BNR Online ISSN: 2709-7374

Required and Urgent: An Upgrade of Pidgin English in the Cameroonian Tower of Babel

Peter Wuteh Vakunta*

Abstract

The problem with Cameroon's brand of bilingualism is that it does not grant official status to any of the indigenous languages existent in the country. The product of this status quo is that Cameroonians are divided into disparate groups with distinctive linguistic loyalties that often breed internal strife, undermine effective inter-ethnic relationships and threaten the very survival of the nation-state. In the absence of a dependable language policy, Cameroon's most pressing need remains that of a common medium of communication and instruction that is inclusive of all social strata and ethnic identities. This paper makes a case for the official adoption of Pidgin English in Cameroon by drawing attention to some of the sociolinguistic benefits that would accrue to the country in the process.

Keywords: Cameron; Pidgin English; indigenous languages; French; English; multilingualism

Introduction

The Republic of Cameroon, a post-colony situated in central Africa, is a hotchpotch of languages and cultures. According to Ngefac (2012), the country boasts approximately 285 indigenous languages, two contact languages (Kamtok and Camfranglais), and two official languages (English and French), generally catalogued as imperial languages (Echu 2005; Rosendal 2008; Ayafor 2005; Anchimbe 2006; Kouega 2008). Cameroonian indigenous languages include Afro-Asiatic languages, Nilo-Saharan languages, Ubangian languages, and Niger-Congo languages. This latter group is divided into one Senegambian language (Fulfulde), 28 Adamawa languages, and 142 Benue-Congo languages (130 of which are Bantu languages). French and English constitute a heritage of Cameroon›s colonial past as a colony of both France and the United Kingdom from 1916 to 1961. More often than not, this Babelian diversity serves as an incubator of tribal, ethnic and socio-political animosities. As Oyegoke (2014:97) puts it, "Babel is a site of fragmentation; linguistic and cultural harmonies and unities giving way to cultural and linguistic disharmonies and disunities". Yet, there is no gainsaying the fact that linguistic harmony plays a non-negligible role in the process of nation building. Writing along similar lines, Laureys (2008) observes that the notion of ethnolinguistic nationalism coined by Eric Hobsbawm in his innovative work on nationalism in Europe stresses the fact that a common language in many cases functions as a vehicle for the shaping of a national identity. In this light, it is easy to see how the most intractable problem relating to national integration in Cameroon stems from its linguistic plurality and skewed language policies.

It is in this light that Ayafor (2005:124) observes, "ethnic diversity… threatens national unity in terms of territorial integrity more than anything else in the country". In other words, Cameroon's linguistic heterogeneity functions as an obstacle to cross-lingual and intercultural discourses. Echu (2005:1) strikes the right note when he posits, "the policy of official language bilingualism, originally aimed at guaranteeing political integration and unity of the Cameroon State, now seems to constitute a source of conflict and political disintegration". The problem with Cameroon's brand of bilingualism is that it does not grant official status to any of the indigenous languages' existent in the country.The product of this status quo is that Cameroonians are divided into disparate groups

* Peter Wuteh Vakunta,Defense Language Institute, United States of America. Email: peter.w.vakunta@dliflc.edu

with distinctive linguistic loyalties that often breed internal strife, undermine effective inter-ethnic relationships and threaten the very survival of the nation-state. In the absence of a dependable language policy, Cameroon's most pressing need remains that of a common medium of communication and instruction that is inclusive of all social strata and ethnic identities. Anchimbe (2006:96) notes that in "promoting its bilingual language education policy, the government has largely disregarded the multilingual makeup of the country. Indigenous languages play only a secondary role". This status quo is a stark contradiction of the wording of the country's revised Constitution of 1996 (Sec.1.1.3) which stipulates, "The official languages of the country shall be English and French, both having the same status. The state shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavour to promote and protect national languages". The fundamental flaw of this constitutional stipulation on official bilingualism in Cameroon is that it falls short of providing a clear working definition. It is not clear what level of linguistic proficiency Cameroonian citizens must attain in order to demonstrate officially sanctioned bilingualism. Worse still, the constitution simply glosses over the dichotomy between individual and state bilingualism. In a linguistically pluralistic nation such as Cameroon, bilingualism could mean fluency in English and French; English and a national language; French and a national language; Pidgin English and a national language; a national language and another national language, and more. Besides, proficiency in any of these languages could vary from zero plus to near perfection. It is in this perspective that Rosendal (2008:25) makes the observation that "The extent of bilingualism in French and English in Cameroon is hard to estimate. Bilingual proficiency varies from zero to near perfect at the universities, depending on how semi-bilingualism, functional bilingualism and passive bilingualism are defined".

