



Official Bilingualism in Cameroon and the Option of Text Translation: English Words and Expressions in Original Official Policy Texts in French

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Abstract

Besides the over 280 national languages of Cameroon, there exist English and French as its constitutionally sanctioned status-equal official languages from its last colonial encounters with Britain and France that actively ended at the dawn of the 1960s. However, the effectiveness of the acclaimed policy of official bilingualism has been disputed in several studies, citing imbalances in the use of the two languages and resulting tensions that have degenerated into the now commonly discussed so-called “Anglophone crisis.” In this article, we demonstrate that, in preference to a language policy that protects and promotes national languages as enshrined in the constitution, the said official bilingual policy was instituted and has been prompted to date, to showcase protection of the identity of the minority Anglophone population, the latter having opted, at independence in 1961, to join the then already independent Republic of Cameroon with a majority Francophone population, in a federation. Reviewing work on the imbalance in official language usage and the specific nature of the use of English in policy discourse, we further show that an instrumental use of English to the detriment of the genius of its constitutional equality with French has gradually moved to include an appeasement role in the face of the said growing tension.

Keywords: Anglicism, appeasement, bilingual policy, Cameroon, code-switching, English, equal status, French, national language, official bilingualism, official language, text translation

INTRODUCTION

As pointed out in Ayafor (2005), although unofficial bilingualism (or multilingualism) of two (or more) indigenous or national languages, or of one or more of these languages and one of the two official languages – English and French – is quite common in Cameroon today, functional bilingualism within the framework of the much-acclaimed official bilingualism remains hard to come by. Within this framework of official bilingualism, Anglophone children, from the school-going age, have been expected, since the 1960s, to

learn and speak French (as a foreign language (FFL/L3)), while they speak English as a second language (ESL/L2) and study its grammar as a subject at school; and Francophone children, vice versa, with EFL (their L3) and FSL (their L2). Ayafor (2005) points out, however, that

[s]till, those who accept government's view of bilingualism as the perfect mastery of the two official languages, English and French, find that a very small percentage of the population can speak the two languages with functional fluency.

One question that might then be entertained in mind is whether the system behind the policy of official bilingualism is effective.

Examining English tag question and response preferences of EFL speakers at University level (following what is now seen as Standard Cameroonian Francophone English (CamFE) as in Safotso (2012) and Atechi (2015)), the presence of high levels of inadequacies in the use of English question tags have been demonstrated, attributable to a systemic problem that has led to lukewarm attitudes towards the teaching and/or learning of EFL in Cameroon, Spoken English generally learned involuntarily through business, educational or neighborhood interactions with ESL speakers, than from formal EFL classroom situations (Achiri-Taboh et al., 2020). This general Francophone lukewarmness in attitude towards English in Cameroon is hardly unexpected, not least because the politico-governing class that is naturally and by far of a large Francophone majority, are generally lukewarm at it. Specifically, as pointed out in Ngwoh (2017), in spite of laid down majors to ensure the practice of functional bilingualism, there is hardly ever any implementation, as the general business of government in Cameroon goes on almost entirely in French, sometimes with some or generally without any form of translation of relevant official texts. Thus, in Cameroon, generally, one gets the feeling that, while an Anglophone is expected to speak French in a given situation, in no situation is a francophone expected to reciprocate. For example, Ngwoh (2017) also points out (as cited in Achiri-Taboh et al., 2020) that "the language of the military and of the Military Tribunal in Cameroon is exclusively French in practice, and Anglophones at all levels in both the military and police forces are expected to use French and not English to render or receive commands." This is corroborated in Chebe (2019), where it is shown that technical education in the Anglophone subsystem of education is Francophonized, with Anglophone teachers trained together with Francophone ones in the Francophone subsystem and together made to teach Anglophone children, and the end-of-course certificates are French styled and named.

