

THE EMERGENCE OF CAMEROON FRANCOPHONE ENGLISH AND THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH IN CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT: *A Sub-variety of English in Cameroon known as Cameroon Francophone English (CamFE) has been hitherto treated dismissively as a performance variety (Simo Bobda and Mbangwana 1993, Simo Bobda 1994) and in some cases not even recognized as a sub-variety of Cameroon English (Kouega 1999). Nevertheless, this variety is growing rapidly, is exhibiting fairly stable, and has systematic features that are significantly different from Cameroon English (CamE). This development is attributed to the change of attitudes of Francophones towards English. That is, we have recently been witnessing an unprecedented trend towards rushing for English among the Francophones in Cameroon. On the basis of my personal experiences as a teacher of English as a second and foreign language and on some key findings by previous researchers, I look at the implications of this growth on the future of English spoken in Cameroon. The emergence of Cameroon Francophone English and the future of English in Cameroon*

KEYWORDS: Cameroon, Francophone English, English,

INTRODUCTION¹

Research on the spread of English across the globe and the emergence of new varieties of English has indeed advanced over the past three decades. Today, we can comfortably discuss regional and national varieties of English (Indian English, Ghanaian English, Nigerian English, and Cameroon English) as varieties in their own right. The description of these varieties is quite advanced and researches have shown that these second language varieties exhibit a huge amount of variation depending on the sociolinguistic and cultural realities of each linguistic ecology. In Nigeria for example, we have three main sub varieties, namely Igbo English, Yoruba English and Hausa English which exhibit definable characteristics that warrant them to be researched independently. In Cameroon, researchers have reported that English as spoken in Cameroon is far from being a monolith (Simo Bobda, 1994; Mbangwana 1987; Atechi 2006, 2010; Kouega 2008; Safotso 2012). The Camerronian scenario is further exacerbated by the unique, complex linguistic setting in which English operates. The country has been described by linguists as one of the most complex linguistic settings in the continent of Africa. For example, Wolf (2003:71) echoes Todd (1982) that 'there is an almost infinite set of English varieties in Cameroon'. Atechi (2006) follows Todd and Wolf to reiterate that Cameroon English is indeed not a monolith, but quickly points out that, despite the variation CamE exhibits, these varieties are to a large extent identifiable. The complex nature of CamE reflects the multilingual and multicultural nature of the Cameroon

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linguistic ecology. Proof of this is the fact that the country is home to over 250 indigenous languages, mostly mutually unintelligible, a dominant English-based Pidgin used as a language of wider communication (Atechi & Fonka 2007) throughout the country, and two received languages, French and English, functioning as official languages. Cameroon therefore operates under a non-mother tongue official bilingualism policy which projects French and English as the languages of administration, education, media, etc. Upon reunification in 1961, these two colonial linguistic legacies were adopted as the official languages with equal status as enshrined in the constitution of the nation. However, the two entities (French Cameroon & English Cameroon) that came together to form one nation did not have the same demographic weight. French made up 80% and English, just 20%. Despite this imbalance, the architects of the official bilingualism policy set a number of goals to be achieved:

1. They desired that the policy produce Bloomfieldian perfect bilinguals.
2. They aimed at following one approach to national integration and another to linguistic integration, while both were intended to complement each other in the achievement and sustainability of national unity, seen in terms of territorial integration and social cohesion through linguistic communication (Ayafor 2005:124).
3. They also anticipated the benefits and opportunities pertaining to the exposure to the vast worlds of the Commonwealth and the Francophonie .

In order to achieve these lofty goals, Mbangwana (2004:11) reports that in the early years of reunification, linguistic centers were opened in Yaounde and Buea for the ordinary citizens to learn English and French. Meanwhile, The British Council, American Cultural, and French cultural centers would vigorously and generously teach the two languages to Cameroonians. Moreover, the USA, UK, French, and Canadian governments offered scholarships to Cameroonians to study translation and interpretation of the languages in their home countries. Government also created bilingual schools and made the second official language compulsory at the end of course examination in both subsystems.

