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Textuality of Idiomatic Expressions in Cameroon English

INTRODUCTION

The field of linguistics has seen a number of major and remarkable evolutions. Among the foremost developments is the “World Englishes” paradigm. World Englishes is mostly used to refer to the institutionalized second language varieties of English spoken around the world (Wolf & Polzenhagen: 2009). As this new variety is focused on local identities of various national or regional varieties of English, it is looked upon as the “linguistics of particularity” (Figueroa: 1994 5). With regard to this, literature on second language acquisition reports numerous studies of second language speakers who diverge significantly from the native speakers’ model, despite the evidence offered by the L2 input. Consequently, there is a dissociation between syntactic knowledge and semantics. Second language learners usually have a semantic knowledge of the language, but occasionally fail to associate it with the correct syntactic properties or morphological forms (Lardiere: 1998; Prévost & White: 2000; Goad & White: 2004; Adeyanju: 2009; Mostafa: 2010). This is even more true when it comes to idiomatic expressions. It has been observed that acquiring idioms usage is a neglected variable that has not received a paramount attention in the lexical and structural paradigms. To this end, the composition and usage of English idioms is a daunting and challenging task to ESL speakers and users. For instance, the idiomatic expression “she broke my heart” may be semantically quite opaque to members of the community whose culture does not see the heart as the seat of emotions (Fernando: 1996).

It is healthy to point out here that language has often been characterized as a systematic correlation between certain types of lexemes, structure and meaning, as represented simplistically in Figure1.

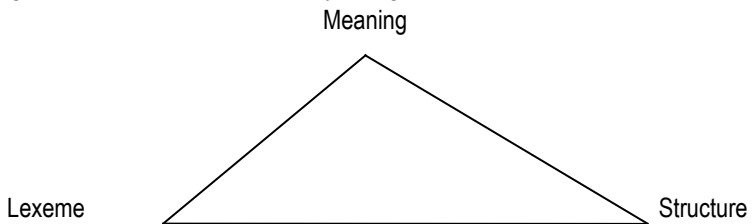


Figure 1: Language as a correlation between lexeme, structure and meaning

The figure above shows that certain types of lexemes are organized in a structure so as to create meaning. Each language has a stock of meaning-bearing elements (lexemes) and different ways of combining them (structures) to express various meanings, the ways of combining them being themselves meaningful. For instance, the expressions “Please, roll up the carpet” (*i.e.* to fold the carpet around itself to make it short) and “Please, roll the carpet up” (*i.e.* to fold the carpet around itself by lifting or raising it) contain exactly the same meaning-bearing elements, but they do not have the same meaning. The difference in meaning is brought about by the syntactic paradigm. Furthermore, Universal Grammar opines that each language has its parameter settings in combining meaning-bearing elements in order to express meaning. This is what makes one language different from the other. For instance, the two idiomatic expressions “You can’t eat your cake and have it” (Cameroon English) and “You can’t have your cake and eat it” (British English) contain the same meaning-bearing elements which convey the same meaning (*i.e.* You can’t have things both ways), but do not have the same structural paradigm. In the same vein, the idioms “Birds of the same feathers flock together” (Cameroon English) and “Birds of a feather flock together” (British English) do not contain exactly the same meaning-bearing elements (*i.e.* words and morphological forms), but they have the same meaning (*i.e.* people with similar interest will stick together). These different combinations fall into the realm of syntax. The two sentences differ both in terms of the words used in them and syntax. The term “syntax,” according to Matthew (1982), is a verbal noun which literally means “arrangement” or “setting out together.” Traditionally, it refers to the branch of grammar dealing with the ways in which words, with or without appropriate inflections, are arranged to show connections of meaning within the sentence (Matthews: 1982 1).

This reveals that syntax deals with how sentences are constructed, and that users of human languages employ a striking variety of possible arrangements of the elements in sentences. One of the most obvious, yet important, ways in which languages differ is the composition and order of the main elements in a sentence. It is in this light that the expression “textuality” comes to the limelight. According to Stockwell & Trask (2007), the term “textuality” refers to the characteristics of a text which make clear what sort of text it is intended to be. A newspaper story does not resemble a scholarly monograph, and a poem is quite dissimilar to a television commercial. Each particular type of text has its own typical characteristics; so, when we encounter an unknown text, we expect to see appropriate characteristics, and recognizing those characteristics allows us to recognize quickly what sort of text we

are looking at. The identifying properties of each type of text constitute its textuality. One of the principal goals of text linguistics is to identify, as explicitly as possible, the distinguishing features of each type of text (Stockwell & Trask: 2007 298).