Cameroon's underdevelopment conundrum is an offshoot of its dead-letter language policies, the more so because language, culture and development are interrelated. One topic that is recurrent in discourses relating to national development in this age of globalization is the question of language as a corollary of human empowerment. Language access is a human rights issue. The right to language accessibility ranks top on the list of grievances leveled against governments by linguistic minorities around the globe. Such claims continue to pose problems today ranging from the official status of minority languages, language of instruction and language use in schools and other institutions such as the mass media. Language plays a vital role in knowledge creation and the dissemination of knowledge on a whole range of social, economic and political issues at national and global levels. Evidently, there is need for dialogue between locally produced knowledge and knowledge imported from other sources. It is impossible for this kind of dialogue to transpire if people are being marginalized and excluded based on their linguistic minority status in their countries of origin. In Cameroon, indigenous languages seem to seem to find themselves in a permanent state of victimhood.

Status of Cameroonian Indigenous Languages

The major factors that tend to militate against the recognition of Cameroonian indigenous languages as official languages are legion but suffice it to underscore the following salient points: colonial legacy, negative attitudes toward indigenous languages, misconception of the notion of bilingualism, and defective language and policy conceptualization.

In the following paragraphs, we will dwell on these phenomena with the aim of making a case for the promotion of Pidgin English to the status of an official language in the Cameroonian Tower of Babel.

Colonial legacy

Historical evidence shows that the French and British imperial powers imposed their languages and cultures on natives in each of the two regions that they governed, namely French-speaking and English-speaking Cameroons for a variety of reasons. According to Bamgbose (2011), objectives differ from one colonial power to another, ranging from assimilation to the culture of the occupying power to the selective grooming of elites that would relate to the masses in their own cultures. Regardless of the motives behind the colonial assimilation process, the outcome was the same for Anglophone and Francophone Cameroons, namely that the languages of the colonial powers were dominant and African languages took the backstage in terms of usage and status. The elites who were groomed in the colonial education system developed a disdain for their mother tongue. Though they constituted a minority, they wielded immense power because of their proficiency in the language of the colonizers. This colonial legacy has persisted in Cameroon to the point where French and English have remained official languages to date. Proposals aimed at linguistically empowering the majority of Cameroonians who cannot express themselves in French or English have met with stiff opposition from the political elite because of two fundamental reasons: "elite closure" (Scotton and Ury 1977:27). Scotton defines "elite closure" as the monopoly of the language power by the elites and resistance on their part to extend this jealously guarded power to other groups. The second factor has to do with what Gellar (1973:385) refers to as "inheritance situation." He sheds light on this linguistic phenomenon by describing it as the situation where the policies and practices from the colonial period continue to determine post-colonial policies and practices. The effect of the colonial policy of assimilation in Cameroon is that the hegemony of imported languages, which began during the colonial era, has persisted. Additional evidence of the continued dominance of imperial languages in Cameroon is the choice of the medium of instruction, which has remained substantially in these colonial languages, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels.

Another colonial legacy that has accounted for the low status of Cameroonian indigenous languages is the partition of the country into arbitrary geographic divisions based on artificial borders created from the balkanization of Africa during the Berlin Conference of 1884-85. The palpable consequence of this fragmentation is that identical or related languages have been splintered into several trans-border languages (Chumbow and Tamanji 2000). According to these scholars, Cameroon shares as many as seventy cross-border languages with neighboring countries such as Nigeria, with which it shares as many as forty-five languages. The effect of this colonial meddling in the socio-political and territorial affairs of Africa is the diminished strength accorded to each cross-border language in the territories concerned, thereby reducing its claim to enhanced status and correspondingly accentuating the dominance of imported languages. Consequently, a trans-border language that should have served as an instrument of integration becomes a divisive force, given that a different imported language in each territory wields it. Another fact that accounts for the low status of indigenous languages in Cameroon is the negative attitudes of Cameroonians toward their mother tongue. While the foregoing factors may be perceived as residing beyond the control of Cameroonians, the question of an apathetical attitude toward the indigenous African language resides with those who speak these languages.

