

Linguistic Choices in Postcolonial Multilingual Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

In a complex postcolonial multilingual context, such as Cameroon, many languages are available to the speakers and even compete to be used. This study investigates linguistic choices made by Cameroonians selected according to some sociolinguistic factors, their reasons for choosing or rejecting the languages used in Cameroon and the political, sociocultural and sociolinguistic ideologies such choices are likely to convey.

Keywords: Cameroon, multilingualism, linguistic choices, sociolinguistic/political ideologies

1. INTRODUCTION

Colonialism has come and gone, but its impact in postcolonial multilingual contexts continues to shape and mould people's ideologies, identity, culture, perceptions and attitudes. In postcolonial settings, certain attitudinal tendencies, linguistic/cultural conflicts and unhealthy identity competitions tend to be the hallmarks of the day, especially when people resort to defining their identity with one of the colonial languages. Instead of exploring the potentials of multilingualism for the wellbeing of the members of the whole community, speakers of the different languages in postcolonial multilingual settings often embark on tendencies that often disharmonize the unity of the community. Anchimbe (2007: 71) identifies some of these attitudinal tendencies, which usually characterize postcolonial multilingual settings. They include imposing one's language on others irrespective of their knowledge of that language, refusing to speak the language of given groups of speakers, threatening and even penalizing speakers for using certain languages, identifying speakers with certain stereotypes and prototypes and, in rare cases, banning or threatening to ban certain languages (Alobwede, 1998; Anchimbe, 2007: 71).

In postcolonial multilingual Cameroon, many sociolinguistic studies have reported some of such attitudinal tendencies. For instance, it has been reported that French-speaking Cameroonians are now passionately opting for English and the English system of education (see Kouega, 1999; Anchimbe, 2007; Mforteh, 2007), unlike what prevailed a few years ago when some of them used to perceive English as the language of lower class citizens. This tendency reached

the point where some provocative expressions such as “anglo”, “anglofool” and “les anglos là” were often used by some French-speaking Cameroonians to describe their English-speaking counterparts and counter-provocative expressions were used in return to also identify and describe French-speaking Cameroonians (Anchimbe, 2007; Mforteh, 2007).

Previous studies such as Kouega (1999), Anchimbe (2007) and Mforteh (2007) have diligently studied attitudes and perceptions of Cameroonians in relation to the two colonial languages. But what these studies present is just a tip of the iceberg of the different levels of perceptions and attitudes that prevail in a complex postcolonial multilingual context such as Cameroon, a country blessed with a multiplicity of languages with different statuses and functions. In other words, previous studies have only described attitudes and perceptions within the dynamics of colonial languages, English and French, which serve as the official languages of Cameroon. Similar attitudinal tendencies, which prevail in Cameroon in relation to such languages as Camfranglais, Mbokotok and Kamtok, are still to be investigated. Current tendencies in relation to previously studied languages, such as English and French, are equally of interest. This study therefore sets out to investigate choices speakers make as far as the different languages spoken in Cameroon are concerned (Kamtok, Camfranglais, indigenous languages, Mbokotok, English and French), the reasons for choosing to speak or for choosing to reject certain languages and attitudinal tendencies that ensue from the choices. The language choices are investigated in relation to some sociolinguistic factors. Many sociolinguistic variables, such as occupation, gender and ethnicity, may have a significant influence on the speakers’ choices, but the scope of this paper is limited to linguistic background (Anglophone or Francophone) and age.

2. POSTCOLONIAL SETTINGS AND MULTILINGUALISM

Since postcolonialism cannot exist without colonialism, it is worthwhile to first of all succinctly provide some hallmarks of colonialism and its impact on the linguistic maps of the colonised nations before discussing the linguistic situation of postcolonial settings. This dehumanising practice referred to as colonialism involved the total domination and transformation of African and Asian nations by some Western nations. Through this practice the political, economic and social life of the colonised nations was invaded, transformed and controlled by the colonisers; the worldviews, cultures and languages of the colonised people were eroded and subjected to an inferior position; their minds and cosmic vision were upset and they were finally made to understand that everything of theirs was barbaric, satanic and inferior (Ngefacs, forthcoming).

