

# The Perceptions and Attitudes of Francophone Cameroonians towards Cameroon Francophone English Pronunciation

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## Abstract

This study investigates both the way educated Francophone users of English in Cameroon perceive their English accent and the attitudes they have towards it. Their opinions on the Cameroon Francophone English accent are formulated in comparison with the accent of their Anglophone counterparts. To carry out the investigation, a questionnaire was designed and administered to 150 carefully-selected informants. The analysis of the data collected reveals the following findings: Francophone Cameroonians are convinced that the English they speak is significantly different from the one Anglophone Cameroonians speak. They believe that their speech, contrarily to that of Anglophones, is close to native English and is Pidgin-free. The respondents showcased a very positive attitude towards Cameroon Francophone English and expressed their wish to see it documented and used for educational practices as early as possible.

**Keywords:** Cameroon Francophone English, Cameroon English, perception, attitude

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## 1. Introduction

No empirical study has been conducted so far to shed light on Francophone Cameroonians' perceptions of the differences existing between their English pronunciation and that of their Anglophone counterparts. In addition to this gap, research on language attitudes in Cameroon has mainly focused on the attitudes of Cameroonians either towards foreign varieties of English or towards Cameroon English, more and more referred to in the literature as *Cameroon Anglophone English* in order to make clear the distinction between this postcolonial English variety and Cameroon Francophone English (which has significantly gained ground across the French-speaking part of the country). Some of the studies which investigated language attitudes from the above-mentioned perspective are Ngefac (2008), Essossomo (2015), and Atechi and Angwa (2016). Therefore, no concrete attempt has so far been made to investigate the attitude of Francophone users of English towards their own English pronunciation model. The importance of such a study cannot be belaboured, as it is scientifically acknowledged that people's attitude towards a language they speak is a determining factor for its status. Atechi and Angwa (2016), in this vein, posit that the attitude of the speakers of a New English is a necessary prerequisite for such developments as its identification, codification and standardisation to take place. The present paper focuses on the perceptions and attitudes of Francophone Cameroonians towards their own English accent.

## 2. Review of Literature

This section explores previous studies on perceptions and attitudes with regard to Cameroonian Englishes: Cameroon Francophone English and Cameroon (Anglophone) English.

### 2.1 Perceptions regarding Cameroonian Englishes

Linguistic perception with regard to Cameroon Francophone English (*CamFE* in abbreviation) is still begging for scholarly attention. As concerns Cameroon English (*CamE* hereafter), Angwa (2015) investigated Anglophone primary school teachers' linguistic perception and the phonological aspects of their English. He observed that some Anglophone Cameroonians still strongly believe that the English they speak is not only different from what obtains in the country, but is unambiguously Standard British English. Paradoxically, the findings of the study led to the conclusion that while such Cameroonians think highly of their English, their oral and written performances suggest the contrary. Within the field of CamFE phonology, Kouam (2022) remarked that educated Francophone users of English in Cameroon generally make conscious efforts to produce features that reflect native English models. Interestingly, they end up, in most cases, yielding forms that are neither those of the native accents they were targeting nor those of mainstream CamE they were trying to avoid, thereby falling victim to hypercorrection. It is thus important to investigate Cameroon Francophone English speakers' perceptions of their English accent in relation to the Cameroon English accent. This is because the way they perceive each of these accents is likely to significantly explain the attitudes they have towards them.

## 2.2 Attitudes towards Cameroon Francophone English and Cameroon English

Many works have established that while Anglophone Cameroonians are more and more accepting Cameroon English, Francophones continue to reject it and rather long for native models. Essossomo (2015) depicts the attitude of Francophone Cameroonian users of English towards Cameroon English as follows:

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 [it] 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 pidginisent l’anglais, ce n’est pas comme ça que les blancs parlent” tell more (Essossomo 2015:100).

The above quotation goes a long way to portray Francophone Cameroonians’ phobia about the English spoken by their Anglophone compatriots. Atechi and Angwa (2016) also note that “Francophones feel uncomfortable with features of CamE, though a close observation of their speech, paradoxically, often reveals a deviation in their speech which is now generally described in the literature as Cameroon Francophone English (abbreviated as CamFE).” Their paper investigates the attitudes of Cameroonians towards Standard British English (SBE) and Cameroon English. The results indicate that the majority of Anglophone informants have a positive attitude towards Cameroon English as a model of English language teaching, while the majority of Francophone respondents display a positive attitude towards Standard British English. It should be recalled that Standard British English, a foreign English variety, is what teachers are expected to promote in the Cameroonian English language teaching industry. Atechi and Angwa (ibid:1) denounce this state of affairs, highlighting that “teachers of English in Cameroon are proficient speakers of Cameroon English and their non-native status militates against their usage of Standard British English in the English language classrooms.”

