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The Dilemma of the Teacher and the Learner of English in the Non-Native English Classroom: the Case of Cameroon

1. Introduction¹

The spread of English across the globe has raised commonplace questions such as “which English, whose English?” etc. It is not new to point out that, among the sea of English varieties in the world, only BrE and AmE have held sway in terms of standards and codification. They are the most documented varieties so far. These two varieties, often referred to as the two main native varieties, are seen by many as models for other varieties to look up to. This view is, however, not shared by all, who think that seeing the native speaker as the sole norm provider for the whole English-speaking world will be ignoring the multilingual and multicultural realities of the non-native speaking environment. Most of the non-native speakers who now show a favourable attitude towards their own forms see the imposition of the native model on them as a threat to what serves as a marker of their identity. This debate therefore, is centred on the problems and prospects as well as the motivation of accepting native standards in non-native speaking settings. Geeraerts (2003) identifies two models in which the trends outlined above are situated, respectively the romantic and the rationalist models. The proponents of the romantic model hold that English as a world language should remain a monolith. To them, international intelligibility will be guaranteed if a single standard is maintained both in the native and non-native speaking environments. Scholars like Quirk, Chevillet, Gimson, etc., defend this thesis.

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Diametrically opposed to this view is Braj Kachru who published a series of articles during the last years of the twentieth century (1994, 1995, 1996, etc.), raising a myriad of concerns about this debate on standards. Anne Pakir shares the concerns raised by Kachru and goes further to reiterate two lessons of the global spread of English when she contends: "we have to place the English language in its regional and social context, and 'to know' in the classical sense, the multi-identities and faces of such a language" and second, "we have to accept the inevitable "pluricentricity" of English, rather than carrying on with the tradition that there can only be a duo-centricity (viz., the British or the American centres of linguistic hegemony)" (Pakir 1997: 172).

When we talk of standards, it is mainly in respect of spoken English that the fear is often expressed that a non-native variety may become unintelligible to the rest of the English-speaking world. This is all the more so because the spread of English varieties around the world has developed many statuses and functions. The speakers in the new English environments have twisted the language or nativised it to suit their sociolinguistic realities against the wish of those who wish to see it remain a monolith. Bamgbose identifies three types of nativisation, namely, pragmatic, creative and linguistic nativisation (1998: 5-7). Of these three types, he observes that linguistic nativisation stands less chances of being tolerated. He blames this on the lack of codification. "One of the major factors militating against the emergence of endo-normative standards in non-native Englishes is precisely the dearth of codification." The debate on the acceptance of non-native English norms in non-native settings has attracted the sustained attention of scholars across the globe. Bamgbose reports a scene in 1984, at the conference held in London to mark the 50th anniversary of the British Council, where Lord Randolph Quirk and Professor Braj Kachru were engaged in what he calls a "battle royal on Standard English as a norm for the English-using world" (1998: 1). Quirk argued in favour of a global standard, which he thought will guarantee international intelligibility, while Kachru argued in favour of the legitimacy and equality of Englishes in the three concentric circles. To Kachru, English being an international language, it cannot be seen as the sole property of na-

tive speakers who will be the sole norm setters. Simo Bobda observes that the 1980s and 1990s especially have seen countless formal and informal academic and non-academic debates on the model to aspire to in non-native English-using communities (2000: 54-55). He cites a case in Cameroon where in 1989, the Cameroonian television series *English With a Difference* provoked long passionate arguments for and against the emulation of the native English model in Cameroon, namely in pronunciation. In the same vein, Simo Bobda reports on how in South Africa, the increasing divergence of South African Black English (SABE) from the native English norms occasioned the organisation at the University of Pretoria of a seminar on "Appropriating English in Democratic South Africa." The debate was centred on whether stable deviations in SABE should be accepted as alternative norms. The debate featured, on the "con" side, Professor Peter Tittlestead, and Professor Christa van der Walt on the "pro" side. Despite the consensus by a majority of these scholars that it is unrealistic to impose native norms in non-native environments, some conservatives still think that British and American Englishes should be used as norms in these New English settings.

