



## Recent Changes in the Area of New Englishes in Cameroon and Some Sociolinguistic and Pedagogic Implications

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**Abstract:** Over the past years, English has spread its tentacles all over the world like wildfire. That unprecedented propagation of the language led to the emergence of what is technically referred to as New Englishes, which have received sustained attention from researchers in the domain from different perspectives. On that move, Cameroon, where English is one of the official languages (the other being French) is not left behind. In fact, we have witnessed and are still witnessing effective evolution of Nativised Varieties of English in the postcolonial multilingual Cameroon and this is becoming more and more a fertile ground for linguistic and sociolinguistic inquiries. In this research endeavour, focus is on Cameroon Francophone English (hereafter CamFE), one of those varieties of English that has emerged recently and which is now competing with other varieties of English in the country. As the title suggests, the work is a historical appraisal of the recent changes in the area of New Englishes and the implications of this sociolinguistic phenomenon on English Language Teaching in Cameroon. The work adopted the Descriptive Critical Approach for a sound analysis of the phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Linguistics, Language Variation, Cameroon Francophone English (CamFE), Bilingualism, Postcolonial Linguistics, Nativised Varieties of English.

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### 1. New Englishes: A Socio-historical Appraisal

The unprecedented spread of English inevitably led to what specialists in the domain call *New Englishes*. They serve different communicative purposes in new ecologies where they are not the mother tongue of the majority of the population. The direct consequence of this spread is that everywhere English is found today, be it in settlement or exploitation areas, it has developed “new features which differ significantly from native Englishes but not deficient at all” (Atechi: 2006). Most of these varieties crop up as a result of the amalgamation or contact between the English language and other local languages (Mbangwana: 1987). According to Ngefac (2010), the indigenisation of the English language is at the root of the differences that abound in the

language today. These differences are noticed at all linguistic levels. In each and every new milieu in which it is spoken, English develops new features that are either society-related or idiosyncratic. Ngefac (ibid: 40) states that in the various postcolonial settings where the language has been transplanted, “it has developed through an itinerary that is determined by the ecological and sociocultural realities of the places and has acquired an identity unique to such places”. Thus, English adapts to the sociocultural realities of the new linguistic environment where it finds itself. It is therefore evident that English, in non-native settings, is not spoken in a uniform manner. Each time English finds itself in a new community, it has a new touch thus a new identity.

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The description of these varieties is quite developed and researchers 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 this light, Cameroon is not left out. In fact, the English language has developed many ethnic varieties. Ample literature reveals that English, as spoken in Cameroon, is far from being a monolith (Mbangwana: 1987; Simo Bobda: 2013; Atechi: 2006; Kouega: 2008; Safotso: 2012). The Cameroonian scenario is further exacerbated by the unique complex linguistic setting in which English operates. In fact, Cameroon has been described by linguists as one of the most complex linguistic settings in the African continent. Wolf (2003:71) rightly observed that “there is an almost infinite set of English varieties in Cameroon”. In the same vein, Atechi (2006) reiterates that English in Cameroon is indeed not a monolith, but quickly points out that the numerous English varieties are to a large extent identifiable.

## 2. *New Englishes* in the world and some major thematic preoccupations

In linguistic studies today, there is a plethora of topics and debates that turn around language matters and pedagogic issues in the postcolonial world. Among other issues of particular interest, we have the thematic preoccupations of the ownership of English nowadays, and the question of intelligibility of non-native Englishes. The spread of English throughout the four corners of the world led to the advent of many other Englishes referred to as *Nativised Englishes*. Consequently, Standard British English (hereafter SBE) was forced to be modified in non-native settings because non-native speakers were bound to adopt and adapt the language in a way that will suit their socio-cultural realities. After the advent of non-native varieties of English in non-native milieus, the question of the real owner of English came up. British people were no longer viewed as the sole proprietor of the English language (Bamgbose: 1998). Africans, Europeans, Asians, etc. also claim their ownership of the language. English has therefore become a world popular *Lingua Franca* that serves myriad purposes in the new settings where it has been transplanted.

