

# English as Foreign Language (EFL) Teaching and Learning in Cameroon: Decolonizing Francophone Teachers' Minds

Clement Kouam

## Abstract

This article makes an argument for Francophone EFL (English as Foreign Language) teachers in Cameroon to recover from the 'Ukolonia' syndrome (Bokamba, 2011) and to use the indigenised variety of English as the model for teaching and learning instead of continuing to target the Standard British English accent. The study shows that the attempt to use an Inner Circle accent as a model leads to hypercorrection and limited fluency on the part of the learners. On the other hand, the use of the indigenised variety as a model by a few Anglophone EFL teachers results in better proficiency. The arguments are supported by (1) a questionnaire survey of 50 Francophone EFL teachers, (2) classroom observation carried out in ten EFL classes five of which were conducted by Anglophone teachers and the other five by Francophones, and (3) the analysis of curriculum documents for teacher education. The study is underpinned by Bokamba's (2011) Ukolonia theory and Kachru's (1985) World Englishes framework. The paper argues that a decolonization of Francophone EFL teachers' mindset and the replacement of Standard British English by mainstream Cameroon English can enhance the EFL teaching/learning process significantly. The findings and the recommendations provided also constitute a good material for innovation in EFL teacher education and in classroom practice.

**Keywords:** *Cameroon, Cameroon English, Received pronunciation, EFL teaching/learning*

## The Sociolinguistic Context of Cameroon

Cameroon is a multilingual country with 273 living indigenous languages (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2023) and numerous foreign languages, two of which (French and English) are colonial legacies inherited from the Franco-British colonial rule. Located at the intersection between West and Central Africa, the Republic of Cameroon is a blend of former East Cameroon (French colony from 1916 to 1960) and former West Cameroon (British colony from 1916 to 1961). While the former has remained essentially Francophone, the latter continues to be a dominantly English-speaking area. Although Cameroon had for long been a German protectorate (1884-1916) before the taking over by France and Britain following their victory over Germany during the First World War, the impact of the German language in the country is insignificant as compared to that of French and English. Besides being the most important *lingua francas* for both intranational and international communication, they are the only of

ficial languages of the country. In the partitioning of the war trophy, Britain obtained one-fifth of the Cameroonian territory composed of two discontinuous strips of land along the Nigerian border while France acquired the remaining four-fifths (Echu, 2003).

The two colonial powers adopted different modes of administration in their colonies. Interestingly, many current developments in English in general and in attitudes and pedagogic concerns in particular are still a reflection of the colonial systems that were practised. For instance, despite the current scramble for English in the French-speaking part of Cameroon, Francophone EFL (English as Foreign Language) teachers' attitude still clearly shows their preference for the far-fetched Standard British English accent to the detriment of the more attainable Cameroon English model. Though other factors (e.g., variation in curriculum content for EFL and ESL teacher education) may come into play in accounting for this attitudinal behaviour, the French colonial system of indirect rule that attempted to create an idealised Europeanised African appears to be one of the tangible explanations.

Full listing of authors and contacts can be found at the end of this article.



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### **Training and specificities of EFL and ESL teachers in Cameroon**

Most Cameroonian teacher training colleges devote two series to the training of secondary and high school teachers of English, namely the English Modern Letters series and the Bilingual Letters series. While the former is overwhelmingly dominated by student teachers with an Anglophone background, Francophone students dominantly constitute the latter. Upon completion, graduates from the Bilingual unit are transferred to secondary and high schools to teach English and French as foreign languages (EFL/FFL). On their part, those from the purely English division serve as ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers. However, given the extremely large number of the Francophone student population, some ESL teachers are often solicited for the teaching of EFL.

The observation stage of the study showed that while ESL teachers' efforts are geared towards the upgrading of learners' communicative skills through indigenized Cameroon English, most of their Francophone EFL colleagues waste precious time, energy and resources targeting near-native English speech appropriation by the Francophone learners. Unfortunately, their efforts do not yield the expected results as they themselves do not master the native accent they want the learners to acquire. In other words, Francophone EFL teachers jeopardise the EFL teaching and learning process with hypercorrection, resulting from their unattainable goal to sound British or American. This paper seeks to explain the strong attachment of Francophones to native English speech, examine the consequences of this phenomenon on the EFL teaching and learning process and suggest solutions to the problem.

There seems to be a close relationship between the colonial modes of administration in the two parts of Cameroon and the attitude of English users towards English. While the French system of assimilation exposed Francophone Cameroonians to standard French, the British policy of indirect rule rather promoted an educational policy that deviated Anglophone Cameroonians from standard English. This is confirmed by Simo Bobda (2004) who equates the British policy to "linguistic apartheid" and Bokamba (2011) who notes that the French, unlike their Belgian, British and German counterparts who appeared to be largely circumspect regarding their assimilation objectives, were very explicitly eloquent, with education as the means par excellence for achieving them. Thus, the attitude to accent in teaching French in Cameroon might have been

transferred to the teaching of EFL.

