

What English for the Cameroonian Classroom Today?

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Abstract

The linguistic imperialism of the English language across the globe and the consequent adoption of various identities has plunged the L2 speaker and learner into a kind of bewilderment, owing to the difficulty in choosing the variety of English to use. This article examines the foregoing question with the specificity of the ESL acquisition context in Cameroon. To a common user of English, the question of variety may sound inconsequential. However, the pedagogue finds this question primordial given his status as the beholder of the linguistic etiquette in the classroom context. The survey research design is used to sample opinions of 60 ESL teachers within the North West Region of Cameroon on this question. According to the findings, the choice of CamE is related to its simplicity and closeness to the learner's social realities, whereas the choice of BrE is based on the necessity to meet the exigencies of the global village. AmE is rejected on stereotypical bases, with the claim that the variety is related to youthful language imbedded with crime oriented undertones. Statistically speaking, CamE should be used in the classroom, but given that language revolves around a plethora of other sociolinguistic intricacies, it is necessary to consider the challenges of codification and documentation raised by previous researchers. However, there is need for a take off point.

Keywords: Englishes, Performance, Language teaching, Language learning

1. Introduction

That the English language has extended its tentacles the world over and established its hegemony over a number of languages in the global village has dominated research in sociolinguistics in the last decades. Questions on the reason for such linguistic imperialism and above all the particularity of English, have resulted in the conclusion that the language “has transcended the realm of ownership by any nation or people” Atechi (2010:24). This is of course true given that unlike political domination where specific systems of government are implanted and controlled from the centre, linguistic dominance and the spread of English in particular has in one way or the other resisted the regulations of the centre. In which case, the spread of the language to various geographical settings is accompanied by the adoption of socio-cultural exigencies of the settling area thereby resulting in a multiplicity of the various varieties we have today. While such varieties are either clamouring for or claiming autonomy, the centre can no longer hold and only contends in raising questions on intelligibility. As challenges of description and codification raised as imperatives for a language to achieve independence are grappled with given the enormity of literature¹ being written in the varieties; the various ramifications of the language within the outer circles leaves much to be desired.

The jostling for position by the goliath varieties; British and American English within the international arena leaves the tentacle varieties in bewilderment. The quest for the parent variety to turn to only goes a long way to broaden the perplexity raising such questions as; which is the reference variety? Though Cameroonians will claim that British English is the reference variety for Cameroon English² the socio-cultural, economic and even political might of the USA has been accompanied by the silent admiration for American English and a consequent adoption of Americanisms in Cameroon English (Atechi 2010). Despite this confusion, linguists engaged in the description of Cameroon English, while suggesting the introduction of this variety into the classroom, claim that this may not be possible on account of the lack of didactic material in the variety. As new theoretical dimensions and methodologies of ESL teaching are being developed over the years, the burning question that comes to mind is; what English are such theories and methods referring to especially in second language contexts where given varieties like Cameroon English have developed. When Atechi (2008) evaluates the situation, he believes the second language teacher is more or less in a dilemma as to which of the Englishes (British or American) to use in their classroom. Added to this dilemma is the presence of Cameroon English that both the teacher and learner may not ignore given the almost innate property as well as its significance in terms of the expression of the socio-cultural reality and/or identity. It is therefore no longer a tussle between British English (later BrE) and American English (later AmE) but equally between these native varieties and Cameroon English (later CamE) resulting in the following question; what English for the Cameroonian classroom today? To answer this question, it is necessary to evaluate the stakes of English language teaching and learning in Cameroon.

¹ See literature on Cameroon English

² Owing to colonial origins

2. English Language Teaching and Learning in Cameroon: Evolutionary and Present Trends

The origin of the English language in Cameroon today can be traced as far back as the 15th to the 18th century with the arrival of British slave lords in the coastal areas of Cameroon.³ Though introduced only to a few middlemen essentially for business purposes, the wide spread of the ‘interpreters’ English’ through their apprentices was later hampered by the political twists in which Cameroon became a German Protectorate in 1884. It is only after the defeat of the Germans in 1916 and the consequent handing over of the territory to Britain that effective teaching and learning of English could take place. This was done through the creation of schools and missionary centres where not only was the gospel taught but the language as well. As time went on, British teachers were gradually being replaced by Cameroonian teachers who had just completed standard six⁴. The so called ‘impeccable’ English spoken by those who studied at the time bears testimony to the learning situation. With the advent of independence in 1961, the language spread beyond the confines of the elitist few with the multiplicity of state owned schools. The constitutional bases of the language as an official language, was enough booster and motivation for its spread so much such that today in Cameroon, English could be acquired even in the informal milieu. Research by Gabe (1996) proves that children who acquire the language at home are more fluent in speech than their counterparts in the school milieu. Given the multilingual setting of Cameroon today, intermarriages between couples from different linguistic backgrounds have resulted in the use of English as the main family language in such families. In which case, the offspring turn to acquire English as their first language. Despite this, one may hesitate to call them native speakers of English; but if that were the case it would be native speakers of Cameroon English. The teaching and learning of English today in Cameroon is a daunting task. Needless mentioning the usual mechanical difficulties of insufficient teachers, didactic material, motivation for both teachers and learners etc. While the government and stakeholders are grappling with the difficulties, there is more to these visible shortcomings.

