



HAL
open science

Camerron Pidgin English: to Teach or not to Teach

Samuel N. Atechi

► **To cite this version:**

Samuel N. Atechi. Camerron Pidgin English: to Teach or not to Teach. Alizés : Revue angliciste de La Réunion, 2010, Old Days, New Days, 33, pp.237-261. hal-02341416

HAL Id: hal-02341416

<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02341416v1>

Submitted on 31 Oct 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Cameroon Pidgin English: to Teach or not to Teach

Introduction

The Cameroon linguistic landscape comprises two received languages: English and French co-existing as official languages, a multitude of indigenous languages, and a dominant English-based Pidgin, which is an invaluable tool of wider communication in the country. While French and English enjoy official status because they are recognized and recommended by the State as languages of instruction, CPE enjoys an unofficial status vested by Cameroonians who have recognized it as an important language of social interaction in the country. Though in a complex multilingual setting with its ongoing official neglect by the State, the language has been asserting itself in manifold ways (Tarh 2007). It has forced its way into areas that were hitherto the preserve of the two official languages (see Simo Bobda 2009, Chia 2009). Commenting on the “exploits” of CPE, Yuka (2001) states that CPE has virtually taken the centre stage, relegating the local languages to the background. In an earlier account, Fonlon argues that CPE was and still is “the most widely spoken *lingua franca* in Cameroon” (1963 402). This claim is further reinforced by Chia (1983), who says it is not only widely spoken, but also a very popular language in Cameroon. In a more recent account, Mbangwana (2004 23) states that 97.8 % of Anglophone and 61.8 % of Francophone Cameroonian urban dwellers speak

CPE. In spite of the ground covered by CPE, it is still to receive the blessings of governmental authorities with regard to official recognition, as it is neither mentioned in the constitution of the country nor given any role in the education system. In short, CPE does not have any policy statement in respect of the language policy of Cameroon. The country's constitution assigns roles to English and French as the two official languages, and at least takes the engagement to promote and protect the indigenous languages, but nothing is said about CPE.

Language policy in Cameroon

Language plays a vital role in the achievement of the national unity, stability and development of a country. This explains why the decision as to what type of language policy to adopt is very crucial. When a country makes choices regarding official languages, they affect every aspect of the country: local culture, economy, education, etc. Cameroon has been critical too about the choice of a language policy considering its bi-cultural colonial identity. The country's constitution states clearly that

[t]he official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The State shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavour to protect and promote national languages. (Section 1, Article 1, paragraph 3, 1996 Constitution)

As the quote shows, Cameroon operates under the framework of an official bilingualism language policy, which designates English and French as the official languages of government institutions (education, administration, parliament, mass media, international communication, etc.), to the detri-

ment of the other languages that are spoken in the country. This language policy has left many concerned researchers worried, given that it failed to meet their expectations. Chiatoh thinks that this policy leaves much to be desired in terms of national unity, stability and development, given its lifespan of over forty years in Cameroon. He argues that these linguistic choices have “consciously or unconsciously discarded the linguistic and cultural identities of the people, thereby marginalizing them in the mainstream of decision-making” (2006 44). Thus, this discriminatory treatment has weakened the enthusiasm and the ability of many Cameroonians to contribute to the national development effort. The shaky nature of this language policy has led to frantic calls for alternative language policies to be adopted with the intention of achieving national unity and stability in the country. Tadadjeu (1983) cited in Nanfah (2006 137) opts for *trilingualism of hope*, which is an educational policy that involves French, English and the national languages, as a better option to the present situation that prevails in the country. He argues that this *trilingualism policy* will enable Cameroon to arrive at one language, or many languages, that will, in turn, reflect the Cameroonian identity. Nanfah (2006) on his part sees the necessity to arrive at one language that can be spoken by all Cameroonians in the country. On the other hand, (Mbangwana: 1983; 2004; Yuka: 2001; Atechi & Fonka: 2007; Tarh: 2007; etc.) think that CPE should be given official recognition as one of the official languages in the country. It is quite evident from the debate above that something is wrong somewhere and needs the attention of decision makers. A lot has changed and is still changing and it must be reflected in the language policy of Cameroon because the present language policy does not reflect the aspirations of Cameroonians.

