

# Attitudes of Professional Users of English Towards French-Induced Lexemes in Cameroon English

\*Jespa Siri Duala, \*\*Samuel Ngwa Atechi

\*PhD Student, Department of English, University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon

\*\*Professor, Department of English, University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon

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## ABSTRACT

Lexemes are quite central in language contact situations and scholars agree that lexical innovation constitutes one of the most important and creative sources of language growth. This study investigates the attitudes of professional users of English towards the incorporation of French-induced lexemes in the word-stock of Cameroon English. The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Kachru's (1985) World Englishes Paradigm. Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model on varieties of English and the spread of English around the globe is of value for informing how to understand that the English Language is a global language with numerous native and non-native varieties, each of which presents specific features that make it distinct from other varieties. A total of 200 participants were selected for this study using simple random sampling. We collected data using questionnaire and interview techniques. Microsoft Excel 365 was used to analyze quantitative variables while a narrative analysis was done for qualitative data. Findings reveal that attitudes towards the consideration of deviant patterns or usages in Cameroon English tend to vary significantly with deeply rooted arguments at every point.

**Keywords:** *Lexemes; Attitudes; Cameroon English; professional users of English*

## INTRODUCTION

Lexemes are quite central in language contact situations and scholars agree that lexical innovations constitute one of the most important and creative sources of language growth. Today, we can comfortably discuss regional and national varieties of English (Indian English, Ghanaian English, Nigerian English, and Cameroon English (CamE) as varieties in their own right (Atechi, 2015b). Post-colonial multilingual Cameroon is a classic example of a language contact point. This is so because multiple languages including English and French compete in different social settings. English and French enjoy official statuses in Cameroon – they are the major languages of communication in government, education, military and the court of law. Even at that, English tends to be more vulnerable considering its relatively small number of speakers in the country, as well as the priority observably given to French especially in government, the law court and the military. As a result of the vulnerable position of the English Language, speakers of English tend to adopt French induced lexemes especially in desperate communicative situations. Such usages have gradually informed a societal pattern of usage and are observably quite recurrent in Anglophone Cameroonians' oral and written texts. Given the growing influence of context-specific varieties of the English language, both native and non-native speakers of English show varied attitudes towards the new Englishes. Indeed, negative and positive attitudes towards the new varieties of English are evident on the two sides. It is therefore important to find out Cameroonians' attitudes towards the incorporation of French-induced lexemes in the stock of CamE vocabulary. In this study, we explore the attitudes of professional users of English on the incorporation of such lexical variables in the stock of CamE vocabulary.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

Both native and non-native speakers of English show varied attitudes towards the new Englishes. Native speakers feel frustrated by the rising of new varieties of English across the globe as they view in the new Englishes a source of disintegration of English. Prator (1968) condemns the use of indigenized varieties as models in English Language teaching (ELT) across the New Nations. He sees Standard British English (SBE) as the unique model of English that must be promoted in all the corners of the world, including post-colonial countries and other non-native settings. But looking at the spectacular progression of English nowadays and the increasingly high statuses that the new Englishes are bound to acquire, Simo Bobda (1994, p.15) bets that “the pressure of the evolution [of the English language] is such that even Prator might have moderated the tone of his article if he were writing today”. Honey (1997) argues that if non-native speakers of English create their own standard, they are likely to be excluded from the global scene because they can’t exercise the same level of competence as other members of English language communities around the globe. Such a position seems to ignore the numerical advantage that non-native speakers of English possess. In fact, Kachru (1986) observes that post-colonial users of English outnumber by far the genetic native speakers. For this reason, the author thinks that features of the new Englishes cannot be systematically excluded from the international arena when it comes to adopting English as an International Language. It may seem paradoxical that some non-native speakers are at the forefront to combat indigenized English and advocate native models. But this should surprise less if one considers Kachru’s (1985) warning that “the first enemy of the new Englishes is the new nations themselves”. Kachru’s prediction seems to really hold, given that many non-native voices reject anything different from Inner Circle Englishes. In fact, for some non-native speakers, it is out of question to talk of the new-Englishes. Djibril (1987), quoted in Anchimbe (2008, p.5), reports the case of some conservative speakers of new Englishes who proclaimed that “the death-knell of Nigerian English [New Englishes for the matter] should be sounded ‘loud and clear’ as it has never existed, does not exist now and will never see the sun of the day”. What makes the situation more interesting is that Outer Circle speakers who condemn non-native varieties are not always laypeople. Among them, there are often some prominent scholars in the field of linguistics as well as some ELT leading professionals, as observed in Simo Bobda (2004, p.24). Another category of Outer Circle speakers accept the New Englishes, but observes that they are not yet ready for use and cannot satisfy the educational and professional needs of its speakers (Simo, 2004). But it quickly appears that such speakers simply do not want to accept the reality. The basic fact is that their speech organs are so used to their indigenized accents that they may never get rid of them. This tendency, which is also commonplace in Cameroon, led Ngefac (2010, p.166) to hypothesise that the reason which has influenced some Cameroonians to change their black skin using chemical products in order to look white like their ex-colonial masters is the same reason at the base of their negative attitude toward the languages that are rooted in the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic realities of their country