This explicitly implies that texts have their own particularities and that the dissimilarities between texts particularities breed texts differences. Thus, Sinclair (1991), after the examining the way texts are organized, concluded that there are two principles which govern the speakers' choices to construct a text: the open-choice principle and the idiom principle. The first principle refers to the many options a speaker has in order to produce sentences according to a given language system of rules. In other words, the open-choice principle is related to a user's creativity to fill in a text's slots with a wide range of possible and acceptable words. The idiomatic principle refers to the static and closed-ended option a speaker has in order to produce sentences according to the parameters of the language. In view of this, Moon (1997) identifies a closed-class of multi-word combinations such as compounds (e.g. dining-chair), phrasal verbs (e.g. come around), idioms (e.g. kick the bucket), fixed phrases (e.g. how do you do) and prefarbs (e.g. I'm a great believer in...). In this regard, the most representative types of idiom principle (i.e. idiomatic expressions) considered in this paper are idioms and phrasal verbs.

IDIOMATIC EXPRESSION

The definition of an idiomatic expression has not been explicitly captured by the microscopic lens of English linguists. As such, it has been defined variously as follows: (i) "an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts" (Richards *et al.*: 1985 134); (ii) "a group of two or more words which are chosen together in order to produce a specific meaning or effect in speech or writing" (Sinclair: 1991 172); (iii) "a frozen pattern of language which allows little or no variation in form [...] often carrying meaning which cannot be deduced from its individual components" (Baker: 1992 63); (iv) "a fixed expression whose meaning is not guessable from the meaning of its parts (Trask: 2000 67); and (v) "a special metaphorical fixed phrase whose meaning and form is not negotiable" (Ghazala: 2003 204). In view of the foregoing definitions, an idiomatic expression can be broadly construed as an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from the meanings of its constituent words. For instance, even if one knows the

meanings of all the words in the phrase “Let the cat out of the bag,” one cannot guess the idiomatic meaning of the whole expression. The meaning of such an expression (to reveal something publicly which is supposed to be a secret) must only be learnt separately. Consequently, Ghazala (2003: 204) opines that idioms are all in all metaphorical and cannot be understood directly; they should not be taken literally in the sense that their meanings are not the outcome of the individual meanings of their constituent words taken collectively. Their syntactic form is actually fixed and cannot be changed or described.

From the above stipulation, we deduce that when interpreting idiomatic expressions, the learner’s first and most difficult task is to recognize that a non-literal sense is intended. As such, he has to accept that familiar words do not always convey their normal meaning (e.g. “It is raining cats and dogs,” in Yaounde). The said idiomatic expression “it is raining cats and dogs” means it is raining very heavily. It has nothing to do with cats and dogs. Furthermore, Ghazala’s stipulation (2003) of what idiomatic expressions are clearly points out that the syntactic form and composition of an idiom is fixed and cannot be changed. Consequently, the mastery of the lexical and structural paradigm of idioms is primordial in language acquisition in order to maintain its figurative and unpredictable nature. This breeds successful communication in listening, speaking, reading and writing. This argument is supported by the fact that idioms add grace and exactness to the language while at the same time they help the learners of the language to achieve fluency and communicative competence. For instance, if someone does not want to say where he obtained some piece of information, he can say explicitly that “a little bird told him.” Furthermore, if someone is in some sort of dilemma, we could say explicitly that he is caught “between the devil and the deep blue sea.” With regard to this, researchers such as Yorio (1989) and Ellis (1997) hold that adequate knowledge and appropriate use of idioms in an L2 is an important indicator of L2 communicative competence.

