

## THE PRONUNCIATION COMPONENT IN THE COMPETENCE-BASED EFL CURRICULUM IN CAMEROON SECONDARY EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT:** *The shift from the objective-based approach to the competence-based approach in English at the secondary level in Cameroon places too much emphasis on real life situations and the vocabulary thereof, in its current field implementation. Apart from vocabulary, the other structural components are very shallowly dealt with, not only grammar, but, much more the teaching of pronunciation and speech sounds. Using the contents analysis theory, the paper brings up the shallow presence of English sounds, paramount element in pronunciation and ipso facto in oral communication in the curriculum. The paper justifies the need to stress the sounds of English in actual EFL pedagogy. It argues that the sounds of English must be significantly present in the classroom implementation of the curriculum and prescribes recordings, audio visual materials specially designed for the purpose of supporting and concretising the constitutional official bilingualism policy that is most current in the nation presently on the one hand, and worldwide intelligibility on the other hand.*

**KEYWORDS:** Pronunciation, Sounds of English, Pedagogy, EFL, Curriculum

**RÉSUMÉ :** *Le passage de l'approche basée sur les objectifs à l'approche basée sur les compétences en anglais dans l'enseignement secondaire camerounais place trop d'emphasis sur les situations réelles de vie et leur vocabulaire, dans son application actuelle sur le terrain. Les autres éléments de structure sont traités très superficiellement, non seulement la grammaire, mais bien plus, la prononciation et les sons. En empruntant à l'analyse des contenus comme théorie, cet article manifeste la piètre présence des sons de l'anglais, éléments incontournables de la prononciation et de ce fait de toute communication orale, dans le programme. Ce travail justifie aussi le besoin de leur accorder plus d'importance dans la pédagogie de l'anglais langue étrangère. Il prescrit aussi la conception des enregistrements et d'autres matériels audio/-visuels pour soutenir cette pédagogie, et ainsi concrétiser la politique constitutionnelle du bilinguisme officiel qui est plus que jamais d'actualité dans la nation, d'une part, et l'intercompréhension) l'échelle mondiale, d'autre part.*

**MOTS CLES :** Prononciation, Sons de l'anglais, Pédagogie, Anglais langue étrangère, Curriculum

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## INTRODUCTION

English is a living language, taught and learnt the world over for real-life communication. It has earned global prominence over the years (see Crystal (2004); Richards (2008: 1); Focho (2011), MINESEC (2014a:16)), though in Europe, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union tends to be corollary with the slow and gradual loss of this status. EFL teaching in Cameroon secondary school seems to have trained the French-speaking students' visual memory only, in reading and writing, which visual memory in turn could have just been

the result of similarities between French – their main language of instruction, and English, a subject on the curriculum – alphabet, word resemblance, etc. (for cross linguistic similarities and their importance, see Ringbom and Jarvis (2011)). The listening skill has been extremely deficient, and speaking and interactional skills are not much better (Sokeng 2010: 305 – 308). The Competence-Based Approach with entry through Real Life Situations (CBA-RLS hereafter) comes as a new impetus into the development of these oral skills. It replaces the Objective-Based Approach (OBA hereafter) which, interpretedly, taught language so “*language items both relevant and irrelevant, had to be memorised by the learners with the hope that one day, they would meet a situation in which to apply such knowledge*” (MINESEC<sup>1</sup> 2012: 64). The CBA-RLS curriculum was effected in August 2012 by ministerial order. It was therefore an innovation, seeking to make the language learnt directly relevant to the learner. This curriculum was tried for two school years (2012/2013 and 2013/2014). Then, ministerial order N° 264/14/MINESEC/IGE of 13<sup>th</sup> August 2014 enhanced the tried curriculum into a more contextual CBA-RLS curriculum. Triggered in *Sixième* in the year 2014/2016, it moved on to *Cinquième* in 2015/2016, to *Quatrième* in 2016/2017 and will so continue up to *Terminale*. If making the learners orally proficient is not sheer propaganda, how effective will the contribution of this new curriculum be for the actual development of the learners’ oral skills? The paper discusses the place of pronunciation in this new curriculum.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sokeng (2010) had discovered that many French-speaking students leave the high school without a clear knowledge of their actual English language proficiency. She set out to evaluate the learners overall proficiency, nonetheless including details such as how they do in listening comprehension, reading comprehension, structure (grammar and vocabulary), writing, the factors that contribute to their poor or good performance, and the effectiveness of the testing tool used in the *Baccalaureate* exam. The learners in her study displayed only acceptable proficiencies in reading (58.3% below average), in writing structure (52% below average) and in structure (63.7% below average) and their worst performances in listening (93.7% below average). Sokeng decried the neglect of oral skills in the classroom and in the official exams paper, and suggests that English be taught and tested following the TOEFL model, to enhance learners’ language proficiencies.

