LANGUAGE CHOICE IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MAROUA, CAMEROON

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Abstract:
This study sets out to investigate language choice in a public setting. The study intends to scrutinize the factors accounting for the choice of some language users at the University of Maroua, i.e., to choose any other languages different from the two official languages. To do this, a random sampling of 250 participants was used. The instrument used is a questionnaire with a purely sociolinguistic undertone. Spolsky's (2009) Language Management backed up the study as the frame. At the end of the analyses, it has been shown that students, the teaching staff (involving some university administrators), and the support staff have some positive and negative attitudes following the language choices made in relation to where the communication takes place as well as the language situations such as enabling mutual intelligibility, social inclusion/exclusion, intimacy and showing identity, solidarity, and work coordination.

Keywords: language choice, multilingualism, official public setting, University of Maroua

1. Introduction

Language choice with what it embodies shows how complex some psycholinguistic operations take place to some extent. By pointing out this aspect, reference is made in line with what affects the speaker's attitudes towards a specific language and the participants involved in the communication vicinity. In effect, some paralinguistic, best still, some sociolinguistic forces tend to orient a given researcher's thought that way, that is, modifying subtle operations to take place by making things to happen the way the speaker intends; who is involved in my communication vicinity? What is likely the subject to be discussed and where is this going to take place? Such questionings can inhabit some brains out there for the requirements of effective communication. Later on, may arise other questions such 'How should I use a specific language (choosing a language) for which and what specific purpose (the manner in which the initiator of the speech wants the communication to take place)'? It is some sort of attitudinal force driving the

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communication as one may tend to say. The above-mentioned questions are some of the paraphrasing of Fishman's (1965) *'Who speaks What language to Whom and When?'*

That said, before going deeper into the crux of the matter, there are introductive elements of the language sphere in general and how it is used in particular.

2. Literature review

2.1 Monolingualism and multilingualism

Monolinguals are individuals who use one language and may be proficient at using a number of different varieties of the language together with different registers in the variety of varieties they know and switching between varieties and between registers in the appropriate context. Another native term occasionally used is "*monoglot*". It is the condition of being able to speak only a single language at an individual or societal level. It is a common phenomenon at an individual level in the world. There are also many de jure monolingual countries in the world (Wardhaugh, 2006:96). America, France, Botswana, and Somalia can be mentioned as a few examples. Many think monolingualism as an asset but it has its own shortcomings. In monolingual countries, there may be both indigenous and non-indigenous minority languages that are dispossessed of their national belonging officially.

This official marginalizing of the language and culture of minorities is assumed as on "*internal colonization*" and political scientists and linguists called the situation the "*fourth world*" (Romaine, 1994).

2.2 Diglossia, according to Wardhaugh (2006)

"*A diglossic situation exists in a society when it has two distinct codes which show clear functional separation; that is, one code is employed in one set of circumstances and the other in an entirely different set.*" Ferguson (1959, p.336) has defined diglossia as the existence of a "*divergent, highly codified*" variety of language, which is used only in particular situations. Wardhaugh (2006, p. 90) further explained that the characteristic feature of diglossia is that the two varieties are kept quite apart in their functions. For example, the high varieties may not be used for delivering sermons and formal lectures, especially in parliament or legislative bodies, for giving political speeches, for broadcasting the news on radio and television, and for writing poetry, fine literature, and editorials in newspapers. In contrast, the low varieties may be used in giving instructions to workers in low-prestige occupations or to household servants, in conversation with familiars, in "*soap operas*" and popular programs on the radio, in captions on political cartoons in newspapers, and in "*folk literature*". On occasion, a person may lecture in an H variety but answer questions about its contents or explain parts of it in an L variety so as to ensure understanding.

1.3. Language choice in a Cameroonian context of multilingualism

In many African countries, for example, the distinction between the official language, possible various national languages, and a number of local, ethnic, and vernacular languages tends to reflect a particular high-low continuum in which the high variety is identified with the official

language this is quite often that of the former colonial master in Africa (English, French, Portuguese).