### **Language policy in Cameroon**

Although advocacies for linguistic decolonization have been receiving favourable echoes in many African countries (e.g., Botswana, Burundi and even Nigeria) where local languages now have official and other important statuses (Bokamba, 2011), the language policy in Cameroon is still geared towards the sole promotion of colonially inherited languages. The current language policy itself tends to be, to a great extent, a reproduction of colonial practices.

#### ***Language policies in the colonial era***

The correlation between the language policy that held sway in East Cameroon during the colonial period and the yearning for the native English accent by Francophone teachers of English in Cameroon is obvious. This myth of the native speaker dates back to the French colonial period where the policy of assimilation prepared the indigenous people to target the colonial master's speech model. This contrasted significantly with the system of indirect rule applied by Britain in its colonies, former West Cameroon included.

The aim of the French policy was to replace the indigenous languages, cultures and civilization with the French one. Echu (2003) reports that barely one year after taking over Cameroon from the Germans, France instituted a special subvention for schools that used French as the language of instruction and those that taught in indigenous languages were closed. Thus, 47 schools opened by Sultan Njoya in the Bamun region were all closed down and his printing press destroyed. Many other schools (e.g., those run by the American Presbyterian missionaries, and in which Bulu was the language of instruction later suffered the same fate (Echu, 2003, 36). This policy quickly paved the way to the creation of many French-medium schools before independence (e.g., Lycée Leclerc, Lycée Joss Douala and Lycée Manengouba Nkongsamba). The French and trained Cameroonians ran such schools to acquire a native-like command of the French language. Looking at the drastic nature of the measures undertaken to promote the French model of education, one can logically suspect that such actions were aimed to serve a hidden agenda. It won't therefore be an exaggeration to conclude with Bokamba (2011) that the colonial culture assimilatory or brainwashing objectives were well elaborated and "touched on the means to achieve more important and fundamental objectives: Cheap African



labor and other economic benefits for France.”

On their own, the British governed through Cameroonian traditional authorities. The use of indigenous languages (Bafut, Duala, Kenyang, Mungaka, etc.) as languages of instruction was a common phenomenon. Pidgin English, rather than Standard English, was promoted alongside these local languages (Echu, 2003). For Simo Bobda (2004), the British seem to have thought that Pidgin English was more suitable for Africans than standard English and at the same time a way to keep Africans away from their privacy. Kachru (1986) confirms this, noting that the acquisition by Africans of native-like proficiency in English made them suspect. Looking at the two colonial systems, it readily ensues that Francophones, through the system of assimilation, were moulded to look up to the native speech model, contrary to Anglophones who were trained to prioritise the communicative value of English rather than to long for Standard British English.

### ***The language policy in postcolonial Cameroon***

French became the official language in French-speaking Cameroon upon independence in 1960 and English enjoyed the same status in the English-speaking area following its independence in 1961. At reunification on 1 October, 1961, official bilingualism was instituted in the new federal republic. Cameroon, like many other former African colonies, obviously opted for this foreign language option in order to avoid a language conflict arising from the choice of an indigenous language on the one hand and the financial and material cost on the other (Bokamba, 2007; Echu, 2003). To promote the official bilingualism policy, the government made the teaching of English and French compulsory in the two subsystems of education inherited from colonisation. Since then, French has mainly been operating as a foreign language in the Anglophone subsystem. English has also been enjoying the same privilege in the Francophone subsystem. The following excerpt from the Constitution of 18 January 1996 better captures the current language policy in Cameroon.

*The official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The State shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavour to protect and promote national languages. (Article 1, paragraph 3)*

Despite constitutional provisions which make clear that French and English have the same status and constitute the backbone of the country’s language policy,

it is obvious that French remains the main official language. The numerical advantage of French-speaking Cameroon (eight regions out of ten and seventy-five percent of the national population) favours this situation which has caused a lot of harm to national unity. Anglophones have long complained about linguistic marginalization and the posting of Francophone monolingual administrators, magistrate and teachers to their regions is often cited as one of the main reasons accounting for the Anglophone Crisis which has been going on since 2016. Hopefully, the new trend consisting of Francophones rushing for English is likely to reduce French dominance over English in the future in both public and social spheres.

As for the hundreds of Cameroonian languages, they continue to be relegated to the background even though more efforts are now made to promote them through formal education. But even here, they compete with other imported languages such as Spanish, German, Chinese, Russian, Italian and even the fading Latin. Also, even though it is not uncommon for public workers to speak their local language with collaborators or users of the same linguistic community, this practice is frequently denounced, and its promoters accused either of tribalism or of taking the administration hostage to the benefit of their village people. Bokamba (2011) warns against such a neglect of local languages in favour of policies that privilege the colonial master’s language, observing that

*If Africa is to reclaim its destiny and emerge from its “downward spiral” of missteps and misfortunes of the last fifty years or so, the utilization of key African languages in public domains represents not only a major rectification in the development trajectory, but also invaluable tools towards its advancement. The time to engage this process is now, and we, Africans alone, are its captains and navigators. As argued in Bokamba (2007), if the Ukolonia behavior discussed here, which is a curable syndrome via civic/cultural education, is not reversed, Africa will suffer a deeper level of marginalization, and it will certainly be trampled over by the ever-encroaching globalization of English, French, and Portuguese through multinational companies that are aggressively seeking unfettered access to African natural resources. (pp. 162-163)*

Indeed, English as a global language has penetrated Cameroon so profoundly that Francophones are increasingly neglecting local languages in favour of English. As a result, more and more kids grow up in the



French part of the country without the knowledge of their mother tongues.

