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# ***Attitudes of Professional Users of English towards Cameroon English Accent***

## **Introduction**

In spite of the numerous dehumanizing dimensions of colonialism (such as the invasion and total control of the political, economic and sociocultural lives of the colonized nations and the upsetting of the minds and cosmic vision of the people), the adoption, adaptation and sharing of ownership of colonial languages is one of the things that should at least be consoling to postcolonial nations. As a result of colonialism, the linguistic map of the colonized nations has expanded, given that colonial languages, such as English, French, Spanish and Portuguese have gained admission into the linguistic spectrum of these new nations. Moreover, most of these languages have been adopted, adapted and appropriated according to local needs (Schneider 2007 and Mbangwana 2008) and are now “cooperating” with indigenous languages to express the culture, cosmic vision and identity of the different postcolonial contexts where they are in use.

The English language is one of the colonial legacies that have planted their roots very deeply into postcolonial settings (see, for instance, Kachru 1986, Mufwene 2001, Schneider 2007 and Ngefac 2008). In these postcolonial contexts, the language has “grown local roots” (Schneider: 2007 2) according to their specific ecological and sociocultural realities (Kachru 1986 & Mufwene 2001). As a result, each community where the language is used now has its own type of English. For instance, one can identify in literature such Englishes as

Indian English, Singaporean English, Kenyan English, Tanzanian English, Nigerian English, Ghanaian English and Cameroon English. Each of these Englishes has distinctive phonological, syntactic, lexico-semantic and morphological peculiarities that are conditioned by the contextual realities of the various places where the language is used.

As exemplified in (3) below, the journey of the new Englishes to maturation has witnessed fierce resistance from their enemies. For instance, as early as 1968, Prator considered any attempt to promote indigenized varieties of English in postcolonial contexts as heretical. In the opinion of Chevillet (1999), features of indigenized Englishes are simply havoc that has been wreaked on Standard English, whatever that means in his opinion. Unlike what purists and cynics think about indigenized Englishes, friends of these postcolonial Englishes (Kachru: 1985, 1986, 1992; Mufwene: 1997 and Schneider: 2007) have adopted an accommodating attitude towards them, which justifies why the area has become a vibrant domain of current linguistic enquiry. Celebrated international journals that are interested in the way the language has been given context-specific orientation in different parts of the world now abound (see, for instance, *World Englishes*, *English World-Wide* and *English Today*). In addition, there is even an association of World Englishes that annually brings together scholars of the domain from different corners of the planet. This is a clear indication that World Englishes do not have only contestants; there are scholars who have passionately and vigorously embarked on the study, teaching, promotion and projection of these indigenized Englishes. In recent years, these scholars of World Englishes, through their intellectual activities, especially through conferences, lectures and publications, have influenced the attitudes of many people towards

indigenized Englishes. In Cameroon, for instance, the number of purists who insist on traditional native English norms is on a significant and steady decrease. Most English linguistics scholars in this postcolonial context have already reoriented their research visions and goals. Instead of spending time and energy investigating whether or not Cameroonians observe the rules of the language according to Standard British English (SBE) norms, many Cameroonian researchers, though not all, are now more concerned with the description of the context-specific peculiarities of the language, at different linguistic levels (see Bobda: 2000 a, b, c; Anchimbe: 2006; Mbangwana: 2008; Ngefac: 2008 a, b; Mbangwana and Sala: 2009).

It is therefore important to investigate what Cameroonians think about their own English, especially at the level of accent, after all is said and done. Is the passionate promotion of SBE pronunciation norms in the Cameroonian classroom having any significant influence on the way Cameroonians perceive their indigenized English accent? Are the linguistic philosophies of purists and cynics prevailing over those of pragmatists? Are efforts towards projecting Cameroon English as a self-contained system of communication that is rooted in the ecological and sociocultural realities of Cameroon having any significant impact on the attitudes of the speakers towards this new English? This paper investigates the various approaches of professional users of English who are active agents in the attainment of the government's goal of promoting SBE pronunciation norms in Cameroon. These are English Language teachers, pedagogic inspectors and journalists. The study reveals whether their attitudes as individuals reflect the official goal of promoting SBE norms in the postcolonial context.

