

## ENGLISH IN CAMEROON: TYPOLOGY, STATUS AND USE

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Because English is the less widely-used of Cameroon's two official languages, the markers of the country's non-native variety of English point to a mixed EFL/ESL situation. An examination of the situation of English in Cameroon, however, reveals that the language is steadily evolving towards a typical ESL situation. This situation is characterized first of all by a certain complexity which is hardly found in a typical EFL situation. English in Cameroon exhibits several varieties determined both functionally and in terms of the closeness of each variety to the standard. The various varieties can be said to form an English language "continuum." Further evidence of an ESL-type situation is found in the relatively high status the language enjoys, in the increasing range of its users and uses, and in the existence of more than one model for users. All these considerations lead on to the conclusion that English in Cameroon is not a "marginal" language and that Cameroon deserves its place among other countries in what is often referred to as "the English-speaking world".

Since the larger part of what is the Republic of Cameroon today was formerly administered by France, there is a frequent tendency, even among language specialists, to classify the whole country as French-speaking. This generally leads people to conclude that English in Cameroon is a marginal language, spoken by very few people and with restricted uses. When, however, one considers that the formerly British-administered part of the country is not as insignificant as it is often thought to be and that English is one of the "official" languages of the whole country, the picture begins to look different. When one goes further to consider the role of Pidgin English as a lingua franca, not only in the English-speaking area but in other areas of the country, and the growing interest in English among the educated people, it becomes imperative to reassess the role of English in the country and to re-examine previous views concerning the place of Cameroon in the English-speaking world. It is widely believed that much of the discussions that took place during the 1961 Foumban Constitutional Conference at which the creation of the Federal Republic of Cameroon was decided was held in Pidgin English. The language has remained a useful tool in (official) communication between monolingual government and political leaders.

### **Defining English in Cameroon**

When a Cameroonian says "I speak English", it is easy to determine (before one has heard him speak for a while) the variety of English he uses and the extent to which he masters that and other varieties. Indeed, Cameroonians tend to speak English in slightly different ways and with varying degrees of fluency and accuracy, depending on what part of the country they come from and on the level and type of formal education they have received. Varieties of "Educated" or "Standard" English and of Pidgin English thus exist side by side and so far there is little agreement among local scholars on what should be termed English and what should not. The question of new English has been addressed by various authors in studies of related language situations in other parts of the world (Kachru 1981, 1983; Richards and Tay 1981; Tay 1982; Tsuzaki 1971, Bamgbose 1973; 1983; Sey 1973; Mehrotra 1982). Practically all of these studies describing situations in which a standard form of English co-exists and is complemented by a pidginized form of the language agree to consider both forms

as parts of one and the same phenomenon: English. The English language in these societies generally tends to be viewed in terms of a continuum at the top of which is found a “standard” or “educated” variety or “lect” of the language and at the bottom of which has been said of the English language in India (Kachru 1983; Mehrotra 1982), in Singapore (Tay, 1982), in Ghana (Sey 1973) and in Nigeria (Bamgbose 1973, 1983).

The situation in Cameroon is much the same as that described in the other countries. Mbassi-Manga (1976) has already suggested the existence of an English language continuum in Cameroon with, at one end, “Educated English” and at the other, Pidgin English. But the exact number of lects within this continuum is yet to be determined. Besides, it may not be possible to do this as there tends to be a considerable degree of overlap between the various lects.

The continuum referred to here is of the non-developmental type discussed by Richards and Tay (1981) and Kachru (1981, 1983). It is functionally determined and the varieties of lects function in a complementary rather than in a competitive manner. Indeed, individual speakers often master several lects which they use, one at a time, depending on the function and context. The existence of this non-developmental lectal continuum does not exclude the existence of one or more “language learning developmental continuums” (Richards and Tay 1981). Within the “educated” variety which is found at the upper end of the continuum and is generally acquired through formal education, one can distinguish a “language learning developmental continuum”. The language learning moves up the scale as the individual achieves a mastery of this particular variety. A careful examination of the other lects within the non-developmental lectal continuum is likely to reveal the existence of language learning developmental continuums within them.

In conclusion, English in Cameroon may be defined as a complex of both *functionally and developmentally determined varieties* that can be described, in terms of use, as a lectal continuum which has, at its lower end, a “basilectal” variety (Pidgin English) and, at its upper end, an Educated English “acrolect”; and, according to competence, as involving various developmental continuums along each of which varying levels of proficiency in a given lectal variety may be identified. This situation closely reflects the “continuum of continuums” referred to earlier and which tends to characterize situations in which there is both intensive and extensive use of English. The terms “basilect”, “mesolect” and “acrolect” have been used by some authors (Bailey, 1974; Schneider, 1966; Tay, 1982) to refer to possible lectal divisions within the functionally determined lectal continuum.

### **English in Cameroon: EFL, ESL or Both**

The foregoing attempt at defining English in Cameroon seems to have considerably facilitated the task of determining the type of English-using society that Cameroon is. But this is not quite the case. The task remains a complicated one on account of the uneven distribution of the language over the national territory. Although one of the official languages, English is mostly used in the part of the country that was formally administered by the British and its spread to the other parts of the country is only beginning to be felt.

At first sight, it would seem logical to suggest that there is a juxtaposition of two types of English-using societies in the country: an ESL type in the formerly British-administered area and an EFL type in the rest of the country, formerly administered by France. But over the years, influences seem to have existed at the time of reunification in 1961. Besides, it can

be said that one variety of English, that is, Pidgin English, actually kept the territory united even during the 40 to 50 years of separate trusteeship rule. A more careful examination of the situation based on the parameters used by Moag (1982), Strevens (1981, 1983) and Smith (1983 b) is likely to throw more light on the situation.

These three authors have each attempted to describe various types of English-using societies. The various parameters suggested by them can be summarized under five main headings:

- i) Official language policy in relation to the role and functions ascribed to English, and to the measures taken to foster the spread of the language;
- ii) The extend of English use in relation to the number of users and the range of uses to which the language is put;
- iii) The attitude adopted by users and learners of the language in relation to the status of English within the society;
- iv) The presence or absence of a local 'standard' of English in relation to the presence or absence of non-native models;
- v) The range of lectal and stylistic variation observable within a given variety of English as a measure of the intensity with which the language is used. Examined in the light of these parameters, the situation of English in Cameroon is likely to stand out more clearly.

### **Official Language Policy**

English is one of the two official languages of Cameroon, the other being French. Because of its official status, government has been doing everything possible to promote its use. Most efforts toward getting Cameroonians to acquire the language are channelled through the school system. The language is taught in all secondary schools and institutions of higher learning in the country. It is the medium of instruction in all primary and secondary institutions in the English-speaking North West and South West provinces. Meanwhile, attempts have been made since the early 1980s to introduce its teaching in primary school in some French-speaking provinces through what has been termed "operation bilingualism". French-English bilingualism is also being promoted through special "bilingual" primary and secondary schools. The best example of such schools is the Bilingual Grammar school at Molyko-Buea which has successfully produced several classes of functionally bilingual graduates.

Bilingualism is also promoted out of the regular school system. After the reunification of the two territories, French and English were taught to workers and other interested persons at special linguistic centers and through radio courses. With government approval, the American Cultural Centers in Yaoundé and Douala have organized special English language courses open to the public for several years. And, as recently as August 1985, a center for the teaching of English to employees of the public sector was created in Yaoundé. All the measures reveal an official language policy which can be said to be very favourable to the spread of English in the country.

But the English promoted through these efforts is only the "standard" variety whose use remains fairly restricted for reasons that will be examined later. There are no official efforts toward promoting the spread of the pidginized variety. Nevertheless, no form of official hostility has been expressed toward it. Only some school authorities continue to

frown at Pidgin English which they see as a stumbling block in the way of young learners of the “standard” variety. Otherwise, Pidgin English frequently creeps into official transactions sometimes involving even top government and state officials.