### **English in Francophone Cameroon**

It was not until the early 1990s that Francophones started developing real interest for English, the language that had become the first international language and the language of business and professional opportunities. Mbangwana (2004) depicts the unprecedented rush of French-speaking Cameroonians for English in the following terms:

*Francophones who never bothered learning English through the bilingual training programme in the university, which was free of charge, started looking for money after graduating from universities to register for language courses, whether they were private language institutes such as the B & K Language Institute, British Council, or the American Cultural Center. All of these efforts were for acquiring the language that served like a passport to study or work abroad around the world. (p. 25)*

The passion of Francophone Cameroonians for English has led to a situation where they are now massively represented in EFL teaching in secondary education nationwide. This zeal for the language has even led to the emergence of a new variety of English known as *Cameroon Francophone English* and abbreviated as *CamFE* (Atechi, 2015; Ngefac, 2022; Safotso, 2018; Simo Bobda, 2013). Due to this new brand, the label *Cameroon Anglophone English* (CamAE) is now supplanting that of *Cameroon English* (CamE) in referring to the English of Anglophone Cameroonians. Although CamFE still necessitates an in-depth linguistic description, it is fast gaining ground. The exceptionally rapid growth of Cameroon Francophone English (which is normally an EFL variety) is also due to its proximity and even its co-existence with Cameroon *Anglophone* English (which is an ESL variety).

### **The place of CamFE and CamAE within English-speaking communities**

English-speaking communities across the world obey to specific classifications. Crystal (2003) distinguishes between ENL (English as a Native Language), ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) communities. Kachru (1985) introduces the terminologies Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle in the place of ENL, ESL and EFL,

respectively. Kachru's classification pays close attention to the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures. It highlights, for instance, the difference between traditional native speakers (found in countries which represent the traditional seats of English) and the functional native speakers (who are those that speak English as from birth in Outer Circle countries). However, both classifications share significant similarities.

Crystal and Kachru both present the first community (ENL community/ Inner Circle) as including settings where English is mostly used as mother tongue and unique language by the population. Such countries comprise the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The Second group (ESL countries/ Outer Circle) includes former British colonies. In this circle, English enjoys a prestigious status because it is generally one of the official languages if not the only one. It occupies a preponderant position among the two or numerous languages which make the speakers' linguistic repertoire. Here, English often exists alongside many other languages and is significantly indigenised. It is generally assigned a very high status (official or co-official language). It is used as a medium of instruction and a language of administration. Countries which belong to this circle include Anglophone Cameroon, Nigeria, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Ghana, Kenya, Hawaii and South Africa. The third group (EFL countries/Expanding Circle) includes the rest of the English-speaking world. In this circle, English is used mainly for international communication. In such contexts, the English language is simply a subject in the curriculum and is used only for specific purposes. Francophone Cameroon, France, South Korea, China, Tunisia, Egypt, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Russia are some of the countries which belong to the Expanding Circle.

### **Francophone Cameroonians' attitudes towards Cameroon English**

In spite of the fact that Francophone Cameroonians are now passionate about the English language and the English subsystem of education, they prefer native Englishes, especially British English, and reject indigenised CamE which they view as 'pidginized.' However, research has shown that targeting native English in Cameroon is unattainable. Kouam (2022) shows that the attempt by Francophone Cameroonians to articulate native English features only results in hypercorrec



tion, defined by Labov (1966) as the tendency whereby speakers strive to articulate standard linguistic features, but end up producing features that are neither those of the standard variety they are targeting nor those of the mainstream variety spoken by members of their speech community and which they were trying to avoid. This phenomenon seems to be greatly compromising ELT efforts in the country's EFL context. While postcolonial theorists such as Wa Thiongo (1986) and Bolton, Kachru, Kachry, and Nelson (2006) advocate linguistic decolonization and a pronounced preference of indigenous African languages in education to enable the Africanisation of the educational industry, it is difficult to understand the preference of Francophone Cameroonians for native English models and the rejection of the indigenised accent which has the advantage of portraying the identity of the postcolonial user to a great extent. This attitude is a clear indication that the French colonial system of assimilation still holds sway in the minds of Francophone Cameroonians. It totally contradicts the aspirations formulated in decolonization voices.