Many previous research works have confirmed Francophones’ love and favourable attitude towards native English accents to the detriment of the local Cameroon English one (Anchimbe 2007, Atechi 2015a, Atechi and Angwa 2016, Kouam 2022, etc.). They have also identified a number of instrumental reasons which may explain this attitudinal tendency. These reasons include the various advantages and opportunities that Standard British English can offer, as enumerated in Anchimbe (2007). In the paper, Anchimbe notes that Francophone Cameroonians, who so much despised English at one point in time, now embrace it with a lot of enthusiasm. He sees “this unprecedented rush for English by Francophones as an identity opportunism whereby postcolonial multilingual speakers choose an identity or a language at a given time based on the advantages they are likely to benefit.”

With regard to the Cameroonian English language teaching context, Atechi and Angwa (ibid) identify as exact reasons underlying the choice of Standard British English as preferred model by Francophone informants the fact that it is universally acknowledged and accepted, codified and well documented, and is a variety that is as good in writing as in speech. Most importantly, Francophones believe that Standard British English, more than Cameroon English, can contribute to their economic well-being. This is in line with Simo Bobda’s (2000) recommendation that Cameroonians should continue to learn native English models in order to stay connected to the Western powers in whose houses the best professional and educational opportunities seem to reside.

## 3. Methodology

A total of 150 Cameroon Francophone active users of English were retained for this study. They fulfilled the necessary criteria required to qualify as CamFE speakers. All these informants had already completed secondary school education and came from different parts of Cameroon. They equally belonged to various academic and professional horizons. Among them were 75 English language specialists (30 English as a Foreign Language teachers, 9 pedagogic inspectors, 25 university students in bilingual series and 11 learners in pilot linguistic centres) and 75 non-specialists (11 lecturers, 20 PhD researchers and 14 other students from Cameroonian state universities, 8 medical doctors, 10 secondary and high school teachers with French as means of instruction, and 12 other non-specialists of English). A questionnaire segmented into two sets of questions was designed for data collection. The first section aimed at investigating Francophones’ perception of the differences involving CamFE and CamE, while the second set out to elicit the informants’ attitudes towards their English pronunciation model. Before the questions related to the investigation per se, some preliminary statements and questions were proposed to make sure that only respondents with appropriate profiles are finally chosen for the study. As a whole, 132 Francophone informants out of the 150 retained went through the Francophone subsystem of education in primary and secondary school and were holders of a Baccalauréat; 11 went through the Anglophone subsystem and were holders of a GCE Advanced Level; and the remaining 07 went through the bilingual section and were holders of a Baccalauréat bilingue. But at the base, they are all from Francophone families. The informants all acknowledged that they speak English in various situations away from school.

#### 4. The Findings

The questions formulated in the questionnaire had two main objectives. The first was to investigate the informants' perceptions of the differences between their English speech and the speech of their Anglophone fellows. The second was to elicit their attitudes towards their English accent.

##### 4.1 Francophones' Perceptions of their English Accent and that of Anglophone Cameroonians

Francophone Cameroonians who were selected as informants for this study were asked to indicate the extent to which they think the English pronunciation of educated Cameroonians with a Francophone background differs from that of Anglophones, say which speech model is closer to native English, and state the factors that may account for the speech differences.

##### 4.1.1 On the Gap between Francophone and Anglophone English Speech Models

The reactions of the informants in relation to the differences between the English speech of Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians are captured in the following table.