It is useful to distinguish multilingualism and diglossia in African context clearly. Multilingualism is a general ability (habit) of an individual or society where as diglossia is a specific usage of different varieties of the same language or different language for different functional purposes. Originally diglossia would exclude the use of the high variety in everyday conversation.

As regards language choice proper, there are some Cameroonian scholars whose works are worthy of note. These are Kouega (2008a), Kouega and Baimada (2012), and Ndzotom (2017). They will be taken in turn.

Ndzotom (2017) worked on a paper entitled '*Language choice in multilingual religious settings: The historical factor'.* The author made mention of the fact that the field of language and religion can be traced as far back as the 1960s with the seminal works by David Crystal in 1965. Moving a bit further, he indicated that in 2006, Fishman and Omoniyi came up with the beginning of a theoretical framework entitled the Sociology of Language and Religion (SLR). From 2008 onwards, the scholar believes that a handful of papers have addressed the issue of language use and religious practices in Cameroon, following the structural-functional approach (Ndzotom, 2017). He further said that the vast majority unfortunately have failed to unequivocally trace the relationship between language use and the historical background of individual churches examined. Some of these works are reviewed in the paragraphs below.

Kouega (2008a) pioneered the structural-functional approach in one of his scientific endeavours. As cited in Ndzotom (2017), he examined language use in the Catholic Church in the city of Yaoundé, Cameroon. From the analysis of the findings, the author grouped the languages used into three main categories. Category 1 included languages that occurred 33 times or more, namely Bamileke (220 times), French (100 times), Ewondo (88 times), and Latin (80 times). They have in common the fact that they are used in all parishes. Another aspect of this category of languages is that their speakers are found almost everywhere in the city. Category 2 languages included those which occurred between 17 and 33 times. The author listed six such languages, namely Bafia, Giziga, Mafa, Tupuri, and Basaa. These languages were found to be spoken in specific parishes. Actually, they were used only when there was a large chunk of the community speaking them in and around the parish. Category 3 languages, which occurred 16 times or less included 11 languages. Among those languages, one can list Pidgin-English, English, Banen, Bamun, Gidar, Massa, Mundang, Matakam, Mofu, Lamnso', and Igbo. These languages were used more specifically in songs and hymns in some parishes. They were therefore found to be used for each activity as follows:

- French: all activities;
- English: gospel reading, sermons, and singing (in some few parishes);
- Latin: recitation or singing of ritual prayers (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, Pater Noster, Agnus Dei);
- Beti: gospel reading and preaching in certain parishes, singing in almost all parishes;
- Pidgin-English: singing in a couple of parishes (used in early morning masses in one parish);

- Bamileke: reading the epistles and singing in almost every parish except Anglophone parishes;
- Others: singing (Igbo at the Mvog-Ada parish where a large Nigerian community lives). After interviewing churchgoers and priests, Kouega found that a language was chosen for various reasons, the four salient ones being the following:
  o The presence of at least one priest speaking that language in the parish. Otherwise, French was used as the default language. This explains why in a Bamileke mass, for example, the bulk of the activities were conducted in French and only some specific activities like hymns and epistles reading were performed in Bamileke;
  o The presence of devoted chaplains and catechists speaking that language. They prepared and helped choose potential readers;
  o The full involvement in and commitment of the community speaking that language to the activities of the parish (cleaning of the parish, financial contributions, and active participation in masses, reinforced by a dynamic choir or the like). The numerical factor turned out to be irrelevant;
  o The availability of written religious materials in the language chosen (mass, hymns, catechism, Scriptures).

Wholly, the author found that liturgical languages (languages used for the Missal, the Gospel, and the Sermon or preaching) were used in all cases, while minority languages were used in specific activities (epistles reading, singing). Also, some activities seemed to be better performed in specific languages. In that vein, French appeared more frequently with announcements, Latin with ritual prayers, and indigenous languages with singing and epistles reading. It was found that a Catholic mass usually lasts for about 90 minutes and displays a canonical structure, the main segments of which being the Introit (first and second readings), the Epistle, the Gospel, the Sermon, the Offertory, the Eucharist, the Lord's Prayer, the Holy Communion, the Blessing and Dismissal, and Announcements. Baimada (2010) made an interesting reflection on the relationship between language and Islam in northern Cameroon.

