

Research Article

Assessing *Anglais* Paper Instructions Set by Francophone Primary School Teachers in Guidiguis, Far-north Cameroon

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Abstract

This study aims to assess the linguistic quality of *Anglais* paper instructions set by Francophone primary school teachers. Guided by the Error Analysis framework, 40 authentic CM2 question papers were examined. The analysis revealed recurrent word order and subject–verb agreement errors, alongside frequent orthographic mistakes. These issues were largely attributed to negative transfer from French and an incomplete mastery of English grammatical and orthographic conventions. Such errors compromise the clarity of instructions, risk confusing learners during assessments, and potentially undermine the objectives of Cameroon’s bilingual education policy. The study recommends targeted in-service teacher training focused on English grammar and assessment language, the development of clear instructional guidelines, and the institution of systematic quality control measures to ensure the production of accurate and comprehensible paper materials in English.

Keywords

Error Analysis, Francophone Primary School Teachers, Instructions, Negative Transfer, Question Papers

1. Introduction

Cameroon’s bilingual identity, rooted in its colonial past, was officially consolidated by the 1996 Constitution, which affirms English and French as languages of equal status. In line with this, the Cameroonian government has committed to promoting bilingualism and biculturalism across all levels of education as a means of fostering national unity and integration. This commitment was reinforced by Law No. 98/004 of April 14, 1998, which provides general guidelines for education in Cameroon and clearly states in its first part, Section 3, that “The State shall institute bilingualism at all levels of education as a factor of national unity and integration.”

To operationalise this vision, the Ministry of National Education issued Order No. 62/C/13/MINEDUC/CAB of February 2001, making English a compulsory subject from the

first year of primary school in Francophone regions, and French a compulsory subject in Anglophone schools. The aim was to equip learners with functional competence in both official languages from an early age. Further, Presidential Decree No. 2001/041 of 19 February 2001 created Écoles Normales d’Instituteurs de l’Enseignement Général Bilingues, designed to train teachers proficient in both English and French for deployment nationwide.

Despite this robust policy framework, the practical implementation of bilingualism in education remains uneven, especially in underserved rural areas. In many parts of the Far North Region, qualified bilingual teachers are scarce. Consequently, Francophone primary school teachers with limited or no formal training in English are often tasked with teaching

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Received: 16 August 2025; **Accepted:** 27 August 2025; **Published:** 9 December 2025



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and assessing the subject, including setting papers. This has serious pedagogical implications, as teacher input is a key determinant of learner output (Swain [14]; Lightbown [10]; Gass [7]; Anthony [1]; Ellis, Collins [4] & Fayeke [5]) as cited in Taboh and Landon [15]. As Noyomdi [12] observes, learners' language performance is directly shaped by the quality of language input they receive. Anthony [1] adds that both the quality and quantity of input influence language acquisition.

For teachers to provide such effective input, they must possess strong mastery of the language they teach (Kimberly [8]). According to Bachman and Palmer [2], this mastery encompasses grammatical knowledge (vocabulary, syntax, phonology), textual and pragmatic competence, functional knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness. However, research on the English of French-speaking learners and teachers in Cameroon shows that such mastery is often lacking. Fornkwa [6] found frequent misuse and avoidance of inflectional affixes among Francophone secondary learners, largely due to French interference. Kouega and Sokeng [9] revealed that Francophone secondary school-leavers had not reached even primary-level proficiency in English, while Sokeng [13] identified persistent grammatical errors in the writing of university-level bilingual programme students. Recent studies in the Far North (Meutem & Noyomdi, [11]) further show that many Francophone primary school teachers exhibit weaknesses in grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, limiting their capacity to produce accurate and clear written English.

These deficiencies become particularly problematic when teachers set papers, which are crucial to guiding learners in interpreting and responding to test items. Linguistically inaccurate, unclear, or grammatically faulty instructions can hinder performance, not because learners lack content knowledge, but because they misunderstand the task requirements. This risk is heightened in contexts where teachers are not proficient in the language of assessment yet are responsible for drafting it.

This study therefore seeks to assess the clarity, grammatical accuracy, and structural coherence of instructions in "Anglais" papers set by Francophone primary school teachers in selected schools in Guidiguis, with the aim of identifying weaknesses and suggesting pedagogic improvements.