In addition to the linguistic preoccupation of the ownership of English, there is another issue of great concern, that of intelligibility. Jenkins (2000: 69) states that “non-native varieties of English were viewed as deficient and unintelligible and hence to be modified as per the requirements of the native speakers”, a conception that Atechi (2006) does not share and directly reacts against. He came up with the following interrogations: to whom non-native varieties of English are not intelligible? Are non-native speakers of English the only ones to make

efforts to make themselves understood by native listeners? Why should native speakers not make the same effort to be understood by non-native ones? These interrogatives changed the view that linguists had on the intelligibility of new Englishes. The author clearly critically examined the intelligibility of non-native Englishes to non-native speakers and came up with interesting findings that revolutionised linguistic thinking in the domain.

## 3. *New Englishes* in the Cameroonian ELT industry: Current situation and perspectives

In the postcolonial multilingual Cameroon, debates on the Cameroonian ELT industry are turning around but not limited to the variety of English that must serve as the Reference Model in the classroom as well as issues related to post method pedagogy in the area of New Englishes. Let us cast a critical look on each of those major concerns.

### 3.1 Towards a Post-method pedagogy in ELT in the Cameroonian context

The past decades, as trends reveal, have witnessed a shift of focus in the teaching profession both in the Inner Circle and in the Outer and Expanding Circles. The methods and approaches used in the process of teaching and learning English have significantly changed. Definitely, we have moved from traditional methods where emphasis was on accuracy to communicative or proficiency-based methods to language teaching which focus on communicative purposes (Essossomo: 2017). Despite the major changes made so far, Cameroon is still lagging behind as far as the implementation of the major innovations in TESOL are concerned. Essossomo (Ibid) therefore strongly advocates the teaching of English in the Postcolonial Cameroon from a typically Postmethod Pedagogy which is more appropriate in that new ecology. In fact, the TESOL profession has witnessed evolving perspectives on language teaching methods in terms of three perceptible shifts. Thus, we shifted from communicative language teaching to task-based language teaching, and from Method-based Pedagogy to Post method Pedagogy. In fact, recent developments in the ELT industry have led Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1997:148 quoted in Essossomo 2022) to wonder “whether it makes any sense to talk about CLT at all”. They recognise that “the development of language teaching theory has arrived at a postmethod condition, which requires a reconsideration of some of the metaphors used to describe methodological issues” (p. 148), and that it has provided “a coherent enough framework for teachers to make it unnecessary to use higher-order terms such as CLT” (p. 149). In making these remarks, they were prompted by a shift that has been fast unfolding. According to Essossomo (2022), it is urgent to put an end to the profession’s innocence

about the neutrality of the method in fact, the concept of method “reflects a particular view of the world and is articulated in the interests of unequal power relationships”, and that it “has diminished rather than enhanced our understanding of language teaching” (Pennycook 1989: 597). In the same light, there is no best method and that what really matters is the need for teachers to learn “to operate with some personal conceptualisation of how their teaching leads to desired learning—with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility for them” (Essossomo, *ibid*). He called the resulting pedagogic intuition a teacher’s sense of plausibility. The challenge facing the profession, he noted, is not how to design a new method but how to devise a new way “to help activate and develop teachers’ varied senses of plausibility” (also see Prabhu 1990). It would be appropriate to put an end to the infatuation with the search for the best method. It is an unnecessary waste of time and energy.