It is worthy to note that the English language has a lot of idiomatic expressions such as “She washed her hands of the matter” (*i.e.* She refused to have anything more to do with the matter), “to cut the Gordian knot” (*i.e.* to solve a very complex problem in a simple way), “to cut off your nose to spite your face” (*i.e.* to do something rash or silly that ends up making things worse for you, often because you are angry or upset), “to buy a pig in a poke” (*i.e.* to commit oneself to an irrevocable course of action without knowing the relevant facts), “a couch potato” (*i.e.* an extremely idle or lazy person who chooses to spend most of his time in front of a television set), “to close

the stable door after the horse has bolted” (*i.e.* to try to fix something after the problem has occurred), “bright-eyed and bushy-tailed” (*i.e.* full of energy and enthusiasm), “to catch as catch can” (*i.e.* to get something any way you can), “to be three sheets to the wind” (*i.e.* drunk), and “to stick to one’s guns” (*i.e.* to refuse to change one’s mind or give up).

The meanings of all such idioms are unpredictable and must be learned separately, because idiomatic expressions often involve metaphors, slang words, proverbs, allusions, similes, social formulas, and collocations (Fernando: 1996). To this end, idioms are usually derived from the social history of the language community and offer a good guide to the cultural concerns of that society. This is evidenced by the fact that conventions differ across cultures; so, straightforward images in one culture do not need to be self-evident in another. Working in this light, Ghazala (2003 208) classifies idiomatic expressions into five main types: (i) pure idioms, (ii) semi-idioms, (iii) proverbs, popular sayings and semi-proverbial expressions, (iv) phrasal verbs, metaphorical catchphrases and popular expressions (v). It is healthy to point out here that the consideration of phrasal verbs as an integral part of idiomatic expression is attested by many researchers such as Aldahesh (2009; Yan & Yoshinori: 2002; Latty: 1986; and Alexander: 1984), just to name a few. Furthermore, English also has prepositional idioms (Wekker & Haegeman: 1996 187). They consist of a verb followed by a noun phrase (NP) and a preposition as illustrated by the structure below.

[_{VP} [_V took][_{NP} advantage][_{PP} of his goodness]]

Some of these prepositional idioms include: to make mention of, to make use of, to pay attention to, to take advantage of, to set fire to, etc. It is important to note that these idioms often allow two passives as a result of their dual structure, as follows:

- Everyone took advantage of her goodness. [_{VP} [_V took][_{NP} advantage][_{PP} of her goodness]]
- Advantage was taken of her goodness. [_{VP} [_V took advantage][_{PP} of his goodness]]
- Her goodness was taken advantage of. [_{VP} [_V took advantage of][_{NP} her goodness]]

The aforementioned classification of what is considered an idiomatic expression has given impetus, shape, direction and even an area of concern to the examination of English idioms in Cameroon English.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data for this study come from the responses provided to a production test administered to 180 ESL learners/speakers of English in Cameroon, as well as from my own observations through recordings and field investigations over the past five years. The test consisted of a multiple choice comprehension task (MCCT), a gap test task (GTT) and a sentence correction task (SCT). In the multiple choice comprehension task, the respondents were asked to choose an appropriate word or phrase from the list provided in the brackets at the end of each sentence, to fill in the blank so that the sentence is complete and expresses a complete thought (e.g. My aunt often shouts _____ of her voice (at the top, on top, in high); I came _____ a vase exactly like yours in a Chinese shop (over, above, across)). In the gap test task, respondents were asked to fill in each of the gaps provided with an appropriate word or phrase, they deem necessary, which best completes the sentence (e.g. The students have been _____ their brains over the question for two hours; Birds of _____ flock together; I will say it again without _____ words. The government has come _____ with a wonderful strategy to curb corruption). Each of the sentences contained an idiomatic expression within which a word or phrase was omitted and it required that the respondents provide it by filling in each of the blanks. In the sentence correction task, respondents were asked to rewrite the sentences given to them in standard British English when they judged that the sentence does not respect the Standard British English parameter settings (e.g. A bird in hand is more than two in the bush; You cannot eat your cake and have it). The test, which consisted of 30 idiomatic expressions, was administered to 180 randomly selected English Major undergraduate and postgraduate students of the English Department in the University of Yaounde I, the Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) Maroua of the University of Maroua, and undergraduate students from the University of Buea, during their lectures. The distribution of the respondents, according to their institution, is presented in the table below.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents according to their University

| University | Number of Respondents |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Yaounde I | 62 (34.45%) |
| Maroua | 58 (32.22%) |
| Buea | 60 (33.33%) |
| TOTAL | 180 (100%) |

Data were also collected through recordings and field investigation. The recordings involved mainly informal and formal conversations of university students as well as educated speakers of Cameroon English at different social events. Some data also came from various radio and television programmes. With the assistance of a few English language experts in the country, the present researcher identified impressive number of lexical and syntactic innovations in the idiomatic expressions of ESL learners/speakers in Cameroon.