Attitudes towards Cameroon Pidgin English

Attitudes towards CPE are varied and confusing especially given the complex sociolinguistic and cultural landscape of the country. Anglophones, Francophones, and researchers exhibit different attitudes towards this language. Kelly (1978) points out that “until very recently, Pidgin and Creole speakers have been made to feel ashamed of the language in which they could most easily express themselves.” To Kelly, therefore, attitudes towards CPE are improving every passing day. The only thing CPE needs is official recognition by the State. To reinforce the exploits made by CPE, Mbufong's (2001) investigation shows that CPE is the first language of most children in the South West and North West regions of Cameroon. He thinks that this is enough for the language to be used for the teaching of children at the initial level of their schooling. This argument is buttressed by the statistics provided by Koenig *et al.* The picture painted by the table below shows clearly that the percentage of children who acquire CPE as their first language outweighs those who acquire Standard English as their first language.

Table I: Acquisition of English and Pidgin English as First language

	English	Pidgin English
Bamenda	1%	22%
Mamfe	0%	25%
Kumba	1%	19%
Buea	7%	26%
Limbe	4%	31%

(Koenig et al.: 1983 98)

Fifteen years later, Alobwede (1998: 54) carried out the same survey adding two major cities, Yaounde and Douala, and obtained the following results.

Table II: The acquisition of English and Pidgin English as first language

	English	Pidgin
Bamenda	3.5%	24%
Mamfe	1%	25%
Kumba	3%	22%
Buea	13%	28%
Limbe	9%	30%
Douala	6%	10%
Yaounde	8%	15%

(Alobwede: 1998 69)

From the above statistics, it is crystal clear that CPE is a force to reckon with in Cameroon. Thus Mbufong (2001) does not understand how Cameroon policymakers would ignore such a popular language, which is so close to the people, and rather promote “foreign” languages. Many Cameroonians tend to lean towards CPE because the language reflects their mother tongues in manifold ways, as there are a multiplicity of thought patterns and lexical elements in CPE that give it a specific Cameroonian flavour. This explains why the intimacy that Cameroonians show towards their mother tongues seems to be the same intimacy they exhibit towards CPE. They feel at ease discussing in CPE, the same way they would discuss in their mother tongues. CPE is non-hierarchical, and puts people on an even footing.

Cameroon English vs. Cameroon Pidgin English

The English language is one of the two official languages in Cameroon that are recommended as subjects in school; it is

also a medium of instruction in the Anglophone subsystem of education. Though it is educated English which is used in schools, Kelly contends that “it is simply unreal to pretend that Standard English is the language of communication between teachers and pupils. It is the language of the English lessons, with luck” (1978 294). This is happening already because a substantial number of nursery school teachers resort to CPE in the early days of their teaching, as this is the language they bring to with them to school. Pointing out more difficulties that could be encountered at the basic stage of education with the use of Standard English, Kelly asserts:

To insist that [...] Standard English should always be the medium of both teacher and pupils is shortsighted. In the first place few of the pupils starting school will have control of a variety at the Standard end of the spectrum. Furthermore, while the teachers are assumed to have such mastery, they can rarely sustain a teaching program entirely in Standard English... But if they could sustain such a program, to do so might well mean talking about the linguistic competence of their pupils, and this could result in either alienation or a complete breakdown in communication. (*ibid.*)

This is not the case with CPE, which is conveniently flexible and acquired at no cost (Alobwede 1998: 59). We should in fact, seek to provide a fostering environment that nurtures and appreciates the communicative skills that most children bring with them to school. The notions that Pidgin English is inferior “broken English” and that children who use it are deficient, are not only unjustified and biased, but simply wrong.

While many people are convinced that Standard English is better than Pidgin, it is quite clear to scholars of language that no language variety is inherently better than any other. That is, there is nothing that makes Standard English linguistically better than Pidgin. All languages and dialects are fully

grammatical systems which their speakers can use for effective communication on any topic and in any situation. The mistake people make is that they think that a prestige advantage is consequently a linguistic advantage. Standard English does have a prestige advantage over CPE because of the role the State has given it in the language policy of the country, as well as on-going prejudices and misconceptions against CPE. As dust is still to settle on the issues raised above, the debate between CPE and CamE has shifted from how much the former militates against the proper acquisition of the latter, to the fact that CPE is losing ground to English, even in domains that were the preserve of the former (Schroder: 2003). This, it is claimed, is due to the fact that CPE is undergoing some restructuring which moves the language more and more towards its status language: English (Sala & Ngefac: 2006; Sala: 2009). This restructuring process, it is prophesied, will get to a point where the two languages will merge, thus robbing CPE of its idiosyncrasies and identity. To state that CPE is evolving towards English is not new. This is a phenomenon that has been going on for a long time now, even if it only caught the attention of researchers of late. The obvious reason for this is that the less educated people who used CPE with a given local flavour, and out of communicative necessities, are now giving way to a more youthful (educated) pidgin-English-using population. This restructuring process gets more glaring because CPE speakers are getting more and more exposed to English, as rightly pointed out by Sala and Ngefac (2006).