Among all the dehumanising dimensions of colonialism, the most disastrous, at least in my opinion, is the upsetting of the minds of the indigenous population. Before colonialism, most African and Asian areas already had well

organised and established political, social, economic and communicative systems. Linguistically, most of these areas already had complex multilingual landscapes and colonialism only came in to make them more complex by introducing colonial languages. Anchimbe (2007: 3) joins Makoni and Meinhof (2003: 1) to affirm that intertribal marriages, the random displacement of slaves for slave trade and slavery, migrations, the quest for peaceful neighbours, the search for fertile soils and interethnic conflicts brought together peoples from different linguistic backgrounds and this made many African and Asian contexts heavily multilingual before the era of colonialism. As a result of colonialism, many colonised people fallaciously came to the conclusion that they were living in a completely disordered world where there was nothing with a logical pattern. This type of thinking has preoccupied the minds of many people in postcolonial settings and they tend to see everything that reflects their contextual or ecological setting as inferior. This type of inferiority complex, referred to by Bokamba (2007: 41) as a “ukolonia” tendency, has dramatically changed the life and thinking of many people in postcolonial settings. According to Bokamba (2007: 41), many people in postcolonial contexts display this “ukolonia” tendency because they tend to undervalue many things that have their contextual reality in favour of Western constructs. Some people in such contexts now perceive their own culture and indigenous languages as inferior. They think that the colonial languages are the only media through which effective communication can take place and are even ready to negotiate their own identities to embrace one that strongly links them to the Western world. These types of tendencies unquestionably have their roots in colonial history, where the dignity and identity of the colonised population were greatly reshaped and conditioned and they were subsequently indoctrinated with the false belief that their dreams must be built on Western constructs in order to be real and meaningful. Anchimbe (2007: 9) points out that as a result of the French so-called “mission civilisatrice”, the expression “nos ancêtres les Gaulois” was forced on the tongue of indigenous colonial subjects. With such indoctrination, it is not surprising that in postcolonial Cameroon, for instance, indigenous languages, Kamtok and indigenised English are sometimes treated with contempt and indignation because they do not fit within Western constructs. In most postcolonial settings, people are still identified with colonial languages as “Anglophone”, “Francophone” and “Lusophone” and not as “Bantuphone”, “Swahiliphone” and “Mandingphone” (Bokamba, 2007: 27–28; Anchimbe, 2007: 9).

According to the Commission for European Communities on the promotion of multilingualism that held in Brussels in November 2005, multilingualism is “a persons’s ability to use several languages and the co-existence of different language communities [and many languages] in one geographical area”. The European Union attaches a lot of importance to multilingualism and it is for this reason that the European Commission for the promotion of multilingualism adopted the slogan “The more languages you know, the more of a person you are”. Many postcolonial nations are heavily multilingual. In such postcolonial

settings, indigenous languages, pidgins and creoles co-exist with one or more colonial languages. In most cases, a single speaker has the ability to speak two or more languages. But in such contexts, very few people are conscious of the fact that it is only a very blessed tongue that is multilingual. In other words, many people in multilingual settings think it is more prestigious to speak an exonormative language than to speak languages that are rooted in their sociocultural realities.

3. CAMEROON AS A MULTILINGUAL NATION

Before colonialism came to make the linguistic situation of Cameroon more complex, this West African nation could already boast of hundreds of indigenous languages and a major lingua franca known today as Kamtok. The country can now identify as many as 285 indigenous languages, though four are said to have already died (Ethnologue, 2001). From the outset, the government was very hesitant to give these languages the place they deserve. But recent developments show that these languages, which are carriers of the Cameroonian culture, are being recognised as strong forces to reckon with. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)'s (2004) report, quoted in Mforteh (2007: 94), reveals that 166 of these languages have already been standardized; 36 are being taught in some primary schools; 18 of them now have the translated version of the Holy Bible; 30 of them have the translated version of the New Testament and 30 have translated portions of the Scriptures. The most recent development in relation to the status of Cameroonian indigenous languages is the creation of a Department of Cameroonian Languages and Cultures at the Higher Teacher Training College, a branch of the University of Yaounde that trains secondary and high school teachers. This is a promising sign that the government is determined to raise the status of these languages, which have for many years been relegated to the background, probably because of what Bokamba (2007: 41) refers to as a "ukolonia" tendency.

