

Cameroon and the Dynamics of Francophone-Anglophone Diplomacy in the African Union (2000-2023)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how Cameroon's bilingual identity has influenced its diplomatic strategies within the African Union (AU) from 2000 to 2023. Positioned uniquely at the intersection of Francophone and Anglophone Africa, Cameroon utilizes its dual colonial heritage to navigate and mediate linguistic and political tensions that frequently divide AU member states. The study argues that Cameroon's bilingualism serves not only as a symbol of internal cohesion but also as a strategic asset in regional diplomacy. Employing a qualitative methodology, the article draws on official AU communiqués, summit resolutions, Cameroonian foreign policy archives, presidential speeches, parliamentary records, and press releases from the Ministry of External Relations. It analyzes Cameroon's contributions to AU peace and security initiatives, debates on institutional reform, and coalition-building across language lines. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on bilingualism as a diplomatic resource an angle often neglected in analyses of Cameroonian foreign policy and African multilateralism. The article further considers how domestic linguistic tensions, particularly the Anglophone crisis, affect Cameroon's regional legitimacy. Ultimately, it offers a fresh perspective on the interplay between language, identity, and diplomacy in postcolonial African institutions.

Keywords: Cameroon, African Union, Bilingualism, Francophone-Anglophone diplomacy, regional integration, postcolonial identity.

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon is one of Africa's most linguistically distinctive nations, shaped by a dual colonial legacy under both British and French rule. Following independence and unification in 1961, Cameroon enshrined bilingualism as a core national identity, recognizing both English and French as official languages. This internal policy of linguistic coexistence distinguishes Cameroon within the African Union (AU), where language often intersects with regional power dynamics, institutional hierarchies, and alliance formation.

The transformation from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union in 2002 marked a critical shift in African multilateralism. With the establishment of stronger institutions—such as the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)—member states faced increased expectations for active diplomatic engagement. Within this framework, linguistic blocs—frequently aligned with former colonial affiliations—have influenced voting patterns, leadership contests, and policy debates. Francophone and Anglophone states occasionally clash over legal interpretations, institutional reforms, and procedural norms, highlighting the strategic importance of mediating actors.

This study asks: How has Cameroon's bilingual identity shaped its diplomacy within the African Union between 2000 and 2023? This question is central because language is not merely a communication tool; it serves as a marker of identity, alliance, and power in multilateral governance. Cameroon's bilingualism provides both opportunities and constraints. It allows access to wider diplomatic coalitions and credibility as a mediator while internal tensions, most notably the Anglophone crisis since 2016, undermine its domestic legitimacy and, by extension, its standing in continental forums.

By focusing on the interplay between linguistic identity and diplomacy, this article contributes to underexplored areas of African multilateralism: the use of bilingualism as a diplomatic resource, the role of middle powers in

bridging linguistic divides, and the implications of domestic governance for regional legitimacy. Using a qualitative methodology, the study draws on official AU communiqués, summit resolutions, Cameroonian foreign policy archives, parliamentary records, and press releases from the Ministry of External Relations. Through this approach, it illuminates how Cameroon’s bilingualism shapes institutional participation, coalition-building, and regional influence within the AU, offering insights into the broader relationship between language, identity, and African governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since its establishment in 2002, the African Union (AU) has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, especially in relation to its institutional dynamics and the complexities of regional integration. Foundational works in this domain stress the lingering impact of historical configurations—particularly colonial legacies—on intra-African cooperation. Adekeye Adebajo’s comprehensive analysis situates the AU within the post-Cold War geopolitical milieu, arguing that “the arbitrary territorial and administrative legacies of colonialism have persisted into the configuration of contemporary regional institutions,” shaping not only state behavior but also intergovernmental alignments across the continent.¹ In *The Curse of Berlin*, Adebajo highlights that the territorial fractures instituted at the 1884–85 Berlin Conference continue to reverberate through the AU’s institutional processes, with notable implications for policy formation and alliance dynamics. He identifies linguistic and legal divisions—most prominently between Francophone and Anglophone membership—as enduring fault lines that influence voting patterns and coalition formation across AU organs.²

Francophone-Anglophone Dynamics

The scholarship on African multilateralism repeatedly points to the *Francophone–Anglophone divide* as more than a linguistic distinction; it is a constitutive feature of institutional politics. In frameworks developed by international relations scholars, linguistic blocs are seen as carriers of distinct normative repertoires and legal traditions (civil law vs. common law), which in turn influence policy preferences within regional institutions.³ Mwesiga Francis Mutunga, for example, situates the linguistic divide within broader debates on legal pluralism in Africa, arguing that “common law and civil law traditions carry embedded assumptions about sovereignty, subsidiarity, and institutional autonomy that are often reproduced along Anglophone and Francophone lines in regional forums.”⁴ This perspective resonates with Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s postcolonial critiques of African governance, which emphasize how colonial categories persist as structuring logics in contemporary multilateral diplomacy.⁵

Within AU scholarship, Nicodemus Murithi specifically interrogates how these linguistic alignments translate into *institutional friction*. Drawing on deliberations over the African Standby Force and African Peer Review Mechanism, Murithi contends that divergences in legal interpretation and procedural philosophy were not merely technical disagreements but also reflective of broader normative commitments associated with Anglophone and Francophone traditions.⁶ Such work situates linguistic dynamics within the AU not as peripheral curiosities but as integral to understanding institutional behavior and policy outcomes.

Cameroon occupies a unique intersection within these dynamics. Its *bilingual heritage*—rooted in both French and English colonial legacies—positions it uniquely within AU politics. Yet, despite this strategic placement, scholarly attention to Cameroon’s external diplomatic positioning within linguistic blocs remains sparse, often overshadowed by domestic analyses of internal Anglophone–Francophone tensions.

Multilingual Diplomacy

The concept of multilingual diplomacy has been developed most robustly in comparative literature on international organizations, where language is theorized not just as medium but as *structure of power*. Paul

¹ A. Adebajo, *The Curse of Berlin: Africa After the Cold War*, London: Hurst & Company, 2015, p. 23.