Negative attitude toward the indigenous languages

Contrary to expectations, most Cameroonians tend to shun their native tongue, opting to communicate in French or English with friends and family. Ngefac (2012:163) notes that "many Cameroonians show an attitude of rejection towards languages that are rooted in the sociocultural and sociolinguistic

realities of Cameroon, predictably because the colonial indoctrination and the slave trade mentality still hold sway in this postcolonial multilingual nation." He buttresses this claim by noting that official business of Cameroon is transacted solely in French and English and no indigenous language enjoys this official language status. The most active purveyors of this negative attitudinal mindset are Cameroonian elites who have been brainwashed in Western-style schools. It is common in Cameroon to find a couple who speak the same indigenous language but prefer to communicate with their offspring in imperial languages. Another type of negative attitude noticeable in Cameroon is one that denigrates Cameroonians who speak a less commonly taught language such as Pidgin English and Camfranglais. Interestingly, Pidgin is the only language spoken by the majority of Cameroonians.

These negative attitudes have imperiled effective language planning in Cameroon for decades. Ngefac (2012:164) echoes the same concern which he observes that this "mentality" also prevailed during the colonial administration, especially during the French colonial policy of Direct Rule, which aimed at stripping the colonized indigenes of their "barbaric" and "primitive" ways of life, introducing them to the "super" French culture and eventually transforming them into French overseas citizens". The French were determined to annihilate indigenous languages and cultures in a bid to transform indigenes into French people. In order to attain this objective, they deemed it necessary to strip Africans of their cultures and inculcate into the French culture and worldview. This vision of the world inherited from the colonial era has significantly shaped the attitude of Cameroonians toward their own languages, cultures and identities.

This explains why more than six decades after gaining independence from colonial masters, Cameroonians are still unable to design an indigenous language policy for themselves. This explains why pleas aimed at raising Cameroon Pidgin English to the status of an official language have been ignored. Cameroon Pidgin English has been outlawed on some university campuses, notably the campus of the University of Buea in the Southwest Region of Cameroon. The foregoing observations provide irrefutable evidence that the concept of bilingualism has been misconstrued in Cameroon.

Misconception of bilingualism in Cameroon

Bilingualism has proven to be a double-edged sword in Cameroon. It is a topic of great interest to many, yet no one fully grasps the significance of this elusive linguistic phenomenon in the developmental trajectory of the nation state. Officially, Cameroon is construed as a bilingual nation. This is ironic given the multi-linguistic landscape of the country. The usage of French and English during the French and British colonial eras in Cameroon (1916-1958) favored the choice of these languages as official languages. As Echu (1999:3) puts it, "*Depuis 1961, date de la mise en vigueur de la constitution fédérale, le Cameroun suit une politique de bilinguisme officiel. Le français et l'anglais sont les deux langues officielles, une situation qui se fonde aussi bien dans la situation historico-politique que linguistique du pays*" (Nganang 2001:50) [Woman, he said, haven't you heard what people are saying? Thieves already have a potion that makes them invisible out there. Don't you know that yesterday they went into Massa Kokari's living room and took his television right from under his nose? A di tell you!]" (Nganang 2006:34).

Romaine (1995) notes that bilingualism has often been defined and described in terms of categories, scales and dichotomies such as ideal versus partial bilingual; coordinate versus compound bilingual and so on. These different definitions correlate with factors such as proficiency and linguistic function. At the end of the spectrum of definitions of bilingualism it would be like Bloomfield's (1953) concept of bilingualism which underscores "native-like control of two languages" as the criterion for laying claim to bilingualism. Diebold (1964), however, provides what may be called

a minimal definition of bilingualism when he uses the term "incipient bilingualism" to characterize the initial stages of contact between two languages. In doing so, he leaves open the question of the absolute minimal proficiency required in order to be bilingual and allows for the fact that a person may be bilingual to some degree, yet not be able to produce complete meaningful utterance (Romaine 1995).

According to Romaine, a person might have no productive control over a language but be able to understand utterances in it. In such instances, linguists generally speak of "passive" or "receptive" bilingualism. Hockett (1956) uses the term "semi-bilingualism" to describe the same phenomenon. Over time, the concept of bilingualism has become broader and more elastic. It is in this light that Romaine, maintains that bilingualism exists within cognitive systems of individuals, as well as in families and communities. Psychologists have investigated the effects of bilingualism on mental processes. On the other hand, sociologists tend to treat bilingualism as an element in cultural conflict. They look at some of the consequences of linguistic heterogeneity as a societal phenomenon. Educationalists show a lot of interest in the interrelationship between bilingualism and educational policy conceptualization. Basic questions about the nexus between bilingualism and intelligence also arouse interest of educationists.

