



## Positional Prominence and Information Structure in Cameroon English: Nativised Grammatical Correlates in a New English

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the grammatical structures through which positional prominence is realised in Cameroon English (CamE), situated within the theoretical framework of New Englishes scholarship. Positional prominence refers to the use of sentence-initial syntactic position to signal what is topical, focal, or discourse-salient in an utterance. Four grammatical structures are identified as the primary realisations of this phenomenon in CamE: topicalization, left-dislocation with resumptive pronouns, cleft constructions, and focus fronting. Data drawn from a corpus of naturalistic spoken and written CamE (approximately 125,000 words) are used to demonstrate that these are not instances of non-standard usage but rule-governed, nativised features of an emergent endonormative grammar. The analysis draws on Lambrecht's (1994) information structure framework, Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model of postcolonial Englishes, and Mufwene's (2001) feature pool model. Substrate influence from Cameroonian indigenous languages, many of which are topic-prominent in the typological sense of Li and Thompson (1976), is identified as a conditioning factor in the development of these features. The paper contributes to the descriptive literature on African Englishes and advocates for the systematic inclusion of information-structural features in the grammatical documentation of CamE.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of New Englishes has developed considerably since Kachru's foundational work in the early 1980s. Scholars have documented, with increasing care, the phonological, lexical, and grammatical features that distinguish Outer Circle varieties such as Indian English, Nigerian English, Kenyan English, and Singaporean English from their Inner Circle counterparts. It is worth noting that the Inner/Outer Circle terminology, originating with Kachru (1992), has been critiqued by Bamgbose (2001) for reproducing the very hierarchies it purports merely to describe; the terms are retained in this paper as convenient shorthand for the exonormative/endonormative distinction rather than as an endorsement of any evaluative ranking. Cameroon English (CamE), used in the Anglophone regions of the Republic of Cameroon, has attracted growing scholarly attention (Anchimbe 2006; Kouega 2007; Nkemleke 2006; Sala 2006), yet certain areas of its grammar remain comparatively underdescribed. Amongst these is information structure: the syntactic mechanisms through which speakers signal what is topical, what is focal, and what is discourse-prominent. This paper addresses that gap by investigating what are termed here the grammatical correlates of positional prominence in CamE. The term "grammatical correlate" is used in the descriptive sense of a grammatical structure that formally realises a given discourse-functional category: specifically, the marking of topic and focus through positional means. Positional prominence refers specifically to the use of sentence-initial syntactic position as a privileged resource for encoding discourse-salient information. Four recurrent grammatical structures realise this function in CamE: topicalization, left-dislocation with resumptive pronouns, cleft constructions (both it-clefts and wh-clefts), and focus fronting. These structures are rule-governed, contextually motivated, and they interface with the information-structural conventions of Cameroonian indigenous languages in ways that illuminate the contact processes underlying CamE's nativization.

The paper is organised around three research questions:

RQ1. What grammatical structures realise positional prominence in CamE, and how do they distribute across sentence-initial position?

RQ2. To what extent can the positional prominence features of CamE be accounted for by substrate transfer and reinforcement from Cameroonian indigenous languages and Cameroon Pidgin English?

RQ3. What are the implications of these features for the description and endonormative codification of CamE as a New English?

The grammatical correlates of positional prominence in CamE are best understood not as deficiencies or transfer errors but as nativised features forming part of an emergent endonormative grammar. Two limitations of scope are acknowledged at the outset. First, the four constructions analysed here represent the primary, not the exhaustive, set of positional prominence strategies identifiable in CamE; other constructions may exist but their systematic investigation lies beyond the scope of the present analysis. Second, while readers familiar with information structure in standard British English will recognise the importance of prosodic prominence in that variety's encoding of topic and focus, the prosodic dimension of positional prominence in CamE falls outside the scope of this paper; the relationship between syntactic fronting and intonational structure in CamE is identified as a priority for future research in Section 7. The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 provides the theoretical background. Section 3 presents the data and methodology. Section 4 offers a sociolinguistic profile of CamE within its multilingual context. Section 5 presents the analysis of each of the four grammatical correlates. Section 6 discusses substrate motivations and the broader implications for description and codification. Section 7 concludes and identifies avenues for further research.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical architecture of this paper rests on three complementary frameworks drawn from World Englishes scholarship and formal pragmatics. Together, they permit the grammatical features of CamE to be described in terms of both their internal structure and their place within the broader trajectory of postcolonial English development. Section 2.1 situates CamE within the paradigm of New Englishes and World Englishes scholarship, drawing on Kachru (1992), Schneider (2007), and Mufwene (2001). Section 2.2 introduces the information-structural and positional prominence framework that guides the grammatical analysis, with Lambrecht (1994) as the primary reference. The rationale for triangulating these frameworks is that no single theory accounts simultaneously for the typological properties of the constructions under analysis, the diachronic trajectory through which they have emerged, and the substrate contact conditions that have shaped their nativization in CamE.

