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# ***The Implementation in the University of Yaounde I of Cameroon's French-English Official Bilingualism Policy***

## **Introduction**

In 1961, Cameroon adopted French and English as its official languages and ever since the country has been promoting a policy of official language bilingualism. This paper deals with the implementation of this policy in the only officially bilingual of the seven universities of Cameroon *i.e.* the University of Yaounde I. The study is divided into four sections, entitled "Overview of the policy of official bilingualism in Cameroon" (1), "Research design" (2), "Data analysis" (3), "Discussion and recommendations" (4). These are considered in turn.

## **Overview of official bilingualism in Cameroon**

After the First World War, Cameroon, a German colony, was divided into two separate territories which were placed under the administration of the war victors *i.e.* France and Britain. In 1960, French Cameroon obtained its independence and called itself the Republic of Cameroon. As the territory included hundreds of tribes speaking different languages, the first legislators of independent Cameroon decided to adopt French, the ex-colonial master's language, as its official language. In 1961, part of British Cameroon, which had adopted English as its official language, obtained its independence by reuniting with the Republic of Cameroon. The country was renamed the Federal Republic of Cameroon with French and

English as joint official languages. In 1972, the country's name was changed to the United Republic of Cameroon, still with French and English being official languages. Besides, it was pledged that bilingualism in these two languages will be promoted.

Since then, several decisions—couched in the form of ordinances, decrees, circulars, service notes—have been taken by the State to ensure the spread of official bilingualism in the country. A selection of these decisions is mentioned below.

Linguistic centres were created to enable citizens to learn English and French, an activity which was originally restricted to the British Council, the American Cultural Center and the French Cultural Centre. Translation services were offered in all State institutions and a school for the training of translators and interpreters (Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters: ASTI) was opened in Buea. Bilingual secondary schools were created in various localities in the country and the bilingual degree programme was set up in the University of Yaounde and the Higher Teacher Training College (*Ecole Normale Supérieure*—ENS); today this programme is available in all State universities of the country.

English became a subject in all French-medium secondary schools and French the same in all English-medium schools. The second official language became a subject in all public examinations, with Francophone candidates writing an English language paper and Anglophone candidates writing a French language paper.

The *Official Gazette*, which records the country's daily activities, was printed in the two languages and so was the official daily newspaper, *i.e. Cameroon Tribune*. The national radio and TV network (CRTV) alternated programmes in French and English at regular intervals.

Since the year 1996, another battery of measures has been added to the older ones. These measures include the following: an order stipulating that every primary school teacher would henceforth teach every subject on the school syllabus, including the second official language subject, was issued (Order No 21/E/59 of May 15, 1996 organising the Grade One Teacher Certificate examination); a primary school syllabus outlining how each subject, including the second official language subject, would be taught was designed by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC: 2001; Kouega: 2003a).

An order introduces the second official language subject in both the written and oral parts of the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) examinations and its French equivalent, the *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires* (CEP) examinations (Order No 66/C/13 of February 16, 2001). A National Day of Bilingualism in public and private schools in Cameroon was instituted (Decision No 1141/B1/1464/ MINEDUC/IGE/IGP/BIL of October 28, 2002); on this day, Anglophone pupils are expected to communicate in French and Francophone pupils in English. A circular letter instructing primary and nursery education states officials to see that bilingualism is effective in all nursery and primary schools (circular letter No 033/B1/1464/ MINEDUC/IE/IGPBIL of October 14, 2002). A circular letter instructing secondary education states officials to see that the National Bilingualism Day is observed in all schools and that, in addition, Language Clubs (LC), to be called "Club Français" for Anglophone pupils and "English Club" for Francophone pupils, be set up in all schools, that the National Anthem be sung in English and French on alternate days and that a prize be awarded to the best bilingual pupils in each class (Circular letter No B1/1464/MINEDUC/IGE/IGE/GP/BIL of December 2, 2002). A circular letter instructs teacher training college princi-

pals to provide adequate training so that student-teachers be sufficiently equipped to teach the second official language (Circular letter No 009/B1/1464/MINEDUC/IGE/IGP/BIL of April 9, 2003) (see Abang 2006 for an evaluation).