² Ibid, p. 78.

³ M. Francis Mutunga, *Legal Pluralism and Regional Integration in Africa*, Nairobi: African Books Collective, 2019, p. 112.

⁴ Ibid, p. 119.

⁵ S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Decolonizing the University: The Challenge of Deep Cognitive Justice*, London: Routledge, 2018, p. 54.

⁶ N. Murithi, *The African Union: Pan-Africanism, Peacebuilding and Development*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 143.

Sharp's influential work on institutional linguistics conceptualizes language as a form of *soft power* that shapes access to discourse, agenda-setting, and actor visibility within multilateral forums.⁷ Sharp asserts that "language choice in international institutions is not neutral; it privileges certain epistemologies and normative frameworks over others," thereby affecting both participation and influence in diplomacy.⁸ This theoretical lens has been applied to the EU and the UN, but only selectively to regional African contexts.

Scholarship on multilingualism in regional institutions underscores that language can serve both as a resource and constraint. In the context of the AU, English and French are recognized as working languages, but the uneven deployment and institutional support for these languages often leads to differential visibility and influence for member states.⁹ Alan Bryden and Boubacar N'Diaye argue that linguistic practice in the AU—especially in decision-making bodies—reproduces power imbalances, inadvertently privileging members with greater command over dominant procedural languages.¹⁰ This body of work highlights the need to treat multilingualism as *diplomatic capital* rather than merely a logistical challenge.

Cameroon's bilingualism, in theory, should confer a *dual anchoring* within both Francophone and Anglophone diplomatic circuits. Yet, the extant literature rarely treats this bilingual heritage as an *active diplomatic strategy* within AU political processes. The limited applications of multilingual diplomacy in AU studies focus predominantly on translation regimes and administrative practice rather than the *geopolitical deployment* of language as an instrument of influence.

Postcolonial Identity in International Relations

Postcolonial critiques have enriched international relations by foregrounding how formerly colonized states navigate global and regional orders through hybridized identities. Robbie Shilliam advances this perspective by defining postcoloniality not as a residue of historical domination but as a *strategic modality* through which states negotiate multiple normative orders.¹¹ In edited collections that interrogate postcolonial international thought, Shilliam emphasizes that "postcolonial states often craft complex diplomatic postures that simultaneously engage, reinterpret, and resist dominant institutional paradigms."¹² This line of reasoning provides a fertile theoretical grounding for interpreting Cameroon's diplomatic behavior as more than reactive; it is potentially *constructive and strategic*.

Viewed through a postcolonial lens, Cameroon's bilingualism may embody a *negotiated identity* that spans institutional cultures and legal repertoires, offering a form of diplomatic *hybridity* that can be leveraged within AU politics. This reframing moves beyond seeing bilingualism as internal tension toward understanding it as a *resource for external institutional engagement*.

Middle Power Theory in African Contexts

Middle power theory—a concept originating from studies of states like Canada, Australia, and Sweden—has been increasingly adapted to explain the diplomatic influence of states lacking overwhelming material power but possessing *strategic diplomatic capital*. In African contexts, scholars such as Christopher Landsberg interpret middle powers as actors that "exert influence disproportionate to their economic or military size by virtue of their capacity for mediation, consensus building, and institutional engagement."¹³ Applied to African regionalism, this perspective articulates how certain states function as *bridges across cleavages*, contributing to institutional stability and conflict mitigation. Cameroon's geographical positioning at the crossroads of Central and West Africa, its multilingual composition, and its relatively neutral posture in certain regional disputes arguably align with this theoretical construct.

⁷ P. Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 67.

⁸ Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*, p. 78.

⁹ A. Bryden and B. N'Diaye, *Multilingualism in International Organisations*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2017, p. 103.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹¹ R. Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 12.

¹² R. Shilliam, *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity*, London: Routledge, 2011, p. 6.

¹³ C. Landsberg, *Middle Power Diplomacy in Africa: The Case of South Africa and Nigeria*, Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2018, p. 33.

However, while middle power theory has been invoked to understand countries like Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa, its application to Cameroon—especially through the prism of linguistic mediation—is underdeveloped. There is a distinct analytical opportunity to examine whether Cameroon’s bilingual diplomatic posture translates into *institutional mediation capacity* within AU political arenas.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the richness of scholarship on AU institutional politics, linguistic divides, and postcolonial diplomacy, there remains a notable gap at the intersection of multilingual diplomacy and state role articulation within the AU: specifically, scholars have yet to systematically analyze how Cameroon’s bilingual heritage functions as diplomatic agency within AU institutional politics, whether as soft power leverage, brokerage capital, or institutional mediator between Francophone and Anglophone configurations—an omission this study seeks to address.

Cameroon’s Diplomatic Identity Post-2000

Following the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) in 2002, Cameroon redefined its foreign policy to align with new continental priorities peace and security, regional integration, and institutional reform. Although often perceived as discreet in high-profile diplomacy, Cameroon has carved a niche for itself through consistent multilateral engagement, especially via its unique linguistic identity.

Cameroon’s Foreign Policy Orientation

Since 2000, Cameroon’s foreign policy has been driven by a deliberate strategy of “discreet diplomacy,” emphasizing stability, non-interference, and peaceful conflict resolution. This orientation is rooted in both domestic political considerations particularly the need to project internal stability amidst regional volatility and historical commitments to multilateralism. Cameroon has consistently maintained a low-profile but consistent presence in diplomatic forums, often favoring consensus-building over public confrontation.¹⁴ Within the sub-region, Cameroon’s active role in ECCAS and CEMAC reflects its desire to maintain leadership in Central Africa while reinforcing its commitment to African integration. ECCAS, in particular, has served as a conduit for Cameroon’s contributions to AU-led peacekeeping initiatives, such as the MICOPAX mission in the Central African Republic. These interventions illustrate Cameroon’s preference for multilateral solutions and its strategic use of regional alliances to influence broader AU security frameworks. CEMAC, meanwhile, provides an economic dimension to Cameroon’s diplomacy, especially through coordination on fiscal and monetary policy with Francophone neighbors.¹⁵ This regional anchoring has allowed Cameroon to function as a stabilizing actor in AU peace and security processes, despite its limited financial or military power. The government’s steady engagement in mediation efforts such as supporting AU electoral missions or hosting regional summits has enhanced its soft power profile and diplomatic relevance within the African Union.