Before colonial languages (English and French) formally gained admission into the linguistic spectrum of Cameroon, the indigenous languages existed alongside Cameroon Pidgin English, which is now known as Kamtok. The name "Kamtok" (Cameroon talk) is preferable because of three reasons. First, the language is no more a pidgin, given that it displays most, if not all, creolistic traits (see Ngefac, Ms). Second, it transcends most ethnic, educational, geographical, professional, religious and other social boundaries, given that its speakers are not restricted by any of the social boundaries. Third, it has incredible communicative potential, given that it has served communicative needs of Cameroonians for more than five hundred years (see Kouega, 2008) and today it remains one of the most widely spoken languages in the country. The linguistic features of this contact language are drawn from the colonial languages spoken in Cameroon and the indigenous languages. There are even

traces of Portuguese in this language, given that the language was born out of contact between the indigenous population and Portuguese businessmen who came to the coastal regions of Cameroon in 1472 in search of slaves and raw materials. Cameroon Pidgin English has therefore existed in Cameroon for more than 500 years (Kouega, 2003) and has adapted itself significantly to the ecological and sociocultural realities of Cameroon. The language now has systematic linguistic peculiarities that are very different from those of the languages from which it originated. It has even become the mother tongue of many children in Cameroon (Koenig et al., 1983; Schröder, 2003; Neba et al., 2006). It is for these reason that many people think the language is now a creole and should no longer continue to carry the pidgin label, which suggests a marginal and simplified language that serves only limited and temporary communicative needs. In spite of the wide-spread nature of Kamtok and the fact that it is a lingua franca that has penetrated the hearts and minds of most Cameroonians, there are many attempts from the government sector to discourage and even ban its use (Alobwede, 1998). The argument often advanced is that it is an impediment to the effective learning of English, one of the colonial legacies in Cameroon. Is it what Bokamba (2007: 41) refers to as a “ukolonia” tendency?

The existence of Kamtok in Cameroon has given birth to other languages, which other schools of thought would refer to as varieties of Kamtok. These languages include Camfranglais and Mbokotok¹. They are actually in-group languages with well defined boundaries. Camfranglais (“Cameroon-frenchenglish”), for instance, is seen as the language of French-speaking youths in urban areas in Cameroon (see Kouega, 2003). Most of its lexical items are taken from French and English. Mbokotok is a language spoken by unemployed people who embark on all types of activities, especially commercial activities, to raise money for their daily bread. The name of the language has two stems: “mboko”, which means an irresponsible person or a vagabond, and “tok”, coined from the word “talk”. The whole name means the talk or language of people with doubtful moral background. Speakers of this language perceive themselves differently from the way they are perceived by out-group members, as shall be seen later on in this paper.

In spite of the temptation to consider Camfranglais and Mbokotok as varieties of Kamtok, these are distinct languages. Kamtok borrows most of its lexical items (about 80%) from English, its main lexifier, but has a grammatical structure that is significantly different from that of English. Camfranglais, on the other hand, borrows more than 80% of its lexicon from French and a very limited percentage from English, and the structure of the language is predominantly that of French (see Férel, 2009). Mbokotok, on the other hand,

¹ B. M. Sala told me during a conversation that he would eventually carry out a project to describe Mbokotok as a distinct variety of Kamtok. Its status either as a variety of Kamtok or as an independent language in its own right will be known only after the completion of research works like the one envisaged by B.M. Sala.

has a structure that is neither that of French nor that of English. Most of its lexicon is created, though it also borrows from French, English, Kamtok and the indigenous languages. One major difference between Mbokotok and the other restructured languages is the fact that it is highly coded and its intelligibility is significantly limited to in-group members.

The languages presented so far co-exist in Cameroon with French and English, the two official languages of the country. Out of the ten regions that make up the country, eight are French-speaking and two are English-speaking. Despite the fact that every Cameroonian is identified with one of the official languages either as Francophone or Anglophone, the country's constitution and the language policy of the country, at least in principle, expect every Cameroonian to be bilingual in the two official languages. Whether this policy to implement bilingualism in French and English has been successful remains a highly debatable issue. A few years back, there was a general outcry from the English-speaking community that the bilingual status of the country was far from being practical, given that most administrative documents and decrees existed only in French, and English-speaking Cameroonians were not given the place they deserve. Simo Bobda's (2001) study provides a good picture of the discontentment that has characterised the Anglophone community in Cameroon. It is pointed out in this study that Anglophones have often complained against "accumulated injustice perpetrated against their language, themselves and their culture... after a quarter of a century of co-existence with their francophone countrymen" (Simo Bobda, 2001). As a result of this alleged injustice against, and marginalisation of, the Anglophones and their culture, the author points out that revolutionary tendencies that threaten the harmony of the country have often erupted.