Part of the interest of this paper comes from the insightful description it makes of the language situation in the northern part of the country. In fact, northern Cameroon is a heterogeneous area, contrary to what has been generally believed. In addition to French, four lingua francas.

Ndzotom (2017) continued by pointing out the fact that language choice in multilingual religious settings is reckoned in the area, namely Fulfulde, Kanuri, Wandala, and Shuwa Arabic. These languages are consensual languages used for out-group communication in mosques, churches, markets, and at political rallies by people who have different mother tongues. He therefore puts in the effect that, the supremacy of these languages in almost all domains has led to an alarming linguistic situation in northern Cameroon. In effect, he showed that reports demonstrate that all the dead indigenous languages attested in the country are natively spoken in northern Cameroon, a situation which can rightfully be blamed on the pervasiveness of Fulfulde, Kanuri, Wandala, and Shuwa Arabic in that area (Ndzotom, 2017).

Baimada (2012) collected his data for his research in that same vicinity by pointing out how he went about the said study. It is seen in his research that he collected data through

participant observation in various mosques, personal communication with Muslims, and questionnaires. He also used the Myers- Scotton's Matrix Language Frame to identify the main and minor languages found in the speech of his informants. The analysis of the data revealed that Islam has contributed, and continues to contribute, to the empowerment of Fulfulde, Kanuri, Wandala, and Shuwa Arabic. According to the author, this owes to the fact that the acquisition of the Islamic culture and tradition stands as a prerequisite for the integration of any new believer (Ndzotom, 2017). It therefore appears that people whose ancestral language markedly differs from the above-mentioned ones claimed to belong to these language groups. This purportedly results in their identification with the Muslim family (Baimada, 2012). One of the major consequences of this language situation was language shift as pointed out in the researcher's reports. He found that Northerners usually tend to use Fulfulde, Kanuri, Wandala, and Shuwa Arabic in domains where they formerly used their mother tongues. Such domains include trade, social interactions, and religious communication (Ndzotom, 2017). Although it can be conjectured that this shift may be reversed, the reasons why people go in for these lingua francas are still too strong to be reversed (Baimada, 2012). In addition, the scholar opines that, to identify with the Muslim family, mutual intelligibility required in mixed couples as well as mass communication implied by political rallies continue to fuel the leading position of these languages. The author therefore concludes that the way people use language in northern Cameroon portends the death of minority languages in that area. The first works to have alluded to the impact of the historical factor on language use, though not straightforwardly, are Kouega and Ndzotom Mbakop (2011a) and Kouega and Ndzotom Mbakop (2011b). Kouega and Ndzotom Mbakop (2011a) examined multilingual practices in two Presbyterian Churches in Cameroon, the EPC Oyom-Abang parish, and the PCC Nsimeyong. From his findings, it was revealed that a series of observations of the services of these churches showed that the main structures of their liturgy comprised a total of 15 main parts. These are as follows: Salutation, Adoration, Invitation, Prayer of Confession of Sins, Act of Praise, Announcements, Illumination Prayer, Scripture Reading, Sermons, Confession of Faith, Pastoral Acts, Offerings, Intercession Prayer, Invocation and Blessing.

In the same vein, Kouega (2013) published a paper that examined the factors motivating language choice in the church in two semi-urban, multilingual localities of Anglophone Cameroon, namely, Kumba and Mundemba. The informants were priests, catechists, choir leaders, and parishioners; and the data were collected through participant observation and a questionnaire. The structural-functional model proposed by Kouega (2008) was adopted. The findings revealed amongst other facts, that, the languages used in these two places were English, Pidgin English, Latin, Lingala, and Lamnso, and those used in one or the other locality were Oroko and Bamileke. These languages were found to be chosen for one or more of the following reasons: the priests were proficient in them, the parishioners understood them, there were religious materials available in them, there were choirs singing in them and, lastly, there existed a collection of captivating lyrics in them.