Nkwetisama (2012) thinks that an integration pedagogy (otherwise known as competency-based approach) is a solution to boosting learners’ accuracy and fluency in language use, as they would be involved in solving their own daily problems using English, with an adequate integration of language segments (grammar, vocabulary and phonology) in the development of learners’ four language skills and know-how. To this effect, he suggests a scheme of work and a lesson plan, which Nforbi & Siéwoué (2016b) criticised. But the main difficulty is that these learners seldom find anyone with whom to practise the language especially in rural areas. Even in the urban zone where Anglophone children can be found,

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<sup>1</sup>‘MINESEC’ is an acronym that stands for “Ministère des Enseignements Secondaires”, that is, the Cameroonian Ministry of Secondary Education. The educational sector in Cameroon is divided basically into three levels for three separate ministry. Thus, there is a ministry of Basic Education (for the nursery and primary levels), a ministry of Secondary Education (for the secondary level) and a ministry of Higher Education (for the tertiary or university level).

these Anglophones instead struggle to speak French, so as to be bilingual as well. We hardly find any Francophone student struggling to learn English from their Anglophone fellows. Another challenge with Nkwetisama's proposal, which has been faced till date, is at the level of the terminology in competence-based language teaching, which used to impede seriously on the understanding and ipso facto the implementation of the new curriculum.

Nforbi and Siéwoué (2016b) put out that the implementation of the 2012 CBA curriculum was not adequate partly because of lack of understanding, and partly because of apathy on the part of the teachers. The understanding problems were recorded as the strange terminology (families of situations, categories of actions, outcome, skills, etc.), strange because the field teachers had never encountered these terms before, the strange symbols referred to as 'sounds of English' on the syllabus, as well as the interrelatedness of items on the curriculum. Again, the pedagogic seminars organised annually as a forum for teachers' continuous training used to gather very few teachers, the heads of departments from the various schools, whereas it could be opened to all the teachers. Teachers in the study reported serious problems in lesson planning (scheme of work, lesson plan), lesson delivery (lack of didactic materials and uneasy individualisation of the teaching) and language testing (no formal testing format, uneasy individualisation, lack of testing guidance ...). Though the study proves that this approach could be very promising for the development of learners' four basic language skills, the teachers' heart cry is for guidance, the explicitation of the new method (understanding, planning, teaching and testing) and adapted didactic materials such as relevant course books. We also demonstrate the need for a course book in the language pedagogy enterprise, and provide guidelines for its design. Between 2014 and now, many new textbooks for the teaching of English to French-speaking secondary school learners have been designed. They include *Majors in English* and *Interactions in English*. A textbook analysis is needed to verify their relevance. Dang & Chi Che (2016) also discuss the CBA-RLS in Cameroon's secondary level ESL and EFL and propose pedagogic models on teaching, assessment and feedback with schemes of work, lesson plans and sample lessons. Their dream remains the making of learners into 'autonomous language users'. Yet, they do not address the pronunciation component.

The place of linguistic knowledge is problematic in the whole enterprise. Since 2012, it is not rare to observe that language knowledge per se is pushed to the background and EFL teachers tend to focus on topics such as health, the environment, the media, trying to teach the vocabulary of the domains and at the same time creating awkward lessons without titles (grammar, vocabulary, speaking, ...), no specific outcome, because of confusion (Siéwoué, 2014: 35 - 42). In this connexion, Nforbi and Siéwoué (2016a) pose the hypothesis that most French-speaking Cameroonians in general and students in particular do not speak English eloquently because they possess no mastery of the tense and aspect system of English, as different from French. We prove that there is no major enhancement in learners' mastery of these key verb phrase structures throughout their secondary education journey. The learners face hellish problems encoding and decoding tense - as grammatical expression of time (See Comrie, 1985), and aspect (Comrie, 1971) - as duration/frequency of situation in the verb phrase. The tenses of English used to feature on syllabi for all seven levels in the secondary education, and were highly focused upon in the OBA era. But an inadequate pedagogy banning the use of French - the learners' language of instruction - and teaching too many things in a year produced results that left much to be desired (Nforbi, 2012a : 2). We suggest that, given the place that tense and aspect hold as core elements in the verb phrase and for successful communication, EFL pedagogy should henceforth dwell on fostering their mastery by the learners. There must be an interlanguage-informed pedagogy that frees learners'