Despite the negative attitude displayed by some native speakers of English toward the new Englishes, others, on the contrary, show a positive attitude or at least an attitude of tolerance toward these varieties. McArthur (1999) holds that the English language has become a global resource. As such, it does not owe its existence to one nation or group but it is the possession of every individual and every community that in any way uses it regardless of what any other individual or community may feel or think about the matter. Platt et al. (1984) and McArthur (ibid), for instance, can be said to manifest this type of attitude, as they see the new Englishes as varieties that reflect the ecology of their contexts of use and help to express non-native speakers’ identity.

Many studies confirm that non-native speakers of English are increasingly showing a positive attitude toward their local varieties, which they see as representative of their linguistic and cultural identities. In the Cameroonian situation, it is indicated that users of English in their great majority are proud to speak the indigenised variety, and those who insist on sounding like Britons are ridiculed rather than admired” (Mbangwana 1987, p. 423). In the same vein, Simo Bobda (1994) perceives that many English-speaking Cameroonians are of the opinion that what matters is how well someone handles the language and not how much tongue twisting or rolling he can perform. New Englishes features are now seen more and more as innovations and markers of linguistic identity. Following this view, Ngefac (2008, p. 410) maintains that CamE features should not be seen “as errors, failures, incongruous concoctions, or havoc that is being wreaked on the English language. They should rather be perceived as systematic linguistic features that are reflections of the sociocultural and ecological realities of a given new English context

The above discussion on attitudes towards non-native Englishes seems important in this paper since the research question that guide this investigation sets out principally to find out the attitudes of Anglophones towards the

incorporation of French-induced lexemes in mainstream CamE. Also, the attitude people show toward a language will give interesting insights into its acceptability and stability.

## **RESEARCH PURPOSE**

This paper seeks to assess the attitudes of professional users of English towards the incorporation of French-induced lexemes in the vocabulary stock of mainstream CamE. The above objective prompted us to seek answers to the following research question which is quite central in understanding the issue at stake: what are the attitudes of professional users of English towards the incorporation of French-induced lexemes in mainstream CamE?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study is built on the logic of Kachru's World Englishes (WEs) paradigm in which Kachru (1985, 1986, 1992) captured the spread of the English Language in the world through what he refers to as the "concentric circles." These circles present the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the functional domains in which the language is used. According to Kachru, the Inner Circle includes the Native English-speaking countries such as England, USA and Canada. The Outer Circle consists of the former colonies such as India and Nigeria and finally the Expanding Circle includes countries such as China, Japan and Turkey, where English is becoming an important language in business, science, technology and education. In this research, we draw on the works of Kachru (1985) to make our argument that there exist a Cameroon variety of the English Language. Kachru's (ibid) Three Concentric Circles Model on varieties of English and the spread of English around the globe is of value for informing how to understand that the English Language is a global language with numerous native and non-native varieties, each of which presents specific features that make it distinct from other varieties.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is primarily quantitative research. We recruited 200 professional users of English, chosen among Cameroonians who have English as their first official language, born of English-speaking parents and who originate from the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. They included Anglophone teachers of English and Literature, Anglophone journalists as well as Anglophone post-graduate students of English and linguistics in different parts of the country. This population was considered most appropriate for this study because they have a certain mastery of such French-induced lexemes and could, to a certain extent, draw a line between such French-induced expressions and their equivalences in the recommended Standard British English (hereafter: SBE). The random sampling (probability sampling) technique was used to select the participants for this study in order to allow for the randomization of sample selection. Data was collected using a questionnaire, interview and recording. The Likert scale was used to ask participants to indicate the level that they agree or disagree (generally, from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree') about the statements we set out to investigate. It included a five-point response which included an odd number of answer option, to make sure the participant is provided with a neutral response. Participants were expected to simply mark an (x) in the box and column that better expressed their feelings towards proposed propositions. An Example of such a statement was: "A codified and standardized CamE will be as good as the recommended SBE." 1. Strongly Disagree, 2. Disagree 3. Undecided or Neutral (neither agree nor disagree), 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree. Besides, participants also had a chance to justify their responses by expressing their opinions, additional perspective, or information not captured in other questions through written justifications or verbal justifications which were noted through recording. This was necessary for purposes of indicating their stances on each subject. It allowed the participants to share feelings and opinions that are important to them about the topic under investigation. Microsoft Excel 365 Database was used to analyse the data. The analysis was based on the opinions of participants on the items designed for the investigation. Quantitative evidence from participants' responses were qualitatively reported in relation to the overall standpoint of this study. The participants' opinions on the incorporation of targeted lexical features in the word stock of CamE were categorized in relation to positive and negative attitudes. The analysis followed an ideological perspective in which each proposition was discussed in relation to the frequency and percentages of participants who assert or negate them.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants were asked to state their stances on specific propositions on a Five-Likert scale. Their responses were categorised in terms of the two extremes (agree and strongly agree versus disagree and strongly disagree). The other alternative was neutral. Generally, there were three stances on the issue – positive attitudes (informants who would like French-induced lexical features in the word stock of Cameroon English), negative attitude (those who would not like French-induced words into the word stock of Cameroon English), moderate attitude (persons who are not totally against the incorporation of French-induced features in Cameroon English vocabulary). (see the Appendix for a summary of the results).