Bilingualism as Soft Power

Cameroon’s constitutional bilingualism recognizing both French and English as official languages has served not only as a symbol of internal unity but also as a diplomatic tool in African multilateral settings. This linguistic duality allows Cameroon to operate flexibly across both Francophone and Anglophone blocs within the African Union (AU), where language often structures alliances, voting behaviors, and legal preferences. Unlike many AU member states that align strictly along linguistic lines, Cameroon’s bilingualism enables it to act as a cultural and procedural intermediary, especially during contentious debates over institutional reform or security mechanisms.¹⁶ In practice, Cameroonian diplomats often use bilingual rhetoric to frame the country as a model of coexistence and mutual understanding. During AU summits, particularly in sessions involving the

¹⁴ N. Atem George, *Cameroon’s Foreign Policy in the Central African Sub-region: Trends and Prospects*, Yaounde: Éditions CLÉ, 2017, p. 55.

¹⁵ International Crisis Group, “Cameroon: The Dangers of Centralisation”, *Africa Report No. 160*, June 2010, p. 21.

¹⁶ Ndangam et al., *Language Policy and Nation-Building in Cameroon: Problems and Prospects*, Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2013, p. 88.

African Governance Architecture (AGA) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), Cameroonian delegations have been known to offer compromise language or mediate between competing legal interpretations. For example, at the 2014 AU summit in Malabo, Cameroon's representatives emphasized their country's experience with legal pluralism and bilingual administration as a microcosm for continental diversity proposing procedural flexibilities that were later incorporated into AGA reporting guidelines.¹⁷ This strategic use of bilingualism has not only enhanced Cameroon's diplomatic visibility but also contributed to its image as a "bridge state," capable of diffusing tensions in linguistically divided forums.

Position in Regional Blocs and Implications for AU Diplomacy

Cameroon's simultaneous engagement in regional blocs such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) has been central to its AU diplomacy, positioning the country as both a stabilizing force and a strategic intermediary in Central Africa. Through ECCAS, Cameroon has played a consistent role in AU-led peace operations, notably in the Central African Republic (CAR), where its troops and diplomatic personnel have participated in joint ECCAS-AU mediation and peacekeeping efforts. These alignments bolster Cameroon's regional credibility and reinforce its image as a committed actor in African collective security frameworks.¹⁸ Moreover, ECCAS's strategic goals often dovetail with those of the AU, particularly in conflict prevention, economic integration, and security sector reform. Cameroon's proactive diplomacy within ECCAS for instance, during the 2008 Gabon-led negotiations in CAR demonstrated its capacity to translate sub-regional priorities into AU agendas without necessarily aligning with Francophone or Anglophone power blocs. This diplomatic balancing act strengthens its soft power across linguistic divides, allowing it to participate in sensitive debates (e.g., AU institutional reform or electoral standards) with a degree of neutrality.¹⁹ However, Cameroon's ties to CEMAC and the CFA franc zone, both heavily influenced by French monetary and administrative traditions, have also led to critiques that the country remains economically and structurally tied to Francophone paradigms. This occasionally complicates engagement with Anglophone-dominated initiatives like ECOWAS or IGAD, where legal frameworks and development philosophies may diverge. Despite these constraints, Cameroon continues to maintain active roles in pan-African governance organs such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, reinforcing its commitment to trans-bloc diplomacy and bilingual representation.²⁰

Francophone-Anglophone Tensions in the AU

Language politics are a persistent undercurrent in African Union (AU) decision-making, shaping not only communication but also institutional power dynamics. While both English and French are official languages of the AU, the linguistic divide reflects deeper political and colonial legacies that continue to influence alliances, voting patterns, and leadership structures. Informal blocs often form along linguistic lines, particularly during debates on peacekeeping mandates, leadership appointments, and normative frameworks like the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the African Governance Architecture (AGA).²¹ Tensions have been particularly visible in the composition and functioning of AU organs such as the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP). During ECOSOCC elections, disputes emerged over regional representation lists that disproportionately favored Francophone candidates, raising concerns from Anglophone delegates about equitable linguistic and geographic inclusion.²² At the PAP, disagreements arose over procedural language use and the dominance of Francophone jurists in legal committees. The lack of simultaneous interpretation and delayed translation of key documents exacerbated feelings of exclusion among English-speaking members.²³ These tensions are more than administrative they reflect competition over

¹⁷ African Union, "African Governance Architecture Report", AU Summit Proceedings, Malabo 2014, p. 17.

¹⁸ T. Rodrigo, *Regional Security: The Capacity of International Organizations*, London: Routledge, 2010, p. 154.

¹⁹ "African Union Peace and Security Council", Report on ECCAS-AU Collaboration in the CAR Crisis, Addis Ababa, 2015, p. 6.

²⁰ C. Bach Daniel, "Regionalism in Africa: Genealogies, Institutions and Trans-State Networks", London: Routledge, 2016, p. 112.

²¹ K. Tiekou Thomas, "Language Politics in Multilateral Institutions: Evidence from the African Union", *African Affairs* 116, no. 463 (2017): p. 92.

²² M. Tim, "The African Union's Economic, Social and Cultural Council: An Opportunity Lost?", *Nordic Africa Institute Policy Notes*, no. 3, 2011, p. 5.

²³ "Pan-African Parliament, Proceedings of the Second Ordinary Session", Midrand, 2015, p. 14.

influence, legitimacy, and visibility in a postcolonial continental order. Language, in this sense, becomes a proxy for political capital. Disagreements over voting procedures, leadership roles, and even the framing of communiqués often mirror broader concerns about Francophone-African alignment with French diplomatic traditions versus Anglophone preferences for common law and liberal internationalism.