Table 1: Francophones' opinions about the gap involving their English pronunciation and that of Anglophone Cameroonians

How different is Francophones' English speech from Anglophones' English speech?	Specialists of English		Non-specialists of English		Overall figures	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Overall Frequency	Overall Percentage
Just slightly different	30	40	12	16	42	28
Significantly different	41	54.7	62	82.7	103	68.7
Not different	4	5.3	1	1.3	5	3.3
Total	75	100	75	100	150	100

From the table above, it appears that CamFE speech is different from CamE speech. This is attested by 96.7% of the informants, 68.7% of whom describe the difference as very significant. Up to 94.7% of Francophone English language specialists (EFL teachers, inspectors and students) believe in this difference in pronunciation. While 40% of them admit that the difference involving the speech of the two Cameroonian linguistic communities is not considerable, 54.7% think that the gap is significant. Whatever the case, the figures clearly show that the English spoken by Francophone Cameroonians is quite distinct from the one spoken by Anglophones, as only a minute proportion of the respondents (5.3%) failed to acknowledge that the two communities speak English differently.

For the non-specialists of English, the gap between Anglophone Cameroonians' English speech and Francophone Cameroonians' English speech is even bigger. This is seen as up to 98.7% of them are of the opinion that the English speech of the two linguistic communities is incontestably different. The most striking remark is that for the majority of these non-specialists of English (82.7%), the difference is very significant. The situation portrayed by the figures above confirms that the distinction between Cameroon English and Cameroon Francophone English, as established in previous studies (see, for instance, Kouega 2008, Simo Bobda 2013, Safotso 2016 and 2018, and Atechi 2015b) deserves to be made. The informants were also invited to indicate the speech community which approximates native English more.

##### 4.1.2 Informants' Views on CamFE and CamE Speeches in Relation to Native English

After establishing that there is a difference between Francophone Cameroonians' English speech and Anglophone's English pronunciation, the informants were asked to indicate the speech community they think approximates native English accents more. The following answers were obtained.

Table 2: Speakers who approximate native English more

Those whose speech is closer to native English are:	Specialists of English		Non-specialists of English		Overall figures	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Overall Frequency	Overall Percentage
speakers with an Anglophone background	9	12	30	40	39	26
speakers with a Francophone background	62	82.7	44	58.7	106	70.7
none of the two categories.	4	5.3	1	1.3	5	3.3
Total	75	100	75	100	150	100

Table 2 above clearly illustrates what Francophone users of English in Cameroon think of the English they speak. In fact, a great majority (70.7%) declare that their speech community produces speech features which, as compared to those produced by the Anglophone community, are closer to the native accent. This corroborates Essossomo's (2015) observation that Francophone Cameroonians generally see the English spoken by Anglophone Cameroonians as very different from native English, and rather associate it with Pidgin English, even though not sounding native does not necessarily mean speaking Pidgin. The logical consequence of such a perception is that Francophone Cameroonians would hardly aspire to emulate the English speech of their Anglophone countrymen.

The table also displays some figures which pave the way to a number of questions. Out of the 94.7% of Francophone English specialists who declare that there is a difference involving their English and that of Anglophones (see Table 1), 82.7% consider that as compared to CamE, CamFE is closer to the native English model. However, one can question why on the other side Francophone non-specialists of English are so cautious to make the same observation. In fact, up to 98.7% of them (see Table 1) declare that the English of Francophones is different from that of Anglophones. But unlike Francophone English specialists, they are only 58.7% (see Table 2) to think that they approximate the native English accent more than their Anglophone counterparts. Various interpretations may arise from this. For instance, is it a relatively weak potential in English phonology that causes many of them to hold, out of ignorance, that Anglophone Cameroonians, unlike Francophones, speak an English which reflects the native model? One can also wonder if it is not just out of pride that as many as 82.7% of Francophone specialists of English claim that their English, contrarily to that of Anglophones, sounds native. The respondents were also called upon to indicate the reasons they think could explain the difference involving the English pronunciation of Francophones and Anglophones in Cameroon.

#### 4.1.3 Justifying the English Speech Difference between Anglophones and Francophones

Four options were proposed to the informants to justify why the English spoken by Francophones differs from the one spoken by Anglophones in Cameroon. They were equally given the opportunity to provide additional reasons. The table below gives an overview of their choices.

