



Official Bilingualism in Cameroon : A Double-Edged Sword

Stephen Jikong

► To cite this version:

Stephen Jikong. Official Bilingualism in Cameroon : A Double-Edged Sword. Alizés : Revue angliciste de La Réunion, 2000, Interviews, Miscellanies, South Africa, 19, pp.117-135. hal-02346469

HAL Id: hal-02346469

<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02346469>

Submitted on 5 Nov 2019

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

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

Official Bilingualism in Cameroon: A Double-Edged Sword

Language can be either a unifying or a divisive factor in a community purported to be corporate. Consequently, the leadership of such a community, being quite aware of the stakes, make it their bounden duty to plan and implement a language policy that will meet the communicative needs of all the members of the community and enhance its corporateness.

Countries like Canada and Belgium were conscious of their precarious language situation and opted for state bilingualism in which official languages are used by the citizens in a non-competitive manner. But Cameroon opted for individual bilingualism following Professor Fonlon's recommendations.

Though many Cameroonians have become bilingual, the majority are monolingual. Some of these monolinguals speak the only language they know to any other Cameroonian and if the interlocutor is also a monolingual, the speaker will say, "Cameroon is a bilingual country, so you have to understand what I am saying." This attitude has created several conflicts in Cameroonian society and many people have missed opportunities, especially in the domain of education. Thus, the bilingual policy in Cameroon because it was implemented as individual bilingualism rather than state bilingualism, has deprived many Cameroonians of their liberty of expression in offices, schools, courts, meetings, etc. This imbroglio can be attributed to inadequate language planning.

This paper is intended to highlight the pertinence of language planning in a multilingual environment, then evaluate the language situation in Cameroon with a focus on language and education as the cradle of the linguistic malaise in Cameroon.

Language Planning

The language policy a nation adopts depends on language planning effected by experts in the science of language. According to Fishman (1977), language planning is an organised pursuit of solutions to language problems in a nation. Its main aim is to provide all the possible language alternatives for policy makers to select the ones that can likely solve all the communication problems within the nation.

Language planning can be handled at two levels: language corpus planning and language status planning (Fishman 1977). At the level of language corpus planning the focus is on the language as a code with its internal structure comprising spelling or a writing system, grammar and lexicology. Status planning focuses on the place conferred to a given language in relation to the other languages in the same community by policy makers. In other words, status planning provides an answer to the question: which language should be spoken where and for what purpose?

Stewart in Fishman (1972) recommends that the assignment of a status to a given language in a multilingual nation be based on the function the language is supposed to fulfil. He states that for the function of a language to be specified an answer must be given to the following question: "For what purpose is a particular linguistic system used as a medium of communication in the nation?" (Fishman: 1972 540).

He then proposes ten possible functional categories that can guide language planners as follows: Official, Provincial, Wider Communication, International, Capital, Group, Educational, School Subject, Literary, and Religious. "Capital" refers to the language that functions as a primary medium of communication around the capital of a country.

Most of these function types overlap. But what is relevant in Stewart's study is that it draws the attention of language planners to the fact that language planning is a very serious activity for the smooth running of a nation. Thus, it is an activity that is to be handled meticulously. He explains that careful sociolinguistic analysis is a prerequisite because it aids planners to avoid linguistic feuds in a nation. He expresses his idea thus:

Multilingual situations may be considered stable when the different linguistic systems are geographically, socially, and functionally non-competitive. For example, there may be two languages in a given nation which both have a provincial or group function. But as long as there are the languages of different local administrative units, or of different social or ethnic groups, then no linguistic conflict is involved. At the same time, two different linguistic systems may be used by the same people, but if they occupy different functional slots, then there is no conflict. However, language conflicts can occur if this complementary relationship is upset, either by a natural historical process or by direct administrative intervention. (Fishman: 1972 541)

The key point made here is that in a multilingual nation language planners should ascertain that the various languages within the polity are non-competitive.