When Cameroonians adumbrate the term "bilingualism", it is often not clear whether they are referring to individual or national bilingualism. Central to discourses relating to bilingualism is the need to distinguish between these two facets of bilingual competence, namely societal and individual bilingualism. On the one hand, individual bilingualism refers to the ability of an individual to use two or more languages (Muysken and Appel 1987:1-3). Individual bilingualism has to do with the parameters that could enable the individual to become proficient through teaching and the effects that factors such as age and linguistic interference could have on second language acquisition (Chaika 1934:34).On the other hand, societal bilingualism refers to a situation where two or more languages are in use. As far as societal bilingualism is concerned, emphasis should be put on the kinds of languages spoken in a given country and by whom, for what purpose, and the effect bilingualism has on the socio-economic development of that particular community. Grasping the fundamental differences between these two kinds of bilingualism in Cameroon is of critical importance given that it enables policy-makers to determine the sorts of resources and frameworks needed to achieve set goals.

Another problem that often arises in discourses pertaining to bilingualism in Cameroon is the question of degree of bilingualism or communicative competence in the two languages that the individual speaks. It is in this light that Romaine (1995:14) observes that "Since communicative competence has to do with both rules of grammar (understood here in the widest sense as embracing phonology, grammar, lexicon and semantics) and rules for their use in socially appropriate circumstances, it is possible that a bilingual will be lacking in some aspects of communicative competences for one of the languages". The notion of official bilingualism in Cameroon is ill defined in the sense that it fails to provide information on which type of language is official. In other words, the concept does not provide information regarding the languages that the government deems official-national or languages of the ex-colonizer.

Chumbow (1990:288) confounds the problem further when he maintains:English-French bilingualism has been dubbed the official language policy of Cameroon and we shall continue to refer to it as such. However, it is important to point out that technically speaking, it isn't really a language policy; for a language policy, from a sociolinguistic perspective, is normally part of a careful and judicious language planning based on a detailed study of a wide range of socio-economic

variables relevant to the state's development needs (both in the short and long terms). He further notes that the choice of English and French as official languages was not based on any elaborate linguistic or paralinguistic research. It was dictated by pragmatism. One other intractable problem relating to bilingual practice in Cameroon is the unwillingness of politicians to conflate language policies with national development planning. This shortcoming has nefarious consequences for national integration and unity. As Chiatoh (2012:66) observes. It is widely accepted that bilingualism and bilingual education constitute a valuable asset in individual and societal construction. However, when not properly conceived, the implementation of these concepts could have very devastating consequences on national cohesion especially in minority settings where minority groups are subjected to unfair subjugation by mainstream languages.

These observations have wide-ranging implications for language planning and the choice of a language policy in Cameroon that is foolproof.

Defective language planning and conceptualization

The inability of the political leadership to comprehend the potency of bilingualism as a paradigm for national (re)construction in Cameroon tool has led to a status quo where official languages, namely, English and French are employed for the purpose of division, mutual exclusion, self-denial, and animosity. This counter-productive system has proven to be inimical to national development. Elaborating the point further, Chiatoh (2012:66) explains that "such a system 'remains fundamentally flawed and has helped in deepening existing frustration among citizens, thereby, prolonging a rather undesirable situation of division and exclusion." Language policy constitutes the cornerstone of a country's nation-building endeavors. The primacy of language planning is even greater in a linguistically pluralistic society such as Cameroon given that satisfaction with the nation's language policies often determines the degree to which citizens embrace nation-building efforts. Tollefson (2002:5) drives home the point when he posits:

> in order to understand language policy debates and the role of language policy in contemporary States, we must examine the underlying social, economic, and political struggles that language can symbolize. The symbolic value of language can have profound consequences, not only for language minorities seeking to negotiate complex and changing identities, but also for dominant groups seeking to retain various forms of political and economic power.

What this all portends is that it behooves policy-makers, regardless of their territoriality, to play a seminal role in the choice of official languages that harbor the potential to play a contributory role in national integration and identity sustenance. This has wide-ranging ramifications on the choice of official languages.

Toward a Quadrilingual Policy in Cameroon

It is a known fact that members of every linguistic community tend to reject any attempts to deprive them of their mother tongues. Cameroon is no exception. The reality of the Cameroonian situation is that although some ethnic groups tolerate speakers of other ethnic groups and may even voluntarily learn to communicate with them, they vehemently oppose any threats, real or imagined that undermine the importance of their own indigenous languages. The implication of this is that national policy-planners must have the foresight to take the languages and cultures of the different peoples that make up the national tapestry into consideration. Selecting an official language in an

ethnically heterogeneous entity such as Cameroon has political, economic, and social implications.