### **Range of Users and Use**

A socio-linguistic survey of urban centres in Cameroon has revealed that the use of “Standard” or “Education” English remains fairly restricted in the country. Povey (1983) reports that even those who claim competence in the language say they use it only in formal situations and to strangers. Koenig and Jikong (1983) also point out that unlike French which serves as a lingua franca in much of the southern half of the country, Standard English is used almost exclusively by the educated people. Both statements are true and clearly reflect the way standard English is used in Cameroon.

It is the medium of instruction in schools in the English speaking North West and South West provinces. It is also the predominant language of administration and the Court. In the other parts of the country which are predominantly French speaking, standard English is only occasionally used in administration although is a medium of instruction at the University of Yaoundé and other institutions of higher learning. All these situations are seen to be formal. Povey (1983) also reports that twice as many people declared they had competence in French than those who claimed familiarity with English. This is first of all not surprising because the English-speaking provinces account for only about a fifth of the total population. Besides, even in the so-called English-speaking provinces, only those who have attained a certain level in the formal educational system can be said to be competent in the “standard” variety of English. One other factor that restricts the use of standard English is that although many people are taught English while at secondary school in French-speaking provinces, they soon lose any competence they may have acquired when they leave school because situations which call for the use of the language are few. If English in Cameroon were restricted to the standard variety, then one then one would be inclined to conclude that the use of English in the country was not very widespread. But as it was pointed out in the definition of English in Cameroon, English is a complex phenomenon which includes all varieties both standard and non standard.

When Pidgin English is considered as a variety of English in Cameroon, one can talk of both extensive and intensive use of English in the country. The recent socio-linguistics survey of urban centers in Cameroon reveals that Pidgin English is rapidly spreading throughout the country. The most important and unexpected result of this study, and one infinitely rich in its implications for national policy, is the extraordinary and unanticipated extent of Pidgin English. In the extent of its area of dominance, and in the breath of the circumstances of its primary usage, Pidgin clearly assumes an importance never previously recognized.

If one examines the overall figures provided in this report, it is not French, it is not Fulfulde, and it is certainly not Standard English that has established itself as the most widespread and, therefore, the single most useful means of communication in Cameroon, it is Pidgin English.

One may argue that the survey covered only urban centers and its findings can therefore not be said to be conclusive. Nevertheless, this is a clear indication of a trend that needs to be watched with a lot of interest and attention. Neither encouraged nor discouraged, but through the sheer force of its accessibility and its effectiveness as a means of

communication between people who do not share a common “home language” or “received language”, Pidgin English has crept from its original home along the Atlantic coast to urban centers as far north as Maroua and is even beginning to creep into many homes where it is becoming as important as the “home language” (Mbangwana 1983). This scholar used the term “home language” to refer to any vernacular language and “received language” to refer to either English or French.

Pidgin English completes “standard English” in a wide range of situations that do not call for much formality or in which the other languages cannot function because they are not known by all the participants. Still according to Mbangwana (1983), Pidgin English is a language of culture used in musical compositions, folk-tales and other popular literature. It is one of the main languages used in out-of-group interaction and for that reason it is frequently used during political campaigns and other popular assemblies. It is the trade language *par excellence*, used in all local markets attended by people from various linguistic backgrounds. It is a language of evangelisation and worship as well as the language of the local craftsmen-mechanics, radio repairers, builders, etc.

This very wide use of Pidgin English is seen as one of the factors restricting the use of Standard English. Indeed, there is very little competition between these two main varieties of English; instead, each serves to complete the other. One may thus conclude that English as a whole remains a widely used language in Cameroon.

### **Attitudes Expressed Toward English**

Being one of the official languages, the “Standard” variety maintains a fairly high status within the country. This status remains high in spite of the fact that many speakers of French would tend to rate it below French. Nevertheless, English-speaking Cameroonians as well as many of the originally French-speaking elite who have acquired a mastery of English, rate Standard English very high. Most of these speakers are conscious of the role of English as a world language in the spheres of business and science and technology.

Attitudes toward Pidgin English are not always clearly defined. Its fairly wide use and the circumstances of its use tend to arouse mostly neutral feelings towards the lingua franca. Certainly it is frowned at in classrooms and other formal situations where the use of the standard variety is expected. But outside these situations it becomes a very popular language and can be heard on the lips of Cameroonians of all social level. To many people all over the country, it is the only form of English they know and more so cherish. The market woman in Bertoua, Akonolinga, Yaounde, Douala, Bamenda or Kumba who succeeds through the use of Pidgin English to sell her wares is very proud of her achievement. Often it happens that this is the only other language she speaks apart from her home language. One cannot get people to look low on their most effective means of communication. Hence attitudes toward English in general range from neutral to very positive.

### **Models and Standards**

In all English-speaking societies models are either “native” or “non-native” (Kachru 1983 a). The term model is used here to refer to a form that is generally acceptable to the users of a language. Consequently, a “native” model is one based on the rules of acceptability recognized and observed by native-speakers of English. Native models exist in non-native English situations when use of the language is so restricted or specialized that no local norms

of usage have developed and users look up to native norms of usage to guide them in their use of the language. Non-native models exist in societies where English is more widely used and where the peculiarities of the contexts of use have given rise to local standards or to local norms of acceptability.

In the case of English in Cameroon, one can conveniently say that local norms of acceptability have developed. Mbassi-Manga (1976) points out that very few users of English in Cameroon ever had the opportunity of learning from native speakers of the language. The average user of English in Cameroon therefore speaks a variety of English which is strongly marked by the environment.

The Education English which grew out of the above situation was bound to be a special variety which can be described as sharing some common core with the world Education English Standard at the written model and especially in grammar, but which is variably divergent in its lexis, especially at the idiomatic and collocational “levels”, and greatly differentiated from the Educated English Standard in phonology.

But as Kachru (1983 a) suggests, there are situations in which only one model can be identified and others which makes room for the existence of several models. English in Cameroon presents a situation of the latter type. One may talk of a “polymodel” type of situation in Cameroon because there is considerable variation within the society in terms of the functions assumed by English, its method of acquisition and its context of use. There are first of all main varieties, an educated English and a Pidgin, and each of these can be said to have its model. Besides, even at the level of educated English alone, one may talk of the emergence of a native-like model based on internationally accepted norms of usage. Such a model or standard is pursued by those speakers of English in Cameroon who have undertaken university or other advanced studies in countries where English is a native tongue. The “polymodel” situation is characteristic of ESL-type societies (Moag 1982; Strevens 1981).

### **Range of Lectal and Stylistic Variation**

Lectal variation in English in Cameroon can be said to be considerable. The existence of a non-developmental lectal continuum discussed earlier makes room for the existence of various lects that are determined by language function. This variation, however, is not as evident in the educated variety of English as it is in the pidgin. Educated English, it was said, is restricted to official situations. But even so, one can clearly distinguish between the English of the courts from that of the newspaper, for example. As far as Pidgin English is concerned, one can say there are as many lects as the distinctive functions to which the language variety is put. The pidgin used for worship in the churches is of course different from that used in the market. Various lects are developing around trades and crafts, while the younger generation has a variety of Pidgin English with a typically “in-group” function.

Stylistic variation is not as extensive as lectal variation in Cameroon English. Not that there are no markers of style in the language, but that in a variety like Educated English which is reserved for formal occasions, there is not much need for variation. Hence, variation within such a variety remains fairly limited. Lect-switching is a more commonly used marker of style when a Cameroon user of English wants to distinguish formal from informal usage. A switch from Educated English to Pidgin English often makes a switch from a formal to an informal style. Among educated English-speaking Cameroonians, Pidgin English use is a mark of familiarity *par excellence*.

