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# Linguistic Undertones of Protest, Commitment and Alienation: The case of Pidgin English in Cameroon Anglophone Literature

## INTRODUCTION

In a typical plurilingual, multiethnic and emergent postcolonial democracy like Cameroon that proffers an enabling ground for the breeding of innumerable interesting linguistic and sociocultural phenomena, linguists and literature writers and critics make the most of this rich background as they continue to emerge with fascinating and thought-provoking publications. They show concern about the different linguistic, sociocultural, economic, political and religious developments in their different communities, developments which tend to inform and enrich their different linguistic and imaginative experiences. Central to all these issues is the concept of language – any communication medium, verbal or nonverbal, used by humans and animals to express their experiences. However, the fundamental role of language in the expression of these experiences cannot be overemphasized, especially in typical multilingual settings where writers and users in general have to grapple with several linguistic choices which make the task all the more daunting.

The language problem, especially in literature, has earlier been evoked with the biased question on which language suits best for African literature, seen from the historical background enshrined in its colonial past. In Cameroon, the language problem has been at the centre of several debates on national language policy, although the languages used there seem to have pre-prescribed specific roles at the official, national and informal levels. This study seeks to probe the use and role of one of the languages – Cameroon Pidgin English (henceforth CamPE) in what has felicitously become known as Anglophone Cameroon Literature (henceforth ACL). Though the generally used and accepted code of expression for literature (equally referred to as Cameroon literature of English expression) is the English language, some of the writers show sensitivity to the linguistic realities of their communities through linguistic admixture – a reflection of national multilingualism. Apart from (re)creating local color through images deeply enshrined

in specific cultures, there is a sporadic but significant use of Pidgin English for different purposes.

Through Giles' *Accommodation Theory* (developed in the 60s and 70s and used to demonstrate how interactants change their socio-cultural and linguistic behaviors so as to accommodate others), this study probes the use of Pidgin English in ACL and explores the different ends to the use of the language. The choice of the approach is explained by the fact that it accounts for the way writers are informed of and show sensitivity to societal events which tend to shape their different imaginative experiences. According to this approach, literary writers' productions tend to reflect the different socio-cultural and linguistic experiences of the people in their different speech communities, and this through authorial mouthpieces (characters and *dramatis personae's* views). This study explores the use of the language in the literary productions of Cameroonian writers of English expression with the aim of determining the effect to which the code is used here, the users and uses of language in selected texts of prominent writers such as Alobwede d'Epie, Bate Besong, John Nkemngong Nkengasong, Bole Butake, Anne Tanyi Tang, John Menget and Kenjo Jumbam.

Commitment and protest in this study are related to immediate reactions to societal problems (social, cultural, political, religious, economic, psychological, etc.) with the aim of creating awareness and requesting permanent or temporal solutions to existing problems. This view corroborates Ambanansom who asserts that committed writers "write sensitively, showing great concern for the lot of suffering humanity, people who write with the intention of improving the human condition, of contributing towards the general welfare of the greatest majority" (2003 86). In such cases, the writers "would be seen, in the final analysis, to be advocating a certain line of behavior, to be propounding a certain ideology" (*ibid.*) often meant to provoke protest as the parties concerned take up different responsibilities towards positive change.

Alienation is essentially a polysemous and ambiguous entity often used in several disciplines to describe different physical, religious, spiritual, psychological, political, social, or economic behaviors. It has generally to do with not belonging, side-lining, strangeness, distancing, relegation, unrecognition, disdain and scorn. As a matter of fact, it has negative attributes and submits to societal ills, either accidentally or by design. Linguistic alienation as used in this study is akin to loss of linguistic rights, specifically in relation to the use of Pidgin English in plurilingual Cameroon where its use has been relegated to the background and is often considered as a threat as it is affiliated to users with a "particular" status (low). In fact, attitudes towards the use and

users of the language often demonstrate scorn, apprehension and disdain because of unscientific prejudices. Through authorial mouthpieces, literary artists show their artistry in a demonstration of the use of the language by those described above (low status); when used alongside English, an evident diglossic situation emanates with biases against Pidgin English. Therefore, it is against this backdrop of alienation that linguists continue to clamor for positive change towards this invaluable linguistic resource through which literalists and linguists alike continue to showcase their artistry, and in which linguistic boundaries are breached, thereby making communication in a crassly plurilingual setting harmonious.

### **ACL: THE STATE OF THE ART**

According to Ambanasom (2003), the roots of ACL were planted in 1959 with the first publication of Sankie Maimo's *I Am Vindicated*. Fifty-three years is good enough a period for literature to attain maturity and to engender stock-taking. Since the early 90s, with the liberalization policies of the New Deal regime which favored political pluralism and freedom of speech that witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of written and audio-visual agencies, the literary landscape in Cameroon has not remained untouched. The last decade has witnessed an upsurge in literary production in almost all the genres (novelistic, poetic, dramatic and essayist) as Cameroonian literary writers have more and more been involved in creative adventures in a bid to address some of the major ills plaguing their different communities. But, what is exactly ACL? The tag ACL itself is obviously one of the consequences of the politico-linguistic divisions of the country – an accident of history therefore often related to literature of French expression produced on the other side of the geographic divide. Descriptions of ACL converge on the fact that it is the literature produced by Anglophones of both the North West and South West regions, though that produced by Francophones in English often hesitantly intrudes this circle. Besides, although this is often considered as problematic, it is a literature produced in a superimposed imperial language and culture, their subject matters being the different socio-cultural, religious, economic and political experiences of the people. This literature exhibits development at several levels with a diversity at the thematic, stylistic, attitudinal and critical levels. The imaginative works produced then commemorate diversity and hybridity as they explore and experimentally address innumerable societal mores and foibles, ranging from neo-colonialism, corruption, capital flight, capitalist exploitation, greed, torture of political opponents, tribalism, embez-

zlement, marriage and generational conflicts, feminism, education, succession, colonization, racism, witchcraft, superstition and black magic, justice, politics, history, etc., with the aim of developing popular awareness and orchestrating positive changes at several levels.