Tadadjeu (1985:180) has identified two factors that might affect the conceptualization of language policies in Cameroon. Primarily, he suggests that Cameroonian policy-makers should include Pidgin English as a vehicle for the expression of a Cameroonian national identity. Second, he contends that Cameroonian bilingualism has reached a point now where it should metamorphose into a quadrilingual status that allows Cameroonians to gain proficiency in English, French and Pidgin English in addition to their mother tongues. It should be noted that given the plurilingual configuration of Cameroon, a quadrilingual policy is practically feasible and culturally rewarding. The prevailing status quo where bilingualism is limited to proficiency in two colonial languages defies logic. Among its many shortcomings is the fact that Cameroon's current bilingual policy has led to the marginalization of minority linguistic communities. One such minority grouping is the community of Pidginophones. Pidgin has all the attributes required to become an official language in Cameroon. It is a neutral language not indigenous to any of the ethnic groups in Cameroon.

A Case for the Adoption of Pidgin English

For the sake of socio-political cohesion and pacific inter-ethnic cohabitation in Cameroon, this paper advocates the choice of a "neutral" language that would be tolerated and spoken throughout the country at all levels. Pidgin fulfills this function. Pidgin is a lingua franca that tears down ethnic boundaries. It builds communicative bridges between the hundreds of tribal groupings that exist in Cameroon and is regarded by Cameroonians "as a major lingua franca… spoken by 50% of the population" (Kouega 2008:11). Pidgin is a medium of communication for people who have no first language in common. It functions as a vehicular language, the language of trade and the medium through which people who speak different languages are able to communicate and socialize. All inter-ethnic animosities tend to dissipate when Cameroonians communicate through the medium of Pidgin English. Most importantly, Pidgin English grammar is simple and easy to learn given the fact that its grammar is akin to that of most indigenous languages spoken in Cameroon as seen in the following examples involving the use of verbs. You will notice that Pidgin English verbs do not change to agree with the subject as illustrated in the following examples culled from Todd (1991:11):

A di go. (I'm going.)
Yu di go. (You're going.)
I di go. (He/she/it is going.)
Wi di go. (We are going.)
Wuna di go. (You plural are going.)
Dehm di go. (They are going.)

Echu (2003:2) has identified five different varieties of Pidgin English, also known as Kamtok (from Cameroon Talk), namely, Grafi Pidgin English (the variety spoken in the grassfields in the Northwest Region and often referred as "Grafi Tok"); Francophone Pidgin English (the variety spoken in cities such as Douala, Bafoussam, Nkongsamba and Yaoundé); Limbe Pidgin English (the variety spoken in the Southwest coastal area around the seaport); Bororo Pidgin English (the variety spoken by Bororo cattle traders) and liturgical Pidgin English (the variety used by the Catholic Church). Ethnologue (2002) estimates the number of Pidginophones in Cameroon to be about two million. Notice that Pidgin English has become a mother tongue in many urban communities in Cameroon. It is spoken throughout the national territory for out-group communication purposes

between people from different tribes and ethnic groups. It has become a language of the media. Cameroon now has radio broadcast programs in Pidgin English in Douala (FM 105), Buea (Mount Cameroon Radio), Yaoundé (Radio Siantou) and Bamenda (Northwest Regional Radio Station). Pidgin English is a language of advertisement and musical production. Popular musicians such as Lapiro de Mbanga, Prince Nico Mbarga, John Minang, Longue Longue and Francis Ndom have adopted Pidgin as a language of show business and political militancy as illustrated in the excerpt from one of Lapiro's tracks below:

> We no wan kick-oh
> We no wan go for ngata
> We de daso for ndengwe
> A beg mimba we-oh, yes tara.
> We no wan problem para
> We no wan go for Ndengui
> We di fain daso garri
> For helep we own famili-oh! (Vakunta 31 May 2021).[1]

Lapiro sings mostly in Pidgin English because this language enables him to reach out to the downtrodden in Cameroon. The importance of Pidgin English as an integrative communicative medium in Cameroon has been underscored in several substantive research studies (Mbangwana1983 1987; Menang 1979; Ngefac 2008; Ngome 1986; Sala 2009; Schneider 1966; Todd 1969; Schröder 2003). Mbangwana (1983:87) underscores the importance of Pidgin English as a potent communicative tool as follows:

> Pidgin English is very crucial as a communication bridge, for it links an anglophone to a francophone. It also links an anglophone to another anglophone, an educated Cameroonian to another educated one, a non-educated Cameroonian to another non-educated one, and more importantly an educated Cameroonian to a non-educated one.

