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Decline in spoken English on Anglophone campuses in the Francophone Regions in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Anglo-Saxon campuses in the Francophone section of the country instruct their learners in English Language. This paper examines the language used out of class by learners after receiving instructions in English in the classroom. Two secondary and one higher institutes of learning, which have English as the language of instruction, were sampled. From the observation, which was conducted by silently monitoring pairs or groups of learners conversing with one another, it was discovered that the most spoken language by learners is French. French is just a subject in some of these institutions. The reason for French being highly spoken language on Anglophone campuses is the fact that more Francophones attend these schools than Anglophones and Anglophones struggle to speak French rather than English since they believe that it is already their language. The consequences of "frenchifying" the Anglophone campuses is that spoken French is on the steady rise while spoken English is on the steady decline even among Anglophones on these campuses. This paper therefore proposes that the use of English, out of the classroom, should be encouraged through sensitization and rewards.

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1. Introduction

Depending on the context in which education is carried out, students can start school already having two or more languages in their linguistic repertoire. In a monolingual situation, a situation which is not evident in any nation in the world, children may start school with only one language common to all of them involved in the study. This is not the case in multilingual situations where students already command a number of languages before beginning school. The language used in school may not always be the language the students used at home. This is the commonest linguistic scenario in countries where English is used as a second language. Most children, who go to school, speak their vernaculars and only an insignificant proportion of them speak English they are expected to use on a daily basis in school. This view is elaborated by Schleppegrell (2004) as follow:

Language use is always socially and culturally situated. What we learn and how we learn it depends on the contexts in which we learn. Not all students come to school with the same background and ways of using language. School language tasks are not familiar to all students from their experiences in their homes and communities. For some children, the socialization contexts in which they have participated have prepared them well for the ways of using language they encounter at school. For many other children, however, this is not the case. (P.04).

This actually means that in the same class, one can find students who already can use the school language while others in that very class may not. If the students who have a command over a particular language are more than those of the other language, the tendency is that those who have command will control social discussions in school. The

importance attached to English language in almost every aspect in life is becoming so alarming as languages that used to be in command, in some countries around the world, are losing to or sharing their authority with English language. English language is commonly referred to as the global language (Crystal 2003; Zhu 2003:36; Smith 2005:56), the world's lingua franca (Ngefac and Sala 2006:218; Mauranen 2009:1; Sewell 2009:37) because it is the widely, most spoken language in the world today and a language that links people with diverse languages. Being the language of globalization, it also serves distinctively local needs and is used, in various forms, as a local language among locals (Higgins 2009). The study of English is not for the same purpose everywhere by different individuals. The reason for which it is studied determines the manner in which it is studied. English, especially in the developing world, is used as a key to academic success, as a means of obtaining international job opportunities, as a way of facilitating international communication and as a medium for achieving global education leading to global understanding (Ngwi 2001:2).

The use of language in Cameroon, especially in the school milieu is becoming more and more complex with many francophone Cameroonians embracing English education at the detriment of French that was hitherto the rule. With this new trend, many schools that are opened in cosmopolitan cities of Cameroon like Yaounde and Douala are either bilingual or purely English to meet the growing demand. When one gets into a new locality, the most significant thing that convinces one that the environment has changed is the change in language. In some cases, it may not be a change in language but a change in the variety of language used. This used to be the case in



the academic setting in Cameroon where one could immediately know that he was on the campus of an anglophone school or francophone school from the language spoken around. New trends have set in today, making it impossible to use Campus language as the identifying mark of the kind of school one is in.

It is generally understood that, unlike today where schools do not reflect the regions in which they are found, schools in Cameroon, some ten to fifteen years ago, very much represented the regions in which they were situated linguistically. In the francophone regions, francophone schools were found in which French was the language of instruction and a subject and English was used only as a class subject. In the anglophone regions, anglophone schools were found with English being the language of instruction and a class subject and French only as a subject. Exceptionally for the promotion of bilingualism, bilingual schools could be found in either section. There were really no pure French schools in the anglophone regions and pure English schools in the francophone regions. Such schools at that time would not have yielded much because English, for example, was considered as the language of the "anglo" (a derogatory term for anglophone), who were constitutionally equal to francophones but practically second class citizens in Cameroon. French, however, wielded a lot of influence since it was considered the language of power. The advantages, ripped from language use, were looked at only within the circumference of Cameroon. To perfect the language of those in bilingual schools, especially in professional institutions like the Higher Teachers' Training Schools (Ecole Normale), which train bilingual teachers, students at the final year went to France and Britain for anglophones and francophones

respectively. That in itself could be considered motivation for many students who would not have done the bilingual course had it not been for the fact that they would move out of the country. Given that it was never thought that English Medium schools would be of such great interest to francophones and French-medium schools of interest to anglophones some day in the future, the rule for anglophone children was to attend English-medium schools where they took up French as a compulsory subject, and francophone children to go to French-medium schools where English was a compulsory subject (Kouega 2005:1201).