The sociolinguistic environment with over 200 languages (Wolf 2001, Atechi 2006 and Kouega 2007) is more of a mixed blessing to the ESL learner in Cameroon. The intricacies in the language (structural ramifications) have made scholars to refer to the English language as mad. In this light Simo Bobda’s (2011) article talks of taming such madness of the English language. The wide spread lingua franca Pidgin English (which seems easier) is in a serious jostling for position with English and is gradually relegating English to the background in political, religious and market discourse or better still in discourse intended to meet the general population. This is definitely placing English at an elitist position vis-à-vis the other languages. That is, a language that is the reserve of a secluded class; getting back to colonial English as was the case in South Africa. The situation is so glaring that empirical research in Cameroon Pidgin English is already proposing the introduction of this language into the classroom (Fonka 2010). Above all, the multiplicity of varieties that are present in the Cameroonian context through the multimedia, only go to add more salt to injury. With these

³ See Mbassi Manga (1976) for details on the evolution of English language in Cameroon

⁴ Final class for primary education at the time

difficulties, the concluding remark is that English language teaching and learning in Cameroon is quite enigmatic for the teacher and learner respectively. Who is this teacher and who is the learner? The next segment describes the teacher and learner of English within the Cameroonian context before examining the kind of English that is plausible for the classroom in which the two find themselves.

3. The ESL Teacher and Learner in Cameroon

Describing the ESL teacher and learner in Cameroon here entails a review of their sociolinguistic as well as academic profile. Generally speaking, ESL teachers at all levels are Cameroonians who have acquired the language in a particular formal context; at the end of which a certificate is awarded to testify their level of competence in the language. For ESL teachers in the primary section, they are holders of the General Certificate Examination (GCE) Ordinary and/or Advanced Level in the Anglo Saxon subsystem of education in either four or two papers respectively. The professional training received in the schools of education permits them to acquire methods of teaching English amongst other subjects in the curriculum. At the secondary level, the ESL teacher has received specialised training. They are supposed to have succeeded in the GCE A/level (English inclusive) and possess a teacher's diploma from an advanced school of education where they have either spent 3 or 5 years as the case may be. Apart from this, others constitute holders of either the Bachelor or Masters Degree in English language. Both the ESL teacher and learner generally acquire a home language as their first language (L1) before learning English subsequently in school. Along the acquisition line, they could get to learn Pidgin English, French or another lingua franca as the case may be (Kouega 2000). What remains certain is that at the end of the training the teachers as well as the learners do speak a variety of English. Given that BrE is regarded as the reference variety for CamE, mindful of the influx of Americanisms in CamE as depicted by Atechi (2010) as well as the jostling for position between CamE, Pidgin English and the silent penetration of Nigerian English to Cameroon, it becomes imperative to describe the kind of English in the Cameroonian classroom today.

4. English in the Cameroonian Classroom Today

When the constitution of the Republic of Cameroon in article 1 section 1 prescribed the use of English and French as official languages of the country at the advent of independence, little did the law makers pause to ponder about the intricacies in the English language. That is, which of the varieties was to be recommended for use? Though the impression is that since the British introduced English to Cameroon, BrE should be the reference, there is no legal and/or official backing to this. It should however be noted here that the spread of AmE to various parts of the globe has nothing to do with colonization. The prestige enjoyed by the variety has not left Cameroonians indifferent. It is therefore a challenging venture to isolate the type of English spoken in the Cameroonian classroom at least to an absolute degree. Of course Cameroonians speak Cameroon English as research in all levels of language analysis over the years has proven (phonology, grammar, lexicology, discourse etc). Unfortunately, a majority of educated Cameroonians (secondary leavers and university graduates) would claim that they speak British English. This is definitely because of the inferiority complex imposed

by speakers on Cameroon English vis-à-vis British and American English. It would be quite unconvincing to claim that Cameroonians speak BrE especially given the enormity of deviations from standard BrE as observed by Simo Bobda (2006). This equally explains why Ngefac (2011) is quick to observe that it is a fallacy introducing BrE norms to the Cameroonian classroom. Could it thus be that Cameroonians speak AmE given the influx and enormity of Americanisms in their speech and writing? (see Atechi 2010). In fact Atechi (2008:39) earlier described the relationship between British and American English in Cameroon as that of coexistence and further comments that the confusion brought about by this coexistence is so serious that it poses a lot of challenges to both the teacher and learner in non-native speaking environments. Below is a list of few examples of words from the various varieties that find expression in the Cameroonian context.