### **World Englishes as areas of linguistic inquiry**

If this study had been conducted in the 1960s, the goal would have been to investigate attitudes towards the English accent, and not necessarily towards a particular indigenized accent, as it is the case in this study. The passing of time made it possible for the English language that was transported from traditional native English countries and transplanted into colonial settings to evolve according to the contextual realities of those places. Scholars from around the world have vigorously and passionately embarked on describing the way this language has been adopted and adapted in different parts of the world (Platt et al.: 1984; Kachru: 1985, 1986, 1992; Gradol: 1997; Mufwene: 2001; Crystal: 1997 ; Schneider: 2007). Linguists have equally postulated different models to capture and depict the fact that the language has transcended many frontiers, “grown local roots” (Schneider: 2007 2) in different postcolonial contexts and is now serving as the native language of many people outside traditional native English countries.

The twists and turns the language has undergone in different ecological settings have been described in literature as nativisation, indigenization and acculturalisation (Kachru: 1986; Mufwene: 2001; Schneider: 2007). The implication is that English now has native speakers with different speech patterns in contexts where the language has been acculturalized. Though some scholars find it difficult to accept this unprecedented phenomenon, the disintegration of the hegemony of English into diverse forms according to the pragmatic and sociocultural realities of the different places where the language has been appropriated is now an unquestionable reality. Each postcolonial setting where English was transplanted

now has its own English with linguistic peculiarities significantly different from those of traditional native Englishes. For instance, one can find in the literature on this new domain of linguistic inquiry such Englishes as Indian English, Singaporean English, Kenyan English, Ghanaian English, Cameroon English and Nigerian English. Literature on these Englishes abound. The linguistic peculiarities of each of the Englishes at each linguistic level are context-specific and are significant bearers of the flags of their respective contexts.

As a vibrant and attractive area of linguistic inquiry that has come to stay, scientific journals of high international reputation abound and are dedicated to the publishing of research results on the domain. All of such journals cannot be mentioned here because of space limitation, but very reputable journals such as *World Englishes*, *English World-Wide* and *English Today* beg to be mentioned. The high quality of papers published in these journals, the caliber of scholars publishing in the journals, the type of linguistic debates raised in them and the number of papers submitted each day for evaluation and possible publication justify the high reputation of these journals and the vibrant nature of this research area. It is also worth mentioning that World Englishes as a fertile area of linguistic inquiry that has surfaced, and is amazingly prevailing, now has insightful theoretical frameworks and models that are sanctioning research in the domain (see, for instance, Braj B. Kachru's 1985 three concentric model, Tom McArthur's 1998 wheel-like circle and Edgar Schneider's 2007 dynamic model). The existence of these models and theoretical frameworks further indicates that World Englishes is now a well-established area of linguistic inquiry.

### **Cameroon English as one of the World Englishes**

Before research works from Cameroonian scholars of World Englishes inundated celebrated scientific journals and publishing houses around the world, many people used to believe that Cameroon was only a French-speaking country, given especially the fact that French is more dominant in Cameroon than English. But thanks to these research works (see, for instance, Mbangwana: 1987; Bobda: 2004; Kouega: 1999; Anchimbe: 2006; Ngefac: 2008; Mbangwana & Sala: 2009), Cameroon English is unquestionably recognized as one of the World Englishes (see Tom Arthur's 1998 wheel-like model and Edgar Schneider's 2007 dynamic model). This postcolonial English displays context-specific peculiarities at all linguistic levels significantly varying from traditional native Englishes. At the level of phonology, the concern of this investigation, previous studies have demonstrated that this New English is characterised by a heavy simplification of consonant clusters, a devoicing of final voiced consonants, the reduction of long sounds to short ones, the monophthongisation of diphthongs and stress and intonation patterns that are different from those of traditional native Englishes. These linguistic peculiarities are the outcome of the influence of the sociocultural, pragmatic and multilingual realities of Cameroon; they indicate that the language has "grown local roots" according to local realities, as postulated in Schneider (2007). It should be noted that Cameroon displays many contextual realities that have significantly shaped and moulded what is today referred to as Cameroon English. One of such dimensions of local realities includes the heavy multilingual nature of the country. Interestingly, besides English and French as the country's official languages, Kamtok or Cameroon Pidgin Eng-