With the foregone remarks, it is no surprise, then, that it may be asked, as on the web page STOPBLABLACAM.com on Wednesday 26th July 2017 (accessed for the purpose of this article on 11th November 2022), if it is true that since he took over as President of the Republic of Cameroon, "Paul Biya never gave a speech in English." With over 280 national languages (Eberhard et al., 2020), Cameroon is a country with English and French as official languages with equal status as per the national constitution of the country, following its last colonial encounters with Britain and France that ended at the beginning of the 1960s with the achievement of 'independence.' It is, therefore, expected that official and/or (key) policy speeches to citizens in a country like Cameroon be rendered directly

from their original sources in both English and French to reflect the constitutional stance on the two languages and ensure a somewhat equal effect on both sets of targeted audiences. Since such equality in the use of the two languages has been shown in the literature, mainly from the point of view of attitude, to be illusive and hard to come by in the predominantly Francophone country, one thing that seems to stand out clear is that the use of English in Cameroon by Francophones is mainly for reasons other than the one originally imprinted in the policy of official language bilingualism, namely, to foster “political integration and unity of the Cameroon State (Echu, 2004, p. 20).” In this paper, therefore, we are concerned with two main items. We start by taking a critical look at the linguistic situation of Cameroon and how its languages are used. Thus, we demonstrate that, in spite of the rich linguistic background of the country, its national languages have been sidelined since 1961 in favor of an English and French official bilingual language policy for a Federal Republic of Cameroon, made up of the former British Southern Cameroons that had independence then (i.e., 1 October, 1961), as the State of West Cameroon, and the hitherto already independent Republic of Cameroon (i.e., since 1 January, 1960), as the State of East Cameroon, only in a bid to entice the former to stay in the union. We then proceed to examine President Paul Biya’s use of English in official speeches within the length of time that he has been in power, what observably only comes in different forms of hardly commonplace code-switching operations of words, phrases, and short stretches of text. Thus, we further demonstrate that this scarcity in the official use of English in Cameroon suggests that the latter is actually only used instrumentally for reasons of appeasement in the face of growing tension from a clear imbalance in the use of the two official languages, rather than for the actual genius of its equality with French as official languages in Cameroon.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW: LANGUAGE USE IN CAMEROON

An analytical survey

According to recent versions of *Ethnologue* – see, for example, Lewis et al. (2015) and more recently Eberhard et al. (2020), Cameroon harbors over 280 indigenous languages, with 14 extinct ones. According to Boum Ndongo-Semengue and Sadembouo (1999), 4 others from the northern part of the country, namely, Duli, Gey, Nagumi and Yeni are on the verge of extinction. This number of languages for a country of over 25 million people gives an average ratio of about 89 thousand speakers per language. The figures are, however, often subject to dispute as in, for example, Wolf (2001), especially as dialects of the same language are often claimed by speakers as separate languages as pointed out in Echu (2004, p. 21) for Northern and Southern Fali, Adamawan and Kanoan Fulfulde, Northern and Southern Gbaya, Northern and Southern Giziga, and Northern and Southern Mofu. These are also often documented as such. As also reported in Echu (2004), the languages of Cameroon fall within three of the four language phyla of Africa, namely, Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger Kordofanian, with no Khoisan language spoken there.¹ The Niger-Kordofanian phylum, so-labeled as in Welmers (1973), is currently more

Khoisan languages are spoken around the Kalahari Desert in Southern Africa, primarily in Namibia and ¹ Botswana, and also along the Rift Valley in central Tanzania, far away from Cameroon.

predominantly known as Niger-Congo, and is most represented in Cameroon. It is also the largest of the 4 phyla of languages in Africa and, indeed, of the 3 in Cameroon, with 169 languages (i.e., in Cameroon), following Tomedes.com (accessed for the purposes of this article on 4 September, 2023), 142 of which are Benue-Congo languages (its largest sub-phylum), 28 Adamawa languages, and one single Senegambian language – Fulfulde. Of the 142 Benue-Congo languages, 130 are Bantu languages. Note that this number is about a quarter of the total number of Bantu languages, and these are spoken in Cameroon alone. The present day Bantu homeland covers nearly all of the southern half of Africa, from the line that cuts through from the North Western corner of Cameroon (i.e., present day Northwest Region of Cameroon) bordering South Eastern Nigeria, right across to Southern Somalia, down to the Cape of Good Hope, with about 500 languages. The heavy concentration of Bantu languages in Cameroon is not surprising, given that the presumed original homeland of the Bantu people is located in the said North Western corner of Cameroon (Greenberg 1964, 1972).