### 3.2 The Reference Model in the ELT industry in Cameroon

One major question was raised in the literature concerning the variety of English to be taught in the classrooms in the Cameroonian context. On the issue, Ngefac (2010) adamantly pointed out that the promotion of native varieties of English in non-native settings such as Cameroon is definitely a fallacy, an unattainable goal and therefore a total waste of time and energy. He stands for the teaching of new varieties of English in the Cameroonian context. The author strongly stands for Cameroon English (hereafter CamE) which is flourishing day after day in order to avoid problems of intelligibility. In fact, he qualifies the non-native teacher as a blind leading another blind (the student). He states that “no matter our effort to speak like the British for so many years, we have not succeeded”. In the actual fact, “it is an unrealistic goal; we should better consume our own products” (P3). Essossomo (2013, 2017) does not share that opinion. The author rather thinks that goliath varieties of English should continue serving as the standard in the English language teaching industry in Cameroon for a number of reasons including the non-codification of CamE, the lack of pedagogic materials, and the negative attitude of majority of Cameroonians (mostly francophones) towards the promotion of CamE. All these reasons brought him to think that, until CamE is codified, standardised and fully accepted, teaching SBE is the ideal even if our objectives are hardly attained.

### 3.3 The Emergence of CamFE and pedagogic implications

Lately, we have witnessed a very interesting and surprising linguistic situation in the Cameroonian sociolinguistic landscape. In fact, the advent of Cameroon Francophone English (the

variety of English spoken by French-speaking learners of English) is emerging and is “even competing with CamE” (Atechi and Angwah (2016: 1). Francophone speakers representing about three-quarters of the country have produced a variety of English called CamFE and that variety is what is found in English classes and even in higher teacher training schools (Ngefac: 2010). This linguistic situation represents a real duel between CamE and CamFE.

The multilingual and multicultural nature of the Cameroon linguistic ecology can be justified by the presence of all these languages which are mostly mutually unintelligible throughout the country, (Atechi & Fonka: 2007). This makes the effects of language interference on their production of English unavoidable. Though English and French were sanctioned as the languages of formal education, law, official documents, diplomacy, radio and television, French has always been the dominant language in all sectors of the country (Kouega: 1999; Echu 1999: 190). Simo Bobda (2013:290) reechoes that “the French language overwhelmingly dominates the sociolinguistic landscape in Cameroon”. As a matter of fact, 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 (Atechi: 2015).

CamFE, a variety of English which has been hitherto treated dismissively as a performance variety (Simo Bobda & Mbangwana: 1993; Simo Bobda: 1994) and in some cases not even recognised as a sub-variety of CamE (Kouega:1999) is gaining ground in Cameroon. This paper is an echo of the current situation of this variety of English. The aspect of CamFE chosen is pronunciation, already handled by many scholars (Simo Bobda: 2013; Safotso: 2012; Khan: 2012; Kouega: 2008; Atechi: 2015 etc). This variety is growing rapidly, exhibiting fairly stable, and has systematic features that are significantly different from CamE (Atechi 2015: 23). That said, Simo Bobda (2013) declares that,

*Whether it is considered a satellite, a sub-variety, an outgrowth, a tributary, an ethnolect of CamE, CamFE no longer passes unnoticed. It has attracted attention in society, in the workplace and in the classroom. It is carving its attention in society, in the workplace and the classroom. It is also carving its autonomous routes as seen for example in its reorganization of word stress.* (Simo Bobda 2013:289)

In the light of that conception, CamFE nowadays stands as a variety on its own and it is gaining more and more recognition in the country. In fact, CamFE pronunciation is introduced into the

classroom by the very teachers who are trained in highly rated institutions (Simo Bobda: *ibid*). 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 (Atechi:2015), although the “notion of CamFE is still fuzzy and it is not always possible to identify what is, even tacitly, accepted or rejected” (Simo Bobda 2013:298), hence the main interest of this research endeavour.