In spite of the cultural/linguistic friction that has often characterised the relationship between Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians, it is reported that Francophones are now passionately rushing for English and the English system of education (Kouega, 1999; Anchimbe, 2007; Mforteh, 2007). But Anchimbe (2007) describes this new interest in English and the English system of education as an identity opportunism whereby postcolonial multilingual speakers choose an identity or a language at a given time based on the advantages they are likely to benefit. He concludes that the rush for English by Francophone speakers is not because of their positive attitude towards English-speaking Cameroonians, but he rather sees it as an attempt to catch-up with the advantages that are associated with English, the language of globalization and modern technology.

The discussion underscored so far in (3) shows that a multiplicity of languages with different statuses and functions co-exist in Cameroon. In such a complex multilingual context, it is sociolinguistically significant to investigate speakers' language choices, their reasons for choosing certain languages, and not others, and attitudinal tendencies that ensue from the choices. For instance, if a speaker declares that he or she does not speak, say, Mbokotok or

Camfranglais, is it because of lack of proficiency in these languages or the speaker's choice is motivated by other attitudinal or political reasons?

4. METHODOLOGY

A number of methodological strategies were used to investigate speakers' language choices in postcolonial multilingual Cameroon. First, carefully designed questionnaires that assess language choices and attitudes were administered to 150 speakers living in both English and French-speaking towns in Cameroon. They were selected according to the two sociolinguistic factors under study, namely, official language background (Anglophone or Francophone), and age. Out of the total number of questionnaires administered, 128 were filled in by the informants and returned and 120 were considered to evaluate the impact of age and official language background on the choice of languages in Cameroon. It should be noted that 120 questionnaires, not 128, were considered for the investigation because of the need to have a uniform number for the three age groups that made up each of the two categories of speakers (Francophones and Anglophones). A total of 20 informants for each of the age groups (15–25, 26–39 and 40 and above) from the two linguistic backgrounds were therefore considered. A total of 60 informants for each of the official language backgrounds (Anglophones and Francophones) were also considered. Second, the informants' responses were quantified and expressed as percentages according to the different sociolinguistic factors under study. Third, the reasons for the different language choices were equally quantified according to the sociolinguistic factors and then expressed as percentages. Through these methodological strategies, it was possible to determine the language choices speakers from the two sociolinguistic backgrounds make, their reasons for choosing or for rejecting certain languages and attitudinal tendencies that ensue from the choices.

5. POSTCOLONIAL MULTILINGUAL CAMEROON AND THE DRAMA OF LANGUAGE CHOICE

5.1 AGE, OFFICIAL LANGUAGE BACKGROUND AND LANGUAGE CHOICES

The existence of such languages as Camfranglais, Kamtok, Mbokotok, indigenous Cameroonian languages, English and French with different statuses and functions in the same context and the language choices speakers make would reveal diverse attitudes and perceptions, as earlier stated. Declaring that one does, or does not, usually speak a particular language or languages may reveal significant sociolinguistic information other than just revealing that

person’s level of competence in the language or languages. This is partly why this study set out to investigate speakers’ choices in postcolonial multilingual Cameroon and the reasons for the choices, as an attempt to explore attitudinal tendencies and other motivations that are behind the choices.

Following the methodological strategy underscored above, speakers’ choices were investigated according to two sociolinguistic factors (age and official language background). As concerns the choices made in relation to age, informants of different age groups were evaluated within the context of their official language background, that is, both English-speaking and French-speaking informants of different age groups were evaluated separately, given that their language choices were hypothesized to be different. The following table presents the language choices of three different age groups from the two major linguistic backgrounds.

Table 1. *Percentage of Francophone and Anglophone speakers according to age and the different languages spoken in Cameroon.*

	Franso- phone	Anglo- phone	Franso- phone	Anglo- phone	Franso- phone	Ango- phone	No. of speakers	% of speakers
	15–25	15–25	26–39	26–39	40 and above	40 and above		
Cam- franglais	100	10	65	15	0	0	38	32
Kamtok	0	60	10	100	80	100	72	60
Mbokotok	0	0	15	0	45	20	16	13
Indigenous Language	45	40	85	70	100	100	88	73
English	45	100	90	100	70	100	101	84
French	100	70	100	65	100	55	98	82