With this richness in diversity of languages (and Cameroon the presumed ancestral homeland of the Bantu people), however, no Cameroonian language has as much as gained importance for official use in public space as the colonially inherited languages from 1960s on – English and French. These exoglossic languages are enshrined in the constitution of the Republic of Cameroon of 18 January 1996 as the official languages of the country (with equal status). Thus, the two official languages of colonial heritage completely dominate public life in Cameroon in the areas of education, administration, politics, mass media, publicity, and literature, while the supposedly 280 or so indigenous languages are relegated to the background, except observably for a few pockets of usage for liturgy in the church and for popular Cameroonian music as in, for example, Duala, Ewondo, and Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), the latter of which has been developed since the first landing of the Portuguese.

Local Cameroonian languages like Duala, Ewondo, and CPE thrive in the music industry in Cameroon because they are actually languages of wider communication, which, according to Breton and Fohtung (1991, p. 20), include Fulfulde, Basaa, Hausa, Wandala, Kanuri, and Arab Choa, all used as lingua francas by a wide variety of Cameroonians. However, according to Wolf (2001, p. 155), there exist three lingua franca zones in Cameroon that can be identified as the Fulfulde lingua franca zone in the north, the Pidgin English lingua franca zone in the west and the Popular French lingua franca zone in the rest of the country. These lingua franca zones certainly owe their existence to the multiplicity of languages in Cameroon, with the different language communities seeking to have a common medium of communication at zonal level.

The three lingua francas here certainly overlap at different degrees, depending on the movement and internal migration patterns of the people. With the different waves of its colonial implantations in Cameroon, CPE can easily be seen as the most widely-spoken lingua franca in the country. Thus, describing it as a “no man’s language,” Echu (2004, p. 22) notes that

Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) is widely used not only in the North-West and South-West provinces, but also in the Littoral and West provinces. Presently, its

influence is felt in several major towns of the Francophone provinces. In short, CPE [as in Féral (1089, p. 46)] is no longer perceived exclusively as a lingua franca of the English-speaking population, but a language that has a possible national dimension. In urban as well as rural areas, CPE is used in churches, in market places, in motor parks, in railway stations, in the street, as well as in other informal situations.

Although CPE can no longer be seen exclusively as a lingua franca of the English-speaking population in Cameroon, Echu's description of it as a "no man's language" is a gross exaggeration, with the false impression that just anyone in towns and villages across the length and breadth of Cameroon can access it to either initiate a conversation or ask/respond to a question by means of it in a meeting of people from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds. On account of this, Ekanjume-Ilongo (2015) sees it as a common medium of communication for Cameroon, and describes it as "viable, flexible and practical," with Cameroonians being "more comfortable using this language [...] than using either French or English." We dispense with this view, not least because CPE is actually home-based in the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon and is used as the only lingua franca there. Classic evidence for this is the fact that the first Baptist missionaries, who came to Cameroon in 1845, landing in the then Victoria and exploited the use of CPE there to introduce formal education in English. Its use elsewhere in Cameroon flourishes mainly among Anglophones who have migrated there mainly for socio-economic reasons. Although different accented varieties of it (with new words and other expressions) have then arisen (due to the same contact effects that creates pidgins in the first place) and are generally placed together under the umbrella term "Francophone Pidgin English" as in Todd (1984) and Todd and Jumbam (1992), they are generally used by Francophones only when addressing Anglophones (when necessary) rather than among themselves, unlike Anglophones who use Pidgin English among themselves. A recent study (Ayuk, 2021) shows that, in Cameroon, speakers prefer using a language they already have in common with their interlocutors, except to overcome language barriers. Note that, as pointed out earlier, Francophone Cameroonians already have the Popular French lingua franca, and would not need some form of Pidgin English if it is only to converse among themselves.² Of course, when they want to be catchy or sound different as some form of prestige, they may use it, and this cannot be seen as ordinary usage.³ What Anglophones speak, therefore, constitute the original varieties and these cannot be said to lack a specific home base in Cameroon.⁴

With this, the claim of CPE as a "no man's language" really looks farfetched.² The exceptional use of a form of language for reasons of being catchy is not uncommon. A classic example is ³ the unruly use of the present first person negative contraction *ain't* (cf. "It ain't right," in the speech of the American President, Obama, in a presidential campaign with respect to the proposals of the Republican candidate as regards health policies, and "Manchester ain't big enough for both Messi and Ronaldo," where a journalist of the *Daily Mail* of 26 May 2009 writes in reference to the football European champions' league final).