New styles are developing within Pidgin English that call for attention. Recent studies undertaken by graduate students of the Department of English of the University of Yaoundé indicate that Cameroonians are putting a lot of their creative genius into the language and the results are as interesting as they can be confounding to the outsider. Two such studies are entitled “CAMSPK: A Speech Reality in Cameroon” by T. Lekobou and “Lexical Renovations in Cameroon Pidgin English” by B. Ngome. Both studies reveal a wide range of new lexical items and expressions coined from existing “home language” English or French items and expressions.

## Conclusion

The foregoing discussion based on the five parameters abstracted from the various studies cited, leads one to the conclusion that the English language is anything but a marginal language in Cameroon. It is one of the two official languages in the country and much is being done to promote its spread and use. The number of its users is increasing at a steady pace and it is put to a fairly wide range of uses by those who use it. Attitudes of users toward it can be rated from neutral to favourable and its intensive use within the country has given rise to a local standard and non-native models. Finally, lectal variation within the language is considerable while stylistic variation exists, although not following the same patterns found in native-English situations.

These defining features of English in Cameroon, considering particularly the integrative role of Cameroon Pidgin English, lead one to safely conclude that the whole territory is evolving toward a typical ESL situation. In the thickly populated northwest, southwest, western and littoral provinces, English is a familiar phenomenon. In the other provinces, its use is rapidly expanding and hardly does one raise an eyebrow any more to hear the language spoken. Of the various types of English-using societies described by Moag (1982) and Strevens (1981, 1983) only the former’s ESL-type and the latter’s intra-national LFE-type can clearly be identified in Cameroon. This places the country in the front row of non-native English societies along with countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, India and Singapore.

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## **RECENT TRENDS IN CAMEROON PIDGIN ENGLISH.**

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### **0. INTRODUCTION.**

The history of Pidgin English (PE) is closely linked to that of contacts between this part of the West and Central Africa and the Countries of Europe. According to J. Bouchaud (1952), contact between Europe and the West Coast of Africa was made in the fifteenth century when the Portuguese, under Henry the Navigator, decided to explore this part of the African continent. According to the same source, the Portuguese first established contact with the coast of Cameroon shortly after 1472 when a Portuguese expedition reached Fernando Pô, an island off the coast of Cameroon, now part of Equatorial Guinea.

The contacts between Portuguese and the languages of this part of Africa first gave rise to Portuguese –based Pidgins and Creoles that spread from Saô Tomé to the Cape Verde islands (Schneider, 1974). But when Portuguese influence started dwindling , other powers came into the area. The Dutch came in at the beginning of the seventeenth century but their presence was short-lived as they were soon replaced by the British. Mbassi Mnaga (1973) states that British presence in the Guinea started growing by 1618 when a trade monopoly was granted to a British firm to carry out trade transactions in the area. Dike (1956) suggests that British influence spread in the eighteenth century with the introduction of the ‘factory’ and ‘trust’ systems that brought about closer contacts between the British and inhabitants of the area. These contacts were intensified during the slave trade period as the bulk of the slaves were transported by the British.

These contacts with the British gave rise to an English Base pidgin that ultimately replaced the Portuguese pidgins that had been used in the area for over two centuries. The exact manner in which the shift from Portuguese pidgins to Pidgin English occurred remains uncertain. What is however certain is that by the end of the eighteenth century, Pidgin English was firmly established throughout the West African Coast (Schneider, 1974). Since then, the use of the language has continued to spread in Cameroon and elsewhere along the coast. Today, Pidgin English is one of the principal languages of inter-ethnic communication in Cameroon.

Pidgin English in Cameroon has been the object of considerable scholarly interest. Linguists and writers such as Schneider (1974), Mbassi-Manga (1973, 1976); Todd (1969, 1974, 1979, 1984); Menang (1979), Mbangwana (1983), Ngome (1985), Gilman (1979) and others have examined various aspects of Pidgin English use in Cameroon. But as the language continues to grow and spread, there is need to constantly track it. The present paper thus reviews some of the trends that have been observed in the form and use of the language over the last two decades or so. On account of the vastness of the topic and the rate at which changes continue to occur within the language, the paper will provide just a bird's view. Focus in this rapid survey will be on the following: spread and function, linguistic features, variational trends, interlingual ties and future prospects.

## **1.0 SPREAD AND FUNCTIONS OF CPE**

Recent studies and on-going field studies reveal that Pidgin English is steadily gaining grounds in both its spread and use in Cameroon. This is happening notwithstanding the fact that certain 'linguistic snobs' in the country wish that this important medium of communication could disappear for the simple reason that prior knowledge of Pidgin English seems to impede the rapid acquisition of 'Standard English' among school-age children. As the facts presented below clearly indicate, those who hope that this language is going to disappear may indeed have to wait for quite some time for that to happen.

### **1.1 SPREAD OF CPE**

The single, most revealing study that provides information on the spread of Pidgin English is the socio-linguistic survey of urban centres in Cameroon, of which the findings are published in a work edited by Edna L. Koenig, Emmanuel Chia and Jon Povey (1983). The survey was conducted under the auspices of the English Department at Yaounde.

From a fairly restricted code that grew out of contacts between European explorers, merchants and missionaries and the coastal inhabitants of Cameroon some three to four hundred years ago, Pidgin English has grown into one of the most widely spoken languages in Cameroon. According to the linguistic survey, by the early nineteen eighties, Pidgin English had spread throughout the southern half of the country although it was more intensively used in the two English speaking provinces of the North West and South West and in the Littoral and Western Provinces, (Jikong and Koenig, 1983). A closer look at this spread taken by Koenig (1983) revealed that in all the urban areas surveyed in the southern half of francophone Cameroon, Pidgin English was present. Between 30% and 60% or more of the people interviewed in these towns claimed that they knew and used the language. The highest percentage was registered in Douala, Cameroon's economic capital and chief town of the Littoral Province, while the lowest was recorded in Bertoua in the east Province. The number of people who claimed to know and use Pidgin in the six urban areas studied in the two English-speaking provinces of the country hardly ever dropped below 80% of those interviewed. Around the same period, Renaud (1983) cited by Ngome (1985), estimated the number of CPE speakers at around one million and half, an estimate that looks modest by all standards when one considers that English-speaking provinces of the country where the language is most widespread today account for about one fifth of a total population which stands at more than fifteen million.

## **1.2 FUNCTIONS OF CPE**

Mbangwana (1983), lists the following functions for Pidgin English in Cameroon:

- it is used in electronic and print media for advertisement and other programs that target a rural audience;

- it is used in popular music production;
- it is used as an out-group language;
- it is used for worship and evangelisation by Christian churches;
- it is used for buying and selling;
- it is finally used for socialisation.

This list clearly indicates that Pidgin English does not play a marginal role in the lives of those who use it. Writing earlier, Mbassi-Manga (1973) and Todd (1974) had indicated that Pidgin English was being used alongside standard English as a medium of education and instruction in certain nursery schools. Menang (1979) pointed to the increasing use of Pidgin English as a language of trade apprenticeship and practice.

Underscoring the importance of Pidgin English as a language of inter-ethnic communication or lingua franca, Jikong and Koenig (1983:55) write:

“On the basis of the survey data, it was found that Cameroon can be divided into three major lingua franca zones: Pidgin English, French, and Fulfulde, with a fourth possible zone for Fang-Beti (Ewondo) language group”.

As indicated earlier, Pidgin English serves as a lingua franca in much of the southern half of the country.

