

The Attitudes of Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians towards Cameroon English as a Model of English Language Teaching and Learning in Cameroon

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Abstract

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. This makes the attainment of British English thorny and perhaps impossible in Cameroon. Standing on that premise, we were motivated to find out Cameroonians' attitudes towards Cameroon English as a model of English language teaching and learning in the country. Eighty (80) post graduate Cameroonian users of English (40 Anglophones and 40 Francophones) were randomly in the Departments of English both in the University of Yaounde I and the Higher Teacher Training College Yaounde. A four-Likert scale questionnaire comprising 27 questions was designed for the informants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with them. The findings revealed that attitudes towards CamE as a variety that must serve as a model in the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry are varied. While the majority of Anglophone informants had a positive attitude towards Cameroon English as a model of English language teaching and a relative negative attitude towards Standard British English, the majority of Francophone informants rather had a negative attitude towards CamE and a very favourable attitude towards Standard British English.

Keywords: Attitude, Anglophone, Francophone, Cameroon English, English Language Teaching

1. Introduction and Background

English Language enjoys a global privilege as the language of international relations, technology, aviation, commerce and education in almost every community in the world. The importance of English is perhaps apparent in the current itch, in some initially non-native English-speaking communities, to gradually divorce French and embrace English, basically because of the numerous advantages that come with fluency in this target language (Plonski and Teferra 2013).

Interestingly, English has grown beyond its national boundaries into new contexts where it has been adopted and adapted, according to various contextual ecologies. Consequently, the English that is spoken in these new contexts has undergone serious indigenisation and is significantly different from Standard British English at all linguistic levels. The marked peculiarities of the New Englishes are evidently divulged through such appellations as Singaporean English, Indian English, Nigerian English, and Cameroon English.

In the new environments where the language has been transplanted and adopted scholarly efforts are more and more to standardise context-specific varieties that better express the ecological, sociocultural and pragmatic realities of the new geographical landscape. However, in native and non native settings, attitudes towards non native Englishes are varied. While conservatives, such as Quirk (1985), Honey (1989) and Chevillet (1999) are of the opinion that features which differ from Standard British English (SBE henceforth) are haphazard deviations, pragmatists such as Bamgbose (1971), Kachru (1985) Brown (1989), Modiano (1999), Simo Bobda (1994), Ngefacc (2008) and Atechi (2008, 2010), are of the opinion that, it is a total waste of time to continuously impose native norms on non-native speakers. Pedagogic efforts should rather be made to standardize and promote the New Englishes which have patterns that are simple, straightforward, systematic and predictable. Amidst this controversy, some scholars, like (Crystal 1988:7), have maintained moderate stance, based on their arguments that every speaker of English should have a public and a private voice. The public voice is to help them communicate with the rest of the world while the private voice is to uphold their respective cultural realities.

Many Cameroonians, just like other speakers of English in other parts of the world, ascribe a relatively significant degree of prestige to the English language through a sustained interest to study it. This interest in the English language is born out of instrumental than integrative reasons. Cameroonians want to use this language to obtain international opportunities available to proficient speakers of English around the world and not for national integration. With the fervent interest to learn SBE for instrumental purposes, and considering the sustained use of Cameroon English (hereafter CamE) in almost every sphere of life in Cameroon, the question of the variety of English to be used for pedagogic purposes is unavoidable. Simo Bobda (2000:66) sees two problems that may militate against the use of a non-native variety in the English language teaching industry. First, the limited professional and educational opportunities in a world, controlled by the west and second, the lack of codification of these alternative standards which is sine qua non for the design of didactic materials.

However, the nature of English language teaching in the country has been described as the “blind leading the blind” (Ngefac 2011). This is so because teachers of English in the country, who are speakers of Cameroon English are expected to teach Standard British English to Cameroonian students who are speakers of Cameroon English. This is simply unrealistic. Perhaps, it is just time for a more realistic standard in the country that is likely to introduce a new category of proficient speakers of English in Cameroon.