Table 1. List of words from BrE, AmE and CamE

	British English	American English	Cameroon English
1	Sweets	Candy	Bonbon
2	Taxi	Cab	Taxi
3	Thermos flask	Thermos bottle	Flask
4	Level crossing	Grade crossing	Railway crossing
5	Dual carriage way	Divided highway	Two way traffic
6	Lodger	Roomer	Roommate
7	Town hall	City hall	Council/municipal hall
8	Spirits	Liquor	Strong/hot drink
9	Soft drink	Soda	Sweet drink
10	Cyclist	Cycler	Bicycle rider
11	Lift	Elevator	Lifter
12	Cooker	Stove	Cook
13	Sitting room	Living room	Parlour
14	Pig-sty	Hog-pen	Pig fence
15	Nappy	Diaper	Baby napkin
16	Vest	Undershirt	Singlet
17	Water tap	Faucet	Pump/tap
18	Give way (road sign)	Yield	No priority
19	Vice chancellor	President	Rector
20	Luggage	Baggage	Cargo

(see Mbangwana 2002, Simo Bobda 2006 and Atechi 2008 for more examples of this confusion).

The much cherished learner-centred approaches to teaching that privilege the learner have emphasised the acceptance of local realities in second language teaching. The local realities are undefined and simply refer to what is predominant in the learner's society. This trend has orchestrated the spread of Nigerian English coloration in the ESL classroom in Cameroon. That is why Nigerian exclamations like *ahru*, *eewo*, and jargons like *igwe*, *lolo*, etc from local languages in Nigeria find expression in the classroom in Cameroon. From this discussion, it is evident that English in the Cameroonian classroom is a hodgepodge of varied influences

rendering its description a herculean task. The preliminary conclusive statement here is that Cameroonians speak CamE which is of course present in the ESL classroom but that this English just like any other language is enriched by vocabulary and grammar from various sources (see Kouega 2004 and Epoge 2012). Therefore, in the ESL classroom in Cameroon today, the predominant variety of English is Cameroon English with a British, American and Nigerian coloration at varying degrees.

5. What English for the Cameroonian Classroom?

The forgoing discussion is so far establishing that there is no particular variety of English privileged in the ESL classroom in Cameroon today. The imposition of BrE in Cameroon is considered a fallacy (see Ngefac 2011) and its teaching equated to a blind leading the blind given the absence of native teachers. American English is simply jostling for position and its use only limited to items considered prestigious (see Atechi 2008). Codification, extra-linguistic challenges and lack of didactic material have debilitated the introduction and practical use of CamE in the classroom (see Simo Bobda 2011, Ngefac 2011). Having this caveat in mind, I think it is high time decisions be taken on the kind of English (variety) to be used in the ESL classroom in Cameroon. One of the ways of doing this is to seek the opinion of stakeholders. In which case, a questionnaire was designed with the aim of establishing the variety of English that both the teachers and learners of English in the Cameroonian setting would like to use in the classroom. An analysis of the questionnaire described below will respond to the question raised here.

6. Methodology

Generally speaking, the survey research design is used for this investigation. As such, a questionnaire is designed to sample opinions of 60 teachers of English as a second language within the North West Region of Cameroon (an English speaking region). Such variables as teaching experience are taken into consideration and only those with at least two years are considered given that fresh teachers may not have got the time to evaluate the challenges in the field. A variety of question types are used including open ended questions and indirect questions.

Questions 1 and 2 evaluate generalities like teaching experience and learners' general performance in English. Questions 3 and 4 centre on the respondents' knowledge of the vocabulary of BrE, AmE and CamE as well as their opinions towards the vocabulary. Questions 5 and 6 move to the sentence level and equally evaluate respondents' attitudes towards the use of expressions in the various Englishes under study. Items 7, 8 and 9 while examining respondents' opinions when they listen to others speak any of the varieties, equally allow them to make statements on the kind of English they would recommend in an ESL classroom within the context of Cameroon.

7. Analysis

The analysis is subdivided into various sections within the rubrics highlighted and discussed above.