But to predict that this will get to a point where CPE will lose its identity, I would be more cautious given the complex nature of the linguistic landscape involved. Quite germane to this debate are the results of recent findings on CPE use, es-

pecially in domains that are thought to be reserved for English, such as the universities. Chia (2009) reports a startling case where a whopping 63% of a sample population of 1 442 students were spotted discussing in CPE on the University of Buea campus. It should be noted that this is a university that was conceived in the Anglo-Saxon tradition for the obvious reason that it would serve as a breeding ground for “correct” English usage. That is presumably why the university authorities have been doing everything possible to meet this goal. The common enemy to this lofty goal, it is presumed, is CP which must be eradicated at all cost. Proof of this is the fact that an official ban is placed on the language, with signboards placed everywhere on the campus to reinforce the ban. Since the students defiled this ban to use the language the way Chia's findings show, then we need to revise the approach when it comes to dealing with the relationship between English and Pidgin. Simo Bobba reinforces this when he points out that we are gradually moving to a point “where Pidgin English, even in university circles, has squatted into domains which were hitherto the preserve of English” (2009 19). He sees English fast becoming a foreign language while Pidgin is commonly used by postgraduate students to discuss Shakespeare and Chomsky, or Nuclear Physics. From the above, we notice that research on CPE is not only complex but perplexing. Chia (*ibid.*) thus concludes that the fear here is that since CPE is making in-roads into the very fief of Standard English in this nascent role as a language of education discourse, it may eventually supplant Standard English. It is interesting to notice the sharp contrast in the findings on CPE within a relatively very short period of time, that is, between 2003 and 2009. This type of controversial scenario only points to the fact that it is sensible to be more cautious when we

make linguistic predictions. It also points to the fact that research on CPE is very slippery. The ban placed on the language here and there has helped to send the eager speakers of CPE underground. This has made it very difficult to obtain sincere data from the speakers, especially in respect of their attitudes towards the language.

Experiment

This investigation concentrates on the views of educated Cameroonians because they are better placed to judge which language is appropriate to be used in the education system in a complex multilingual setting such as Cameroon. It is also felt that their views matter more than those of the less educated because they are better placed to influence policies as well as to participate in policy making (Igboanusi: 2008 70). I equally preferred to select respondents from the university community because this linguistic medium is very fashionable among students on campus. Students feel very comfortable discussing even their academic issues in CPE. The sample comprises 100 students from the University of Yaounde I. The University of Yaounde I is the oldest State university in the country and it attracts an extensively heterogeneous population from all the ten regions of the Republic. This is a good breeding ground for CPE, which the students prefer because it is very flexible, fashionable and a language of intimacy. A thirteen-item questionnaire with evaluatively worded statements was designed and distributed to the students with a 4-Likert scale (marking agreement or disagreement) following (Hyland: 1997; Lasagabaster: 2003; Lai: 2005). The results of the questionnaire are analysed and discussed below, showing the attitude of the informants towards CPE.

Table 3: Attitude toward CPE

	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1. Cameroon Pidgin influences your English in a very negative way	30%)	30%	25%	15%
2. Pidgin should be spoken on campus	20%	25%	32%	23%
3. Pidgin is the preserve of uneducated people	15%	15%	30%	40%
4. Pidgin should be taught as a subject in schools	18%	22%	35%	25%
5. Pidgin should be used as a medium of instruction in schools	11%	20%	42%	27%
6. Pidgin should be made one of the official languages in Cameroon	21%	28%	33%	18%
7. Pidgin is a language of intimacy	44%	45%	08%	03%
8. Pidgin is easy to learn	19%	10%	30%	41%
9. Pidgin is easy to speak but difficult to write	28%	40%	18%	14%
10. Pidgin is an important <i>lingua franca</i> in Cameroon	39%	46%	09%	10%
11. Pidgin does not discriminate its speakers	45%	46%	00%	09%
12. Pidgin is just like one of our indigenous languages	33%	38%	10%	19%
13. For Pidgin to be taught in schools, it needs to be codified	30%	43%	10%	17%

In the table above, the results are analysed to reflect attitudes towards CPE in education-related issues and the informants' perception of this linguistic medium.

The analysis shows markedly that CPE is a very prominent language in Cameroon. The respondents in this study confirm this: 85% "strongly agree" or "agree" that it is an important *lingua franca*, against 15% who "strongly disagree" or "disagree." In fact, Atechi and Fonka (2007) show that CPE is not only a *lingua franca* in the Anglophone part of the country but also in most Francophone settings. The language has

indeed spread its tentacles to all the nooks and crannies of the country, assuming manifold functions and statuses.