2. Literature Review

By and large, several researchers have written on second language acquisition, with particular emphasis on Error Analysis (EA). Error Analysis (EA) is a pivotal theoretical framework in the study of second language acquisition (SLA) that focuses on the identification, classification, and explanation of errors made by language learners. The foundation of EA is grounded in the work of Corder [3], who challenged the traditional view of errors as mere signs of failure or incompetence. Instead, Corder proposed that errors are natural and essential components of the language learning process, re-

flecting the learner's evolving interlanguage, a dynamic linguistic system constructed as learners move toward target language competence.

According to Corder [3], errors serve several important functions in SLA research and language teaching. First, they reveal the learner's current level of linguistic knowledge and understanding, offering insights into which aspects of the target language have been acquired and which require further attention. Second, errors provide clues about the cognitive processes underlying language acquisition, such as hypotheses learners form about rules and patterns in the new language. Finally, systematic analysis of errors can inform teachers and curriculum developers about common difficulties faced by learners, guiding more effective instruction and remedial strategies.

In practical terms, EA involves collecting language samples from learners, identifying errors by comparing the learner's output with a target language norm, classifying these errors according to type (e.g., phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical), and explaining their possible sources. This systematic approach provides a rich diagnostic tool for both research and pedagogical purposes.

Building on this theoretical foundation, Noyomdi [12] conducted an empirical investigation into the English written productions of 61 Francophone primary school teachers in the Far North Region of Cameroon. Using Error Analysis as a methodological framework, the study examined graphological, lexical, and grammatical aspects of the participants' writing. The findings revealed a high frequency of errors attributable to both interlingual factors, mainly negative transfer from French, and intralingual factors, such as over-generalization and ignorance of rule restrictions. The study highlighted the limited English proficiency of these teachers and raised serious concerns about their ability to effectively teach the subject to young learners. Noyomdi [12] concluded that the lack of adequately trained bilingual teachers, particularly in rural areas, poses a threat to the success of Cameroon's official bilingual policy, recommending retraining programs and improved deployment of proficient English teachers in primary schools.

Similarly, Taboh and Landon [15] investigated the extent to which teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) in Cameroon master the language they teach, emphasizing that the teacher remains one of the major challenges to be addressed. Their main objective was to assess teachers' language skills. Employing a Homogeneous Purposive Sampling Technique, they studied 40 ESL teachers in the Tiko and Buea Sub-divisions of the South West Region of Cameroon using questionnaires and interviews. The results revealed that 36 of the teachers had difficulties with spelling, 33 with punctuation, 30 with pronunciation, 28 with capitalization, 27 with sentence construction, and five with subject-verb agreement.

Although the studies by Noyomdi [12] and Taboh and Landon [15] shed light on the linguistic competence of ESL teachers in Cameroon, the trustworthiness of their data is open

to question. In both cases, the data relied heavily on teachers' self-generated outputs, such as written essays, questionnaire responses, or interview statements, which may not fully reflect their actual classroom performance. Teachers might not have approached these tasks with the same level of seriousness as in formal assessment settings, or they may have been idling, producing work that does not mirror their authentic instructional practices. Similarly, preparatory notes or elicited writing samples may be influenced by external factors such as time constraints or lack of motivation during the study. This methodological limitation creates a gap in understanding how teachers' linguistic proficiency manifests in real pedagogical contexts. To address this, the present study focuses specifically on the instructions set by these teachers in *Anglais* question papers, as these constitute authentic, high-stakes communicative acts directly impacting learners' interpretation of paper tasks.

3. Methodology

3.1. Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprised Franco-phone primary school teachers in Guidiguis who set the "*Anglais*" papers for CM2 classes. This group was chosen because CM2 represents the final stage of the primary cycle, where learners' mastery of English is assessed before transitioning to secondary school.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to deliberately select schools and teachers directly involved in setting the *Anglais* question papers. This approach ensured that the data came from authentic, high-stakes documents rather than elicited or simulated teacher performances, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the findings.

In total, 40 CM2 *Anglais* question papers (2025) were collected. Of these, 8 papers originated from the only private primary school in Guidiguis, and 32 papers were obtained from seven public primary schools.

3.2. Instruments

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was document analysis, focusing on authentic *Anglais* question papers set by CM2 teachers in Guidiguis. This choice was guided by the need to examine the linguistic quality, clarity, and accuracy of instructions as they appear in real paper contexts, rather than in simulated or elicited teacher performances.