7.1 Learners' General Performance in English

As regards the learners' general performance in English, a majority of teachers (75%) confirmed that their learners' generally performance in English is average. This owing to the low marks obtained in examinations and to general fluency in communication situations. Just a minimal percentage of 25% did attest that the performance was good and none of the respondents placed the learners' degree of accuracy at *very good*. This definitely poses a problem. One begins to ponder why learners in an English speaking region would perform poorly in English meanwhile they have good communicative contexts to practise the language unlike their francophone counterparts in the French speaking regions of Cameroon. One of the difficulties that easily comes to mind is the number of Englishes that the learner has to grapple with and of course the inability to stick to one.

In terms of preference of varieties in communicative situations especially as regards vocabulary items, the following results were obtained.

Table 2. Preference of Vocabulary Items

Variety of Eng	No of teachers	Percentage
BrE	17	28.8
AmE	10	16.6
CamE	33	55

Statistics in the table above reveal that teachers preferred using CamE vocabulary items while conversing with friends. In which case, they would prefer to use for example the items *state council* instead of *district attorney* in AmE or *public prosecutor* in BrE. A similar situation goes for the use of *lawyer* in CamE instead of *barrister* and *attorney* in BrE and AmE respectively. The reason given for the use of these items is that it is a matter of preference and not that of ungrammaticality. Therefore, these respondents are quite aware of the existence of these varieties but would prefer a particular one. It is therefore high time we evaluated the English Cameroonians prefer to use and base analysis on it rather than impose a variety we would want them to use. Language acquisition especially second language acquisition requires some intrinsic motivation (Ellis 1997) and questions on attitude are quite consequential in this domain. If Cameroonians use the English they prefer, it is possible that their performance in English will not be graded low as in the first item. Worthy of note is the AmE item *liquor* as against the CamE *hot drink* or BrE *spirits* as well as AmE *city hall* as against CamE *municipal hall/city council hall* and BrE *town hall* that were preferred by teachers in general conversation. Unlike the CamE items where choice was a matter of preference, the reason for choosing AmE items is because they sound nice. The question to be raised here is this: if teachers could switch 'codes' and use items just because they sound nice what more of learners? Or what will they teach the learners? Fortunately, this tendency is recurrent in free conversation and the hope is that it should not be transferred into the classroom.

Closely related to the analysis above based on lexical choice, it was equally observed that a majority of teachers confessed they would love to use CamE expressions as against BrE and

AmE expressions as statistics in the table below indicate

Table 3. Choice of sentential Expressions

Variety of Eng	No of teachers	Percentage
BrE	25	41.6
AmE	9	15
CamE	26	43.3

The table above is indicative of the fact that 26 of the 60 respondents preferred using CamE expressions recording a 43.3% of the general sample. This was closely followed by BrE where 41.6% of the respondents preferred BrE expressions unlike the minimal 15% that considered using AmE expressions. Though falling below the mean, it is still evident that a majority of the respondents preferred using the CamE expressions below instead of their BrE and AmE counterparts.

- 1) Do you have a cold?
 - Yes I've got it. AmE
 - Yes I have it. BrE
 - Yes I have . CamE
- 2) Can I find the book here
 - We'll have to check it. BrE
 - We'll have to check it out. AmE
 - We'll have to check. CamE

The proximity between the number of respondents that preferred CamE and BrE is quite close. That is, 26 and 25 for CamE and BrE respectively. This is however justifiable not only on historical (colonial) grounds but equally on account of the fact that BrE is the source variety for CamE. This is why no matter the nice sounding AmE as observed in the first case, a majority of Cameroonians consciously or not will find some natural attachment to BrE than to AmE.

It is more interesting to evaluate the *raison d'être* for the choices made above. As such, responding to the question "why did you chose the expression above", a majority of respondents still believe it is a matter of preference while a minority as statistics in the table below reveal indicate that some of the expressions sound odd. Odd here can be related to their unfamiliarity with the expression.

Table 4. Reason for choosing particular items

	Reason for choice			
	ungrammatical	Preference	Sound nice	Other
BrE	-----	20	-----	5
AmE	-----	5	4	----
CamE	-----	23	-----	3

The table above is indicative of the fact that all the respondents did not see any ungrammaticality in the expressions of the different Englishes proposed for choice. A majority of them, that is, 20, 5 and 23 for BrE, AmE and CamE respectively chose these varieties as a matter of preference. Interestingly, 4 of the 9 respondents that chose AmE still maintained that they preferred this variety because the expressions sound nice. This confirms the previous findings with lexical choice, meaning that both the vocabulary and sentential strings/expressions in AmE are somehow beautiful and since speakers would definitely want to sound nice, they thus adopt these forms. The question one may pose here is the reason for such a desire to sound nice. Why would a speaker consider a linguistic item as sounding nicer than another? I think it is likely because such words and expressions have been used by icons in one domain or the other (politics, music, education, film etc). It is no news again that American films have been flourishing in the world and Cameroon is no exception. Hence, in such films, speakers of English become familiar with expressions especially when they are used by admirable heroes. This explains why consciously or not, they become familiar with the expressions and in turn want to use them with an imbedded mental association of the item to the heroes who use it, thereby considering such expressions as high sounding and beautiful.