Again, CPE is a language of intimacy. Once out of office, most Cameroonians interact with each other using CPE. During political campaigns, CPE is usually used in addressing the masses. Politicians use this language to narrow the gap that English and French have created between them and the masses. It gives the impression that the politicians are close to the people, given that the language does not discriminate. It is the language of the people, be they from the north, south, east, west, be they illiterate or literate, French-speaking or English-speaking. The findings in this paper confirm this very clearly as 89 % of the respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” to the statement that CPE is a language of intimacy.

Concerning the official introduction of CPE as a means of instruction in schools, studies like Alobwede’s (1998), Mbangwana’s (1983, 2004), or Mbufong’s (2001) suggest it should be used in school. They base the thrust of their arguments on the functions and statuses the language assumes throughout the country. Schröder (2003) reports that the attitude of Cameroonians towards CPE at the time of her research was still predominantly negative. Accordingly, the respondents in this study exhibit almost the same attitude as 38% “strongly agree” or “agree” that CPE be taught as a subject in our schools. I wish to remark that the attitude of Cameroonians towards the teaching of CPE in our schools is improving in an interesting fashion. A few decades ago, it was inconceivable to mention the use of CPE in school, let alone the teaching of the language. I strongly blame the slow pace at which this improvement is going on the indiscriminate banning of the language both in private and public places. But because CPE has developed to a point of no return, it is as-

serting itself in an admirable way. Recent findings on attitudes towards CPE as a pedagogic language actually show a consistent positive trend despite the enormous intimidation and stigmatisation of its users throughout the country. In 2001, Kouega (2001: 20) carried out an investigation on attitudes towards CPE where, out of 189 informants, 151 respondents (79.8%) were against its adoption as a language of instruction in the first three years of education and only 38 respondents (20.1%) voted in favour of its institution. Six years later, in 2007, Tarh conducted a similar survey in three towns in Cameroon, namely, Bamenda, Bertoua and Yaounde; the results showed that 53 out of the 142 informants, that is 37.4%, were willing to have CPE as a pedagogic language in Cameroon. Thus if we follow the trend since 2001 from Kouega's (2001) 20.1%, through Tarh's (2007) 37.4% and this study's 38 %, even skeptics would not need to be reminded what the future holds for such a self-assertive language as CPE.

While the majority of the respondents (81%) disagree with the statement that CPE is easy to learn, they did agree (68%) that CPE is easy to speak but difficult to write. There is a general consensus on the difficulties of writing CPE and the need for the language to be codified. The respondents (70%) "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement that, for CPE to be taught in schools, there is dire need for codification. It may be useful to remark that the question of codification is a very serious one if the language must be taught in schools. For any language to be taught, it must have a standard orthography, which will, in turn, spur the creation of dictionaries and grammar books on the language. CPE has no officially sanctioned orthography even though it is undoubtedly the most spoken language in Cameroon. Sala (2009: 11) echoes the concern that CPE writing is marred by inconsistencies. He thinks that

the writing system for CPE should follow the English orthography as much as we lose nothing, and deviate from it as much as we gain something. From this conclusion, it is very clear that dust is still to settle on this matter. The earlier there is a consensus on this matter, the better, given that studies on more advanced aspects of CPE have been and are being carried out with foundational issues like the writing system still pending. This may just be like putting the cart before the horse. Codification and eventual standardization of CPE, Mbangwana thinks, will enable the language to “enjoy stability, reasonable uniformity, autonomy and authority” (2004 39).

Regarding the suggestion that CPE be made an official language, 49 % of the respondents either “strongly agree” or “agree,” while 51% “strongly disagree” or “agree.” Does it mean that the covert prestige enjoyed by CPE lies in the fact that the State does not care about this linguistic medium? Hall (1972 151) intimates that the lone factor liable to change the status of a Pidgin is a political one. Schröder (2003 248) thinks that most Cameroonians are not particularly open towards the introduction of CPE as a means of instruction, not because of its supposedly detrimental influence on Standard English acquisition or on the educational standards as a whole, but because of its language development status.