For Bolton, Kachru, Kachry, & Nelson (2006, 230), learners should "target pronunciation which is easier to learn because it is more attuned to the phonology of their mother tongues, without forfeiting intelligibility," instead of struggling to produce the mannerisms of an idealised native speaker of English. These scholars encourage the promotion of pronunciation models with which speakers of the New Englishes are familiar and which are attained through formal education to ensure international intelligibility. Bolton, Kachru, Kachry, and Nelson (2006) corroborate Kramsch's (1999) recommendation that each variety of English must cater for both intranational and international communication. In the same connection, Firth (1964) recommends that second language learners of English be equipped with the educated variety of their local accents. He views "educated English" as follows:

*By educated English we must not understand Standard English. Educated English shows a wide range of permissible variations. Speakers of this kind of English do not necessarily submerge all signs of social or geographical origin. Their accent is often unmistakably local or characteristic of a class. Educated English is spoken by all the classes of people all over the English-speaking world. This is the only kind of English that has the remotest chance of universality even in Great Britain itself.* (Firth, 1964, 196)

The quote above shows that targeting strict American and British accents in postcolonial settings to the detriment of the educated varieties of the local Englishes is a futility. Firth's (1964) view is shared by Achebe (1965) who opines that non-native speakers of English should passionately espouse their local English models and avoid useless emulations of native speech forms. He declares:

*So my answer to the question 'Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?' is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask 'Can he ever learn to use it as a native speaker?' I should say, I hope not. It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so. The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use.* (Achebe, 1965, 29)

Achebe (1965) thus sees indigenized varieties of English as hallmarks of the African identity and as varieties which Africans should go for. Unfortunately, the myth of the native speaker continues to be present and is sometimes encouraged by ELT professionals as is the case with Simo Bobda (2004, 25) who points out that "the educational and professional survival of the ambitious African at the beginning of the third millennium still largely depends on how well he or she accommodates to Inner Circle Englishes". He upholds that it is a truism that school curricula in Africa must seek to promote this accommodation. The Cameroonian scenario is perfectly in line with this recommendation. Ngefacs (2011, 40) observes that "in most English Language textbooks used for the teaching of English in Cameroon, drills on Standard British English accent abound and no drills are provided for educated Cameroon English pronunciation." Although the situation has improved a little bit now, with more and more literary works and a few teaching materials designed based on CamE, most current English Language textbooks, if not all (e.g., *Interactions in English*) still reflect Inner Circle English norms.

### Methodology

Fifty (50) Francophone and five (5) Anglophone EFL teachers from ten (10) secondary and high schools in three French-speaking regions of Cameroon were recruited as participants for this study. They were selected among seventy-four EFL teachers who made up the EFL teaching staff of the ten schools. The regions selected included Centre, Littoral and West. Different



research tools were used to collect data. A short questionnaire was designed to thoroughly identify teachers and elicit their claims about the English accent they promote for educational practices. It was given to Francophone EFL teachers exclusively. A survey of the curriculum was also done to check if student teachers from both the Bilingual Letters series (future EFL teachers) and the English Modern Letters series (prospective ESL teachers) are subjected to the same English Language courses during their training. The purpose was to subsequently find out if there was any correlation between pronunciation choice in the classroom and the content of the curriculum that served for their instruction. In other words, is there any relationship between pronunciation practice in the ELT classroom and the nature of the courses taught at the teacher training school? An observation of five EFL classes conducted by Francophone teachers also helped to determine the extent to which the pedagogic model practised by Francophone EFL teachers reflects their claims in the questionnaire. This model was then compared to what obtains in the EFL teaching situations conducted by the five selected Anglophone teachers.

As concerns theoretical considerations, Bokamba's (2011) Ukolonia theory and Kachru's (1985) World Englishes model are the perspectives from which the study was carried out. Bokamba (2011, 161) defines Ukolonia as "a psychological syndrome that obfuscates the rational thinking of a patient in a postcolonial society and causes him/her to evaluate himself/herself in terms of values and standards established by the former colonial masters' culture(s)". This reflects Francophone Cameroonians' attitude towards Cameroon English; an attitudinal tendency that clearly reveals the internalized colonial mentality that characterizes these English users. As for the origin of this slave mentality, Bokamba (2011) explains:

*Ukolonia resulted from the long-term brainwashing that characterized the explicit or implicit policy of assimilation of Africans to Western cultures, especially through education, religious practices, and administrative practices. Through these agencies, African customs and cultures were viewed as inferior to their Western counterparts, and thus devalued and stigmatized as "backward"; while, in contrast the Western modes of life were valued, promoted, and incentivized as worthy of emulation.* (p. 161)

From the above description, it is clear that Ukolonia remains a widespread practice in Cameroon. Even the school curricula seem to serve the needs of the West more than those of Cameroon.