These are the different issues which constitute the “anglophoneness” of this literature, championed by prominent writers such as Anne Tanyi Tang, Azanwi Nchami, Babila Mutia, Bole Butake, Bate Besong, Emelda Samba, Emmanuel FruDoh, Ernest Veyu, Eugene J. Kongnyuy, Francis B. Nyamn-joh, George Nyamndi, Godfrey Tangwa, Jetimen (John Menget), John Ngongkum, John Nkemngong, Joseph Ngongwikuo, Julius Ndofor, KenjoJumbam, Linus T. Asong, Margaret Fru, Mathew Takwi, Mbella Sone Dipoko, Ndumbe Eyoh, Nlangha Kizito, Nsalai Christopher, Nsanda Eba, Sankie Maimo, Shadrach Ambanasom, Tah Asongwed, Tah Proteus, Talla Ngarka, Tangyie SuhNfor, Victor Elame Musinga and Victor EpieNgome.

Eyoh submits that these writers see themselves in the role of developing the critical consciousness of their society, of mobilizing people for change through the destruction of the “culture of silence” which has so far subjected them to years of oppression (1993 107). Their role seems to be that of building the foundations of a new society in which social justice and a sense of communal belonging can prevail. In Doh’s eyes, ACL has a particular character: “It is the literature of a patriotic minority trying to set right the wrongs of a hypocritical system – a literature which is largely protest and iconoclastic in nature” (1993 82). That is why these writers internalize a certain degree of radicalism as their own modest contribution is enacting and contesting societal ills.

Despite its relatively high tone of protest, it is progressively incorporated into the school curricula with children literature at the elementary stage, and that for adults, read and appreciated at the secondary, high school and even university levels. In this way, it is gradually replacing imperial literature and rapidly playing a conscientization role while the audience is becoming more and more aware of their precarious situation in a problem-infested context.

If ACL eventually saw the limelight, it was thanks to unflinching and whole-hearted efforts at various levels. Significant contributions of individuals at the editorial level cannot however be underestimated. Specialized and general media such as journals (the defunct *ABBIA*, *Cameroon Cultural Review*, *The Mould*, *Thunder On the Mountain*), literary clubs such as the University Poetry Club of the University of Yaounde I, Musinga Drama Group, University of Yaounde Theatre, God Given Idiots and the Flame Players have left and continue to leave indelible marks on the Cameroonian literary

landscape. The Anglophone Creative Writers' Association has equally boosted literary creativity through contests, workshops and conferences during which related issues are proposed, discussed and elaborated. The dissemination and eventual consumption of the literary productions has been greatly facilitated by both international (Heinemann, Longman, Macmillan, Kola Press, etc.) and local publishing houses (BumaKor in Yaounde, Patron Publishing House in Bamenda, and Editions CLE in Yaounde). No doubt, the financial assistance from corporate institutions, individual and governmental structures such as the Ministry of Culture have played invaluable roles in the development of ACL.

Thanks to the support and attention paid to ACL by committed writers and a very interested readership, and considering the burgeoning productions on the subject, it seems now safe to assume that the future of ACL is promising. This hope, beyond the decried shoddiness of this literature as a result of linguistic approximations which tend to mar its value, is addressed as a conscious wish to eventually see its quality improve.

#### CAMEROON PIDGIN ENGLISH: THE INVALUABLE "BUFFER" IDIOM

According to Mbangwana (1983 56), CamPE, one of the several varieties of pre-colonial, trade-inspired pidgins spoken along the coast of West Africa, is 542 years old today. The study establishes that the roots of the language were planted in Cameroon in 1472, a landmark in the history of the country as it marked the first contact of the coastal inhabitants with European inhabitants such as the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Swedes and the Dutch traders and explorers, right to the XVI<sup>th</sup> century. The survival and assertive role of the language till today could better be attributed to an accumulation of several socializing, economic, historical and political events which came to bear on the inhabitants of the country during the pre-colonial, colonial and even post-colonial epochs. A vivid examination of the forces that led to the development of the language reveals some situations of co-habitation with other languages – exoglossic and indigenous. It is therefore difficult to trace the development of the language in isolation from the other languages that influenced and shaped its development.

It was described variously by previous researchers as *Kamtok* (Todd & Jumbam: 1992, Ayafor: 1990), *Camspeak* (Tiayon: 1985), *Mbokotok* (Nkwain: 78); these are some of the labelings which Mbangwana (2004 6) thinks lend the language "descriptive and evaluative quality that invests it with a badge of identity as a Cameroonised language since it is actively re-

sponsive to the linguistic environment of Cameroon.” Besides, these appellations aptly demonstrate the vitality that characterizes the language, a no man’s code reflecting different people and experiences, serving innumerable communication exigencies, establishing and fostering solidarity links between acquaintances and strangers alike. It is the code that has fast developed into a quasi-autonomous system with seven sub-varieties (Mbangwana: 2004 6-8), assuming a broad range of communication roles and a coherent structure, in terms of stability and speakers, thus explaining the spread of the language to all the regions of the country. The role of the language in Cameroon has facilitated the acquisition of an identity unique to these speech communities so that it is generally referred to as Cameroon Pidgin English (CamPE).