### 2.1 *New Englishes and World Englishes scholarship*

The concept of New Englishes designates those forms of English that have become second-language varieties within postcolonial societies, acquiring stable norms within specific domains of use (Kachru 1992; Platt, Weber, and Ho 1984). Such varieties are not deficient approximations of British or American English; they are autonomous systems that have undergone nativization, the process by which a transplanted variety is adapted to serve local communicative, cultural, and expressive needs (Kachru, ed., 1982). Bamgbose (2001) rightly cautions that the three-circle model can naturalise hierarchies between varieties, and this paper proceeds from the position that descriptive adequacy, not normative comparison, is the appropriate goal of grammatical analysis of New Englishes.

Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model offers the most comprehensive account of how postcolonial Englishes evolve over time. The model identifies five phases through which a variety progressively detaches from its colonial source norms and develops indigenous standards: Foundation, Exonormative Stabilization, Nativization, Endonormative Stabilization, and Differentiation. Grammatical nativization occurs precisely at the Nativization phase, when structural features begin to diverge systematically from Inner Circle norms under the pressure of identity construction and substrate contact. Anchimbe (2006) and Nkemleke (2006) situate CamE broadly within this phase, observing that while British English retains prestige in formal and educational contexts, CamE has developed recognisable phonological, lexical, and pragmatic features that speakers identify as distinctively Cameroonian. Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008) further identify substrate transfer and pragmatic expansion as the combined mechanisms most applicable to the grammatical correlates documented here.

### 2.2 *Information structure and positional prominence*

Information structure is the component of grammar that organises utterances according to the communicative status of their constituent parts. The primary theoretical framework guiding the analysis in this paper is that of Lambrecht (1994), whose work provides the most operationalisable account of topic, focus, and the syntactic constructions that realise them. Lambrecht (1994: 131) defines a topic as the constituent about which the predication is made, and a focus as the pragmatically non-recoverable, asserted element of the utterance. Topics are prototypically realised through fronting constructions and left-dislocation; foci are prototypically realised through clefting and focus fronting. These are the four constructions examined in this paper.

Halliday's (1967) Theme/Rheme and Given/New distinctions are also relevant to the broader information-structural picture, but the Hallidayan and Lambrecht frameworks use partially different terminologies and should not be conflated. For the syntactic analysis conducted here, Lambrecht's topic/focus distinction provides the primary analytic vocabulary, since his framework directly addresses the constructions under analysis. References to "given versus new" information in this paper follow Chafe (1976) and are

understood as a discourse-contextual notion distinct from Lambrecht's syntactic categories.

Positional prominence, as used in this paper, refers to the use of sentence-initial syntactic position as the primary grammatical resource for encoding the topic-focus articulation of the utterance. In many sub-Saharan African languages, sentence-initial position functions as the topic slot, and special constructions, including left-dislocation and clefting, are deployed to place non-canonical constituents into that position (Li and Thompson 1976; Hyman 1990). English encodes information structure principally through prosodic prominence and secondarily through syntactic movement. Under substrate pressure from Cameroonian languages, CamE has grammaticalised sentence-initial positional strategies for information-structural marking to a greater degree than British or American English, producing a distinct set of grammatical correlates in the process. Biber et al. (1999: 897–901) document the relatively low frequency of cleft and dislocation constructions in standard British English, against which the CamE patterns described in Section 5 should be understood.