A decision creates a bilingualism watchdog committee in the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for the observation, verification and supervision of the practice of bilingualism in central and external services of the Ministry of Education (Decision No 1230/B1/ 1464/MINEDUC/CAB of June 12, 2003).

It was envisaged that, after these decisions and measures are implemented fully, every Cameroonian citizen would be bilingual in French and English and every pupil who leaves secondary education would have learned enough French and English to be capable of following courses taught in either official language at tertiary education level. Partial evaluations of these measures were provided by a number of researchers, including Constable (1977), Tchoungui (1983), Kouega (1999, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2008) and Sokeng (2006). This study examines how these measures were implemented in the University of Yaounde I.

### **Research design**

This section first presents the setting of the research (2.1). Then it describes the informants selected and the method of data collection adopted for the study (2.2).

#### *Description of the setting: the University of Yaounde I*

From 1962 to 1993, there was only one university in Cameroon, the University of Yaounde. In 1993, six new uni-

versities were created, and in 2008, a seventh university, the University of Maroua, was opened. Of the six universities set up in 1993, one, namely the University of Yaounde I, inherited both the staff and the premises of the former University of Yaounde. Structurally, this university comprises two faculties and three higher education schools. The faculties are known as the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences (FALSS) and the Faculty of Sciences (FS). The three higher institutions attached to this university are the school of education known as the Higher Teacher Training School, the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences and the School of Engineering. These are considered in turn.

The Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences (FALSS for short) which, in 2006, had an intake of 12,416 students (University of Yaounde I, 2003), comprises some 12 departments grouped into language departments including French, English, German, Spanish, French-English Bilingual Studies etc., Social Sciences departments including Linguistics, Sociology, Anthropology, and Arts departments including Archeology, Performing Arts, Plastic Arts etc. The Faculty of Sciences (FS for short) with an intake of 11,623 students in 2006, comprises nine departments, *i.e.* Animal Biology, Biochemistry, Computer sciences, Geology, Inorganic Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Organic Chemistry and Plant Biology.

The Higher Teacher Training School (best known by its French appellation *Ecole Normale Supérieure*–ENS), comprises two campuses. One is located in Yaounde (ENS–Yaounde) and the other in Bambili (ENS–Bambili). In 2006, ENS–Yaounde, which trains both secondary and high school teachers, had an intake of 3,039 students in a total of twelve departments, which could be grouped into four academic categories, *i.e.* Language departments (English, French, Foreign

languages), Social Science departments (geography, history), Science departments (Chemistry, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Physics), and the department of Education. That same year, ENS-Bambili, which trains only Anglophone secondary school teachers in such fields as Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Physics etc., had an intake of 1,662 students.

The Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (best known as *Faculté de Médecine et des Sciences Biomédicales*–FMSB) had an intake of 957 students in 2006; it comprises eleven departments, including Medicine and Traditional Medicine, Physiology/Biochemistry, Surgery, Gynaecology, Pediatrics, Ophthalmology etc.

The School of Engineering (best known as *Ecole Nationale Supérieure Polytechnique*–ENSP) had an intake of 495 students in 2006; it comprises four engineering departments–Civil, Electrics and Telecommunications, Industrial and Mechanics and Computer–and two other departments, *i.e.* Mathematics and Physics, and Valorisation of Research. The total intake of this university for the academic year 2006 was 30,192 students, distributed as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Intake of the University of Yaounde I (2006 academic year)

FALSS	FS	ENS	FMBS	ENSP	Total
12,416	11,623	4,701	957	495	30,192

These students were taught by 696 permanent lecturers,<sup>1</sup> of whom a proportion hardly attaining 30% were Anglophone and the remainder Francophone. In the FALSS for instance, of 170 lecturers, 37 (21.76%) were Anglophones and 88.24% were Francophones. The imbalance observed in the number

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that permanent staff members are assisted by a number of part-time lecturers, who are recruited whenever the need arises.

of Anglophone and Francophone lecturers as shown in Table 2, already signals an imbalance in the use of French and English in this institution..