Table 3: Reasons accounting for the English speech difference between Francophones and Anglophones in Cameroon

What accounts for the difference between Francophones' English speech and Anglophones' English speech?	Specialists of English		Non-specialists of English		Overall figures	
	Frequency of answers	Percentage	Frequency of answers	Percentage	Overall Frequency	Overall Percentage
Francophones' desire to speak good English	62	44.9	44	40.7	106	43
Anglophones' desire to speak good English	9	6.5	2	1.9	11	4.5
Francophones' wish to speak English respecting the rules of the language	56	40.6	30	27.8	86	35
Anglophones' extensive exposure to English	11	8	32	29.6	43	17.5
TOTAL	138	100	108	100	246	100

Table 3 above presents the four options that were proposed to the informants in a bid to explain the divergences existing between the English speech of Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians. It should be noted that informants had the possibility to choose more than one option. For language specialists, the main

factors that enable Francophones in Cameroon to speak a more refined English as compared to Anglophones are their desire to speak good English (62 occurrences out of 138) and their wish to abide by the rules that govern English speech (56 occurrences). Non-language specialists instead provided a quite mitigated answer. In fact, 40.7% of them believe that the desire to speak good English makes Francophone Cameroonians to speak an English that differs from that of Anglophones and up to 29.6% think that Anglophones' extensive exposure to English is an important asset that permits them to distinguish themselves positively from Francophones in English oral communication.

Apart from the options mentioned in Table 3 above, a few other reasons were advanced by the informants themselves to account for the speech difference involving the English of Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians. They are summarised as follows:

- Anglophones do not care about their speech (18 occurrences).
- Unlike Francophones, Anglophones are so exposed and used to Pidgin English that they cannot dissociate it from standard English (23 occurrences).
- Unlike Anglophones, who strongly believe that they master the English language, Francophones are conscious that they need to work hard to speak it appropriately (29 occurrences).

To the question as to whether Francophone Cameroonians would dream to speak English the way their Anglophone counterparts do, all the informants ticked the option "NO", thereby indicating their rejection of Cameroon English. This corroborates Atechi and Angwa's (2016) view that Francophone Cameroonians do not, in any way, aspire to speak English the way their Anglophone counterparts do.

#### 4.2 Investigating Francophone's Attitudes towards CamFE and their Plans for the Variety

One of the main objectives of the study was to elicit the informants' attitudes towards the English spoken by educated Francophone Cameroonians who use English very often. They were also expected to suggest and justify the treatments they would want this New English accent to undergo.

##### 4.2.1 CamFE Users' Attitudes towards the CamFE Accent

The attitudes of the informants towards their own English accent are contained in the table below. It should be noted that in the questionnaire, the model was not referred to as CamFE because some of its speakers are not yet aware that the English they speak already bears a particular label.

Table 4: The Attitudes of CamFE speakers towards CamFE

Francophones' attitudes towards CamFE	Specialists of English		Non-specialists of English		Overall figures	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Overall Frequency	Overall Percentage
Total acceptance (positive)	70	93.3	66	88	136	90.7
Total rejection (negative)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tolerance (mitigated)	5	6.7	9	12	14	9.3
Total	75	100	75	100	150	100

As indicated in Table 4 above, educated and active Francophone users of English in Cameroon have a very positive attitude towards the English they speak. In fact, up to 90.7% of the Francophones consulted for the study showcased their pride and heartfelt love for Cameroon Francophone English. It is interesting to note that no single informant displayed a negative attitude towards this variety. Rather, the few who do not show a positive attitude towards it remain neutral; that is, they neither praise nor reject this new variety. Such a situation shows that Cameroon Francophone English stands a great chance to witness a very rapid growth, unlike Cameroon English which, until very recently, still had a lot of detractors among the Anglophone population.

##### 4.2.2 Treatments Proposed for CamFE

Below are the different treatments Francophone Cameroonians think Cameroon Francophone English should undergo.



Table 5: Treatments proposed for CamFE

CamFE should:	Specialists of English		Non-specialists of English		Overall figures	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Overall Frequency	Overall Percentage
be documented and encouraged through educational practices	58	77.3	52	69.3	110	73.3
be discouraged	3	4	6	8	9	6
be banned from Cameroonian classrooms	0	0	0	0	0	0
neither be encouraged nor discouraged	14	18.7	17	22.7	31	20.7
Total	75	100	75	100	150	100

The table above displays interesting figures. Up to 73.3% of the informants express their wish to see Cameroon Francophone English codified and used in the English language teaching industry in Cameroon. This is an indication that the majority of Francophones like being taught English by other Francophones. This wish is in line with the current ELT policy which consists in training Francophones in bilingual series and posting them to teach English in the Francophone sub-system of education and French in the Anglophone sub-system. Nowadays, the greatest majority of English Language teachers in Francophone sections have a Francophone background across the Cameroonian territory. Although 6% of the informants prefer to see CamFE discouraged in the country, nobody wants it to be banned from the classroom and 20.7% think this variety should neither be promoted nor discouraged. The informants went further to justify the choices they made.