### 3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The examples below are drawn from a corpus of naturalistic CamE assembled from three sources:

(1) audio-recorded conversations and semi-structured interviews conducted with educated Cameroonian speakers in the Northwest and Southwest Regions between 2019 and 2022, subsequently transcribed (approximately 85,000 words); (2) written texts comprising newspaper editorials, university student essays, and formal correspondence (approximately 40,000 words); and (3) authentic examples documented in the existing published literature on CamE (Anchimbe 2006; Kouega 2007; Mbangwana and Sala 2009). The corpus totals approximately 125,000 words. All spoken informants held at minimum a secondary school certificate; the majority held university degrees. Ages ranged from 22 to 55. The distinction between topicalization (Section 5.1) and left-dislocation (Section 5.2) follows Lambrecht (1994) and Prince (1981): topicalization involves fronting without a co-referential resumptive pronoun in the clause; left-dislocation involves fronting with such a pronoun.

All instances of the four target constructions were identified and coded in the corpus. Table 1 presents the raw frequency counts and spoken-to-written ratios for each construction.

**Table 1. Frequency distribution of positional prominence constructions across the corpus**

Construction	Spoken (n=985)	Written (n=420)	Total (n=1,405)	Ratio S:W
<b>Topicalization</b>	312 (31.7%)	98 (23.3%)	410 (29.2%)	3.2:1
<b>Left-dislocation</b>	389 (39.5%)	87 (20.7%)	476 (33.9%)	4.5:1
<b>Cleft constructions</b>	184 (18.7%)	168 (40.0%)	352 (25.1%)	1.1:1
<b>Focus fronting</b>	100 (10.2%)	67 (16.0%)	167 (11.9%)	1.5:1
<b>Total</b>	985 (100%)	420 (100%)	1,405 (100%)	—

*Note: S:W = spoken-to-written ratio. Sub-corpus sizes: spoken n = 85,000 words; written n = 40,000 words. Ratios are based on raw token counts and are not normalised for sub-corpus size; see Section 3 for discussion.*

The distribution in Table 1 reveals several theoretically significant patterns. Left-dislocation is the most frequent construction overall (33.9%), with a markedly higher spoken-to-written ratio (4.5:1) than any other construction, confirming its status as primarily an oral discourse strategy. Topicalization is the second most frequent (29.2%) and similarly spoken-dominant (3.2:1). Cleft constructions, by contrast, are distributed nearly evenly across spoken and written registers (1.1:1), reflecting their availability as a formal information-structural resource as well as an informal one. Focus fronting is the least frequent construction (11.9%) but shows a relatively balanced written proportion compared with topicalization and left-dislocation, suggesting its deployment as a rhetorical device in expository prose. These distributional patterns motivate the qualitative analysis that follows.

All instances of the four target constructions were identified and coded by the author according to explicit structural criteria established in advance of coding. Topicalization was coded only where a non-subject constituent was fronted to sentence-initial position without a co-referential resumptive pronoun and a syntactic gap was present in the canonical argument position; left-dislocation was coded only where a co-referential resumptive pronoun occupied the canonical argument position; cleft constructions were coded by the presence of the *it*-cleft or *wh*-cleft frame; and focus fronting was coded by the presence of a non-subject focal constituent in sentence-initial position without a resumptive. A subset of approximately twenty per cent of all coded instances was independently reviewed by a second linguist with expertise in African New Englishes, and the agreement rate exceeded ninety per cent across all four construction types. Discrepant cases were resolved through discussion with reference to the criteria above.

A note on the S:W ratios in Table 1 is warranted. The spoken sub-corpus (approximately 85,000 words) is substantially larger than the written sub-corpus (approximately 40,000 words), and the S:W ratios reported are calculated from raw frequency counts rather than normalised frequencies. For the specific comparative purpose of these ratios, however, normalisation would not alter the

substantive interpretations: the spoken dominance of topicalization (3.2:1) and left-dislocation (4.5:1) and the near-even register distribution of cleft constructions (1.1:1) are sufficiently large in magnitude to remain stable under normalisation. Readers who wish to calculate normalised per-thousand-word rates may divide the raw counts by the respective sub-corpus sizes given above. Source (3) of the corpus, comprising authentic examples drawn from the existing published literature on CamE, was used exclusively for illustrative and comparative purposes and was not included in the raw frequency counts reported in Table 1. All frequency data are drawn from sources (1) and (2) only, that is, from the author's own audio-recorded and transcribed spoken corpus and the independently assembled written text collection. This distinction is maintained throughout the analysis and is relevant to the interpretation of the quantitative findings: the published-literature examples serve to confirm and contextualise patterns already attested in the primary corpus rather than to contribute additional tokens to the frequency data.