Quirk strongly believes that Native English norms should be maintained in non-native areas if we do not want to see English degenerate to mutually unintelligible varieties. Talking about falling standards in non-native areas, he contends: "there is the need for native teacher's support and the need for non-native teachers to be in constant touch with the native language" (1990: 7). He further observes that "since research has shown that natives have radically different internalisations, the implications for attempting the institutionalisation of non-native varieties of the language are too obvious for me to mention." He frowns at the liberal way in which issues of standards are handled: "If recent history has given us 'liberation theory' why not also 'liberation linguistics?'"

Quirk raises two concerns about variation: He thinks that it will set up barriers to communication and "we won't be able to break down barriers to careers and social mobility" (ibid.). But Fairman sees the issue of barrier and mobility as a prejudice against regional dialects and that any theory which defines regional dialects as deficient com-

pared with native standards helps to maintain this prejudice and barrier. "We can't replace dialect variation. What we ought to do, however, is to make variation the basis for action against social and communication barriers in this multidialectal world" (1990: 26). (For more on this debate, see Chevillet 1992, Gimson 1980, 1981; Fairman 1990).

Looking at the way some of these scholars cling tenaciously to their claim, one begins to ask whether there is something else hidden behind the insistence on native models in non-native settings. Simo Bobda (1994) echoes Makoni, who thinks that there are many economic considerations behind the fight for the maintenance of native English as the sole norm (1992: 8). He notes that during a recession Britain and America can sell English teachers and teaching materials unchallenged to the whole world, an advantage that they will lose if new Englishes are recognised in education in Africa and Asia. He quotes Sir Richard Francis, Director General of the British Council, who argues that "Britain's real black gold is not the North Sea oil but the English language," and the Director of the International House in London who writes: "once we used to send gunboats and diplomats abroad; now we are sending English teachers."

It would appear that those who are fighting for the maintenance of native English norms in non-native environments are fighting a lost battle. There is ample evidence to show that a majority of scholars all over the world are unanimous on the unrealistic nature of imposing native norms in non-native settings. These scholars tend to see the issue of identity as cardinal in the debate, for denying the use of these local forms is robbing these speakers of a vital aspect of their identity. In this connection, Paikeday (1985) quoted by Simo Bobda, proclaims unequivocally: "The Native Speaker is Dead!" This statement is supported by ample evidence from many non-native English-speaking countries as seen in the example by (2000: 66). In Cameroon, for example, the most seasoned ELT professionals say p[ɪ]asant, spell "in front" as one word "infront," spell "occurred/occurrence" with a single "r", say and write "enable/allow" someone do something, "make" someone to do something, "emphasize/stress" on something, etc. All these forms help to mark the identity of the English speaking Camer-

oonian, a marker he will jealously want to keep rather than lose it to an illusionary model that is unattainable.

2. To teach or not to teach

Modiano (1999), like Brown (1995), thinks non-native features should gain legitimacy in the classroom and should be accepted as alternative standards in international English proficiency tests like the TOEFL and the TOEIC. Simo Bobda (2000: 66), however, sees two problems that will likely militate against such an ambitious proposal. First, the limited professional and educational opportunities attached to such features in a world almost exclusively controlled by the West. Second, the lack of codification of these alternative standards, a prerequisite for the design of required didactic materials.

On the strength of the above, one can conclude that dust is still to settle with regard to attitudes towards non-native norms, especially when it comes to accepting them in the classroom. In the face of all these controversies, one may be tempted to agree with those scholars who see the codification of non-native varieties as a giant step forward. Kachru (1992) suggests that with a shift of interlocutors, there has to be a shift of the canon (quoted by Pakir 1997: 172). He thinks that, issues of standards and the documentation of "such additional Englishes then become a major new focus of study." Bamgbose notes that the importance of codification of non-native varieties "is too obvious to be belaboured" (1998:4). The acceptance, recognition and consequent codification of these new varieties will clearly define which aspects of these varieties are errors and which can be called features that mark them as varieties in their own right. This clarification is vital to the issue of intelligibility and identity (for more on the argument for codification of non-native varieties of English see Fairman: 1990; Simo Bobda: 1994; Bamgbose: 1998).