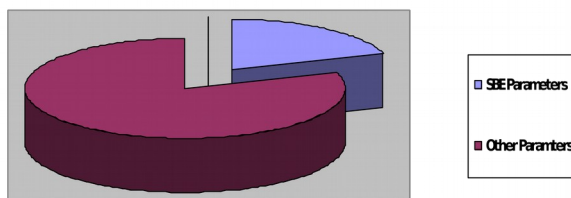
RESULTS

English idiomatic expressions are thought to be “relatively frozen and to have severe grammatical restriction” (Moon: 1997 47). As such, it might be generally taken that they do not permit any lexical or syntactic modifications. However, a close examination of them in the second language context in general and Cameroon English in particular, reveals that they undergo a lot of modifications than might be expected as the data below illustrate. The data, which were collected through the production test, were analysed using a scoring scheme wherein a response that reflected the Standard British English (SBE) parameter settings of an idiomatic expression got a point, and any other got no point. Furthermore, feature specifications were identified, described, and analysed. The results of the respondents’ performance are jointly presented in the table below for description and interpretation. The table presents the number of instances and the percentage score by the respondents in setting the Standard British English (SBE) parameters on the one hand, and in coming up with other parameter settings on the other.

Table 2: Respondents' performance in the production of idiomatic expressions

| University | SBE Parameter Settings | Other Parameter Settings | Total |
|--------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Yaounde I | 392 (21.08%) | 1468 (78.92%) | 1860 (100%) |
| Maroua | 318 (18.28%) | 1422 (81.72%) | 1740 (100%) |
| Buea | 360 (20%) | 1440 (80%) | 1800 (100%) |
| TOTAL | 1070 (19.81%) | 4330 (80.19%) | 5400 (100%) |

As can be inferred from the table above, the respondents provided 1,070 (19.81%) instances of idiomatic expressions wherein the Standard British English parameter settings were respected, and 4,330 (80.19%) instances wherein the respondents employed other parameter settings in coming up with idiomatic expressions. This result is more explicitly captured in the pie chart below.

**Figure 2:** Performance of respondents in setting parameters

The above figure shows that the majority of instances of idiomatic expressions (80.19%) produced by the respondents does not reflect the Standard British English input-oriented feature specifications of the examined expressions. Consequently, they have come up with idiomatic expressions that are lexically and structurally different. As such, it will not be erroneous to say that these respondents have produced a dialectal variety of English idiomatic expressions which reflect their sociolinguistic and cultural backgrounds, as illustrated by the following samples identified in the data provided:

- Birds of **the same feathers** flock together. (for SBE “a feather,” *i.e.* people with similar interest will stick together).
- I will say it again without **mixing** words. (for SBE “without mincing words”)

- A bird in **hand is more than** two in the bush. (for SBE “the hand is worth,” *i.e.* it is better to have something that is certain than to take the risk to get more, where you might lose everything)
- John was caught **right-handed** when he was falsifying the information. (for SBE “red-handed,” *i.e.* found doing something wrong)
- The students have been **cracking** their brains over that question for two hours. (for SBE “racking,” *i.e.* to think very hard)
- You can’t **eat** your cake and **have it** (for SBE “You can’t have your cake and eat it,” *i.e.* you can’t have things both ways)
- What you have done has taken us **from** the frying pan into the fire (for SBE “out of,” *i.e.* when you move from a bad or difficult situation to one which is worse)

What is feasible in the exemplifications above are changes inscribed in the way English idiomatic expressions are produced. These changes or innovations are products of reality in new language speaking contexts such as Cameroon. When the respondents encounter difficulties in reproducing idiomatic expressions due to their structural peculiarities, they come up with lexical and syntactic structures that are communicatively comprehensible among themselves. The innovative processes that these idiomatic expressions undergo in the grammar of these L2 learners/speakers include: substitution, addition, and deletion of lexemes or phrases.

