The Fallacy of Promoting Non Native Varieties of English in Postcolonial Multilingual Settings: The Case of Cameroon English (CamE) in Cameroon

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Abstract

This research endeavour is a major contribution to the current debate on the integration of non-native varieties into the school curriculum in non-native settings. Taking the specific case of Cameroon, this work rests on the solid assumption that the promotion of CamE to the detriment of Standard British English accent is definitely a fallacy. The researcher is of the opinion that the ELT pedagogy based on the local variety of English advocated by Cameroonian scholars and researchers cannot bare fruits as Cameroonian professional users of English did not received any training on how to teach CamE; there are no pedagogic materials so far that clearly outline an approach to CamE grammar, vocabulary, morphology instruction, most of the so-called CamE characteristic features are errors and seem not to reflect the sociocultural realities of the entire country but of the Anglophone Cameroon represented by 20% in the Cameroonian landscape. Above all, decision makers on language use in Cameroon and learners prefer native varieties of English like Standard British English and American English as well as other varieties of English spoken in the Cameroonian setting to the detriment of CamE.
Keywords: Cameroon, Cameroon English, ELT, Sociolinguistic realities, Varieties of English

Introduction

The advent of post modernity and advanced technology saw the recognition of English as the *de facto* language of globalisation (Graddol 2007). In fact, in the new millennium, the English language that was at one point the language of a few native countries has undergone some twists and turns and is now the world's number one language. Statistics prove beyond doubt that there are approximately seventy-five territories where English is spoken either as a first language or as an official or institutionalized second language in domains such as government, education and law. This unprecedented spread of English, a world lingua franca par excellence, across cultures, has ipso facto led to the emergence of new varieties of the language which phonologically, syntactically, morphologically and lexically deviate markedly from the native norms (Atechi 2006). Thus, the English language, which was once considered as a monolith by purists like Prator (1968), Buckmaster and Chevillet (1993), has led to the advent of new forms that have developed quasi-autonomy and therefore have a mark of Cain regional coloration. Each of these variant languages has its peculiarities that better suit it's socio-political, economic and linguistic contexts. Thus, the spread of English has definitely, as Rajadurai (2006) rightly puts it "resulted in a new demographic distribution of the language as well as in new uses and users." This is also in line with Jingxia's (2008) view that "Once English [is] adapted in a new region whether for science, technology, literature, prestige, elitism or modernization, it [goes] through reincarnation process which is unique to another culture." To support this argument, Mbangwana (2002) and Schneider (2007) asserts that,

> given that colonial languages, such as English, French, Spanish and Portuguese have not only gained admission into the linguistic spectrum of postcolonial nations, but most of these languages have been adopted, adapted and appropriated according to local needs and are now 'cooperating' with indigenous languages to express the culture, cosmic vision and identity of the different postcolonial contexts where they are used.

1. The twists and turns English has undergone in new ecologies

English now serves as a sound medium through which socio-political, cultural and linguistic realities of most nations are expressed. In the different new nations where the language has been transplanted and adopted, it has evolved according to the ecological, cultural and sociolinguistic realities of such contexts (see Kachru 1986; Graddol 1997; Mufwene 2001; Anchimbe 2006; Schneider 2007; and Ngefac 2008a). In these new nations, the structure of the language at all linguistic levels is significantly influenced by contextual realities and the language tends to display significant differences from British English and other traditional native Englishes (Ngefac: 2010).

According to Moag (1992), once English finds itself in a new setting, it normally goes through four processes of a *life cycle* namely *transportation* or *transplantation*, *indigenisation* and *expansion*, *institutionalization* and *deinstitutionalisation*. Thus, the native variety of English is first transported or transplanted into the new multicultural environment for the purpose of colonial administration. The multilingual and multicultural setting of the new environment inevitably leads to the process of indigenisation, that is, "a process of language change by which a new variety of English becomes distinct from the parent imported variety" (Moag

1992:235). During this stage, many features from the local languages and cultures are incorporated into English through a variety of processes.

