Revisiting antilanguage: cryptolects, the underworld and resistance identity

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Abstract: *This paper proposes an integrative model for the analysis of cryptolects which blends Halliday's (1978) concept of antilaguage and Castells' (2010) model for the construction of social identity. This integrative model of analysis is applied to youth varieties, in general, and to Camfranglais, in particular, with a view to establishing not necessarily whether these sociolects constitute antilanguages, but whether they correspond to the concept of antilanguage as advanced by Halliday. The ethno-linguistic data discussed in this paper clearly demonstrate that Camfranglais functions as an antilanguage through which its urban young speakers construct and project a resistance identity which opposes the expected norms imposed by the mainstream society.*

Key words: *antilanguage, cryptolect, code-switching, pidginization, resistance identity*

1. Introduction

The concept of antilanguage was introduced by Halliday in 1976 to refer to a language variety used by an antisociety, i.e. a small community intentionally set up within a larger society as an alternative and a mode of resistance to the mainstream society (Halliday 1978: 164). He coined the term to describe the languages used in the Elizabethan underworld, Polish prisons, and the Calcutta underworld. An antilanguage is generated by an antisociety to reflect the social, ideological or other phenomena that are problematic or especially salient to the antisociety in question. According to Halliday (1978:172), an antilanguage not only serves as a way of expressing an alternative subjective reality, but of "actively creating and maintaining it", where "the process is one not of construction, but of reconstruction" (Halliday 1978: 170). In this sense, he sees an antilanguage as "no different from a language 'proper': both are reality-generating systems" (Halliday 1978: 168).

Halliday's theory of 'anti-language' sparked off a large body of research on various genres and areas of linguistic inquiry such as fiction (Fowler 1981; Kress 1978), radio slang (Montgomery 1986), the languages of teenage gangs (Hodge and Kress 1993: 71), cockney rhyming slang, the language of Rap music and culture (O'Sullivan 1994: 15), Angloromani spoken by gypsies in the British Isles (Fowler 1996), to mention just a few.

This paper proposes an integrative model for the analysis of cryptolects which blends Halliday's (1978) concept of antilaguage and Castells' (2010) model for the construction of social identity. This integrative model of analysis is applied to youth varieties, in general, and to Camfranglais, in particular with a view to establishing whether they correspond to the concept of antilanguage as advanced by Halliday. My rationale behind integrating Castells' model for social identity construction is that the notions of opposition and resistance are the driving forces behind the creation of antisocieties. Thus, conceptualizing the construction of social identity as occurring within frameworks of power and applying it to antisocieties is perhaps the most viable model of analysis that explains resistance through language practices which are incomprehensible to non-members.

2 Antilanguage: a critical review

Although Halliday pinpointed the specificity of antilanguages as early as 1978, there is still ongoing debate over this concept. When he first introduced the term he emphasized an anti-societal or counter-cultural force that generates an antilanguage. Later on, however, he questioned the status of an antilanguage as a distinct linguistic category, arguing that "it is a category to which any given instance approximates more or less" (Halliday 1978:181).

According to Halliday (1978:181), an antilanguage can be interpreted either "as the limiting case of social dialect" or "as the limiting case of code", admitting that both interpretations are extreme. In other words, neither an exclusively sociolinguistic variationist approach, nor a semantic perspective can fully account for the intricacies and complexities of an antilanguage. The former would emphasize the variation of linguistic form, whereas the latter would highlight the oppositional message. However, since both are extreme "limiting cases", an integrative perspective that would account for both the extreme social dialect form and the extreme code or message of an antilanguage should be the only feasible way of solving the problem.

2.1 Halliday's concept of antilanguage

In what follows, I will outline the major characteristics of an antilanguage as proposed by Halliday in his seminal study. An antilanguage is built on the principle of ***same grammar, different vocabulary*** (Halliday 1978: 165). In its simplest form, an antilanguage is a language relexicalized. Speakers of an antilanguage employ a wide variety of mechanisms to create new vocabulary, such as metaphor, metathesis, syllable addition and transposition, lexical borrowing, compounding and suffixation.