**Table 2:** Permanent teaching staff of the University of Yaounde I (2006 academic year)

Teaching staff	FALSS	FS	ENS	FMBS	ENSP	Total
Francophones	133	182	N/A <sup>2</sup>	101	54	N/A
Anglophones	37	22	N/A	24	4	N/A
Total	170	204	139	125	58	696

*Informants and method of data collection*

A total of 400 out of the 450 students contacted individually agreed to take part in this study. They were male and female undergraduate students who had been in the University of Yaounde I for at least two semesters and who were in their first, second or third university year. All departments of the university were represented in the sample. There was no need to relate the number of informants from each department to the intake of this department, given the type of exercise these informants were called upon to do, *i.e.* filling in a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered by a team of 90 research students making their first steps in data collection. They were asked to each contact at least five students from different levels (levels one to three) and from different departments of the University of Yaounde I. They were to report on the difficulties they had in getting the right informants, in persuading them to do the exercise and in collecting the filled questionnaires. As the returns came in, they were grouped according to the departments and the levels of the informants

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<sup>2</sup> Not available for the 2006 academic year.



and care was taken for each department and level of study to be included in the sample. A grouping of the returns according to the informants' faculty or school gives the figures presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Number of returns from each faculty or school

FALSS	FS	ENS	ENSP	Total
98	110	82	33	400

The first research students to complete the assignment were then asked to administer the lecturers' questionnaire. The university officials' questionnaire was handled by the researcher himself; in addition, he interviewed non-teaching staff and observed a number of classroom lectures. In all, some 400 copies of the students' questionnaire, 50 of the lecturers' questionnaire (10 lecturers picked out at random from each of the five schools and faculties) and 10 of the high-ranking university officials' questionnaire were returned.

#### *Description of the questionnaires*

As indicated above, three separate questionnaires, which are reproduced in the appendix, were used. Underlying the design of these questionnaires were ideas drawn from Baker (2001), Fishman (1970) and Huallachain (1970) to name only these few researchers on bilingual education. The students' questionnaire (Q1-23) contained some 23 items grouped into 5 sections, with section 1 dealing with the identification of the informants, section 2 with information on language use in the classroom, section 3 with classroom activities, and section 4 with students' life on campus. The lecturers' questionnaire (Q24-34) had some 10 items focusing mainly on language use

in the classroom, and the university officials' questionnaire (Q35-40) was concerned with language use in administration, especially activities such as holding meetings and writing correspondence.

### **Analysis**

This section considers in turn language use in such activities as lecturing, note-taking, answering examination questions and other classroom activities.

#### *Report on courses and the languages of instruction*

Q5-6 asked the informants to indicate the number of courses they had in the first and second semester and the number of these courses that were taught in French and in English. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Number of courses received by the student informants and languages of instruction

	FALSS	FS	ENS	FMBS	ENSP	Total
French	882 (90%)	1,210 (91.67%)	738 (90%)	-	272 (89.18%)	-
English	98 (10%)	110 (8.33%)	82 (10%)	-	33 (10.82%)	-
Number of courses	980 (100%)	1,320 (100%)	820 (100%)	1,540	305 (100%)	4,965

In the FALSS, the informants reported a total 980 courses taught in the first and second semesters of the preceding year, of which 882 (90%) were taught in French and 98 (10%) in English. Actually in this faculty, all students are taught a

course called "Bilingual Training," which is French for Anglophones and English for Francophones. There is one department, the French-English Bilingual Studies Department, where courses are taught in French (50%) and in English (50%). Participant observation reveals that there are a few other departments where one or two Anglophone lecturers occasionally teach in English. The situation in the other faculty and schools is just about the same, *i.e.* 90% of courses taught in French and 10% in English. Strangely enough, the School of Medicine (FMBS) is markedly different; here the 77 informants reported that their courses were taught in French and English, irrespective of the lecturers and that one cannot tell beforehand whether a course was to be taught in French or English. For this reason, they had no "Bilingual Training Course" of the type taught in the main faculties of this university. This finding was not corroborated by participant observation, nor the lecturers themselves. These lecturers were asked to indicate how many of their courses they taught mainly in French (Q26) or mainly in English (Q27) and over 75% reported teaching mainly in French, including Anglophone lecturers. Besides, both the students and the lecturers confirmed that when a course was taught in one language, a summary was not offered in the other language (Q9-10 and Q28-29).