The extension of the use of English in new domains especially in education, media and government, leads to the third phase, institutionalization. During this stage, the status of English shifts from that of a foreign language (EFL) to a second language (ESL). Tay (1993: 95) is in agreement with this when he says that the term *institutionalized* refers to "non-native varieties of English which have been developed in many multilingual countries formerly colonized by Britain and the US". The final phase of the life cycle "involves the displacement of English by a local official language usually through language planning" (Moag 1992:235). This displacement of English inevitably leads to the reversion of English to the status of a foreign language (EFL)**.** Thus it involves the change of English from the ESL status back to the EFL status which is called deinstitutionalization (Moag:1992).

Diversification is another term that has been coined to designate the major changes that English generally undergoes in new ecologies. According to Kachru, the *diversification* of English into the different varieties as spoken worldwide happens through the two processes of *acculturation* and *nativization* (Kachru: 1992). *Acculturation* refers to the process of transference of the socio-cultural identity of a group to their particular variety of English. This may be in the form of the linguistic realization of the substratal thought process for a bilingual (Kachru: 1987a). By *nativization* (Kachru: 1992) refers to the process whereby a language that is appropriated by a group is tuned to the particular requirements of that group so that it fits their socio-cultural needs. This process involves their adaptation of English with respect to the linguistic and discoursal features of the traditional language or languages that are available to the members of that particular group. And according to Kachru, nativization may be seen in the areas of *context*, *cohesion and cohesiveness*, and of *rhetorical strategies* (Kachru: 1987a). In the *nativization of context*, the cultural presumptions of a group may not be fully addressed by previous understandings of English and thus require a reinterpretation through the lens of the local socio-cultural premise. In the *nativization of cohesion* and *cohesiveness* (Kachru, 1987a), patterns of collocation and combination of words, and the frequencies of particular lexical forms of a nativized English are affected by the patterns of language use for stylistic and attitudinal reasons. The results from these changes in cohesion and cohesiveness patterns then present not only the surface meaning as may be read directly from the lexical meanings of the localised constructs but also the contextualized meanings that might exist for that particular variety. And in the *nativization of rhetorical strategies*, a move to approximate the dominant code for a bilingual may cause a shift in the style and production of the nativized variety of English so as to create a feel of authenticity respecting the particular context of situation. This nativization of rhetorical strategies may be in the use of local similes and metaphors, rhetorical devices, translation or trans-creation of proverbs and idioms, use of culturally dependent speech styles, and the use of locally relevant syntactic devices. Pandharipaande (1987:149) equally discussed nativization in three contexts, namely the "process of logic transfer of the local languages, the variation within the nativized varieties of English depending upon their sociolinguistic functions and the deviations from native varieties of English". The author explains that deviations from native norms can be categorized into two categories, i.e. *intentional* and *unintentional*. *Unintentional deviations* include institutionalised deviation and mistakes. *Intentional deviation* refers to the "conscious use of deviation by the user to perform a particular function". Such deviations can be found in creative writing, newspaper registers and media communications. Media communications serve "as a linguistic device to create an appropriate extra linguistic effect" and in newspaper registers to give local colour to the news (Pandharipande 1987: 155).

Institutionalised varieties (Kachru: 1982a), on the other hand, have a relevance of usage among members within a particular geopolitical group. These varieties have a wide range of registers and styles, and have effectively been nativized into the particular socio-cultural contexts of situation of the particular groups. There is also a body of nativized literature that reflects the unique characteristics of these institutionalised varieties as compared to other varieties, although on the other hand these nativized literatures are still to be considered part of the larger body of English literature. These varieties attain their institutionalised status from their origin as performance varieties through a process of institutionalisation.

According to Kachru, institutionalised varieties start-off as performance varieties, and with the realisation of certain characteristics over time take up the status of being institutionalised (Kachru: 1982a). These characteristics include having adopted the language over a long period of time, an increasingly wide functional load for the language, an increasingly important functional role for the language, a psychological importance to the members of the group, and a sociolinguistically important status for the language. Institutionalisation works in two processes, an *attitudinal process* and a *linguistic process*. Attitudinally, most of the speakers in a group should affiliate themselves with the nominal label that has been attached to the variety. Linguistically, a model that can express the formal characteristics of a *generally acceptable* expression of the variety should be feasible.