From present reasoning, we follow Todd (1984) and Todd and Jumbam (1992) to place the original forms of ⁴ CPE as "Grafi Pidgin English" spoken in the Grassfields region of Cameroon and "Coastal Pidgin English" spoken mainly in the Southwest Region of Cameroon. Todd's and Todd and Jumbam's classification also include "Liturgical Pidgin English" used by the Catholic Church, "Francophone Pidgin English" discussed

We take keen interest in the fact that CPE is only “viable, flexible and practical, [and] more comfortable” to use inasmuch as standard rules of grammaticality (with restrictions on usage) are NOT of any concern. That certainly explains why, during the German annexation period (1884–1914), the language was able to resist a ban that was obviously meant to encourage the speaking of (a given standard of) German, and rather took flight as it attained the status of a makeshift language in German created plantations and other undertakings, used by forced laborers who were drawn from the hinterland with different indigenous languages (see, for example, Kouega, 2007).⁵ When Ekanjume-Ilongo (2015, p. 155), citing Neba et al (2006, p. 41), resorts to the guess that “an estimated 70 percent of the population speaks it in some form,” it has to be understood that, it is not every sort of talking around the country with a few English-sounding words (or phrases, especially as a response) that has to be taken for CPE, and the latter can, by no means, be described as a “no man’s languages.” To describe it this way is tantamount to saying it is what is also mainly spoken across Southern Nigeria, West of the colonial divide from Cameroon. Of course, Nigerian Pidgin English (or NPE) is clearly different from CPE in many ways, possibly on the same ratio as Spanish is to Portuguese, for example (both being Latin-based). See Achiri-Taboh (in preparation) and citations therein for argument that the discourse pragmatic marker *nàw* in NPE is a loan adaptation of CPE *nòor* through Cameroonian Colloquial English *nàa*. Compare CPE *Yu di kam nòor?* and NPE *Yo de ko(m) nàw?* for “You are coming, right/aren’t you?”

Whether or not it can be said (as in Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2015, p. 155) that the multiplicity of languages in Cameroon has forestalled the chances of selecting official languages from them, one thing that certainly takes some of the blame (if not all) relates to colonialism and its neo-form.⁶ Thus, Echu (2004) further points out that

[t]he two official languages, English and French, came into the Cameroon scene in 1916 when Britain and France shared Cameroon into two unequal parts after defeating the German forces in the country. The new colonial masters then sought to impose their languages in the newly acquired territory both in the areas of education and administration. This led to the solid implantation of the two languages during the colonial era, a situation that was later reinforced after Cameroon became independent.

It is worth noting here that Echu’s generalization ignores certain important details, namely, that Britain and France did not jointly seek “to impose their languages in the newly acquired territory,” especially as these were then two separate territories, each taking one of the two languages rather than both languages. The prepositional phrase

above, and “Bororo Pidgin English,” a variety spoken by the Fulani cattle herdsman, originally from West Africa, traveling through Nigeria and Cameroon, and settling mainly in the Northern and Adamawa Regions of Cameroon.

Note that the Agro-industrial complex, duped Cameroon Development Cooperation (or CDC) was founded by ⁵ the German colonialist in (then) Victoria in 1884 upon arrival.

Note that the Republic of South Africa has 11 official languages as an example of countries with a multiplicity ⁶ of languages, an indication that native official languages are a possibility in Cameroon. As pointed out in Mojapelo (2023, p. 223), for example, one of them – Northern Sotho – is spoken by about 9% of the total population as a first language

“after Cameroon became independent” is also misleading, as the two territories did not become independent together as Cameroon, but separately and on separate dates and separate occasions.