Considering the fact that contemporary research effort is tilting towards the identification, codification and standardisation of indigenous Englishes, the attitude of the speakers is a necessary prerequisite for such a development to take place. Research on attitudes in Cameroon has been limited to the attitude of Cameroonians towards non-native speakers of English who try to approximate features of SBE (Mbangwana 1987); the attitudes of Cameroonians towards the different lects of Cameroon English (Ngefac 2008); the attitudes of Cameroonians towards the different varieties of English in Cameroon, such as American English (AmE), British English (BrE), Nigerian English (NigE), Cameroon English (CamE) (Anchimbe 2006); and the attitudes of users of English in Cameroon as they grapple with local identity and international intelligibility (Atechi 2010). Contrary to these previous studies, we set out to investigate the attitudes of Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians towards the use of CamE as a model for teaching and learning English in Cameroon in a bid to add a voice to the current debate on the standardisation of CamE. This investigation is guided by the following questions:

1. What are Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians’ attitudes towards Cameroon English as a model for teaching and learning English in Cameroon?
2. What factors account for their positive or negative attitude towards Cameroon English as the model in the English language teaching industry in Cameroon?
3. What are the pedagogic implications of using Cameroon English as a model of teaching and learning English in Cameroon?

2. Methodology

In order to systematically investigate the issue at stake, eighty (80) postgraduates (40 Anglophones and 40 Francophones) who had taken courses on World Englishes in the University of Yaounde I and Higher Teacher Training College Yaounde, were selected. Care was taken to make sure that all the informants have taught English or are actually involved in the teaching of English, either as a Second Language (ESL) or as a Foreign Language (EFL). A questionnaire, with close and open-ended questions, was conceived to elicit the informants’ attitudes towards CamE as a model of English Language teaching and learning in Cameroon. The survey was carried out primarily by using the direct method of opinion/attitude measurement and the qualitative and interpretative function of data. The data were categorised in terms of positive and negative responses to specific questions on the questionnaire. We got the informants’ positive and negative attitudes, towards CamE as a model of English Language teaching and learning in Cameroon, by summarizing the positive and negative responses.

It is important to note that though the focus of the current study is on attitudes towards CamE as a model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon, the incorporation of attitudes towards BrE and AmE was meant for them to express their attitudes towards CamE alongside other varieties of English in Cameroon. This was necessary for reliability of the process of data analysis.

3. Results

An understanding of a people’s attitude towards a language or variety of a language requires broad alternatives that give the people multiple options for them to define their stance. In the subsections below, Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians’ positive and negative attitudes and the different arguments advanced in favour or against CamE as the model in ELT in the postcolonial Cameroon are discussed.

3.1. Attitudes towards CamE as Model of English Language Teaching & Learning

In this section, we discuss, from the general perspectives, both Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians’ attitudes towards CamE. From the analysis of the data, it stands out that Anglophones and Francophones have positive and negative attitudes towards CamE as a model in English Language teaching and learning in Cameroon.

Table 1: General Attitudes towards CamE as a Model of English Language Teaching

Geo-linguistic background	Positive attitude	Negative attitude	Total
Anglophones	86.42% (34.6)	13.58% (5.4)	100% (40)
Francophones	21.78 % (8.71)	78.22% (31.29)	100% (40)
Mean value	54.1% (21.65)	60.21 % (48.17)	

The above results reveal that majority of the Anglophone informants, perhaps, because of the linguistic realities in the country, agree that a specific standard of CamE should be identified, codified and standardised as the medium of English Language teaching and learning in Cameroon. Contrary to the above stance, 13.58%

(5.42) of the Anglophone informants refuted the idea that CamE English should be used for pedagogical purposes. In fact, they unequivocally averred that even though CamE has features of Cameroonian socio-cultural realities, it will be a mistake to introduce it in our classrooms as a model for learners of English in Cameroon. The majority of Cameroonians who express a negative attitude towards CamE, as a pedagogic tool in Cameroon, are Francophones. Table 1 above shows that as many as 78.22% of Francophones have a very negative attitude towards CamE for reasons that will be presented in table 3. As the two main groups of informants that make the population of this study had different attitudes towards CamE, they were asked to give arguments for or against CamE as a model in ELT in Cameroon. In the section below, we discuss in details the different reasons that the informants gave.