Unlike in the 1930s, when Pidgin and Creole linguistics received very little scholarly attention for they were regarded as marginal languages – “baby talk” or degenerations and deviations from other established and fully-developed languages – whose study could jeopardize the career of a researcher, things have change today while particular attention is being accorded to pidgins and creoles as their study is fast becoming an integral part of linguistics, with its own literature, just like any other science. This makes the speakers realize that the language they speak is not a denigrated form of a particular language, but a variety in its own right, having an independent history, a discernible structure, a wide array of functions and even capable of competing with other fully-developed languages. Gradually, pidgins have been stripped of prejudices that had so far stigmatized them and their users.

Judging from its spread, the interest it attracts, the attention paid to it and its pervasive nature, there is all evidence to claim that CamPE constitutes a “veritable linguistic menu” (Mbangwana: 2004 23). This is partly explained by the fact that, despite the negative attitudinal and institutional prejudices advertently or inadvertently associated with it, especially in a complex heterogeneous community like Cameroon, the language, surprisingly, continues to survive and assert itself in a seemingly unpropitious environment. The language has gained national character by virtue of its spread throughout the country. The invaluable place occupied by CamPE is further demonstrated as it has become the mother tongue of most users, even in urban towns.

A keen examination of the language exhibits certain significant complexities at various levels. Attempts to quantify or categorize the users of the language have always produced disputable findings as a result of the diverse attitudes towards it. Whereas some researchers such as Kouega (2001) and Kfua (1996) predict its eventual death, many others use the language profi-

ciently, and yet refuse to attest to its use when questioned. Findings from Mbangwana (2004 87) and Alobwede (1998 54) attest that despite this regrettable situation, the spread of the language, especially in urban areas has not been hindered. A critical examination of the evolution and functional status of CamPE reveals that it remains a no-man's code which transcends socio-cultural and linguistic boundaries to reflect different societal realities.

CamPE has the highest functional load and number of users and despite the multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual backgrounds of the country, the language successfully bridges communication gaps in interpersonal transactions, both in formal and informal contexts. Despite its high functional capacity and inevitability in communication, it is still considered with much contempt as though it were fit for illiterates only. It has even been banned in some learning institutions, homes and administrative departments. This attitude stems from the misconstrued assumption that the language is instrumental in the falling standards recorded in English language production. Based on the argument that there is the need for the re-lexification and integration of new forms, usages and expressions in the English language, the role of Pidgin English in such an undertaking is of prime importance. CamPE is not just the source of most segmental and supra-segmental structures, but, most predominantly, the code through which loans and transliterations of HL and French origins come into Cameroon English.

Ayafor (1990 34) outlines the vital functions of CamPE which assumes fundamental roles in the printed and electronic media, in advertisement, in music production, in out-group communication media like in soap-box electioneering in the Anglophone sections of the country mostly and in religion, both from the pulpit and literature, as well as in adult literacy programs. CamPE has assumed a national dimension with its trick-lings all over the country, serving users' linguistic needs in their multifarious spheres of interactions, being a mother tongue to some Cameroonians, enjoying a central position, and so it can be said to assume a national character. Arguing for the legacy of CamPE, Mbangwana (1983 89) regrets that official language policies have remained dormant in the face of one of the richest linguistic resources of the country which best conveys their philosophy of life and socio-cultural heritage.

Considered from a synchronic or diachronic perspective, the fate of Pidgin English in Cameroon can be likened to that of an orphan. Despite the adverse environment surrounding the language, it continues to defy adversities and vie for a higher status, at the level of other languages. The fate of home languages and Pidgin English in Cameroon has been based on functional



seclusion. Prospecting for language planning studies in Cameroon, Tadadjeu (1983 214) identifies the development of the official multilingual national communication system as one of the numerous language problems in Cameroon. Regrettably, his advocacy has never taken into consideration the fate of Pidgin English. This questions the language policy in Cameroon which has not been able to reconcile the linguistic situation of the country such as to fully satisfy the aspirations of speakers of the different languages. This becomes even more problematic when Povey observes that “there are persistent weaknesses in any language policy that gives and neglects the very languages which prove the basis for the broadcast range of day-to-day activity and which are numerically superior to less extensive usages which attract attention because of their elite status” (1983 12). Though this refers to the home languages, Pidgin English suffers from the same fate.

Obviously, the language is constantly being revitalized by new vocabulary from identified sources. It constantly changes to accommodate a greater measure of local applicability and in this way, it satisfies the needs of the users. Despite its low status, due to the fact that it has neither been recognized at the official level nor accorded enough scholarly attention to enhance its acquisition at formal levels, it continues to survive thanks to a situation of linguistic “osmosis” resulting from contacts. In this way, the language has developed and expanded its tentacles to far reaching horizons in recent years, and this to the astonishment of language planners, policy makers and all those who have ignored or underestimated the value and functional load of the language when language policies were tabled. Today, CamPE stands unrivaled by any other language used in the country, especially when the number of users and its uses are considered. Insisting on the utility of the language, Mbangwana (1983 89) argues perceptively and vigorously that CamPE is a vital resource to the users and its discretionary use makes it an inevitable asset in the communication system of Cameroonians. It now assumes a national dimension and so, users identify in it a certain essence, thanks to its strong communication power.

#### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

The following sections examine some aspects of Pidgin English use in ACL.

## PIDGIN ENGLISH IN ACL

A critical survey of almost all the literary genres (prose, drama and poetry, but not the essay) which constitute ACL, demonstrate a sporadic but conscious use of Pidgin English, and this for aesthetic and stylistic purposes. Through the use of the language, the writers successfully express certain mind frames, experiences or visions of life and above all divulge certain human predicaments, thereby circuitously creating the audience's awareness about specific problematic situations.