A number of linguists (eg Baetens 1982; Ayafor 2004; Neba *et al*. 2006; Sala 2009) has highlighted this integrative function of Pidgin English in works. These researchers perceive Pidgin English as a viable local language for standardization and eventual elevation to the status of an official language, given that it is spoken by Cameroonians across different ethnic divides, geographic settings and educational levels. According to Ngefac (2012:166) "Given the neutrality of the language, selecting it for standardization and adopting it for official transactions will not easily lead to regional and ethnic conflicts, as is likely to be the case if a tribal language were chosen". A handful of Cameroonian linguists have even argued in a favor of adopting Pidgin English as an official language of instruction throughout the national territory. Ngefac (2012:167) puts the case for this as follows:

> Being one of the most widely spoken languages in Cameroon, having served the communicative needs of Cameroonians for more than 500 years, being a language that carries the identity and ecology of Cameroon and being a language that significantly unites Cameroonians as it transcends most social boundaries, one should normally expect a language with such potentials to be one of the languages of education.

[1] Vakunta, PW 31 May 2021. "Up Station Mountain Club: The Status of Pidgin English in the Cameroonian Tower of Babel", postnewsline.com, accessed 16 November 2022.

The potential drawback associated with the adoption of Pidgin English as an official language stems from the fact that there is a sizeable number of so-called linguistic purists in Cameroon who have no tolerance for the indigenization process that the English language has undergone in Cameroon. Bobda (2004:19), for example, abhors the proliferation of English-based pidgins and creoles, perceiving them as impediments to "the development of British-based standard forms of English" in Cameroon. Such attitudes are also reflected in the fact that the campus of the University of Buea is littered with signboards openly banning the use of the language (Ngefac 2012).

Regrettably, malcontents such as Bobda (2004) are oblivious of the fact that English is no longer just a language of the Metropolis; it is a global language that has acquired regional specificities. Pidgin English is now widely regarded as an African language that has undergone the process of indigenization (Kwachu 1986; Mufwene 2001; Schneider 2007). Like all other global Englishes, Cameroonian Pidgin English harbors local realities and dynamics -namely worldview and cultural sensibilities. Through the process of reterritorialization, English in the Cameroonian context has acquired new norms and usages peculiar to the local context. This reterritorialized English language is marked by context-specific patterns that give Pidgin English a peculiar local color and flavor. These in turn make Pidgin an ideal language for promoting cross-ethnic communication and thus for fostering a truly pan-ethnic national identity.

Conclusion

It is the closing contention of this paper that Cameroonian Pidgin English is a language in its own right, distinct from other global pidgins such as the pidgin spoken in Nigeria, Ghana, Papua New Guinea, Jamaica, and Hawaii, among others. It has its own system, with a distinctive structure and should not be treated as a bastardized version of British or American English. It is not a dialect of Cameroonian English or any other local language. Pidgin English is more serviceable to Cameroonians than European-based standard forms of English. It is clear from this discussion that Cameroonian Pidgin English is a carrier of the national identity, culture and worldview of the Cameroonian people. It is more emblematic of the identity and ecology of Cameroon than British English. Most importantly, Cameroonian Pidgin English is a significant carrier of the historical, ecological, and multicultural narratives of the inhabitants of the post-colony. A rejection of Pidgin English by Cameroonians would be tantamount to self-abnegation because this language speaks volumes about the historical and linguistic evolutions that distinguish Cameroonians from other Africans.

The multiplicity of languages spoken in Cameroon with the attendant difficulty of choosing an indigenous official language sheds light on the phenomenon that I have described in the title of this paper as the "Cameroonian Tower of Babel". No language indigenous to Cameroon plays a more phatic communicative role than Pidgin English. It is the language of customary law in some parts of the country. Most importantly, Pidgin English is the language of social intercourse and neutralizer of linguistic apartheid tendencies. It is the language of business throughout the national territory. Given the fact that the majority of Cameroonian tradesmen and tradeswomen are illiterate, they often communicate in Pidgin English. The language is used as a medium of communication during social events such as sporting events, notably soccer. In the literary domain, Pidgin English has become a medium for the exteriorization of creative genius. Nowadays, there is a proliferation of literary works written entirely in Pidginized English by Cameroonians and foreigners in Cameroon. Importantly, unlike the other Cameroonian languages, Pidgin English has many speakers in all the ten regions that constitute the Republic of Cameroon.