With this historical background, two main factors can be held responsible for this neglect of Cameroonian languages. To start with, it should be noted that implanting a foreign language amounts to implanting a foreign culture or way of life, which is what actually happened in Cameroon. Then, when the British Southern Cameroons became independent in 1961 and took the option of joining the already independent Republic of Cameroon in a federation of 2 equal states, it is clear that one way to accommodate the minority people of the smaller State of West Cameroon as it then became known (the other being the State of East Cameroon) and ensure security for their Anglophone identity (with the English language they brought as a colonial legacy) was to opt for the policy of official bilingualism in English and French, with equal status – see Awasom (1998) for discussion. Evidently, this was the case. Thus, to be seen to offer this protection, much effort has since been expended to showcase this bilingual policy, especially in the face of growing tension from an eventual continuous imbalance in the use of the official languages (see the next two main sections) after the federal system was abolished in 1972 (see the subsection that follows). In concrete terms, in one of the amendments of the country’s 1972 constitution, it is stipulated in Law No. 84/1 of 4 February 1984 that the name that had been adapted to “The United Republic of Cameroon shall with effect from the date of entry into force of this law be known as ‘REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON’,” with the view that the substituted name was ambiguous (arguably showing ‘unity in disunity’ and, therefore, not seen to be indicative enough of unity). This is then followed, in the same law, by the renewed statement “The official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French.” For reinforcement, Article 1, paragraph 3 of the Constitution of 18 January 1996 states that “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.” Other reinforcements include Prime-ministerial circular No. 001/CAB/PM of 16 August 1999 stipulating that every Cameroonian had the right to be attended to in either English or French. Within the last 7 years, since 2016 with the so-called “Anglophone crises” (as in Budi, 2019; Ekah, 2019; Fai, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2017; Lando, 2021; Ngangchi et al., 2019; Nouhou, 2022; and Tabe & Fieze, 2018 among others), other measures have been taken, including the creation of The National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism by Presidential decree No: 2017/013 of 23 January 2017 as an advisory body under the authority of the President of the Republic of Cameroon, with regular visits by members to public offices around the country to monitor and encourage its implementation.

As one can imagine, one major downside of this policy of official bilingualism of English and French as it stands, however, is that it has helplessly orchestrated loss of sight of what is actually of Cameroonian expression – its many indigenous languages. This is in spite of the fact that, in the 1996 Constitution, it is stated (as if in a retort, though) that “The State [...] shall endeavor to protect and promote national languages.” Since then, the

Government of Cameroon, through the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education, has only recently taken measures to introduce indigenous languages in schools. Even so, however, implementation of the relevant policies down to the classroom poses so many pedagogic and other challenges. See, for example, Yaro (2020) for relevant discussion.

Another typical downside of this policy of official bilingualism is that, as a function of the demographic distinction between the two facets of the Cameroonian society as a Francophone majority country plus an Anglophone appending minority, one gets the feeling (as pointed out in the introduction to this study) that, while an Anglophone is expected to speak French in a given situation, in no situation is a francophone expected to reciprocate. Specifically, while Anglophones, who find themselves in Francophone East of Cameroon, especially as first-time visitors, generally exhibit awareness of the likelihood to meet Francophones (or French speakers) than Anglophones (or English speakers) most of the time, and so tend to (attempt to) address any stranger first in French, the reverse is true for their Francophone counterparts, who find themselves in Anglophone West of Cameroon, especially as first-time visitors – the reader can conduct a quick survey on both sides of the colonial divide, for example, at bus stations. Hypothetically, therefore, while Anglophones in the former British Southern Cameroons were made to understand, at independence, that they were joining the already independent Republic of Cameroun with French as its official language, Francophones on the other side were never treated to the same kind of narrative, to get them prepared to genuinely accommodate Anglophones as equals, with English as the latter's official language. What this actually mean is that, while English is enshrined in the constitution as one of the two official languages of Cameroon, its actual official use in Cameroon is shallow and not projected internationally. One evidence for this is that, while "Cameroonian French" is generally displayed by current computer software packages as part of their language forms, "Cameroonian English" is simply not.

The idea of a bilingual policy

With respect to the idea of a bilingual policy, implementation can be a very intriguing matter in Cameroon, given its very colonial background and the diversity of attitudes that has been developed from it. Thus, as Echu (2004) points out,

... there is clear imbalance in the use of the two official languages as French continues to be the dominant official language while English is relegated to a second place within the [Unitary] State. The frustration that ensues within the Anglophone community has led in recent years to the birth of Anglophone nationalism, a situation that seems to be widening the rift between the two main components of the society (Anglophones and Francophones), ...