This begs the question: over half a century later, have these objectives been attained? Ayafor (2005:123) argues that in spite of all the government efforts, 'just a very small percentage of the population is able to speak the two languages with functional fluency' because of the poor implementation of the policy (cf. Anchimbe 2006). Ayafor (ibid) points out that instrumental instead of integrative orientation was adopted by learners of the two languages, a choice that was counterproductive to the main objectives of the official bilingualism policy. Consequently, French assumed a dominant position and English was relegated to the background. French became the *de facto* language of administration and the military, thereby stifling the dream of having the two communities live in peace and harmony. Simo Bobda (2013:290) echoes this fact that 'the French language overwhelmingly dominates the sociolinguistic landscape in Cameroon.' Of course, the consequences of this scenario cannot be over emphasized. One glaring outcome was that Francophone motivations towards learning English declined rapidly since they considered French sufficient for them to function in Cameroon. To Francophones therefore, learning the second official language was a sheer waste of time (Ze Amvela 1999). This attitude did not only help to frustrate the objectives of the official bilingualism policy, but it also discouraged the Anglophones and they decided to learn French more for instrumental rather than for integrative reasons. Thus, the attempt to

achieve national and linguistic integration yielded the opposite of what was expected: that is, ethnicity along the Francophone-Anglophone division has emerged, which now threatens national unity in terms of territorial integration and social cohesion.

However, the economic meltdown that took the country by surprise in the early 1990s would bring significant change to the linguistic landscape of Cameroon. This unprecedented economic quagmire made Cameroonians to understand that they did not need to look at their world through a narrow lens. An economic downturn meant fewer jobs, abject poverty, and of course, less hope for the future generation. The only option for both Francophones and Anglophones was to start looking beyond the national boundaries to see if there were greener pastures anywhere. Yet, everywhere that Cameroonians saw hope they needed knowledge of the English language. This was particularly disturbing to the French-speaking Cameroonians who had neglected the language.— a second official language which they had ignored as a minority language within Cameroon. This dilemma brought about a radical change in attitudes towards English, and many Francophones decided to invest significant effort in the learning of the English language (Kouega 1999, Anchimbe 2006, 2007). They no longer saw it as a minority language spoken by Anglophones in Cameroon but as an indispensable tool for survival in a world that science and technology has reduced to a global village with English as the main *lingua franca*, a language on which the sun never sets (Crystal 1997).

French-speaking parents decided to take a number of measures to have their children learn English, namely: they began to send their children to English medium schools, some of them did all to encourage their children who were already enrolled in the French medium schools to take their English lessons seriously, some hired the services of home English teachers to reinforce the learning of the language, while some registered the children for English language classes in language centres such as the Pilot Linguistic Centre, B&K Language Institute, British Language Centre, American Cultural Center, among others. This massive and unprecedented shift towards the learning of the English language by the Francophones started making headlines not only on radio and television but also in the print media (Simo Bobda 2001). My experience as a teacher of English as both a second and foreign language stands as a clear testimony to this recent phenomenon. For the first time in my postgraduate English language specialisation class, I did not only notice that the Francophones outnumbered the Anglophones but also that the English they spoke was different from CamE at almost all levels of linguistic analysis. These were students who have had French as a medium of instruction from Primary through secondary to high school before deciding to enrol in the bilingual undergraduate program at the University. The easy way out would have been to pursue postgraduate studies in French, but because of the transnational attraction of English they decided to do so in English. This was not the least easy. But at the end of our time together, some of them made it to the next level and today, some are colleagues in the university teaching English to both Francophones and Anglophones. While some of these students were evolving into university lecturers, the Higher Teacher Training College was graduating a good number of them as secondary and high school teachers and as now a very large number of CamFE speakers are found all over the country teaching English both as a second and as a foreign language. It is even more serious given that Cameroon now has more state universities where many French-speaking students are being trained as English Language teachers. Simo Bobda (2013) reports cases how Francophone science teachers are being sent to teach in Anglophone technical schools where Anglophone teachers are in short

supply. One can imagine the rate at which this sub-variety of English is spreading, not only among Francophones but also among Anglophones as well.