However, it should be pointed out that ***relexicalization*** in an antilanguage is partial, not total. Typically, not all words in the standard lexicon need have equivalents in the antilanguage. The vocabulary of the

antilanguage is different only in those areas which are especially central or relevant to the activities of the antisociety and which sharply reflect its distance from, and tension with, the established norms of the mainstream society. Thus, the vocabulary of an antilanguage may include new words denoting types of criminal acts, classes of criminal and victim, tools of the trade, penalties, police and other representatives of the law enforcement structure of the society, and so on. For instance, discussing the Elizabethan underworld language in terms of *relexicalization*, Halliday (1978:165) mentions scores of terms used to denote classes of vagabonds, such as *upright man*, *rogue*, *wild rogue*, *prigger of prancers* (i.e. ‘horse thief’), *counterfeit crank*, *jarkman*, *bawdy basket*, *walking mort*, *kinchin mort*, *doxy and dell*. Similarly, there are numerous terms for specific roles, strategies which are known as *laws* (e.g. *lifting law* to refer to ‘stealing packages’), names for the tools (e.g. *wresters* for ‘picking locks’), or names for various penalties, such as *clying the jerk* (i.e. ‘being whipped’) or *trining on the chats* (i.e. ‘getting hanged’).

Moreover, Halliday (1978:165) points out that an antilanguage “is not merely relexicalized in these areas; it is overlexicalized”. Typically, as a result of this ***overlexicalization*** an antilaguage can become *opaque* to outsiders while reinforcing in-group membership and social solidarity among members of the antisociety. As examples of this overlexicalisation, Halliday points to the proliferation of synonyms (or near-synonyms) in two of the three varieties he cites in support of his theory. Thus, in the language of the underworld of West Bengal there 41 words referring to the police and 21 for bomb (Mallik 1972:22-3), while the cant of criminals or vagabonds in Elizabethan England included approximately 20 terms for different types of vagabond (Halliday 1978: 165). The third variety cited by Halliday was the Grypserka spoken by those incarcerated in Polish prisons and reform schools.

An anti-language is rich in ***metaphorical expressions***. This metaphorical quality is a defining feature of antilanguages in two special ways. First, metaphor permeates antilanguage on all linguistic levels, from phonological through lexical to grammatical metaphors (Halliday, 1978: 176). Second, an antilanguage itself is a metaphor for an everyday language, as is the antisociety which generates it a metaphor for the society. In terms of Levi-Strauss’s distinction between metaphor and metonymy, the antisociety is *metonymic* to society – it is an extension of it; while its realizations are metaphorical, whether they are realizations in social structure or linguistic realizations (Levi-Strauss 1966). As Halliday (1978:177) points out, an antilanguage is “itself a metaphorical entity, and hence metaphorical modes of expression are the norm”, with metaphorical compounding, metatheses, rhyming alternations and the like among patterns of realization. To illustrate this metaphorical quality, consider the examples in (1) taken from Elizabethan

pelting speech (also referred to as *cant*[1], i.e. the language of the underworld), collected by Thomas Harman:

(1)
crashing-cheats – ‘teeth’ (chest = general element for ‘thing which..’)
smelling-cheat – ‘nose’ also ‘garden, orchard’
belly-cheat – ‘apron’
Rome-booze – ‘wine’
stalling-ken – ‘house that will receive stolen ware’ (*stall* ‘make or ordain’ i.e. order, *ken* ‘house’)
queer-ken – ‘prison-house’ (*queer* ‘nought’, i.e. = general derogatory element)
darkmans – ‘night’
queer cuffin – ‘Justice of the Peace’
(Thomas Harman[2], *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursetors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds*, Kessinger’s Legacy Reprints, 1814)

The determinant of an antilanguage is an ***alternative reality***. An antilanguage does not merely express this alternative reality, but it actively creates and maintains it (172). Neither verbal art, nor secrecy can account for the origin of an antilanguage. While secrecy is a key property of antilanguages, it is by no means the major cause of their existence. Secrecy is a feature of jargon rather than the cause of the antilanguage (Halliday 1978: 166, 172).

Lamguage and antilanguage share a common feature. Like the language ‘proper’, the antilanguage is a “reality-generating systems” (Halliday, 1978: 168). However, the reality it generates is different from the reality generated by the language. Nonetheless they are both “part and parcel of the same social system” (172).

With regard to the three *meta-functions of language* proposed by Halliday, antilanguages have “a characteristic ***functional orientation***, away from the experiential mode of meaning towards the interpersonal and textual modes” (Halliday 1978: 166).