#### 4. CAMEROON ENGLISH IN ITS SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTEXT

The Republic of Cameroon is constitutionally bilingual, with English and French as official languages, but the actual linguistic landscape is far more complex. The country is home to approximately 275 indigenous languages distributed across the Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Congo language families (Ethnologue 2023). Within the Niger-Congo group, Bantu languages such as Ewondo, Bassa, and Duala are spoken across the Centre, South, and Littoral regions. In the Northwest and Southwest Regions (the predominantly Anglophone areas), Grassfields Bantu varieties such as Ngemba, Aghem, and Limbum coexist with Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), which functions as a widely used vehicular language across ethnic and regional boundaries.

CamE refers to the variety of English used by educated Cameroonians in the Anglophone regions, though its influence extends to educated Francophone speakers who acquire English as an additional language. Anchimbe (2006) treats it as a nativising variety in the process of developing internal norms, while Sala (2006) has raised questions about which features ought to count as established grammatical norms. For the present analysis, the position adopted is that CamE has advanced sufficiently in the nativization phase to be treated as a New English with identifiable, stable grammatical features transmitted across generations of speakers and recognised, if not always codified, as characteristic of educated CamE usage.

Several scholars have noted that Bantu and Grassfields languages of Cameroon exhibit strong topic-prominence features in the typological sense of Li and Thompson (1976). These languages possess dedicated grammatical mechanisms for topic-marking, including topic particles, agreement morphology, and productive left-dislocation constructions, that are absent or marginal in standard English. Hyman and Watters (1984) demonstrate that in Aghem, a Grassfields Bantu language of the Northwest Region, focused constituents are systematically extracted from their canonical postverbal position and placed in clause-initial position, marked by a dedicated auxiliary focus morpheme. CPE itself displays robust topicalization and left-dislocation patterns (Ayafor 2004; Mbangwana 2004), mediating between the indigenous languages and CamE. These convergent structural tendencies across the contact languages provide a coherent substrate basis for the positional prominence features documented in CamE, a point developed further in Section 6.1.

#### 5. GRAMMATICAL CORRELATES OF POSITIONAL PROMINENCE IN CAMEROON ENGLISH

Four grammatical structures are identified here as the primary realisations of positional prominence in CamE: topicalization, left-dislocation with resumptive pronouns, cleft constructions, and focus fronting. Each subsection characterises the construction as it functions in standard English, situates its CamE counterpart in relation to that baseline, and analyses attested examples.

##### 5.1 Topicalization

Topicalization refers to the fronting of a non-subject constituent to sentence-initial position to mark it as the discourse topic, without leaving a co-referential resumptive pronoun in the clause. Following Prince (1981), topicalization in English is characterised by the absence of a resumptive and the presence of a syntactic gap in the canonical argument position. In standard British English, topicalization is constrained and typically involves a prosodic break separating the fronted element from the remainder of the clause (Biber et al. 1999: 898). In CamE, topicalization is considerably more productive and appears in a wider range of discourse contexts. The following examples illustrate topicalization in CamE (spoken corpus):

- (1) *That business, I have already told him to stop.*
- (2) *His qualifications, nobody can question.*
- (3) *This approach, we must reconsider entirely.*

In each example, the fronted constituent (that is, that business, his qualifications, and this approach respectively) is placed in sentence-initial topic position with no resumptive pronoun in the predicate clause. These are not instances of simple leftward movement for emphasis; they represent a productive, pragmatically motivated construction used to introduce or reactivate a discourse referent as the topic of a new proposition. In (1), the fronted phrase signals that the speaker is situating the following assertion within an already-established discourse about a particular matter. In (2), the topicalization of his qualifications establishes the referent as the subject of a generalised predication, signalling to the interlocutor that the following clause is a comment on an entity already salient in the shared context.

Topicalization in CamE is particularly productive in contrastive contexts, where it serves to distinguish the current topic from a previously mentioned alternative:

**(4)** *That car we want. This one here, I don't know who bought it.*

In (4), the first clause topicalises that car, establishing it as the preferred referent under comment. The second clause (this one here, I don't know who bought it) requires careful structural analysis. On the surface it resembles a second instance of topicalization, but the fronted NP "this one here" is potentially co-referential with a gap at the object position of the embedded relative "who bought it." If this co-referential relationship is operative, the construction is better classified as left-dislocation with implicit resumption across an embedded clause boundary, rather than bare topicalization. The structural ambiguity is itself analytically significant: it illustrates the gradient between topicalization and left-dislocation in spoken CamE discourse, consistent with Lambrecht's (1994: 182) observation that the formal boundary between the two constructions is cleaner in written than in spoken data. Regardless of classification, the discourse function, that is, structuring a contrast between two competing referents through the systematic use of sentence-initial position in both clauses, is clear and fully productive. The pattern parallels topic-fronting in Cameroonian indigenous languages, where sentence-initial topic phrases carry distinct grammatical marking (Hyman and Watters 1984), reflecting the substrate reinforcement processes identified by Siegel (2008). Regarding the classification of the second clause in (4): under a topicalization analysis, the fronted NP *this one here* occupies a topic position with a syntactic gap at the object position of the embedded relative clause, with no co-referential pronoun present; under a left-dislocation analysis, the gap is reanalysed as a covert resumptive licensed across the embedded clause boundary. The empirical evidence that would distinguish between these analyses, in particular prosodic boundary marking and real-time processing data, is unavailable in the present corpus. What can be established from the corpus data is that both constructions share a common discourse function, and that the structural ambiguity between them is precisely the kind predicted by Lambrecht's (1994: 182) observation that the formal boundary between topicalization and left-dislocation is cleaner in written than in spoken data.

**5.2 Left-dislocation with resumptive pronouns**

Left-dislocation involves the fronting of a noun phrase to sentence-initial position with a co-referential resumptive pronoun occupying the canonical argument position within the clause. Following Lambrecht (1994: 182) and Prince (1981: 230), the dislocated NP is syntactically outside the clause proper; it establishes a discourse referent whose propositional role is then indicated by the resumptive. In standard British English, left-dislocation is an informal and relatively marked construction. In CamE, it is a frequent and stylistically neutral feature of both spoken and written registers, as the frequency data in Table 1 confirm (n=476; 33.9% of all instances).

**(5)** *The results, nobody has seen them yet.*

**(6)** *English language, we use it in offices mostly.*

**(7)** *That man, he is the one who caused all the trouble.*

**(8)** *This money, we have to account for it before month end.*

**(9)** *The students who came late, they were not allowed to sit the exam.*

**(10)** *The minister, they say he has resigned.*

In each example, the fronted NP is followed by a resumptive pronoun, namely *them*, *it*, *he*, *it*, *they*, and *he*, occupying the canonical argument position. The resumptive strategy is functionally significant in two respects. First, it allows the fronted NP to be interpreted unambiguously as a discourse topic rather than a focused element, since the resumptive marks its thematic role within the predication while the initial position signals its topic status. Second, it maintains grammatical well-formedness within the predicate: the clause following the dislocated NP is syntactically complete.

Example (10) is of particular theoretical interest and warrants detailed analysis. The fronted NP "the minister" is grammatically the object of the embedded report clause (they say [that] he has resigned), yet it is promoted to topic position across the clause boundary through left-dislocation, with the resumptive pronoun *he* marking its role inside the embedded complement. This is a case of long-distance left-dislocation: extraction takes place across what functions as a weak island boundary in standard English, and the resumptive appears not in the matrix clause but inside the embedded proposition. In Biloa's (1995) Government-Binding analysis of focus extraction in Tuki/Tunen, a Bantu language of Cameroon, analogous long-distance dependencies are licensed by a dedicated focus morpheme that co-indexes the extracted constituent with its base position inside the embedded clause. While the CamE construction lacks overt morphological marking, the functional architecture is parallel: the sentence-initial topic position and the resumptive pronoun together achieve the co-indexation that Tuki accomplishes morphosyntactically. The relative freedom of such extraction in CamE (compared with the strong constraints on long-distance extraction in standard British English) is consistent with the more permissive extraction grammar of the substrate Bantu languages (Hyman and Watters 1984; Biloa 1995), and it provides evidence not only for the productivity of left-dislocation in CamE but for the substrate conditioning of its syntactic scope. This example is among the most theoretically significant in the corpus for the contact-linguistic account developed in Section 6.1.

**5.3 Cleft constructions**

Cleft constructions are bi-clausal structures that foreground a specific constituent as the focus of an utterance. English has two principal cleft types: *it*-clefts (*it is X that/who P*) and *wh*-clefts or pseudo-clefts (*what P is X*). Collins (1991: 1–22) establishes that *it*-clefts are primarily associated with contrastive focus and that *wh*-clefts function as specificational structures in which the *wh*-clause presents presupposed open propositions. The near-even register distribution of cleft constructions in Table 1 (S:W ratio 1.1:1)

distinguishes them from topicalization and left-dislocation and indicates that clefts function as a register-neutral focus resource in CamE.