As earlier discussed, the status of Pidgin English in multilingual Cameroon has been much decried in spite of its communicational capacity. Despite efforts by linguists to demonstrate the potentialities of the language, especially if it is developed and enacted as a national language thanks to its spread, the lukewarm or passive attitude put up against its use and the very survival of the language continue to baffle keen observers and linguists who relentlessly showcase the vitality of this buffer code. To many, it continues to be held responsible for the falling standards of the English language in Cameroon and it is and should be reserved for illiterates; it is a mean language reserved for the underprivileged in society such as those who do menial jobs and finally, it is seen as the last language to be used when interactants discuss serious issues. These scornful, disdainful, prejudicial attitudes and unscientific claims have been instrumental in motions in favor of the unconditional banning of the language, as echoed in Kfua (1996 8) and Kouega (2001 18). Despite these pessimistic moves, however, the language continues to assert itself and its use in literary forms is just an indication of this assertiveness and the resoluteness of the language against mavericks. Writers therefore use the language to assert its potential, to discard prejudices related to the false assumption that it is reserved for the illiterates. Above all, apart from revalorizing cultural facets through it, they successfully create awareness while divulging their artistry.

## THE FUNCTIONAL ROLE AND ARTISTIC VALUE OF PIDGIN ENGLISH IN ACL

An overview of ACL reveals that the use of the language is rarely accidental but appears by design to attain specific objectives. These objectives set from the outset are closely or directly linked to most of the themes treated by the writers in their different works. Many of the issues raised are done so thanks to the use of this "no man's language" which in such cases becomes quite effective as it provides the writer with a poetic license sparing him or

her from any potential harangues. The language is therefore a multi-edged weapon through which writers address societal issues as the following discussion illustrates.

Some of the burning and eminent issues addressed by most of the writers is marginalization and segregation. It is what has eventually been referred to as the “Anglophone problem” – an unequivocal request for the respect of the terms of the conditions of the reunification of the two Anglophone regions (North West and South West) with *La République du Cameroun* following the February 11<sup>th</sup> 1961 plebiscite results. The disrespect of the terms of this reunion has left the Anglophone community disgruntled and frustrated as they feel marginalized at several levels such as appointments to key political posts, the biased attribution and distribution of national resources, unbalanced development and many other forms of physical, economic and psychological segregation. Reactions to the situation have been at several levels with the upsurge of political and pressure groups showing total disgruntlement with the prevailing situation. At the literary level, several writers through different approaches have addressed the issue. In these approaches, one discerns two differing solutions to the problem: an unconditional secession and the unequivocal respect of the terms of the reunion. The latter solution has been championed by radical revolutionaries like John Nkemngong and Bate Besong in some of their works.

Bate Besong, a self-conscious and militant playwright, has developed an apparent revolutionary dramatic technique of expression which has helped in qualifying him as an obscure writer. As if to demystify the claims, Besong, conscious of the people’s plight, engages in linguistic simplification through profuse use of Pidgin English – a no man’s language, as an attempt to translate his wish to get down to the level of the masses, thereby reaching across the message a broad spectrum of those concerned.

In *Beasts of no Nation* (1990), Besong lashes out against the discriminatory and segregationist tendencies of those at the helm, as the masses endure untold pain and dehumanizing conditions. In one of the thought-provoking songs – “Song of the Prodigal” –, the beasts cry out against this uncompromising situation.

#### **SONG OF THE PRODIGAL**

*Goat di chop  
For place weh  
Dey be tie him*

*Goat di chop  
For place weh  
Dey be tie him*

*If I die  
I go come back  
If I quench  
I go come back*

*So my dear frog-  
Brother wack  
And burn  
This damnbrubahEdnuoay  
Dear frog-  
Brother wack  
And burn  
This damnbrubahEdnuoay*

*For seeka  
Goat di chop  
For place weh  
Dey be tie him  
Goat di chop  
For place weh  
Dey be tie him (100-01)*

Through the image of the *goat* browsing where it is tethered, the song highlights the marginalization of the Anglophones, compared to their Franco-phone counterparts symbolized by the *frog* (familiar reference to a Franco-phone) lavishing in the nation's resources. It is revelatory of the strategic positioning of "the chosen ones" who do away with State resources with total impunity. The use of a Pidgin English song reveals the playwright's artistry as he effectively incites the masses to use the language they master most to express their dissatisfaction.

On the same subject, John Nkemngong Nkengasong still exposes this marginalization through unbalanced development in certain parts of the country. To him, such developmental projects are so strategic and unarguably invaluable in that they eventually benefit both the downtrodden and the politically privileged. Ironically and unfortunately, this is not the case with Honourable Mataka Mbutuku who fails to develop the road infrastructure in his constituency and at his death, the transportation of his corpse to his vil-

lage becomes a nightmare. This provides a propitious context for one of the masses – the driver and again, one of the purported good users of Pidgin English –, to express his irritation both with the state of the road and the powers in place. Irately, he lashes out as the convoy awaits helplessly:

*“Na dem government no di fix road, he said. Dem don chop all money for country, but dem no de member seydem go waka for road time weydem go die.” (146)*

Even the request for the driver to review the amount demanded augments the driver’s fury as he frantically reminds them of the innumerable injustices they have been subjected to. He insists:

*“I no fit move one franc, said the driver. Na demgovernment don increase money for petrol. Road no dey but na plenty tax we di pay. Policeman and gendarme demdey for control for daso take money for driver, book correct or e no correct. This country don ton nawahala! If my moto damage, na me I de loss. Wuna pay weti I want mek I carry the coffin. This country na chop I chop country waka. Na so dem, big people de do. Big man yi coffin heavy too much. Wuna pay the money make I no loss time.” (146-47)*

The authorial mouthpiece here seizes this opportunity to make the powers in place aware of their precarious situation as a result of marginalization. It is an invocation of the affected to break the silence, to stand up for their rights and to redress their precarious situation. This is done through a language the people identify themselves with and through one of those who feel the pinch of the marginalization and whose use of the language in such a situation is not surprising. Besides, like in the case of the prodigal song above, the language becomes an effective, virulent instrument of conscientisation, awareness and reawakening.