Cameroon's Mediating Role

Cameroon's official bilingualism has enabled it to serve as a neutral arbiter in inter-bloc frictions within the African Union (AU), particularly between Francophone and Anglophone member states. Its diplomats, often fluent in both languages, have played strategic roles in fostering compromise in otherwise deadlocked institutional settings. During the contentious 2015 ECOSOCC elections, when Francophone dominance in committee nominations raised objections from English-speaking delegates, Cameroon's representatives proposed a dual-language rotation mechanism for committee chairmanships. This proposal designed to alternate leadership between French- and English-speaking members was ultimately adopted in several ECOSOCC subcommittees and cited as a model for balancing representation without reopening divisive debates.²⁴ At the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), Cameroon's intervention extended beyond rhetoric. In 2017, Ambassador Luc Ayah, representing Cameroon, argued during plenary sessions in Midrand for procedural reforms to ensure balanced linguistic representation in leadership roles. His proposal included amending internal regulations to require that all legislative drafts, committee reports, and budget briefs be simultaneously published in English and French. This lobbying effort contributed to an administrative reform the following year, mandating that all core documents undergo bilingual translation before distribution a decision welcomed by both blocs.²⁵ These diplomatic maneuvers have elevated Cameroon's status as a consensus-builder within the AU. Rather than siding openly with either bloc, Cameroon leveraged its bilingual identity to promote procedural equity, enhancing not only the legitimacy of AU institutions but also its own diplomatic visibility. By occupying this bridging space, Cameroon demonstrated that linguistic hybridity, when strategically deployed, could reduce institutional paralysis and deepen multilateral cooperation.²⁶

Case Study 1: Cameroon in AU Peace and Security Council

Cameroon's participation in the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) provides a revealing lens through which to analyze how bilingual diplomacy can operate as a form of institutional mediation within African multilateral politics. Established in 2004 as the central organ of the AU's peace and security architecture, the PSC functions as the continent's standing decision-making body for conflict prevention, management, and resolution.²⁷ Within this institutional setting, linguistic dynamics often intersect with diplomatic practice, given that English and French constitute the two most widely used working languages in AU deliberations.

Cameroon's diplomatic conduct within the PSC demonstrates how bilingual capacity can facilitate procedural inclusivity, mediation, and consensus-building during crisis management. Through several major regional conflicts—including Mali (2012–2013), Sudan–South Sudan (2013–2014), and the Central African Republic (2014–2016)—Cameroon used linguistic competence not merely as administrative accommodation but as a strategic diplomatic instrument. These interventions illustrate how bilingualism can support institutional effectiveness by reducing misunderstandings, harmonizing legal terminology, and facilitating broader participation in decision-making processes.

Intervention in Mali (2012–2013)

The 2012 crisis in Mali, triggered by a military coup and the subsequent insurgency by armed Islamist groups in the country's northern regions, posed one of the most significant security challenges confronting the AU in the

²⁴ African Union ECOSOCC Bureau, "Summary Report of the 2015 Committee Chair Elections", Addis Ababa: African Union Commission, 2015, p. 8.

²⁵ "Pan-African Parliament. Official Proceedings of the Fourth Ordinary Session", Midrand, May 2017, p. 23.

²⁶N. Martin. "Language, Power and Diplomacy: Cameroon's Role in African Union Multilingual Governance", *Cameroon Journal of International Affairs* 6, no. 2, 2019, p. 41.

²⁷ African Union, "Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union", Addis Ababa: AU Commission, 2002, p. 3.

early 2010s. In response, the Peace and Security Council convened a series of emergency meetings throughout 2012 and 2013 to coordinate regional intervention and authorize the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA).²⁸

During these deliberations, the importance of linguistic inclusivity became particularly apparent. PSC communiqués on the Malian crisis were issued simultaneously in English and French, reflecting the AU's multilingual institutional framework and the need to ensure accessibility across diverse member states.²⁹ Cameroon's delegation actively supported this approach, emphasizing the necessity of maintaining bilingual documentation during negotiation processes.

Cameroon's diplomatic engagement focused on promoting consistent bilingual communication across all PSC proceedings, particularly during the drafting of communiqués and operational directives for AFISMA. According to the communiqué of the PSC's 341st meeting held on 13 November 2012, which addressed joint planning for the deployment of the African-led force, the Council stressed the importance of coordination among AU organs, ECOWAS, and international partners in stabilizing Mali.³⁰ Such coordination required clear and mutually understood policy language, particularly when integrating military and diplomatic actors from both Anglophone and Francophone countries.

Within these discussions, Cameroon's representatives advocated the systematic circulation of briefing materials in both languages prior to deliberation, arguing that linguistic accessibility was essential to equitable participation in decision-making processes. This approach facilitated more inclusive debates among member states and contributed to smoother coordination between regional organizations and AU institutions.

More broadly, Cameroon's approach reflected an understanding that linguistic clarity was operationally significant for the planning of AFISMA's mandate, including rules of engagement and timelines for deployment. Scholars of African security governance note that AU peace operations frequently depend on multinational coordination across diverse legal and military traditions, making clear communication essential for mission coherence.³¹ By reinforcing bilingual documentation practices, Cameroon contributed to minimizing potential misunderstandings that could have complicated operational planning.

Sudan and South Sudan (2013–2014)

Another significant illustration of Cameroon's linguistic diplomacy emerged during the AU's mediation efforts between Sudan and South Sudan following South Sudan's independence in 2011. Persistent tensions between the two states—particularly over oil revenue sharing, border demarcation, and cross-border violence—required sustained engagement by the AU Peace and Security Council.

During Cameroon's 2013 tenure as rotating chair of the PSC, the Council held several high-level sessions addressing escalating hostilities and humanitarian concerns in the region. These deliberations underscored the importance of clear and inclusive communication within AU diplomatic processes.

Under Cameroon's chairmanship, PSC communiqués addressing the Sudan–South Sudan conflict were systematically published in both English and French. One such communiqué called upon both parties to cease hostilities and protect civilian populations, reflecting the Council's emphasis on conflict de-escalation and humanitarian protection.³²

²⁸ P. D. Williams, *War and Conflict in Africa*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016, pp. 210.