See Nzomo and Gomez (2019) for more recent perspectives on the challenges faced by the policy of official bilingualism in Cameroon, and the linguistic tensions in connection with the disparities between official language usage in the French-speaking and English-speaking regions.

In itself, the bilingual policy can be a blessing. One example that can be considered here is the case of Singapore, which, according to the web page prezi.com (accessed for

purposes of this study on September 14, 2023), started in 1966, five years later. Singapore is a multilingual country, not on a large scale like Cameroon though. Thus, although multiracial and multiethnic in nature, it is made up of three main population groupings, namely, Chinese, Malay, and Indian. Singapore's bilingual policy is that of one of these three ethnic languages as a mother tongue plus English as an official language. Prior to 1966, more and more Singaporeans were becoming ignorant of their culture and language due to the increased demand for English at the time. Thus, this bilingual policy was created to achieve social cohesion in the multi-racial and multilingual country, and to encourage the young to learn and appreciate their different cultures. According to [prezi.com](#), although the policy has not been without adverse effects like the loss of some of the rich linguistic diversity and the shift from multilingualism to bilingualism, with people no longer using their mother tongues at home as they used to, social cohesion has indeed been achieved together with economic and social growth, with a relieve of racial and ethnic tensions.

Looking at the quote from Echu (2004) above, an important twofold question that arises is what specific bilingual policy was adopted for Cameroon and how it has been implemented. As is well known, Cameroon's bilingual policy is that of the two exoglossic languages of colonial inheritance as official languages in a neglect of its many indigenous languages (as already described above). As we have argued above, this option was motivated as the need arose how to be seen to properly accommodate the British Southern Cameroons with English as its official language, when the latter opted in 1961 to join the already independent and demographically and geographically larger Republic of Cameroon in a federation of 2 equal states. In principle, the nature of this bilingual policy did not pose any problem at the beginning, since in the federation that ensued, each of the two federated states had an official language of its own with the full potentials of generating such benefits as in the case of Singapore (see, for example, [Monoji et al., 2023](#) for relevant discussions), and could then manage its indigenous languages in the best way possible.⁷

This experiment lasted only some 10 years (see [Konings and Nyamnjoh \(2003, pp. 52-74\)](#) for relevant discussion), as the federal form of the country was abolished in 1972 (as pointed out earlier) and the constitution amended. As a result, the bilingual policy took a dimension that required the two official languages to be used concomitantly in the business of the now unitary state, with the effect that, in spite of the 1996 constitutional pledge, as pointed out above, that "The State [...] shall endeavor to protect and promote national languages," there has been a loss of sight of national languages. It is since this time (i.e., 1972) that it can actually be said that much effort has been expended on justifying this bilingual policy, with the said imbalance in the use of the two official languages, leaving such expenditure increasingly looking like a smoke-screen covering

Like with the Singaporean experience, every Cameroonian would have the chance to be perfectly bilingual in ⁷ either English or French (as an official language) and their individual indigenous language as a mother tongue language. In this case, (perfect) bilingualism in English and French would only then come as a welcome bonus or advantage to be exploited by the federal government, with no one being under duress to speak the other (person's) official language.

ulterior motives (Ngwoh, 2017, 2019). In the following two sections, we examine the extent to which official bilingualism is practiced in Cameroon by means of translation, with a focus on official Presidential policy speeches since 1982 and how its pitfalls have been managed, with implications thereof.

ANALYSES: SPEECH TRANSLATIONS, READINGS AND EFFECTS

Posted on the web page STOPBLABLACAM.com on Wednesday 26th July 2017 is a response by Monique Ngo Mayag to a question whether it is true that since he took over as President of the Republic of Cameroon, “Paul Biya never gave a speech in English.” Quoted as follows are her words in four short paragraphs indicated here by means of double slash paragraph boundaries:

Cameroonians are used to listening to their President’s speeches dubbed in English on the national TV channel. Therefore some are not aware that the Head of State has pronounced a bilingual speech on Feb. [21, 2014], at Buea, on the sidelines of the 50th anniversary of Cameroon’s Reunification. // At the occasion, Paul Biya had in person gone to the capital of the South West region, one of the English-speaking parts of the country. Surprising many, he spoke few words in English at the opening and closing of his speech. Indeed, over the speech’s twenty seven minutes, the President spoke English in the first eight minutes [fifty seconds], before continuing in French, and closing the last two minutes in English again. // Those present that day lauded the president’s efforts. “*I am proud, very proud to be in Buea, proud to walk on the same soil like our heroes who fought for Reunification,*” he said, not really fluid, but understandable at least. // Regardless, it remains that in over [30] years of ruling the only bilingual country in Africa, Paul Biya, at the exception of this time, gave all his speeches in French.