As regards other reasons given by the respondents, 5 and 3 out of the 60 respondents for BrE and CamE respectively gave other reasons apart from the ones in the questionnaire for their choice. In which case, the following reasons were advanced.

BrE: familiar with, found in the textbook

CamE: familiar with, simple and easily understood

The other expressions is youthful language

Apart from familiarity with structures, it can be observed that BrE expressions were for example preferred because of their presence in the textbook. This underscores the role of pedagogic grammar in language acquisition in an ESL context. Learners are pruned to textbooks and believe it is the beholder of good grammar. It is no news again that textbooks used in the educational system in Cameroon are written following the BrE standards. The question (though not quite related to the study) on the usability of CamE as a standard variety within Cameroon is raised here. It is not all about advocacy for its use but more about codification and use especially within the educational milieu. When respondents confess familiarity with BrE and AmE and choose to use it equally as a matter of preference, it is not all about advocacy but about codification. In fact, the literature, academics they have been familiar with is British and American oriented. As mentioned previously, it becomes but normal for them to be pruned to the variety. If CamE must reach this stage as the wish of a majority of descriptive linguists in the variety is, there is ample need for the insertion of CamE literature into the academic milieu. As such when speakers/learners become familiar with the variety, they will not feel inferior and will have more confidence using the variety in formal contexts. That is why it would be possible for them to think of the variety as simple and easy to understand.

While believing that AmE expressions were grammatical, a number of respondents justifying their use of BrE and/or CamE claimed that AmE expressions were related to youthful language and they would not like to come across as such. Equally, there is a growing tendency especially for youths to use AmE as a means of deception to girlfriends or culprits in general in what is today known in Cameroon as ‘scamming’. As such, users of anything that can be identified as AmE either through various phonological renditions (mostly hypercorrections) or lexical modifications is regarded as AmE and people who feel they are not irresponsible will not want to identify themselves with such users. Stereotyping can have repercussions in language acquisition and use which could either be positive (as in the language of the high class, the bourgeoisie or the nobility in the UK) as well as negative. (as the case in hand or black American English some years back in the USA).

Item 8 that required respondents to classify expressions used by learners as plausible or not produced similar results as the previous analyses. Apart from the fact that all BrE and CamE expressions were regarded as plausible, the AmE expressions below were regarded as strange and ungrammatical. The results from this exercise are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Grading Expressions in various Englishes

no	Expression	Implausible	Ungrammatical
1a	Please fill in the form	0	0
1b	Please fill out the form	37	23
1c	Please fill the form	0	0
2a	I have tried talking to her	4	0
2b	I have tried talking with her	3	0
2c	I have tried to talk to her	5	0
3a	A lion is different from a tiger	0	0
3b	A lion is different than a tiger	40	20

The items above restricted respondents to produce negative judgements on any of the expressions. That is, which of the statements sounds odd? In fact, 2 AmE expressions had the highest negative points. For the expression 1b, as many as 37 and 23 out of the 60 respondents respectively said the statement is not plausible and that it is ungrammatical. The same with the 40 and 20 respondents that saw the statement; “A lion is different than a tiger” as both implausible and ungrammatical. Item 2 had results that were very close with 3, 4 and 5 respondents respectively considering AmE, BrE, and CamE expressions as implausible. Even though CamE is still in the codification process, I believe Cameroonians are more interested in familiar than unfamiliar language no matter the source or structure which could either be completely American, British even Nigerian or something completely different (a local language transposition for example). Item 2 in the table seems to exhibit this kind of consideration. It is therefore evident that the respondents in one way or the other are familiar with the expressions and would find no reason considering them as ungrammatical.

It was thought wise to evaluate respondents knowledge of the varieties of English in question in the study before letting them make decisions on which of the Englishes could be recommended for the Cameroonian classroom. Of course one may not make plausible decisions if they do not have a grasp of the subject matter. In this light, respondents were asked to grade their knowledge of the varieties under study within these lines; very good, good, poor, very poor. The results obtained from this exercise are presented in table 6 below.