3 Revisiting the concept of antilanguage

The concept of the antilaguage has been applied by researchers as a theoretical construct in the investigation of language practices associated with youth and

[1] In the cant of criminals and vagabonds in Elizabethan England, the word *cant* was a verb meaning ’to speak’. For more examples of cant, see Partridge (1998).
[2] A *Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, vulgarly called vagabonds* was first published in 1566 by Thomas Harman. Harman claimed to have collected his material in face-to-face interviews with vagabonds. The Caveat was comprised of stories of vagabond life, a description of their society and techniques, a taxonomy of rogues, and a canting dictionary, which were reproduced in later works.

criminal sub-/countercultures (e.g. Veit-Wild 2009; González and Stenström 2011; Mugaddam 2012, 2015; Dalzell 2014; Hollington 2015). These studies highlight such crucial aspects as the construction of an identity and expressing an ideology which oppose those of the mainstream society. For illustrative purposes, some are mentioned below:

• Dalzell (2014: 18–9) views **hip hop culture** as an antisociety. Its lexicon portrays an altered, "upside down" view of the world. For Dalzell, the word that represents hip hop as an antisociety more than any other is *gangsta* (as in *gangsta rap*). The word connotes admiration of violence and crime, being thus rooted in illegal inner city troubles and crimes.
• Mayr (2004: 22), analysing **the language of Scottish prisoners**, points to resistance arguing that it takes the shape of "oppositional discourse people set up and use as a conscious alternative to the dominant or established discourse type in the form of an antilanguage".
• González and Stenström (2011: 236), in their analysis of the of **youth slang** used in London and Madrid, argue that in the use of such expressive devices as humour and irony, speakers express a kind of rebellion which results in "a subversive language, an 'antilanguage', as it implies values set against the established society".

A review of the literature shows that some researchers view antilanguage as a concept instrumental in explaining the role the social and linguistic behaviours identified play in constructing an identity of resistance in some subcultures (e.g. Einat and Einat 2000; Sherzer 2002; Zarzycki 2015). However, it should be pointed out that the concept of antilanguage is not universally supported or, where it is applied, it is not accepted entirely without reservation.

Some scholars question the degree to which Halliday's concept adequately explains the varieties they investigated. A case in point is Eble's (1996) study of the US college language. Although she identifies certain linguistics manipulations characteristic of antilanguages and a clear tendency towards over-lexicalisation which might prevent others from understanding what is being communicated, as well as an opposition to social and academic authority, nevertheless the semantic areas reflected in the lexicon do not represent those domains which set students off most distinctly from the mainstream society. Instead, they reflect taboos held by the society at large or revolve around inter-student relationships. She concludes that college student language is "only mildly and occasionally adversarial" (Eble 1996: 129) and not "cautiously secret" in the way that a "full-fledged antilanguage" is normally understood to be (Eble 1996: 127).

Similarly, in her study of US youth language practices, Labov (1992: 358–9) points out that "each subset of youth culture has its own bases for

differentiating itself, for being less readily penetrated by other people, including other youth”. More recent research on youth language and hip hop carried out in Norway and the US has shown that speakers sought to project difference from others, including non-hip hop youth, as well as to signal resistance to the norms of standard language or traditional ethnic categories (Cutler and Røyneland 2015; see also Stenström, Andersen and Hasund 2002, and Vierke's 2015 for a discussion of hip hop and Sheng).

These studies suggest that care should be taken to avoid treating resistance and Halliday's binary distinctions as defining features of antilanguages and antisocieties. It is possible that there could be a number of antisocieties that display resistance to the dominant mainstream society as well as resistance to or distinctiveness from one another antisociety (Drury 2005; Bucholtz 2006) and they may do so in different ways. Social groups, in general, and youth, in particular, are not a single homogeneous social cohort (e.g. Labov 1992; Thurlow 2003a, 2003b, 2005). Instead a more relevant approach would be to view them as comprising various *communities of practice* with distinct identities and distinct ways of displaying resistance[3].

4 Resistance and resistance identities

In what follows, I argue for a framework of analysis that integrates Halliday's (1978) concept of *antilanguage* and Castells's (2010) theoretical model for the *construction of social identity*. Antisocieties are created as a “mode of resistance” to the mainstream society, the notions of opposition and resistance being viewed as the driving forces behind their creation (Halliday 1978: 164). Conceptualizing the construction of social identity as occurring within frameworks of power and applying it to antisocieties is perhaps the most viable model of analysis that explains resistance in accounts of language practices of various social groups and countercultures.