LEXEME DELETION

One of the characteristic innovative features in the structure of English idiomatic expressions in the Cameroon variety of English is the deletion of a lexeme (*e.g.* Please, don’t *bite more than you can chew*). The above idiomatic expression “to bite more than you can chew” has witnessed the deletion of the adverb particle “off” after the verb “bite.” This makes the syntactic composition of the said idiomatic expression different from the one in Standard British English (*e.g.* Please, don’t *bite off more than you can chew*). In such situations, the deletion process is concerned either with the definite article as exemplified in 1 or with an adverb participle as exemplified in 2 and 3.

1. - *By no stretch of imagination* could he be seriously described as an artist. (for SBE “by no stretch of *the* imagination,” *i.e.* used to describe things that are impossible to believe, even with a lot of effort).

2. - Please, don't *bite more* than you can chew. (for SBE "bite off more than you can chew," *i.e.* to take on more responsibilities than you can manage or to try to do something which is too difficult for you).
3. - Our deepest sympathies *go to* her husband and children. (for SBE "go out to," *i.e.* to think and feel sorry for someone).

As the above examples show, the definite article "the" is deleted in example 1, the adverb particle "off" in 2, and "out" in 3. The next innovative process noticeable in the data provided is the addition of a lexeme to the syntactic structure of English idioms.

LEXEME INFLECTION AND ADDITION

Lexeme addition denotes the addition of a word within or to the syntactic composition of an English idiomatic expression (*e.g.* We have to know that "where there is a will, there is always a way"). Within the idiomatic expression exemplified here, the frequency adverb "always" is added between the lexical verb "is" and the noun phrase "a way." Furthermore, lexeme inflection is the addition of an inflectional bound morpheme to a word within an idiomatic expression (*e.g.* You are pulling my *legs*, aren't you? (for SBE "leg")). In this example, the inflectional bound morpheme "s" is added to the noun phrase "leg." Thus, lexeme addition is noticeable in 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

4. - We have to know that "where there is a will, there is *always* a way." (for SBE "where there is a will, there is a way").
5. - Using computer nowadays is *a child's play* compared to how difficult they were to use ten years ago. (for SBE "child's play," *i.e.* to be very easy).
6. - I would like to thank my publisher, my editor and, *last but not the least*, my husband. (for SBE "last but not least," *i.e.* importantly, despite being mentioned after everyone else).
7. - You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink *water* (for SBE "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink").
8. - When you are in Rome, do as the Romans *do* (for SBE "When in Rome do as the Romans", *i.e.* when visiting a different culture or place, try to do their customs and practices).
9. - Do you think we will be able to meet *up with* our deadline (for SBE "to meet our deadline," *i.e.* to satisfy, fulfil).
10. - This young man has made a *big* name for himself. (for SBE "name").

In 4, the frequency adverb “always” is added in the internal structure of the idiomatic expression examined. In 5, the indefinite article “a” is preceded to the NP “child’s play.” In 6, the definite article “the” is introduced before the final adverb “least” in the idiomatic expression. In 7, the NP “water” is added at the end of the idiom. In 8, the verb “do” is added to the end of the idiom. In 9, the adverb “up” and the preposition “with” are added to come up with the phrasal verb (to come up with), and in (10), the adjective “big” is added to qualify the noun phrase “name.” These additions are made to make the idiomatic expressions comprehensible to the L2 learners or speakers of English. The respondents felt that there is something lacking to make these idioms complete in thought and structure. Another innovative process feasible in the data provided is lexeme substitution.