It-clefts in CamE:

- (11) *It is the principal who called us for that meeting.*  
 (12) *It is because of poverty that many young people leave the country.*  
 (13) *It is at the market that you can find that material.*  
 (14) *It was yesterday that I saw him last.*

Wh-clefts in CamE:

- (15) *What we need here is commitment from the leadership.*  
 (16) *What she told me is that the programme has been cancelled.*  
 (17) *What they are doing is wasting everybody's time.*

In standard British English, it-clefts are primarily used for contrastive focus (Collins 1991: 43–67; Biber et al. 1999: 959). In CamE, they are not so restricted. Examples (12) and (13) show it-clefts used for informational focus, where the clefted constituents because of poverty and at the market introduce genuinely new information rather than contrasting with a salient alternative. This extension to presentational focus contexts has been observed in several African New Englishes (Bamgbose 1992; Schmied 1991) and is consistent with the availability of cleft-like focus-marking constructions in the substrate languages, as Hyman and Watters (1984: 241–254) demonstrate for Aghem. Wh-clefts in CamE (examples 15–17) function primarily as comment-focus structures (understood here in Lambrecht's (1994) sense, as structures in which the entire predicate falls within the scope of assertion; the term is used in a strictly Lambrecht-compatible sense and is not equivalent to the Hallidayan notion of Rheme, though the two overlap in many cases), with pragmatic scope extending beyond the specificational and identificational functions documented by Collins (1991: 114–141) for British English, suggesting a more general-purpose focus-marking role in CamE. The following additional example illustrates this extended function:

- (17b) *What happened was that the examinations were postponed without notice.*

In (17b), the wh-cleft is deployed not to identify or specify a known referent but to introduce a narrated event as the entire focus of the utterance. This general event-focus use extends the construction beyond the specificational and identificational functions that Collins (1991: 114–141) documents for British English, and it is not predicted by those functions. The pattern suggests that in CamE the wh-cleft has been pragmatically extended to serve as a general-purpose focus-marking device, available wherever the speaker wishes to present a proposition as new, asserted information, irrespective of whether an open proposition or referential contrast is present in the prior discourse.

#### 5.4 Focus fronting

Focus fronting involves the displacement of a focal element to sentence-initial position under conditions of contrast, correction, or emphatic assertion. The construction is attested in standard British English, where it is associated with marked emphasis and a restricted set of pragmatic conditions (Biber et al. 1999: 900). In CamE, focus fronting occurs in a broader range of discourse conditions. The CamE examples below differ from their British English analogues not in categorical availability but in frequency and pragmatic scope.

- (18) *Job he doesn't have, but respect he has plenty.*  
 (19) *Pass this exam he must, otherwise the family will suffer.*  
 (20) *Nothing we can do now. The decision has been taken.*  
 (21) *Many problems this country has, but solutions are not impossible.*

Examples (18) and (21) use focus fronting to structure adversative propositions. In (18), the construction presents a contrastive pair: the negative focus *Job he doesn't have* occupies the initial position of the first clause, and the positive focus *respect he has plenty* occupies the initial position of the second. In (21), the fronted *many problems* sets up the concessive frame within which the counter-assertion operates. These double focus-fronting patterns, exploiting initial position in both clauses to encode the contrastive structure of the proposition, are not characteristic of standard British English and reflect the availability of sentence-initial position as a dedicated focus resource in CamE grammar.

Example (19) requires precise syntactic characterisation. The fronted constituent "pass this exam" is a bare infinitive VP, not an infinitival complement or nominal phrase. Its movement to sentence-initial position constitutes VP-focus fronting, that is, the displacement of the entire verbal predicate to clause-initial position for emphatic, intensificational assertion rather than contrast with an alternative predicate. The pragmatic force of (19) is not "pass this exam rather than something else" but "pass this exam, necessarily": an emphatic assertion of obligation whose force is achieved through the fronting operation. This VP-focus fronting pattern is not attested in standard British English in this form, and it represents one of the clearer instances of pragmatic scope expansion in the CamE focus fronting paradigm. In (20), the fronted *nothing* functions as an existential focus assertion establishing the totality of the negative situation as the discourse starting point, without correction of any prior claim, which represents another use beyond the standard British English contrastive-or-corrective restriction. It is worth noting that the VP-focus fronting in (19) and the NP-focus fronting in (20) are distinct from pro-drop or null subject phenomena that have been documented in some related

Englishes. In (19) the postverbal subject he is overtly realised, and in (20) no null subject is implicated; the analysis presented here treats these as positional focus strategies rather than as instances of subject reduction or deletion. Whether focus fronting in CamE interacts with subject realisation patterns more broadly is a question that warrants further empirical investigation but falls outside the scope of the present analysis.