English from the interference of their other languages. This should be even more carefully watched upon in the era of CBA-RLS. Siéwoué (2017) still regrets that the poor pronunciation of English words by Francophone students has bearings on their spelling. This poor pronunciation mainly results from structural transfers from French to English, and overgeneralisation in English. Again, he compares the 2012 and the 2014 curricula, discovering that decision-makers have gone a long way to facilitate the implementation of the curriculum, with the fitting of modules within administrative sequences, laying emphasis on listening and speaking, providing grounds for the harmonisation of testing nationwide, and preparing a pedagogic guide for teachers. Listening and speaking, as well as the tenses of English, feature prominently on the EFL syllabi. But the gap between policy and practice is obvious, and the need to stress the pronunciation component even more.

### Problem

The listening and speaking skills feature on both the 2012 and the 2014 CBA curricula, but still seem not to have been thoroughly reflected upon and tackled in classrooms. These skills have not been tested so far in the official examinations (Sokeng, 2010, Nforbi, 2016). The teaching of listening and speaking in the Francophone secondary schools is not only rare but also seems to follow the same patterns: for the listening lesson, teacher reads a passage and students answer the questions; for the speaking lessons, students are given phrases to repeat (“thank you!” – “you are welcome”, etc.), to initiate and sustain interaction, and asked to practice dialogues. The minute skills involved in listening and speaking are generally not focused upon. The usual apathy of the older teachers and the inexperience of the recent teacher training college graduates, along with the novelty of the CBA-RLS demand training in teaching listening and speaking with much theoretical grounding, as the decision makers over emphasise the need to develop the learners four language skills. If “*a growing number of people of both communities are investing efforts to be able to use English and French fluently in real life situations*” (MINESEC, 2012:64), then there is no better time to give the teachers the necessary equipment, for the solution to social problems are almost always sought for in the educational system (Nforbi, 2012a: 10). With a keen look on the speech workload on the new syllabi in general education (and syllabi in technical education are not any better), one doubts whether this syllabus could really enhance the learner’s speaking skills and listening skills from a phonetic and phonological perspective.

### METHOD

This paper is mainly theoretical and tries to show the importance pronunciation should be ascribed on the new curriculum. The speech work data will be analysed with a contents analysis approach. This approach is “*the intellectual process of categorizing qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes*” (Julien, 2003: 120). It is only realistic to feel, at the end of the analysis, that some issues will not have been adequately addressed. Julien (ibid: 121) puts it this way: “*The researcher also should consider what is missing or not present in the text being analysed*”. The paper matches the workload content to the challenges in the field and gives reasons for more tackling of pronunciation.

### Speech work on the curriculum

Spoken language cannot be thought of without pronunciation, and its prominence in day to day language use is not negligible. The way speech work is presented on the current competence-based programme of study is subject to worries. The speech work items on the 2014 programme of study are gathered and presented in the table below.

**Table 1: Speech work on the programme of study**

	<i>Sixième</i>	<i>Cinquième</i>	<i>Quatrième</i>	<i>Troisième</i>
<b>Module 1</b>	- Vowels and consonants	- Recycle [vowels/consonants] - Contrast consonant sounds	- Recycle [vowels/consonants] - Contrast all the vowel and consonant sounds	- Recycle [vowels/consonants] - Contrast all the vowel and consonant sounds
<b>Module 2</b>	- Pronounce the definite and indefinite articles in isolation and in connected speech correctly	- Produce simple stress and intonation patterns - Produce short utterances and dialogues	- Focus on nasals /m/, /n/, /ŋ/; /ʃ/, /dʒ/ and more consonant sounds	- Produce correct word stress and sentence stress
<b>Module 3</b>	- Pronounce weak and strong form in speech	- Identify and use homophones and homonyms - Contrast the short, long and diphthong vowel sounds	- Practice intonation and stress patterns	- Show mastery of intonation and stress patterns: weak forms in connected speech, orthography and pronunciation
<b>Module 4</b>	- Pronounce <i>s</i> and <i>es</i> plural regular noun formation correctly - Recycle the strong and weak forms	- Practise stressed and unstressed syllables in connected speech	- Practise stressed and unstressed syllables in connected speech, dialogues, role play and simulation activities.	- Make thorough discrimination and identification of all the sounds through speech work.
<b>Module 5</b>	- Recycle homophones - General revision	- General revision [vowels/consonants]	- General revision	- General revision

Only trained and hardworking English language teachers would be able to tackle the speech work as presented in Table 1 adequately. The first reason being that the sounds of English are not visible, and teachers should decide which one to teach and which one not to teach. There is a conspicuous negligence of the sounds of English in the new syllabus, whether in 2012 where the symbols were too strange to be called phonetic symbols (Nforbi & Siéwoué, 2016b) or in 2014 where phonetic symbols are bluntly left aside, except the nasals in *Quatrième*,



though the teacher's guide advises to integrate pronunciation activities into lessons, to accompany the learners in speaking tasks (MINESEC, 2014d: 35).