Discussion

We follow that it is possible for low-status languages to be promoted to the extent that they can be used in prestigious domains hitherto the preserve of official languages (Igboanusi: 2008). A glaring case in point is Kiswahili in East Africa as cited by Simala, Kembo-Sure and Ogechi (2006). This implies that a language’s role is strongly determined by factors like

empowerment or marginalisation, and that any language can be empowered if matters of status and corpus planning are addressed. CPE badly needs this therapy so as to enjoy overt prestige like French and English in Cameroon. This type of empowerment will only be a step in the right direction given that Pidgins and Creoles are already enjoying a new status in some parts of the world. Simo Bobda (2006 75) reports that Kriolu is the national language in the Cape Verde Islands, while Creole is now co-official with French in Haiti. This kind of recognition makes Creole a language of education in Haiti (Igboanusi: 2008 75). In Sierra Leone, Krio is enjoying the status of a national language, alongside Limba, Mende, and Temne, and has been standardized (Sandred 1996). Sandred (1996) further reports that Krio is now being used in primary education, in adult literacy campaigns, in newspaper articles and for serious creative literature. CPE is already being extensively used in the media. What we need to do is to further empower this language of wider communication and intimacy so that it can be fully useful to its users as it were.

Challenges facing the promotion of CPE

The challenges facing the valorization of CPE are enormous. First, the fact that it is perceived to be a poor version of Standard English can militate against its acquisition, not unlike the thinking that if we do away with Pidgin English, our children's performance in English would improve. The amusing thing about this type of wishful thinking is that people fail to understand that the relationship between Pidgin English and English is too complex to suggest that simply eradicating Pidgin will be a magic solution to the problems children face in English. Second, hypocrisy is one of the major challenges

CPE is facing in Cameroon. Cameroonians of all walks of life use CPE in varied ways in their day-to-day functioning in society. Students use it in class to discuss with friends and sometimes with their teachers; (see Chia: 2009; Simo Bobda: 2009), parents use it with friends at home, in their offices, etc.; teachers use the language with students on campus, in the streets and even in some official settings. Both educated and uneducated persons use the language. In fact, it is just like the air they breathe. However, the same people, who make extensive use of this language, tend to exhibit a rather negative attitude towards it when it comes to declaring their attitudes overtly. As earlier stated, I blame this on the massive intimidation and stigmatisation that are going on in the country in varied forms. Simo Bobda (2009 19) thinks that this stigmatisation and intimidation is due to the fact that the status of Pidgin English has significantly improved of late. He points out that it is because Pidgin English is threatening the hegemony of English even in university circles, that university authorities are forced to devise means to eradicate it. A case in point is the University of Buea, where the authorities have erected signboards with the following inscriptions to reinforce the ban on this idiom on campus:

No Pidgin on Campus please!
Pidgin is taking a heavy toll on your English; shun it.
The medium of studies at UB is English, not Pidgin
If you speak Pidgin, you will write Pidgin.
English is the password, not Pidgin
Speak less Pidgin and more English

Inscriptions of this nature are conspicuous in many public and private higher institutions, while other private and gov-

ernment-owned schools have outrightly banned its use on the school premises. I remember how serious the issue of banning Pidgin English was, even when I was a primary school teacher in the mid-1980s. My headteacher asked each of us to produce two big badges with the inscriptions “MR PIDGIN” and “MISS PIDGIN.” These badges were to be hung on the wall in class and the pupils asked to watch out for anyone who spoke Pidgin. When a girl was spotted speaking pidgin, the big badge, “MISS PIDGIN,” was taken and hung on her neck, and “MR PIDGIN” in the case of a boy. The whole day, the poor kids moved around with these big badges, mocked and ridiculed by their classmates. If no other child was spotted speaking Pidgin, they would have them on for the whole day.

These and many more have in large measure contributed to the attitudes towards CPE today. Thus when researchers go out for surveys on CPE, it is always very difficult to get results that paint a vivid picture of the situation on the ground. This type of intimidating scenario for users of CPE witnessed in Cameroon is not an isolated case. The same shabby treatment of Pidgin English speakers is equally reported in Nigeria and Ghana. In Ghana, for example, Huber (2008: 95) reports that schools strongly discourage the use of Pidgin, but boys freely resort to it when unobserved by teachers. He asserts that Pidgin English in Ghana serves as a social register, as an in-group language, being used not so much out of the communicative necessity but as a means of expressing solidarity and intimacy with peers. Pidgin has established itself in the university as the main informal code of male students. It is heard on campus, in students bars, and in the halls of residence (Huber: 2008 96). It must also be pointed out that gone are the days when CPE was used out of communicative necessity. It can safely be asserted that the language has grad-

ually elbowed its way and established itself in the linguistic make-up of Cameroon, assuming a myriad of functions and statuses. It is almost unthinkable that it can be supplanted by another language, may be just because it is backed by the language policy of the country or whatever power. By implication, the evolution, call it restructuring, observed in CPE is simply moving the language to a point where it will stabilize and establish itself as a more solid force to reckon with in the country's complex linguistic landscape and thus should be given a chance in prestigious domains.