In Cameroon today, Anglophone schools can be found in the francophone regions as many as francophone schools, although the reverse is not true for francophone schools in the anglophone regions. Only very few francophone schools are found in anglophone regions because anglophones are not embracing French with the same spirit in which francophone embrace English. The cities of Yaounde and Douala, being the political and economic capitals respectively, are beaming with increasing number of English schools as the demand for English is steadily on the rise among French-speaking Cameroonians.

In terms of languages spoken in Cameroon daily for social interaction and for official purposes, English language is said to be facing a great competition at both the higher front and the lower front (Kouega 2002:93). At the lower front, it is competing with an English-based Cameroon pidgin that is the most widely used language of social interaction (Wolf 2000, Mbangwana 2004, Atechi 2011, Ubanako 2013) and at the upper front, it is competing with French as described by Kouega (2002):

the other official language, which is dominant in tertiary level education, in the



media (where most newspapers as well as most foreign radio and cable television programmes are in it), in public places (where respondents report overhearing talks and reading notices in tongues other than English), and in the civil service (where most official correspondences are initiated in it). (P.93).

The dominance of French, in almost every aspect of life in Cameroon, indicates that it is the language of power in the context of Cameroon and naturally had to attract anglophones who would want to actively participate in the life of the country. But the situation today is the contrary as the francophones are becoming more interested in English than anglophones do for French (Fonka, 2013). This shows that some languages are naturally powerful such that speakers, even of other languages, are attracted towards them.

With this background, the present paper investigates the language used on anglophone campuses in Yaounde, using three schools, one University and two secondary schools as a case study. The schools here include PK Fokam Institute of Excellence, a University; Mario academic complex and English High School, secondary schools. All these schools have English as their language of instruction and French as a subject. In all of these schools, the use of other languages brought from home by the student, are not allowed in the classroom but on campus. Exceptionally, Cameroon Pidgin is banned from some of the campuses like Mario Academic complex because it is considered destructive to the use of English language. Most anglophone schools in Cameroon either directly or indirectly ban the use of pidgin on their various campuses for the same reason already given (Mbangwana 1983; Sala 2006; Fonka and Atechi 2007; Simo Bobda 2001, 2009; Chia 2009; Fonka 2011; Atechi 2011). Therefore,

the study examines the decline of spoken English on the campuses of anglophone schools situated in the francophone regions of Cameroon.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Linguistic Situation of Anglophone Schools in Cameroon

The linguistic situation of schools in Cameroon is as complex in its multilingualism as that of the whole country. Ngefac (2011) adds his voice to that of Atechi (2006) and others who have discussed the multilingual situation of Cameroon. He believes that "besides French and English as the country's official languages, there are approximately 280 indigenous languages" (P.43). He equally makes mention of Cameroon Pidgin creole, which he refers to as Kamtok and Camfranglais. Anchimbe (2006) also reports that "in Cameroon, the official languages, French and English, dictate the standard for all education-related jobs, government employment, the media, education, and are continuously encroaching into other spheres hitherto reserved for the other languages"(P.97). This explains why the use of local languages is not common both in the anglophone and francophone schools in Cameroon. Even in situations, where the local languages are considered important and are taught in certain institutions or departments like in the linguistic departments in some Cameroon's state Universities, no particular local language is taught. Only those related to these local languages are taught in English or French, depending on the lecturer. Thus, the language situation in anglophone schools in Cameroon today reflects the language trends in Cameroon in terms of the use of official and local languages and their perception.

2.2 Language use in school



Language performs different functions including a means of communication, expression and conceptualization (Seyoum 1997). These functions of language, as indicated here, do not seclude its use in school. Seyoum further says that “once the functions and importance of languages are recognised, the choice of languages of education is often made on historical, political (nationalistic) and cultural grounds as much as on the basis of pedagogical and linguistic ones”(P.02). This works with the language of the classroom that is regulated by institutions and not the language of the campus that is determined by the speakers themselves. Schleppegrell (2004) defines school as a unitary construct that each classroom and each school has its own subculture and its own ways of using language for learning. She further points out that “*school* can also be conceptualized broadly as the institutional framework in which children are socialized into ways of formal learning in our society”(P.05). The idea of each school, having its own subculture and its own manner of using language, is quite clear in anglophone schools in Cameroon where, in most cases, classroom language is not campus language. Anglophone schools in the cities have a different linguistic setup to anglophone schools in the villages.