According to Castells (2010:8), the construction of social identity occurs within frameworks of power which lead to a subdivision of the notion of identity into three types:

• **Legitimizing identity**: introduced by the dominant institutions of mainstream society to enhance and rationalize their domination with regard to members of the society.
• **Resistance identity**[4]: this type of identity is created by those who are in positions/conditions with low social value/status or are stigmatized by the logic

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[3] See, for instance, Mugaddam's (2015) study of the use of Randuk by three distinct communities in Khartoum: university students, mechanics and street boys.
[4] As pointed out by Castells (2010), identities which start as resistance may give rise to projects which, in their turn, over time, may become dominant at institutional level, thus becoming legitimizing identities and rationalizing their domination.

of domination. Consequently, those who generate a resistance identity construct "trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society" (Castells 2010: 8).

• **Project identity**: this is when social actors, starting from whatever cultural materials are available to them, construct a new identity that redefines the position they occupy in society and, in so doing, they look to transform the overall social structure. To illustrate this type of identity, a case in point is when feminism moves out of the trenches of resistance of women's identity and women's rights to challenge everything that patriarchalism entails, i.e. the patriarchal family, the structure of production, reproduction, sexuality, and personality which constitute the foundation of patriarchal societies Castells 2010: 8).

According to Castells (2010: 8-10), each type of identity-construction process leads to a different outcome. **Legitimizing identity** generates a *civil society*; in other words, it generates a set of organizations, institutions and structured and organized social actors, which reinforce the identity that rationalizes the sources of domination. The second type of identity-construction, **resistance identity**, leads to the formation of communities or subcultures which oppose mainstream society. Of the three types of identity-construction processes, Castells argues that resistance identity may be the most socially important insofar as it generates *collective resistance* against "otherwise unbearable oppression"[5]. The third process of constructing identity, **project identity**, produces subjects defined as "the desire of being an individual, of creating a personal history, of giving meaning to the whole realm of experiences of individual life" (Touraine (1995: 29–30). In this last case, the building of identity is a project of a different life which may be based on an oppressed identity but which expands toward the *transformation of society* (e.g. liberating women, men, and children, through the realization of women's identity).

Of the three identity-construction processes proposed by Castell, **resistance identity** is the most salient and socially important in a discussion of antilanguage and antisociety insofar as it generates collective resistance to "otherwise unbearable oppression" (Castells 2010: 9). The next section applies resistance identity, as conceptualized by Castel (2010) to explain resistance in

[5] Castells (2010:9) views religious fundamentalism, territorial communities, nationalist self-affirmation, or taking pride in self-denigration (as in the ''queer culture'') as manifestations of "the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded", thereby inverting the terms of oppressive discourse by constructing a *defensive identity* with regard to dominant institutions/ideologies, by reversing the value judgment while reinforcing the boundary.

accounts of youth language practices, as well as those of other social subgroups and countercultures, arguing that through these language practises, which are to a certain extent cryptic, speakers construct and project subversive identities which oppose the expected norms imposed by the mainstream society.

4.1 Youth language

A number of scholars associate youth language practices with notions of *resistance* and document how resistance can be encountered in various youth practices. For instance, Vierke (2015: 231), in a study exploring the poetic aspects of Sheng, argues that it is employed in hip hop due to its association with an identity that is tied to resistance and opposition where "counter-identity necessitates counter-form". Ferrell (1995) explores how youth in some U.S. and European cities use graffiti to resist the increasing segregation and control of urban environment imposed by legal, political and religious authority. He shows how the collective production of graffiti underground not only resists and opposes mainstream society but also constructs "alternative arrangements that shape both individual identities and communities of support and meaning" (Ferrell 1995: 87). Similarly, Mensah (2016: 5) views the use of graffiti in urban areas in Africa as "a means of resistant identity, where young people initiate a platform to talk back to the establishment". To provide yet another example, Miller (2004, 2006, 2011) documents how Japanese girls and young women, through highly unconventional means of communication, construct and project subversive identities that convey their opposition and resistance to the expected role of a conservative, submissive young woman. Thus, a review of the literature highlights youth, criminal and other countercultural practices described in terms of resistance identity. These scholars have argued that the failings of modern state institutions and uncertainty regarding a better future have triggered, in some cases, resistance identity in gangs that display their opposition to dominant cultures.

4.2 Camfranglais

Camfranglais[6] is a highly hybrid sociolect spoken in Cameroon. It consists of a mixture of French, English, Pidgin in addition to borrowings from various indigenous languages. Kouega (2003:23) defines Camfranglais as "a

[6] The term Camfranglais is a portmanteau of the French adjectives *camerounais*, *français*, and *anglais*.

composite language consciously developed by secondary school pupils who have in common a number of linguistic codes, namely French, English and a few widespread indigenous languages". The sociolect is used by adolescents in the big cities of Cameroon as a code of communication in order to exclude other members of the community such as the older generation, the rural population and the Cameroonian elites. In other words, urban Cameroonian adolescents use it as a cryptolect to talk about daily events that are of interest to them in a way that is mysterious to non-members.