The Language Situation in Cameroon

The language situation in Cameroon is extremely complex. In addition to the numerous home languages, there are the official languages, English and French, inherited from the colonial masters, then lingua francas such as Pidgin English and Fulfulde. The exact number of Cameroon home languages has until recently been a mystery notwithstanding the fact that a number of research projects have been carried out in this direction. Povey has made the same point by saying:

The unexampled complexity of the linguistic situation in Cameroon has long fascinated linguists, though its innumerable indigenous tongues may rather seem a daunting accumulation to those concerned with practical educational problems. It is hard to determine how many languages are in use within its borders. All the usual problems of quantification are augmented by the particular difficulty of establishing the distinction between a language and dialect in this country. (Povey 7)

In an earlier research, Mbassi-Manga (1976) came to the conclusion that there are 285 home languages in Cameroon while in a recent research Emmanuel Chia (1983) has concluded:

Using methods such as mutual intelligibility testing, measure of linguistic distance, further socio-linguistic surveys into language use and function, though far from completion, makes one think that there may not be as many as 120 STANDARDIZABLE LANGUAGES IN THE COUNTRY. (Chia 19)

The most recent publication in this field is the *Atlas linguistique du Cameroon*, edited by Breton and Dieu (1985) which states that there

are 237 Cameroon home languages. Not only are the home languages too many for one nation, but they belong to different language families. Greenberg's findings have been confirmed by Chia in the following observation:

The indigenous languages thus defined do not for that matter form a single linguistic family but rather a large number of different linguistic phyla which manifest a vast variety of phonological, grammatical, and lexical types. Of the four major families into which Joseph Greenberg (1966) groups African languages, the Congo-Kordofanian, the Nilo-Saharan, the Afro-Asiatic and the Khoisan, only the last of these is not attested in Cameroon. (Chia 19)

Between 1884 and 1916 the Germans governed Cameroon and communication was almost impossible so they taught German, used Pidgin English and tried to vulgarise Douala and Mungaka, the Bali language. This was for the purpose of establishing a sense of identity among these disparate groups of people.

By 1916, when the Germans were defeated by the British and French forces, English and French were introduced into Cameroon. When Cameroon was partitioned in 1919 by the League of Nations, the West was to be administered as a Trust Territory by Britain and the East by France. Thus, English and French were used for instruction and official duties. When East Cameroon and West Cameroon re-unified in 1961, the need for language planning was felt. The language experts went to work and came out with the conclusion that French and English be adopted as official languages in the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

Implementation of the Bilingual Policy

When the Cameroon government adopted the bilingual policy, language experts elaborated the implementation principles. Professor Fonlon was one of the experts. According to him the bilingual policy enshrined in the constitution of 1st September, 1961, placed Cameroon among other bilingual countries in the world, like Canada and Belgium. He pointed out that though these countries adopted the bilingual policy a long time ago, not all Canadians speak English and French, nor all Belgians French and Dutch (or the Belgian variety of Dutch), but he went ahead to suggest that Cameroon should be different:

La grande majorité des Canadiens et des Belges sont restés monolingues. Un État bilingue ne suppose donc pas nécessairement des individus, des citoyens bilingues. Mais pour nous, au Cameroun, ce serait une méconnaissance des avantages qui s'offrent à nous et un manque regrettable d'idéal que de nous contenter d'avoir créé un État bilingue.

L'objectif que nous devons viser doit être un bilinguisme individuel grâce auquel chaque enfant qui suit le cycle de notre système d'éducation sera capable de parler l'anglais et le français.

This is the recommendation that has governed the bilingual policy in Cameroon since independence. He then outlined the educational system from primary school, secondary school, and high school to University. According to him English and French should be taught at the various levels in such a way that after high school studies the students should be able to follow courses in English and French at the University level. However, he was aware of the difficulties that young Cameroonians will face as they follow his prescriptions but he still insisted on individual bilingualism:

Normalement une université bilingue est une université dans laquelle un étudiant peut suivre des cours dans chacune des langues à son gré. C'est en fait une double université comme c'est le cas de l'université de Louvain où le néerlandais et le français sont les deux langues d'enseignement.

He watered down this appropriate type of true bilingual university with an argument which was outside language planning but in the domain of policy implementers: "J'imagine qu'une telle université est très coûteuse à établir. Le grand avantage du système bilingue que je préconise plus haut est qu'il rend ce type d'université inutile."