Due to the earlier on presented development, many researchers including those who had been neglecting or treating this variety dismissively in the past began to describe it. The results of the early findings show glaringly that the Cameroon Francophone variety of English seems to be charting its own separate course from the mainstream variety, CamE. At least at the phonological level, it is shown that CamFE has developed some systematic features that set it aside as a variety that needs to be researched independently, although the 'notion of standard with regard to CamFE is still fuzzy and it is not always possible to identify what is, even tacitly, accepted or rejected' (Simo Bobda 2013:298).

In this light, certain basic questions about the relationship between CamE and CamFE remain to be settled: What is the relationship between CamE and CamFE?, Is CamFE still a performance variety (Simo Bobda and Mbangwana 1993, Simo Bobda 1994), a nonexistent variety of English in Cameroon (Kouega 1999)? How does the rush for English affect the relationship between Anglophones and Francophones? In terms of cross-linguistic interference, which variety is likely to influence which? Do these new trends have any positive impact on the lofty objectives of the official bilingualism policy? Is CamE soon going to lose its mainstream status to CamFE? This paper will consider how various researchers have been grappling with this phenomenon. By analyzing their statements, more facts pertaining to the growth and expansion of this new sub-variety will be made visible and projections on what the future holds for these two varieties of English in multilingual and multicultural Cameroon will also be highlighted.

Some salient characteristics of CamFE

CamE has received more sustained attention compared to CamFE. This is understandable given that the latter is still just making its way into the Cameroon linguistic setting. As mentioned earlier, some of the hallmarks of this emerging variety have been reported by researchers such as Kouega (2008); Amah (2012); Safotso, (2006, 2012); Essomba (2013); Simo Bobda (2013). These features include: H-dropping, H-insertion, the use of nasal vowels, the dropping of the plural forms/third person singular markers, and some French-induced pronunciation.

Table 1: Some segmental features of CamFE²

word	CamE	CamFE	transcriptions
both	[t]	[f]	bo[f]
tooth	[t]	[s]	too[s]
anything	[t]	[ts]	any[ts]ing
mo <u>th</u> er	[d]	[v]	mo[v]er,
<u>th</u> ere, bro <u>th</u> er	[d]	[z]	[z]ere, bro[z]er
<u>th</u> eir	[d]	[dz]	[dz]eir

Most of the data on the tables are adapted, first, from the works of previous authors such as Kouega, 2008; Safotso, 2012; Amah, 2012; Essomba, 2013; Simo Bobda, 2013, and second, from a large dataset of CamFE that I am currently preparing for acoustic analysis.

<u>G</u> George, <u>j</u> aw	[dʒ]	[ʒ]	[ʒ]eorge, [ge,
<u>ch</u> ildren	[tʃ]	[ʃ]	[ʃ]ildren
<u>p</u> re <u>j</u> udice	[ʊ]	[y]	Prej[y]dice
<u>t</u> own, <u>c</u> ouncil	[aʊ]	[ɔ]	t[ɔ]n, c[ɔ]ncil

From the table above we can see that CamE and CamFE are significantly different with regard to the variability in the phonemes like the voiced and the voiceless dental fricatives [θ] and [ð]. While the realisation of the two sounds is fairly stable in CamE, it varies tremendously in CamFE. This manifestation of the voiced and voiceless fricatives may be to confirm the fact that this variety of CamE is still stabilising or that there are still a number of variables that have not been taken into consideration by these researchers.

