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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-59531

Title: Interferences linguistiques et alternance codique dans l'usage du français et des langues locales dans les marchés urbains d'Avotrou et de Midombo (Cotonou, Bénin).

Recommendation:
Accept as it is .....
Accept after Minor revision.....
Accept after Major revision .....
Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	✓			
Techn. Quality		✔		
Clarity		✔		
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

Reviewer's Comment for Publication.

The manuscript examines language contact in two urban markets in Cotonou, Avotrou and Midombo, focusing on the relationship between French and local languages, particularly Goun and Yoruba, in commercial interactions. Its principal strength lies in the choice of a setting that remains less explored in the literature reviewed by the author: everyday marketplace communication, where language choices are shaped by practical needs, bargaining, social relationships, and the desire to establish trust. The study also attempts to distinguish code-switching from linguistic interference and borrowing, a distinction that is important to its analytical purpose. The reported findings suggest that multilingual practices are widespread among the 30 respondents and that language choice varies between ordinary commercial exchanges and negotiation. Nevertheless, the manuscript's most important contribution is not yet fully realised because the empirical material is too limited to sustain some of the linguistic and functional claims, and the relationship between the study's stated objectives, hypotheses, data collection, and analysis requires greater consistency. The following revisions would help strengthen the paper while preserving its exploratory character.

The first issue concerns the title and the relationship between the two central concepts. The title places linguistic interference and code-switching on equal footing, suggesting that the study systematically documents both phenomena. However, the empirical sections provide considerably more evidence about

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respondents' reported language choices and the perceived functions of code-switching than about linguistic interference itself. The three tables in Section 4 report the languages used, languages employed during negotiation, and respondents' self-reported practice of code-switching. They do not measure the frequency of interference or provide a systematic corpus of examples across phonological, lexical, and syntactic levels. Indeed, Section 5.6 explicitly acknowledges that the first hypothesis concerning interference is supported only qualitatively. The authors should therefore decide whether to retain the current title and strengthen the evidence for interference, or revise the title to reflect the study's actual empirical emphasis. If the available data cannot be supplemented, a title foregrounding code-switching and multilingual practices in the two markets, with linguistic interference treated as a secondary exploratory theme, would be more accurate. This is a substantive issue rather than a cosmetic one, because the title determines what readers expect the research to demonstrate.

A second concern is the inconsistency between the research questions and hypotheses presented in the Introduction and Section 2. The Introduction identifies three questions: the forms of interference observed, the situations in which speakers change languages, and the role of code-switching in seller–customer communication. Section 2.2, however, presents a single general hypothesis concerning the contribution of interference and code-switching to comprehension and commercial efficiency. Section 5.6 subsequently refers to a first, second, and third hypothesis, including hypotheses about the frequency of interference and variation across situations. These hypotheses are not all stated in the hypothesis section as presented. The authors should correct this inconsistency by either listing the three hypotheses explicitly in Section 2.2 or removing references to separate hypotheses in the discussion and organising the analysis around the stated research questions. The first option would be appropriate if the hypotheses genuinely guided data collection; otherwise, the second would avoid presenting the analysis as a test of propositions that were not clearly formulated in advance. In either case, the conclusion should evaluate the research questions and hypotheses using the same terminology as the earlier sections.

The methodology in Section 3 requires clarification, particularly regarding the relationship between the stated sampling procedure and the actual data collected. The authors describe the sample as a random sample of 30 people, comprising 15 traders and 15 customers, and state that data were collected through direct interviews. Yet the manuscript does not explain how respondents were selected in the two markets, how many participants came from each market, or what procedure made the selection random. Nor does it provide the interview questions or explain whether the same questions were put to traders and customers. These details matter because the findings concern language practices that may differ according to a person's role in a transaction, familiarity with the market, linguistic repertoire, and position in the bargaining process. The authors should add a concise account of the sampling procedure,

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distribution of participants between Avotrou and Midombo, and structure of the interview instrument. If the selection was based on availability or willingness to participate during market activity, it would be more accurate to describe it as a convenience or purposive sample rather than random sampling. The paper need not claim representativeness; it needs to describe the procedure honestly and transparently.