The consequences of the institutionalisation of a group's variety of English may be viewed in three ways (Kachru 1992). In the first way, the institutionalised variety may be seen to have expanded its *functional load* within various domains for the group, which could include the *instrumental function* as a tool for learning and

research, the *regulative function* as a language of administration and the judiciary, the *interpersonal function* as the language of communication within the group, and the *imaginative/innovative function* as the language for cultural production. Another way is to appreciate the *creative potential* of the variety as part of the national literatures of the group. This may be seen through its government's recognition of the role of the variety as a factor in the integration for the group, in the stance of its literati regarding the variety, and in the historical progression of literature for the group. One other way to look at the consequence of institutionalisation is that of the creation of a separate *sociocultural identity* and the contextualization of the group's language production may result in the issue of lesser intelligibility with speakers of other varieties of English.

2. Non Native varieties of English in new ecologies: status and problems of acceptability

As we had pointed out above, in the different new nations where English has been transplanted and adopted, it has evolved according to the ecological, cultural and sociolinguistic realities of such contexts. As a result of the *acculturation*, *indiginisation* and *nativisation* of the English language in the new geographical areas, each of the countries where a new English is spoken is now claiming its own standard of the language. In the literature, one can now identify expressions such as Nigerian Standard English, Ghanian English and Indian Standard English. Ngefac (2010) pointed out that this trend towards recognizing the New Englishes spoken in the new nations is in conformity with Kachru's (1992:11) recommendation 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". What is however worth pointing out here is that, in spite of Kachru's recommendation and the efforts made by scholars from different parts of the world to defend the status, acceptability and equality of Englishes in the three concentric circles, some Outer Circle and/or Expanding Circle speakers continue to think that traditional native English norms are superior to those of their indigenised English, despite the positive attitude they show towards their local English (see Ngefac 2008a). Rajadurai (2005:6) captures this tendency in the following words: "[Outer Circle] speakers express pride in their own accents and varieties, and yet at the same time, espouse a preference and yearning for the native-speaker accent and for traditional old variety norms". This attitude is observed in the Cameroonian context.

3. The status of Cameroon English (CamE) in the English classroom in Cameroon

Most researchers have investigated the current status of CamE in the classroom in the Cameroonian setting. Most of them pointed out that despite the fact that Cameroon is one of the postcolonial contexts where a new English, namely Cameroon English (CamE), 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 enterprise and CamE educated features that reflect the contextual realities of this postcolonial setting continue to be treated with an attitude of rejection and indignation (Ngefac: 2010). The researcher noticed that although the English language in postcolonial multilingual Cameroon has undergone significant indigenisation and, consequently, nativisation, Standard British English (SBE) accent continues to be the preferred pronunciation model in the ELT industry in Cameroon. Interestingly, in most English Language textbooks used for the teaching of the language, drills on SBE accent abound and no drills are provided for educated Cameroon English (CamE) pronunciation. In fact, in all examinations that involve the testing of pronunciation (e.g. the entrance examination into the Higher Teacher Training College Yaounde), RP or SBE accent is always the target. Apart from Ngefac (2008 b), RP or SBE is always the reference accent in most research works (e.g. dissertations, theses and scientific papers, such as Bobda 1991) carried out on phonology in Cameroon. In other words, informants are always evaluated in most of these research works in terms of their knowledge of RP, and not in terms of their knowledge of educated CamE. 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 languages, is inferior and that the African dream must necessarily be rooted in Western constructs for it to be meaningful.