Because of economic considerations which lay beyond language planning, the inappropriate language policy in higher education was recommended and over the years it has made numerous victims in the educational process.

The bilingual policy Professor Fonlon recommended for Cameroonians was based on students who had completed high school studies, leaving out the majority of Cameroonians who were never going to follow the same programme. But the practice of bilingualism in Cameroon is based on individual bilingualism where everybody is involved with the consequences that are obvious. The educational programme to form bilingual Cameroonians has so far produced limited results.

The various languages existing in Cameroon are performing different functions. As far as the numerous home languages and lingua francas are concerned, there is no linguistic feud because each language is used under the appropriate circumstances. This situation was verified during a research effected on the use of language in Cameroon urban centres. After the analysis of the data obtained from the questions on language usage, Jikong and Koenig drew the following conclusion:

Cameroonians tend to use the languages available to them in a discrete fashion, i.e., the language selected is based on knowledge of the identity of the person being addressed and the language that person speaks. Thus we find a high percentage of persons throughout the country using an L1 if the other person shares the L1. Similarly, in instances of a non-shared L1, the language is selected on the basis of the knowledge of the other person's languages. Such selection does not necessarily have to be a major lingua franca The patterns of language usage throughout the country can best be summed up in the words of one gentleman who was interviewed in Kribi: "I speak Hausa to the Hausa, Douala to the Douala, Ewondo to the Ewondo, and French to the rest." (Jikong and Koenig 59)

Thus, in Cameroon, in spite of the more than one hundred home languages and several lingua francas, communication in these languages is feud free. However, in official settings some government workers tend to serve the people with the same L1 first, which is inappropriate.

But English and French, the official languages, are competitive in various domains, following the application of the principle of individual bilingualism, instead of that of state bilingualism. This situation points to the fact that language planning in Cameroon has so far been inappropriate. Other researchers in this domain have expressed the same point of view. For instance, Tchoungui in Koenig et al. (1983) states:

The policy of bilingualism is based on two erroneous premises: the first error—possibly unintentional at first and attributable to the rush of the planners in the wake of reunification—has since become a wilful error: it was to assume that all Cameroonian speakers speak English or French, either in the adult or children's generations, an assumption which has not been indicated by our data

The author of the paper from which the above quotation has been extracted came to this conclusion after analysing data on official language bilingualism in Cameroon. Part of the data was on bilingualism in the educational domain. The conclusion here is more explicit:

The policy of bilingualism as it was stated had a definite target: a bilingual Cameroonian individual and the moribund existence of such creations as the Cameroon Linguistic Centres in Yaounde and Buea are still proof of it. But it has not kept its promise and in fact, little progress seems to have been achieved since independence. The analysis carried out in this paper on data collected about the children's generation born with Independence and Reunification leads us to the following conclusions; twenty years after the historical land mark, bilingualism in Cameroon—at least the type advocated by official proponents—is still more a wish than a reality. (114)

Bilingualism in Cameroon is being evaluated in this paper 38 years after independence. The bilingual educational institutions mentioned in the above quotation have improved and produced many bilingual Cameroonians, but the general percentage of efficient bilingual individuals is still insignificant. There is still the cry in situations where English and French are competitive.

Tadadjeu in Koenig et al (1983) is also of the opinion that individual bilingualism has not attained the expected goal in spite of the various steps so far taken:

It has become apparent that truly bilingual education is actually implemented only at the university level. Even at this stage, the vast majority of students find themselves ill prepared by their secondary school education for a bilingual education system. Language planning studies must suggest some solution to this problem. (118)

Till today no solution has been found to the problem. This opinion is substantiated by several research projects carried out recently on language and education at the tertiary level in Cameroon with findings indicating several difficulties faced by students because of the competitive language situation.

Language is a thorn in the flesh of students. For instance, the course entitled "Bilingual Training" is intended to teach English to Francophones and French to Anglophones in the University of Yaounde I. The failure rate is so high that no one can believe that the students passed through secondary schools which were meant to render them bilingual after upper sixth and prepare them for University studies in English and French.