3. The Status of the Non-Native teacher in the ELT profession

Closely linked to the debate on the introduction of non-native models in non-native classrooms and the didactic material used for

instruction in non-native settings, is the debate on the non-native English teacher's dilemma in the ELT profession. Those who defend the thesis for the imposition of native English models in non-native settings believe that if the non-native teacher is allowed to teach the language, this will only lead to the dissemination of local features in the end, and the dream for international intelligibility will be dashed. Many scholars dismiss this assertion arguing that the non-native teacher stands a better chance of teaching their fellow non-native learners than native English teachers who do not know the realities of these settings.

Cheshire points out that the distinction conventionally drawn between the native speaker and the non-native speaker is becoming blurred and increasingly difficult to operationalise (1991b: 2). Nayar equally argues that the concept of the native speaker, particularly for a language with such a trans-national and trans-ethnic profile as English creates some insidious pragmatic problems (1998: 28).

Still on the same line of thought, Widdowson (1994) argues that the native speaker teachers are by and large equipped with knowledge only in a privileged intuitive sense and with pedagogic competence only to a rudimentary degree. By contrast, he goes on to argue, non-native speaker teachers know the "subject," English, in an explicit rather than intuitive sense, by virtue of having themselves learnt it as a foreign language and as a result of this, their pedagogic "credentials" are more credible.

Jenkins (2000) seems to take a more radical stance with regard to the non-native speaking teachers' status in the ELT profession. She thinks that the non-native teacher is better placed to teach other non-native learners because of their personal knowledge of the "route" that their learners are travelling. This is an experience that NS teachers have not passed through. Non-native teachers have this privileged knowledge which informs their teaching, particularly if they share the same L1 (see Kershaw: 1996; Parrott: 1998; Gnutzmann: 1999).

Kachru thinks that what is clear is that the "accent bar" segregating native and non-native users is still alive and well (1992: 27). Nobody wants to spend time to look into what the non-native teachers are doing in the domain of pronunciation teaching; instead people

keep evaluating these teachers' accents in terms of their proximity to NS standard accents. This type of attitude only goes to explain the type of hurdles the non-native teachers go through in securing teaching positions. Bony Norton, referring to her experience of studying job offers at the 1996 TESOL Convention in Chicago, says she was "struck by the number of advertisements that called specifically for a 'native English speaker'" (1992: 422).

The phenomenon of relegating the non-native teacher to the background has got to the point where they have developed an inferiority complex and most of them now show the ultimate desire in "becoming like the native speakers in their command of the English language and perhaps even in their general behaviour." Scholars like Prator (1968) and Chevillet (1992) still find it difficult to accept that Non-Native speakers are qualified to teach the language. Walelign notes with indignation that even a marginally qualified native speaker "has long been preferred to a well-trained and experienced non-native speaker" (1986: 41).

This is rather unfortunate but all seems not to be lost as Jenkins (2000) thinks there is light at the end of the tunnel. She thinks we may one day get to the situation predicted by Eph Tunkle, a presenter at a colloquium entitled "Non-native teachers teaching pronunciation" held at the 1999 TESOL teaching Convention in New York. She now asks the question if it is not feasible that in a few years, a colloquium will be held on the topic "Native English teachers teaching pronunciation; where can we put them"? (2000: 227) (for more on those who vote for a shift in attitudes towards the Non-Native teachers, see Jenkins: 1998)

4. The teaching of English in Cameroon

Cameroon is one of the most complex linguistic settings in the world. The linguistic landscape comprises two official languages, English and French, a dominant Pidgin English and over 248 indigenous languages. English is one of the official languages in the country and serves as a second language to Anglophone Cameroonians. It is also

taught as a foreign language to French-speaking Cameroonians. Language teaching and learning entails a learner, a teacher and the material taught. In short, it has to do with who teaches what and to whom. The teacher of English as a second language in Cameroon is a person who is also a speaker of the language as a second language. The learner is acquiring that language as a second language. The teaching material is in normal circumstances supposed to reflect the sociolinguistic and cultural realities of the learner's environment. While the teacher and the learner are all speakers of the local model that has developed in the Cameroonian environment, the didactic material still unfortunately does not reflect the realities of the setting.