4. Policy makers and language planners and the problem of standardisation and promotion of Cameroon English

The standardisation and promotion of Cameroon English pronunciation is of very little interest to policy makers and language planners. All efforts made for the promotion of CamE seem not to bear fruits. However, as Ngefac (ibid) rightly observed, the varieties of English accent on the tongue of Cameroonian speakers of English carry aspects of the local realities and features of British English are seldom heard, as reported in previous studies on Cameroon English pronunciation (see Masanga, 1983; Mbangwana, 1987; Bobda, 1994; Kouega, 1991; Ngefac, 2008a, b). These studies have equally unequivocally established that features of the so-called SBE which teachers labour to promote, even when they do not master it, are systematically lacking in the speech of the most educated speakers of English in Cameroon. The speech of these speakers is, predictably and logically, patterned according

to the sociocultural and pragmatic realities of Cameroon. This implies that SBE targeted in the Cameroonian classroom will hardly ever penetrate the speakers' sociocultural and ecological backgrounds to emerge as an easily accessible accent of English for the speakers. Definitely, the promotion of Standard British English accent in Cameroon to the detriment of educated Cameroon English pronunciation is an unrealistic goal.

Cameroonian language planners and decision makers therefore appear to be the main enemies of their own accent of English. Paradoxically the pedagogic efforts deployed so far have never significantly implanted SBE in Cameroon. There are sundry cases in Cameroon that illustrate that promoting SBE in Cameroon is definitely far-fetched. In a sociophonetic investigation that Ngefac carried out in the year 2003, the author assessed the spoken productions of the English of some professional users of English in Cameroon with a view to determining the degree of RP in their speech. His findings reveal that the English Language teachers who are presumed to be promoters of SBE accent are not even familiar with the SBE or RP variant. This further shows that government's efforts to implant SBE accent in a New English setting with unique contextual realities is likely to yield very little fruits. Therefore, the author is of the idea that, instead of targeting SBE which is psychologically, physically and practically far remote from many Cameroonian speakers of English, one of the varieties of English pronunciation that characterise the tongue of Cameroonian speakers of English needs to be selected, standardised, promoted and used to project the Cameroonian experience and identity. Cameroonians need a variety that carries the Cameroonian flag, and this variety should necessarily be rooted in their contextual realities.

5. Policy makers' reluctance towards the integration of Cameroon English into the school curriculum

Cameroonian scholars and researchers have been concerned with the reticence of decision makers on language issues in Cameroon towards the integration of the Cameroon English accent into the school curriculum. Most of them point an accusing finger at the Policy makers' ignorance of recent development of the English language and the current status of non native English. According to Ngefac (2010) "stakeholders are not conversant with the new status that has, in recent years, been attributed to varieties of English spoken in the new nations". The researcher explains that instead of perceiving such varieties of English as error systems, inadequate learning, failures, incongruous concoctions, different scholars from different corners of the globe have successfully projected these Englishes as strong forces to reckon with. In fact, it has been unambiguously acknowledged that English in the Outer Circle, such as Cameroon, has developed through an itinerary that is conditioned by the sociolinguistic and cultural realities of the place and it is actually serving the communicative needs of the people concerned. The author therefore suggests that decision makers on language issues in Cameroon should open their ears to current debates provided in international conferences in favour of the New Englishes and should also open their eyes to interesting argumentative essays published in international journals which x-ray the New Englishes as self-contained systems of communication, instead of spending their time castigating CamE and setting ELT goals in terms of Western standards.

Another factor that has been pointed out is that most Cameroonian decision makers on language issues seems to ignore that there are many arguments against Standard English pedagogy for two main reasons. First, as Seidlhofer (2005) argues, teaching Standard English is not very realistic, given that it is not a language variety easy to define. She notices that "in terms of numbers of speakers and domains of use, an insistence on Standard English as the only option for all purposes is difficult to justify". Furthermore, there is no scientific indication that teaching a 'standard' variety of the language will result in learners' reproduction of that same standard, given that the influence of learners' background languages and learners' incapacity to reproduce certain sounds or language items correctly, among other factors, can significantly undermine standard language teaching. This is in line with the findings of studies in Second Language Acquisition where researchers have demonstrated that language is not learnt according to the physical response paradigm. This has been known as the "poverty of the stimulus" (see Chomsky 1965). Second, it is not plausible to teach and learn English through texts or course materials that display a foreign language culture sometimes totally alien to both teachers and students. In that perspective, Cunningsworth (1985) holds: "cultural gaps pose problems to learners of English, particularly where the social, political or religious differences are great" (p.19). Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi (1990) believe that culture in the EFL classroom is not only a problem for learners, but also for teachers. They argue, for instance, that a textbook containing lessons on "dating" is socially and religiously inappropriate in Morocco. They hold that "many Moroccan teachers of English are uncomfortable in the role of presenters of alien cultures with which they may not identify and which they perhaps have not themselves experienced" (p.8).