The tense atmosphere created around the speaker of CPE has rendered respondents suspicious as they tend get hypocritical in the way they respond to any inquiry on the language. Researchers would then have to devise other means to collect data for research on CPE. This is why I must salute the approach used by Chia (2009) to investigate the use of CPE in the University of Buea. Regarding the difficulties involved in collecting authentic data from the students, he remarks, "we were aware that if we asked students simply to indicate whether or not they spoke CPE the answer would be overwhelmingly negative even in answering anonymous questionnaires, because of the ban." He then decided to conceive a questionnaire allowing English—along side CPE, French and other languages—to be marked present when spoken. He then enrolled some senior students, trained them on how to carry out the exercise and they had to station themselves at strategic points on campus, preferably at the entrance into lecture halls to observe and note down (with a tick) any pair of students who came by conversing. The observer would tick the language of the conversation, the gender and the topic or subject as academic or nonacademic. I must say that the results obtained by Chia (*ibid*), 63% for CPE, 25% for English and

11% for French paint a vivid picture of the popularity of CPE. This study goes a long way to complement Chia's findings as it opts for the open method of eliciting attitudes. These results put side by side reveal, in a very interesting fashion, how sensitive the process of measuring attitudes towards CPE can be. It is marred by hypocrisy and suspicion because of the tension created here and there with regard to CPE use.

Lastly, the impending issue of a writing system for CPE is a great challenge to overcome. CPE has no standard or generally accepted writing system. There is, therefore, an impending need for it to be given a written form, a sort of supra-dialectal norm. Mbangwana (1983: 89) thinks that the only solution to this orthographic problem will be one that exposes the phonological form of CPE as independent of Standard English conventions. To him, this will, in turn, express Cameroon Pidgin's identity as a *Cameroonised* language rather than a hybridized form of any language whatsoever. In as much as Schröder (2003: 226) does not deviate from Mbangwana's argument, she maintains Haugen's suggestion that "an ideal orthography [...] should permit alternate interpretation of the symbols so that different idiolects can read their own sounds into it" (1966: 54); thereby, opting for a "practicable, englobing and representative orthography" for CPE (Sala: 2009: 11), Sala envisages such a reality only in an English-derived orthography, its weaknesses notwithstanding. This is because, he claims, English is historically linked to Pidgin English. He adds that the ideal orthography should be one that "merges both simplicity and consistency such that any cases of redundancy are felt across the board" (*ibid.*), and also that, unlike English, this CPE orthography should, as much as possible, have a "one-to-one representation between sound and grapheme." It should be noted that this challenge is

not peculiar to CPE but also applies to other pidgins such as Nigerian Pidgin (NP), as reported by (Igboanusi: 2008). He concludes that the problem of standard orthography is one of the unsolved problems concerning the use of Nigerian Pidgin.

The way forward

From all indications, CPE has elbowed its way and established itself as a dominant language in the linguistic landscape of Cameroon, despite the reluctance by government to give it an official place in the language policy of the country. For CPE to enjoy overt prestige and probably find itself in more prestigious domains such as the classroom, a number of measures need to be taken. First, governmental authorities should duly recognize it, that is, give it a place in its constitution or in its language policy, as it is the case with the two official languages and the indigenous languages. The revision of the language policy to cater for the concerns raised in this paper will leave a serious impact on the attitudes of Cameroonians towards CPE. It should not only be recognized but should also be promoted and protected in domains, such as education, that will give the language the prestige it deserves. Schneider (2005) asserts that education is the most important institution through which we can implement language policies. CPE should be given a chance in the education system by being used as a medium of instruction in early primary education and at least taught as a subject in both secondary and tertiary level. This step, it is hoped, will positively affect the status of the language as attitudes towards the language would change through encouragement from teachers.

Second, education officials should organise language awareness seminars, classes or in-services for teachers,

which include strategies for building on the home language and for understanding language systems, as well as language awareness programs for students to learn about the history and social functions of both Pidgin and English, and to discover ways in which Pidgin and English are different. Research on the relationship between Pidgin and school success, and how to best build on the language that children come to school with in the achievement of school success should be thoroughly conducted. A basic and well-established educational principle is to build on the strengths that children come to school with. Local children tend to have linguistic strengths which include exposure to and knowledge of a variety of languages and abilities to move between language varieties for various purposes. Building on these strengths would entail discussing language and language variation as part of the school curriculum.