The distinction between reported language practices and observed linguistic behaviour should be maintained more consistently throughout the analysis. Section 3.3 states that the data are primarily declarative, while Section 4.3 appropriately acknowledges that respondents' answers do not measure the actual frequency or form of code-switching. Nevertheless, Sections 5.1–5.4 often describe communicative, identity-related, commercial, humorous, and emotional functions as though these functions had been directly established from observed conversations. For example, Section 5.3 argues that code-switching can allow traders to negotiate strategically, communicate privately, or create an information advantage over customers who do not understand a particular language. These are plausible sociolinguistic interpretations, but the manuscript does not present specific conversational extracts or interview responses demonstrating that these practices occurred among the respondents. The authors should distinguish between functions explicitly reported by participants, functions inferred from the language-use patterns, and possibilities proposed from the theoretical literature. Where the evidence is inferential, formulations such as "may serve," "could facilitate," or "the literature suggests" would be more defensible than categorical claims. This would improve the analysis without requiring the authors to abandon its functional perspective.

The treatment of code-switching in Section 5 would also benefit from a stronger connection between the theoretical framework and the empirical material. The literature review introduces Gumperz, Poplack, Mackey, and Zongo, providing a useful basis for examining both the structural organisation and the interactional functions of language alternation. However, the discussion mainly organises its findings into broad functional categories rather than demonstrating how individual instances fit those categories. For example, the analysis of identity draws on Gumperz's distinction between "we-code" and "they-code," while the commercial discussion proposes that switching languages may establish trust or create an advantage in bargaining. The manuscript would be more convincing if each major function were illustrated by at least one concrete instance from the interviews or, preferably, a recorded interaction with an accompanying translation and explanation of the context. Such evidence would allow readers to assess whether a switch actually marks affiliation, facilitates understanding, expresses emotion, or serves a bargaining strategy. If no interactional recordings or sufficiently detailed interview extracts are available, the authors should present these categories as interpretive possibilities rather than as empirically demonstrated functions of the sampled exchanges.

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The quantitative findings in Tables 1 and 2 are potentially useful, but their interpretation needs to be more precise. Table 1 indicates that 10 respondents report using French and Goun, another 10 French and Yoruba, four French alone, three Yoruba alone, and three French, Goun, and Yoruba. Table 2 presents a different distribution for negotiation, with Yoruba and Goun the most frequently reported combination. The manuscript interprets these differences as evidence that language choice varies according to communicative situation. That interpretation is plausible, but the two tables appear to classify respondents by reported language use rather than record repeated observations of the same individuals in two defined interactional contexts. The authors should clarify whether each participant answered separate questions about ordinary commercial exchanges and negotiation, whether the response categories were mutually exclusive, and how the language combinations were recorded. If the same participants responded to both questions, the authors may describe the distributions as differences in reported use across contexts; they should not imply that the tables demonstrate observed switching within individual conversations. This distinction is important for the validity of the paper's central argument about situational variation.

There is also a small but important interpretive issue in the calculation of language-use percentages. The manuscript reports that 23 respondents, or 76.7%, combine French with at least one local language in Table 1, and that Yoruba appears alone or in combination in 16 cases while Goun appears in 13. These calculations are consistent with the categories presented, but the language combinations overlap in terms of which languages are present. The authors should briefly clarify that the percentages for the presence of individual languages are not mutually exclusive and therefore should not be added together as if they represented separate respondent groups. More importantly, the tables identify French, Yoruba, and Goun as the principal reported languages, but the limitations section notes that Fon does not appear in the results despite its presence in Cotonou's linguistic environment. The authors should explain whether Fon was included as an option in the questionnaire, whether respondents mentioned it, and whether the absence reflects the sample or the design of the instrument. This matters because the paper presents itself as an account of multilingual language practices in urban markets, and the set of languages made visible by the questionnaire shapes the findings.