Cameroon has severally been crowned the most corrupted country in the world. This positioning is indicatory of the acuteness of the canker worm which has eaten deep into the marrow of society. This has been the concern of many writers who, in various ways, seek to paint a vivid picture of the situation as a deliberate attempt to rescue it.

Once more, Bate Besong cries out loudly against the societal ills practiced at several levels with untold negative consequences and which has become as innovatory as the different strategies put forth to curb it. Still in

*Beasts of no Nation*, the situation of corruption, embezzlement and bribery is exposed in another inspiring song:

*Masked night-soil-men accompanied by Blindman and Cripple appear from the left-wing of the stage and sing.*

**Solo:** *I fit tief one hundred million. I fit tief five hundred million sef.*

**Chorus:** *Because ma umbrella dey for capital city.*

*Because ma umbrella dey for Ednouay city.*

**Solo:** *I fit bury one million for my ceiling. I fit bury même ten thousand for my ceiling.*

**Chorus:** *Because Ednouay city don spoil-oh.*

*Because Ednouay city don spoil-oh. (103)*

The song highlights the incredible siphoning of huge sums hoarded away in house ceilings with impunity. This is the specific situation of government officials who have an “umbrella” (*protégé*) in Ednouay city – the capital city which is renowned for such ill-practices. More still, apart from misappropriating physical cash, embezzlement is evident through the sumptuous activities of those who involve in it, as the night-soil-men sing:

**All:** *Tief man!*

*(They sing)*

*Give us seven million c.f.a*

*Na one third*

*Of your twenty-one million c.f.a*

*That's why Mr. Mayor, sar,*

*Give us money make we build*

*One thousand storey building.*

*Give we money*

*Make we buy plenty*

*Italian Ferraris and*

*Plenty plentyPajero motor-car*

*For this heart of the dragon crisis. (104)*

The dismal situation is rendered more pathetic as, whereas the masses wallow in poverty, want and lack of shelter, some individuals continue to erect mansions and ride in luxurious cars even at the “heart of the dragon crisis.” Through contrast, the playwright effectively paints a picture of disequilibrium with an unequalled distribution of resources. Here, corruption tends to take other innovatory forms, as the night-soil-men indicate through yet another song:

**All:** *Your Honour Excellency, sah  
 Give us your sweet banana  
 Wif make we tori, so  
 That I fit go to Seoul Olympics  
 With five athletes  
 And fifty officials (104)*

Here, they reenact a usual unbelievable scenario in which, through their spouses, government officials are cajoled and during international sporting events, delegations are constituted comprising more officials than actors themselves. This provides an enabling opportunity for nationals to travel abroad never to return, to have mission warrants and to award contracts following devious criteria. In the same vein, the playwright does not spare the armed forces and the police from the lampoon. Apart from taking bribes as the driver indicates in the extract from Nkemngong's work, they are equally involved in petty bribery-related scandals, as the first night-soil-man indicates:

**Third:** *Prof. you dey smell federal.  
 The day gendarme  
 Go catch you, mad  
 Man*  
**First:** *Which kind gendarme?  
 They go form line  
 In front Pro. Him door  
 Every evening to get  
 Their daily kola. (109)*

In this way, criminals go free on condition that they provide the necessary "kola" meant to silence their mouths, as they give a deaf ear and a blind eye to such acts. As a matter of fact, the playwright seems to insinuate the fact that, ironically, these anti-corruption agents use quite an effective weapon to fight against corruption: bribery.

Exploitation constitutes one of the societal vices that has been addressed by several writers through various approaches. Be it socio-cultural, physical, psychological, economic or else, it is one of the tendencies to which many conscious beings would be indifferent. Depending on how the pressure is brought to bear on the affected as a result of consequential frustration, one of the ways through which the affected is relieved is through the

use of language. The choice of the language probably plays down on the emotions of the interactant(s). This is the role Pidgin English plays in such trying situations, as in the case of Anne Tanyi Tang's second play – *My Bundle of Joy* (2000), in which Mallam exploits Kechen's almost helpless situation when she comes seeking a magic solution to her problem of childlessness:

**Scene four: Kechen and other women are sitting in a waiting-room in a native doctor's residence.**

**Boy:** (*Touching Kechen*). Madam, masasey make you wait small.

**Kechen:** Okay. Thank you. (*To herself*). If the renowned gynecologist had succeeded, I would not have been sitting here and listening to 'madam, masasey make you wait small'.

**Mallam:** (*To boy*). Tell madam Kechen make ee come inside.

**Boy:** Madam, mallasey make you come inside. No forget for remove your shoes.

**Kechen:** I don hear. Thank you.

**Mallam:** Madam. I think sey you don forget we. Wunadey fine?

**Kechen:** Yes, but ...

**Mallam:** I know. I bee tell you say make you come back. But you nobi come. So I be think sey all thing fine. Wait mek I finam. (*Throws cowries on the floor and examines them very carefully. Turning to Kechen*). Madam your papa ye people demdee vex plenty for sikasey since you married, your massa no di give dem money. (*Examines the cowries a second time*). Dey wan one swine, one bag rice, mukanjo, salt and tobacco. No forget strong mimbo. Tell your masa. After you give them all these things come back for me and I go give you medicine. After three months you go carry bele. My fee na one thousand frs.