At the level of the masses the principle of individual bilingualism has also not produced positive results. Most Cameroonians have never

had the opportunity to learn two languages, so they are monolinguals. They are forced to interact among themselves. This means that a Cameroonian who knows only French and wants to communicate with another who knows only English, will surely encounter a problem. Several of such encounters have ended in feuds.

A bilingual degree was instituted so that the graduates should take care of the monolingual masses but the services of the bilinguals are minimal. For instance, these bilinguals were intended to occupy posts in offices or other situations where monolinguals were likely to interact in order to facilitate communication among them, but with the policy of individual bilingualism the trained bilinguals are not utilised optimally.

According to Wancha Titus Neba, a professional translator, in a manuscript presented to me, translators and interpreters who are supposed to be the flagbearers of state bilingualism in Cameroon are sidelined in every aspect of their profession to the advantage of monolinguals who encourage social bitterness with utterances as "Je ne comprends pas votre anglais là." He states his point thus:

One of the major reasons accounting for the assertion that state bilingualism is a mere slogan resides in the way in which high level appointments are carried out in the civil service. It is not a secret that monolingual top civil servants—Presidents, Ministers, Secretaries General, Directors, Governors, Prefects—still litter our landscape in their majority In a bilingual country, one of the major criteria for appointment would have been bilingual competence. Other factors however account for this and that is why a completely English illiterate Divisional Officer can serve in Su-Bum without any qualms.

He adds that bilinguals who are generally well trained and are in category A2 of the civil service are ignored in appointments and that they are underused even though their services are indispensable for smooth communication among all the citizens of Cameroon.

A careful analysis of Professor Fonlon's principle of individual and early bilingualism reveals that it was based on the quest for *National Integration* and *Economic Considerations* rather than on the principle of non-competitiveness between official languages in a nation based on careful and conscious language planning. According to Baker, bilingual education takes several parameters into consideration. He says:

Bilingual education, whatever form it takes, cannot be properly understood unless it is connected to basic philosophies and politics in society. Bilingual education does not just reflect curriculum decisions. Rather, bilingual education is surrounded and underpinned by basic beliefs about minority languages, minority cultures, in-migrants, equality of opportunity, the rights of individuals and the rights of language minority groups, assimilation and integration, desegregation and discrimination, pluralism and multiculturalism. (247)

This approach to bilingual education can be more explicit if the philosophies of equal opportunity and the rights of individuals are analysed. The reality underlying these philosophies is that in selecting the languages of education in a multilingual society the selection should be guided by the fact that every member of the society has his inalienable rights to the choice of his own language. As Baker puts it:

Just as there are individual rights in choice of religion, so it is argued, there should be an individual right to choice of language. Just as there are attempts to eradicate discrimination based on colour and creed, so people within this orientation argue that language prejudice and discrimination need to be eradicated in a democratic society. (249)

In this case, the individual's freedom in the choice of a language will depend on the possibilities provided by language planners and policy makers. This is not the case in Cameroon. In many educational institutions the learners have no choice but to grapple with a language which they do not know in order to acquire facts or contents. The policy makers were governed by the principle of national unity, that is why they imposed English and French as compulsory languages of instruction for all young Cameroonians irrespective of their backgrounds in both languages. In some institutions only French served as the language of instruction, so whoever could not speak French had no freedom of language choice.

But research has proven that it is possible to achieve national unity without language uniformity. Thus, language diversity and national unity can co-exist (Singapore, Luxembourg, Switzerland). Baker makes this point in the following terms:

Within the "language as a resource" orientation, there tends to be the assumption that linguistic diversity does not cause separation nor less integration in society. Rather, it is possible that national unity and linguistic diversity can co-exist. Tolerance and co-operation between groups may be as possible with linguistic diversity as they would be unlikely when such linguistic diversity is repressed. (253)

This orientation lays emphasis on the fact that the languages of education in a multilingual society should be based on the idea that each member of the society has basic human rights including the right to choose a language to achieve a goal rather than the aim to achieve unity and make every member of the society bilingual.