### 3.4 What variety of English in Cameroonian Classrooms: CamE or CamFE?

Which of the two main varieties of English are to be taught in the Cameroonian classrooms? Or is it better to continue promoting SBE as it is still the case? Those are some of the important questions that are still pending in the domain of language in Cameroon. There are some authors who have tried to provide answers (see Safotso: 2015, 2016; Simo Bobda: 2015; Sala: 2016, Essossomo 2022). Since the debate is still open, we want to add our voice in order to contribute in filling this linguistic gap. It is no longer open to debate that CamFE is a variety of English on its own in Cameroon and evidence from previous research show that it even competes with CamE. This linguistic situation brings Simo Bobda (2013) to declare that,

*What the future holds for CamFE is not easy to tell, but at least it seems predictable that an English accent like CamFE regularly implanted by the English teachers themselves in the classroom has come to stay. It seems safe to predict that CamE and CamFE will go on influencing each other in both directions. The influence of CamE on shaping CamFE is definitely a more certain direction but the influence of CamFE is also to be expected (Simo Bobda 2013: 299).*

On the issue, Atechi (2015) sees the possibility of CamFE supplanting CamE and taking over as the mainstream variety of English that will be spoken in Cameroon. Mandzo (forthcoming) thinks of an eventual future codification of CamFE that better expresses the sociolinguistic and cultural realities of the Francophone geo-linguistic world in Cameroon. In fact, considering that codification is a necessary step for its possible standardisation in future, Mandzo (forthcoming) provides a linguistic description of the lectal features of CamFE at the basilectal, mesolectal and acrolectal levels. The work is the first major attempt to lay bare the different lects that constitute the continuum of CamFE pronunciation. She sees Essossomo (2022) suggestion to promote Cameroon Received Pronunciation (hereafter CRP) as being too ambitious but strongly believes that the linguistic description of CamFE lects is of paramount importance.

### 3.5 The way forward

Comparatively, 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. That said, there are some aspects that are still to be studied. It is worth noting that most previous studies on CamFE pronunciation (Safotso: 2012; 2006; Amah: 2012; Khan: 2012; Simo Bobda: 2013; Atechi: 2015; Kouega: 2019) have concentrated mostly on the description of CamFE features and its characteristics in general (which can be considered as mesolects), but placing its phonological features at different levels of the continuum to indicate in the linguistic spectrum of what can be called standard or substandard CamFE has received very little scholarly attention. Though CamFE is ingeniously gaining autonomy, it still comprises different types of lects which are worth investigating. The heterogeneity of the English language in Cameroon constitutes a continuum which ranges its features from basilects, through mesolects to acrolects. This goes a long way to show how deviant some forms of a language variety can be. As Niba (2015) observed, if such features are not identified and probably discouraged through pedagogic efforts, in the long run, we may have problems of intelligibility of the English language within the Cameroonian setting. That said, one of these phonological lects need to be elected to provide a classroom teacher what to project and what to avoid. In the same line of thought, Mandzo (forthcoming) holds that CamFE speakers display many phonological features that are rooted in the sociocultural realities of Cameroon. These pronunciation features range from basilectal tribal forms through mesolectal features to acrolects. Her findings reveal that each of these categories of features occurs at varying degree in the speech of the speakers and are perceived differently by them. The frequency of features in the speech of the informants and the speakers' attitudes towards the different categories of features will be used to determine which features should be promoted through pedagogic efforts.

## CONCLUSION

The present linguistic endeavour has provided suggestive insight into the newly observed sociolinguistic phenomenon: the recent changes in the area of New Englishes and its implications on English Language Teaching and Learning in Cameroon. From our scrutiny, it clearly stands out that the Cameroonian ELT industry has witnessed and is still witnessing significant changes that have serious sociolinguistic and pedagogic implications. Taking the specific case of CamFE, as Simo Bobda (2013:300) rightly observed, “Whether it is considered a satellite, a sub-variety, or an outgrowth, CamFE no longer passes unnoticed”. It has been

described at different levels of linguistic analysis and is now an issue of major concern in language pedagogy. What the future holds for CamFE is not easy to tell, but at least it seems predictable that an English accent like CamFE regularly implanted by the English teachers themselves in the classroom has come to stay.

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