Table 2: H-dropping in CamFE

word	CamE	CamFE
habit	[habit]	[abit]
horrible	[hɔribel]	[oribel]
history	[histri]	[istri]
hospital	[hɔspitəl]	[ospital]
hostile	[hɔstail]	[ɔstil]
Henry	[hɛnri]	[ãri]
husband	[hɔsban]	[ɔsban]
hungry	[hɔngri]	[ɔgri]
human	[human]	[uman]

The realisation of the voiceless glottal fricative, /h/ presents a lot of challenges in CamFE. It should be noted that this sound is rarely attested in French which is the language that induces CamFE the most. The sound /h/ is often silent in French and we see this rule being reflected onto the production of francophone speakers of English by the realizations such as those in the table above.

Table 3: H-insertion in CamFE

Word	CamE	CamFE
as	[as]	[has]
honour	[ɔnɔ]	[hɔnɔ]
honest	[ɔnes]	[hɔnes]
air	[ɛ]	[hɛ]

As noted above, the voiceless glottal fricative /h/ exhibits interesting characteristics in CamFE. This sound appears marginally in French and that may be why it is dropped in words such as *hotel*, *husband*, *hungry*, *human*, rendering these words, 'otel', 'usband', 'ungry', 'uman'. In this case, if consistency were anything to go by, we would expect CamFE speakers to favour the English rule that drops the sound in words such as *honour*, *honest*, *hour*, but CamFE speakers strangely contradict this rule and go further to insert the sound even in words that do not have any orthographic 'h', such as *as* and *air*, rendering 'as soon as' as 'has soon has' (Simo Bobda 2013).

Table 4: French-induced pronunciation in CamFE

word	CamE	CamFE
island	[ailan]	[islan]
mayor	[mɛjɔ]	[majɔ]
efforts	[ɛfɔts]	[ɛfɔ]
maritime	[maritaim]	[maritim]
quality	[kweliti]	[kaliti]
mentality	[mentaliti]	[mãtaliti]
rich	[ritʃ]	[riʃ]
parents	[pɛrens]	[pærɛn]

That French induces CamFE most, is not open to any debate. This is seen especially in the table above where most CamFE words are induced by French reading rules. Words like *maritime*, *quality*, *rich*, *efforts*, are pronounced in CamFE in a similar fashion as in French. The realisation of some of the words such as *island*, *mayor*, *parents*, etc may bear traces of spelling pronunciation.

Table 5: Nasal vowels in CamFE

word	CamE	CamFE
Injure, province	[in]	[ĩ]
Central, Henry	[ɛn]	[ã]
Monday, only	[ɔn]	[õ]
dancing	[aŋ]	[ê]
mountain	[aon]	[õ]

One distinctive characteristic of CamFE is the use of nasalized vowels, with most outstanding ones being, [ã, õ, ê, ã]. With these regard, nasalization of English vowels such as in *Henry*, *only*, *dancing*, *province* may be due to the inducement of French.

Table 6: Plural forms/3rd person singular

word	CamE	CamFE
shops	[ʃɔps]	[ʃɔp]
shorts	[ʃɔts]	[ʃɔt]
runs	[rɔns]	[rɔn]
writes	[raits]	[riat]
rings	[riŋs]	[rin/rins]
calabashes	[kalabaʃis]	[kalabaʃ]
instances	[instansis]	[ĩstãs]
mangoes	[mangos]	[mãgo/mẽgo]
buses	[bɔsis]	[bys/bysis]

Majority of CamFE speakers silence the plural markers, -s, -es, -ies, as well as the 3rd person singular markers. Safotso (2012) remarks that the silencing of the markers of the plural/3rd person singular is a clear characteristic of the pronunciation of CamFE speakers, and thinks that this may be as a result of French influence given that the plural markers are silent in that language and because the singular noun is differentiated from the plural one by the article, for instance, 'la table' /la tabl/ (singular); 'les tables' /lɛ tabl/ (plural) (tables). The same explanation goes for the 3rd person singular because in French it is not marked in the verbs of the first group, and even though marked in the verbs of the 2nd and 3rd groups, the marker remains silent as in *il benit, il mord*, [il beni, il mɔr] (he blesses/bites) (Safotso 2012:2473).