lish as a major *lingua franca* that transcends many social boundaries, Camfranglais as the language of younger speakers in Francophone urban towns, Mbokotok as the language of the rustics, there exist approximately 285 indigenous Cameroonian languages. This complex multilingual landscape of Cameroon and other pragmatic realities have given birth to what is called Cameroon English.

### **Enemies and friends of World Englishes**

The existence of context-specific Englishes or World Englishes implies a marked deviation from the norms observed in traditional native English contexts. Some people see the emergence of English as a global language with context-specific norms as a blessing, but others see it as a tendency that must be resisted at all costs. One of the first scholars who openly expressed his indignation and determination to combat this unprecedented phenomenon is Prator (1968). He declared, without mincing words, that

the heretical tenet I feel I must take exception to is the idea that it is best, in a country where English is not spoken natively but is widely used as the medium of instruction, to set up the local variety of English as the ultimate model to be imitated by those learning the language. (Prator: 1968 459)

In his opinion, traditional native English norms should be the ultimate goal of every user of English around the world, irrespective of the ecological and sociocultural realities that sanction usage in different parts of the world where the language is used.

In spite of Kachru's (1986) open condemnation of such an attitude that imposes norms of usage on postcolonial

speakers, Chevillet (1999: 33), like Prator, qualifies indigenized Englishes as varieties that lack any logical structural pattern. In his opinion,

[f]oreigners often wreak havoc on the stress pattern of English polysyllables, they stress personal pronouns which shouldn't be emphasised, and they use strong forms instead of weak forms, thereby jeopardising communication. Should such a state of things be institutionalised or codified? (Chevillet : 1999 33)

This negative attitude towards indigenized Englishes and their speakers have a number of implications (Ngefac: 2008a). First, who is a "foreigner" in the reasoning of Chevillet? It should be noted that even an American or a Canadian speaker is a foreigner in, say, Britain and Nigeria and vice versa. Second, if we assume that "foreigner," in the opinion of Chevillet, refers to speakers of the New Englishes, then he is in a way perpetuating the dichotomy of "us versus them"—a dichotomy which is very much condemned by those who acknowledge the status of English as a global language. Kachru and Nelson (1996: 79) have cautioned that the dichotomy of "native" and "non-native" speakers, or "us versus them," creates attitudinal problems as people are likely to take "non-native" or "foreign" as less worthy "in the sense, for example, that coming in a race is not as good as coming in first" (Kachru & Nelson: 1996 79). Third, Chevillet tends to assume that the principal criterion to codify or standardise a variety of a language is the degree of its intelligibility to speakers of other varieties. In fact, among the factors that have been identified in the literature as necessary factors for a variety of a language to be standardised, intelligibility to speakers of other varieties is not even one of them (see, for instance, Kachru: 1986 and Bobda: 1994).

Surprisingly, some of the great enemies of indigenized Englishes are local speakers themselves. Oji (n. d.), a scholar from an indigenized context, argues that

[t]he death-knell of Nigerian English should be sounded *loud and clear* as it has never existed, does not exist now, and will never see the light [sic] of day. (Oji: n. d., quoted in Jibril: 1987 47)

Such an attitude expressed by Oji is very similar to the English Language Teaching policy in many contexts where indigenized Englishes are spoken. In such contexts, efforts are being made to project indigenized Englishes as complete systems of communication, but Inner Circle norms continue to be prioritized. In Cameroon, for instance, Bobda declares that