References

Official document

Republic of Cameroon 1996. Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon. Yaoundé: Groupe. Mauger.

Secondary sources

Anchimbe, AE 2006. Cameroon English: Authenticity, Ecology and Evolution. Frankfurt amMain: Peter Lang.

Awa, PS 1984. Sunday Lectionary in Pidgin English. Rome:Vatican Polyglot Press.

Ayafor, M 2004. "Cameroon Pidgin English (Kamtok): Morphology and Syntax",in Kortmann, B, Burridge, K, Mesthrie, R, Schneider EW and Upton,C (Eds.), A*Handbook of Varieties of English: A Multi-media Reference Tool*, *vol. 2. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 909-928.*

Ayafor, IM 2005. "Official Bilingualism in Cameroon: Instrumental or Integrative Policy",in Cohel, J, McAlister, KT, Rolstad,K and MacSwan,J (Eds.), Proceedings of the4th International Symposium on Bilingualism. Somerville: Cascadilla Press, pp.123-142.

Baetens, H 1982. Bilingualism: Basic principles. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Baker, C 2011. Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism. London: Multilingual Matters.

Bamgbose, A 2011. "African Languages Today: The Challenge of and Prospects for Empowerment under Globalization",in Bokamba, E.G, Ryan, K.S. and Bezz T.A. (Eds.), Selected Proceedings *of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics: African Languages and Linguistics Today. Somerville: Cascadilla Proceedings Project,pp.2-14.*

Bloomfield, L 1933. Language. *New York: Holt.*

Bobda, S 2004. "Linguistic Apartheid: English Language Policy in Africa", EnglishToday, vol. *20, 1, pp.19-26.*

Chaka, E 1934. Language: The Social Mirror. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Chiatoh, L 2012. "Official Bilingualism and the Construction of a Cameroonian National Identity", In Echdu, G and Bangui, A (Eds.), Fifty Years of Official Language Bilingualism in Cameroon (1961-2011). Paris: l'Harmattan, pp.65-85.

Chumbow, S 1990. "Language and Language Policy in Cameroon",In Kale,K (Ed.), An African Experience in Nation Building: The Bilingual Cameroon Republic Since Reunification. *London: Westview Press, pp.281-311.*

Chumbow, S and Tamanji, P 2000. "Linguistic Identity Across the Borders of the Cameroon Triangle",in Prah,K (Ed.), Between Distinction and Extinction: The Harmonization and Standardization of African Languages. Cape Town: CASAS, pp.53-74.

Diebold, AR 1964. "Incipient Bilingualism",in Hymes D (Ed.), Language in Culture and Society. *New York: Harper and Row, pp.71-85.*

Echu, G 1999. "Colonialism and Linguistic Dilemmas in Africa: Cameroon as a Paradigm (Revisited)", Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy, *vol.* XIII*, 1-2, pp.19-26.*

Echu, G 2003. *"Influence of Cameroon Pidgin English on the Linguistic and Cultural Development of the French Language", https://www.google.com/#q=+Influence+of+cameroon+pidgin+english+on+the+linguistic+and+cutlural+development+of+the+french+language, accessed 17 March 2003.*

Echu, G 2005. "The Language Question in Cameroon", http://www.linguistik-online.com/18_04/echu.html,accessed 23 July 2005.

Ethnologue. E 2002. "Influence of Cameroon Pidgin English on the Linguistic and Cultural Development of the French Language", https://www.indiana.edu/~iulcwp/wp/article/view/03-03,accessed 5 February 2003.

Fonlon, B 1969. "The Language Question in Cameroon", Abbia, *vol. 22, pp.5-40.*

Garcia, O and Wei, L 2014. Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualismand Education. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gellar, S 1973."State-building and Nation-building in West Africa",in Einsentadt SN and Rokkan,S (Eds.), Building States and Nations. Beverly Hills: Sage Publishing, pp.384-426.

Hamers, JF and Blanc, MH 1989. Bilinguality and Bilingualism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Haugen, E 1953. The Norwegian Language in America: A Study in Bilingual Behavior. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hockett, CF 1958. A Course in Modern Linguistics. New York: Macmillan.

Hornby, P 1977. Bilingualism: Psychological, Social and Educational Implications. New York: Academic Press.

Hornby, P 1977. Englishes. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Kouega, P 2001. "Pidgin Facing Death in Cameroon", Language: Terralingua Newsletter,vol. 21, pp.23-34.