Concerning Kachru's (1985) World Englishes model, it acknowledges the irreversible indigenisation process undergone by English out of its traditional seats, and establishes the New Englishes as autonomous varieties with characteristic features. Therefore, it contrasts with frameworks such as Error Analysis, which view all deviations from traditional native Englishes as errors and, consequently, as uninvited guests in any ELT situation. In this perspective, it is actual communication and intelligibility which are the watchwords, and not necessarily how much a speaker can twist their tongue to approximate native speech models. Besides, the model denounces the monopole that Inner Circle Englishes still have in many non-native environments. For Kachru (1985), Inner Circle speakers cannot continue to be the exclusive norm-setters in a context where the English language has transcended many national, international and continental boundaries to emerge as a global lingua franca. In this development process, Ngefac (2012, 169) points out, English has significantly embraced the contextual realities of postcolonial contexts, due to the process of nativisation through which each New English setting "has acquired new norms of correctness, which very much reflect the twists and turns the language has undergone in such contexts". Many Outer Circle countries and even some Expanding Circle ones are claiming their Englishness, thereby manifesting their wish to move from norm-depending to norm providing English settings. This can only be made possible through frameworks such as the present ones.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The analysis of the data collected yielded interesting findings.

#### **Representation of Francophones in EFL teaching**

One of the issues which need to be surveyed accurately in the EFL teaching sector in Cameroon is that of 'who teaches English as a Foreign Language in Cameroon'. The answer to this question is likely to shed more light on the speech orientations millions of Francophone Cameroonians trained in secondary and high schools receive every year. In other words, if EFL teachers are mostly *Anglophone* Cameroonians, the learners will obviously tend to be accustomed to Cameroon *Anglophone* English. On the contrary, if the EFL teaching staff is dominated by Francophones as pre-



dicted in this study, there is a likelihood that Cameroonian learners from the Francophone sub-system of education will be adepts of Cameroon Francophone English, which also entails that their likelihood to exhibit hypercorrection in their English speech will be very high. This is because CamFE has been observed to be a variety with a great deal of hypercorrect features. Not having the means to carry out a large-scale survey to determine the exact percentage of Francophone EFL teachers serving nationwide, we could, at least, do this verification from the ten schools we consulted for the investigation. In each EFL Department (commonly referred to as *Anglais Department*), the number of teachers was determined. Then a distinction was made between those who had a Francophone background and those with an Anglophone background. The table below provides a picture of the representation of Francophones in the ten EFL departments that were visited.

As shown in Table 1, EFL teachers are mostly Francophones (up to 67.5% of the EFL teachers that were met in the schools that were sampled). The overall teaching staff of the ten EFL Departments that were visited was made up of seventy-four (74) EFL teachers. Out of this number, up to 50 had a Francophone background. While in some departments we could have a fair number of Anglophones (e.g., 4 out of 10 teachers met in Government Bilingual High School Obala),

**Table 1.** Representation of Francophones in EFL teaching

Distribution of EFL teachers (n=74)	Frequency	Percentage
Francophones	50	67.5%
Anglophones	24	32.5%

in others (e.g., Government Technical High School Nkommetou-Centre where 6 EFL teachers could be found), all were Francophones. These figures clearly denote the predominance of Francophone teachers in the teaching of English to Francophone Cameroonians. As mentioned earlier, a questionnaire was administered exclusively to the fifty Francophone teachers. This aimed at eliciting their preferred English accent for ELT.

**Francophone EFL teachers preferred English accent**

Teachers were expected to choose their preferred English accent for educational practices out of the three options that were proposed, namely (1) the Standard British English Accent, abbreviated as SBE and also known as Received Pronunciation or RP, (2) the Cameroon English

(CamE) Accent and (3) a Mixture of SBE and CamE accents. The table below displays their choices.

Table 2 indicates that up to 38 (76%) of the teachers went for the native accent (Standard British English). While 9 (18%) were in favour of a mixture of native and Cameroon English accents, only 3 (6%) showed a preference for the indigenised Cameroon English accent. These figures are very indicative of Francophone Cameroonians' very negative attitude towards Cameroon *Anglophone* English and their strong attachment to Western speech models. Given that there is often a gap between what one prefers and what they actually have or do, it was considered suitable to seek to know what they think they teach. Their claims are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 2.** Francophone EFL teachers preferred accent.

Accents	Frequency	Percentage
SBE	38	76%
CamE	09	18%
Mixture of SBE and CamE	03	6%

It is quite interesting to note that as many as 28 Francophone EFL teachers (56%) out of 50 claimed they teach nothing but the Standard British English accent. This claim makes one wonder if what these teachers claimed they are teaching was actually what they taught. Such a preoccupation could only be addressed through classroom observation that was carried out at a later stage of the data collection process. Nineteen (38%) acknowledged that they teach a mixture of native and CamE accents and only 3 (6%) recognized that they teach the indigenized Cameroon English accent. From all indications, teachers' claims are not genuine but simply a way for them to show that they abide by the official recommendations to promote traditional native English norms.

Kachru (1986, 117) thinks it's not only useless but impossible to implement Inner Circle English standards in postcolonial environments. That is why he disagrees with non-native speakers who boldly claim they speak Received Pronunciation. The scholar makes it clear that "no member of the Outer Circle speaks RP," and upholds

**Table 3.** Francophone EFL teachers' claims about the accent they teach.

Accents	Frequency	Percentage
SBE accent	28	56%
CamE accent	3	6%
Mixture of SBE and CamE accents	19	38%



that “even if he could, he would lack those mannerisms distinct of a native speaker”. In the same vein, Todd (1982, 289) had earlier observed that “virtually no African speaks RP.” It should be noted that even in Britain, RP features are now very scarce as research shows that less than 3% of the British population now uses RP in its pure form. Despite this literature contradicting teachers’ statement that they teach Standard British English, it was important to seek empirical evidence through classroom realities.