To supplement the analysis, a document collection sheet was used to record relevant contextual details for each paper, including the school type (public or private), date of test. These details helped in organizing and categorizing the data for systematic analysis.

3.3. Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal authorisation was obtained from the headmasters of the selected schools. This approval granted the researchers access to school records and facilitated contact with the teachers concerned.

Following authorisation, the headmasters provided information on the teachers responsible for teaching CM2 classes in their respective schools. The researchers then met these teachers in person to explain the purpose of the study and to request copies of the *Anglais* question papers they had set for the 2025.

The teachers voluntarily provided the requested papers, which were then organised according to school type (public or private) and date of paper. All collected documents were handled in compliance with ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality and use solely for research purposes.

3.4. Measure

The collected *Anglais* question papers were analysed using Error Analysis (EA) as the principal methodological framework. The analysis followed Corder's [3] procedural steps: identification of errors, classification of errors, explanation of their sources, and evaluation of their potential impact on learners' comprehension.

First, each paper was read in full, and all instructions were extracted and isolated from the rest of the content. Second, errors were identified at three levels:

- 1) Grammatical errors
- 2) Capitalisation
- 3) Spelling

The identified errors were then categorised according to type and frequency and their sources were determined as either interlingual (negative transfer from French) or intralingual (overgeneralisation, ignorance of rule restrictions, or incomplete rule application).

4. Results

As mentioned above the errors collected from the instructions are categorised into grammatical errors, capitalisation errors and spelling errors.

4.1. Grammatical Errors

4.1.1. Word Order

Word order errors occur when the sequence of words in an instruction does not conform to standard English syntax. Such errors can hinder comprehension and affect the clarity of paper tasks for learners. The table below presents examples of word order errors identified in the CM2 *Anglais* paper instructions, alongside their corrected forms.

Table 1. Errors related to word order.

Word order errors	Corrected instructions
Complete correctly the correct sentences	Complete the sentence correctly
Write the answers in the boxes given below	Write your answers in the boxes below
Match correctly the words with their meanings.	Match the words correctly with their meanings
Circle with a pencil the correct answer	Circle the correct answer with a pencil
Underline the verbs all in the sentence	Underline all the verbs in the sentence

As presented in Table 1, the *Anglais* paper instructions exhibit recurrent word order errors, particularly in the placement of adverbs, quantifiers, and prepositional phrases. For example, "Complete correctly the correct sentences" incorrectly places the adverb "correctly" before the object, whereas standard English syntax requires the adverb after the object: "Complete the sentences correctly." Similarly, "Match correctly the words with their meanings" shows misplacement of the adverb "correctly," which should follow the direct object.

The phrase "Circle with a pencil the correct answer" demonstrates improper positioning of the prepositional phrase "with a pencil," which standard English places after the object: "Circle the correct answer with a pencil." Lastly, "Underline the verbs all in the sentence" contains incorrect quantifier placement; the quantifier "all" should precede the noun phrase, as in "Underline all the verbs in the sentence."

These errors reveal a systematic difficulty in conforming to English word order norms, likely due to transfer from French syntax. Such misordering affects the clarity and effectiveness of instructions, underscoring the need for focused linguistic support in exam paper preparation.

4.1.2. Agreement

Agreement errors arise when grammatical elements that should correspond in number, person, or gender do not align. In the *Anglais* paper instructions, such discrepancies frequently occur between subjects and verbs, pronouns and their referents, or determiners and nouns. These inconsistencies can compromise the precision of the instructions and cause confusion among learners. The table below illustrates representative agreement errors identified in CM2 *Anglais* paper instructions, along with their corrected versions.

Table 2. Errors related to agreement.

Incorrect instructions	Correct instructions
Underline the verbs that is in the past	Underline the verbs that are in the past
Each of the words have a missing letter	Each of the words has a missing letter
Match the pictures with it correct names	Match the pictures with their correct names
Choose the sentences which best describes the picture	Choose the sentences with best describe the picture
Write the answers in the space which is provided	Write the answers in the space which are provided

The data reveal several instances of agreement errors in the *Anglais* paper instructions, primarily involving mismatches between subjects and verbs, as well as pronouns and their antecedents. For example, "Underline the verbs that is in the past" exhibits a singular verb form "is" incorrectly paired with the plural noun "verbs," whereas the corrected version uses the plural verb "are." Similarly, "Each of the words have a missing letter" misaligns the singular subject "Each" with the plural verb "have," which should be singular "has".