²⁹ African Union Peace and Security Council, "Communiqué of the 314th Meeting on the Situation in Mali", PSC/MIN/COMM.(CCCXIV), 20 March 2012, pp. 1-2.

³⁰ African Union Peace and Security Council, "Communiqué of the 341st Meeting on the Situation in Mali", PSC/PR/COMM.(CCCXLI), 13 November 2012, pp. 2-3.

³¹ D. Paul Williams, *Fighting for Peace in Somalia: A History and Analysis of the African Union Mission (AMISOM)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 58.

³² African Union Peace and Security Council, "*Communiqué on the Situation between Sudan and South Sudan*", Addis Ababa, 2013, pp. 4-5.

Cameroon's leadership placed particular emphasis on ensuring that draft resolutions were circulated in both languages prior to debate. This procedural adjustment had two important implications. First, it enhanced transparency within the Council, enabling smaller member states with limited interpretation resources to participate more effectively in discussions. Second, it helped mitigate concerns that linguistic ambiguity might alter the interpretation of key legal terms within draft resolutions.

This emphasis on linguistic equity reflects broader scholarship on multilingual governance in international organizations, which demonstrates that language can shape the distribution of influence and participation within institutional settings.³³ By promoting bilingual documentation practices, Cameroon sought to ensure that diplomatic negotiations within the PSC remained accessible to both Anglophone and Francophone delegations.

Moreover, Cameroon's chairmanship facilitated coordination between the AU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the regional organization leading mediation efforts between Sudan and South Sudan. Through harmonized policy statements and bilingual communiqués, Cameroon contributed to reinforcing a unified continental position during negotiations.

Central African Republic (CAR, 2014–2016)

The crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) between 2013 and 2016 represented another context in which Cameroon's bilingual diplomacy played a significant institutional role. Following the collapse of state authority in CAR and escalating sectarian violence between Seleka and anti-Balaka factions, the AU authorized the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) in 2013.³⁴

As a neighboring state directly affected by refugee flows and regional instability, Cameroon participated actively in PSC deliberations concerning the mission's mandate and coordination with regional organizations such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).³⁵

During PSC sessions addressing the CAR crisis, Cameroon frequently intervened to clarify the interpretation of key legal and operational terminology across English and French versions of draft resolutions. Such interventions were particularly important during discussions on the extension of MISCA's mandate and its eventual transition into the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).³⁶

Analyses by the Institute for Security Studies note that linguistic ambiguities occasionally complicated PSC deliberations, particularly when translating technical legal concepts between languages.³⁷ Cameroon's representatives therefore contributed to ensuring that terms such as *human security*, *civilian protection*, and *rules of engagement* were consistently interpreted across both language versions of official documents.

Cameroon's diplomatic engagement during the CAR crisis illustrates how bilingual states can function as informal linguistic intermediaries within multilingual institutions. By helping reconcile divergent terminologies and clarifying policy language, Cameroon contributed to smoother deliberations and more coherent decision-making within the PSC.

Case Study 2: Cameroon and Institutional Reform Debates (2016-2019)

Between 2016 and 2019, the African Union launched an ambitious institutional reform process aimed at improving the efficiency, financial sustainability, and political effectiveness of the organization. These reforms

³³ P. Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 78.

³⁴ A. J. Bellamy and D. Paul Williams, *Providing Peacekeepers: The Politics, Challenges, and Future of United Nations Peacekeeping Contributions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 147-148.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 149

³⁷ Institute for Security Studies, "Peace and Security Council Report, Pretoria: ISS, 2015, p. 6.

were spearheaded by Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, who was appointed by the AU Assembly in 2016 to lead a comprehensive review of the Union's institutional structures.³⁸

The reform agenda generated considerable debate among AU member states, particularly regarding governance structures, budgetary autonomy, and language use within AU institutions. These discussions revealed underlying tensions between Anglophone and Francophone member states regarding the future direction of the organization. Cameroon's diplomatic engagement during this period demonstrates its attempt to balance support for institutional modernization with the preservation of linguistic equity within the AU system.

Reform Proposals and Linguistic Divides

The Kagame Reform Report, presented to the AU Assembly in January 2017, proposed a range of measures designed to strengthen the Union's operational efficiency. These included reforms to financing mechanisms, administrative restructuring, and the streamlining of AU decision-making processes. Although the reform agenda focused primarily on institutional efficiency, it also generated debate concerning language practices within AU bureaucratic structures. Several reform proposals implicitly encouraged greater reliance on English in technical documentation and policy reporting, reflecting the increasing influence of Anglophone administrative models within international organizations.³⁹

Francophone delegations expressed concern that such trends could gradually marginalize French within AU decision-making processes. Cameroon adopted a moderate and pragmatic position during these debates. While expressing support for reforms aimed at improving institutional efficiency and financial independence, Cameroon emphasized the importance of maintaining linguistic balance within AU institutions. During Executive Council deliberations on the reform process in 2017, Cameroon's diplomatic representatives argued that linguistic parity was essential for maintaining the AU's representational legitimacy. Ensuring equal access to both English and French in policy documentation, they contended, would help preserve the inclusive character of AU governance.⁴⁰

Voting Patterns and Shifts

Cameroon's voting behavior during the African Union (AU) reform debates reflects a pragmatic effort to balance institutional efficiency with the protection of linguistic diversity within the Union. During the 31st AU Summit held in Nouakchott in July 2018, member states examined several proposals aimed at restructuring AU administrative systems and strengthening staff capacity as part of the broader reform agenda initiated in 2016. These reforms sought to improve organizational efficiency, accountability, and professional standards within AU institutions. Cameroon generally supported initiatives designed to enhance bureaucratic performance, including measures related to staff evaluation and recruitment procedures, which were intended to improve the effectiveness of the AU Commission and its departments.⁴¹

However, Cameroon also expressed caution regarding reforms that could undermine the Union's multilingual character. During discussions on staff capacity development and administrative restructuring, the Cameroonian delegation emphasized the importance of maintaining institutional support for bilingual training programs and translation services within AU structures. In collaboration with other Francophone member states such as Senegal and Chad, Cameroon advocated for equitable funding of interpretation and translation infrastructure across AU institutions. This coalition approach aimed to ensure that language parity—particularly between English and French—remained an integral component of the AU reform implementation process while still allowing the organization to pursue administrative modernization.⁴²

³⁸ P. Kagame, "Report on the Institutional Reform of the African Union", African Union, January 2017, p. 5.