Povey (1983) insists on the importance of Pidgin English as a language of day-to-day communication when he writes:

“In Douala it was discovered that 83% of the population used Pidgin English when buying in the market, a figure that indicated the near monopoly of Pidgin for day-to-day services. In the Anglophone West, 79% of children entering school affirmed they used Pidgin”.

Two other important developments in the use of Pidgin English in Cameroon deserve attention. The first is its increased use in the domains of local government, local capacity building and technology transfer among both urban and rural populations. This trend is more noticeable in the Anglophone provinces. Indeed administrators, technical staff and extension workers in certain key government

ministries cannot carry on their duties in this part of the country without a good knowledge of Pidgin English. Administrative field staff of the Ministry of Territorial Administration (Governors, Senior Divisional Officers, Divisional Officers, District Heads etc....) use Pidgin English on a regular, if not daily, basis to reach out to both urban and rural masses and local (village) authorities. Health education staff from the Ministry of Public health, almost exclusively used Pidgin English when dealing with urban and rural populations. The same applies to technical and field staff of the Ministries of Agriculture and Animal and Livestock Breeding and of the numerous Non-governmental Organisation (NGO's) that work among rural and urban populations to promote various development programmes. Thus a lot of information of a specialised and technical character is passed on from specialists to the ordinary urban dweller or peasant through the medium of Pidgin English.

Another important development is the increased use of Pidgin English as a language of social identification and differentiation. This trend has indeed given rise to new varieties of the language that are particularly popular among young people of various walks of life. These have been variously referred to as 'Kamtok' (Beteck, 1986; Ayafor 1996), Camspeak (Tiayon, 1985) and Camfranglais ( Ze Amvela, 1989, Biloa, 1999). In a nutshell, these social groups comprising young people who share the same school/university milieu or who engage in the same economic activities have developed new ways of speaking Pidgin English that enable their members to communicate among themselves without being understood by Pidgin English users outside these groups. The phenomenon will be referred to later under formal and variational trends. But what is important to note here is this functional specialisation within Pidgin English as a medium of socialisation in Cameroon.

## **2.0 FORMAL AND VARIATIONAL TRENDS IN CPE**

Talking about formal and variational trends in Cameroon Pidgin English is quite a complicated matter. In the first place, because Pidgin English is still not 'standardized' in the strict sense of the word, there is ample room for differences and developments in form and variational trends that become almost impossible to track. In the second place, most people agree that changes in grammatical form are often so subtle and so slow that they are hardly noticeable. This makes it difficult to clearly

identify and describe those features that may be said to indicate formal evolutionary trends. Nevertheless, an attempt is made below to outline some of the broad formal features that have been observed within Cameroon Pidgin English over the past two decades or so.

## **2.1 LEXICAL, GRAMMATICAL AND PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES**

The most remarkable change that has taken place within Cameroon Pidgin English over the past two decades has been the rapid growth in its vocabulary. In his study of Anglophone Pidgin English speech at the start of the period under review, Menang (1979) observed the following trends in lexical development:

- Pidgin English was borrowing massively from 'Educated' or 'Standard' English;
- The borrowed items came from a wide range of usage domains but it was noticed that items referring to new habits, lifestyles and technologies were quite numerous;
- Following this massive importation of words from SE, the vocabulary of the educated Anglophone speaker of Pidgin English was steadily increasing and creating room for the existence of synonyms within the language that hitherto did not exist;
- An increasing number of loans were also entering CPE from French and home language (HL) sources;
- Loans from home languages came in generally to fill cultural gaps and were used to name items, practices, beliefs etc. found in ethnic cultures;
- Loans from French were mostly used to name political and administrative institutions, titles practices etc.

Subsequent studies, (Tiayon, 1985; Ngome, 1985) confirmed these trends and focused particularly on recent loans from HL sources. Ngome for instance describe lexical 'renovations' in Pidgin English in the following terms (Ngome, 1985:41).

*“That aggregate of words, particles and phrases which enter into the vocabulary of CPE-speaking population is what is referred to as lexical renovations. They vary from colloquial and common, dialectal and slang, to foreign and scientific”.*

Ngome pointed out that while some of the new items were shared by both Anglophone and Francophone users of CPE, others were not. Among the items that formed part of what he termed the “common core” featured the following: ‘alo’, ‘repei’, ‘fua’, ‘tinge’. He also pointed out that many of these new items (about 50%) were found mostly in the speech of special social groups such as young people, hawkers, taxi drivers and ‘market boys’. One thus notices that these studies by Ngome (1985) and Tiayon (1985) were among the first to draw attention to what some researchers refer to today as ‘Camfranglais’.

Some of Ngome’s conclusions are worth nothing:

- The lexical resources of CPE had undergone a rapid increase within a few years;
- The emergence of new forms was gradually leading to the disuse of certain older ones;
- With the increase in the lexical resources of CPE, the use of reduplications had become less frequent;
- Hardly any changes involved the grammar of CPE.

As concerns changes in the grammar of Pidgin English, hardly any studies have paid attention to these, most probably on account of the fact that because the language does not have a written grammar to which users may refer, changes would be hard to determine. Nevertheless, Schneider’s (1966) description of West African Pidgin English, which relied heavily on Pidgin English usage in Cameroon, remains till date one of the most exhaustive studies of the grammar of CPE. In terms of new trends, the following are worth noting:

- The use of fewer reduplications on account of the importation into CPE of adverbs from SE that serve that grammatical function;
- The co-existence of two sets of plural morphemes following the frequent adoption of English plural forms. These are used interchangeably or sometimes together. For example in the first of the two utterances that are not uncommon in the CPE speech of educated Anglophones, only SE plural markers are used, while in the second utterance the CPE plural markers 'dem' is added to already existing SE markers:

In addition to standard English plural morphemes 'z' 's' and 'iz', use is also made here of the typical Pidgin English plural marker 'dem'.

- dem bin giv praiziz tu di men an wimen. (Prizes were given to the men and the women);
- boiz dem an gels dem tu bin risiv praiziz (Boys and girls also received prizes);
- entire stretches in which SE and not PE syntax is observed are frequently grafted on CPE utterances by Anglophone speakers in a manner that makes it hard for one to determine which of the two languages the speaker is using.

These, of course, are features that are not widely shared among CPE users, particularly those from the French-speaking areas of the country. They need to be more closely examined before one can determine exactly what they represent.

As far as pronunciation is concerned, CPE is marked by considerable variation as people from different ethnic backgrounds, particularly those who have not attained a reasonable level of formal education in English, speak the language with varying accents. Most francophones also speak with typical 'francophone' accent. In Anglophone speech however, one trend may be observed. SE+CPE bilinguals, when speaking among themselves, tend to adopt SE pronunciation for most recent or occasional loans from SE. This is a trend that also needs to be watched even among

francophones who, in addition to using French and CPE, possess a fairly good knowledge of English and whose number is steadily growing.

## **2.2 VARIATIONAL TRENDS**

Variational trends are also quite difficult to determine in CPE because variation is the rule rather than the exception. It has been said above that the language is spoken with as many accents as ethnic and second language influences dictate.

Renaud (1983), cited by Ngome (1985), suggests that there are two broad varieties of Pidgin English in Cameroon: Anglophone Pidgin English and Francophone Pidgin English. This, of course, is a gross simplification of the actual situation which is more complex. Beteck (1986) raises the issue of the possible existence of an English language continuum in Cameroon with CPE as its basilect and Educated English (EdE) as its acrolect. The original suggestion of the existence of such a continuum comes from Mbassi-Manga (1973, 1976). Although the discussion attempts to answer the question whether Pidgin English is the same language as Standard English, it definitely draws attention to the considerable variation that exists within both CPE and SE in Cameroon. Beteck cites Todd (1974) who does not subscribe to the view that CPE is the same language as SE although the latter recognises the fact that with regular and increasing exposure of an English-based Pidgin or Creole to its matrillect (SE), a 'spectrum of Englishes often arises, some of which closely resemble the standard and tends to make the task of identification and classification quite difficult.