Fonka (2013:87-91) patently depicts this when he presents the use of English language in anglophone schools in Cameroon. He states that in anglophone schools in villages, English is commonly used in conjunction with vernaculars whose usage is encouraged over the use of Cameroon Pidgin. This is because most children start school without any acquaintance with the school language which is English. The language on campus, in such a case, is undoubtedly the indigenous language that is spoken by a majority of the children,

especially in the case where they are from the same village. He states that in anglophone schools in the cities, some children already have English as their first language; some have it as a second language while others, mostly the francophones, have it as their foreign language. With this kind of multilingual setup, not everybody is comfortable with the language of school that is not very familiar to all. Many continue using the languages brought from home for social interaction and use the school language only in class for academic purposes. This presents a parallel situation to the one in Malaysia where “those whose experience of English is confined to the school system rarely go on to use it in their daily life” (Benson 1990:20). Although Benson (*ibid*) terms those Malaysians, who speak English as speakers by inclination and speakers of English as a foreign language, their use of English can be considered higher as they do not only read English language newspapers, listening to the English language 'Blue Network' radio, watching English television news broadcasts, but equally use it in conversations with friends and family.

The linguistic situation on anglophone campuses in the francophone regions of Cameroon is determined by the ratio of the population of the students who speak which language as their primary language of communication. Davis (1865), as cited by Fairman (1999:24), advocated this rule when he asserts that, “the art of speaking and writing correctly is founded upon *rules* ... [which] ‘may be altered at any time if the majority of literary persons so decide.’” This explains why the increasing population of students from the French-speaking background, on the anglophone school campuses in francophone regions, has changed the linguistic setup as examined in the statistics on the different tables in this



paper. The next section of this paper handles data presentation and analysis. Many researchers hold that francophone Cameroonians are becoming interested in English language than ever before (Simo Bobda 2010), but no one has investigated the language used on these anglophone campuses today though subjective statements have been made stating the dominance of French.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The data for this study, as mentioned earlier, was collected from three anglophone schools in the central region; one of the eight French-speaking regions of Cameroon. These schools include the lone Anglo-Saxon University in the French-speaking part of Cameroon- PK Fokam Institute of Excellence and two secondary schools- Mario Academic Complex and English High School. All these schools are located in Yaounde, the capital city of Cameroon and one of the cosmopolitan cities in the country. In each school, a pair or a group of students were monitored during recreation. In each case, a student was tutored to move round with an already prepared sheet of paper and note the language used in interchanges by fellow students. A student was used because students have the tendency of switching to a recommended school language when they see a teacher, especially if the language they were using is considered not good for the school environment. This was done without drawing the attention of the students to the exercise so as to avoid pretentious habits that are common, especially on campuses where some languages are not allowed. In order to have a balance study, thirty groups of students were examined in each school, giving a total of 90 pairs or groups of students.

3.2 Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

The data collected indicated that in the three anglophone schools sampled; three languages were dominant on campus - English, French and Cameroon Pidgin (Henceforth CPc). No vernacular and no Camfranglais (a mixture of English French, indigenous language and pidgin spoken by youths) were found. The absence of these two languages, especially Camfranglais, which is said to be common among youngsters (Kouega 2003, Echu 2007), can be attributed to the following:

- Students are from diverse backgrounds and therefore do not possibly have a common vernacular.
- Some may be ashamed to speak their indigenous languages since students are in the habit of jeering when they hear a local language in a situation where it is not a recognized school language.

Camfranglais is very common among francophones and not the anglophones. Though most of the students are of the francophone background, they are not francophones because they have carried out all their studies in English and not French and they spend much of their time with anglophones who do not speak camfranglais. Since the students, collecting the data, did not have to stay for long with a group, they did not take notice of camfranglais since it is highly made up of French lexifiers.

From the survey carried out, it was found that at PK Fokam Institute of excellence, the only anglophone University in this survey, out of the thirty groups monitored, only English and French were the languages on campus. However, English is almost inexistent as almost all the students carry out their discussions in French. This is contrary to the classroom scenario where English language is both a subject and a language of instruction. One would have



expected English to dominate the scene. This directly indicates that the University itself is an anglophone institution in theory but francophone in practice as students seem resistant to change.