³⁹ P. Kagame, "The Imperative to Strengthen Our Union: Report on the Proposed Institutional Reforms of the African Union", Addis Ababa: AU Commission, 2017, p. 10.

⁴⁰ P. Kagame, "The Imperative to Strengthen Our Union:", p. 16.

⁴¹ African Union, "Decisions, Declarations and Resolution of the 31st Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, 1-2 July 2018", Nouakchott, Mauritania, Addis Ababa: African Union, 2018, pp. 3-4.

⁴² African Union, "Draft Report of the Thirty-Sixth Ordinary Session of the Permanent Representatives' Committee (PRC), 25-26 June 2018", Nouakchott, Mauritania. Addis Ababa: African Union, 2018, p. 7.

Speeches, Positions, and Public Messaging

Cameroon's diplomatic position on linguistic equity within the African Union (AU) was further articulated during the 2019 Kigali summit, where debates on institutional reform and the implementation of the AU reform agenda continued. During plenary discussions, Cameroonian representatives emphasized that bilingualism should not be viewed solely as a historical legacy of colonial administration but rather as a strategic asset for continental governance. By promoting both English and French within AU institutions, Cameroon argued that the Union could strengthen inclusivity and facilitate effective communication among member states. This perspective aligned with broader AU commitments to multilingualism as a tool for enhancing cooperation and participation in continental decision-making processes.⁴³

Beyond formal statements, Cameroon also participated actively in discussions within AU institutional bodies responsible for overseeing reform implementation. In these negotiations, Cameroonian diplomats supported mechanisms that would ensure continued funding for translation and simultaneous interpretation services across AU departments. These contributions were reflected in the Executive Council Decision EX.CL/Dec.1091(XXXV) adopted in 2019, which reaffirmed the importance of linguistic inclusivity within the AU reform framework. The decision emphasized that maintaining language equity was essential not only for fairness among member states but also for the legitimacy and operational effectiveness of the Union's institutional architecture.⁴⁴

Challenges Cameroon Faces in Playing a Bridging Role

While Cameroon's bilingual identity has offered it a unique platform within the African Union, its role as a linguistic and diplomatic bridge is not without significant challenges. These stem from internal contradictions, regional perceptions, and institutional constraints within the AU. The following section explores how domestic instability, external skepticism, and structural asymmetries complicate Cameroon's efforts to mediate between Francophone and Anglophone blocs on the continental stage.

Internal Anglophone Crisis Affecting Credibility

Cameroon's domestic Anglophone crisis significantly undermines its image as a credible bridge between Francophone and Anglophone blocs within the African Union. Rooted in the 1961 post-unification constitutional arrangements, the crisis escalated into a full-blown conflict by late 2016 when Anglophone teachers and lawyers protested the erosion of the common law system and the dominance of French in courts and schools.⁴⁵ The government's heavy-handed response—including mass arrests, internet shutdowns, and deployment of military forces—exposed deep structural inequalities and contradicted Cameroon's official discourse of bilingual harmony. This internal discord severely weakens Cameroon's legitimacy when advocating for linguistic equity in continental institutions. International observers and AU member states increasingly view its bilingual diplomacy as externally strategic but internally inconsistent. By 2018, only 3 out of 65 ministerial portfolios were held by Anglophones,⁴⁶ and court proceedings in Anglophone regions continued to be dominated by French-speaking judges, intensifying grievances over representation and access to justice. The resulting perception is that Cameroon's official bilingualism functions more as an external diplomatic tool than a lived domestic reality.⁴⁷ This duality casts a shadow over its role in AU reform negotiations and language-mediation efforts, as member states question whether a government suppressing internal linguistic diversity can genuinely promote it abroad.

⁴³ African Union, "Assembly of the African Union, Thirty-Second Ordinary Session: Decisions, Declarations and Resolution of the Assembly of the Union, 10-11 February 2019", Addis Ababa, Ethiopia : African Union Commission, 2019, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁴ African Union Executive Council, "Decisions and Recommendations of the Thirty-Fifth Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, 4-5 July 2019", Niamey, Niger, Addis Ababa: African Union Commission, 2019, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁵ A. N. Fru, "Anglophone Nationalism in Cameroon: The Historical Origins", *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2010, p. 140.

⁴⁶ B. Francis et al, "The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 1997, p. 211.

⁴⁷ Amnesty International, "A Turn for the Worse: Violence and Human Rights Violations in Anglophone Cameroon", London, 2017, p. 8.

Perceptions from Other AU Member States

Cameroon's self-positioning as a bilingual mediator is often undercut by how other AU member states perceive its allegiances. Despite its official bilingualism, many Francophone countries continue to regard Cameroon as culturally and diplomatically closer to the French-speaking bloc due to its historical and institutional alignment with structures like CEMAC, whose legal and fiscal systems are largely modeled on the French tradition.⁴⁸ This association has sometimes led to expectations that Cameroon will support Francophone preferences in leadership appointments, legal interpretations, or procedural reforms within AU bodies. Conversely, Anglophone states—particularly those in ECOWAS tend to question Cameroon's long-term credibility as an equitable broker, citing its limited involvement in English-led coalitions and its frequent abstention or procedural silence in debates where language-based voting splits have emerged.⁴⁹ This perception of ambiguity has limited Cameroon's influence in trust-building initiatives, as some member states interpret its "bridge" strategy as a form of strategic ambivalence rather than balanced diplomacy.