This quote from Mayag (2017) actually locates the speech event in time as having taken place on 24th February, 2017, which we assume to be in error, the actual date being 21st February, 2014 as in angle brackets (i.e., three years earlier) (see YouTube·PaulBiya·21 Feb 2014). Thus, in the last-but-one line, we also change her “over 35 years” to “over 30 years.” In addition to the corrections, the first part of the President’s speech in English actually went for 50 seconds more.

As indicated in the first paragraph of Mayag’s quoted response, the President’s speeches have generally only always been translated into English from their original conceptions and renditions in French. Thus, apart from this famous 21st February 2014 block code-switching instance, it is truly difficult for many to remember other (official) speech events where President Biya has rendered parts of his speech to Cameroonians in English, so difficult that even Mayag herself (as the author of the quoted text above) does not seem to have remembered that there had been, as in Fonka Mutta, (n.d.) “a rare [three minute twelve second opening, in English, of a] public speech [...] by Cameroonian President Paul Biya in the restive town of Bamenda during a celebration to mark the 50th anniversary of the country’s defense forces [on 19th August, 2010].” Although there have certainly been other such occasions, the sheer length of President Biya’s overall official speech time certainly talks to the high level insignificance of these barely available cases. The

traditional option of translating official speeches of the President is, therefore, what has continued to flourish to this day in Cameroon, with more recent isolated cases of intra-sentential code-switching involving English nominal expressions like “followers” in the President’s message to the youths on 10th February, 2018 (p. 5, 1st paragraph), “Common Law” in his New Year policy speech on 31st December, 2019 (p.5, 1st paragraph), “Eurobond” and “fake-news” in his New Year policy speech on 31st December, 2021 (pp. 3, 3rd paragraph and 8, 1st paragraph, respectively), and “fair-play” and “start-up” in his message to the youths on 10th February, 2022 (pp. 3, 5th paragraph and 6, last paragraph, respectively).

For a whole range of reasons, translated texts are certainly not an ideal means by which to deliver messages, especially when their renditions as read speeches are not by their originators. Specifically, although translation allows for easy transfer of information of all kinds across communities of diverse languages and cultures, one particular problem associated with it is that translated texts are typically susceptible to errors (be they human or machine), and are, therefore, always likely to misrepresent the original speech. Shrouded with the likelihood of human errors, differences between the source text and the target text may deliberately be designed for the two different target communities to get different readings with different effects. Thus, in light of the Speech Act Theory as in Austin (1962, 1971) and subsequent refinements in Searle (1971, 1977, 1986), translations are prone to miss out on the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary forces of the original text and/or utterance of its originator, with discrepancies in references and intended acts and effects, and cultural insensitivities alongside a possible host of other insensitivities.⁸ This preference for official translations is, therefore, very surprising for a country that is socio-culturally and politico-economically divided on post-colonial grounds. Arguably, this is not without reasons beyond linguistic competence, an investigation of which goes beyond the scope of this article – but see, for example, Kemegni (in preparation).

DISCUSSION: FROM CODE-SWITCHING TO ANGLICISM

Contexts and concepts

From our conclusions in the preceding section, it is expected that official and/or (key) policy speeches to citizens in a country like Cameroon be rendered directly from their original sources in both English and French to reflect the constitutional stance on the two languages – their co-officiality with equal status – for the equal benefit of the two target populations. However, even more surprising is the fact of the isolated instances of code-switching and Anglicism in President Biya’s original official speeches in French, as “Cameroonians are [for a long time] used to listening to their President’s speeches [only by being] dubbed in English on the national TV channel.” In the rest of this article, we briefly examine the circumstances under which these usages occur, with suggestions that they are for instrumental reasons of appeasement and other accrued benefits.