The speech work is loaded with supra-segmental features including stress, intonation and weak and strong forms. But that is no learner's first concern with pronunciation. When they encounter a new word, the first question or challenge is about reading, better still articulating that new word. They should therefore be taught to articulate phonetic symbols – as the pronunciation of each word in isolation is specified in the dictionary to this end. In this connexion, MINESEC (2014a:17) provides that the *Sixième* learner should “*read words from the dictionary correctly (based on the sounds learned so far)*” as part of their exit profile, but no clear plan is made to achieve this goal. That a teacher should decide which sounds to study with the learners is not a wary approach, although it must be exploited in the meantime. One could think that it is advantageous for the early learner of *Sixième* not to stress up their minds with spelling and sounds at the same time. But there are many disadvantages not inserting distinct sounds to be taught in the syllabus.

### **The Case of *Interactions In English***

As we mentioned earlier, *Interactions in English* is a manual that was designed to fit into the CBA-RLS curriculum in EFL at the secondary level, and first published in 2015. How helpful is this textbook for the teaching/learning of English sounds? As one goes through its pages, one discovers that the sounds of English are tackled to an extent but the teacher will need to put it more energy for the sounds to come out clearly and enhance self-learning.

In *Sixième* for example, the textbook presents various instances of tongue twisters. Image 1 in the appendix is an example. Here, the sounds /r/ and /f/ are practised, but the phonetic symbols are absent. The speech work section also presents words for the practice of stress (image 2) but throughout the textbook, the stress is not materialised. Towards the end of the student's textbook, the first and only two phonetic symbols in the whole volume appear: /k/ and /p/ (Image 3). In *Cinquième*, tongue twisters appears once, but this time with sound symbols (Image 4). Learners are also required to produce more tongue twisters with the same sounds as practice. Sound symbols, voiceless consonants and their voiced counterparts are also provided for a listening exercise (Image 6). Towards the end of the textbook, multiple choice items in which words with different sounds must be identified (Image 5). Most of the time, all the words in the speech work section are used in the other activities in the units. This is commendable in that these other activities help practise the phonetics learnt in the unit. For this reason, pronunciation should normally be taught from the onset.

Sounds begin to come out clearly in *Quatrième*, where from the first instance, diphthongs are provided, and learners are required to identify them in sentences and sort the words correspondingly (Image 10). The same type of exercise appears on pages 30 and 177 in *Troisième*. In all these instances, the recommendation we make is the same for classroom teachers. They should consistently transcribe the words involved or materialise the stress, for students' memory sake. They could identify all the words with the same sounds in the unit and present them at once. The sounds should be present in the students' mind.

The weakness of *Interactions in English* is failing to include pronunciation as a dictionary skill. Dictionary entries are presented in that form in the textbook, with some of the key words used. The main word (entry) is presented in bold, followed by word class, plural form (for nouns), and the definition are all present, and at times with the other meanings (Images 7, 8, 9).

Throughout the first cycle, from Sixième to Troisième, there is only one instance of a dictionary entry presented with its phonetics, in Quatrième, page 180 (image 11). Yet, the element that follows the headword in most dictionaries, the word's transcription following the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), is conspicuously absent. Its closeness to the headword teaches us to know how to articulate the word first, before the other dictionary information, for the signifier (graphic or oral) precedes the signified in the receptive skills - reading and listening, and must be well related to each other in production skills (speaking, writing), all for the sake of smooth communication. Also, pronunciation is not treated with the same seriousness throughout the textbook. In one volume, it could be treated as described above only in four or five units, out of fifteen.

### **The Importance of Speech Sounds on the Schemes of Work**

The pedagogic hierarchy's prescription on how to prepare CBA-RLS schemes of work make no room for speech work. Image 12 on the appendix is a photograph of page 26 of the pedagogic guide issued by the Ministry in July 2014. This should be considered as gross negligence. A speech work section must be inserted there. And as teachers draw their schemes of work, they should insert distinct sounds to be taught, as a guide and reference for the EFL practitioner, as graded content for learners, for facilitating autonomous further learning, and for developing worldwide intelligibility.