4.2.1 The origins of Camfranglais

Even the most cursory look at the sociolinguistic setting in Cameroon will shed light on the linguistic makeup and socio-psychological functions of Camfranglais. With more than 248 distinct national languages (Breton and Fohtung 1991, SIL 2001), Cameroon has often been described as "Afrique en miniature". After its "creation" in 1884 and an initial period under German rule (1884-1918), the territory of Cameroon was divided as a consequence of the treaty of Versailles after World War I, between France and Britain. Both colonial powers imposed their languages in their sectors, which made the French Cameroons Francophone and the British Cameroons Anglophone. With the reunification of both parts in 1961 after independence, Cameroon had to face the challenge of building a nation comprising a multitude of highly diverse, partly antagonistic, ethnic groups who had already started to define themselves as Francophone and Anglophone. Moreover, these two major competing identities are superimposed on the background of 248 ethno-linguistically defined identities. Thus, Cameroon has adhered to an *exoglossic language policy*, i.e. none of its 248 indigenous languages is the official language in education, administration and politics. Instead Cameroon has adopted, as official languages French and English, the languages of its former colonial masters. This official exoglossic bilingualism is the outcome of Cameroon's colonial past.

In order to reconcile these internal oppositions official bilingualism was declared, i.e. French and English were adopted as official languages of equal status, and the nationwide promotion of this bilingualism was guaranteed in the constitution adopted in 1996. Official bilingualism has become a symbol of Cameroon's national unity and has gained the country prestige on the international level (Wolf 2001). The reality, however, is radically different. Official bilingualism is highly imbalanced (Echu 1999a, 1999b), due to the predominance of Francophones on the political and administrative scene, many of whom cannot speak English (Chumbow and Simo Bobda 1995: 19). Moreover, in order to work one's way up the social or professional ladder, it is absolutely necessary for Anglophones to become bilingual in French, whereas Francophones do not have to become bilingual in English. Another factor

contributing to imbalanced bilingualism is the high rate of pupils in the Francophone area leaving secondary school without being fluent in English (Kouega 1999).

Not only is official bilingualism at the national level a myth, but individual French/English bilingualism is also grossly underdeveloped. Even though most individuals are multilingual in a various Cameroonian vernaculars, they are either Francophone or Anglophone, should they have mastery of the official languages at all, and only a few are bilingual in both. Most Cameroonians, however, use neither French nor English for interethnic communication, but one of the other vehicular languages such as Pidgin English or Fulfulde. This lack of mastery of either French or English has important consequences, leading to their exclusion from participation in the modern state and alienation from African home languages in urban settings (Kouega 1999).

In this ethno-linguistic and socioeconomic context, Cameroonian young people feel the need to construct and establish their identity as a *new social group* – the modern Cameroonian urban youth – distancing themselves not only from the older generations represented mainly by their parents, but also from the Cameroonian elites who define themselves as either Franco- or Anglophone, and also from the rural population.

Camfranglais first emerged in the mid-1970s after the reunification of Francophone Cameroun and Anglophone Southern Cameroons and became fashionable in the late 1990s, to a certain extent due to its use by popular singers and songwriters. Kouega (2003) gives an account of its striking social distribution:

> An impressionistic inspection of the profession of fluent Camfranglais speakers outside school premises reveals that they are peddlers, and laborers, hair stylists and barbers, prostitutes and vagabonds, rank and file soldiers and policemen, thieves and prisoners, gamblers and con men, musicians and comedians, to name just the most popular ones.
> Kouega (2003:513)

4.2.2 The linguistic properties of Camfranglais

Camfranglais integrates non-French lexical items, borrowed from all available sources (e.g. e.g. French, English, Pidgin English, even German, and several Cameroonian languages) into a French morphosyntactic frame (Biloa 1999, 2003, Vakunta 2008). In what follows I have selected a couple of examples from the literature to illustrate some of the lexical, phonological and

morphosyntactic features which render Camfranglais incomprehensible to outsiders.