The pertinence of the concept of language as an inalienable right is illustrated by a court case brought against the San Francisco School District in 1970 on behalf of Chinese pupils. It is stated in Baker that:

The case concerned whether or not non-English speaking students received equal educational opportunity when instructed in a language they could not understand. The failure to provide bilingual education was alleged to violate both the protection clause of the 14th Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. (250)

Judgement was finally passed in 1974 by the Supreme Court in favour of the Chinese pupils. Since then, language rights have been carefully respected in the United States of America through the "broadening of the goals of bilingual education to include the possible maintenance of minority languages and cultures." I hope young Cameroonians do not need to go to court to obtain their rights in the free choice of languages of instruction.

Sample Consequences of Individual Bilingualism

As has been pointed out above, the implementation of the bilingual policy in Cameroon as *individual bilingualism* instead of *state bilingualism* has given room for bitterness in communication at various levels among Cameroonians.

At the level of higher education research findings have indicated that there is a problem with the languages of instruction and the substance to be acquired by the students. Alice Njeck in her "Maîtrise" dissertation titled "Official Language Bilingualism in the University of Yaounde: Some Educational and Social Issues," in 1992 came out with the findings that most of the students were dissatisfied with the use of their second official language as a medium of instruction because it rendered the acquisition of knowledge in the various subjects very strenuous, thereby leading to poor performance in examinations.

Victorine Bessem carried out research on the topic "Official Bilingualism in the University of Yaounde 1" in 1996 and arrived at a similar conclusion. The most recent research in this domain is the one carried out by Ali Usmanu Rih-Reh on the topic "Official Bilingualism in Higher Education: An Investigation into the Use of English and French as Languages of Instruction in the National School of Administration and Magistracy and the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences."

He administered a questionnaire to 10 lecturers and 40 students from the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM) and to a similar number of lecturers and students in the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (FMBS). The questionnaire was intended to obtain information about the informants' proficiency in their Second Official Language (SOL), how they coped with the use of SOL as a medium of instruction and their opinion on the indiscriminate use of the two official languages for instruction. After analysing the data so collected the researcher came out with a number of findings.

He stated that the results of his data analysis confirmed his hypothesis which was that the bilingual education practised in ENAM and the FMBS was problematic because both students and lecturers were not proficient in their SOL and could not effectively learn or teach in it, and this adversely affected the students' academic performance and also made studies and teaching very strenuous.

His analysis revealed that students and lecturers alike had problems with the dual media system of education in both institutions. In ENAM, 80% of the student respondents declared that their knowledge of the SOL was just average or below average, while in the FMBS, 50% of the sample students echoed those of ENAM, indicating that they were not proficient enough in their SOL to effectively follow courses in it. Most of the lecturers belonged to this category.

To be more specific, these students confessed that they faced difficulties in note-taking, translation from the SOL to the FOL, comprehension of lectures, etc., and ended up performing poorly. The researcher added that the lecturers also confessed that they strained to make the students understand them and equally strained to make sense out of the

scripts of the students who answered questions in the lecturer's SOL. Consequently one could hardly talk of objective evaluation under such circumstances.

The results of the above research projects point out clearly that the students in most of the higher institutions of learning in Cameroon have lost their human rights in the freedom to choose the language through which to acquire vital knowledge.

Just as the individual bilingual policy is a hindrance to knowledge acquisition, it is also a hindrance to the admission of candidates to institutions of higher learning or to professions. In this case, questions are set in one official language and translated into the other one poorly or they are not translated at all. For instance, Dora Yila Shely carried out research on the topic "The Translation of Some Public Service Examination Questions in Cameroon" for a "Maîtrise" in 1989 and discovered many wrongly translated questions. Below are some of them.

1. a) French: Quelle est la nature de la semence—fruit ou graine? Et vous donnez le mode de dissémination.
 b) English: What is the nature of seed? Is it a fruit? How is it scattered?
 c) Accepted version: What type of seed is it? A fruit or a grain? How is it planted? (69)
2. a) French: Sur un mécanisme, on a relevé les indications suivantes sur les pièces.
 b). English: They have picked up from a mechanisms the following indications on the pieces.
 c) Accepted Version: The following instructions were found on parts of an appliance.
3. a) French: Les adjuvants: définition, modes d'action, condition d'emploi.
 b) English: adjuvants: definition, method of action, use conditions.
 c) Accepted Version: Define a catalyst. How does it work? When is it used/employed?
4. a) French: Qu'entend-t-on par outil de mesure simple et outil de mesure avec vernier. Pour chaque cas donnez un exemple.
 b) English: What do you call by simple measurement tool and by measurement with vernier? Give an example of each.
 c) Accepted Version: What is a simple measuring instrument, and a vernier measuring instrument? Give an example of each.