6. The fallacy of promoting Cameroon English in the ELT industry in Cameroon

The ELT pedagogy based on the local variety of English advocated by many Cameroonian TESOL professionals and scholars in New Englishes (Atechi 2008; Ngefac 2008, 2010, 2011; Mbibeh 2013) appears to be a fallacy for both pedagogical and sociolinguistic reasons. First and foremost, Cameroonian English Language teachers were not trained to teach non-native varieties of English. Who then will teach CamE? As Mbibeh (ibid) rightly acknowledged, the majority of teachers prefer that CamE be used in the English language classroom. However,

there is a gap between theory and practice; "teachers face great difficulties in implementing a non-standard English pedagogy because they were trained to teach only standard language forms". From primary school to the university passing through secondary school, language instructors are introduced to the phonological, grammatical, morphological and syntactic aspects of Standard English. The same goes with the professional schools like the Higher Training Teacher's College where teachers receive special training for effective English language teaching. In fact, the syllabus of the Department of English of the Advanced Teachers' Training College of Yaounde – which provides models for the other two government teacher training colleges (Bambili and Maroua) – emphasizes content knowledge in Standard (British) English. English language common core courses include Structure of English, Advanced English Speech and Usage I & II (English phonology and correct usage of collocations and formulaic language), Academic Writing, Discourse Analysis and Error Analysis. Sociolinguistics and Varieties of English, the only courses that mainly deal with variation across Englishes, are generally taught as electives, depending on the availability of staff and number of enrolled students (Belibi: 2013). At the university level, those who promote CamE hardly speak this variety of language. We have analysed the written and spoken productions of most university lecturers; honestly, instances of Cameroonisms are very limited in number. Most of them have a native-like control of English.

In the same line of thought, Cameroon English still suffers from the problem of description and codification. We have examined some features of the so-called CamE and to be candid, we have notice that, CamE is just a mixture of some phonological, grammatical, morphological, orthographic features of the different varieties of English which co-exist in Cameroon. The language is enriched by vocabulary and grammar from various sources (see Atechi 2008, Kouega 2004 and Epoge 2012). One really wonders why Cameroon English has been presented in the literature as a variety of English that stands out as a variety on its own: it has a British, American, Ghanaian and Nigerian coloration at varying degrees. In the literature, it has been said that the language portrays the sociocultural and linguistic realities of Cameroon! Which Cameroon are we really talking about here? Is it really the Republic of Cameroon? It must be made clear here, Cameroon English is by no means an embodiment of the social, political, cultural and linguistic realities of the French-speaking part of the country! Simo Bobda (1994) made it clear when he pointed out that "Cameroon English contrasts with the speech of Francophone Cameroonians". Most French-speaking can hardly identified themselves as speakers of CamE. In clear, what is referred to as Cameroon English is the English of some Anglophone Cameroonians who constitute just 20% of the Cameroonian population. To Massanga (1983:73), it is "logical to consider Cameroon Standard English as being that variety of English spoken by the Anglophone Cameroonian who has at least attained and completed the secondary school level of education". It is therefore inadequate to consider CamE as the Cameroonian national variety as those who speak it are very limited in number. The problem is further aggravated by the fact, even if the so-called CamE were to be taught in the classroom, there are no pedagogic materials so far that clearly outline an approach to CamE grammar, vocabulary, morphology instruction thought some efforts have been made in describing CamE phonology. Most of the characteristics, which are projected as the essential features of Cameroon English, appear to be basilectal and/or mesolectal features of CamE; such features are, in our opinion, simple errors that generally occur in the process of learning a foreign language in a complex multilingual setting like Cameroon. experience has shown that, as learners advance with their studies, they generally disappear from the learner's speech. What really is the problem? In Cameroon, there is no clear distinction between the speaker's idiosyncrasy and a *feature* of a non-native variety of English: any deviation from SBE in Cameroon is inadequately referred to Cameroon English on the unjust ground that "immediately a structure is used for communication in a community, it is intelligible and is a norm for interlocutors. If a group of people successfully communicate via an avowed error, the error becomes a norm (Sala 2006:61). Honestly, promoting the so-called CamE lexical, grammatical and morpho-syntactic features will be a way of directing Cameroon young learners to hell! What does it take to tell learners that we don't say *disponibility, scholarity, bordereau, licence, dateline* but *availability*, *admission's office*, *mail enclosure slip*, *Bachelor's degree* and *deadline* respectively; that the words *pregnant*, *aggress* cannot exist as verbs as is the case in CamE (to pregnant a girl, to aggress somebody), that we do not *correct* a script but we *mark* it, that we do not *congratulate* somebody *for* his/her appointing but we *congratulate* him *on* his/her new appointment? Aspects that should be promoted are those that are culture-related like *co-wife*, *Eru*, *okok*, *chinda* just to name the few. Such words do not have English equivalent and the realities they do express cannot be expressed otherwise in English.