3. Research questions

The topic under focus revolves around two research questions that are as follows:
- What obtains from language choice in official settings as a whole?
- What are the factors that account for the choice of any languages used by language users at the University of Maroua?

4. Methodology

4.1 Population and sampling

As the University of Maroua is a public setting with a large number of language communities, the sampling system was a simple random sampling to give equal chances to all the respondents to be selected with their various variables and sociolinguistic properties. Yet, the University is a place with a huge number of populations, and only 250 informants were randomly selected. The characteristics that governed the random selection were the following: the level of education, being a student registered at the University of Maroua, being a support staff or a lecturer or a university administrator. The informants were males and females.

4.2 Instrument

The main instrument used for this study is a survey questionnaire which is made up of four-sectioned items. To be more precise, the means used to gather data for this study is chiefly a questionnaire. It is based on the deductive approach. Also, it was deemed necessary to give a brief description of the questions found in the questionnaire so as to highlight their rationales.

This questionnaire is made up of ten (10) major questions which are also made up of four sections and sub-questions. The sub-sections are:
a) Background information/sociolinguistic profiles,
b) Language practices/management on campus/in an office,
c) Language attitudes, and
d) Language perceptions

4.3 Framework

Spolsky's (2009) '*Language Management*' is the mainframe that covers this study. As concerns the tenets of this theory, the trilogy of communication is put forth having as core components of language management the following three major tenets gotten from Spolsky (2004) on Language Policy:
1) language practices (participation-topic-location),
2) language beliefs or the beliefs about the functions of the language in relation to each other, and
3) language policy.

The trilogy is inspired by Fishman's (1972) language domain analysis. The choice of this theory is ipso facto imposed by the nature of the topic and its sociolinguistic orientations (the sociology of language as put by Fishman).

With reference to the theory, the author described the language policy theory first so as to lead the reader to the language domains. In fact, as long as the theory of Language Policy dates back to 1964 and 1965 in relation to Fishman's works, it by birth inspired by Fishman himself who wanted to get an understanding of some sociological language use situations. In this respect, the scholar had to call for help from his peers in the field to develop an outstanding theory to back up his works.

Furthermore, the language policy theory as noted in Spolsky (2004 and 2007), the very theory is upheld by three major components which are namely, language practices, language beliefs/ideology, and language management. So, from there, Spolsky had to narrow down the study on communication domains to language management; which is the third component of language policy. Since some scholars talked of Language Policy and language planning interchangeably, Spolsky (2004) believes that there is no way to plan a language, but one can only manage it. As such, he stressed his 2009 works on Language management. This is where he came up with the above-mentioned tenets:

1) language practices (participation-topic-location),
2) language beliefs or the beliefs about the functions of the language in relation to each other, and
3) language policy.

More particularly demonstrates the fact that there is no clear way to plan a language as we can only manage it depending on the participants one meets during the day, the place where the communication will take place (location), and the topic(s) or the issues that will be discussed. In short, the language management approach subscribes to the viewpoint that there are language managers but not language planners since planning is always in theory. In practice, the language users can only manage as individuals have different parameters that actually compel them to choose a particular language depending on a specific participant, a particular location, and a particular topic raised during the communication situation.

5. Results and discussions

The findings of this study are discussed on the basis of the above research questions on language choices in public settings. To recap, the questions unfold as follows:
- What obtains from language choice in official settings as a whole?
- What are the factors that account for the choice of any languages used by language users at the University of Maroua?

The table below tackles the sociolinguistic repertoires of the participants. So, the questions asked to the participants serve that aim.

Below is the table yielding the various native languages found in the sociolinguistic background of the respondents. As such, there is a total of 37 native languages with different frequencies as can be noted in the table above. The table above shows the other local languages or heritage languages spoken by the respondents but not used automatically on campus, in class, or in an office. Among the local languages spoken by the informants, a few of them are used on campus, that is, in offices and out of the offices. This is what the table above presents.