The above table reveals significant sociolinguistic information about the language choices of French-speaking and English-speaking Cameroonians of different age groups. First, it reveals the languages that are most spoken and least spoken by each age group from the two major identity backgrounds. Second, it shows in which cases the impact of the official language background is more dominant than the influence of age in the speakers’ choices of the languages. As concerns the languages that are most spoken and least spoken by the different age groups, it can be seen from the table that Camfranglais is most spoken by Francophone speakers between the ages of 15 and 25, given that 100% of informants from this age group acknowledged that they speak it. The table also shows that this language is least spoken by speakers above the age of 40, given that no single informant from this age group identified himself or herself as its speaker. Kamtok is least spoken by Francophone speakers between the ages of 15 and 25 and most spoken by Anglophone speakers between the ages of 26 and 39 and those above the age of 40, given that all the English-speaking informants within these age groups confirmed that they use the language for their daily communication. Francophone speakers above the age of

40 very much use this language, given that up to 80% of the informants testified that they speak the language. With regard to Mbokotok, the table also shows that this language is not generally spoken by younger speakers, especially those of the English-speaking background. Below the age of 40, the few who testified that they speak this language (i.e. 15% of speakers between the age of 26 and 39) are only Francophone speakers. The language is mostly spoken by those from the age of 40, but within this age group, French-speaking Cameroonians seem to be more interested in the language than their English-speaking counterparts, as the table shows. Concerning the indigenous languages, the pattern displayed in the above table shows that, generally speaking, older speakers speak them more than younger ones. Cases where all the informants (i.e. 100%) acknowledged that they speak their indigenous languages all involved those from the age of 40. As concerns English and French, the two official languages of the country, predictably, all Francophone speakers, irrespective of their age group, testified that they speak French and all Anglophone speakers, irrespective of age group, also acknowledged that they speak English. But the pattern is different with regard to speakers of one official language speaking the other language. For instance, only 45% of French-speaking informants between the age of 15 and 25 and only 70% of those from the age of 40 indicated that they use English to express their communicative needs. These percentages, though considered low, would be seen as impressive and a significant improvement by those who are familiar with the hitherto negative attitude Francophone Cameroonians had towards English. As concerns Anglophone speakers, interestingly, the percentage of speakers who asserted that they speak and use French to express their communicative needs reduces systematically as one climbs the age ladder, as the table shows. The reasons for this tendency are discussed in the next section.

All in all, the above table reveals the language choices of the different age groups and the impact of the official language background. For instance, Francophone speakers between the age of 15 and 25 indicated that they speak Camfranglais and French most and Anglophone speakers of the same age group prefer to speak English, French and, to a certain extent, Kamtok. Francophone speakers between the ages of 26 and 39 mostly use French, English, indigenous languages and, to a limited extent, Camfranglais, as their media of communication. Anglophone speakers of the same age group mostly speak English, Kamtok, indigenous languages and, to a certain extent, French. Speakers from the age of 40, irrespective of official language background, mostly use their indigenous languages, Kamtok and the language that defines their identity as Anglophone or Francophone. Speakers of this age group, irrespective of their official language background, are least interested in Camfranglais. Mbokotok serves as a medium of communication more for Francophone speakers from the age of 40 than for their Anglophone counterparts. The impact of the official language background in making language choices is also very glaring from the above table. For instance, Camfranglais and, to a certain extent, Mbokotok are more of interest to

Francophone speakers; English, at least for now, continues to be more of interest to Anglophone speakers than to their Francophone counterparts, though the situation may eventually change, as reported in previous studies. In spite of the fact that Kamtok is highly solicited by both Anglophone and Francophone older speakers, the above table shows that younger Francophone speakers are not interested in this language, etc.

5.2 SPEAKERS' REASONS FOR CHOOSING OR FOR REJECTING PARTICULAR LANGUAGES IN CAMEROON

Reporting that speakers in postcolonial multilingual Cameroon speak or do not speak a particular language or languages is not enough if the reasons for such language behaviours are not known. Besides asking the informants of this study to say which languages they speak, and do not speak, they were asked to give reasons for using or for not using certain languages to express their communicative needs. The reasons provided by the informants were grouped according to their similarities in relation to the languages under study and then quantified, by establishing their frequencies. These reasons are presented below according to the various languages under study.

Camfranglais

As concerns Camfranglais, the 38 speakers (32%), out of 120, who use this language as a medium of communication advanced the following reasons for speaking the language.