### **The EFL teaching scenario in Cameroon**

Classroom observation involved ten EFL classes, five of which were conducted by Anglophone teachers and the other five by Francophone teachers. It ensued from the ten classes attended that Levis’ (2005) Nativeness and Intelligibility principles are two paradigms holding sway in the Cameroonian English language teaching industry nowadays. It was so obvious to note that English language teachers with an Anglophone background are mostly guided by the Intelligibility Principle and insist on the local CamE while those with a Francophone background are mostly guided by the Nativeness Principle, despite on-going signals that the promotion of native English models in Cameroon is not yielding the expected fruits.

### **Anglophone EFL teachers’ focus**

An appraisal of what constitutes the target in EFL teaching situations for each of the two categories of English language teachers that were observed showed that Anglophone EFL teachers’ efforts are aimed at developing learners’ communicative skills through a pedagogic model which enables them to understand and to be understood by other English-speaking users. These are teachers who are basically trained to serve as ESL teachers. They proved to be more attuned to the promotion of educational practices that favour a realistic, pragmatic and attainable speech model to the learners. Without forfeiting intelligibility, they train learners to speak English as naturally as they speak their Cameroonian first languages.

### **Francophone EFL teachers’ focus**

These are Francophones trained in Bilingual series to teach English to other Francophone Cameroonians. Classroom observation demonstrated that their objective is geared towards the attainment of native or native-like speech. They pretend to be teaching nothing but native English. However, observation showed that

their attempts to approximate these Inner Circle Englishes rather lead them to hypercorrection. For instance, /mɔːrəl wɛn/ (instead of /mɔːdʒul wɔn/) was provided by a Francophone EFL teacher as the American English pronunciation of *module one*. In the same vein, /rɪdʒɪkt/ (instead of /rɪdʒɛkt/) was brandished by another Francophone EFL teacher as the SBE rendition of *reject*.

The phonological rendition of *th* in words such as *this* and *mathematics* are other glaring examples that were observed, as the sequence was hypercorrectly articulated by Francophone EFL teachers as /v/ and /f/, respectively, to the detriment of their SBE counterparts /ð/ and /θ/ and their CamE forms /d/ and /t/. This is further evidence that the increasingly high percentage of hypercorrect speech features in Cameroon Francophone English is as a result of Francophone EFL teachers’ Ukolonia mindset which vividly depicts neo-colonialism as it cherishes and idealises what is foreign but despises and rejects what is local.

### **General observations**

While Anglophone EFL teachers simply ensure that their learners speak English in a way that is intelligible to the listeners, their Francophone colleagues are interested in ensuring that the learner articulates words following Standard British English and American English patterns. Interestingly, the pronunciation model provided by the teachers themselves does not, in most cases, reflect the variety they are struggling to teach. The learner finally does not gain much because the efforts to sound British or American limit their fluency significantly. This could explain why Francophone Cameroonians are very good at English grammar but avoid speaking due to the fear to make mistakes (Safotso, 2022). In fact, they are very often interrupted by their Francophone EFL teachers who constantly come in to “correct” their English pronunciation.

It also transpired from classroom observation that Francophone students trained by Francophone EFL teachers are far less fluent in English and, consequently, less officially bilingual than the few trained by Anglophone teachers, whose target is actual communication. A palpable example came from a speech exercise done in two Première classes in GBHS Obala where learners were expected to say the sentences aloud stressing the words in bold so as to give the sentence the rhythm or cadence it deserves. While the Première D1 learners, taught by an Anglophone EFL teacher, could easily and fluently repeat the sentences following their teacher’s





local English accent, those of Premiere D2 found it very difficult arriving at a pronunciation their Francophone trainer was imposing on them. In most cases, Francophone teachers' speech was flawed by hypercorrection due to their unsuccessful attempts to respect SBE segmental and suprasegmental rules. At the same time, learners, whose speech organs could not get rid of the sound systems of French and their mother tongues, could not afford to emulate the teacher whose own efforts to sound native were actually fruitless. For the sentence, *It would be great if all Cameroonians could have access to the internet*, (*Interactions in English 1eres*, p. 258) for instance, the Francophone EFL teacher provided the following as reference pronunciation: *It would be gr[i]t if all C[ɛ]meroonians [kiɔ] [hɛf] access to [vi] internet*. On the other hand, the digest Cameroon English pronunciation the Anglophone EFL teacher provided to her learners enabled the latter to repeat with a high degree of fluency. The glaring contrast characterizing the teaching approaches used by Francophone and Anglophone EFL teachers led to the scrutiny of their training programmes.