Table 1: Native languages' frequency

Native langugaes		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fulfuldé	35	14	14	14
	Moundang	14	5,6	5,6	16,8
	Kapsiki	11	4,4	4,4	21,2
	Mafa	16	6,4	6,4	27,6
	Massa	14	5,6	5,6	33,2
	Guiziga	12	4,8	4,8	38,0
	Toupouri	15	6,0	6,0	44,0
	Mandara	10	4,0	4,0	48,0
	Mada	5	2,0	2,0	50,0
	Guidar	11	4,6	4,6	54,6
	Fali	5	2,0	2,0	56,4
	Bamoun	5	2,0	2,0	58,4
	Medzjumba	2	,8	,8	59,2
	Kera	5	2,0	2,0	61,2
	Bassa	2	,8	,8	62,0
	Bulu	4	1,6	1,6	63,6
	Kamale	4	1,6	1,6	65,2
	Kotoko	2	,8	,8	66,0
	Lame	5	2,0	2,0	68,0
	Moufou	6	2,4	2,4	70,4
	Zime	7	2,8	2,8	73,2
	Peve	5	2,0	2,0	75,2
	Baham	3	1,2	1,2	76,8
	Akosee	4	1,6	1,6	78,4
	Igbo	2	,8	,8	79,2
	Karentshi	2	,8	,8	80,0
	Falata	3	1,2	1,2	81,2
	Marva	3	1,2	1,2	82,4
	Bana	8	3,2	3,2	85,6
	Sarah	3	1,2	1,2	86,8
	Mandara	5	2,0	2,0	88,8
	Mouyang	5	2,0	2,0	90,8
	Dschang	3	1,2	1,2	94,4
	Haussa	4	1,6	1,6	96,0
	Kotoko	3	1,2	1,2	97,2
	Mouzgoum	4	1,6	1,6	98,8
	Daba	3	1,2	1,2	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Table 2: What is your first official language?

Languages		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	French	163	65,2	65,2	65,2
	English	87	34,8	34,8	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Table 2 provides the statistics of the first official language spoken by the respondents. It appears that there are 163 respondents who have French as their first official language while there are 87 of them use English as their first official language; hence the bilingual nature of the study. This is of course based on the 1996 Constitution on language policy stipulating that, the two official languages of Cameroon shall be English and French, both having the same status while the State shall guarantee the promotion of national languages.

Table 3: Do you speak your second official language?

Questions		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	48	19,2	19,2	19,2
	Yes	202	80,8	80,8	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Table 3 seeks to know whether the informant can speak their second official language being English or French depending on their geolinguistic background in Cameroon. The figures show that there are only 48 informants who cannot speak their second official language while **202** informants do.

Table 4: The ability to use the first official language on campus on campus (in/outside the offices)

Questions		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	22	8,8	8,8	8,8
	Yes	228	91,2	91,2	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

From the above table, it can be seen that 22 informants over 250 cannot speak their first official language in the office or on campus.

Table 5: Language(s) spoken at workplace /on campus with friends

Languages		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	7	2,8	2,8	2,8
	French	243	97,2	97,2	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

From the table above, there are 243 times when French is used on campus at the workplace, or with friends. English proves to only have 7 frequencies.

Table 6: Languages spoken on campus/workplace with colleagues

Languages		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	French	168	67,2	67,2	67,2
	English	82	32,8	32,8	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Here, French still tops the frequency of use. It is quite obvious to have 168 frequencies against 82 frequencies for English.

Table 7: Languages spoken on campus/workplace with students

Languages		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	87	34,8	34,8	34,8
	French	163	65,2	65,2	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Here, as well as in the previous table, French appears first with 163 frequencies against 87 in English. The table presents French as the language mostly used by informants when communicating with students on campus/at the workplace.