First, the Cameroonian EFL teachers are not native speakers of English, and therefore the challenges they face in attaining RP are a reality. It would not be unrealistic to declare that the English of some of these teachers leaves much to be desired, as the insufficient presence of trained teachers – who are not exempted – is covered by supply teachers with certificates between the GCE Advanced Level or the Francophones' *Baccalauréat* and Master's degrees in languages, as well as other fields of study. It is not unusual to see Anglophone teachers of other subjects teaching EFL (Siéwoué, 2013: 45 – 46; Siéwoué, 2014: 47). At the same time, learners tend to see the teachers as second to God, and will copy their pronunciation. The learners' attention needs to be drawn to the reference found in dictionary transcriptions as early as possible, for autonomous learning.

If these teachers of other subjects should teach English, therefore, there must be intra-departmental sessions where they are trained in various language issues, including the sounds and pronunciation patterns of English. The difficulty at this level is that not much profit can be made out of this training, since these teachers teach English just for the moment, until an English language teacher is available. Nonetheless, the training is necessary and in addition to the learners, the teachers themselves are beneficiaries. In the absence of this training, the heads of department should accompany these teachers so as to ensure quality teaching.

Second, phonological features might be just cloudy for the learners if they are not backed by material transcriptions. If the learners are to learn the use of 'the' as either [ðə] or [ði], the different realisations must be transcribed for memory sake. Teachers put needless demands on learners' memories when they ask them to repeat words after them and think that they will memorise their pronunciation. In some cases the pronunciation is actually memorised, but in many others, many are the students who forget it, and the end result is inability to speak English or listen to English. Teaching is all about facilitating learning, and all the assets in this regard should be operationalized.

Third, CBA-RLS over-emphasises the need to put the learner at the centre of their learning, an enterprise whose impact should be the development of learners' autonomous learning for the method adopted by the ministry of Secondary Education is "student-centred and learners are accompanied to self-direct their learning, it is important to teach them the strategies that they need" (MINESEC 2014b: 34). Teaching the learners the sounds of English equips them with the dictionary skills needed to articulate words that they had never encountered before, from the dictionary transcription. This is even more needed when the curriculum encourages learner creativity and student-student interaction, classroom instruction is to be at least 75% student talk (MINESEC, 2012: 73 -74, 77, 81, 84, 88, 92, 95-96, 103, 107); see also MINESEC (2014a: 21-22, 25-26, 29, 33,37), though no percentage is specified. In the effort to be creative, the learners will need to use new words in English. What these words are and how they are articulated, the dictionary will answer. If the teacher is referred to all the time when learners need to use a new word, the teaching learning will be slowed down and the teacher will be regarded, not only as facilitator – and may be not at all – but also as the 'magister' (welcome back to the grammar-translation age). Again, we suggest that the phonetic systems found in the learners' pocket dictionaries be used in teaching them the sounds of English. If another system is used, maybe the one that the teacher masters best, or the one found in advanced learner's dictionaries, these early learners may get confused and give up. This should further serve the purpose of developing learner autonomy.

Fourth, language sounds are one of the major features in oral language production, the most evident, through the other features could be perceived. Martin Bygate (2011) distinguishes four phases in the processing of oral language production, including: conceptualisation (involving access to long-term memory, tracking of the discourse, interlocutor's knowledge and expectations, pragmatic purpose, etc.), formulation (involving the lexico-grammatical selection and phonological priming), articulation (involving the segmental and supra segmental processing), and monitoring. The syllabus as discussed above has gone a great extent in providing for the fostering of conceptualisation (such as the pre-listening activities spelled out in the pedagogic guide (MINESEC, 2014b: 34-35), formulation has to do with contextual vocabulary, grammar, and the phonological rules to govern the sounds in the utterance. The first two are greatly provided for, but for the latter, we see two occurrences in the syllabus for *Sixième*: the '-s/-es' and the articulation of 'the' in connected speech. This is quite acceptable, but the articulation process must also be well catered for, by an adequate teaching of sounds and supra-segmental features.