Promoting CamE becomes more and more a fallacy as most Cameroonians seem to have an intrinsic attachment to native varieties of English like Standard British English and American English as well as other non native varieties of English like Cameroon Francophone English [1], Nigerian English and Ghanaian English. According to Belibi (2013) most Cameroonians see "CamE as a replica of bad English within the context". The

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[1] *A variety of English spoken by up to 70% of the total Cameroonian population, that is French-speaking Cameroonians. Its features have been described by Essossomo 2014, Essomba 2013, Simo Bobda 2013, Kouega 2009, Khan 2012, Tagne Safotso 2012, Ombouda 2010)*

researcher explains that, except at the postgraduate level every other learner views CamE with quite negative stance. Due to some prestige enjoyed by the Western goliath varieties, young learners would not like to be associated with the local colour. That tendency to sound "big" has engendered the admiration for BrE and AmE and a consequent disdain for CamE. Research over the years has shown that those who constitute 80% of the Cameroonian population, that is French-speaking Cameroonians, generally view CamE with negative stance and tend to adopt a disquieting, nonchalant and uncaring attitude towards learning English because they see CamE just as a "Pidginised" form of English. Expressions like *"l'anglais des anglos", "l'anglais des anglofous", "l'anglais des Bamenda" "les anglos parlent le Pidgin, pas l'anglais", "Je ne vois rien d'anglais dans ce qu'ils parlent", "les anglos pidginise l'anglais, ce n'est pas comme ça que les blancs parlent*", tell more. In his survey on the attitude of professional users of English in Cameroon, Ngefac (2010) pointed out that most informants preferred SBE as a model of English pronunciation in ELT in Cameroon. The author reports that though 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, most of them rather recommend an Inner Circle English accent in the classroom.

In the same manner, teaching non-standard English features further exposes teachers to criticism from parents who do not tolerate any form of English sentence or utterance that is not British. For instance, many educated parents would meet teachers or school administrators to complain about teaching 'wrong' language forms to their children. This form of language seems to lock the door to the international. Also, educators and parents fear that accepting non-standard English features might result in students' use of such features in formal contexts and academic writing. As such, the belief that standard language pedagogy is better remains very strong, with the result that language testing is based only on SBE. Adherence to SBE is so strong that only few teachers recognize and accept the use of AmE features in writing tasks. However, the use of non-English words and "deviant" structures is encouraged in creative writing, speaking and literature classes as a need to describe postcolonial or African concepts, ideas, objects or deities that do not have one-word equivalences in Standard English.

Conclusion

In clear, the promotion of Cameroon English to the detriment of Standard British English accent in Cameroon appears to be a fallacy. From the analysis of some aspects above, we realise that it is definitely an unattainable goal. Therefore, instead of wasting time and energy by trying to promote what seems to be impossible for the moment, Cameroonian researchers and researchers who advocate the ELT pedagogy based on CamE, one of Cameroon's local varieties of English, have better look for appropriate ways for a better integration of some SBE features which are still problematic to some learners.

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