Structural Limits within the AU

Despite Cameroon's diplomatic intentions, structural limitations within the African Union itself often frustrate the practical application of multilingual inclusivity. While the AU formally recognizes six working languages English, French, Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, and Kiswahili in practice, the organization relies almost exclusively on English and French, and even these are subject to serious logistical shortcomings. During Peace and Security Council (PSC) meetings or emergency summits, simultaneous interpretation is frequently delayed or unavailable due to shortages in trained personnel, uneven funding for language services, or technical failures in real-time translation systems.⁵⁰ These systemic inefficiencies not only hinder equal participation but also reinforce existing linguistic hierarchies. Countries without dominant Anglophone or Francophone delegations—such as Cameroon—often find their interventions misinterpreted or delayed, especially when attempting to synthesize perspectives across blocs. Moreover, the AU budget allocates only a limited percentage to interpretation and documentation services, resulting in many policy drafts, communiqués, and resolutions being distributed in one language for days before translated versions become available.⁵¹ As a result, Cameroon's advocacy for operational multilingualism while diplomatically appealing remains constrained by institutional inertia and financial limitations that continue to privilege dominant blocs.

Cameroon's Strategic Partnerships

Cameroon's strategic relationships with its neighbours Nigeria and Chad play a crucial role in shaping its posture within the African Union. These partnerships, grounded in both security and economic cooperation, reinforce Cameroon's influence in regional diplomacy and contribute to its AU credibility.

Engagements with Nigeria (Anglophone)

Cameroon's strategic partnership with Nigeria, its largest Anglophone neighbor, has played a decisive role in shaping its bilingual diplomacy within the African Union. While historically marked by territorial disputes most notably over the Bakassi Peninsula the bilateral relationship has evolved into one of pragmatic cooperation, especially in the area of regional security. Beginning in the mid-2010s, both countries confronted the escalating threat posed by Boko Haram, prompting a shift from bilateral suspicion to operational synergy. In 2014, Cameroon officially joined the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), working alongside Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Benin under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. This joint military architecture enabled Cameroon to deploy troops in Far North Region, share intelligence, and conduct synchronized operations with Nigerian forces along porous border zones. The success of this coordination was recognized in multiple AU Peace and Security Council communiqués, which praised the "robust subregional cooperation" led

⁴⁸ N. Therese, "Cameroon and the Francophone Bloc: Continuities and Constraints", *African Studies Review*, vol. 58, no. 3, 2015, p. 112.

⁴⁹ M. Tim, "The African Union: A Normative Institution in the Making", Routledge, 2017, p. 94.

⁵⁰ M. Tim, *The African Union: Autocracy, Diplomacy and Peacebuilding*, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 88.

⁵¹ A. Armstrong, "Language, Power and Participation in the African Union", *African Journal of Political Science*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2018, p. 57.

by Cameroon and Nigeria.⁵² This collaboration has extended beyond security. The establishment of the Trans-Border Security Committee in 2012, following the 2006 Greentree Agreement that peacefully settled the Bakassi conflict, institutionalized dialogue mechanisms and routine military coordination.⁵³ These developments reinforced Cameroon's credibility among Anglophone states and allowed it to demonstrate operational and diplomatic trustworthiness in high-stakes regional initiatives. In AU settings, this tangible alignment with Nigeria symbolically significant due to its Anglophone identity and continental influence allows Cameroon to step beyond the Francophone sphere. It enables Yaoundé to function as a linguistic and political hinge between blocs, while reinforcing its image as a state that can adapt to shifting geopolitical demands through hybrid diplomacy.

Engagements with Chad (Francophone)

Cameroon's bilateral relationship with Chad plays a significant role in reinforcing its Francophone diplomatic alignment within African multilateral platforms. The two countries share not only a border but also overlapping security and economic interests that have fostered institutional cooperation over decades. Their shared membership in the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) has allowed Cameroon to anchor itself firmly in Francophone regional diplomacy. In the security sphere, Cameroon and Chad have coordinated closely on counterterrorism. In early 2015, Chadian troops were granted passage through Cameroonian territory en route to reinforce the fight against Boko Haram in northern Nigeria an unprecedented show of military cooperation planned during an ECCAS summit hosted in Yaoundé. This move reflected both countries' shared commitment to subregional stability and illustrated Cameroon's willingness to facilitate Francophone-led interventions under AU-aligned security frameworks.⁵⁴ Yet, these cooperative ventures are not immune to strain. Diplomatic tensions surfaced in 2000 when Chad briefly recalled its ambassador to Cameroon over disputes concerning profit-sharing and management of the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline project, which is key to both economies. The conflict reflected deeper grievances about economic asymmetries and external influence (notably from international oil firms), revealing the fragility underlying the two countries' formal alignment.⁵⁵ Such episodes of mistrust limit Cameroon's ability to project a unified Francophone front within the AU and underscore the challenges of maintaining coherent regional blocs. These dynamics demonstrate that while Cameroon uses its relationship with Chad to solidify its Francophone credentials, the partnership remains transactional and sensitive to national interests. Consequently, Cameroon's bridging role within the AU cannot rely solely on fixed alliances, but rather on flexible diplomacy calibrated to shifting bilateral realities.

Hybrid Diplomacy: Leveraging Regional Ties

Cameroon's diplomatic posture within the African Union is reinforced by its ability to engage simultaneously with Francophone and Anglophone regional partners. By cultivating sustained bilateral relations with Nigeria and Chad two linguistic and geopolitical anchors Cameroon projects a hybrid diplomatic identity. This dual engagement strategy allows it to present itself as a potential consensus-builder in AU debates often marked by language-based divisions. Its simultaneous membership in both the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) enhances this role. While ECCAS serves as the broader political and security platform, CEMAC largely influenced by French economic frameworks provides Cameroon with deep institutional ties to Francophone networks. These memberships position Cameroon at the nexus of overlapping regional architectures, enabling it to translate sub-regional consensus into AU-level proposals and mediation strategies.⁵⁶ However, the strength of this hybrid diplomacy hinges on Cameroon's ability to maintain equilibrium in its external alliances. Historical disputes, such as the Bakassi Peninsula conflict with Nigeria or periodic economic disagreements with Chad, have at times

⁵² "African Union Peace and Security Council, Communiqué on Regional Coordination Against Boko Haram", PSC/PR/COMM.1(DLXXXV), April 2016, p. 3.