*The language of note-taking, examinations and evaluation*

Q11-12 asked the informants to indicate the language they took down notes in when a course was taught in the other language. Their reports are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Languages in which courses were taught and notes were taken

	FALSS	FS	ENS	FMBS	ENSP	Total
"Lectures in French, notes taken in French" and "Lectures in English, notes taken in English"	98	10	82	58	33	381 (95.25%)
Lectures in one language, notes taken in the other				19		9 (4.75%)
Total	98	10	82	77	33	400 100%

Many informants (381 out of 400, *i.e.* 95.25%) claimed to take down notes in French when courses were taught in French and to take them down in English when they were taught in English. However, there was a meagre 4.75% who claimed that they took down notes in one language say, French, when a course was taught in the other, say, English. In other words, these informants claimed that they translated their notes into the other language as the teachers lectured. This finding came as a surprise to us and the issue will have to be investigated in future research.

Regarding examinations, several items were devised to check in what languages questions were set by teachers (Q13-14) and answered by students (Q15-16). It was reported that all lecturers teaching in English set their examinations in English and those teaching in French set theirs in French. At this point, there is obviously a problem: as the majority of courses are taught in French, so are the majority of examinations set. This means that Anglophone students must make an extra effort to cope with French while comparable effort is not necessarily made by their Francophone counterparts. As for answering examination questions, all Francophone students

reported using French, while Anglophone students reported using either French or English.

Q17 inquired about students' attitude to their score when they wrote their examinations in a language different from the one they were taught in. Most informants reported that they did not have such examinations. However, there are a few departments like Sociology and Biochemistry where a couple of content courses were taught in English and examinations set in both French and English. For such courses, Francophone students claimed to have written their examinations in French and to have been satisfied with their scores. This means that Anglophone teachers are sufficiently bilingual to score scripts written in French. To check these teachers' bilingual competence, Q31 asked them to indicate whether they had difficulty in marking papers written in a language different from the one in which they taught.

**Table 6:** Difficulty in scoring scripts written in the other official language

	FALSS	FS	ENS	FMBS	ENSP	Total
No	10	10	10	10	10	50 (100%)
Yes						
Total	10	10	10	10	10	50 (100%)

As Table 6 shows, all teachers claimed that they had no difficulty marking such papers. However, Francophone teachers reported that Anglophone students' scripts are generally structured poorly, with too many facts lumped together in their scripts. They markedly contrast with Francophone students' scripts, which always include an introduction, a body and a conclusion, with internal transitions linking up the various sec-

tions of the scripts.<sup>3</sup> In fact, by the time Anglophone students graduate, they have already assimilated French ways of doing many things, chief of which is answering examination questions.

*Languages of discussion*

Informants were asked to indicate the languages in which Francophone students discussed a course taught in French with their Anglophone classmates (Q18) and the language in which they discussed a course taught in English with Anglophone classmates (Q19). The returns revealed two interesting results. First, when the course discussed was English language, the discussion was reported to be in English. When on the contrary, the course dealt with subject matter like the cell in Biology or the family in Sociology, the language of discussion was French instead. This switch to French seems to show that Francophones cannot discuss content subjects in English whereas Anglophones can discuss them in French with relative ease. This finding corroborates previous findings, *i.e.* that Anglophones in Cameroon are proportionately more competent in French than Francophones are in English.

Q20 asked the informants to indicate the language in which notices were generally written in their Departments or Schools, and the vast majority said it was French. The same finding was confirmed by both Anglophone and Francophone teachers (Q32), who reported that they usually wrote notices intended for students in French; it was also corroborated by university officials (Q37) who said that notices intended for the

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<sup>3</sup> There is some truth in this claim: generally when Anglophone and Francophone students sit in the same classroom to write a given paper in, say, three hours, Anglophone students usually submit their scripts one to two hours before their Francophone counterparts.

staff or students were generally written in French. Informants also reported that interactions between the staff of their Departments or Schools and the students (Q21-22) were generally in French. Participant observation revealed that when Anglophone students, lecturers or officials are exclusively among themselves, they speak English and occasionally Pidgin English.