Table 8: Languages spoken on campus/workplace with relatives

Languages		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	French	107	42,8	42,8	42,8
	Other languages	143	57,2	57,2	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

This table presents the languages spoken on campus with relatives. It shows that there are 107 frequencies for French and 143 frequencies for other languages apart from English earning an official status.

Table 9: Languages spoken on campus/workplace with fellow students

Languages		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	34	13,6	13,6	13,6
	French	179	71,6	71,6	85,2
	Other languages	37	14,8	14,8	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

French still comes first as regards the languages spoken amongst students on campus. One sees that French has a total record of 179 frequencies while other languages score 37 frequencies the second and English comes last with 34 frequencies. The choice of French may be motivated by some circumstances that will analysed in chapter five which tackles the data analysis properly.

Situations in which some languages are spoken:
- work coordination: 17,9%,
- make communication easy: 32,5%,
- during the break: 24,5%,
- during work: 20,5%,
- situation of debates with friends: 4,6%

Here, the table presents various situations in which the movement from an official language to any other local language. In this respect, one notices that there is work coordination (27 frequencies), easy communication linked to language shortage (47 frequencies), during the break (37 frequencies), during work (31 frequencies), in debate situations (7 frequencies), with friends (151 frequencies). The above summary of findings presents the communication situations in relation to 'friends' as the one topping the frequencies with a majority of 151.

Table 10: Reasons for which some languages are chosen by the participants

Sociolinguistic situations		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Facilitate coordination	133	53,2	53,2	53,2
	Facilitate understanding among us	37	14,8	14,8	68,0
	Speeds job tasks	80	32,0	32,0	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

As can be noted above, language users in official settings as is the case at the University of Maroua, choose some languages for specific functions with their peers or friends., relatives, colleagues, students, and fellow students, the support staff. As it is all clear here in the table, they choose some languages with rationales such as easy communication, to facilitate work coordination, mutual intelligibility, and speeding up job tasks or duties in the work environment. The next table tackles the opinions about the most useful language at the University of Maroua in an office and outside the office.

Table 11: Opinions about the most useful language at the University of Maroua (on campus)

Languages		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	34	13,6	13,6	13,6
	French	216	86,4	86,4	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Table 12: The most useful language at the University of Maroua (in an office)

Languages		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	French	223	89,2	89,2	89,2
	English	27	10,8	10,8	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

From the observation at first glance at the tables above, it is clear that French (86,4%; 89,2%) tops the analysis in terms of choice and use in offices and outside the offices at the University of Maroua. This poses a problem when the gap is terribly huge as compared to English which is also an official language. This clearly implies that English, though an official language (13.6%; 10.8%), receives a negative attitude on the part of the students, the teaching staff, and the support staff at the University of Maroua workplace. Also, the highly francophonised choice of codes; triggers the balanced choice of the workplace language.

The tables below as compared to previous ones tackled language attitudes, the next tables present the perceptions informants have about some languages; an issue of sociolinguistic perception.

Table 13: The most perceived languages on campus

Languages		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	French	155	62,0	62,0	62,0
	English	95	38,0	38,0	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Table 14: The language mostly perceived in the offices

Languages		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	115	46,0	46,0	46,0
	French	135	54,0	54,0	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Either on campus or in an office, it has been proven in the data presentation above that, French is the most chosen language in various scenarios of communication. The frequencies above with related statistics prove that due to the trilogy (participant topics or issues and location) of communication subsumed in the language management which actually, governed their way of choosing a specific language for a specific purpose in a particular setting.

7. Conclusion

It is henceforth clear in this study that the participants, the location, and the topics determine the operational choices of the language users at the University of Maroua. This can be seen with the major groups of individuals found at this university. These are students, the teaching staff, and the support staff. So, their psycholinguistic operations obey to some paralinguistic aspects of the language situations such as where they are found, the matters (work coordination and mutual understanding/intelligibility) being discussed and the people involved in the communication. This has been backed up by the underlying Spolsky's (2009) *'Language Management'*.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The above-mentioned authors declare no conflicts of interest with regard to this work.

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