The analysis of linguistic interference in Sections 5.5.1–5.5.3 is the area where the manuscript most urgently needs additional empirical specificity. Section 5.5.1 discusses phonetic and phonological interference but provides no concrete example of a pronunciation pattern, no phonetic transcription, and no explanation of which French sound or syllabic pattern is allegedly influenced by Goun or Yoruba. Section 5.5.2 acknowledges the difficulty of distinguishing lexical interference from borrowing and intraphrastic code-switching, but does not provide individual lexical items that would allow the reader to

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assess their degree of integration or the nature of the transfer. Section 5.5.3 gives the example "c'est ça moi je veux à 1000F" and offers a plausible syntactic analysis involving a presentative, subject dislocation, and an omitted relative marker. Crucially, however, the authors themselves acknowledge that a transfer from a local language remains to be verified through contrastive analysis. The same caution should guide the whole discussion of interference. The authors should provide a small, carefully selected set of examples, each accompanied by its context, the proposed classification, and an explanation of the linguistic feature involved. For phonological claims, the evidence should identify the relevant pronunciation feature; for lexical claims, it should distinguish established borrowing, code-switching, and semantic transfer; and for syntactic claims, it should demonstrate why the construction is attributable to language contact rather than to ordinary spoken French or a locally established variety of French. If the study did not collect sufficient linguistic data for these distinctions, the claims should be narrowed accordingly.

This last point also raises a broader conceptual concern about the manuscript's treatment of French as the norm against which interference is identified. The Introduction describes local French as deviating from the school norm, while Section 5.5.3 more appropriately cautions against treating an intelligible spoken construction as "asyntaxic." The latter is a useful distinction and deserves to inform the analysis more consistently. A construction that differs from prescriptive or school-taught French is not necessarily evidence of interference; it may reflect ordinary spoken French, a regional or contact variety, discourse-pragmatic choices, or a conventional local construction. To classify an instance as interference, the authors need to demonstrate a plausible transfer mechanism rather than simply identify a difference from standard written French. A brief clarification of the analytical standard used to distinguish contact-induced transfer from spoken-language variation would make the paper more linguistically rigorous and avoid inadvertently presenting multilingual speakers' practices as deficient forms of communication.

The discussion of commercial functions in Section 5.3 has the potential to be the manuscript's most distinctive contribution, but it should be developed with greater analytical balance. The argument that language choice can facilitate bargaining and create proximity between sellers and customers is consistent with the setting and the reported patterns. The further suggestion that code-switching can be used to conceal information or exploit a customer's lack of understanding is more consequential. The paper currently moves from the general possibility of a "cryptic" function to an example in which a seller may charge a higher price, without presenting a specific incident or participant testimony to substantiate this behaviour. The authors should either provide evidence from the interviews supporting this interpretation or retain it as a theoretical possibility discussed in the literature. They should also recognise that language choice may be cooperative, strategic, or exclusionary depending on the interaction, rather

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than assigning a single commercial function to the practice. Such a distinction would strengthen the argument by showing that multilingual communication is not inherently beneficial or disadvantageous but is shaped by the participants' linguistic resources and bargaining positions.

Finally, the manuscript would benefit from a more focused conclusion and a careful editorial review. The conclusion largely restates the reported percentages and functional categories, while the recommendations propose general measures such as encouraging language-sensitive communication, valuing local languages, and strengthening French in formal professional situations. These recommendations are reasonable but could be tied more directly to the evidence and to the paper's stated didactic implications. In particular, the authors should explain what the findings suggest for French-language teaching without implying that the study has demonstrated specific learning outcomes. The recommendation to reduce penalties for interference in written work is drawn from earlier literature, but the present study concerns marketplace interactions rather than student writing; this distinction should be made explicit. The reference list should also be checked for completeness and consistency, including full bibliographic information for works cited in the text. In addition, the abstract refers to "four functions" but enumerates five—communicative, identity-related, commercial, humorous, and emotional. The same inconsistency appears in the discussion and conclusion and should be corrected by either grouping humour and emotion into a single category, as the section heading suggests, or reporting five distinct functions throughout. The English abstract and keywords also require language editing, and the French text would benefit from consistent spacing, accents, and formatting.

Overall, the manuscript addresses a worthwhile topic and has a promising empirical setting. Its strongest contribution is the attempt to connect multilingual practices in urban markets with the practical demands of commercial interaction, while drawing attention to the distinction between code-switching and linguistic interference. The most important revisions are to align the title and hypotheses with the evidence actually collected, clarify the sampling and questionnaire procedures, distinguish participants' self-reports from observed language behaviour, and provide concrete linguistic examples before making claims about specific forms of interference. With these changes, the article could offer a more precise and credible exploratory account of language contact in the markets of Cotonou.

Final Recommendation

Decision: Major revisions.