to copy and imitate what they see in their teachers and parents. In the same way the teaching of English in francophone primary schools should be done by people who are proficient in English and if imitated this produces reliable results.

At the level of language use following the analytical framework applied here, written productions of francophone primary school teachers showed serious problems in the use of concord, verb tense, number, word order, articles, pronouns, prepositions. This can be observed in the production of unintelligible and awkward sentences. Findings also show that some of their linguistic gaps are filled through code-mixing, the use of deceptive cognates and some lexical misappropriation of some French lexis. Above all, major fundamental language mechanics including punctuation, capitalisation and spelling were unexpectedly not respected to a large extent. Therefore, the fact that their proficiency in English is bad makes us doubt of what they can teach to pupils. It is commonly said 'a blind man cannot lead another blind man, otherwise both of them will fall in a pit' to show that if the teacher does not know English, then he/she cannot pretend to teach it to pupils. By so doing, he/she will train 'twice non-proficient, makers of errors' than him/her. In this respect, Kouega and Onana [16] found out that 'Francophone primary school teachers in Cameroon are not proficient in English and they cannot therefore teach the subject even though they were summoned to do it.' Primary school pupils cannot expect much from these teachers who are lacking proficiency in basic elements of English language.

So, the poor performance of teachers in English language will lead to a poor performance of pupils who will leave primary school with many difficulties. The foundation cannot be fully caught up in secondary schools, and after some years

they will go to training centers with difficulties. The bilingualism that is promoted in the country will not be achieved accordingly.

As suggestions for remedial strategies, many actions should be undertaken in order to reverse the tendency. Among other strategies we have the training and the posting in francophone primary schools of teachers who are very proficient in English and who will lay down the foundation from the base. The government can also develop and implement the teaching of English refresher course for francophone primary school teachers, laying of emphasis on the acquisition of linguistic and functional skills. Besides, measures should be taken in the training of francophone primary school teachers based on special bilingual programs. Furthermore, francophone primary school teachers should be encouraged to register for English language courses at the pilot linguistic centers so as to improve on their proficiency in this language.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study has assessed the written productions of francophone primary school teachers in the Far-North region of Cameroon and provided pedagogical implications for francophone primary school pupils. It has been found that francophone primary school teachers in the accomplishment of their duties do face many difficulties in their written English productions. The spelling, the capitalisation of words, the use of punctuation signs, the use of right and appropriate lexical items, the morphology of words, the structure of constructions are not well mastered. This cannot guarantee a good future for English in francophone schools in the Far North region. Kouega and Onana [16] proposed that, due to the lack of proficiency of francophone primary school teachers in English, they should not teach it as subject in primary schools even if they were summoned to do that. Training pupils to do what they are unable to do well will contribute in maintaining a chain of inefficiency in the process of teaching and learning. The study proposes a range of solutions that engage the government to teachers themselves. The government can proceed to the recycling of primary school teachers by sending them in pilot linguistic centers to improve in English. Furthermore, it is suggested that government proceed with the training of English teachers that are proficient and who will only be teaching English in francophone primary schools. At the level of teachers' training schools, emphasis should be laid on the teaching of English language to help student-teachers acquire fundamentals that will be transmitted to pupils in schools. Furthermore, this study concurs the idea that the identification of errors in the productions of ESL learners can help develop strategies to improve on SL teaching and learning in different settings [18, 28]. Errors have to be pointed out so that adequate solutions are provided to remediate the situations. More importantly, emphasis should be laid on the quality of training of francophone primary school teachers and their level of proficiency in English.

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