### The Syllabus for Teacher Education

The syllabus used in training EFL teachers in Cameroonian higher teacher training colleges shows some significant differences from the one used to train ESL teachers. The main contrast arises from the fact that while ESL student teachers have all their courses in English from Level One to Level Five (except one French course that is supposed to upgrade their French proficiency), their EFL counterparts have 50% of their curriculum content constituted of French subjects and the other 50% being made of English subjects.

Looking at the English subjects, both ESL and EFL student teachers have in common a course entitled *English Speech and Usage*, which focuses on SBE. But unlike their ESL mates, EFL student teachers are not taught a key course entitled *World Englishes*, which aims at exposing the learners to the different varieties of English. The course promotes indigenized Englishes, contrarily to *English Speech and Usage*, which only provides drills on Standard British English and, to an extent, American English. No drill on CamE or any other local variety is thus provided to prospective Francophone EFL teachers. The correlation between the course entitled *World Englishes* and the acceptance or rejection of the New Englishes such a Cameroon English cannot be belaboured. It is a course which values the New Englishes and highlights their place within the

World Englishes arena. Consequently, the course contributes to build self confidence in New Englishes speakers, thereby making them proud of the indigenized Englishes. Such a course is likely to help Francophone EFL student teachers get rid of the *Ukolonia* (slave) mentality (Bokamba, 2007, 2011) which highly characterizes them.

Needless pointing out that while in secondary and high school, most of the present student teachers acquired from their own Francophone EFL teachers what was fallaciously presented to them as native English. The same fallacy is, unfortunately, reinforced through exposure to the course entitled *English Speech and Usage* whose sole aim is to acquaint prospective EFL and ESL teachers with Inner Circle English norms. The presence of this course in the curriculum serving in the training of English language teachers is due to the fact that it is a traditional native English variety, namely Standard British English, which continues to serve as reference model for English language teaching practices across Cameroon despite the fact that researchers have been raising an alarm to denounce a policy which promotes a language variety which is not at the reach of Cameroonians and cannot actually convey Cameroonian experiences. From the numerous research endeavours carried out to assess Cameroonians' familiarity with the British variety of English, it occurs that they significantly lack the mastery of this model. Even teachers who are called upon to teach it have proven beyond any reasonable doubt to be ignorant of it. This has led to publication titles such as *When the blind lead the blind: The fallacy of promoting Standard British English in Cameroon* (Ngefec, 2012).

The absence of EFL teachers' exposure to World Englishes can only lead to the situation prevailing in the Francophone English-speaking community in Cameroon nowadays, where speakers twist their tongues to sound British or American in their English speech and make clear attempts to avoid uttering features that associate them with the local Cameroon English. Unfortunately for them, it is so obvious that even when they successfully articulate some isolated words or sentences in accordance with traditional native English norms, difficulties handling aspects such as intonation and connected speech quickly expose their masquerade and reveal to the limelight that they are simply trying their hand in something their speech organs are unfamiliar with. The decolonization of Francophone EFL teachers' linguistic mindset thus appears as a necessity.



### **The urgency of decolonising Francophone EFL teachers' mindset**

Francophone EFL learners in Cameroon are paying a huge price for the colonial linguistic indoctrination subtly led by such enemies of indigenised Englishes as Prator (1968), Quirk (1985) and Honey (1997), who saw the promotion of the New Englishes as a heresy. Looking at the current English language scenario, how sustainable can Quirk's (1985) call for the use of a "single monochrome standard form that looks as good on paper as it sounds in speech" actually be today? What would Honey (1997) think of his own declaration that if speakers of English in the New Nations create their own standard, they are likely to be excluded from the global scene because they cannot exercise the same level of competence as other members of the world English-speaking community? These advocates of a New Englishes genocide thought they could continuously impose Inner Circle English norms all over the world. It is left to Outer and Expanding Circle users to realise that they outnumber the traditional native speakers by far and this numerical advantage must permit them to set and follow norms which capture the cosmology of the specific non-native English-speaking countries. Unfortunately, some non-native speakers (e.g., Francophone Cameroonians) continue to be at the forefront to combat the Englishes that carry the colours of their sociocultural realities.

The following report by Platt, Weber & Ho (1984, 170) is a clear indication that the decolonisation of many non-native English speakers' linguistic mindset is a matter of utmost importance. The scholars indicate that in a workshop on the English language in Singapore, a speaker with a conspicuous Singaporean accent passionately affirmed: "I speak RP." Surprisingly, his statement rather provoked laughter and protest from the British audience. Such behaviours make one wonder why speakers of the New Englishes undervalue the varieties of English that they speak and rather want to identify themselves with foreign models. Ngefac (2012) attempts an explanation to this state of affairs, hypothesising 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 towards the languages that are rooted in the sociocultural and sociolinguistic realities of their country. He upholds that such people believe the greatness of Cameroon lies "in the ability of Cameroonians to prove that they master ex-colonial languages as much

as, or even more than traditional native speakers of the languages" themselves.