Simo Bobda (1994) remarks that there is still a strong tendency in textbooks to aim at the native model. He cites text books in Cameroon like Atanga et al. *Intensive English for secondary schools* (1986), Grant et al. *Secondary English project* (1977) and Cripwell et al. *Go for English* (1990), which still devote enormous time to the teaching of Native English pronunciation. All these painstaking drills on RP sounds are designed "to help the pupils learn through simple exercises how to minimize articulatory problems resulting from mother tongue interference" (Atanga et al., back cover).

It is worth noting here that these textbooks do not give any concession to local forms that reflect the realities of the sociolinguistic and cultural identity of both the teacher and the learner of the language. It thus sounds most paradoxical and problematic to imagine that the teacher who is a typical speaker of CamE is obliged to teach these forms that he is not familiar with, let alone the learner who has very little exposure to the native forms. We all know that our teachers are all locally trained and that most of them are not exposed to these native forms as it were. We shall briefly look at some of the challenges faced by the teacher and the learner of English in the Cameroonian classroom.

a. Phonological challenges

Given word	CamE	Native English
weren't	/weren't/	/wɛnt/
Satan	/satan/	/seɪtən/
fuel	/fɔɪ/	/fjuəl/
bias	/bajas/	/baɪəs/
Joan	/dzuan/	/dʒəʊn/

It is evident that majority of Cameroonians will not be able to pronounce the words the way the native speakers do, let alone understand them when they are said by the native speakers. Atechi reports that mean intelligibility scores between CamE and BrE and AmE fall below 60% (2006). In a situation where the textbook prescribes the native norm as the only way out, problems are bound to crop up. The most interesting thing here is that the teacher who is supposed to teach these forms is not a native speaker and thus has even a handicap in pronouncing them the way native speakers do. It is only but logical that if the teacher fails to teach well, the learner will not be able to learn anything. To show the amount of confusion brought in by this debate, pedagogues, teachers' associations and other interested groups in Cameroon have been leaving no stone unturned in a bid to find solutions to this problem. The teachers and English Language Advisers for the NW and SW provinces of Cameroon have been meeting to seek solutions to this dilemma. In one of their meetings, they denounce the corruption of English pronunciation by their students, as they give instances of these deviations and prescribe remedial strategies. The teachers, however, seem to be more confused as they encourage and condemn localised forms in the same document.

This confusion stems from the fact that CamE phonology deviates markedly from that of BrE as it is characterized by features like vowel shortening, monophthongisation of native English diphthongs,

the absence of interdentals as in “think” and “that,” spelling, pronunciation, etc. These features are glaringly illustrated by the CamE realizations of the words above. Research on CamE phonology has proved that these features are quite consistent and systematic, thus mapping out CamE as a variety in its own right. In other words, it stands as a mark of identity for the English-speaking Cameroonian. This explains why, “Cameroonians who insist on sounding like Britons are sometimes ridiculed rather than admired” (Mbangwana 1987: 423).

b. Lexical challenges

At the lexical level, CamE equally deviates markedly from BrE. The differences at this level serve as a source of problems to both the learner and teacher of English in the Cameroonian classroom.

BrE	CamE
Lodger	roommate
Bill	cheque
Nappy	baby napkin
Face flannel	face towel
Living room	parlour
Vest	singlet

Should a textbook prescribe these words and neither the teacher nor the learner identifies with any of them, then the teaching /learning process is doomed to fail. The teacher and learner of English are familiar with the CamE items. This ushers in a very serious pedagogical problem. The most intriguing thing here is that the actors in the teaching / learning process may not have the same degree of exposure to both models. The teacher may be well informed with regard to these native forms but the learners may not. On the other hand, some of the learners may be more exposed to the native model than others and even more than the teacher for some reason. What then happens when a form that is not popular is used in class or even in an examination? If the teacher in setting questions uses this form, the learner

will be confused, and if the learners in the course of answering questions use these forms, the teacher who is not well informed may penalize them.

c. Grammatical challenges

It is not only at the level of lexis and phonology that CamE deviates markedly from the native model. At the level of grammar one notices that a good number of features that can comfortably be ascribed to CamE are typically Cameroonian

BrE	CamE
Pick up somebody	Pick somebody
Lend money to somebody	Borrow money to somebody
Congratulate someone on something	Congratulate someone for something
I will be back soon	I am coming
He is a thief. Isn't he?	He is a thief. Isn't it?
How is your wife?	How is our wife?