Lexical insertion of borrowings from French and English

It is important to point out that Camfranglais is crucially different from both pidginization and code-switching, in form, function and in its history, in, at least, two important ways. First, it did *not* come into existence as a result of language contact or imperfect second language acquisition as in cases of pidginization and creolization, but as a result of an intentional effort on the part of its speakers who try to distort the underlying languages in order to create a code for expressing distance: „le Camfranglais est une création consciente et artificielle qui tire profit de la présence d'une pléthore de langues en contact“ (Chia and Gerbault 1991: 269). Second, even though Camfranglais arises in the context of code-switching and owes a lot to it, it essentially different from code-switching, as the examples in (2) show.

(2)
a. *Le book-là c'est pour les mbindi, moi je suis mini.*
'This is a children's game, I am too old for this.'
Chia and Gerbault (1991: 275).
b. *Le test de linguistique étant sharp, j'ai préféré piak.*
'The linguistics assignment was very difficult, I preferred to beat it.'
Chia and Gerbault (1991: 275).
c. *On a kick mon agogo.*
'They stole my watch.' Chia and Gerbault (1991: 274)

On the one hand, the lexical switches do not occur randomly, but at certain emblematic lexemes which make up the core lexicon of Camfranglais. On the other hand, most of these emblematic lexemes cannot be ascribed directly to any of the source language (i.e. French, English, Pidgin-English or any of the Cameroonian languages). Instead, they have undergone linguistic manipulation or deliberate alteration on one linguistic level at least, sometimes beyond recognition.

Borrowings from Cameroonian indigenous languages

Lexical items borrowed from Cameroonian indigenous languages are gradually entering Camfranglais lexicon. The examples in (3) examples are taken from Kouega's corpus (2003) for purposes of illustration:

(3)

kumbu – ‘big dish’
longo-longo – ‘tall and usually slim’
mbambe – ‘someone who does hard labour for a wage’
mbut – ‘idiot’
mola – ‘man’
mof-me-de! – ‘piss-off!’
nayo-nayo – ‘very slowly’
villakonkon – ‘rustic; uncivilized person’ Kouega (2003)

Phonology
Scholars have shown that the phonological system of Camfranglais is neither French nor English (Biloa 2003: 255-61), but approximates Pidgin English and even many Grassfields Bantu systems (de Féral 1989: 189-94). English diphthongs, for instance, are replaced by monophthongs (e.g. [kem] < English *came*) and the Schwa vowel is integrated as /a/ into Camfranglais. English interdental fricatives tend to be replaced either by their alveolar sibilant counterparts, (e.g. [broza] < English *brother*) or by alveolar plosives (e.g. [tìʃ] < English *thief*). It is still debatable whether French nasalised vowels become adjusted in this system or whether it is necessary to set up nasal vowels as distinct phonemes (de Féral 1989: 193).

Semantic manipulation
Semantic aspects of lexical manipulation are still under-researched. The most common semantic manipulations to be found are metonymy (4), dysphemism (5) and hyperbole (6).

Metonymy
In (4), for instance, the body part noun *belly* is used to convey the concept of pregnancy. Such functional extension is common in many Cameroonian languages and might have been directly adopted from Cameroonian Pidgin English.

(4)
a. *blo* – ‘fight’ < English *blow*
bus – ‘go’ < English *bus*
bɛlɛ - ‘pregnant’ < English *belly*
mbɛrɛ - ‘policeman, soldier’ < French *béret*

b. *má ŋgà ɛ bɛlɛ* - ‘My wife is pregnant.’ Todd (1985: 122)

Dysphemism

The essence of dysphemism is to render neutral concepts disparaging or unpleasant by applying derogatory designations or by highlighting unfavourable aspects of the referent. Consider the examples in (5) where a rich old person is labelled a ‘wrinkle-neck’ and elderly people are referred to as ‘the exhausted’.

(5)
[couplié] < ‘rich old person, old fart’ < French *cou* ‘neck’ and plié ‘wrinkled’
[lé fàtìgé] <French les fatigués ‘the exhausted’
mange-mille – ‘policeman’ < French *mange* ‘eat!’ and mille ‘thousand’
baptiser – ‘leave without paying’ < French *baptiser* ‘baptise’ (Kouega 2003)

Hyperbole
Example (6) illustrates the hyperbolic use of French *attaque* ‘attack’ to refer to the first rows in a classroom, i.e. those where the teacher attacks.

(6) *atak* – ‘first rows in a classroom’ < French attaque ‘attack’ (Biloa 2003: 258)

Onomastic synecdoche
Highly satirical instances of onomastic synecdoche are common in Camfranglais. They apply to cases where the name of a person or a place has become conventionalized as designating one of its salient properties, as shown in (7).