They were first asked to indicate their opinions on the claim that some popular and familiar French words could be used in CamE even when they are not used in English everywhere. While 28.5% of the participants think it was possible, 67.5% of others do not feel comfortable with such a move. Indeed, 85% of the participants are also of the opinion that allowing French-induced words in the word stock of CamE can enhance the unity of the country. In addition, 61.5% of the participants believe that CamE bears marks of the Cameroonian realities and the Cameroonian reality is incomplete without the French culture which has a significant effect on the English vocabulary CamE can be enriched with French vocabulary since Cameroon is a bilingual country. More, 83% of the participants share the view that the addition of French words which are already used and understood by Anglophones into the word stock of CamE vocabulary and 88% of them believe that languages are subject to continuous lexical expansion and CamE is not an exception. Furthermore, 61.5% of the participants agree that the incorporation of some French words in the vocabulary stock of CamE cannot be underscored because they provide substitutes to ideas. Even at that 98.5% of the participants share the opinion that allowing French-induced words in the word stock of CamE can affect children's proficiencies and performances in English in the future.

While all the participants are of the opinion that CamE must remain intelligible nationally and internationally, 78.5% of them share the rather radical proposition that French-induced words can corrupt the English language in the country. All the participants also believe that they will be more successful if the English Language in the country rather shifts more towards SBE or American English (AmE) than towards French. Even so they all believe that the Anglophone identity, inherent in the variety should necessarily be protected. This proposition is also quite close to the feeling of security some of the participants believe they will have if CamE totally expresses the Anglophone culture in the country. Consequently, 69.5% of the participants share the categorical claim that CamE is unique and should not be compromised. They all also share the pride of speaking English without French lexical influence. In fact, while all the participants state that they hate the French culture and 88% categorically state that they hate French, only 39.5% of the participants agree that English and French should not interfere in each other since they are two independent languages. Interestingly, there are three major perspectives on the incorporation of French-induced lexemes into the word stock of CamE. First there are those who totally accept such a move. Second, there are those who out rightly reject the move and finally there are the neutralists. In this section, we present the main justifications for the participants' preferences. The participants who see nothing wrong with the incorporation of French-induced lexemes in the word stock of CamE argue that considering French-induced features into CamE can eventually project the language as a code of national unity and integration since speakers of both official languages might be able identify with it. Even though such move can bleak the intelligibility of the language especially beyond the Cameroonian boundaries, it can nonetheless enhance a certain level of national unity and togetherness. The participants further argue that the process better promotes the Cameroonian reality which is not strictly English, but a combination of English and French cultures. They argue that Cameroonian realities include lexical influences from French. To them, what essentially makes CamE different from other varieties in West Africa, especially in terms of vocabulary, is partly its exposure to French. Consequently, any Cameroonian English that ignores French-induced variables cannot fairly reflect the actual features of CamE. They argue that French has from time immemorial, especially during the Norman invasion in 1066 influenced the vocabulary stock of English and so it is practically impossible for French to co-exist with English and not influence it. To them, allowing French-induced vocabulary in the word stock of CamE poses absolutely no major threat to the language, it rather empowers the language.