**Kechen:** Na so ngambe talk?

**Mallam:** (*Irritated*) Na so ngambe talk. Last time I ask you for come back. But you nobi come. Today you di ask me whether na so ngambe talk. I no think sey you want carry bele.

**Kechen:** Mallam no vex. I just ask. I go do as you tell me. (*Opens her bag and hands over a sum of one thousand frs to Mallam*). Okay, I go see you next month.

**Mallam:** Madam waka fine. God go help.

**Kechen:** Thank you. (*Exits. To herself*). How many times must I placate my father's relations? I will do as Mallam says. But I will not tell McOkete. He does not believe in traditional doctors. I will tell him that I want to visit my grandmother. He will accept. (46-47)



The playwright's choice of the use of the code is patent as it effectively captures and conceptualizes the complainant's mind frame and idealizes typical interactions; above all, the traditional doctor falls squarely in the brackets of those who have been associated with the use of the language. Though literate, Kechen cannot pretend to insist to use the English language with the doctor since it would make for an incongruent situation. The playwright castigates the exploitative tendency of the doctor who, like other cohorts, manipulates clients desperately in need of their services. The writer equally chastises the credulous attitude of Kechen, just like all those who shun modern medical solutions to such problems to the advantage of charlatans. Moreover, Kechen is too naive to understand that the doctor cannot help and she is determined to be dubbed twice. Is the choice of the language meant to insinuate or confirm the allegation that it is the language of rascals, crooks and conmen? This is obviously far from the issue. Bate Besong is more categorical in his evocation of the problem, as Cripple insinuates:

**Cripple:** *Monkey will do  
The dirty work  
Gorilla go deywack.*

This is replicated rhetorically in typical pidgin-proverbial terms by the first night-soil-man when he expresses his frustration:

**First:** *(his hands on the head)  
O me die-man, innocent Anglo  
Monkey work gorilla chop. (106)*

This effectively heightens the pathetic situation of the vulnerable Anglophone who is exploited at different levels to the advantage of his Francophone counterpart. The economic crisis which followed the devaluation of the CFA franc and the effects of the Structural Adjustment Program all had a grievous impact on the economy and living standards in general, as civil servants' salaries were slashed by almost 50%. Economic hardship set in and life became a matter of survival. Bate Besong decries this situation through the comments of Blindman, the Cripple and First night-soil-man:

**Blindman:** *Agbada go,  
Crisis come.*  
**Cripple:** *But C.F.A go*

*De flow.*

**First:** *Ah, this country*

*Hard too much.*(107)

Though physically impaired, Blindman is able to “see” the magnitude of the crisis. Again, through contrast, the playwright juxtaposes the present and the former regimes, symbolized by the image of Agbada (the favorite outfit of the former President), and he insinuates that the old regime was better than the new one ushered in economic crisis – “Agbada go, Crisis come.” The first night-soil-man does not mince his words in his depiction of the crisis.

The question of nationhood and identity is equally preoccupying in multi-ethnic Cameroon. The proliferation of about 250 ethnic groups and home languages further complicate the existing situation. Bate Besong equally addresses this situation through the song of the night-soil-men in which they clamor for their identity:

**First:** *And give us professional*

*Identity cards, Sir.*

*(They sing)*

*Give us professional*

*Identity cards, sah*

*Your thirty million budget*

*Sah, na salary for category*

*Noughtanglo-night-soil men*

*For five billion*

*Centuries*

*So give us professional*

*Identity cards, sah. (110-11)*

To him, the Anglophones suffer from marginalization and exploitation because their status is not clearly defined. They are put under “category nought” and this is the root cause of predicaments such as poor salaries, poor jobs and eventually, poor living conditions.

Bole Butake in *Lake God* (1986) dramatizes the precarious situation of farmers and grazers in conflicts which stretch across the North West Region especially, where cattle encroach farmlands destroying food crops. The traditional rulers always provide grazing land to rearers who in turn compensate them with cattle. Whenever there is encroachment, the general belief is always that it is the Fulani herdsmen’s cattle and not those of the ruler(s). This

is the uncompromising situation in which the ruler finds himself in the following excerpt:

**Fon:** *You been talk da foolish talk?*

**Dewa:** *Kai! Me no talkam no noting Mbe. Allah! Me no talkam no noting*

**Fon:** *Na weti happen?*

**Dewa:** *Cow don go drinki water for Ngangbasaiweynakontri for bororo.*

**Fon:** *For sikasey me tell you for go shiddondere da wan mean seynawu-nakontri?*

**Dewa:** *No be gomna don talk sey na place for cow?*

**Fon:** *Which gomna, you bloody fool? You look the palaver we you don bringam for my head?*

**Dewa:** *Allah! Me no bringam no troubu for Mbe.*

**Fon:** *You go pay all da chop weh you cow don choppam.*

**Dewa:** *No be na ma nyun, Mbe! Na you nyun do choppam corn.*

**Fon:** *Shutup you mup, you bloody fool! (18-19)*

Here, the playwright castigates the dictatorial attitude of the Fon who refuses to take up his responsibility following the destruction of maize plants by his cattle, and he rather shifts the blame to Dewa because of his vulnerability as a lay herdsman. This depicts the fate of cattle owners in the whole region who are always pitted in a war at two fronts – with the authorities who provide land and the natives whose crops are often destroyed. The use of Pidgin English in this context is understandably explicated by the illiterate status of both participants who share only this code. Again, it drives one to share the conception that the language is alienated to the illiterate. However, in Dewa's use of the language, one easily captures the variety Mbangwana (2004) elaborately describes as Mbororo Pidgin English – a variety which is systematically differentiated. It equally demonstrates the flexible nature of the language as it easily accommodates different sociolinguistic realities.