When will Africans actually realise that "when an African speaks American English, the credit goes to America," as rightly pointed out by Micheal Ndemanu in May 2023 during the Second World Conference on Transformative Education held in Ghana? There are many Anglophone Cameroonians who successfully carry out their daily activities worldwide using their indigenised CamE accent. Just like no language can portray one's identity better than their mother tongues, no English variety can depict the sociocultural realities of a new English setting or express the ways and thoughts of its users better than the local variety. It is equally obvious that it is only through their native or indigenised languages that individuals can actually showcase their highest degree of creativity, self-confidence and performance.

What can justify the persistence of colonialist visions like Simo Bobda's (2004) equating the language policy applied by the British in Cameroon during the colonial period to a linguistic apartheid, and advocating "not just English per se, but Standard British English" in Cameroon? This is a vision which takes on the British administration for keeping Africans away from "good English". For its author, the British should have drilled Africans on Standard British English. Africans in general and Francophone Cameroonians in particular should stop seeing native English speech as more prestigious, correct and intelligible than their local varieties. Doing so is ignoring Kachru's (1992, 67) call on all English users around the world to "realise that this new role of English [as an international language] puts a burden on those who use it as their *first* language, as well as on those who use it as their *second* language." That is to say, it is not the duty of non-native speakers alone to speak English in a way that ensures international intelligibility. Francophone EFL teachers in Cameroon should be acquainted with this and should equally think of some powerful declarations from such post-colonial thinkers as Achebe who were able, as far back as in the 1960s, to perceive indigenized varieties of English as real forces to reckon with. They should be aware that the English language has become a global resource and the possession of every community that in any way uses it regardless of what any other individual or community may feel or think about the matter (McArthur, 1999).

In a world dominated by the West, Africa must strive to get its own share through fights of various



natures, including linguistic struggles. It is no news that language is power. American imperialism has been very successful thanks to the spread of the English language. If Africa cannot totally rely on indigenous languages to face the rest of the world, its indigenised English varieties can play a major role. Kouam (in production) strongly believes that Cameroonian and African natural resources are appealing enough to America and Europe. If the indigenised African varieties of English appear to be the sole means of communication through which discussions regarding these resources can be held, the Western World will not resist. They will embrace indigenised African English models. Francophone EFL teachers' mindset, as it stands, is contrary to African transformative development initiatives and visions. It must be reshaped through decolonisation. The best method to deconstruct and reconstruct Francophone EFL teachers' English linguistic mindset in Cameroon remains the teaching of the course entitled World Englishes to EFL student teachers. The teaching of such a course will definitely influence their attitudes towards indigenised English varieties.

Fewer and fewer studies now brandish traditional native speakers of English as sole norm-providers and non-native speakers as followers of the established norms. Instead, most works (e.g., Levis, 2005) require that the Nativeness Principle, which used to prevail in the teaching of English pronunciation in both native and non-native contexts, should now pave the way to the Intelligibility Principle, which best addresses all contexts of second or foreign language teaching/learning. Francophone EFL teachers in Cameroon should follow this principle which simply requires learners to be intelligible. Therefore, language policy makers in Cameroon should recommend mainstream Cameroon English for both ESL and EFL teaching to the detriment of Standard British English. Studies have shown that CamFE contains many features of CamE and very few features of SBE even though CamFE speakers paradoxically display a very negative attitude towards CamE and a very positive one towards SBE. The codification process of CamE is far advanced. The legitimate features of its educated variety as well as features that can be considered as mistakes and excluded are well known. More textbooks need to be designed based on its educated variety to enable a smooth teaching of this local English model.

### Conclusion

Although English is mainly a colonial heritage for

Cameroonians and other Africans, postcolonial nations should develop pride for its local varieties, as they are emblematic of our sociocultural realities. As for now, there is almost no alternative to English as a global lingua franca. It would be fallacious to think that a Cameroonian indigenous language can guarantee the instrumental role that English fulfils today. The issue is thus that of the variety that should be promoted. In the Cameroonian context, CamE should be the target in ELT rather than Standard British English. If the Cameroonian EFL teaching stakeholders (who are mostly of a Francophone background) emulate their fellow Anglophone colleagues in the teaching of an accent which is at the reach of the learners and is rooted in their sociolinguistic and sociocultural realities, Francophone Cameroonian learners will develop greater competences in oral communication. The exposure of prospective Francophone EFL teachers to World Englishes, as is already the case with ESL teachers, can seriously play in favour of this. The present situation which is characterized by the unattainable objective of approximating native Englishes ignites frustrations in the students, as they remain unable to communicate actively in the language. Also, embracing CamE rather than SBE can only reinforce national integration. There is thus a necessity to join Wa Thiongo (1986) in his call for a decolonization of the mind. Levis' (2005) Intelligibility Principle should also be the watchword in the Cameroonian EFL teaching industry nowadays given that the Nativeness Principle which has so far been followed by Francophone EFL teachers simply leads to hypercorrection, a phenomenon which was observed to be compromising Francophone learners' ability to speak English naturally and fluently.

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## Author

Clement Kouam (kouamclement@gmail.com) is a part-time lecturer at the University of Yaounde I in Cameroon.