This view indeed reflects the complexity of the situation of English in Cameroon in general and of Pidgin English in particular. This 'spectrum of English' referred to by Todd (1974) includes speech forms that blend into CPE and one thus finds it hard to simply dismiss the idea of a continuum. One thing however is clear: there are numerous varieties of Pidgin English in Cameroon today. Almost all of them still need to be studied. Some of them are determined by geographical location as suggested by Renaud (1983); others are determined by social function as is the case with 'Kamtok', 'Camspeak' and 'Camfranglais', Varieties are also going to arise from

functional specialisation as CPE is increasingly used in occupational and technical domains. All of these will deserve scholarly attention.

### **3.0. INTERLINGUAL TIES**

Interlingual relations simply refer to the links that exist between CPE and the other languages that form part of the rich linguistic repertoire of Cameroonians. Two main factors are taken into consideration in this discussion of interlingual ties: language functions and the existence of mutual influences.

#### **3.1 FUNCTIONAL RELATIONS BETWEEN CPE AND OTHER LANGUAGES**

CPE shares functions with all of the country's major languages.

Without being an L 1 except to a relatively low percentage of children growing up under peculiar circumstances, CPE nevertheless shares 'home' functions with the home languages that are generally of African stock. Indeed, the socio-linguistic survey of urban centres reported that CPE was present in numerous homes and was the preferred language of children when they were communicating with other children. (Mbangwana, 1983). Besides, Koenig (1983:47) also reports the existence of some children who did not speak a Cameroonian home language and for whom CPE had become the home language:

*"In the North Western and South Western provinces, the percent of children who do not speak a Cameroonian language is considerable higher in two of the towns. Percentages are as follows: Kumba, 4% Bamenda, 5% Mamfe, 5% Buea, 10% and Victorai (Limbe), 16%. Again, the extremely heterogeneous socio-linguistic environment, with no language having a sufficiently high percentage of L1 speakers, reinforces the acquisition and usage of Pidgin"*

- As a lingua Franca or LWC, CPE was reported by Jikong and Koenig (1983), as sharing this function with French, Fulfulde and sometimes Ewondo;

- The political and administrative function in Cameroon is of course dominated by French. But French shares this 'Official' function with English and sometimes officially with CPE;
- Finally, as a tool for promoting development and economic integration, CPE also shares what may be termed a technological function with French and English. It has been shown how it is used for the spread and acquisition of knowledge and new technologies among urban and rural masses.

### 3.2 INTERLINGUAL INFLUENCES

Because function-sharing usually implies contact between CPE and Cameroon's other major languages, it has been observed that CPE and these languages exert mutual influences in all except perhaps the case of Fulfulde for which no information is immediately available.

- CPE has borrowed and continues to borrow words from Cameroon's home languages (HLS). Many of these languages, at least in the past, have also borrowed considerably from CPE. It would be interesting to find out how much of this reciprocal activity is going on particularly out-side the English speaking provinces;
- CPE has borrowed heavily from Standard English (85% and 80% of English cognates as reported by Schneider (1966) and Mbassi-Manga (1973 respectively). This activity is still going on particularly within the varieties spoken in the English-speaking provinces as discussed earlier. The local standard of English (EdE) has also borrowed from CPE. Indeed, many HL items find their way into EdE by transiting through CPE;
- Although CPE has borrowed relatively fewer from French, the latter still accounts for about 5% of its lexicon (Mbassi-Manga, 1973). This borrowing is still going on particularly in the varieties of CPE spoken in the francophone provinces. CPE loans in French however remain marginal.

#### **4.0. CONCLUSION: WHAT FUTURE FOR CPE ?**

This rather quick survey of recent trends in CPE enables one to draw a number of broad conclusions regarding its present and future roles in the lives of Cameroonians who use it, the changes that are taking place within the language as it is being used and those that are likely to occur in future.

#### **4.1. WHAT ROLE FOR CPE IN CAMEROON?**

While it has been relatively easy to examine what has been going on within CPE over the past few decades with some degree of accuracy, it is certainly not as easy to determine what is going to happen to the language in future.

It has been established in the course of the present survey that in view of the important functions it performs, CPE plays a very important role in the lives of the Cameroonians who use it. The potential for CPE to play an even more important role in certain areas such as education and the consolidation of national unity and integration is considerable, but the political will is certainly lacking as successive governments since independence in 1960 and Reunification in 1961 have tended to evade the question of language planning, scared no doubt by the complexity and very sensitive nature of the problem.

That notwithstanding, CPE will continue to play an important role as a language of wider communication in Cameroon. It will certainly continue to assume its numerous functions within CPE-using communities. As more and more people leave their ethnic bases in rural areas to settle in largely de-tribalised urban centres, more and more families will be founded in this neutral environment and the offspring from these families will increasingly find themselves using CPE as L1. This is certainly a trend to be watched with attention.

#### **4.2 WHAT KIND OF CPE FOR CAMEROON?**

In an answer to this question, the linguistic 'snobs' referred to at the beginning of this overview would answer 'none', because CPE is a pest. It is a useful 'pest' with numerous varieties. Variation will for long continue to be the rule rather than the exception in CPE. Efforts to standardize CPE remain rather timid as most ethnic communities are presently more pre-occupied with codifying and writing their respective indigenous languages than with ensuring the stability of CPE that is apparently under no threat. Literature does exist in Pidgin English but its use is fairly restricted to church services. A pidgin English Bible has just been launched in Bamenda and may indeed push many members of Christian communities to read the Bible in PE and thus become familiar with a written form of CPE that could limit some forms of variation. P.E. spoken in the English-speaking provinces may develop two broad varieties, with one of them moving quite close to EdE if the present trends observed in educated Anglophone speech persist. Beside it, will continue to exist the Pidgin English speech of the less educated or uneducated Anglophones. The Pidgin English used by Francophones will continue to exhibit a wide range of variation.

'Camfranglais' will continue to thrive in certain 'closed' circles and new 'sporadic' speech varieties of the same kind may emerge. But this is going to have only a limited effect on CPE as a whole. Some items will pass from these exotic speech varieties into 'mainstream' CPE. But 'Camfranglais' is not likely to soon replace CPE as Ze Amvela (1989) reports some analysts to be suggesting. Speakers of 'Camfranglais' will continue to use it with their peers, but they will continue to use CPE to communicate out of their peer groups. The emergence and evolution of these exotic speech forms are another trend that deserves attention.

#### **4.3 WHAT IS THE PRESENT STAGE IN CPE DEVELOPMENT?**

Because of the considerable variety observed within the languages, CPE can be said to be going through several stages at the same time. Menang (1979), in his study of Anglophone speech, already suggested that Anglophone Pidgin English, through supra-lexification and re-borrowing from S.E., was entering the post-Pidgin stage. But he also pointed out that this could not be said of all varieties of CPE in the English-speaking provinces.

Recent studies (Povey, 1983; Mbangwanan, 1983;) Tiayon, 1985; Ngome, 1985; Biloa 1999) confirm this rapid growth in the vocabulary of CPE. The pull can now be said to be not only towards SE but also towards French and HL in certain varieties of the language. On top of what may be termed by some as the start of the de-Pidginisation process within some varieties and further indigenisation within others, there is a clear indication that the process of creolization had definitely begun within CPE. This is one trend that will also have to be watched keenly.