The problem which cropped up with the implementation of the bilingual educational policy is persisting up to the present moment. In *The Herald* No 679 of Wednesday, October 28-29, 1998 on page 4 appeared

an article captioned: "ENS Not for Anglophone Science Students." In the article, the author, Emma Ngu, accused "the domineering Francophone rulers" of doing everything imaginable to "keep Anglophones in their place" by barring them from admission into the Department of Science in the Yaounde School of Education. He was infuriated because no single Anglophone had been admitted into the Department of Sciences in the October 1998 entrance examination. He expressed his main accusation thus:

If this is not a deliberate plot why was it that all the questions at the exams came in French? Yes, "Cameroon is bilingual" they would sing. Have the questions ever come exclusively in English? And when the unfortunate Anglophone candidates dared to plead even for some verbal translations, they were told in no uncertain terms to keep quiet.

A bilingual country? Any real Anglophone who still believes in that is living in a cloud cuckoo land. Bilingualism is a euphemism for francophonising and impoverishing Anglophones. A clear one-way traffic.

The author of this article's anger is justified. It has already been recommended above that the choice of languages of education in a multilingual society should be governed by a number of parameters, the most important of which is the individual's freedom to choose the language he knows best for the transaction of all his businesses. This happens when policy makers provide the possible opportunities to avoid the competitiveness of languages in various functional domains.

It is clear from this article that the author has been following up this dual media instruction process in the higher institutions of learning over the years, that is why he can recount the fate of Anglophones in the Faculty of Sciences in the University of Yaounde since they began registering there. This is how he makes his points:

What makes the situation even more vexing is the fact that the Francophone hegemony just ploughs on, ignoring this long standing problem that faced generations of intelligent Anglophone students. Anglophone Science students would have strings of A-grades at the A-Level and not be able to grope through the "Faculté des Sciences"! Unequivocally illogical!

This bitterness tends to reflect the state of mind and feelings of most of those who have encountered language or communicative problems as a result of the national bilingual policy in Cameroon. The classrooms are intended to help learners acquire knowledge, which they will use to serve members of the society. And to serve society there must

be communication. It happens that over the years, in Cameroon, the communication malaise experienced in the institutions of learning also exists in the society at large.

In government offices in the capital, many Anglophones face communication problems, especially the elderly people who had never had any opportunity to learn French. Some of them have recounted their experiences. For instance, one said he entered an office and tried to obtain information from one government agent. He spoke in English but the agent replied in French. He told the agent that he could not speak French. The agent concluded thus: "Puisque tu ne parles pas le français et je ne parle pas l'anglais, c'est match nul" which means, "Since you do not speak French and I don't speak English, it is a draw." The informant said he guessed from the expression "match nul" that the agent meant what has been stated above.

Another retired government worker who came to Yaounde to see about his entitlements said he had spent several months fumbling in the Ministries and ended up understanding three sentences in French. They were:

- "Le patron n'est pas là."
- "Les machines ne marchent pas."
- "Revenez demain."

It was all fun as he recounted his ordeal, but his experiences reflected those of other monolingual Anglophones in government offices occupied by monolingual Francophones.

In other areas of public life the linguistic malaise is also felt. In the English speaking sector of Cameroon, the uniformed officers speak mostly French, even to Anglophone monolinguals. Thus, French seems to have become the language for harassment or bullying. It is reported that sometime ago in Tiko, a town in the South West Province of Cameroon, a gendarme officer was sent to take statements from a suspect after an incident. The gendarme interrogated the man in English but took down the statement in French. After taking down all the statements the gendarme asked the suspect to sign but the suspect refused to sign on the grounds that he could not read French, and therefore, could not be sure that what was written down was what he had effectively declared. The gendarme got angry and presented the statement in court without the suspect's signature.