Even with the very juicy arguments above, there are others who rather hold a contrary view. They reject the incorporation of French-induced lexical features in the word stock of CamE for four major reasons. They believe that accepting French-induced lexemes in the word stock of CamE gives them a feeling of francophone linguistic assimilation of Anglophones. Their argument anchor on the aged-old resistance of the government plan to assimilate

Anglophones in the majority Francophone culture. This made them see everything French as domineering. The participants further argue that allowing French-induced lexemes in the word stock of CamE poses a serious problem of intelligibility. According to them, allowing more unintelligible features in CamE limits the comprehension of the variety to Cameroon and the unintelligibility of CamE beyond its boundaries. They fear that they might lose international opportunities – scholarships and grants – if French-induced lexical features are allowed or accepted in the vocabulary stock of CamE. Finally, the participants' negative attitude was partly informed by their desire to preserve the Anglophone culture which is predominantly expressed in the variety. They feel that allowing French-induced features in the variety can quiet their voices and cultures and so deny them the international recognition that comes with the analyses of the variety. The last group of participants are the moderates who base most of their arguments on the notion of national and international intelligibility and the promotion of features that connect Cameroon to such superpowers as the United Kingdom and the United States. They argue that French-induced words can be incorporated in the vocabulary stock of CamE as long as they do not pose any major problem of intelligibility beyond Cameroon's borders. While this may seem unfeasible, there is no doubt that local features can gain a certain level of prestige and international recognition.

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings in this study have farfetched sociolinguistic implications. The variation of the English Language across social boundaries has not only brought the riches of different cultures to the lamplight but has practically and significantly enriched the language. Within the scope of CamE, we quickly realize that it predominantly reflects the Anglophone culture and is deeply rooted in the history and mannerism of the people. The co-existence of English and French has significantly influenced the quality of the English language. There is a cross section of English words which are French-induced and this can have significant implications in the sociolinguistic usages of these words. First, the increasing use of such words in formal and informal contexts can lead to miscommunication considering their multi-semantic implications. Consequently, people can misinterpret the content of official documents. This is so because while some Anglophones are familiar with the French-induced usages and their intended meanings, others are not. Since such usages are yet to be considered in mainstream usages, there is therefore the dire need for them to be limited to informal contexts so that they do not pose any major problem of intelligibility that can lead to more complicated outcomes. The new Englishes which are subject to significant acculturation could also be quite dynamic in accepting new features based on the realities on the ground, there is a struggle to conserve the cultural marks on the Englishes and Anglophones are not exempted from this effort. This can explain why they tend to resist lexical features which naturally find themselves in CamE. What quickly comes to mind are the implications of either allowing or rejecting French-induced features in the word stock of what can be fairly considered CamE. Essentially, if French-induced words are incorporated into the word stock of CamE, they can further expand the language and also give it more members. Notably, the geopolitical space referred to as Cameroon is a combination of Francophone and Anglophone colonial territories and cultures. Both cultures united in 1961 and one of the things the Anglophone brought into the union was the English Language which was already significantly influenced by their local cultural realities. Though the union has not been very smooth, somehow the variety of English spoken in the land is CamE. Since the union has enhanced the co-existence of French and English for almost six decades, there is bound to be cross-linguistic influences. French-induced variables in CamE can better project the English and French bilingual nature of the country. Since intelligibility at some point can be affected, the variety of English in the country can eventually become a real national language that accurately reflects the two leading colonial cultures that have been the subject of division in recent years. Such a move can also lead to a feeling of oppression and frustration from the Anglophones, considering the belief that it is induced by the desire to assimilate them as it has been the claim since 1972 and quite prominently since 2016. Though this position is not supported by all the participants, there are indeed cross sections of participants who hold this view. Rejecting the incorporation of French-induced lexical variables in CamE vocabulary stock can also have far fetch sociolinguistic implications. Such a move will mean sustaining and promoting acceptable features in the variety as well as the national and international intelligibility of CamE. More and more Cameroonians can also continue to hope for international opportunities that come with well-written research proposals. Notably, such opportunities are only given to those who convince the host institutions of the relevance of their research interests. A proposal of such magnitude cannot be fairly written with French-induced lexemes since they are only understood by a portion of speakers of English in Cameroon. Additionally, discouraging French-induced lexemes in CamE vocabulary can continuously give Anglophones a feeling of authority or possession of the language in the country. Consequently, this can sustain the Anglophone identity or identification with the British way of life



which logically may not be the best in 21<sup>st</sup> century Cameroon but balance the equation with the majority Francophone mannerism and government policies and actions that continuously tilts towards France.