Fifth, the need for the development of autonomous learning and use of new words – their pronunciation is hardly predictable in English – is further sustained by Bobda & Mbangwana's (2004:37) remark that "*indeed, the inconsistencies between spelling and pronunciation in English are disconcerting*". They go on demonstrating that the same letter or sequence of letters can be phonetically manifested differently and the same sound can be matched with various spellings. For instance, 'a' has nine phonetic manifestations, 's' has five, etc. (ibid: 37-38) and [i:] matches with eight spelling representations, [a:] has nine representations, [tʃ] has four, and the list continues (ibid: 44-45). The sounds and spelling discrepancies continue with silent letters (halfpenny, knee, calm, ...), homophones (see/sea, cue/queue, ...) and heterophones, words with same spelling but different pronunciations with different meanings (row/row, minute/minute, tear/tear, ...), and there are too many instances of these in the language.

It should be noted here that in French, unlike in English, there is a high level matching of one-to-one sound spelling, though there are some few exceptions to the rule, including mischievous



accents, doubling of consonants and old French spellings<sup>2</sup>. The early French-speaking learner of English approaches the L<sub>2</sub> with this (L<sub>1</sub>) previous knowledge, and both English and French use the 26-letter Latin alphabet. The sound and spelling discrepancies in the L<sub>2</sub> do become annoying. The learners therefore need the necessary strategy to facilitate the learning of a language with a similarity relationship of ‘contrast’, that is, the learner perceives L<sub>2</sub> form/pattern as significantly different from L<sub>1</sub> form/pattern (Ringbom & Jarvis, 2011). We have heard many of our students brandishing this as one of the major reasons why they cannot speak English, and think of using English as a solely God-given ability.

It is a necessity to train these learners from early classes like *Sixième* to read and to do phonetic transcriptions. So that they would spend seven years focusing on, amongst others, the very important language component of pronunciation, and seven years of articulating new words from their dictionary phonetic transcriptions, and not simply the non-native teacher’s pronunciation. The seven-year benefit will help greatly in their spoken English development, and the results may be astonishing. This endeavour should not be retarded till the university. The learners will neither study nor discover all that they were supposed to have mastered in seven years during the three years of undergraduate studies. And helping such “*ESL<sup>3</sup> learners work to modify their pronunciation/speech patterns toward increased intelligibility is especially challenging – for both student and teacher — for the patterns are likely to be well entrenched and resistant to change*” (Morley, 1991). Morley further quotes Wong (1986: 232-233) who warns that “*the long-term effects of neglecting pronunciation are most dramatically exemplified by the accountants, programmers, police officers, telephone operators, and engineers enrolled in accent improvement and effective communication courses*” in the Chinese context for instance. In Cameroon, many government officials and high personalities do enrol in linguistic centres as well. This warning clearly spells out the necessity of giving pronunciation the place it rightly deserves.

The classroom teacher could even transcribe each difficult word systematically, encouraging the learners, gradually, to check out in the dictionary. We insist on this because, as we have seen, articulation is a prominent process and component of all oral skills, whether receptive (listening) or productive (speaking, loud reading) or interactional. The necessity is even more emphasised in a socio-economic context where immersion programmes have become almost unthinkable.

A sixth reason for teaching the sounds of English and drawing the learner’s attention to word pronunciation in the dictionary (as a reference) is that the English language has travelled across the globe and the non-native speakers of English have developed varieties of English and some of the varieties are claimed for identity. Here we are reminded of Kachru’s three concentric circles of English. The dictionary skills that involve pronunciation arm both the teachers and, much more, the students with the necessary tools to reach out to the Received Pronunciation (RP), also called Standard British English (BrE). Bobda & Mbangwana (2004: 192-214) study the American accent and the Cameroonian accents of English putting out their major differences from RP in many regards: the sounds, the stress deviations, spelling-influenced pronunciations, etc. They still demonstrate that English does not vary only geographically across the globe, even within the same community, it can vary according to social class, ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> See Tocquet, R. (2001): *Comment avoir une orthographe qui mène au succès*, online, <http://www.livres-gratuits.com>

<sup>3</sup> The author makes it clear in her paper that she uses ESL for both ‘English as a Second Language’ and ‘English as a Foreign Language’.

groups, gender, style, etc. at the level of phonology, the variations do not only involve the sounds and stress, but other supra-segmental features like intonation and rhythm (Crystal, 2004: 168). For Crystal, the need for similarity in the Englishes of the world is unquestionable, for the speakers of the same language, no matter how different, should understand each other:

*The pull imposed by the need for identity which has been making New Englishes dissimilar from British English, could be balanced by a pull imposed by a need for intelligibility, on a world scale, which will make them increasingly similar, through the continued use of Standard English. (2004: 178)*

This should be the rationale behind the Cameroonian educational and administrative policies of promoting Standard British English, and it is the role of pedagogy to implement the policy. The teaching of English sounds is therefore, amongst others, a subtle but significant way of preparing the learners to interact with the English speakers of the globe without much difficulty, since they all relatively refer to RP. The curriculum wants the learners to grow up to be citizens not only of the nation (Cameroon), but also of Africa and of the world (MINESEC 2014a: 16), and intends to “*prepare them for smooth insertion into a more demanding job market worldwide, through a pertinent teaching/learning process*” (MINESEC 2014a: 3).