LEXEME SUBSTITUTION

The learners’ grammar is characterized by idiomatic expressions wherein a lexeme in the Standard British English idiom is substituted for another word [e.g. It is said that “silence *means* consent” (for SBE “gives”)]. The process of lexeme substitution noticed in the data include: (i) the adjective “one” is substituted by the definite article (e.g. Paul and John are “two sides of *the* coin”); (ii) the adjective “red” for the adjective “right” (e.g. John was caught “*right*-handed” when he was falsifying the information); (iii) the noun “sun” for the verb “shine” (e.g. We will go for sight-seeing tomorrow, “come rain or *sun*”); (iv) the preposition “of” for the adverb “off” (e.g. I would like you to do the best “to wash your hands *off* the scandal”) etc. These examples reveal that the substitution of a lexeme is the result of the fervent striving of the respondents to tie the wordings of an idiomatic expression to its meaning (e.g. “John was caught *right*-handed when he was falsifying the information.” “We will go for sight-seeing tomorrow, come rain or *sun*”). The influence of the respondents’ cultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds is not negligible as seen in “Beauty *lies* in the eyes of the beholder;” “Please, stop beating *about* the bush.” Thus, the foregoing discussion portrays that the English idiomatic expressions in the grammar of L2 learners/speakers in Cameroon are characterized by recurrent lexeme substitutions as exemplified by 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20.

11. - I will say it again without *mixing* words (For SBE “without mincing words”).
12. - Paul and John are two sides of *the coin* (for SBE “one”).
13. - The students have been *cracking* their brains over that question for two hours (for SBE “racking,” *i.e.* to think very hard).
14. - John was caught *right-handed* when he was falsifying the information (for SBE “red-handed,” *i.e.* found doing something wrong).
15. - Please, learn to cut your coat according to your *size* (for SBE “cut your coat according to your cloth,” *i.e.* buy things that you have sufficient money to pay for).
16. - We will go for sight-seeing tomorrow, come rain or *sun* (for SBE “come rain or shine,” *i.e.* nothing deter or stop us).
17. - Men of your calibre don't wash their dirty *lenience* in public (for SBE “don't wash your dirty laundry in public,” *i.e.* make public things that are best left private).
18. - I wish you more *grease* to your elbow (for SBE “more power to your elbow,” *i.e.* have courage).
19. - Have you sensed *fowl* play in the game? (for SBE “foul play,” *i.e.* a crime committed).
20. - Life is a vicious *cycle* (for SBE “vicious circle”).
21. - I would like you to do the best to wash your hands *off* the scandal (for SBE “wash your hands of the scandal,” *i.e.* dissociate yourself from the scandal).
22. - What you are doing will wipe the smile *off* Mary's face (for SBE “of,” *i.e.* make her less pleased)
23. - Don't you know that too many cooks spoil the *soup* (for SBE “broth,” *i.e.* many people trying to do something make a mess of it).
24. - Please, stop beating *about* the bush. (for SBE “around the bush,” *i.e.* not discussing what is important).
25. - We have to keep your ear *on* the ground (for SBE “to the ground”).
26. - Jonathan made no bones *of* the incident (for SBE “about the incident”).
27. - I can't quote the exact statistics for you *offhead*, but they are there for you to see in the report (for SBE “offhand,” *i.e.* without looking for information and without thinking carefully; immediately).
28. - He told her from the *onset* he wasn't interested (for SBE “outset,” *i.e.* the beginning).
29. - The government has *come out with* a wonderful strategy to curb corruption (for SBE “come up with,” to suggest or think of an idea or plan).
30. - Opportunity *comes* but ones (for SBE “knocks”).

31. - Mary is putting the *cat* before the horse (for SBE “cart,” *i.e.* doing something the wrong way).
32. - Let's make a *run* down the memory lane (for SBE “stroll”).
33. - You are taking me for a *right* (for SBE “ride,” *i.e.* deceived by someone).
34. - Beauty *lies* in the *eyes* of the beholder (for SBE “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” *i.e.* different people will find different things beautiful and that the differences of opinion don't matter greatly).

As the examples above illustrate, there are varied ways in which lexemes are substituted in order to come up with innovative English idiomatic expressions that are appealing and comprehensible to this group of learners and speakers. Not only do idiomatic expressions undergo lexeme deletion, but they are also subjected to phrase substitution.

PHRASE SUBSTITUTION

One of the innovative features that characterize English idiomatic expressions of L2 learners/speakers is the tendency to substitute a phrase, within the idiomatic expression, for another. The substitution could either be a prepositional phrase for another prepositional phrase [*e.g.* I don't want anybody to drag my name *in the mud* (For “through the mire”)] or a noun phrase for another noun phrase [*e.g.* You cannot bite *the finger* that feeds you. (For SBE “the hand”)]. An insightful look into the way these phrases are substituted points to the fact the cultural and the sociolinguistic backgrounds of the learners play a pivotal role. The learners are striving to give a local colouration to the idioms, as the complementary examples below further illustrate.