3.2. Reasons in favour of or against CamE as the reference model in ELT in Cameroon

The reasons in favour or against CamE as the reference model in English language teaching in Cameroon are many. We discuss them in the subsections below:

3.2.1 Reasons in favour of CamE as the reference model in ELT in Cameroon

As aforementioned, the majority, if not all, of Anglophone informants involved in this study have a positive attitude visa CamE. Their preference of this national variety is justified in the table below:

Table 2: Reasons in favour of CamE as the model in ELT in Cameroon

Arguments	Frequency	Percentage
It is preferable for CamE to be the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon since we understanding it better.	38	95%
As a Cameroonian, CamE can facilitate my economic development more than any other variety of English in Cameroon	25	62.5%
CamE should be studied in the classroom because it contains elements of Cameroonian culture.	40	100%
The use of CamE will not be ridiculed in the future	37	92.5%
Mean	34.5	86.42%

As table 2 above shows, 95% of the informants are in favour of CamE. They strongly believe that it is definitely preferable for CamE to be the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon since it is the variety of English they understanding it better. To 62.5% of the informants, CamE is what the official bodies should promote because it is the faculty that can facilitate their economic development more than any other variety of English in Cameroon. Evidence of the table also reveals that, as CamE, more than any other variety contains elements of Cameroonian culture 100% of the informants think it is the variety of English that must be promoted in the classroom. As many as 92.5% of the informants also think that as the people Cameroonian users will be interacting with will mostly be non native users of English, it is better to promoted CamE which. By using speaking CamE, they will be far from being ridiculous.

3.2.2 Reasons against CamE as the model in ELT in Cameroon

As afore-mentioned, other informants, especially Francophone Cameroonians, are totally against the promotion of CamE in the ELT industry in Cameroon for the following reasons:

Table 3: Reasons against CamE as the model in ELT in Cameroon

Arguments	Frequency	Percentage
CamE is NOT as good as any other variety in the country	38	95%
CamE cannot facilitate my economic development more than any other variety of English in Cameroon	37	92.5%
It is not preferable for CamE to be the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon since we do not understanding it better	38	95%
CamE should not be studied in the classroom because it contains many errors.	40	100%

We readily observe from the above table that the Francophone informants' responses stand in sharp contrast to that of Anglophones. This suggests 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 (CamFE) (Kouega 2009, Ombouda 2010, Safotso 2012, Khan 2012, Essomba 2013, Essossomo 2013, 2014, Atechi 2015). As many as 95% of Francophones prefer native varieties like Standard British English and American English and above all, their own variety of English which in the literature has been termed Cameroon Francophone English. This is in line with Essossomo (2015) observation that "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, "bad" English. the researcher explain that they generally use 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”, to designate CamE. In the same manner, 92.5% of Francophones are totally against CamE as the model to be used in the ELT industry in Cameroon because, to them, CamE cannot facilitate their personal, social and economic development. Only native varieties and mostly French can play that specific role. It is also observable in the table tat, 100% of Francophone have a negative attitude towards CamE because it contains many errors at different levels of analysis.

3.3 Anglophone and Francophones’ attitudes towards BrE

From the above statistics, it was necessary to find out the informants’ attitudes towards Standard British English (SBE hereafter), which has all along been the target in the country, as a model of English language teaching and learning. This was necessary because of the consistent outcry of falling standards in the country and calls for efforts to be employed to ameliorate the proficiency of speakers of English in Cameroon towards SBE (Simo Bobda 2002). Bearing in mind that all the informants, considered for this study, are aware of this linguistic realities in the country, finding out what they think about SBE as the target in the Cameroonian classroom, was, therefore, intended to have a grasp of the antitheses of both perceptive standpoints. Remarkably, the informants’ attitude towards SBE as the target in the teaching industry in Cameroon was in two folds: positive and negative attitudes, relative to their respective geographical backgrounds. The following table presents the attitude of the Anglophone informants towards SBE as a model of English language teaching and learning.