⁵³ "United Nations, Bakassi Peninsula: Implementation of the Greentree Agreement, Security Council Report", S/2006/590, August 2006, p. 6.

⁵⁴ "ECCAS Extraordinary Summit, Yaoundé Communiqué on Regional Response to Boko Haram", ECCAS/DEC/2015/02, February 2015, p. 2.

⁵⁵ "International Crisis Group, Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility", *Africa Report N°233*, March 2016, p. 14.

⁵⁶ K. Yebouet, *Les communautés économiques régionales en Afrique centrale: Intégration et enjeux*, L'Harmattan, 2017, p. 67.

strained these relationships. Moreover, Cameroon's domestic crisis in its Anglophone regions has occasionally cast doubt on its credibility in Anglophone diplomatic circles.⁵⁷ These vulnerabilities suggest that while Cameroon is strategically placed to bridge language and policy divides, its effectiveness depends on continuously recalibrating relations to reflect shifting regional dynamics and expectations.

Legacy and Prospects

Cameroon's long-standing reputation as a bilingual bridge within the African Union (AU) continues to structure its diplomatic posture. The 1996 Constitution affirms bilingualism as a core national value, while the establishment of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism in 2017 institutionalized this identity at the highest state level.⁵⁸ Despite enduring implementation gaps and internal political tension particularly in relation to the Anglophone crisis the symbolic and practical value of bilingualism remains central to Cameroon's regional engagement. In AU forums, Cameroonian diplomats have repeatedly underscored bilingualism as a tool of inclusivity and mutual comprehension, framing it as a model for African unity.⁵⁹ Cameroon's potential as a linguistic mediator is further underscored by its proactive stance in flagship AU initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP). Cameroon ratified the AfCFTA in December 2020 and has since organized technical consultations in both French and English to align national legislation with continental trade rules. This dual-language planning enhances both domestic accessibility and regional legitimacy. Moreover, Cameroon's participation in PAP discussions frequently emphasizes linguistic parity as essential to the democratic legitimacy of continental institutions.

Yet, to consolidate this role, Cameroon must adapt its diplomatic apparatus to the evolving AU architecture. This includes developing specialized training programs in multilingual negotiation, budgeting for high-quality translation services, and supporting reforms that enforce simultaneous publication of documents in both English and French. As the AU experiments with digital transformation strategies including virtual diplomacy and AI-driven interpretation Cameroon could pioneer technical innovations that align language parity with institutional efficiency.⁶⁰ By making these investments, Cameroon would not only reinforce its status as a symbolic "bridge state" but also transition into a practical agent of reform. This would align its bilingual tradition with the AU's broader goals of institutional equity, regional integration, and inclusive governance.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored how Cameroon's bilingual identity shapes its diplomatic conduct within the African Union (AU) from 2000 to 2023. Cameroon's dual heritage, rooted in both Anglophone and Francophone colonial legacies, positions it uniquely as a mediator in an AU often divided along linguistic lines. This dual identity functions simultaneously as a diplomatic resource and a source of constraint. On one hand, Cameroon has effectively leveraged bilingualism as a soft power instrument, fostering consensus in contentious AU debates, bridging interpretive gaps, and promoting procedural inclusivity in key institutions such as the Peace and Security Council and the Pan-African Parliament. Its active participation in regional organizations, notably the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), as well as bilateral engagements with both Anglophone and Francophone neighbors like Nigeria and Chad, reinforces its role as a bridging state capable of mediating across linguistic and policy divides.

On the other hand, Cameroon's credibility as a neutral linguistic actor faces persistent challenges. Domestic contradictions—most prominently the Anglophone crisis—undermine claims to national linguistic harmony, exposing tensions between symbolic bilingualism and lived realities. Structural constraints within the AU, including delayed translation services, uneven funding for language facilitation, and entrenched linguistic

⁵⁷ A. Adekeye, *The Curse of Berlin: Africa After the Cold War*, Hurst Publishers, 2010, p. 274.

⁵⁸ Republic of Cameroon, "Constitution of Cameroon (1996), Art. 1(3); see also National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism", Annual Report 2019 (Yaoundé: NCPBM, 2020), p. 5.

⁵⁹ A. Kane, "Cameroon's Language Diplomacy and the African Union," *African Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2021), p. 64.

⁶⁰ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), "Formulation of Cameroon's National AfCFTA Strategy", Addis Ababa: UNECA, 2020, p. 3.

hierarchies, further limit the operational impact of Cameroon's bilingual diplomacy. These limitations underscore the complex interplay between domestic governance, regional legitimacy, and continental institutional effectiveness.

The broader implication of Cameroon's experience extends beyond its national borders. First, it highlights how linguistic and cultural hybridity can function as a strategic tool in African multilateral governance, enabling states to act as intermediaries and consensus-builders in otherwise polarized settings. Second, Cameroon's case demonstrates that the effectiveness of such mediation depends on alignment between domestic policy coherence and continental institutional support; symbolic bilingualism alone is insufficient to establish credibility or influence. Third, Cameroon illustrates the potential of middle powers in Africa to exert influence through procedural innovation, diplomatic adaptability, and coalition-building, even in contexts constrained by economic or military limitations.

Finally, the lessons from Cameroon's bilingual diplomacy suggest a need for African multilateral institutions to more systematically recognize and support hybrid identities as assets rather than anomalies. By investing in robust multilingual infrastructure, promoting equitable linguistic representation, and fostering inclusive governance frameworks, the AU—and similar regional bodies—can harness the unique capacities of states like Cameroon to reduce institutional deadlock, enhance participation, and deepen regional integration. In this sense, Cameroon's experience is not only a reflection of national strategy but also a model for how linguistic diversity, when coupled with strategic diplomacy, can strengthen African multilateralism and advance continental cohesion.

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