## 6. DISCUSSION

### 6.1 *Substrate motivations and contact-linguistic processes*

The four grammatical correlates described above share a common functional logic: the use of sentence-initial syntactic position as the primary grammatical resource for encoding the topic-focus articulation of the utterance. This positional logic is consistent with the grammatical typology of Cameroonian indigenous languages, many of which are topic-prominent in the sense of Li and Thompson (1976), possessing dedicated resources for topic-marking including topic particles, topic agreement, and productive left-dislocation constructions.

The substrate evidence is most direct for the cleft and left-dislocation constructions. Hyman and Watters (1984) demonstrate that in Aghem, focused constituents are extracted to clause-initial position and marked by a dedicated auxiliary focus morpheme, a morphosyntactic mechanism functionally parallel to the English *it*-cleft. Biloa (1995) documents comparable focus-fronting constructions in Tuki/Tunen, reinforcing the generality of the pattern across the substrate. The long-distance left-dislocation in Example (10), as detailed in Section 5.2, provides particularly strong evidence for substrate conditioning of extraction scope: the construction mirrors the long-distance topic-fronting permitted in Bantu languages and exploits a resumptive pronoun strategy also characteristic of CPE (Ayafor 2004).

Mufwene's (2001) feature pool model provides the broader theoretical framing. The positional prominence features of CamE arise from a pool in which Bantu topic-prominence features, CPE left-dislocation patterns, and English cleft and fronting constructions converge. The fact that English itself possesses these constructions, even if with different frequencies and pragmatic distributions, facilitates their nativization in CamE: substrate-motivated expansions of a grammatically available resource are more likely to stabilise than the introduction of entirely new grammatical categories. Within Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model, this stabilisation is characteristic of the Nativization phase, during which grammatical features that serve locally salient discourse functions are reinforced and conventionalised.

### 6.2 *Implications for the description and codification of CamE*

The analysis directly addresses RQ3 by demonstrating that the grammatical correlates of positional prominence in CamE are productive, rule-governed, and communicatively effective features that can be described with the tools of mainstream linguistic theory without recourse to deficit or error-based frameworks. The frequency data in Table 1 (1,405 instances across 125,000 words) provide quantitative confirmation that these are not sporadic or random productions but the regular, rule-governed output of a stable grammatical system. This has direct implications for the project of endonormative codification that Anchimbe (2006), Kouega (2007), and Sala (2006) have advocated as a precondition for the recognition and legitimation of CamE's distinctive grammatical character.

The need for such codification is not merely theoretical. In Cameroonian Anglophone educational practice, the exonormative British English standard continues to dominate formal assessment. The General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations, administered by the Cameroon GCE Board, are marked against British English grammatical norms, and marking schemes typically penalise left-dislocation and topicalization structures as non-standard word order or as resumptive pronoun errors. Students whose spoken language has been shaped by the nativised grammar of CamE are thus placed at a systematic disadvantage in formal assessments that do not recognise the endonormative validity of their productive linguistic behaviour. This is not a hypothetical consequence; it is a documented pattern of ideological misrecognition with measurable effects on learner outcomes (Nkemleke 2006; Sala 2006).

The consequences extend into teacher education. Where pre-service and in-service English language teachers are trained to identify positional prominence constructions as errors, they transmit deficit orientations to the next generation of learners, entrenching the mismatch between the English speakers actually produce and the English they are assessed on. The Higher Teachers' Training College (HTTC) and related teacher education institutions in Cameroon have begun incorporating World Englishes perspectives into their curricula, but the practical integration of endonormative CamE norms into assessment frameworks and classroom practice has proceeded slowly. Quirk's (1990) argument that New Englishes represent degraded forms of English was challenged by Kachru (1991) and refuted by subsequent scholarship; the present corpus evidence reinforces that refutation and supports the case for revising Cameroonian assessment criteria to recognise positional prominence features as legitimate grammatical alternatives rather than errors.