Table 6. Grading respondents knowledge of the Englishes

Variety	Very good	Good	Poor	Very poor
BrE	40	20	0	0
AmE	5	10	37	8
CamE	45	15	0	0
NigE	0	10	39	11

A reading of statistics in table 6 above reveals that a majority of respondents (40 and 48) out of a total of 60 recording a 66.6% and 75% respectively have a very good knowledge of BrE and CamE. Conversely, 61% of the respondents have poor knowledge of AmE with only 5 and 10 accepting that they possess very good and good knowledge of the varieties respectively. Though Nigerian English was not evaluated in the study, its insertion here is due more to its geographical proximity with CamE. It was equally based on the hypothesis that Cameroonians admire Nigerian English and there could be some infiltration and consequent jostle for position with the other varieties that find expression in the territory. Notwithstanding the minimal percentage of respondents with good knowledge of Nigerian English (16.6) I still insist basing on personal observation that the variety is gaining grounds and consequently having an observable incidence on CamE.

Away from Nigerian English, if one were to classify the various Englishes under study as Table 6 indicates in terms of the variety with the highest number of respondents that possess very good knowledge, it will be represented as follows.

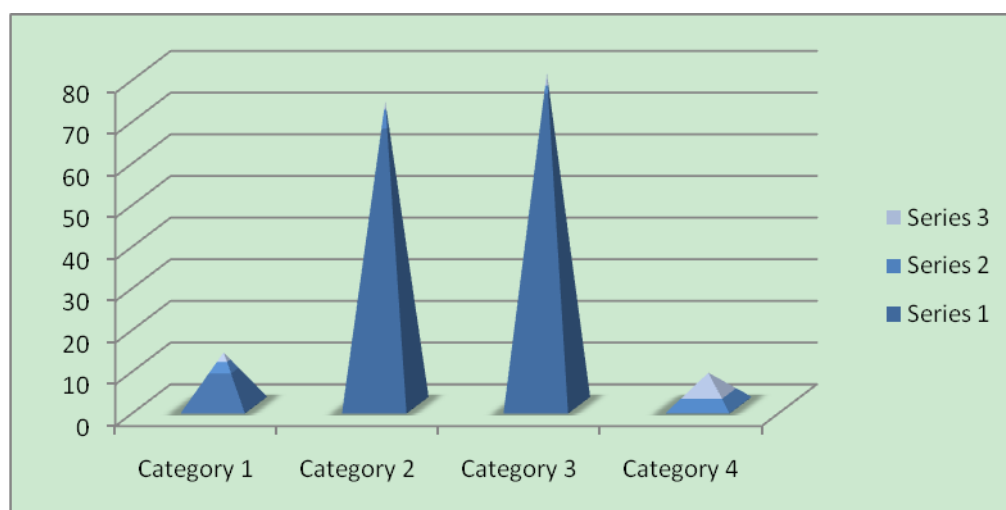


Figure 1. Classifying respondents' knowledge of the Englishes

Key

Category 1: AmE 8.3%

Category 2: BrE 66.6%

Category 3: CamE 75%

Category 4: others 0.1%

The figure above shows that CamE is the variety in which the highest number of respondents possess a very good knowledge and as a consequence can express themselves very well in the variety. This is closely followed by BrE with 66% as against 75% for CamE. AmE is the variety with the least number of respondents that possess very good knowledge. The question that arises from this finding is thus; if a majority of Cameroonians possess very good knowledge of CamE and can conveniently express themselves very well in it, why should the tousele on the variety of English to be used in the classroom be on the drawing board? Any simple observer will definitely see no case between BrE and CamE not to mention AmE which falls at the tail end in our classification. However, the question remains plausible on account of sociolinguistic intricacies (prestige, language of education, language and power, global language etc). Based on this finding, the conviction here is that if CamE were valorised and the fear of stigmatisation removed from the speakers mind, Cameroonians will get even more open to the global village. In the words of Ntebe (2004) if one must be valued in the global village he/she must be deeply enrooted in his culture but open to the world. Cameroonians will need to have an excellent knowledge of CamE yet must equally be open to other varieties of English for the purpose of mutual intelligibility.