Pronoun agreement errors are evident in "Match the pictures

with it correct names," where the singular pronoun "it" is incorrectly used instead of the plural "their" to match the plural noun "pictures." The instruction "Choose the sentences which best describes the picture" combines plural "sentences" with the singular verb "describes," violating subject-verb agreement rules. Lastly, "Write the answers in the space which is provided" incorrectly uses the singular verb "is" with the plural noun "answers" and "space," with the correction aligning verb number to "are".

These errors indicate a fundamental challenge with number

agreement in English syntax, likely exacerbated by cure meaning and reduce the grammatical accuracy of instructions, potentially confusing learners during assessments.

4.2. Capitalisation Errors

Capitalisation errors involve the incorrect use of up-

per-case letters in contexts where they are required or their unnecessary use where lower-case is expected. In *Anglais* paper instructions, such errors often appear in sentence openings, proper nouns, days of the week, and language names. The table below presents examples of capitalisation errors identified in CM2 *Anglais* paper instructions alongside their corrected forms.

Table 3. Errors related to capitalisation.

Incorrect instructions	Correct instructions
write the name of the months in order	Write the name of the months in order
Name the capital of Cameroon	Name the capital of Cameroon
Underline the name in the passage except john	Underline names in the passage except John
After reading the passage, fill in the blanks with Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday	After reading the passage, fill in the blanks with Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday
match correctly the words with their meanings	Match the words correctly with their meanings

As presented in Table 3, the *Anglais* paper instructions exhibit several capitalisation errors, which involve the incorrect use of upper- and lower-case letters in contexts where standard English conventions require capitalisation. For example, sentences often begin without a capital letter, as in "write the name of the months in order," which should begin with "Write." Proper nouns such as country names ("cameroon") and personal names ("john") are frequently not capitalised, violating English orthographic norms.

Additionally, days of the week such as "monday, tuesday, wednesday" are presented in lowercase, despite the rule that these should always be capitalised. One instruction, "match correctly the words with their meanings," also lacks initial capitalisation, indicating inconsistent adherence to basic

writing conventions.

These capitalisation errors reflect limited awareness of English orthographic rules, which could impede the professionalism and clarity of paper instructions, thereby affecting learners' comprehension and respect for the text.

4.3. Spelling Errors

Spelling errors refer to incorrect formation of words, including omissions, substitutions, or additions of letters. These errors in *Anglais* paper instructions can affect readability and learners' understanding of the tasks. The following table provides examples of common spelling mistakes found in the CM2 *Anglais* question papers and their corrected forms.

Table 4. Errors related to spelling.

Incorrect instructions	Corrected instructions
Write the opposit of the following words	Write the opposite of the following words
Circle the correct ansers	Circle the correct answers
Fill in the blancks with the correct words	Fill in the blanks with the correct words
Underline the verbes in the sentences.	Underline the verbs in the sentences.

The data present in Table 4 contain frequent spelling errors, which involve incorrect letter substitutions, omissions, or additions that compromise word accuracy. For instance, "Write the opposit of the following words" incorrectly spells

"opposite" by omitting the final "e." Similarly, "Circle the correct ansers" shows the omission of a letter in "answers."

Other examples include "Fill in the blancks with the correct words," where the word "blancks" is misspelled due to the

substitution of “c” with “k,” and “Underline the verbes in the sentences,” which adds an unnecessary “e” to “verbs.” These errors reflect a lack of careful proofreading and limited mastery of English orthography.

Such spelling inaccuracies in paper instructions can affect learners’ ability to decode the tasks properly, undermining the clarity and professionalism expected in formal assessment contexts.

Table 5. *Distribution of Errors Identified in CM2 Anglais paper instructions by type.*

Errors type	Frequency	Percentage
Word order	102	39.8
Agreement	64	25.0
Capitalisation	46	18.0
Spelling	44	17.2
Total	256	100

As indicated in the table above, a total of 256 errors were identified in the analysis of the Anglais paper instructions. Word order errors were the most frequent, accounting for 39.8% (102 errors) of the total. Agreement errors followed, representing 25.0% (64 errors), while capitalisation and spelling errors accounted for 18.0% (46 errors) and 17.2% (44 errors), respectively. This distribution indicates that syntactic challenges related to word order and agreement constitute the primary difficulties in the instructions, while graphological errors such as capitalisation and spelling also significantly affect the overall linguistic quality.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to assess the linguistic quality of *Anglais* paper instructions set by Francophone primary school teachers in Guidigu, focusing on grammatical, capitalisation, and spelling errors. The findings reveal systematic challenges in the production of clear, accurate, and pedagogically effective instructions, echoing concerns raised in previous research on English language proficiency among Cameroonian ESL teachers (Noyomdi [12]; Taboh & Landon [15]).