Table 4: General Attitudes towards BrE as the Model of English Language Teaching

Geo-linguistic background	Positive attitude	Negative attitude	Total
Anglophones	15.42% (6.17)	84.58% (33.83)	100% (40)
Francophones	64.16 % (25.66)	35.84% (14.34)	100% (40)
Mean value	79.58% (19.88)	60.21 % (48.17)	

The mean value of the frequencies and percentages of the informants’ attitudes towards SBE seems to suggest that though some postgraduate informants, in the city of Yaounde, feel comfortable with the implementation of CamE as the target in the English language teaching industry, the majority of them (79.58% (19.88)), irrespective of their origin, still feel attached to SBE. It is important to note that this majority are principally Francophones just as the majority of fans for CamE are principally Anglophones. What are the arguments in favour or against BrE? The explanations provided by the informants are given below

3.3.1 Reasons for BrE as the model in ELT in Cameroon. Though the two groups of informants had the same explanations, the percentages are different. In the tables below, the arguments advanced are discussed in details.

Table 5: Anglophones’ reasons for BrE as the Model of English Language Teaching

Opinions	Frequencies	Percentages
I prefer to use BrE as the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon because it is universally acknowledged	12	30%
BrE should be the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon even if it does not contain features of Cameroon’s culture	4	10%
BrE should be the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon because it is widely accepted and codified and well documented	19	47.5%
BrE should be the standard variety in the English language teaching classroom because it is the only variety that is as good in writing as it is in speech.	00	00%
BrE should be the standard English in Cameroonian classroom because Cameroon has a colonial past with Britain.	00	00%
Total	16.17	15.42%

The Anglophone informants, from the above results, are observably indifferent about the use of SBE as the target in the English language teaching industry. A significant number (33.83, 84.5%) of them outright rejected the idea of setting SBE as the target. Considering that all the informants have different experiences of English language teaching in the city of Yaounde, their pessimistic attitude towards SBE seems to suggest the fate of SBE in Cameroon, especially because the majority of those who use English in Cameroon are Anglophones.

From the table, it is observable that although the majority of Anglophones are for the promotion of CamE, 47.5% are of the opinion that BrE should be the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon because it is widely accepted, codified and well documented. In the same manner, 30% of Anglophones advocate the promotion of BrE as the model of English language teaching and learning in the Cameroonian because it is universally acknowledged. The prestigious status of English in the world today is what accounts for their choice of the most documented accent of English in the world.

3.3.2 Francophones’ reasons for BrE as the Model of English Language Teaching

Contrary to the Anglophone informants’ down-beat attitude towards SBE, the Francophone informants had a

rather positive opinion about SBE. The reasons for their admiration for this are provided in the table below:

Table 6: Francophones' reasons for BrE as the Model of English Language Teaching

Opinion	Frequencies	Percentages
I prefer to use BrE as the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon because it is universally acknowledged	28	70%
BrE should be the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon even if it does not contain features of Cameroon's culture	27	67.5%
BrE should be the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon because it is widely accepted, codified and well documented	36	90%
BrE should still remain the model of English language teaching and learning in the country	22	55%
BrE should be the standard variety in the English language teaching classroom because it is the only variety that is as good in writing as it is in speech.	27	67.5%
BrE should be the standard English in Cameroonian classroom because Cameroon has a colonial past with Britain.	14	35%
Total	25.66	64.16%

From observation, francophone Cameroonians generally express a marked interest in SBE, though a closer observation of their linguistic performance betrays them as victims of the hypercorrection syndrome, or, on a more feathery perspective, proficient speakers of what is now described in the literature as CamFE (Safotso 2012). We are of the opinion that their uniqueness stems from their abortive effort to approximate SBE. The above significant positivity towards SBE, confirms the hypothesis that they need English for instrumental, rather than integrative reasons. The argument 90% of Francophone informants advanced in order to justify their preference of BrE as the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon is that BrE should be because it is widely accepted, codified and well documented. In the table, it is also indicated that 70% of the informants prefer BrE as the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon because it is universally acknowledged; although there are other varieties of English, they prefer BrE whose international recognition is unquestionable. Table 6 equally reveals that 67.5% of Francophones are of the opinion that BrE should be the model of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon even if it does not contain features of Cameroon's culture. The fact that BrE is the only variety that is as good in writing as it is in speech equally accounts for the preference of 67.5% of the informants.