This event exposes the problem of language loyalty within the wrong context. The gendarme interrogated this man in English and took down the statements in French, then presented them to the man to sign. His action implied that so long as something was written in French, it was authentic and nobody could contest that fact. But he was working in a country, which is officially bilingual, signifying that he as a government agent had to write in the language of the suspect. If he was not capable of doing so, he should have reported to his boss who should have sent a competent person. He thus used an inappropriate code, which stalled the transaction.

Other instances of language conflicts abound. The editorial of *The Herald* of Wednesday, December 9-10, 1998 commented on two incidents of feuds in communication. The first one is said to have occurred in Oku, a village in the North-West Province of Cameroon. The reporter says:

Incidents of highhandedness by Francophone administrators towards Anglophones are legion. One notable one was in Oku in the North-West Heartland Kamdem André (of blessed memory) then Sub-Divisional Officer for Oku, had the knack of addressing the local rustics in French Kamdem and the Senior Divisional Officer for Bui, Tanyi Tiku Baiye Arikai, had an angry exchange on this problem. Kamdem spoke in French at an important boundary resolution meeting and would not stop when called to order by his boss, Baiye Arikai. (4)

The second incident in the editorial is supposed to have taken place recently in Tiko. The story goes thus:

The D.O. had announced a visit of institutions in the area. While preparations were on to receive him, he then wrote a letter in French to Mbake, the principal. What did he say in his letter? We do not know. What we know is that Mbake, like many Anglophones, did not quite understand the letter and took it that the D.O. had cancelled the visit to his school. So Mbake stopped whatever plans he had for receiving the D.O.

Then the story continues: the D.O. came and discovered that nobody was expecting him. Classes were going on normally. When the principal realised that the D.O. had arrived he was embarrassed. All the same, he took his time, then got out of his office to welcome the D.O. and his entourage who had waited for about ten minutes. When the principal met the D.O. he said: "I am surprised you came after all! I thought you

wrote to cancel the visit." The D.O. is said to have lost his temper and retorted, "You'll see me . . . I'll deal with you," and shamefully took off. Commenting on the incident, the editorialist said:

Francophone service heads who work in Anglophone territory must accept that in order to be properly understood and work effectively, they ought to learn to speak and communicate in English, not French. Should they insist on speaking French to an essentially English speaking people, they must bear the corresponding risk of not being understood.

He adds that it is gross discourtesy for Francophone officials to address meetings in French in the North-West and South-West Provinces and that Anglophone administrators can never make such an error. He ends by calling on Francophone administrators to emulate their Anglophone colleagues. These communicative feuds indicate that much still has to be done if the bilingual policy in Cameroon has to produce positive results.

A Possible Way Out

The official bilingual option implemented in Cameroon has to stay until further notice. Young Cameroonians and the unborn will be obliged to live in the existing linguistic environment. It is therefore imperative to handle the language question with the dexterity that will enable the born and unborn Cameroonians to feel that they are in their fatherland.

The first step in this direction will be to rely on older multilingual countries for inspiration. The frequently cited countries are Canada, Belgium and Switzerland. In these countries, the multilingual policy is based on the principle that every citizen has the freedom to select the language he prefers for any communicative purpose. This philosophy is applied in the domain of education by the construction of monolingual and bilingual schools in various linguistic zones with the possibility of students learning in the language they know best.

The 1993 University Reforms in Cameroon are a step in the right direction. Such reforms should extend to institutions as ENAM, the School of Medicine, etc.

In our analysis so far we have pointed to instances where communication was effected by monolinguals to an audience or individuals who could not understand the other official language, thereby creating

strain in communication. To avoid such occurrences, translators should be placed at the disposal of all monolinguals in all government services all over the national territory. The training of translators was initiated to facilitate communication among Cameroon monolinguals, but it seems these specialists have been ignored by the government.