The forgoing analysis has so far evaluated respondents' knowledge of the different varieties of English with the conclusion that Cameroonians are quite conversant with AmE, BrE and CamE, respectively in crescendo. From this knowledge, it is possible to project their attitudinal tendencies towards the varieties. Cardinal to this paper is the question; what variety of English should be used in the Cameroonian L2 classroom? Sampling the opinion of the 60 teachers that constituted the population of study, the following findings were arrived at. Within different degrees of agreement, respondents gave their opinion on the variety of English they would recommend for the Cameroonian classroom. Details of the following findings are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7. The English for the Cameroonian classroom

	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
BrE	13	15	0	0
AmE	1	0	29	31
CamE	18	13	0	0

According to the statistics in the preceding table, what is most glaring is that AmE is not recommended for use in the ESL classroom in Cameroon. That is why up to 29 respondents

disagreed and 31 even more strongly disagreed that the variety be integrated into the classroom. What baffles me is the fact that Cameroonians are aware and some even admire the American accent. Why then would they not want to use it in the classroom? Though this paper did not plunge into that, one of the most obvious reasons would be the stereotype attached to the variety as a youthful language. Of course youthful language has negative connotations especially from the elders given the tendency for such language to conceal youthful ideologies and behaviours that elders would like to scorn at.

As regards the other varieties, 13 respondents agree and 15 others strongly agree that BrE be used as a standard in the classroom. This gives a total of 28 out of 60 respondents that agree in different degrees that BrE be used in the classroom. Of course this may not be so surprising owing to the fact that Cameroonians have an intrinsic attachment to BrE and it is common to hear any educated Cameroonian (mindless of level) claiming to be speaking BrE. To them, anything English without local coloration is BrE. What is however more surprising is the number of respondents that recommend the use of CamE in the classroom. While 18 respondents agree, 13 others do so strongly giving a total of 31 out of the 60 respondents. Why should this be intriguing? It is because of the observed stereotyping of CamE as a replica of bad English within the context. In fact, except at higher levels of education (say university level) every other learner views CamE with negative stance. Due to some prestige or so enjoyed by the 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. If teachers have started thinking that CamE be recommended for use in the classroom, then it is good news for Cameroonian linguists who in the majority advocate its use though with various degrees of reservation.

Another look at these statistics from a chronological stand point presents the results obtained in this order.

Table 8. Ranking respondents preferences

Variety	Percentage of agreement	Position
CamE	51.6	1 st
BrE	46.6	2 nd
AmE	1.6	3 rd

From this table, it is evident that the variety with the highest number of respondents is CamE. As mentioned earlier, this is very ironical given the observed disdain for the variety especially amongst youths. May be one could be coming to the conclusion that as many more people are being exposed to the variety, the tides are changing in favour of CamE. However, language being a social construct would not just be abruptly imposed into the classroom. Many more sociolinguistic issues have to be grappled with for the variety to gain its grounds. When we look at the gap between 1.6% for AmE and 46.6% for BrE at least there is no doubt that the difference is very glaring. But the closeness between CamE with 51.6% and BrE 46.6% needs some consideration. It is evident that the difference, that is 5% is not absolute enough for CamE to claim victory. Another worry is that of considering what BrE is all about. Though the first segment of the questionnaire was intended to solve this worry, it still goes

without saying that the umbilical intimacy that exists between Cameroonian speakers of English and BrE would not permit them completely go without mentioning the variety. There is thus the need to strike a balance between the two varieties with absolute presence in classroom.

8. Summary of Findings

After a presentation of statistical information from the questionnaire, some salient statements on English language in the Cameroonian second language classroom can be made. Such findings arrived at in the study include;

- 1) According to respondents' evaluation of learners' English, it was established that their language is generally average. This average performance is attributed to poor results during classroom and official examinations as well as in general communication.
- 2) As regards the use of varieties of English, a majority of teachers in the study would love to use CamE rather than BrE vocabulary owing to simple preference rather than ungrammaticality.
- 3) A similar situation is applicable to the preference of CamE expressions rather than BrE or AmE expressions. However, worthy of note is the closeness between the number of respondents that chose BrE and CamE expressions, that is 41.6% and 43.3% respectively. This translates the fact that there is possible interchange of experience for these users of English. In a piece of discourse, it would thus be possible to find a melange of BrE and CamE expressions.
- 4) In terms of reasons for the choice of one variety against the other, it was noticed that there is neither great disdain for a particular variety nor great intransigent negative attitudinal undertones. Variety choice is more of an issue of preference (CamE and BrE), familiarity and simplicity (CamE) beauty and nice sound (AmE). Even in terms of negative choice, respondents' preferences are attributed more to stereotyping (considering AmE expressions as youthful language and CamE as inferior).
- 5) It was equally noticed that 75% of the respondents have a very good knowledge of CamE and 66.6% of them affirm that they have very good knowledge of BrE. AmE is the variety with the least number of respondents with very good knowledge, that is, 8.3%.
- 6) Finally, regarding the variety to be used in the Cameroonian classroom, statistical information revealed that a majority of respondents (51.6%) prefer that CamE be used in the classroom. This is closely followed by those who prefer BrE scoring 46.6% and lastly, only a minimal 7.6% of the respondents think that AmE could be introduced in the classroom.