Through Pidgin English, Anglophone Cameroon writers revalorize certain socio-cultural values associated to some Cameroonian cultures. As a matter of fact, the use of home languages in African literary works is no doubt commendable as through them the works gain local colour. This notwithstanding, problems of intelligibility are likely to occur. As a practical solution, the use of a more flexible code in such situations enhances the expression of a broad range of subjects without necessarily jeopardizing local colour or meaning. Following Dupuis & Askov (1983 233), the use of Pidgin qualifies the works for readability, which constitutes a criterion in evaluating good works. To them, the longer or less familiar the word, the harder the

reading, and the same is true when the material becomes more abstract or less concrete. Within these extremes, Pidgin English comfortably plays the role of a “buffer” or neutral code: its sporadic use in some texts has this intent. In Kenjo Jumbam’s *Lukong and the Leopard* (1975), the reader is surprised by a villager’s art in giving directives to a foreigner who misses his direction:

*Massa! Massa! Na road dis. You don teik wrong road. Massa go for woman-hand. No go for man-hand. (46)*

The picturesque descriptions “woman-hand” (left) and “man-hand” (right), especially when void of any physical gestures, sound obviously strange to the foreigner’s ears because they are alien to his linguistic experience. In this context, the villager, whose only available communication tool is Pidgin English, directly transposes a local reality into Pidgin. Similarly, in John Mengot’s “Mimbo Hos” (an unpublished play, 1980) one of the customers, during a palm wine drinking spree, valorizes palm wine at the expense of a locally brewed drink:

*Ali: Mami, if I drink mbrokoto my thing go slack. Give me palm wine, my skin go wake. (9)*

He beautifully euphemises the effects of the different drinks on the male sex organ, variously referred to as “my thing” and “my skin.” In this way, he does not only sound cultured, but, like in the case of the villager of the previous excerpt, he further valorizes the language as a makeshift and flexible communication tool, capable of accommodating even delicate situations of language use.

Apart from serving as a makeshift communication code, Pidgin English has become the medium through which interactants create and consolidate solidarity ties. This occurs during formal and informal encounters and it is no longer a secret that even dignitaries and recognizable personalities make use of the language, especially in informal contexts. It has become the language of communion, particularly when the masses are addressed. This is the case in politicking, religion, adult literacy programs, health campaigns, etc. This is equally the case in Alobwede d’Epie’s *The Lady with a Beard* (2005) where Mr. Okore solemnly calls on mourners’ diligence following the death of his mother-in-law:

*My muyodem, when man e dong do yi work, when man e go this kind go we ma mother in-law go so, then God don send chop for people. I go beg wuna, make man no cry again. Make we bury mami with good heart. When some man chop and e drink make e no cause trouble. Make e go sleep. Chop dey, mimbo e dey. Make we chopam and drinkam but make chop e no chop we or mimbo e drink we. (56)*

The participant in this context warrant the use of this code which saves him from moving from and to English, French and a home language as the case might be, so as to satisfy his homogeneous audience. His talk ends in a beautiful proverbial imploration which could not have been better expressed than in this lively code.

The creation of camaraderie is equally of the domain of Pidgin English. This is evident in the context above in which the villagers seek Mr. Okore's friendship, probably for material gains. One of them introduces himself and explains his relation with the deceased:

*Muyo, dat woman wey e die na ma papa yimami, yi sister e bonam. Minay-ina so we dey,' he said and webbed his fingers. (57)*

Even before Mr. Okore has time to respond, a drunken woman comes pulling Mr. Okore and insinuating that others are simply usurpers:

*Yes muyo if you begin hear all dat people you no go know real people. Dat is people demwehdem get this die.'(57)*

In these ways, the language enhances social cohesion as users effectively and easily create acquaintance, establish camaraderie ties, foster existing relations and above all grease communication wheels in a complex plurilingual and multi-ethnic setting.

### **The Users of Pidgin English in ACL: A Case of Linguistic Alienation**

In order to justify certain claims related to the use of Pidgin English in Cameroon, it is important to examine the different users of the language in the literary works of Anglophone Cameroonians. As has been noted, the sporadic use of the language in literary works is by design and for specific effects. At the linguistic level, a critical examination of the different users (characters or *dramatis personae*) through which the writers express their

world outlook reveals the fact that these users constitute the bulk of those who have been associated or tagged as the "owners" of the language.

In determining the users of the language, Menang (1979: 54) distinguishes three groups. The first group comprises marginal users who constitute the uneducated bulk made up of farmers, craftsmen and unskilled labourers. Their use of the language is restricted to traders, strangers and non-natives as the indigenous languages were strong in village circles. These users acquire the language as their second language, as is the case with most Francophones and Anglophones in rural areas. The second group is constituted of normal users who make up the bulk of the speakers of the language and who use it in a wide range of situations. These speakers reside in the cosmopolitan areas drawing speakers from different ethnic backgrounds and so, to them, Pidgin remains the only contact language. Other speakers identified under this group include mixed population of plantation workers, people working in companies and industries which constitute heterogeneous communities. Most of these users are semi-literates and do blue collar jobs such as mechanical works, electronics, shop keeping, urbanized craftsmanship, driving, etc. Apart from the use of the language at home, they equally use it at the workplace, in commercial transactions and in the church. The last group is constituted of educated users who master either English or French or both languages and make use of Pidgin as a complementary language in informal transactions. They are composed of white collar workers who demonstrate much flexibility in their use of the language which is molded so as to suit specific contexts. This group equally constitutes users who show much hypocrisy in their attitude towards the language, as they usually claim that they do not use it when interviewed for research purposes but actually do so in informal transactions.