On the other hand, telling children that the way they speak is bad, incorrect or inappropriate often leads to one of the following consequences: children withdraw and choose not to speak and participate in class rather than risk saying something "wrong;" they develop negative academic self-concepts labeling themselves as "bad students" and behave accordingly; language becomes an issue and a site of struggle between students and teachers, creating a counter-productive educational atmosphere. Since language is such a central part of identity, to attack someone's language is to attack them.

Third, the challenges of orthography and eventual codification of CPE echoed and reechoed by many (Hall: 1972; Schröder: 2003; Mbangwana: 2004; Atechi & Fonka: 2007; Sala: 2009) should be taken very seriously if CPE must gain overt prestige. A lot has already been written in CPE, such as the *New Testament Bible* by the Cameroon Bible Society,

Some Day Bin Day, by Todd, and the *CPE Dictionary* by Kouega Jean-Paul, and so on. The introduction of a codified CPE as a medium of instruction is a first step towards its general recognition and eventual acceptance as a language of national integration. Government should do well to give incentives to those who write in CPE, encourage the design of syllabuses for CPE as well as didactic materials for the successful learning and teaching of the language.

The teaching of CPE will uplift the ban on its use in schools and other public and private places, thereby making way for many people to have access to it. This will foster unity, as it will no longer be termed a broken form of English used by Anglophones, but seen as a tool to bring Cameroonians of all walks of life on board a single ship of state. This can only be a good thing for a country whose multilingual setting, instead of helping to, tends to destroy its unity.

Finally, the myth according to which if we could do away with Pidgin, our children's writing scores would go up is not founded on any empirical evidence. The reality is that the relationship between Pidgin and English is too complex to suggest that simply eradicating Pidgin will raise scores. Very little research has been conducted to understand the relationships between Pidgin and English. To implicate Pidgin as the cause of children's poor Standard English writing skills is academically unjust and scholastically irresponsible. We should recognize that Pidgin is the first language of many children in Cameroon and that the process of comparing Pidgin to English and other languages will be an extremely effective means of developing the understanding of variations in world languages and preparing students for the acquisition of additional languages.

If these suggestions are taken seriously, this will obviously change the attitudes of Cameroonians towards CPE. Parents will now allow their children to speak their most cherished language freely; students will now feel more at ease to speak this language with their teachers and among themselves, without fearing of being punished. The valorization of CPE will clearly distinguish it from Standard English and thus reduce the fear of both parents and teachers that using CPE will have an adverse effect on their performance in English Language.

Samuel Atechi¹

References

- Adegbija, Efurosibina. *Language Attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Sociolinguistic Overview*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1994.
- Atechi, Samuel. "The Phonological influence of English on Awing." *English Studies* Vol. 87, 2006, 230-47.
- Atechi Samuel. & Hans Fonka. "Pidgin English as a Lingua Franca in Cameroon." *PEL*. Vol. 4, 2007, 28-39.
- Alobwede D'Epie. "Banning Pidgin English in Cameroon?" *English Today*, 14(1), 1998, 54-60.
- Chia, Emmanuel. "Cameroon home languages," in Kofele, Kale (ed.) *An African Experience in Nation Building: the Bilingual Cameroon Republic since Reunification*, Boulder, Co: West View, 1983, 281-311.
- . "Further Developments in Cameroon Pidgin English," in *Annals of the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences*. Special Edition in Honour of Professor Paul N. Mbangwana, 2009, 39-50.
- Chiatoh, Blasius. "Language, Cultural Identity and the National Question in Cameroon," in Mbangwana, Paul, Kizitus Mpoche & Tenu Mbu

¹ University of Yaounde I, Cameroon.