#### 4.2.3 Informants' Reasons for the Treatments Proposed for CamFE

A list with a number of reasons was presented to the informants. They were expected to choose from it suitable answers to justify the treatment suggested for their variety of English. Table 6 below provides the various reasons why Francophone Cameroonians prefer or reject Cameroon Francophone English, their own variety of English. While the first three reasons are for the respondents who are in favour of the model, the last one is for those who regard it with more or less disdain.

Table 6: Reasons underlying Francophones' views about CamFE

Informants' reasons for choosing or rejecting CamFE	Specialists of English		Non-specialists of English		Overall figures	
	Frequency of proposals	Percentage	Frequency of proposals	Percentage	Overall Frequency	Overall Percentage
It reflects my identity as a Francophone Cameroonian.	64	33.5	68	37	132	35.2
It is Pidgin-free.	56	29.3	67	36.4	123	32.8
It is close to native English.	68	35.6	40	22.7	108	28.8
It is not yet known what it is exactly.	3	1.6	9	4.9	12	3.2
TOTAL	191	100	184	100	375	100

From Table 6 above, the most important reason which explains Francophone's extreme love for Cameroon Francophone English is that they think it reflects their identity as Francophone Cameroonians. This means that Francophone Cameroonians see Cameroon English as a variety that portrays only the culture and identity of the Anglophones. Consequently, they can't identify themselves with it. Another important point that accounts for the enthusiasm Francophones have about their accent is that they are convinced to speak an English which is close to native models (to which they attach an immense prestige) as opposed to CamE that they disregard and consider as pidginized. This view is supported by up to 51.6% of the informants.

It is interesting to note, as the figures from the table shows, that many informants, regardless of their status as English language professionals or non-professionals, rely on the fact that CamFE is pidgin-free and reflects native Englishes to justify their attachment to this new variety they speak. The fact that these two arguments were respectively raised by up to 36.4 and 22.7% of non-English specialists (who are supposed to have little knowledge of the characteristic features of English) shows how deep Francophone Cameroonians' disdain for CamE is.

## 5. Some Pedagogic Implications of the Findings

Since Francophone Cameroonians mostly perceive the English of Anglophone Cameroonians as “bad English” and their own as “good English” (even though this view sounds biased), more and more Francophone EFL teachers need to be trained to teach English in the Francophone sub-system of education. This is likely to boost those of the students who had already likened Anglophones’ English to what is commonly referred to as “Pidgin”. It should be noted that although more and more Francophones are now rushing to English-medium schools or are motivated to learn English, a few others continue to perceive the English class as hell, hating the language, especially when it is taught by Anglophones who systematically avoid using French in the classroom. It appears that CamFE speakers are very passionate about the Cameroon Francophone English accent, their own accent. This is seen as up to 90.7% of the informants express their enthusiasm for the model and the remaining 9.3% simply have a mitigated (but not negative) attitude towards it. In a global context where the World Englishes framework is more and more orienting English language practices in Outer and Expanding circles, it is important that this local variety be researched appropriately. It could then be codified and promoted in the Cameroon EFL classroom. If the attitude of the speakers of a New English is a necessary prerequisite for such developments as its identification, codification and standardisation to take place (as Atechi and Angwa 2016 affirm), then the remarkably positive attitude of CamFE speakers towards CamFE is a clear indication that this emerging variety is on the path leading to these stages.

## 6. Conclusion

This study looked at the perceptions and attitudes of Francophone Cameroonians towards their English accent. The findings show that Cameroon Francophone English benefits from an extremely positive attitude on the parts of Francophone Cameroonians. Up to 90.7% of the respondents demonstrated their unflinching love for the English of educated Cameroon Francophone users. Most of them (73.3%) indicated their wish to see Cameroon Francophone English used in the Cameroonian English language teaching industry as early as possible. For them, no variety can better project their identity as Francophone Cameroonians than CamFE. Besides this, they are convinced to be speakers of an English variety which is pidgin-free and significantly approximates native models that they hold in very high esteem.

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