To round off, students (Q23), teachers (Q34) and officials (Q40) were asked to indicate what language was dominant on campus and they all answered French.

### **Discussion and recommendations**

From the analysis of students', lecturers' and university officials' questionnaires, it can be concluded that Cameroon's policy of French-English official bilingualism is not implemented in the University of Yaounde I. This claim can be buttressed by three points. First, the bulk of courses in this university are taught in French; in the Faculty of Arts for example, out of the 980 courses the informants reported to have been taught, only 98 courses (10%) were taught in English. Secondly, students do not make any effort to use their two official languages. They are free to answer examination questions in the language of their choice, which is generally French for Francophones and English for Anglophones. They interact among themselves in French, even when discussing the few content courses taught in English and they interact with university staff in French. Thirdly, the proportion of Anglophone lecturers in the university is very low; in the Faculty of Arts for example, there were only 37 Anglophone lecturers (21.76%) out of a total of 170, and in the Faculty this proportion was even much lower, *i.e.* 22 (12.09%) out of 182. In the class-

room, the few Anglophone lecturers available tend to teach mainly in French, and they hardly give summaries of their lectures in English; they set examination questions in French, occasionally in English and they mark scripts in both French and English. After all, they claim to have no difficulty in marking scripts in one of the official language (Q31). The notices the lecturers write are usually in French and they generally interact among themselves in French, and occasionally in English or Pidgin English.

Fourthly, university officials report that the majority of documents in their offices were in French and that they addressed colleagues and clerks at meetings in French; notices intended for the staff or students were usually in French and incoming and outgoing correspondence was mainly in French. In short, the dominant language on campus was French while English was used only occasionally.

From this analysis, it is evident that the implementation of Cameroon's French-English bilingualism policy leaves much to be desired, and what this policy has been succeeding in doing has been making Anglophones officially bilingual, with Francophones remaining unofficially monolingual in French. To overcome this problem and ensure that Francophones learn as much English as Anglophones learn French, a number of challenging measures need to be taken. At a micro-level, the number of Anglophone lecturers should be increased and the number of content courses to be taught in English in a year should be made known. At a macro-level, a language board has to be set up in the country. Such a board would be responsible for the development of bilingualism, the promotion of bilingual education and the evaluation of bilingual proficiency in the country. Actually, this board should be responsible for all language issues in the country, including the



designing and implementation of the country's language policy on the one hand, and the development of the national language and the ancestral languages on the other.

It is senseless to talk of bilingualism when no provisions for bilingual proficiency evaluation and reward are made. Ideally, all workers should be subjected to an annual achievement test which would group them into at least four scales, labelled B1, B2, B3, B4 etc.: B1 for beginners still learning the other official language, B2 for elementary learners who can potentially communicate in the other official language, though with some difficulty, B3 for intermediate learners who can potentially compete in what Baker (2001: 31) calls real communicative situations (in a shop, at home, at work, during leisure activity), with a First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) holder in the other official language sub-system of education, and B4 for advanced learners who can potentially compete with a Form Two pupil in the other official language sub-system of education etc.

This classification scale should be supported by a corresponding reward scheme, with a specific allowance granted to workers who have unambiguously attained a given level of bilingual competence. To be specific, there should be a compensation for a Faculty member who can teach a content subject and assess students' work bilingually. Non-teaching staff should be capable of working bilingually and their appointments to duty posts should take into account their bilingual competence.

At the level of the country as a whole, there should be a compensating scheme for people who can work bilingually. For example, a medical doctor who can consult bilingually should be given an incentive. If Government was serious about its official bilingualism policy, it would have made sure

the few Cameroonians who can effectively work bilingually at present have a special treatment in the public service, especially in matters of appointments and promotions. It would have made sure that those posts where workers are in contact with the public are occupied exclusively by bilinguals. In short, official bilingualism is not a wish, as successive governments of Cameroon had been thinking; it is a huge investment which should be capable of yielding dividends reflected in workers' take home pay.