Pronunciation holds an unshakable place in oral communication, especially in the era of globalisation. Joan Morley (1991) puts it this way:

*Overall, with today's renewed professional commitment to empowering students to become effective, fully participating members of the English-speaking community in which they communicate, it is clear that there is a persistent, if small, groundswell of movement to write pronunciation back into the instructional equation but with a new look and a basic premise: **Intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence**<sup>4</sup>.*

Richards (2001: 28) confirms in turn that pronunciation is significant in talk as performance. Morley (ibid) draws a parallel between speech production (comprising various micro aspects of pronunciation) and the overall speech performance, reproduced in the table below.

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<sup>4</sup> Her emphasis

**Table 2: Parallel between two components of spoken English: speech production and speech performance**

SPOKEN ENGLISH	
[A focus on specific elements of pronunciation <sup>5</sup> ]	[A focus on general elements of oral communicability <sup>6</sup> ]
<i>Pronunciation: Microfocus</i>	<i>Oral Communication: Macrofocus</i>
* Clarity and precision in articulation of consonant and vowel sounds	* Overall clarity of speech, both segmentals and suprasegmentals
* Consonant combinations both within and across word boundaries, elisions, assimilations	* Voice quality effectiveness for discourse level communication
* Neutral vowel use, reductions, contractions, etc.,	* Overall fluency and ongoing planning and structuring of speech, as it proceeds
* Syllable structure and linking words across word boundaries, phrase groups, and pause points	* Speech intelligibility level
* Features of stress, rhythm, and intonation	* General communicative command of grammar
* Feature of rate, volume, and vocal qualities	* General communicative command of vocabulary words/phrases * Overall use of appropriate and expressive nonverbal behaviours

The table is quite expressive. Taking up the challenge of spoken proficiency commences with drawing the learners attention onto the sounds, the phonetics and the phonology of the target language. If they must speak the ‘global language’ (Crystal 2004) and be intelligible the world over, the pedagogy thereof must integrate thorough pronunciation teaching as a major aspect of the speech workload. We could only comment that, the more frequently sound, word and phrase pronunciation is practiced, the better the individual’s oral performances in clarity, accuracy, fluency and intelligibility.

### **Recordings and Audio-Visual Materials, an Asset**

Both the 2012 and the 2014 curricula provide that the learners listen to recordings and audio-visual materials – see for example MINESEC (2012: 73, 77, 80, 83 – 84, 87, 91, 94-95, 98-99, 102,106) and MINESEC (2014b: 21, 25, 29, 33, 37), but in the field, these media are conspicuously absent, yet the teachers must manage to wangle a few. Though MINESEC (2014b) brings out very useful guidance in tackling the pedagogy of the four skills in general and the oral skills in particular, curriculum implementation and achievement of curriculum goals will be highly paralysed. Recordings and audio visual media are quality tools for the oral skills development. When a learner has to listen to health advice, to dialogues related to selling and buying goods, to TV and radio news reports, to instructions on the phone, to departure and arrival announcements at the airport, to passages with specific information on the environment,

<sup>5</sup> A focus on the discrete features of voice and articulation

<sup>6</sup> A focus on global patterns of spoken English

economic and professional life and all this kind of stuff, and as they learn the notional and functional component, audio and audio-visual media become of utmost importance.

Languages have tones, and one of the first benefits of the listening exercise is that the language learner gets the tone of the language they are learning. This is true for both L1 and L2 language learners. Even without understanding a set of national languages, a Cameroonian who has had the chance to be exposed to them will use tone, among other features, to distinguish Ewondo from Fulfulde, the Bamileke languages, etc. And this is the reason why teachers should bring native speakers recordings into the classroom quite often. Once the learners have picked the tone, fluency is fostered. And it is the benefit of immersion programmes, where the L2 learner is exposed to L2 community and their daily use of language. In the same light, the Francophone students are encouraged to befriend their Anglophone fellows, to visit them in their homes and learn English from them. Though the Received Pronunciation (RP) may be attacked here, the Francophone learners will be in some kind of immersion. For Widdowson, "*immersion [...] would seem to be a kind of baptism which mysteriously induces the gift of tongues*" (1990: 14) but insists that "*the success of immersion by medium teaching is not complete. Students appear to acquire more in the way of fluency than accuracy*" (ibid: 15). Accuracy will be developed through the training of learner's conceptualisation, formulation, articulation and monitoring processes, to follow Bygate's (2011) nomenclature discussed earlier. But the issue is, how will the teachers get these recordings?