Kouega, P 2005. A Dictionary of Pidgin English Usage: Pronunciation, Grammar and Vocabulary. Munich: LINCOM EUROPA.

Kouega, P 2008. A Dictionary of Cameroon Pidgin English Usage. Munich: LINCOM EUROPA.

Laureys, G 2008."Language Policy as a Cornerstone of Nation-building",in Broomans,J(Ed.), The Beloved Mother Tongue: Ethnolinguistic Nationalism in Small Nations -Inventories and Reflections. Leuven: PEETERS, pp.78-91.

Lemke, D 2001. ManNo Be God: Bush Doctor in Cameroon. San Jose: Writers Club Press.

Mbangwana, P 1983. "The Scope and Role of Pidgin English in Cameroon", in Koening, EL,

Chia, E and Povey, J (Eds.), A Sociolinguistic Profile of Urban Centers in Cameroon.California: Crossroad Press, pp.79-92.

Mbassi-Manga, F 1976. The State of Contemporary English in Cameroon: Cameroon Studies in English and French (CASEF). Victoria: Presbook.

Menang, T 2006. "Is Camfranglais a New Language? A Review of Current Opinions", Geolinguistics, *vol. 32, pp.56-66.*

Mufwene, SS 2001. The Ecology of Language Evolution. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Muysken, P and Apple, R1987. Language Contact and Bilingualism. London: EdwardArnold.

Ngefac, A 2012. "From Skin Colour Mutilation to Tongue Rejection: Cameroonians' Attitudes Towards Their Local Tongues",in Echu,G and Ebongue, A (Eds.), Fifty Years of Official Language Bilingualism in Cameroon (1961-2011). Paris: L'Harmattan, pp.163-180.

Ngefac, A 2008. Social Differentiation in Cameroon English: Evidence from Sociolinguistic Fieldwork. New York: Peter Lang.

Neba, A, Chibaka, E and Atindogbe, G 2006. "Cameroon Pidgin English as a Tool for Empowerment and National Development", African Studies Monographs, vol. 27, 2, pp.39-61.

Ngome, M 1980. Kamtok (Cameroon Pidgin English) Orthography. Unpublished Manuscript. Yaoundé: University of Yaoundé.

Oyegoke, L 2014. "Babelian Reflections in Critical Tranquility", Marang: Journal of Language and Literature, vol.24, pp.98-106.

Romaine, S 1995. Bilingualism. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Rosendal, TB 2008. Multilingual Cameroon: Policy, Practice, Problems and Solutions. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg Press.

Sala, BM 2009. "Writing in Cameroon Pidgin English: Begging the Question", English Today, vol. 25, 2, pp.11-17.

Schneider, GD 1966. West African Pidgin English: A Descriptive Linguistic Analysis with Texts and Glossary from the Cameroon Area. Hartford: Hartford Seminary Foundation.

Schneider, WE 2007. Postcolonial English: Varieties around the World. Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.

Schröder, A 2003. "Aspects in Cameroon Pidgin English", in Lucko, P, Peter Lothan and Hans-George Wolf (Eds.) Studies in African varieties of English. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, pp.83-100.

Scotton, CM and Ury, W1977. "Bilingual Strategies: The Social Functions of Code-switching. Linguistics, vol. 193, pp.5-20.

Tadadjeu, M 1985. "For a Policy of Cameroonian Linguistic Integration: Extensive Trilingualism",in MINCOM (ed.), The Cultural Identity of Cameroon, Yaoundé: MINCOM, pp.178-192.

Todd, L 1979. Some Day Been Day: West African Pidgin Solktales. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Todd, L 1991. Talk Pidgin: A structured course in West African Pidgin English. Leeds:Tortoise Books.

Tollefson, JW 2002. "Introduction: Critical Issues in Educational Language Policy", in Tollefson,JW (Ed.), Language Policy in Education: Critical Issues. London: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp.3-15.

Vakunta, PW 2001. African Time and Pidgin Verses. Pretoria: Duplico.

Vakunta, PW 2008. Majunga Tok Poems in Pidgin English. Bamenda: Langaa.

Vakunta, PW 2015a. Tori shweet for Cameroon Pidgin English. Bamenda: Langaa.

Vakunta, PW 2015b. Poems from Abakwa in Cameroon Pidgin English. Bamenda: Langaa.

Media source

Vakunta, PW 31 May 2021. "Up Station Mountain Club: The Status of Pidgin English in the Cameroonian Tower of Babel", postnewsline.com, accessed 16 November 2022.