[w]hile acknowledging the legitimate emergence of an autonomous variety of English in Cameroon, I believe that we are still, in many ways, dependent upon British and American norms. Our educational and professional successes are still dependent on these norms. (Bobda: 2002v)

Interestingly, in spite of the fact that Cameroon is one of the postcolonial contexts where a new English has emerged as one of the native languages of the people, Standard British English (SBE) norms continue to be the target in the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry, and Cameroon English (CamE) educated features that reflect the contextual realities of this postcolonial setting continue to be treated with an attitude of rejection and indignation. This implies that language planners and decision makers who insist on SBE norms are under the addiction of what Bokamba (2007 41) calls a “ukolonia” tendency. This is a phenomenon whereby in postcolonial settings people whose minds have been upset by colonial indoctrination tend to believe that everything that has an African orientation, including indigenized English and African lan-

guages, is inferior, and that the African Dream must necessarily be rooted in Western constructs to be meaningful.

In spite of the negative attitudes underscored above, there are many people who have adopted an accommodating attitude towards postcolonial Englishes. Kachru (1986; 1992) has actually championed the struggle for the identification, acceptability and promotion of context-specific Englishes. In fact, he insists that “it is indeed essential to recognise that World Englishes represent certain linguistic, cultural and pragmatic realities and pluralism, and that pluralism is now an integral part of World Englishes and literatures written in Englishes” (Kachru: 1992 2). Following this line of thought, Kachru (1986 103) considers Prator’s (1968) attitude as “sinful.” He accuses Prator of “seven attitudinal sins” and maintains that such a view ignores the inevitable processes of acculturation and indigenization which the English language has undergone in Third World countries (Kachru: 1986 103). He further argues that “the New Englishes have become the unavoidable companions of most, if not all, Outer Circle speakers of English” (Kachru: 1986 117). Kachru and Nelson (1996: 89) equally maintain that

[i]f a typical American has no wish to speak like or be labelled as a British user of English, why should a Nigerian, an Indian or a Singaporean user feel any differently? (Kachru & Nelson : 1996 89)

It is along the same line of argument raised by Kachru and Nelson (1996 89) that Tommy T. B. Koh, a one-time Singaporean Permanent Secretary to the UN thinks that

[w]hen one is abroad, in a bus or train or airplane and when one overhears someone speaking, one can immediately say this is someone from Malaysia or Singapore: and I should hope when I’m speaking abroad, my countrymen will have no problem recognising that I am a Singaporean. (Koh, quoted in Foley 1988 7f)

Like other friends of these indigenized Englishes, Achebe (1965: 29f) thinks that “[t]he price a world language [like English] must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use,” and Todd holds that the world Englishes “keep alive a world view that might otherwise have disappeared” (Todd: 1999: 30).

One can therefore maintain that the journey of the world Englishes from birth to maturation has not been a straightforward one; but all the same, they have so far transcended every resistance from their enemies to emerge as powerful forces to reckon with thanks to the accommodating attitude of their friends. For instance, according to cynics like Prator (1968) and Chevillet (1999), features of these Englishes pose a serious threat to the health of Standard English, whatever that means. But pragmatists like Achebe (1965), Kachru (1986, 1992), Kachru and Nelson (1996), Todd (1999), Mufwene (2001) and Schneider (2000; 2007) have dedicated a significant portion of their energy to describe, defend and promote these indigenized Englishes as self-contained systems of communication which are actually expressing the worldview, culture and cosmic vision of their speakers.

### **On attitudes of professional users of English towards Cameroon English accent**

Given that professional users of English (English Language teachers, pedagogic inspectors and journalists) are the main government agents in the promotion of traditional native English in Cameroon, this study sets out to investigate whether they perceive phonological features of this indigenized English as natural outcomes of the twists and turns the language has undergone in Cameroon, or whether they perceive them

as aspects that must be discouraged at all costs for a traditional native English accent to prevail. This study actually investigates the way the three categories of speakers perceive their own accent vis-à-vis Cameroon English accent, their attitudes towards Cameroonians who strive to approximate a traditional native English accent, their opinions on whether Cameroon English accent should be promoted or not and their preferred model of English pronunciation in the Cameroonian classroom. In order to investigate the attitudes of professional users of English towards Cameroon English accent, twenty informants from each of the categories of speakers were administered a set of questionnaires. The frequency of each of their responses was calculated and expressed as a percentage. The results were then correlated with the three categories of speakers under study, as presented below.