One could readily answer that as the teachers listen to the radio, watch the different national and international TV channels, as they browse on the internet, they could gather the recordings. This is very possible, but it poses many problems. First, it is still a reality in Cameroon today that not all the teachers are computer-literate, even amongst the younger generation. Those who fall in this category will find it difficult to do the exercise. Second, there is no guarantee that the media files would be gathered and didacticised in time. Third, even if the media could be made ready for instruction in time, the discrepancy between the schools will be considerable: not only will there not be any uniformity in the training of the students, but also there will be no basis on which to evaluate them at the official examination for the same fact. Fourth, it may be very costly for these teachers to engage in the business of gathering audio-visual materials for teaching, at the individual level, even at the level of the department, there is need at this level for a budget line. Last, we want to put forward that the design of such materials as audio and audio-visual materials strongly need to espouse the tenets of the educational policy in the country. Not every teacher will take time to go through these ethical, socio-political and economic restrictions before using a self-designed material in the classroom. As a major part of a curriculum, material design will also "*involve consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational programme*" (Allen, 1984). Curriculum ideologies<sup>7</sup> must be reflected through the choice and use of materials. It is not fully in the teacher's role to design such materials for their teaching, but to select, organise and use them to teach.

The design of audio, visual and audio-visual materials should be left to materials designers who must in turn use these media to support the textbooks produced to back the teaching/learning programme (see Nforbi & Siéwoué (2016b) for a discussion of the needed course book to support CBA-RLS in English as a foreign language). It is the government's responsibility to instruct the commercial textbook designers to complement their textbooks with audio, visual

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<sup>7</sup> For more on curriculum ideologies, see Richards, J. C. (2001): *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 124 - 141

and audio-visual materials and provide the curricular restrictions to this effect. The dialogue, listening passages and even reading passages could be (video) recorded on DVD's for classroom activities and much more for home practice. It is rather sad to know that though such examples as the materials used for IELTS and TOEFL exams preparation are well-known, the government has not promoted them in connexion with their constitutional official bilingualism policy. Quality education demands the use of the media nowadays. Textbook designers could be asked to give these media a prominent place in their products, so that a grammar or vocabulary or writing lesson can make use of them, at different stages of the lessons. The media should be burnt on DVDs or CDs and appended to the textbook, so that each student will have a copy. This is where the multimedia centres in schools become useful for language teaching. They have been mistaken for simple computer rooms – for computer studies – for long in our schools. Another advantage would be that, even at home, the learners will be able to replay the media and train their oral skills. The use of audio and audio-visual materials is an aspect of language teaching that is conspicuously absent in Cameroonian schools. There is a need for quality materials, and the commercial textbook designers must be put down to the task.

Again, the argument will be raised against this point of view, that it is costly to produce such materials, that their prices will be raised and not every Cameroonian parent will afford a copy for their children, and if this were to be done in all the subjects at the secondary level? This may be difficult, but it is not impossible. The materials can be subsidised by various fundings. It simply takes a governmental will, or the will of any other benefactor, as the government targets emergence by 2035. We have already seen that most social problems find their solution in the educational sector of the nation (Nforbi, 2012a). This is where subsidies are extremely meaningful. Where there is a will, there is a way.

## CONCLUSION

We have discussed the speech work as presented in the new CBA-RLS EFL curriculum for secondary education in Cameroon. It provides for the practice of suprasegmental features such as stress, intonation, weak and short forms, but obviously does not say much on the study of the sounds of English, apart from contrasting consonants and vowels, and recycling them. We have discussed the importance of teaching the sounds of English as, equipping the learner with dictionary skills for autonomous learning, for worldwide intelligibility, and as a reference for the teachers. Scheme of work drawers should therefore consider the sounds of English and its phonology, if the French-speaking learner must eventually display commendable oral skills, whether speaking or listening. The standard British English tropism prescribed by David Crystal, and (theoretically) observed in Cameroon's educational system, could be supported by quality audio, visual or audio-visual materials specially designed for pedagogic purposes. Then, students will no longer feel better only with written English, but at ease with both written and spoken English.



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