From the data above, one discovers that CamE has clear identifiable features that cannot be overlooked. These features suggest that this non-native variety has the right to some quasi autonomy. Cameroonians wish to be identified as speakers of CamE. For example, it will be more acceptable for a Cameroonian to ask the question: "how is our wife?" referring to a friend's wife than to ask, "how is your wife?" The Cameroonian thinks that using the collective possessive "our" shows some aspect of communal life. This communal concept gives speakers of CamE the impression that they share even things that can naturally not be shared. This phenomenon of sharing is part and parcel of the Cameroonian society. That is why it is reflected in the way they use the English language. It is very normal for a Cameroonian to talk of "my mothers," "my fathers," etc. In Cameroon all uncles, father's friends and other males that are of the father's age are addressed as father. This is the same with mother, sister, brother, etc. In

the classroom, both the teacher and the learner will be in total confusion in a situation where someone uses the native English version because he or she is exposed to it. As aforementioned, the teacher or the learner may suffer the consequences of this mix up.

5. Further complications in the Cameroonian classroom

Although BrE is the mother of CamE because of the colonial history they have, the unprecedented growth of AmE is now threatening the hegemony of BrE in most areas that were traditionally known to be for BrE (Atechi: 2004). The growth of this variety has led to a change of attitudes towards it and the mad rush to learn it. Foster observes that the use of Americanisms among the young generation in Britain is "the hallmark of the tough-guy and the hey man" (1968: 14). In some cases Cameroonians are more used to American forms than to the British forms, and in some cases they are more exposed to British forms than to American as we see in the examples below:

BrE	AmE	CamE
bill	cheque	cheque
essay	term paper	term paper
trunk call	international call	international call
petrol station	filling station	petrol station
full stop	period	full stop
taxi	cab	taxi

The above scenario can only usher in a high degree of confusion when it comes to the learning/teaching process. At one point the teacher and the learner are more exposed to American forms and at another point, they are more exposed to British forms. One interesting thing to note here is that what they are not exposed to is either seen in terms of wrong usage or in terms of more formal usage as compared to what they know already. Some teachers and learners who are ignorant of the other forms may see them as substandard or incorrect. For example, many Cameroonians think that "cab" and "period"

are more fashionable than "taxi" and "full stop." Some will hardly even know what they mean.

At the level of grammatical patterning, Cameroonians think it is elitist to say "I am visiting with her tomorrow" rather than to say "I am visiting her tomorrow," "I will see you over the weekend" rather than "I will see you at the week end." Even at the phonological level, words like tomato, schedule, leisure, lieutenant, and vase, etc., form part of the confusion because the BrE and AmE have different phonological realizations for these words. Although there is no text that specifies the model to be used in the Cameroonian classroom, most teachers and learners think that since formal education started in Cameroon with the BrE model, and most of the didactic materials and other reference books for the teaching of the language are based on BrE, it should normally be the model to look to. It is worthwhile mentioning here that this line of thought is now being questioned given that Americanisms have forced their way into the Cameroon setting and are even threatening the hegemony of BrE forms. The teacher and the learner are now in more confusion than ever before given that their attitudes and degree of exposure to each variety vary greatly, and that there are some salient differences between the two native varieties in question. Mbangwana points out that there are cases where different words are used to express the same meaning in the two native varieties (2002); AmE, "state department," "president" (university), "congress" and "truck" while BrE, "foreign office," "vice chancellor," "parliament," "lorry."

In some cases the two share a common word or expression, but with a different meaning, e.g., "vest" in AmE is called "waist coat" in BrE, but "vest" in BrE is called an "undershirt" in AmE. "Camp bed" in BrE while "cot" in BrE is "crib" in AmE. In certain cases both varieties have the same meaning, but one variety has an additional meaning not used by the other, e.g., BrE and AmE agree in the meaning of "fall" as something dropping down but AmE extends it to the BrE "autumn" when leaves shed and fall. In some cases still, the two varieties share a common expression and in meaning, but where one or both expressions for the same thing, not used by the other, e.g., both AmE

and BrE use "taxi," while "cab" is essentially AmE, they share "rain-coat," but "mackintosh" is typical BrE for the same thing.