The above categorization done about three decades earlier gives the impression that the use of the language concerns almost all Cameroonians. However, for the most part and unfortunately, today, there is total alienation in the association of the use of the language to specific users who constitute the bulk of illiterates and those who do menial jobs. This is aptly reflected in ACL wherein authorial mouthpieces are easily identifiable within this category of users. The Pidgin English user is supposed to belong to a microcosm in a macro sphere of users. As such, Nkemngong's driver in *The Widow's Might* (2006) becomes representative of those to whom the use of the language has been attributed. Apart from a handful of degree holders and school dropouts who join the profession for lack of anything better, the bulk of them is constituted of illiterates who show a total mastery of the language

as it is their first language. Dewa, in Butake's play, represents the host of Fulanis and other herdsmen who constitute highly marginalized socio-cultural groups, making profuse use of this contact language to commune with the outside world. Though, following greater conscientisation on the importance of formal education, their use of the language remains a communicational prerequisite. Tanyi Tang's Mallam falls in the category of the innumerable soothsayers, healers, charlatans, conmen, crooks, rascals, bandits, smugglers and many of those illiterates and semi-illiterates who make use of the language amongst themselves or in their provision of daily services to clients. The case of the villager in Kenjo Jumbam's *Lukong and the Leopard* reveals that other villagers, illiterate or not, see in the language an inevitable linguistic instrument of personal access, especially at first encounters with non-acquaintants. The drunks in Alobwede d'Epie's *The Lady with a Beard* and Ali's case in John Mengot's "Mimbo Hos" are complementary evidence of linguistic alienation in relation to the use of the language. The drunks, like all drunks during drinking sprees, make profuse use of the language, just as their companions. They are not therefore different from fools and, like the night-soil-men in Bate Besong's *Beasts of no Nation* who are reduced to a state of nothingness, their constant use of the language is all the more significant. The night-soil-men, Cripple and Blindman are alienated as they are invisible, name-ridden and often simply referred to as "anglos." Their use of Pidgin, allegedly an Anglophone property, is equally "alienatory." The marginalization of these characters who are reduced to crap is commensurate to the degraded status of their language. As a matter of fact, it is the language of "shitology," used by those without an identity and fit for an awry community of "deformed" and "ugly" creatures, such as blind men, lepers, beggars and cripples.

Conclusively, amongst the shades of attitudes towards the use, users and very existence of CamPE in Cameroon, that which regards the language with scorn, disdain and condescension stands out clearly. This is the school of thought that relegates the language to the background because of prejudicial and unverified reasons, despite the attempts and efforts of certified linguists to advocate the potential of this linguistic resource. This notwithstanding, the contribution of Cameroonian writers of English expression towards propelling the language has been felt. This contribution seems to be two-pronged: demonstrating the status of the language through authorial mouthpieces who constitute the bulk of the "reject" by society, and at the same time seeking to discard previously held prejudices related to the language by val-

orizing it: if it were meant for the illiterate and the downtrodden, why is it that learned, prolific and venerated scholars continue to use the language?

### PERSPECTIVES: THE FUTURE OF PIDGIN ENGLISH IN ACL

Following dedicated research on Pidgin English in Cameroon, available literature on the subject pinpoints to the fact that the language constitutes a “veritable linguistic menu” (Mbangwana: 2004 23), an invaluable linguistic resource at several levels of appreciation. Despite the lukewarmness in according the language its rightful place in the linguistic map of the country, from every indication, the linguistic tide is gradually and surely turning in favor of the language as efforts towards its standardization continue to galvanize energy. Indeed, the sporadic, yet not timid use of the language in literary works is undeniable evidence attesting to its potential. Although whole anthologies in Pidgin such as John Menget’s *Anoda-man-ting* (1980) and collections such as Loreto Todd’s *Tori dem for Pidgin* have received little publicity, probably because of the widespread biased attitude towards the language, they constitute glimmers of optimism, indicative of the fact that an exclusive literature of Pidgin expression is not an unrealizable dream. The eventual standardization of the language and probably its upgrading as a national language constitute significant steps in further propelling it, thereby, making mavericks to discover its true potential. As Doh (1993 83) avers that the future of Cameroon literature is Anglophone, this write-up predicts that a promising future may be embedded in Pidgin English.

### CONCLUSION

Writers of English expression show much sensitivity and commitment to issues plaguing human existence in their various societies. They imaginatively address these issues which merit critical attention in varying ways and through different approaches. In doing so, these writers show their artistry through a rare technique involving the skillful use of a code which effectively communicates users’ mind-sets, and which paints vivid, realistic and ideal pictures of language use situations akin to those of almost all competent members in the different speech communities depicted. From the foregoing, it is safe to claim that the use of Pidgin in ACL is illustrative of a typical case of artistic and experiential truthfulness in which writers imaginatively reenact empirical scenarios to attain various objectives. This write-up demonstrates that this code constitutes a genuine linguistic resource whose value has not



been fully exploited yet. As a matter of fact, what has been revealed about the language so far only constitutes the tip of the iceberg as this invaluable code does not only guarantee intergroup and personal communication, but no doubt holds the future of ACL.

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