As concerns the way the three categories of speakers perceived their own accent vis-à-vis Cameroon English accent, the following table presents what the informants think about their own accent.

**Table 1:** The informants' self-evaluation of their own accent vis-à-vis Cameroon English accent

| Responses                         | Percentage  |                     |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
|                                   | Journalists | Teachers of English | Pedagogic inspectors of English |
| Very different from my own accent | 30          | 0                   | 0                               |
| Very similar to my own accent     | 10          | 30                  | 5                               |
| Different from my own accent      | 30          | 5                   | 10                              |
| Similar to my own accent          | 20          | 50                  | 30                              |
| I don't know                      | 10          | 15                  | 55                              |

As the above table shows, no pedagogic inspector of English and no teacher of English said that their own accent is very

different from Cameroon English accent; and only 30 % of journalists claimed that their own accent is very different. Interestingly, up to 50 % of teachers of English, 30 % of pedagogic inspectors of English and 20 % of journalists, maintained, without any complex, that their own accent is similar to that of Cameroon English. A substantial number of these categories of speakers even asserted with the intensifier “very” how similar their own accent is to that of Cameroon English.

With regard to the attitudes of the three categories of speakers towards speakers who strive to neutralise their local accent to approximate that of an Inner Circle English, interesting results were equally obtained, as shown below in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Informants' attitudes towards those who strive to neutralise their local accent to approximate that of an Inner Circle English

| Responses             | Percentage  |                     |                                 |
|-----------------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
|                       | Journalists | Teachers of English | Pedagogic inspectors of English |
| I admire them         | 15          | 10                  | 15                              |
| I feel sorry for them | 0           | 10                  | 0                               |
| I am indifferent      | 85          | 80                  | 85                              |

The table shows that only 15 % of journalists and pedagogic inspectors of English and only 10 % of teachers of English indicated that they admire Cameroonians who neutralise their local accent and approximate that of an Inner Circle English. Surprisingly and interestingly, 10 of teachers of English even feel sorry for Cameroonians who speak with a traditional native English accent. Most interestingly, as high as 85 % of journalists, 80 % of teachers of English and 85 % of pedagogic inspectors of English are indifferent to Cameroonians who approximate an Inner Circle English accent.

The three categories of speakers also expressed their opinions on whether Cameroon English accent should be promoted. Table 3 below presents their vote on whether the local accent should be promoted or not.

**Table 3:** Informants' opinion on whether Cameroon English accent should be promoted or not

| Responses | Percentage  |                     |                                 |
|-----------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
|           | Journalists | Teachers of English | Pedagogic inspectors of English |
| Yes       | 80          | 100                 | 95                              |
| No        | 20          | 0                   | 5                               |

As can be seen from the table, the vote is overwhelmingly in favour of the promotion of indigenized Cameroon English accent, given that as high as 80 % of journalists, 100 % of teachers of English and 95 % of pedagogic inspectors of English accepted that it should be promoted.

As concerns the model of English accent the three categories of speakers prefer for the Cameroonian ELT classroom, paradoxically, the preferences of most of them tend to contrast with the generally positive attitude they show towards their local accent. Table 4 below shows the preferences of the three categories of speakers.