Looking at the analysis above one sees that confusion is rife not only between speakers of the two varieties, but also between the learner and teacher of the language in a non-native setting like Cameroon who look to these native varieties for the learning and teaching of the language. As if that was not enough, there is a third and even more complicated dimension to this issue of model in the Cameroonian classroom. We have seen that at first, attitudes towards BrE were positive and anything apart from this was seen as substandard and thus not worth studying. But later on attitudes began to change with the growing popularity of AmE. These two varieties held sway for quite some time until CamE started forcing its way onto the scene, given that features of this non-native variety were becoming very systematic and consistent. This systematicity came along with changing attitudes towards this variety. Most Cameroonians thought that although the two native varieties were well documented with didactic materials and treaties that facilitated the teaching/learning process, a local variety was even more important because it reflects their identity as CamE speakers as well as the sociolinguistic and cultural realities of their setting. We find here, a complex linguistic setting with three models jostling for position.

It is interesting to note that in some cases, CamE speakers adopt BrE forms, in some cases, AmE forms, in some, CamE forms and in some either the two native forms are used interchangeably or the three models are used interchangeably. This type of complexity ushers in a very serious problem for the teacher and the learner of the language given that the degree of exposure may not be the same. For example, when a learner writes an examination, answers questions in class or interacts with other learners. The same applies to the teacher when he teaches in class, corrects or marks scripts, etc. What does he do when he takes up a learner's examination script to discover that he/she uses only AmE forms, BrE forms, CamE forms, BrE and AmE forms, BrE, AmE and CamE forms interchangeably? How does he handle the situation? What if he is not sufficiently exposed to some of the forms used by the learners? When he finally makes a decision,

who suffers? These and many more are the questions that plague the learning and teaching of English in the non-native classroom in general and Cameroon in particular, as we see in the list below:

BrE	AmE	CamE
house of commons	house of representatives	house of assembly
thermos flask	thermos bottle	flask
level crossing	grade crossing	railway crossing
dual carriageway	divided highway	two way traffic
lodger	roomer	roommate

Three possibilities present themselves in this connection: CamE, which is the local variety of English spoken in the country; native English, which is the variety spoken in ENL countries, and EIL, which is a neutral international variety proposed by some scholars (Jenkins: 2000) to serve the needs of international intelligibility. An important question to ask is: Which of these varieties is suitable for CamE speakers, and why? This question is quite complex. Looking at the results of studies conducted on CamE, especially on intelligibility like Talom (1990) and Atechi (2006), it is clear that CamE is suitable for teaching in Cameroon, because the variety takes into account the sociolinguistic and cultural realities of the Cameroon local linguistic landscape. The variety serves as the marker of national identity of the speaker. It is also the variety that they are used to. But two major problems present themselves at this level. For what purpose do Cameroonians learn English? Is it just for purposes of intranational communication or equally for international communication? Is the variety sufficiently described and codified as to take up this function without problems? To answer the first question, one would say Cameroonians need English more for intranational communication than for international communication. But the fact that science and technology are reducing the world to a global village means that the Cameroonians, like any other people, would need to be internationally intelligible in order to fit into this new world. The problem that immediately poses itself is which variety to go for so as to guarantee either international

intelligibility or both international and intranational intelligibility. At this juncture, the problem of maintaining the local variety for purposes of national identity and learning an international variety for international communication purposes ushers in serious debate.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, it will not be an overstatement to say that dust is still to settle on this debate on the model of English that is suitable for the non-native English-speaking setting. We all agree that the native model is not suitable for the Non-Native environment because it violates the socio-linguistic realities of the speaker and more importantly, deprives the speaker of an important marker of his identity. We may, however, not want to lose sight of the advantages that the Native varieties have that non-native varieties lack. Native varieties are amply documented, opposed to non-native varieties that are not codified. These qualities make their credentials as a model for teaching, more credible. But given that this debate revolves around a very sensitive notion like preserving the identity of the non-native Speaker, the qualities that native models have may not be convincing enough to override the need to maintain the speakers' identity. Thus one may only join other eminent scholars like Kachru, Bamgbose, Crystal, Simo Bobda, etc., to reiterate the need for codification of these Englishes. If this is done, it will go a long way to add more impetus to the argument advanced by the above scholars that they gain legitimacy in the classroom.

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