1. - Mabel and Jonathan need to put a *full stop* to their relationship (for SBE “an end /a stop”).
2. - The Chief took the law *into his hands* (for SBE “into his own hand,” *i.e.* to defy the law).
3. - My aunt often shouts *on top* of her voice (for SBE “at the top”).
4. - Birds of *the same feathers* flock together (for SBE “a feather” *i.e.* people with similar interest will stick together)
5. - What you have done has taken us *from the frying pan* into the fire (for SBE “out of the frying pan”).

The substitution of the Standard British English phrase, in an idiomatic expression, for another is a testimony of language change and identity construction as it is exported to another context. This is done to enable the idioms to fit within the cultural and the linguistic atmosphere of the new users. Another feature noticeable in the data that contributes in building this cultural and linguistic atmosphere is the transformation of the idiomatic expressions.

TRANSFORMATION OF IDIOMS

Transformation here denotes almost complete a change of the syntactic composition of an idiomatic expression. In this case, the idiomatic expression undergoes a greater change of wordings, as exemplified below.

1. - Paul *has put his feet into hot waters* (for SBE “is in hot water or has got into hot water”).
2. - He is striving to *have a good name* (for “make a name,” *i.e.* to become famous).
3. - *A bird in hand is more than two* in the bush. (for “bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” *i.e.* better to have something that is certain than to take risk to get more, where you might lose everything).
4. - You can’t *eat your cake and have it* (for SBE “You can’t have your cake and eat it,” *i.e.* You can’t have things both ways).
5. - In politics, you scratch my back, *I scratch your own* (for SBE “You scratch my back and I will scratch yours,” *i.e.* meaning if you do something for me, I will return the favour)
6. - This is a game for all *ansundry* (for SBE “all and sundry,” *i.e.* each and every one).
7. - *Action speaks* louder than words (for “actions speak louder than words,” *i.e.* what people actually do is more important than what they say).

The innovations in the idiomatic expressions in the grammar of these L2 learners/speakers of the English language reveal that the input-oriented syntactic compositions of English idioms undergo mental processes that generate novelty in their output. This novelty turns to give a quasi-autonomy to the variety of the English language produced. This is a common scenario in situations where a language is used out of its native context.

CONCLUSION

The syntactic composition of Standard British English idiomatic expressions results from the explicit attempt by grammarians to tidy up the inherent fuzziness and indeterminacy of spoken as well as written syntax. Consequently, the input-oriented English idiomatic expressions demonstrate a heightened awareness of norms and “correctness.” In spite of this, the use of idiomatic expressions in everyday conversation of L2 learners/speakers of the English language is often marked by the transgression of pre-determined syntactic compositions and structures, and is frequently in contradiction to the lexical and syntactic structures of Standard British English. This warrants the need for a simple research for lexical and syntactic forms in authentic data in order to approach objectively the real variety of language.

The present study has investigated the lexical and syntactic diversity of English idiomatic expressions in Cameroon English. This is done at the backdrop of the meaning of idiomatic expressions which cannot be transparently derived from the meaning of the idioms' parts, due to their figurative and unpredictable nature. After a thorough perusal of the data provided through a production test, field investigation and observation, it appears that L2 learners/speakers of English in Cameroon embark on a series of innovative processes such as substitution, addition and deletion of some words and phrase, as well as the addition of inflectional morpheme to some lexemes in order to indigenize the English idiomatic expressions. These features identify them in their area of usage. Consequently, they portray that every New Englishes context has its rule of constructing and using English idiomatic expressions as they experience the influence of socio-cultural forces. This study therefore enriches variation in new Englishes, especially in the case of Cameroon English. The respondents process the structural paradigm in such a way that a novelty in structural composition is orchestrated and normalized within their linguistic context. As such, they have discarded the Standard British English idioms syntactic composition and structural paradigms and have come up with a quasi-syntactic structure and composition that gives them an identity. This serves as a window in the creation of a distinct discourse of the English spoken in Cameroon.

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