Other peculiarities include the realisation of the simple past and past participle morpheme -ed. In CamFE, the -ed suffix is either silent or pronounced as [ɛt] as in *walk[ɛt], allow[ɛt]* for CamE *walk[t]* and *allow [t]*. This rule works mostly with regular verbs. It should be noted here that we do not intend to highlight those CamFE features that also apply in CamE except in cases like the one above which are meant to show variation in the way CamFE treats certain aspects of CamE.

DISCUSSION

From the above presentation, it is clear that CamFE is fast becoming a reality in Cameroon. As CamFE tries to chart its own course, it is worth clarifying a few issues concerning its relationship with CamE. The first thing we may want to clarify here is that CamE has not yet embraced the differentiation phase of the 'Dynamic Model' of the evolution of postcolonial Englishes (Schneider 2007) as pointed out by Safotso (2012), but rather the emergence of CamFE can be attributed to the notion of 'transnational attraction' of English (Schneider 2012). Schneider (ibid:6), after carefully observing the current status and expansion of English in the expanding circle and other considerations, argues that 'English is undergoing a process of 'transnational attraction', which has its roots in colonial expansion but by now has complimented and outgrown the post colonial dynamics of the language'. The Cameroonian situation fits neatly into this notion since CamFE is developing in a fashion that is unique when compared with CamE. By all indications, the two are markedly different from each other, at least at the phonological level. Secondly, it is noted that French-speaking Cameroonians' attitudes towards English have changed drastically from very negative to very positive from the 1990s. This unprecedented change of attitude may give the impression that the objectives of national integration and national unity are being attained as expected by the architects of the Official Bilingualism policy. The new trends do not seem to move clearly in this direction. Nevertheless, more and more Cameroonians are embracing bilingualism although Ayafor (2005) thinks Cameroon is more divided on linguistic lines than it was at independence. That is why Anchimbe (2007) sees this unprecedented rush for English by Francophones as an identity opportunism, whereby postcolonial multilingual speakers choose an identity or a language at a given time based on the advantages they are likely to benefit. He adds that this sudden positive attitude towards English by Francophone speakers does not correspond to their positive attitude towards English-speaking Cameroonians, but it is rather an attempt to catch-up with the advantages that are associated with English, the language of globalization and modern technology. Nevertheless, it is clear that some progress is being made and Cameroonians can only be encouraged to do more so that they can make the best

out of the advantages that accrue from being bilingual in two of the world's most influential languages.

The third point to note is that CamFE is growing steadily and charting its own course. By all indications, this recent development is very significant with regard to the future of English in Cameroon, especially given the pace at which this variety is growing and the numerical strength of Francophones in this postcolonial linguistic ecology. But since this variety as well as its description is still in its embryonic stage, we may witness a scenario where either CamE or CamFE may influence each other in an interesting fashion. Such cross-linguistic interference, no matter which way it goes, should be of great concern to linguists given that its impact will certainly affect the future of English spoken in Cameroon. If CamFE because of its numerical predominance and other strengths, influences CamE or if CamE given its mainstream status and long history of extensive description, influences CamFE, this will equally raise a myriad of concerns that should attract the attention of researchers in this area. Let us examine some of these implications below.