(7)
bakassi – ‘dangerous place’ < Bakassi disputed peninsula at the Cameroon-Nigeria border, an area of conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon
johnny – ‘to walk’ < English whiskey brand name ‘Johnny Walker’
kodjak – ‘totally shaved head’ < Kojak, from the name of a hero of an American TV series Kouega (2003)

Phonological manipulation
The most common phonological manipulation is **truncation** whereby a lexical item is shortened by deleting segments or even syllables. Truncation may affect both ends of the lexeme, either the end as in (8) or the beginning as in (9).

Terminal truncation
(8)
Camer – ‘Cameroon’ < French *Cameroun*
dang – ‘dangerous’ < French *dangereux* Kouega (2003)

Le blow était dang. – 'This fight was very dangerous' Chia and Gerbault (1991: 274)

Initial truncation
(9)
lɛdʒ < English village   Kouega (2003)

Metathesis
Metathesis is the transposition of sounds or syllables in a word or of words in a sentence. Syllable metathesis is a productive process in Camfranglais. Consider the examples in (10).

(10)
dybo – 'someone' (already based on the truncated form *body* < English *somebody*),
sitac – 'taxi' (which seems to coexist with *taco*),
stycmic – 'complicated, delicate' (< French *mystique*),
tcham – 'fight' (< English *match*)   Kouga (2003: 514)

Morphosyntactic manipulation
The most salient mechanisms involving morpho-syntactic manipulation are **hybridization** and **dummy** or **parasitic affixation**.
Hybridization by affixation of the English gerund suffix –ing to non-English words
For the purposes of this analysis, hybridization is defined has the process of combining lexemes and affixes which are not from the same source. Thus in (11) French verbal stems are combined with the English gerund suffix *–ing*:

(11)
largue-ing [larg–iŋ] < French larguer 'shoot, score, fire'

Hybridization by affixation of the Pidgin English agentive suffix *–man* to non-Pidgin English words
(12)
[fémàn] – 'crook, cheat, rogue' < French *fait* 'done'
[dómàn] – 'easy-going guy who is generous' < French *donner* 'give'

Hybridization by affixation of French suffixes to non-French words
(13)
whit-is-er – 'to talk like a white person' < English white
stat-ois – 'someone who is or has been in the U.S.' < English States
Biloa (2003)

Dummy affixation

Dummy affixation by parasitic suffixes in *–o*, *–sh* and –cho is often combined with truncation.

(14)
pa–cho < French papa ‘father’
ma–cho < French mama ‘mother’
ba–sh < English ‘basketball’ Biloa (2003)

Lack of adaptation to the morphosyntactic frame

In (15a-b), the English verbs *kick* and *cook* are not inflected, neither by a French past participle suffix *–é* nor by its English counterpart *–ed*. The English verb *win* in (15c) is left in its base form and is not inflected by the French infinitive marker *–er*.

(15)
a. *On a kick mon agogo*. – ‘They stole my watch.’ Chia and Gerbault (1991: 274)
b. *La rɛm a cook le tarou*. – ‘Mother has prepared the taro.’ Chia and Gerbault (1991: 276)
c. *On va win*[7] - ‘you will win!’

Word class ambiguity

Another morphosyntactic peculiarity of some Camfranglais neologisms is their ambivalence with regard to word class, a phenomenon described as ‘hypostase’ by Biloa (2003: 273). The lexeme *tinge* which functions as a noun ‘suit’ in (16a) and as a verb ‘be well-dressed’ in (16b).

(16)
a. *Son tinge est mo* – ‘His suit is nice.’
b. *Il a tinge today* – ‘He is well-dressed today.’ Chia and Gerbault (1991: 276)

4.2.3 Camfranglais: distribution, language attitudes and functions

Camfranglais is used for purposes of communication among equals in a peer group (i.e. horizontal communication), mostly in informal settings where adolescent speakers typically interact, such as bus stations, school premises, parties, football-grounds, etc. with discussion topics revolving around “food

[7] The slogan of a lottery in Yaoundé in 2002.

and drink, money and ways of laying hands on it, sex and relationships with women, physical look of people and their feelings, and ways of addressing people and referring to them” (Kouega 2003). In written contexts, Camfranglais is mainly used in email messages to friends. It is not used in communication to superiors such as teachers or parents (i.e. vertical communication). These distribution patterns make Camfranglais a language of *solidarity*, assigning it a *covert prestige*.