- Because Camfranglais is the language for people of my age group79%
- Because Camfranglais is the fashionable language of the day21%

The 82 speakers (68%) who do not use this language as a medium of communication gave the following reasons for not choosing the language:

- Because Camfranglais is the language of rascals and irresponsible children76%
- Because Camfranglais is childish24%

Kamtok

With regard to Kamtok, 60% of the informants (72 informants out of 120) said they use this language for their daily communication. The reasons they advanced for speaking the language include the following:

- Because Kamtok is the language of intimacy between and among friends and the easiest language for communication.....44%
- Because Kamtok guarantees communication with every Cameroonian, irrespective of his or her linguistic background56%

The 48 informants (40% of the speakers) who said they do not speak Kamtok all advanced a single reason for rejecting this language, namely, that a pidgin is likely to contaminate their English.

Mbokotok

As concerns Mbokotok, the few speakers who indicated that this language is one of their media of communication (13%) gave two main reasons for choosing this language to express their communicative needs. These reasons include the following:

- Because Mbokotok is the language for “struggling people” with a common background 81%
- Because Mbokotok is the language of intimate friends in very relaxed and casual environments often use to imitate the rustics for the sake of fun 19%

Those who do not speak this language (87%) all indicated that they do not speak it because it is the language of people with a doubtful moral background.

Indigenous languages

As concerns the indigenous languages, 73% of the informants said that they use these Cameroonian mother tongue languages as media of communication. The reasons for the choice of these languages are as follows:

- Because the mother tongue is the language that actually defines one’s cultural identity77%
- Because the mother tongue is the language used for communication in the village14%
- Because the mother tongue is the language used for communication at our home9%

The 32 (27%) non-speakers of indigenous languages gave the following reasons for not speaking their mother tongue.

- Because I do not know how to speak it; we speak only French or English at home72%
- Because I never grew up in the village28%

English

With regard to English, the 41 Francophone informants, out of 60, who indicated that this language is one of their media of communication, gave the following reasons for choosing the language as a medium of communication:

- Because English is one of the official languages of Cameroon22%
- Because English guarantees communication with fellow Anglophone brothers and sisters17%
- Because English is the language of the global village and a window to international opportunities54%
- Because English is one of the languages used for communication in our home7%

As concerns the 19 non-speakers of English (17%), they advanced the following reasons for not speaking the language:

- Because there are limited opportunities to learn English, given that Anglophones speak only French and Pidgin English79%
- Because English is very difficult to speak21%

French

Concerning French, the 38 English-speaking informants who indicated that they speak this language gave the following reasons for speaking it:

- Because French is one of the official languages of Cameroon and every Cameroonian is supposed to speak the two official languages32%
- Because French is the medium of communication when I interact with francophone interlocutors who do not speak English50%
- Because French is one of the languages used for communication in our home18%

The 22 anglophone informants who said French is not one of their media of communication gave the following reasons:

- Because French is the language of domination and exploitation59%
- Because I do not like the French culture, including its language27%
- Because French offers limited opportunities at the international level.....14%

6. THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The language choices speakers make in postcolonial multilingual Cameroon and the reasons for choosing or rejecting the languages have significant sociolinguistic implications.

First, the fact that older people, irrespective of their official language background, have no interest in Camfranglais and rather consider it a childish language and the language of irresponsible children confirms Chambers' (1995) observation that younger and older people belong to two different worlds with opposing values. The older generation is said to be very conservative and less concerned with fashion while younger people are innovative and creative in their social life, including their language. Chambers (1995: 171) adds that younger people see their parents' control over their lives as a "suffocating authority which they must rebel against" and it is their wish that older people should judge their rebellion as "frivolous" or "extravagant" for the rebellion to fulfil its social function. This certainly explains why older people consider the language as the medium of communication for irresponsible children.

Second, the fact that many young speakers (15–25 years and 26–39 years), especially French-speaking ones, tend to avoid Kamtok is illustrative of their determination to improve their knowledge of English, given that Cameroonians have been made to understand that Pidgin English is an impediment to the effective learning of good English. On some university campuses in Cameroon, one can find all types of signposts overtly banning the use of Pidgin English. But the impact of other languages such as Camfranglais, the indigenous languages, Mbokotok and French are hardly ever considered. It is not surprising

that all the informants who said they do not speak Kamtok asserted that Pidgin can contaminate their English.