Table: 1 Language use on the campus of PK Fokam Institute of Excellence

Language	French	English	Pidgin /Creole	Total
Pairs /groups of students	26	04	/	30
Percentage	6.67	13.33	/	100

Out of the thirty groups or pairs of students monitored, four used English and twenty six used French, giving 13.33% and 86.67% respectively. The high rate of spoken French on the campus of this school is indicative of the ratio of French students to English students. Though an anglophone school, where all the lectures are in English, the language on campus presents a picture of a francophone campus. This is very true in the sense that a crushing majority of the students in this University come from the francophone background, a common scene in anglophone schools in the major Francophone cities in Cameroon (Fonka 2013). No trace of CPc was found on the campus of this school because there are very few anglophones who can initiate the use of pidgin. It should be noted that Pidgin is not a day-to-day language among francophones but a bridge language to create intelligibility.

The second case study was at Mario Academic Complex which is a secondary school that is purely English-speaking with all staff anglophones. Fonka (2013) found out that in this school, there are more francophones than anglophones in terms of student population, but what he did not investigate was the language use out of the classroom. Although the language use on campus is greatly influenced by the population of students, there is a possibility

for the majority to speak the language of the minority if strict measures are taken. Of the thirty groups or pairs of students monitored, six were observed discussing in English, sixteen in French and eight in CPc making up 20% , 53.33 % and 26.67 % respectively. English, which is the language of instruction, is the lowest of the spoken languages on campus while French is first. It should be noted that in this school, pidgin is out rightly banned with placards such as “No pidgin on campus” found at strategic corners of the school. The continuous presence of CPc, however, shows that posters are not padlocks that obstruct people from speaking the language they are most comfortable with.

Table: 2 Language use on the campus of Mario Academic Complex

Language	French	English	Pidgin /Creole	Total
Pairs /groups of students	16	06	08	30
Percentage	3.33	20	26.67	100

The appearance of French, as the most spoken language on the campus, shows that English language, which is used to be the norm on Anglophone campuses, has declined, giving its position to French.

The situation at English High School, the last case study, presents nothing divergent from what has been already examined in the two cases. The language situation on campus is quite analogous to that obtained at Mario Academic Complex where three languages, English French and CPc are in use. Though a colossal sign board with the inscription “English High School” welcomes you as you approach the campus, the language that welcomes you first or that you will hear frequently is French as indicated in table three.

Table: 3 Language use on the campus of English High School, Yaounde



Language	French	English	Pidgin /Creole	Total
Pairs /groups of students	18	06	06	30
Percentage	60	20	20	100

English language is spoken by six out of the thirty groups of students monitored, French by eighteen and pidgincreole by six, giving 20 per cent, 60 per cent and 20 per cent correspondingly. Interestingly here, English language and CPc are used equally on campus while French maintains the lead as the most spoken language.

3.3 Findings

It should be noted that francophones are not found only in the few schools used as sample. All anglophone schools in the francophone zones, especially in cosmopolitan cities are experiencing rapid rise in the population of students of French expression. Though this looks good as it increases the number of bilinguals, it does not go well with spoken English because it is compellingly giving its place to French. In general terms, French is the spoken language on the campuses of anglophone schools in the francophones regions in Cameroon as table four shows.

Table: 4 Language use on Anglophone school campuses

Language	French	English	Pidgin /Creole	Total
Pairs /groups of students	60	16	14	90
Percentage	66.67	17.78	15.55	100

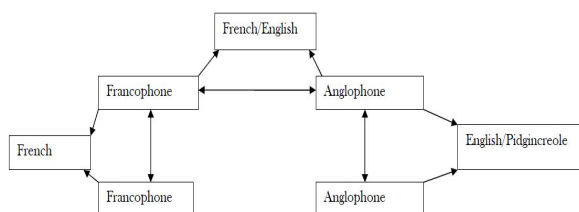
A total of ninety groups or pairs of students were monitored as they spoke with one another on campus and the results indicate that sixteen groups spoke in English language, 60 in French and 14 in CPc. This, of course, shows that 17.78 percent of students, who attend anglophone schools, communicate in English out of the class, 60 per cent in French and 15.55 per cent in

CPc. This does not mean that francophones speak only to francophones while anglophones speak only to anglophones. The following situations can be brought out resulting to the language spoken on anglophone school campuses:

- Anglophones in these schools, who understand and speak French, will speak in French with those from the French-speaking background. The advantage the latter has over the former is that they can speak both French and English when they want to, but they are comfortable in French, giving rise to the high percentage of French on campus.
- Anglophones, who cannot speak French, will communicate with francophones in English since the latter can speak both English and French.
- Anglophones and anglophones, that is, all from anglophone backgrounds will be at ease in Cameroon pidgincreole and in English.