- (eds). *Language, Literature & Identity*. Gottingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 2006, 44-52.
- Coulmas, F. *Sociolinguistics: The Study of Speaker's Choice*: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Deuber, Dagmar. *Nigerian Pidgin in Lagos: Language Contact, Variation and Change in an African Urban Setting*. London: Battlebridge, 2005.
- Fonlon, Bernard. Review article on *Some Day Be Dey*, by Loreto Todd. *ABBIA*, 1963, 31-33.
- Haugen, Einar. "Linguistics and Language Planning," in W. Bright (ed.). *Sociolinguistics Proceedings of the UCLA Sociolinguistics Conference*, The Hague: Mouton, 1964, 50-71.
- Huber, Magnus. "Ghanaian Pidgin English: Phonology," in Rajend Mes-thrie (ed.) *Varieties of English, Africa, South and South-East Asia*. Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008, 93-101.
- Hyland, K. "Language Attitudes at the Handover: Communication and Identity in 1997 Hong Kong." *English Worldwide*, 18, 1997, 191-210.
- Igboanus, Herbert. "Empowering Nigerian Pidgin: A Challenge for Status Planning?" *World Englishes*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2008, 68-82.
- Kelly, Michael. "Taking Pidgin Seriously." *ABBIA*, (31-33), 1978, 285-96.
- Koenig, Edna, Emmanuel Chia, & Povey, John (eds.) *A Sociolinguistic Profile of Urban Centres in Cameroon*, Los Angeles: Crossroads, Univ. of California, 1983.
- Kembo-Sure & Ogechi, Nathan O. "Language Planning and Reform: An Alternative Language Policy for Kenya," in Kembo-Sure, Sera Mwangi, & Nathan O. Ogechi. Eldoret (eds.) *Language Planning for Development in Africa*. Moi University Press, 2006, 37-53.
- Kouega, Jean-Paul. "Pidgin Facing Death in Cameroon." Terralingua Discussion Paper N° 17, 2001. [www.terralingua.org/Discussion papers.html](http://www.terralingua.org/Discussion_papers.html): 20/07/2008.
- Lai, Mee-Ling. "Language Attitudes of the First Post-colonial Generation in Hong Kong Secondary Schools." *Language in Society*, 34, 2005, 363-88.
- Lasagabaster, David. "Attitudes towards English in the Basque Autonomous Community." *World Englishes*, 22(4), 2003, 585-97.
- Mbangwana, Paul. "The Scope and Role of Pidgin English in Cameroon," in Edna, Koenig et al. (eds.) *The Sociolinguistic Profile of Urban Centres in Cameroon*. Los Angeles: Crossroads Press, 1983, 79-92.

- . "Pidgin English in Cameroon: A Veritable Linguistic Menu," in Echu, George & Obeng, S. (eds.) *Africa Meets Europe: Language Contact in West Africa*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2004, 23-44.
- Mbufong, P.K. "Pidgin English in Anglophone Education," *English Today*, 17(3), 2001, 52-54.
- Nanfah, Gaston. "Exoglossic Language Policy and National Unity in Africa: The Cameroonian Model," in Mbangwana P., Kizitus Mpoche & Mathias Mbuh (eds.) *Language, Literature and Identity*. Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 2006, 129-43.
- Sala Bonaventure. "Aspects of the Cameroon English Sentence," unpublished PhD thesis, University of Yaounde I, 2003.
- . "Writing in Cameroon Pidgin English: Begging the Question," in *English Today* 98, vol. 2, June 2009, 11-17.
- Sala B. & A. Ngefac. "The Depidginisation Process in Cameroon Pidgin English." in *PhiN*, No 36, 2006.
- Sandred, Karl Inge. "A West Africa Creole Language in an Atlantic Perspective: The Origins and Present State of Krio," in Sture Ureland & Iain Clarkson (eds.). *Language Contact Across the North Atlantic*, Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1996, 528-42
- Schneider, Britta. *Linguistic Human Rights and Migrant Languages*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005.
- Schröder, Anne. *Status, Functions, and Prospects of Pidgin English: An Empirical Approach to Language Dynamics in Cameroon*. Tubingen: Narr, 2003.
- Simala, Inyani. "Kiswahili in East African Community Education: Challenges and Opportunities," in Kembo-Sure, Sera Mwangi & Nathan O. Ogechi. Eldoret (eds.). *Language Planning for Development in Africa*. Moi University Press, 2006, 97-110.
- Simo Bobda, Augustin. "Facing some Challenges in Language Planning for Cameroon," in Kembo-Sure, Sera Mwangi, Nathan Ogechi, Eldoret (eds.). *Language Planning for Development in Africa*. Moi University Press, 2006, 71-86.
- . "The Heritage of Professor Paul Nkad Mbangwana," Keynote Paper, in *Annals of the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences*. Special Edition in Honour of Professor Paul N. Mbangwana, 2009, 17-25.

- Tadadjeu, Maurice. "Prospects for Language Planning Studies in Cameroon," in Koenig et al. (eds.). *A Sociolinguistic Profile of Urban Centers in Cameroon*. Los Angeles: Crossroads Press, 1983, 117-24.
- Tarh, Immaculate. "Pidgin English as a Self Assertive Language in Cameroon," unpublished MA dissertation, University of Yaounde I, 2007.
- Tod, Loreto. "English in Cameroon: Education in a Multilingual Society," in Pride, John (ed.) *New Englishes*, Rowley MA: Newbury House, 1982, 119-37.
- Yuka, Constantine. "On English as a Minority Official Language," *Language Attitude and Language Conflict in West Africa*. Ibadan: Enierownfit Pub. 2001, 143-51.
-