Third, the fact that Kamtok is spoken by people across the official language background and across other social boundaries implies that the language can seriously unite Cameroonians. As high as 80% of French-speaking informants and 100% of English-speaking informants above the age of 40 indicated that they use this language as a medium of communication. This implies that the official language background is not an impediment for the choice of this language as far as older speakers are concerned. Besides the official language background, the language transcends other social boundaries, such as ethnicity, gender, education and occupation. Kamtok can therefore serve as a serious source of national unity in Cameroon.

Fourth, a majority of those who identified themselves as speakers of Mbokotok asserted that it is the language of “struggling people with a common background” and this implies that speakers of this language do not perceive themselves as vagabonds or rustics, as they are generally seen by out-group members. This language, to them, is a means to expose their plight as jobless people who are still struggling to give meaning to their lives. But to out-group members, speakers of this language are social radicals with doubtful moral background.

Fifth, the fact that only 73% of the informants speak their indigenous language and up to 82% and 84% of the informants speak French and English, respectively, shows that Cameroonians, especially the youths, attach more importance to European languages than to their indigenous languages, which are supposed to be the first carriers of their Cameroonian identity. It should be noted that it is only a recent development that the indigenous languages in Cameroon are given some attention, as many are in the process of being standardized and others are already being taught in some schools (SIL’s 2004 report and Mforteh, 2007). The tendency before this recent development was that these indigenous Cameroonian languages were treated with disdain and no efforts were made to revitalize them. It is not surprising that Schneider (2007: 217), after Wolf (2001: 192), points out that in Cameroon “There is also a noteworthy proportion of children who do not learn an autochthonous African language at all (up to 16 percent)”. Such a tendency shows that Cameroonians who prefer the colonial legacies (French and English) to their indigenous languages are under the influence of what Bokamba (2007: 41) calls “ukolonia”, a tendency whereby some Africans believe that anything that has an African orientation is necessarily inferior and vice versa.

Sixth, the fact that the percentage of Anglophone informants who indicated that they speak French significantly reduces as one climbs the age ladder suggests that older speakers are more involved in the politics of the country than younger speakers. In other words, the fact that more older Anglophone speakers than the younger ones indicated that they do not speak French and even associated the language with domination and lack of opportunities at the international level suggests that age is an important factor in determining

Anglophones' appreciation of their union with French-speaking Cameroonians. It is worth reiterating here that some Anglophone Cameroonians have often argued that the terms of the agreement that led to their reunification with French Cameroon have not been respected, given that the Anglophone culture, their language and identity are given a second-class treatment. Before French-speaking Cameroonians discovered that the English language is a passport to a world of opportunities in the new millennium, English and the English system of education were treated with an inferiority complex (see Kouega, 1999; Anchimbe, 2007; Mforteh, 2007) and very few Francophones were interested in using English as a medium of communication. It is not surprising that seven years ago Kouega (1999: 112) observed that Cameroon bilingualism is a "one-way expansion of bilingualism, with speakers of English operating increasingly or fully in French, but their French-speaking counterparts remaining largely monolingual".

Given therefore the findings of this study, one can maintain that in a multilingual postcolonial setting, such as Cameroon, linguistic choices can reveal different attitudes, language and political ideologies and other relevant sociolinguistic information other than just revealing the speakers' competence or incompetence in a given language. As this investigation shows, Cameroonians choose or reject the different languages used in Cameroon for various reasons. Camfranglais is preferred by Francophone youths to signal their involvement in fashion and to distinguish their world from that of the older generation. Those who reject the language wish to prove their maturity and responsibility. Another reason for rejecting this language may also be the wish to dissociate oneself from the political and cultural ideologies of in-group speakers of the language. Are Anglophone youths distancing themselves from this language because it is the preferred language of Francophone youths? Is it a conscious effort to dissociate themselves from the Francophone community? The fact that much official effort has been made to ban the speaking of Kamtok, yet it is still the medium of communication for many Cameroonians, irrespective of their official language background, suggests that language choices cannot be dictated from above; it is rather the decision of the speakers themselves to choose or reject a particular language. The widespread use of this language by Cameroonians from different social backgrounds, in spite of the official efforts to ban it is indicative of the importance Cameroonians attach to it. Those who avoid speaking the language do this for reasons other than lack of competence. The younger speakers who avoid this language are influenced by their wish to speak good English, given that they have been made to believe that Kamtok is an impediment to effective learning of English. The fact that Anglophone non-speakers of French associate the language with domination, exploitation, dislike of the French culture and lack of international opportunities suggests their frustration and disappointment in the union with French-speaking Cameroonians.

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