### **Conclusion**

This study, which focuses on language use at the University of Yaounde I, shows among other things that Cameroon's French-English official bilingualism policy is still in infancy in this institution which is officially referred to as the only bilingual university of Cameroon. Most courses in this university are taught in French, except English language courses, and examinations are set and written in French. Besides, communication on campus both spoken and written, is mainly in French. This practice places a heavy burden on Anglophones who, to be able to operate fully, must learn French while their Francophone counterparts need not learn English. For official bilingualism to develop in this university, there is a need for the government to set up an incentive scheme which gives special privileges to students and staff who have managed to attain specific levels of bilingual competence.

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## Appendix

### QUESTIONNAIRE (Students)

I am a language student reading in the Faculty of Letters, University of Yaounde I. I am interested in examining the use of French and English in your university. Could you help me by answering the questions below. As my findings are totally dependent on your answers, I will be grateful if you could be as accurate as possible.

#### IDENTIFICATION

1.	Are you a holder of the "Baccalauréat", GCE A' Level or "Capacité en droit"?
2.	What is your faculty/school called? What is your department called?
3.	How many departments are there in your faculty today?
4.	What is your present level of study (Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3?)

#### LANGUAGE USE IN THE CLASSROOM

5.	How many (different) courses did you have in both the first and second semester last year?
6.	How many of these courses were taught in French? How many were taught in English?
7.	How many lecturers taught you last year?
8.	How many of these lecturers taught in English? How many of them taught in French?
9.	When a teacher taught in French, did he summarise what he said in English?
10.	When a teacher taught in English, did he summarise what he said in French?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

11.	When a teacher taught in English, in what language did you take down your notes?
12.	When a teacher taught in French, in what language did you take down your notes?
13.	When a teacher taught in English, in what language did she/he set examination questions?
14.	When a teacher taught in French, in what language did she/he set examination questions?
15.	When examinations were set in English, in what language did you write these examinations?
16.	When examinations were set in French, in what language did you write these examinations?
17.	Were you generally satisfied about your performance in tests marked by teachers who taught in a different language?
18.	When you had to discuss a course taught in French with an Anglophone classmate, in what language did you exchange ideas?
19.	When you had to discuss a course taught in English with an Anglophone classmate, in what language did you exchange ideas?

LIFE ON CAMPUS

20.	Consider the notices that were put up in your department, faculty or university. In what language were they generally written?
21.	In what language(s) did you generally interact with the staff of your department, faculty or university?
22.	In what language(s) did the staff of your department, faculty or school interact with students
23.	In a nutshell, what was the dominant language used on the university campus.

**QUESTIONNAIRE (Teachers)**

I am a language student reading in the Faculty of Letters, University of Yaounde I. I am interested in examining the use of French and English in your university. Could you help me by answering the questions below. As my findings are totally dependent on your answers, I will be grateful if you could be as accurate as possible.

24.	How many courses did you teach in this faculty last year?
25.	What was the common language you used when teaching a course?
26.	How many courses did you teach mainly in French?
27.	How many courses did you teach mainly in English?
28.	When you taught in French, did you summarise what you said in English?
29.	When you taught in English, did you summarise what you said in French?
30.	In what language did you set your examination questions?
31.	When a student wrote the examinations in a language different from the one you used in teaching, did you have any difficulty in marking papers?
32.	When you had notices to put up in your department, in what language did you usually write them?
33.	In what languages did lecturers interact among themselves?
34.	In a nutshell, what was the dominant language used by lecturers on the university campus?

**QUESTIONNAIRE (Officials)**

I am a language student reading in the Faculty of Letters, University of Yaounde I. I am interested in examining the use of French and English in your university. Could you help me by answering the questions below. As my findings are totally dependent on your answers, I will be grateful if you could be as accurate as possible.

35.	Consider the documents that were in your office last year. In what language were the majority of these documents written?
36.	In what language did you address colleagues and clerks at meeting?
37.	In what language did you write notices intended for the staff or students?
38.	In what language did you write most outgoing correspondence?
39.	In what language was written the majority of the incoming correspondence you receive?
40.	In a nutshell, what was the dominant language you used to administer?

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