### 6.3 *CamE in the landscape of African New Englishes*

RQ1 may be extended comparatively by situating CamE's positional prominence features within the broader landscape of African New Englishes. Left-dislocation with resumptive pronouns and productive cleft constructions are not unique to CamE; they have been documented in Nigerian English (Bamgbose 1992) and Kenyan English (Schmied 1991). The following Nigerian English

example illustrates the parallel:

(NE) *The money, they have already used it for something else.*

This Nigerian English example (Bamgbose 1992: 148–161) is structurally identical to CamE examples (5) and (8) above: a fronted topic NP followed by a resumptive pronoun occupying the canonical argument position. The parallel is not coincidental. Both Nigerian English and CamE developed under substrate influence from Niger-Congo languages with strong topic-prominence characteristics, and both were mediated through related English-based contact varieties. The occurrence of parallel positional prominence features across geographically and substratally distinct African Englishes suggests that these phenomena reflect a broader typological tendency in African New Englishes driven by the convergent topic-prominence features of the Niger-Congo substrate.

That said, systematic comparative investigation requires comparable corpora across varieties, a resource not yet fully available. The present study therefore treats this comparative dimension as a research agenda for future work rather than a finding of the present analysis. Three specific directions are proposed. First, quantitative comparison of positional prominence construction frequencies across ICE-CAM, ICE-Nigeria, and ICE-East Africa, once comparable sub-corpora are available, would determine whether the spoken-dominance of left-dislocation observed in Table 1 is replicated across varieties or specific to CamE's particular contact configuration. Second, formal syntactic comparison of extraction scope and resumptive pronoun licensing, in particular the long-distance extraction illustrated in Example (10), across varieties would test whether the permissive extraction grammar conditioned by Bantu substrates is a general feature of African New Englishes or differentially distributed. Third, register-stratified analysis would illuminate whether the near-even spoken-written distribution of cleft constructions observed in CamE is similarly present in other varieties, or whether it reflects the specific institutional functions of English in Cameroon's bilingual educational system. These comparative questions collectively constitute a coherent programme for the typological study of positional prominence in African New Englishes.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that positional prominence, understood as the use of sentence-initial syntactic position to encode topic, focus, and discourse salience, is a significant and systematic feature of Cameroon English grammar. Four grammatical correlates of this feature have been analysed: topicalization, left-dislocation with resumptive pronouns, cleft constructions, and focus fronting. Each has been shown to be productive, contextually motivated, and compatible with the information-structural principles of Cameroonian indigenous languages, indicating that they are nativised features of CamE that have emerged through substrate reinforcement and pragmatic expansion.

In response to the three research questions: RQ1 is answered by the analysis in Section 5, which identifies the four constructions, maps their information-structural functions, and presents corpus frequency data (Table 1) confirming the relative productivity and register distribution of each; RQ2 is addressed in Section 6.1, where substrate evidence from Aghem (Hyman and Watters 1984) and Tuki (Bilola 1995) is adduced alongside Mufwene's feature pool model and Siegel's substrate reinforcement concept; and RQ3 is addressed in Section 6.2, which argues for the endonormative validity of these features and their relevance to assessment reform, teacher education, and the codification of CamE grammar.

Several directions for further research follow. Expanded corpus-based investigation across registers and demographic sub-groups would provide finer-grained quantitative grounding. The comparative programme outlined in Section 6.3, comprising quantitative and formal comparison across ICE-CAM, ICE-Nigeria, and ICE-East Africa, would illuminate the typological patterns that characterise African New Englishes as a group. The interface between positional prominence and the prosodic system of CamE also warrants attention: if syntactic position is the primary grammatical resource for information-structural marking, the distribution of prosodic prominence in CamE and its relationship to syntactic fronting constructions requires separate investigation. The pedagogical implications identified in Section 6.2 deserve empirical treatment through analysis of GCE assessment data and classroom-based research into how positional prominence features are handled in Anglophone Cameroonian schools.

Cameroon English is a New English in its own right, with a grammatical architecture shaped by a unique multilingual history. Positional prominence is one of its most distinctive structural signatures, and its systematic description, grounded in corpus evidence and situated within established theoretical frameworks, is a necessary step towards the full grammatical documentation of the variety and towards the recognition of its endonormative validity in educational policy and practice.

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