Considering its distribution patterns and the ethno-linguistic properties discussed so far, it can be safely argued that the major function of Camfranglais is “that of creating/reinforcing boundaries, unifying its speakers as members of a single speech community and excluding outsiders from intragroup communication” (Saville-Troike 2003: 14). The segments of the larger population who are excluded are the parents, the older generation in general, those living in rural areas and, last but not least, the Cameroonian elites who have adhered to the norms of “la francophonie”.

In this ideology, Camfranglais[8] clearly exhibits the sociolinguistic properties and societal functions of an **antilanguage** in Halliday’s sense (1978: 164ff.). The use of Camfranglais by some young Cameroonians in big cities is undoubtedly linked to an antisociety and accounted for in terms **resistance identity**. These language practices illustrated above construct a group identity whereby speakers mark their in-group membership and differentiate themselves from members of the dominant group. Comprising at least four different languages, Camfranglais embodies not only the rejection by Cameroonian urban youths of the foreign languages imposed on them but also the adoption of a creative communication mode which is cryptic to members of certain groups of the mainstream society. Through various linguistic processes such as lexical manipulation, phonological truncation, morphological hybridization, word class ambiguity illustrated above, Camfranglais translates the provocative attitude of its speakers and their rejection of linguistic norms, imposed by “la francophonie”. Thus, Camfranglais clearly reflects its function as an icon of a “resistance identity” (Castells 1997) characteristic of youth subculture.

On yet another level of resistance, Camfranglais also translates the inner-Cameroonian antagonism of French and English, since it is to a considerable extent the product of Francophone Cameroonian pupils who have been exposed to English, but who left secondary school without being able to hold a conversation in English (Kouega 2003: 516, Kouega 1999), yet aspiring

[8] Ewané (1989) draws a striking parallel between Camfranglais and Verlan, an argot spoken by young people in the French suburbs. Verlan was invented as a cryptic code by youths, drug users and criminals to communicate freely in front of such authority figures as parents and police.

to its prestige by adopting English words wherever they can. This language attitude may explain why content words from English significantly outnumber French content words in Kouega's corpus (2003: 518) despite the French morpho-syntactic matrix of Camfranglais.

From a psycho-social perspective, Camfranglais fills the void between the official languages, French and English, reminiscent of the colonial past, on the one side, which are not felt to express Cameroonian urban identity, and the indigenous languages of Cameroon, on the other side, which are not in the least appropriate either, since they are perceived as being too ethnically loaded and excessively associated with a traditional rural identity. Cameroon Pidgin English, on the other hand, might seem another option, at a cursory glance, due to its status as a lingua franca and its potential of transcending ethnicity. However, this option is ruled out due to its strong association with lack of education and backwardness.

Conclusions

In this paper, I proposed a theoretical framework that integrates Halliday's antilanguage (1978) and concepts of resistance identity (Castels 1997) and opposition arguing that it is instrumental in accounting for language practices in marginalised and/or stigmatised communities. This integrative model of analysis was applied to youth varieties, in general, and to Camfranglais, in particular with a view to establishing not necessarily whether this sociolect constitutes an antilanguage, either partially or entirely, but whether it corresponds to the concept of antilanguage in the sense that Halliday proposed it.

Camfranglais is a highly hybrid sociolect used by the urban youth in Cameroonian big cities, where it serves as an icon of *resistance identity*. While its sentence structure is calqued on the French syntactic structure, Camfranglais is characterized by various techniques of linguistic manipulation such as phonological truncation, morphological hybridisation, hyperbolic and dysphemistic extensions which render it cryptic to outsiders and reflect the provocative attitude of its speakers and their rejection of linguistic norms. The examples discussed in this paper clearly reveal its function as an *antilanguage* as envisaged by Halliday (1978).

One of the functions of antilaguage is related to resocialization, the process whereby those who feel excluded from mainstream society recreate an alternative to the norms of mainstream society. Members of an antisociety can switch between antilanguage and mainstream language at will. Using an antilanguage speakers mark their identity as members of a specific speech community and have the possibility of cryptic communication that is not understood by those outside their subculture.

As directions for future research, two hypotheses can be advanced as far as youth languages are concerned. First, what begins as a resistance identity can develop into a project identity. As the use of such sociolects may be extended to larger segments of the mainstream society, they have the potential of becoming emblems of a newly emerging project identity, thus ceasing to be antilanguages. Second, in case these language practices involve grammatical innovation, thereby potentially challenging the traditional concept of the antilanguage as being constructed on the principal “same grammar, different vocabulary” it will be interesting to chart the degree to which Halliday’s concept of antilaguage remains supported.

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