The predominance of word order and agreement errors highlights a persistent difficulty in adhering to English syntactic conventions, particularly in the positioning of adverbs, quantifiers, and the concord between subjects and verbs or pronouns. Such errors are indicative of negative transfer from French, as the teachers’ first language exhibits different syntactic rules, especially regarding word order and agreement patterns. This aligns with Corder’s [3] Error Analysis theory, which attributes errors partly to interlingual interference during second language acquisition. The intralingual

factors observed, such as overgeneralisation and incomplete rule application, further demonstrate the teachers’ evolving but incomplete grasp of English grammar.

Capitalisation and spelling errors, although less frequent than grammatical mistakes, significantly affect the overall clarity and professionalism of the papers. These graphological errors are consistent with the limited orthographic competence reported by Taboh and Landon [15], suggesting that foundational English language skills require reinforcement even among teaching professionals. The presence of such errors in high-stakes assessment materials is particularly concerning because unclear or incorrect instructions can mislead learners and adversely impact their test performance, independent of their actual knowledge of English.

The methodological approach of analysing authentic question papers, rather than elicited teacher outputs, enhances the trustworthiness of these findings. Unlike previous studies that relied on self-reported data or controlled writing tasks, this study captures teachers’ real-life performance in an official and consequential context. This approach uncovers the genuine linguistic challenges faced by Francophone teachers tasked with preparing English language assessments, thus filling an important gap identified in the literature.

6. Pedagogical Implication

The findings of this study carry direct implications for teaching practice, assessment design, and learner performance in Cameroon’s bilingual education system. Recurrent grammatical, capitalisation, and spelling errors in examination instructions reveal a critical need for systematic teacher training. Teachers must not only strengthen their mastery of English grammar and orthography but also acquire skills in crafting clear, unambiguous instructions to guide learners effectively during assessments.

The clarity and linguistic accuracy of test instructions have a direct impact on learner performance. Poorly worded directives may lead to misinterpretation, causing students to provide incomplete or incorrect responses despite possessing the required knowledge. Consequently, test results may not accurately reflect learners’ competencies, undermining both learning outcomes and the validity of assessment practices.

The results of this study also have significant implications for Cameroon’s bilingual education policy. The persistent presence of these errors reveals weaknesses in the implementation of policies designed to promote bilingualism and high-quality language education. While legislative frameworks such as the 1996 Constitution and Law No. 98/004 of April 14, 1998, mandate bilingual instruction, the findings suggest that insufficient measures have been taken to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to meet these standards.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study investigated the linguistic quality of *Anglais* paper instructions set by Francophone primary school teachers in the Far North Region of Cameroon. The analysis revealed pervasive errors in grammar—especially word order and agreement—alongside frequent capitalisation and spelling mistakes. These errors, largely influenced by negative transfer from French and incomplete mastery of English rules, undermine the clarity and effectiveness of instructions, potentially confusing learners during assessments. By focusing on authentic question papers, this study provides a more reliable picture of the real challenges teachers face in producing accurate English test materials. The findings highlight a critical gap in teacher language proficiency that threatens the success of Cameroon's bilingual education policy, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Recommendations

To address the linguistic shortcomings identified in this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Professional development and training: the Ministry of Basic Education should implement continuous and targeted training programs for Francophone primary school teachers focusing on English grammar, syntax, and orthography to improve their language proficiency and assessment-writing skills.
- 2) Development of standardised assessment guidelines: the Ministry should provide clear guidelines and exemplars for writing paper instructions in English, ensuring consistency, clarity, and adherence to linguistic norms.
- 3) Recruitment and deployment: priority should be given to recruiting and deploying bilingual teachers proficient in both English and French, particularly in rural and underserved regions, to enhance the quality of bilingual education delivery.

Implementing these recommendations will contribute to improving the linguistic quality of *Anglais* papers, thereby supporting learners' comprehension and academic success, and advancing Cameroon's bilingual education objectives.

Abbreviations

EA	Error Analysis
CM2	Cours Moyen 2

Author Contributions

Ebenzert Welyang Le Grand is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Biography

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