9. Conclusion

Discussions in this paper centred on the choice of a variety of English for a non-native classroom with the Cameroonian ESL setting as a case study. Before arriving at the conclusion, the study examined a number of issues in a bid to broaden the reader's mind on

ESL in Cameroon. In which case, an evaluation of English language teaching and learning in the context was done especially from an evolutionary perspective with the conclusion that the foundation of English in Cameroon was laid on slippery ground and presently, its teaching and learning is quite enigmatic owing to both linguistic and extra-linguistic challenges. While the Englishes are jostling for position the world over, the incidence in the ESL classroom in Cameroon is evident as both the teacher and the learner are plunged into a shuttling between the varieties. The study thus recognised the difficulty in describing the English in the Cameroonian classroom especially in terms of absolute specification on a singular variety which of course can only be done in terms of the predominant variety.

The question on the variety of English for the Cameroonian classroom was given both a quantitative and qualitative answer. From a quantitative standpoint, the majority of respondents (51.6%) agreed that CamE be introduced in the ESL classroom in Cameroon while 46.6% advocate the use of BrE. Given that language is a social rather than a mechanical construct that revolves around a plethora of sensitive issues like preserving a peoples' identity, habits and attitudes which could even take a political twist; there is need for a pause, else hasty conclusions that may lead to social and/or political jeopardy could be adopted. This is related to the number of advantages that BrE (which scored a non negligible 41.6%) or native varieties have as opposed to CamE or non-native varieties in general. This is why there is need for a qualitative analysis of the question. In qualitative terms, the paper recognises that a majority of linguists on the question are of the opinion that while CamE is suitable for the ESL classroom in the country, (see Talom 1990, Atechi 2006) dust is yet to settle as far as the model of English suitable for the non-native setting is concerned (see Atechi 2008:196) owing especially to questions on documentation and codification (see Simo Bobda 2000, Kachru 1992, Bamgbose 1998). Without undermining this conclusion, the question raised in this paper is thus; when exactly can one be rest assured that there is enough documentation or that enough codification has been done? When we say the non-native varieties have not been codified there is need to specify the aspect of the language we are referring to or the level to which it has not been codified. This is because documentation and codification are an ongoing process. If the native varieties enjoy the credibility today, it is because the process started some time ago and of course has not yet come to a standstill. Waiting for trumpets to sound for non-native Englishes to be introduced into the classroom would be a tantamount to engaging in a mythical journey to oblivion. There is need for a pilot phase, which would engender loopholes that could then be ameliorated as the process moves on rather than wait infinitely for documentation and codification trumpets to sound.

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Appendix

1. Questionnaire

This questionnaire seeks to obtain information on the teaching and learning of English in the school milieu. Your responses will be vital to enable us propose suggestions that will be useful to both the teacher and learner of English. Your opinions remain confidential.

Teaching experience _____ Years sex _____

1. What classes do you teach _____

2. Give an appraisal of your learner's performance in English

Good _____ Very good _____ Average _____ Poor _____ very poor

3. From the list, tick the words you would use while conversing in English

(a) spirits _____ liquor _____ hot/strong _____

(b) town hall _____ city hall _____ municipal hall _____

(c) barrister _____ attorney _____ lawyer _____

4. why do you prefer the words you have chosen above

Sound nice _____ are grammatical _____ preference _____ other _____

5. which of these expressions will you not like to use

I Sitting room _____ living room _____ Parlour _____

II Have you seen the book?

a) We'll have to check it _____

b) We'll have to check it out _____

c) We'll have to check _____

III Do you have a cold?

(a) Yes I ve got it _____

(b) Yes I have it _____

(c) Yes I have _____

6. Why won't you prefer to use the expressions ticked above

Sound odd _____ ungrammatical _____ preference _____ other _____

7. Imagine your student used these expressions. Place an x where you consider the expression

Wrong.

(i)

(a) Please fill in the form_____

(b) Please fill out the form_____

(c) Please fill the form_____

(ii)

(a) I have tried talking to her_____

(b) I have tried talking with her_____

(c) I have tried to talk to her _____

(iii)

(a) A is different from B_____

(b) A is different than B_____

8. Grade your knowledge of these varieties of English

Variety	Good	Very good	Poor	Very poor
British English				
American English				
Cameroon English				
Nigerian English				

9. Which of the varieties do you recommend should be used in the classroom?

Variety	Agree	Strongly agree	disagree	Strongly disagree
British English				
American English				
Cameroon English				
Nigerian English				