IMPLICATIONS

The implications of CamFE's emergence and rapid expansion in Cameroon cannot be overemphasized. The possibility of CamFE supplanting CamE and taking over as the mainstream variety of English spoken in Cameroon cannot be completely ruled out. There are a number of factors that make this feasible: First, the Francophones are in the majority in Cameroon. The numerical predominance of French in Cameroon plays a very significant role in the future of English in the country. With the present trends, if CamFE were to be spoken by just a third of the French-speaking population, this would constitute a serious threat to mainstream CamE, which makes up just about 20% of the population of Cameroon. The majority CamFE population, backed by economic and political power, can be very influential. But the question is, does it matter whether it is CamE or CamFE that becomes the spoken mainstream variety? It may not matter given that CamE, although fairly stable, is still to be codified or standardized. It is equally true that CamE is more documented and widespread, compared with CamFE. But linguistic phenomena are sometimes so strange in their behaviour in a way that makes predictability a risky venture. However, it may not be easy for CamFE to supplant CamE despite its numerical predominance if we take the example of the second language varieties which are in the majority in the world today but are still unable to use this numerical strength to challenge the hegemony of the older varieties which are in the minority. Several reasons account for this: first, the native varieties are extensively described at all levels of linguistic analysis; second, the availability of didactic material for the teaching of the language to foreign learners; third, they possess enough reference materials, dictionaries, treaties, and more importantly, their speakers wield political, cultural, military and economic power which are a *sine qua non* for a language to gain prestige and sustain it. Splenetic debates that raged in the pages of journals in the late 1980s seemed to have quelled to an acceptance that second language varieties of English are varieties in their own right (Kachru, 1990, Quirk 1990) , but we are yet to see these bear much fruit. For example, we are still to see them gain legitimacy in the classroom, as the model used for teaching in most postcolonial settings is still the native model even though it may be taught by nonnative teachers who do not master the native model themselves.

The line of argument above may offer comfort to those who are anxious to see CamE remain the mainstream variety of English in Cameroon, but the two situations are not entirely analogous for two reasons. First, while native varieties are codified and standardized, CamE is still in the process of being codified: the language is still to be taught in schools as it lacks basic didactic materials. Second, while speakers of the native varieties wield economic, political, cultural, military powers to back up these varieties, CamE speakers may not wield the same powers in Cameroon. These and many other variables may render the linguists unable to make straightforward predictions about the future of English in Cameroon.

Second, the issue of cross-linguistic interference is a plausible one. The implications of one of these varieties influencing the other heavily may come with a lot of questions that may be hard to answer. If CamFE heavily influences CamE, we are in for a mainstream variety of English in Cameroon that presents more challenges than ever before especially with regard to the international intelligibility question. Indeed, the CamFE features above testify to this. This will mean that CamE will need fresh description and other significant adjustments to accommodate this new phenomenon. On the other hand, if CamE heavily influences CamFE, this will mean that the two varieties may merge. Such a merger may not be as problem-free as we may expect. So no matter whichever way the pendulum swings to, it can only further complicate the already very complex linguistic landscape of the country

CONCLUSION

By all indications, the unprecedented rush for English by the French-speaking Cameroonians and the consequent emergence of a variety of English christened CamFE, is a significant development in respect of the linguistic landscape of Cameroon. As Simo Bobda (2013:300) puts it, 'whether it is considered a satellite, a sub-variety, an outgrowth, a tributary, an ethnolect of CamE, CamFE no longer passes unnoticed.' Indeed, whether CamFE ends up supplanting CamE as the mainstream variety of English in the country or CamE maintaining its mainstream status, Whether CamFE ends up influencing CamE or vice versa, whether this development will lead to a change in the attitude of French-speaking and English-speaking Cameroonians towards each other, whether CamFE develops to an autonomous variety in its own right, whether CamFE moves towards CamE to form some sort of a merger, whether these developments end up influencing the sociopolitical and cultural make up of the country or not, is too early to tell. Although some commentators have made various conjectures about the outcome of the emergence of CamFE, I would be more cautious because the linguistic landscape of Cameroon is becoming more and more complicated by the day, especially given that the description of CamFE is still at its embryonic stage. What is certain, however, is that these developments are definitely going to impact the linguistic situation of Cameroon in a significant fashion. And whatever the outcome may be, we are called upon to live with, for those who fight linguistic change tend to lose.

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