The overall situation of CPE is thus complex and constantly evolving. Hymes (1971:78) underscores this co-existence of several stages within the same pidgin in the following terms:

“Within a single region there may coexist, contiguously, more than one stage of Pidgin development. And there may indeed be more than two stages- a pre-Pidgin continuum, a crystallized pidgin, a pidgin undergoing depidginization (re-absorption by its dominant source), a pidgin undergoing creolization, a Creole, a Creole, undergoing decreolization”.

The next few decades will certainly bring more interesting developments within the language. Linguists and socio-linguists must not fail to catch these developments as they unfold.

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## **IS 'CAMFRANGLAIS' A NEW LANGUAGE? - A REVIEW OF CURRENT OPINIONS**

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**0.** The language-contact situation in Cameroon, where hundreds of ethnic languages coexist with two official languages and a number of lingua francas, continues to evolve and to produce new usage trends and patterns. One of the outcomes of the dynamism of the linguistic situation in Cameroon is the emergence over the last two decades or so of a new linguistic phenomenon that certain analysts have styled 'Camfranglais' for the simple reason that it comprises a combination of elements drawn from Cameroon indigenous languages ('cam'), from French ('fran'), and from Pidgin English ('anglai'). What precisely this French acronym refers to in linguistic terms remains fairly controversial as some analysts see in this phenomenon the emergence of a new language while other evidence suggests that 'Camfranglais' is certainly a new speech form but not a new language in the strict sense of the term.

This paper sets out to review some of the current opinions about 'Camfranglais' with a view to critically determining their linguistic validity. It starts by outlining the principal views held about the phenomenon before proceeding, in a second step, to verify their validity. It ends by highlighting the complexities that render this linguistic phenomenon so elusive to definition.

### **1.0 CURRENT VIEWS ABOUT 'CAMFRANGLAIS'.**

Current views about 'Camfranglais' are related particularly to its origins, its functions and its formal characteristics. Almost all these views are expressed in a

number of studies that have attempted to describe aspects of this linguistic phenomenon (Tiayon, 1985; Ngome, 1985, Ze Amvela, 1989, Chia, 1990; Mendo Ze, 1990; Efoua Zengue, 1996; Biloa, 1999). The principal findings and suggestions arising from these and other studies are summarised in the paragraphs that follow.

### 1.1 THE ORIGIN OF 'CAMFRANGLAIS'

Although 'Camfranglais' is a fairly recent phenomenon as the various studies cited above seem to indicate, earlier studies on Pidgin English had already detected innovative activities within the language that augured the emergence of new social varieties of the language. Hence, at the end of the nineteen seventies, Menang (1979) made reference to youthful forms of Pidgin English speech in which one found a mix of lexical items from Pidgin English, French and indigenous languages. In discussing what he referred to as 'emergent trends' in Pidgin English usage, Menang (1979:116) reproduced the following short conversation between two young people, a boy and a girl, in a Victoria (Limbe) pub:

- *Girl:*            *Wusai yu los so*  
                          *(Where have you been. You have been so missing)*
- *Boy:*             *Sista, no bi na mi dis, spoil mi*  
                          *(Sister, isn't this me? Spoil me)*

This of course is not 'Camfranglais' in its present sophistication, but it already indicates a certain speech novelty that is going to develop with time. Menang drew attention to items such as 'jam' and 'spoil' which are old words to which the young people have given new meanings ('meet' and 'give someone a treat' respectively). He also mentioned the introduction of the French word 'sware' (soirée) which was a fashionable replacement for 'ivining' (evening). He concluded (Menang 1979:16): 'Usually, these new meanings are known only to members of the group and thus they are able to keep non-members out of their chats'.

Later on, Mbangwana (1983:83) drew attention to the fact that Pidgin English was rapidly increasing its vocabulary by drawing items from French and home language (HL) sources:

“Such an important contribution to the CPE vocabulary stock from French and indigenous sources clearly demonstrates that the form of CPE in terms of its lexical mix is being constantly enriched and expanded”.

By the mid-eighties, Tiayon (1985) and Ngome (1985) conducted more detailed studies on these emerging speech styles, drawing attention to the various processes through which new vocabulary items were derived and listing several newly coined words. At this time, the term ‘Camfranglais’ had not yet been coined. Tiayon (1985) labelled the new speech form ‘Camspeak’, while Ngome (1985) considered the new items as ‘lexical renovations’ in Pidgin English. The term ‘Camfranglais’ did not emerge before the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties (Ze Amvela, 1989 and Chia, 1990).

In 1989, Ze Amvela, while reporting that some analysts believed that ‘Camfranglais’ was a new language that would gradually replace Pidgin English, described the linguistic phenomenon in the following terms ( Ze Amvela, 1989:57):

“From a purely linguistic point of view, Camfranglais is made up of a composite vocabulary which is usually expressed through Pidgin English grammar or French Grammar”

Chia (1990) is extensively reviewed by Biloa (1999:147-148), who describes Camfranglais as the product of the cohabitation of numerous languages in Cameroon:

“Cette cohabitation, qui constitue en elle-même ‘un labyrinthe des langues’, a donné naissance, chez les chômeurs, ouvriers, les vendeurs à la sauvette, les élèves et les étudiants, à un parler hybride, lexicalement constitué de termes issus des langues Camerounaises, du pidgin english, du français, de l’anglais et qu’on appelle le Camfranglais”.

Here Biloa not only cites the lexical sources of ‘Camfranglais’ which are Cameroonian languages, Pidgin English, French and English, but also mentions the various groups of people in whose mouths this ‘hybrid speech form’ developed : The

unemployed, workers, hawkers, school pupils and students. All the other studies have considerably enriched information about this linguistic phenomenon, but Chia's (1990) seems to be one of the most comprehensive to date

## **1.2 FUNCTIONS OF 'CAMFRANGLAIS'**

The various studies under review are quite unanimous about who uses 'Camfranglais' and what this code is used for.

When Menang (1979) observed what he termed an emerging trend in Pidgin English usage that can be thought of today as a harbinger of 'Camfranglais', he reported in the first place that the new speech form was popular among young users of P.E. He also reported that the main function of the new speech form was to keep adults and strangers out of the young people's chats. Subsequent studies (Ngome, 1985; Ze Amvela, 1989; Chia, 1990; Biloa, 1999 and other have come to confirm in the first place that 'Camfranglais' is a peer-group phenomenon that does not extend to the wider language community. In other words, one can say that within the language community, there may be one or several 'Camfranglais' speech communities. Ngome (1985), for instance, states that most of the new words in his corpus have fairly restricted in-group usage. They are found in the Pidgin English speech of young people who are mostly urban dwellers and are either students, hawkers, taxi drivers or 'market-boys'.

Concerning its uses, the situation has hardly evolved since this linguistic phenomenon came into existence two decades or so ago. Menang reported that the new variety of Pidgin English had a peer-group function.

Twenty years later, Biloa (1999) confirms what Chia (1990) also found almost ten years earlier. In this respect, Biloa (1999:150) writes: "A l'origine, le but avoué du Camfranglais était de communiquer librement aux yeux des autres sans que les non initiés puissent décoder le message. Par la suite, il est devenu une langue d'amusement ou des comiques aussi bien pour les locuteurs que les non-locuteurs".

The secondary function suggested here, i.e. 'Camfranglais' as a language for making fun among speakers and non-speakers, is indeed a very marginal one.' Camfranglais ' is primarily a 'secret code' that is used for communicating messages to chosen persons. If non users of the code find it amusing, this is precisely because it is strange. One other thing that these studies have not highlighted so far is the fact that being a 'secret code', 'Camfranglais' is often used by delinquents and even criminals when they do not want 'honest' people to know their naughty or devilish plans. Although the list of its uses is quite long (unemployed youths, students and pupils, hawkers and 'market-boys', taxi drivers etc.), these groups do not use 'Camfranglais' for communicating with non-members of their respective groups. Students , for instance, do not use it to talk to their teachers, parents or strangers; nor do taxi drivers and hawkers use it to address their customers. Whenever 'Camfranglais' is used, the intention is almost always to exclude non-members of the group.