The chart below presents the linguistic situation on the campus of anglophone schools in the francophone region. It shows that when two francophones meet, they speak French, a francophone and an anglophone will speak either French or English while two anglophones will speak either English or CPc. Logically, the percentage of students, who speak English, and those who speak Pidgin/creole give us an idea of the population of students from the anglophone background and those from the francophone background. Though some anglophone students from the anglophone background speak French with those from the francophone background, the number, in my observation, is not large.

Figure: 1 Linguistic situation on anglophone campuses in Francophone regions



The chart shows that more English and French is spoken than CPc. However, the English and the French spoken are asymmetrical because students of French-speaking background make up a majority of the school population. This kind of linguistic situation is not without implications. The next section examines the implication of this new linguistic trend in Cameroon.

4. The Implications of French Dominance on Anglophone campuses

English, as pointed out earlier, is a global language which is steadily growing in influence as many countries, especially those of the extending circle, are embracing it. In Cameroon, francophones are learners of English as a foreign language thus, according to Kachru's (1986) concentric circle; they are members of the extending or expanding circle. Their interest in learning English language has not been the result of any force or special motivation by the government; they have simply been caught by the global fever of English being the language of opportunities in the world. This is certainly the reason Haggins (2009) holds that:

On the one hand, language studies need to confront the changing realities of urban life, with mobility, shifting populations, social upheaval, health and climate crises, increased access to diverse media, particularly forms of popular culture, and new technologies. On the other hand, language studies are confronted by the growing concern that we need to rethink the ways in which language has been conceptualized. (P: ix).

The study of English in anglophone schools in the urban cities of Cameroon has actually confronted changing realities of life. This has brought with it the following implications:

- The linguistic situation in anglophone schools, that use to be highly CPc and then English language, is now French, English and CPc. Other languages like the vernacular and Camfranglais, not mentioned in this study, are spoken to a less significant degree.
- English language moves from a day-to-day language to a situational language among those who consider themselves anglophones.
- The francophone variety of English risks being the norm in Cameroon with their huge population. If this happens, it means anglophones have no commanding power in the linguistic setup of Cameroon since they are not studying French.
- Anglophone schools in the francophone regions of Cameroon have become anglophone schools of French expression. This, however, does not result to attrition which, in De Bot's (2001) words, as cited in Clyne (2003 :5), is "language knowledge loss over time... decline of language skills in individuals and groups".
- Anglophones still have their skill to speak their language though French, by virtue of its greater number of speakers, overshadows English.

This situation may also mean that these students are simply forced by their parents to learn a language they do not feel comfortable with. They would probably have chosen French schools if their opinions were sought before sending them to anglophone schools. Cameroon Pidgin/creole, which used to be the major rival of English language on anglophone campuses, has also declined, giving its place to French which is now the main language of communication.



5. Conclusion

This study examined the language used on the campuses of anglophone schools in Cameroon. It is very clear that English language is gradually leaving the anglophone schools and giving its place to French as more and more students from the francophone background become interested in anglophone schools in Cameroon. Something needs to be done to reverse this trend as anglophone schools cannot, at the same time, become French campuses. This does not mean stopping students from the francophone backgrounds from attending anglophone schools; it simply has to do with enforcing the language meant for the anglophone institutions to be used both in class and out of class. This should be done by encouraging and not by forcing or punishing. This has been going on in an increasing measure because it is considered normal and nobody really cares about the language used out of the classroom. Research has proved that speaking and listening allows children to 'organise and rehearse ideas in advance of putting them on paper' and it is a key factor in securing successful learning" (Scott 2009:4). The speaking aspect, which is missing in these students, should be encouraged since it affects even performance in class. Students, especially those from French backgrounds, who make good use of spoken English, should be rewarded so that it can serve as motivation to others. It should be borne in mind that their different out-of-school experiences with language affect their knowledge about expectations for language use at school (Schlepppegrell 2009:24). There is increase in this trend because French is one of the official languages in Cameroon and it is considered normal for it to be used anywhere and anyhow. To sum up, the languages used in class should be encouraged

out of the class also such that if other languages should be used, which is always the case, the main language of instruction should dominate.

About the Author:

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