For more Cameroonians to become bilingual it is necessary to motivate them by appointing those who are already bilingual to posts of responsibility. Such a move will minimise communicative conflicts in government offices and during meetings. To give every student a fair chance during examinations, questions should be set in each official language. If it is not possible the questions set in one language should be translated by a professional translator. If nothing is done now the present situation will persist. Schools will keep churning out monolinguals. Monolinguals will keep growing in the numerous villages all over the Republic and occupy government offices and institutions of learning and create communication problems and social malaise.

Dr. Jikong Stephen YERIWA¹

¹ University of Yaounde I, Department of English, P.O. Box 755, Yaounde, Cameroon.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALI, Usmanu Ri-Reh. "Bilingualism in Higher Education in Cameroon: An Investigation into the Use of English and French as Languages of Instruction in the National School of Administration and Magistracy and the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences." Diss. Ecole Normale Supérieure de Yaoundé, 1988.
- BAKER, Colin. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1993).
- BESSEM, Victorine Eyong. "Official Bilingualism in the University of Yaounde: The case of the Language of Instruction on Students' Academic Performance." Diss. Ecole Normale Supérieure de Yaoundé, 1996.
- BRETON, Roland et Michel DIEU. *Atlas linguistique du Cameroun* (Paris: Université d'Aix-Marseille II/CNRS, 1985).
- CHIA, Emmanuel. "Cameroon Home Languages," *A Sociolinguistic Profile of Urban Centers in Cameroon*, Edna L. Koenig, Emmanuel Chia, John Povey, eds. (Los Angeles, University of California: Grossroads Press, 1983) 19-32.
- FISHMAN, Joshua, ed. *Readings in the Sociology of Language* (The Hague: Mouton and Co. Ltd., 1972).
- , "Sociolinguistic Settings of Language Planning," *Language Planning Processes*, Fishman et al., eds. (The Hague: Mouton and Co. Ltd, 1977) n. pag.
- FONLON, Bernard, "A Case for an Early Bilingualism," *Abbia*, No 4, 1963, 56-94.
- JKONG, Stephen Y. and Edna KOENIG. "Language Usage in Cameroon Urban Centers," *A Sociolinguistic Profile of Urban Centers in Cameroon*, Edna L. Koenig, Emmanuel Chia, John Povey, eds. (Los Angeles, University of California: Grossroads Press, 1983) 55-77.
- MACKEY, William. "The Description of Bilingualism," *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, Joshua Fishman, ed. (The Hague: Mouton and Co. Ltd., 1972) n. pag.
- MBASSI-MANGA, Francis. *Cameroon Studies in English and French* (Yaounde: University of Yaounde, 1976).
- NGU, Emma. "ENS Not for Anglophones." *The Herald* 28 Oct. 1998: 4.

- NJECK, Alice. "Official Language Bilingualism in the University of Yaounde: Some Educational and Social Issues." Maîtrise Diss. University of Yaounde, 1992.
- POVEY, John. "The Language Profile of Cameroon: An Introduction," *A Sociolinguistic Profile of Urban Centers in Cameroon*, Edna L. Koenig, Emmanuel Chia, John Povey, eds. (Los Angeles, University of California: Grossroads Press, 1983) 117-124.
- SHELY, Dora Yila. "The Translation of Some Public Service Examination Questions in Cameroon." Maîtrise Diss. University of Yaounde, 1989.
- STEWART, William A. "Sociolinguistic Typology of Multilingualism," *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, Joshua Fishman, ed. (The Hague: Mouton and Co. Ltd., 1972) n. pag.
- TADADJEU, Maurice. "Prospects for Language Planning Studies in Cameroon," *A Sociolinguistic Profile of Urban Centers in Cameroon*, Edna L. Koenig, Emmanuel Chia, John Povey, eds. (Los Angeles, University of California: Grossroads Press, 1983) 117-124.
- TCHOUNGUI, Gisèle. "Focus on Official Bilingualism in Cameroon: Its Relationship to Education," *A Sociolinguistic Profile of Urban Centers in Cameroon*, Edna L. Koenig, Emmanuel Chia, John Povey, eds. (Los Angeles, University of California: Grossroads Press, 1983) 93-115.
- WANCHA, Titus Neba. "Cameroon's Bilingual Civil Servants." Unpublished manuscript, 1998.