### **1.3 FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS OF 'CAMFRANGLAIS'.**

The various studies under review focus primarily on three main formal features: word derivational and coinage processes in 'Camfranglais', utterance structural (syntactic) features and phonological and morpho-phonemic features.

Almost all the studies agree that the ever-growing vocabulary of 'Camfranglais' draws heavily from Pidgin English, French and Cameroon's indigenous languages (Ngome, 1985, Tiayon, 1985; Ze Amvela 1989, Chia, 1990, Efoua Zengue, 1996; Biloa, 1999). Detailed descriptions of the various word derivational processes are found in the last three studies. But they will not be presented here because they are not directly relevant to the present analysis.

As concerns the structure of utterances in 'Camfranglais', various converging, though not identical views are held. Mendo Ze (1990) sees French syntax as the model on which 'Camfranglais' utterances are built. These utterances, he writes, either obey the rules of French grammar or deliberately distort them. Ze Amvela (1989), Chia (1990) and Biloa (1999) draw attention to the fact that apart from French grammar, Pidgin English also sometimes provides the underlying structure of

'Camfranglais' utterances. Chia's (1990) ten principles that are said to govern the building of utterances in this code are indeed enlightening. These principles appear more as new constructive devices than as destructive ones. Of these, the following are worth noting:

- The structure of each utterance reflects the deep-structure of one of its main source languages or one of the super-stratum languages;
- To render 'Camfranglais' difficult to understand, changes in deep structure are effected at points of semantic density;
- Key terms brought in from other languages do not have to obey the rules of the deep structure language;
- The pronunciation of borrowed items remains the same as in the source language;
- Coined words receive an invented pronunciation to avoid confusion.

One thing remains clear all along: Chia (1990) does not suggest that there is yet a grammar of 'Camfranglais' in terms of a coherent system. The same seems true of phonology.

Nevertheless, Biloa (1999) goes on to attempt a phonological and morpho-phonemic analysis of 'Camfranglais'. He lists the various vowels, consonants and semi-vowels of the code. He draws vowels and consonant charts before proceeding to describe various morpho-phonemic processes. It is yet to be seen just how solidly this phonological system is built. But it may be too early to talk of a phonology of 'Camfranglais'.

That notwithstanding, some of the conclusions drawn by Biloa (1999) are interesting as they underscore the absence of consistency in the 'structure' of 'Camfranglais' utterances. He first writes:

"Au niveau de la morphosyntaxe , on peut noter que le temps, le genre , le nombre et le système pronominal du Camfranglais sont ceux du français "(p171).

He immediately points to the fact that French morpho-syntactic rules are not consistently applied :

“ Lorsque les verbes empruntés de l’anglais ou d’autres langues sont employés en Camfranglais, ils sont souvent morphologiquement invariables” (p. 171)

He goes on to confirm the presence in ‘Camfranglais’ of numerous utterances with an underlying Pidgin English structural features :

“Le Camfranglais a aussi recours aux structures du Cameroun pidgin -english. Les formes temporelles et aspectuelles du Cameroun pidgin english, qui sont invariables, abondent dans le Camfranglais“ (p.171).

In what seems to be a general conclusion, Biloa (1999 :172) suggests the existence of varieties of Camfranglais while still insisting on the multiple base of the code in general.

“Certains variétés du Camfranglais ont plus recours à la syntaxe et au lexique du pidgin -english qu’à la syntaxe et au lexique du français. Ce fait suggère néanmoins, que le français et le pidgin -english constituent la fondation lexicale, morphologique et syntaxique sur laquelle le Camfranglais est bâti “

With this review of the origins, functional features and formal characteristics of Camfranglais ended, one may proceed to draw from the various analyses some certainties and uncertainties about ‘Camfranglais’.

## **2.0 CERTAINTIES AND UNCERTAINTIES ABOUT ‘CAMFRANGLAIS’.**

The various studies that have so far permitted the ‘Camfranglais’ phenomenon to come into the limelight have discussed various characteristic features of this code. Some of these features have to do with its users and its uses. Others have to do with its ‘form’ . A close examination of the discussions surrounding these features reveals that there are some on which most analysts tend to agree. These are referred to here as ‘certainties’. There are others however about which there is hardly any consensus either because they are not clearly described or because it is too early to make any

conclusive statement about them. These are the uncertainties. As the situation evolves and more light is shed on this speech phenomenon, some of the points which today appear to be shady will stand out more clearly.

## **2.1 CERTAINTIES ABOUT 'CAMFRANGLAIS'**

Chia (1990) outlines ten principles that can be said to govern usage in 'Camfranglais'. These remain till date the most useful guide to usage in 'Camfranglais' if one may talk about them in those terms. Without invalidating any of those principles, one may also suggest the following ten certainties about 'Camfranglais':

- i. 'Camfranglais' is a fairly recent speech phenomenon in Cameroon. Its emergence was signalled in studies conducted on Pidgin English in Cameroon twenty years or so ago (Menang, 1979; Tiayon, 1985; Ngome, 1985). Its presence under the label of 'Camfranglais' was confirmed by the end of the eighties (Ze Amvela. 1989; Chia, 1990);
- ii. 'Camfranglais' is the product of language contact. All the analysts agree on the fact that contact between some of the numerous languages used in Cameroon gave rise to this speech forms. However, more light still has to be shed on the specific circumstances that gave rise to its emergence since these languages have actually been in contact long before this emergence;
- iii. The use of 'Camfranglais' is not widespread. In fact, it is used within fairly restricted groups and circles that are dominated by young people (School and university campuses, street hawkers and market vendors , taxi drivers etc.);
- iv. 'Camfranglais' is generally part of the speech habits of bilinguals. When one examines the various principles outlined by Chia (1990), it becomes obvious that one needs to be familiar with at least two of its 'source

languages' to communicate effectively through this code. This of course does not exclude the fact that any one of the numerous languages used in Cameroon is a potential contributor to 'Camfranglais';

- v. 'Camfranglais' functions basically as a secret code, the idea being to keep non-members of the group or circle out of the conversation. It is the medium par excellence of what may be referred to as the private domain of the youth (in which older people may not intrude);
- vi. 'Camfranglais' draws its vocabulary from the various languages in contact in Cameroon, notably from French, English and Pidgin English. The widely spoken home languages are all potential sources;
- vii. The deep structure of 'Camfranglais' utterances sometimes reflects that of French and sometimes that of Pidgin English. This feature is stressed in many studies (ZE Amvela, 1989; Chia, 1990; Biloa, 1999);
- viii. Rule-breaking and/or rule-rewriting are some of the structural devices that are constantly used to keep the message inaccessible to the uninitiated. The language rules that are broken or rewritten are generally those of the languages that provide the deep structure of utterances. But it is easier to determine that a French rule has been broken or rewritten than that of Pidgin English. It would indeed appear that when a French rule is broken or rewritten, the intention is to make the structure of the utterance come closer to that of Pidgin English;
- ix. Innovation is the rule rather than the exception in 'Camfranglais'. This is necessary if the secret must be kept. For as uninitiated people become familiar with words and expressions that have been in use for long, it becomes necessary to coin new ones. Most of the processes of innovation are lexico-semantic, but others are morpho-phonemic;

- x. Because change and innovation are the rule in 'Camfranglais'; the phenomenon frequently eludes accurate description and predictability.

These of course are by no means the only certainties about 'Camfranglais' but they obviously summarise major usage trends.