4.0 Accounting for the informants choice of CamE or BrE

One of our major preoccupations in this work was also to find out the respondents' justifications for their attitudes towards CamE or SBE as a model of English Language teaching and learning in the country. The open-ended questions we asked the informants on our questionnaire, gave room for them to justify their stance. We realised that all their justifications were part of the different propositions about the nature of English language in the country as we have highlighted in table 1, 2, 4, and 5 above. The informants basically restated the propositions in different ways. However, there were two major justifications that influenced the informants' attitudes towards CamE and SBE. First, the admiration for CamE, as the target in the English language teaching industry in Cameroon stemmed principally from the fact that language is a vehicle of culture, and since CamE contains aspects of Cameroonian culture, it logically follows that CamE should be the target in our classrooms. Second, as far as SBE was concerned, the need to negotiate intelligibility beyond the linguistic borders of Cameroon was basically what the informants reiterated. They feared that CamE may not be understood out of Cameroon and so felt the need to educate young Cameroonians in a variety that will not pose any major problem to them in the future.

While we share the opinion that CamE should be the target in the English Language teaching industry, because it contains aspects of Cameroon's culture, we do not totally agree with the most of the arguments advanced by the informants for SBE as far as intelligibility is concerned. This is perhaps for two main reasons. Atechi (2006) shows glaringly that SBE poses enormous intelligibility problems to speakers of Cameroon English. So if we are talking about choosing a variety of English that can cater for the needs of international intelligibility, then SBE is just the wrong candidate. The issue of international intelligibility is still being hotly debated upon by linguists and non linguists alike. Firstly, the idea of "international" cannot be fairly limited to the interaction between non-native and native countries. Studies have proven that there is a reasonably significant intelligibility of the English language, used among speakers of English in Central and West Africa (Simo Bobda 2000 and Fongan 2015). Secondly, the question of intelligibility is ambiguous. This is because problems of intelligibility often come up when a native variety is compared with a non-native variety (Atechi 2006). Borrowing from Atechi (2010), we cannot help but ask the fundamental question: "whose intelligibility?" or intelligible for whom or to whom?

7.0 Pedagogic Implications and Conclusion

The importance of attitude towards the implementation of a particular variety of English in our classrooms cannot be over emphasized. Quite often, attitude precedes prestige. If CamE English must survive, then there must be a steadfast positive attitude towards it by its speakers. Considering that most Anglophones have a favourable attitude toward CamE as a model of English language teaching and learning, introducing it in the country as the standard, it is bound to sustain the much protected Anglophone Cameroonian culture which is predominantly represented in this variety.

The introduction of CamE in the English language teaching industry will define a specific standard for the Cameroonian English language teaching industry and a new category of proficient speakers shall also emerge through pedagogic efforts. This phenomenon is likely to introduce a variety of English in Cameroon that is attainable and the notion of Standard CamE speech shall be a new domain of academic research.

While we agree with Simo Bobda (2000) that there is the need for Cameroon to connect to the western powers in whose houses professional and educational opportunities seem to reside, and the idea that CamE is not codified, we are of the opinion that since Cameroonians of all walks of life only speak CamE and any effort to speak SBE only makes them proficient speakers of CamE (Ngefacs 2008), there is no need to continue insisting on features that are practicably unattainable in the country. After all, Cameroonian students continuously excel academically in different native-speaking communities. We, therefore, add our voices to the current call for the identification, codification, and gradual introduction of educated CamE as the standard in the Cameroonian English language teaching industry.

One of the major challenges facing CamE is evidently notoriety. Some Cameroonians, especially francophone Cameroonians often think that it is not good enough. This situation arises when the correctness of its grammar is determined by how close it is to SBE. CamE is used by almost every Cameroonian, and some who try to approximate SBE either ridicule themselves as victims of hypercorrection, or are considered speakers of CamFE (Ngefacs 2008 and Safotso 2012). Considering that the majority of those who find CamE inappropriate are markedly Francophones who are not interested in the international opportunities that come with proficiency in the English language, promoting this variety through pedagogic efforts will not, therefore, be considered unfair. Until now some Cameroonians, especially those connected to the English language in one way or the other, still think that the English they speak is not only different from what obtains in the country, but is unambiguously SBE. While they think highly of their English, their oral and written performances seem to suggest the contrary (Angwah 2015). For what is worth, considering that the majority of educated Cameroonians now have a positive attitude towards CamE as a model of English language teaching and learning, it is worth formally encouraging its use in all formal contexts in the country, especially in the English language teaching and learning industry.

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