**Table 4:** The informants' preferred model of English pronunciation in ELT in Cameroon

| Preferred models of accent | Percentage  |                     |                                 |
|----------------------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
|                            | Journalists | Teachers of English | Pedagogic inspectors of English |
| CamE accent                | 15          | 50                  | 5                               |
| BrE accent                 | 70          | 30                  | 80                              |
| CamE and BrE accent        | 15          | 20                  | 15                              |

The data displayed in this table shows a significantly different attitude from the ones previously presented. Surprisingly, as

high as 70 % of journalists and 80 % of pedagogic inspectors prefer the British English accent in ELT in Cameroon, which contrasts sharply with their very positive attitudes towards their local accent, previously presented. The speakers who continue to show a positive attitude towards the local accent, by recommending it for ELT in Cameroon, are teachers of English. As much as 50 % of this category of speakers recommend indigenized Cameroon English accent in ELT in Cameroon and another 20 % recommend both British and Cameroon English accents.

**Conclusion: sociolinguistic and pedagogic implications**

The informants' self-evaluation of their own English accent, their attitudes towards Cameroonians who strive to approximate an Inner English accent, their opinions on whether Cameroon English accent should be promoted or not and their preferred model of English accent in the Cameroonian ELT classroom have multidimensional sociolinguistic and pedagogic implications. As concerns the speakers' self-evaluation of their own English accent, the fact that up to 30 % of journalists, 80 % of teachers of English and 35 % of pedagogic inspectors of English either said their own accent is similar or very similar to Cameroon English accent implies that this indigenized English is gaining ground. A few years ago, who would have expected those who have the responsibility of promoting "good" English in Cameroon to testify without any complex that their own English is indigenized? The fact that, as English language professionals, they do not find anything wrong identifying their own English as Cameroon English implies that there is a disconnection between the government's policy of targeting British English accent and the accent these

English language professionals wish to be associated with. The fact that a few informants (30 % of journalists) claimed however that their own accent is “very different” from Cameroon English accent, in spite of the obvious Cameroonianisms that characterised their speech, shows the overall confusion that is typical of the English language policy in Cameroon. It should be noted that it is presumed that British English pronunciation is being taught in the ELT classroom; but previous studies on the phonology of Cameroon English (see Masanga 1983, Mbangwana 1987, Kouega 1991, Bobda 1994 and Ngefac 2008) show that most speakers of this new English, irrespective of level of education, social status and other social factors, deviate significantly from traditional native Englishes.

As concerns the informants’ attitude towards Cameroonians who approximate an Inner Circle accent, the fact that a majority of the informants (85 % of journalists and pedagogic inspectors and 80 % of teachers of English) tend to be indifferent implies that the passion for traditional native English norms is gradually giving way to a new type of passion, certainly the one that should be built on local constructs. One should normally expect professional users of English who have the task of carrying out the official duty of promoting British English in Cameroon to be very positive towards speakers who strive to approximate the variety they are promoting. But their indifference is suggestive of the fact that their involvement in the promotion of an Inner Circle English accent in Cameroon is only the reflection of the government’s policy. The fact that most of them (70 % of journalists, 30 % of teachers of English and 80 % of pedagogic inspectors of English) declared that British English accent should be the preferred model of pronunciation in the Cameroonian classroom is seen only as an attempt to protect and justify their jobs as English

language professionals who are expected to promote good English in Cameroon. If it was sincerely their wish that an Inner Circle English accent should be promoted in Cameroon, there is no reason why they should be indifferent to those who strive to approximate it.

The fact that as much as 80 % of journalists, 100 % of teachers of English and 95 % of pedagogic inspectors are of the opinion that Cameroon English accent should be promoted, even though most of them rather recommend an Inner Circle English accent in the classroom, implies that they hold their local English accent in a high esteem and feel more attached to it than to the variety they called upon to promote. But one would want to ask why most of the informants wish that Cameroon English accent should be promoted, but rather want an Inner Circle English accent to be the target in the classroom. What difference does it make if the local English accent is promoted in Cameroon, but not in the classroom? As earlier said, the informants are simply complying with the government's expectations and goals, which are not necessarily theirs. It can therefore be maintained that, generally speaking, the informants of this study showed a positive and accommodating attitude towards Cameroon English accent.

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