## **2.2 UNCERTAINTIES ABOUT 'CAMFRANGLAIS'.**

The biggest uncertainty about 'Camfranglais' has to do with its status and typology. Because 'Camfranglais' is a product of language contact and derives its resources from numerous sources; because its users are fairly well –defined groups and its uses (functions) are fairly restricted, its status as a language in its own right remains questionable. This situation therefore raises a number of questions such as the following:

Is 'Camfranglais' a language, a language variety or several speech varieties in one?

Is it an autonomous system or does it comprise a number of co-existing systems?

Can it be said to have a phonology as Biloa (1999) suggests? How much of 'Camfranglais' as we know it today will survive? Answers to these questions may not be immediately available but it would be interesting to see what the various studies already have to say.

### **2.2.1 THE NATURE AND STATUS OF 'CAMFRANGLAIS'?**

When in the mid-eighties graduated students at the University of Yaounde draw attention to a new speech phenomenon within youth circles, the term 'Camfranglais' has not yet been coined . Ngome (1985) talks of 'lexical renovations in Cameroon Pidgin English', While Tiayon (1985) talks of 'Camspeak' which he describes as a speech reality in Cameroon. Later, Ze Amvela (1989) quotes some analysts as saying that a new language has emerged that is progressively replacing

Pidgin English. When much later, Biloa (1999) reviews a number of studies on 'Camfranglais', particularly Chia's (1990) description, he simply refers to the code as 'a new speech variety observed in Cameroon'. He focuses attention on its lexicosemantic features and on its sounds and other morphophonemic features but without suggesting the language of which it can be said to be a variety. Thus this question had not been clearly answered so far.

### **2.2.2 HOW AUTONOMOUS IS 'CAMFRANGLAIS'?**

Much has been said about the fact that 'Camfranglais' draws its lexical resources from various languages and that its structure is sometimes a reflection of French structure and sometimes that of Pidgin English. But nowhere is it clearly suggested that its speakers believe they are speaking a distinct language with its own norms that can be said to be different from those of the languages from which they draw their resources. Its users are drawn from various walks of life but it can hardly be said to have a clearly defined speech community. Besides, all its resources are retraceable to various sources and cannot be said to have been integrated within a single system.

### **2.2.3 IS THERE A PHONOLOGY OF 'CAMFRANGLAIS'?**

Chia (1990) describes a number of phonological processes that occur within 'Camfranglais' particularly when the handling of new lexical items is concerned. He suggests for instance that terms borrowed from other languages retain their original pronunciation while new or invented words receive an invented pronunciation to avoid confusion. This seems to suggest further that in 'Camfranglais' one is likely to find phonological features drawn from all the languages that 'lend' words to the code in addition to the invented 'new' features.

Biloa (1999), as was seen earlier, pushes his investigation into the phonological features of 'Camfranglais' further and lists both its vowels and consonant sounds which he distributes on vowels and consonant charts. The outcome of this exercise remains puzzling. In the first case, such a phonological analysis could have been conducted only on the assumption that 'Camfranglais' is a distinct language or a distinguishable variety of a given language. Unfortunately, that

fact remains to be established. Besides, a phonology of 'Camfranglais' would have to be a synthesis of the phonologies of all its 'source languages'. This again is quite unlikely. It may thus be too early to talk in terms of a phonology of 'Camfranglais'.

#### **2.2.4 HAS 'CAMFRANGLAIS' COME TO STAY**

This is another question whose answer remains uncertain. Ze Amvela (1989) cites some analysts as saying that 'Camfranglais' is replacing Pidgin English. If that were really the case then the chances of the survival of Camfranglais for a reasonable length of time would be quite many. We may not forget that Pidgin English has been in use in Cameroon for several hundred years and there is hardly any real indication that it is being supplanted. 'Camfranglais' indeed has come in to complement Pidgin English as a language of intimacy in certain circles. But it constitutes no threat to Pidgin English.

Another fact highlighted by the various studies is the fleeting nature of the new speech forms which have to be constantly renewed if the 'secret' must be kept. This poses the question of the survival of Camfranglais as we know it today.

### **3.0 CONCLUSION**

It is certainly too early to provide a definitive answer to the question 'Is 'Camfranglais a new language?' This is largely because the phenomenon is a recent one and existing studies cannot be said to have been thorough. This phenomenon will have to be closely observed by linguists and socio-linguists over the next few decades or so before clear-cut answers can be provided. Nevertheless, from the present review of opinions, the following tentative conclusions may be drawn.

- i. 'Camfranglais' cannot be spoken of in terms of a new language that is distinct from all the other languages from which it draws its resources. In the first place, it does not constitute an autonomous system with its own norms which are recognised and respected as such by its users. Besides,

in its deep structure, it is traceable not to one but to two languages that are recognised as distinct, i.e. French and Pidgin English;

Camfranglais utterances are said to shift from one deep structure to the next and so far no suggestions exist that the two systems are undergoing a process of integration.

- ii. 'Camfranglais' thus seems to be a fairly complex phenomenon that comprises the use of more than one linguistic code and involves considerable internal variation. It would be useful and necessary to explore the possibility of the existence of two broad types of 'Camfranglais', one with a French 'deep structure' and the other with a Pidgin English 'deep structure';

In fact when one examines the evolution of the phenomenon over the past two decades, one easily realises that the version of 'Camfranglais' with a Pidgin English deep structure actually preceded the French-based one. When in the early mid-eighties 'Camfranglais' emerged, it was most popular in Douala, Cameroon's economic capital, where it was viewed as a characteristic way of speaking Pidgin English, among members of the lowly classes that were struggling for survival. It was the language of 'débrouillardise' that gained popularity through the music of Lapiro de Mbanga who stood as a symbol of this new spirit and new generation of survivors and economic warriors (street hawkers, 'market boys', taxi drivers etc.) All these people come to identify and distinguish themselves from the others by the variety of Pidgin English they spoke.

When this phenomenon rocked Douala, 'Camfranglais' in its French (deep structure) version did not exist. It was only subsequently that students in the Yaounde University campuses, drawing inspiration from the Pidgin English version, developed a French based version of Camfranglais. The two versions have coexisted even since then.

- iii. When each broad type of 'Camfranglais' is placed within the context of the base language, it looks more like a functional variety of that language than a new language. These functional varieties can be likened to jargons that

are known to exist within languages without constituting new languages. This is referred to in French as 'argot' which is defined as a speech form that is characteristic of a given social or professional group;

The reason behind the emergence of 'Camfranglais' seems to lend credibility to this view. 'Camfranglais' arose from the desire of members of the various social/youth groups to communicate in the presence of their elders or the uninitiated without being understood by them. In this respect, it functions like any jargon of the underworld. In fact, Camfranglais is extensively used among criminal and juvenile delinquents in Cameroon today.

- iv. Because linguists and socio-linguists have not yet had enough time to observe and study 'Camfranglais', hasty conclusions about this phenomenon have to be avoided. If it turns out that 'Camfranglais' actually involves not one but two or more coexisting codes, then it will have to be studied further from code-switching and code-mixing perspectives. This will certainly permit a better understanding of the phenomenon;
- v. Finally, it is not easy to predict the future of 'Camfranglais'. It has emerged to further complicate the already complex linguistic situation in Cameroon. There are chances that it could last a while but it is not likely to remain the way it is today.

If it does last, and since innovation is the rule, there will continue to be internal variation as different social groups use it. It will also continue to change rapidly in time as one generation grows out of it and a new one emerges to continue the task of innovation. The likelihood that it could develop into a standardizable language is quite slim. It will no doubt influence usage in French, Pidgin English, or even the other languages. But is not likely to supplant any of them in a foreseeable future.

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