The findings also have farfetched pedagogic implications, especially in Cameroon's educational system. In Cameroon, English is studied as a Second Language (ESL) and as a Foreign Language (EFL). While Anglophones study English as a Second Language, Francophones study it as a foreign language. Interestingly, the government is yet to come to terms with a context specific variety that could be pedagogically encouraged in school. This explains why the target is still SBE. Arguably, while the content is SBE, the performance is largely CamE. The preference for SBE suggests the government desire to have learners approximate the native standard. Therefore, considering French-induced features is likely to further bleak the possibility of attaining this goal.

Moreover, CamE is yet to be categorized, codified and formalized. This suggests that any feature that shifts from the expected standard is out of place. This however poses a serious problem because recent studies (Angwah, 2019) have proven that even Cameroonian teachers who are expected to teach this standard are themselves eloquent users of CamE and observably, French-induced features are quite recurrent in their speeches. The implication here is that, they are definitely going to teach the features to the students or at best use the features to teach SBE features (Ngefacs, 2010). There is therefore the dire need for more pedagogic and academic workshops to better guide teachers and students on the implications of certain forms. While prescriptivism may not be popular in this era of descriptivism, there is the dire need for referential knowledge to be transmitted and from this logical premise, even what is considered CamE today needs lawyers to enjoy the kind of prestige that other mainstream varieties like American and British varieties enjoy. Since some of the features posed a serious problem of intelligibility to some Anglophone Cameroonians, there is the dire need for the development of representative corpora of CamE to significantly enhance linguistic descriptions into this variety. Researchers of language and pedagogy must understand the stakes and get to work to identify, codify and standardise what could be fairly considered CamE. Such a move is likely to reduce the debate on what constitutes CamE.

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**APPENDIX**

**Table showing negative, positive and moderate attitudes towards the incorporation of French-induced lexemes in Cameroon English**

<b>Propositions</b>	<b>Positive number (%)</b>	<b>Negative number (%)</b>	<b>Neutral number (%)</b>	<b>Total number (%)</b>
Some popular and familiar French words could be used in Cameroon English even when they are not used in English everywhere	57 (28.5%)	135 (67.5%)	8 (4%)	200 (100%)
Allowing French-induced words in the word stock of Cameroon English can enhance the unity of the country	30 (15%)	170 (85%)	0 (0%)	200 (100%)
Cameroon English bears marks of the Cameroonian realities and the Cameroonian reality is incomplete without the French culture which has a significant effect on the English vocabulary in the country	77(38.5%)	123(61.5%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
Cameroon English can be enriched with French vocabulary since Cameroon is a bilingual country.	78 (39%)	122(61%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
We can add French words that are already used and understood by Anglophones into the stock of Cameroon English vocabulary.	34(17%)	164(83%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
Languages are subject to continuous lexical expansion and Cameroon English is not an exemption	176 (88%)	24(12%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
Some French words are relevant in Cameroon English because they provide substitutes to ideas.	77(38.5%)	123(61.5%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
French-induced words can affect children’s proficiencies and performances in future.	3(1.5%)	197(98.5%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
Cameroon English must remain intelligible to speakers of other varieties.	0(0%)	200(100%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
French-induced words can corrupt the English language in the country.	43(21.5%)	157(78.5%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
I feel that I will be more successful if the English in Cameroon rather shifts more towards the standard British or American English than towards French.	0(0%)	200(100%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
Cameroon English is unique and should not be compromised	30(15%)	169(69.5%)	1(0.5%)	200 (100%)
English and French are two independent languages and should therefore not interfere in each other.	79(39.5%)	110(55%)	11(5.5%)	200 (100%)
Anglophone identity, which is significantly reflected in Cameroon English must be protected against French influences.	0(0%)	200(100%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
I feel secure when Cameroon English totally expresses the Anglophone culture.	32(16%)	168(84%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
I am proud to speak English without French lexical Interference	0(0%)	200(100%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
I don’t like French	9(4.5%)	176(88%)	15(7.5%)	200 (100%)
I don’t like the French culture	0(0%)	200(100%)	0(0%)	200 (100%)
<b>Cumulative total and proportion (%)</b>	<b>725(20.15%)</b>	<b>2838(78.87%)</b>	<b>35(0.98%)</b>	<b>3598(100%)</b>