Also see Mabaquiao’s (2018) brief introduction of the Speech Act Theory.⁸

Anglicism entails intra-sentential code-switching that is restricted to English words (or expressions) used in other languages. Code-switching is the operation in speaking (or utterance of speech) whereby the speaker changes from the use of one language (or dialect) to continue speaking in another, and may resume speaking in the initial language later in the same speech (see, for example, Fasold (1984, p. 180)). Code-switching, therefore, involves whole chunks of the same speech (or text) across sentences, and so may also go by the term “block code-switching” or “inter-sentential code-switching.” This is exactly the case with President Biya’s 2014 speech in Buea in which he “spoke [in] English in the first eight minutes fifty seconds, before continuing in French, and [then] closing the last two minutes in English” The significance of this alternative term is that it gives us access to the counter-term “intra-sentential code-switching” which also involves moving from one language to another, but only happening briefly within a sentence, involving a few words, often just one. Thus, Fasold (1984) terms it “code-mixing,” describing it as a situation “where pieces of one language are used while a speaker is basically speaking another language.” Note that Fasold’s description of the switch paints a picture that is generally not frequently seen within a single sentence. As such, the term “code-mixing” may only apply to extreme cases of intra-sentential code-switching, involving two or more “pieces” of two or more foreign languages within the same sentence or, potentially, two or more consecutive sentences within the same speech. However, he distinguishes between “borrowing” which involves inserting a single foreign word, and what we see as “non-borrowing” which involves two or more words (potentially as a bigger phrase), but still seen as (intra-sentential) code-switching. As he points out (p.182) about borrowing, “the grammar of the clause [or sentence] determines the language [i.e., whether the speaker is borrowing a multi-worded term in code-mixing, or actually doing (block) code-switching which, as Robinson (2006, p. 10) indicates, would involve the grammatical structure of the foreign language].” As this involves the use of English in speeches originated in French, intra-sentential code-switching, in this article, is basically a question of Anglicism, while we refer to block or inter-sentential code-switching simply as code-switching.

The practice of code-switching and Anglicism

Here, we examine the use of code-switching and Anglicism in President Biya’s official (or policy) speeches. Since the speeches are normally translated into English, we seek here to determine why he practices code-switching and Anglicism after all, with possible implications for the much acclaimed policy of official bilingualism.

Code-switching

The rarity of (block) code-switching in President Biya’s official speech events suggests that there is benefit to accrue from it whenever it is applied. To sail through with this, let us start by considering a number of facts. For example, it is worth noting that the three minute twelve second opening remarks in English on 19th August, 2010 took place “in the restive town of Bamenda,” and when a similar event took place just over three years later on 21st February 2014 (as described in the quote from Mayag), it was actually in another restive town – Buea. These two locations are the main cities of the English speaking people of the respective Northwest and Southwest (administrative) Regions of Cameroon

– formerly under the colonial and trusteeship administration of Britain as the British Southern Cameroons. Note the use of the adjective “restive” in describing the insinuated growing Anglophone impatience with the disparity in the right to official language usage. Consider, as in (Ngwoh, 2019), for example, that

English [...] which is the *modus operandi* in the courts of the English-speaking part of Cameroon once suffered major setbacks like when the President of the North West Court of Appeal [...] decided [just the following year] in February 2015 that lawyers should make their court submissions in French [and, citing the Bamenda Provincial Episcopal Conference (BAPEC, 2016)] apparently, most of the magistrates appointed to courts in Anglophone regions were Francophone who could hardly use English as a working language.⁹

It is certainly this identity crisis and the associated tension that then escalated into an armed conflict against the State (of Cameroon) the following year on (Muntoh, 2021), in the said “Anglophone crisis,” sparked by industrial strike actions by lawyers, teachers, and University students, and the ensuing state reaction. It is, therefore, entirely likely that, by applying code-switching, the President was being keen to sound inclusive and (more) conciliatory in the face of the growing tension. In concrete terms, if, as Ngwoh (2017, 2019), points out, “there is an unequal distribution in the usage of English and French as official languages with a minority English speaking population” and that, “[f]or decades since the independence of Cameroon, the Anglophones have constantly been in the battle of trying to negotiate their identity in the country” and that, “according to Nyamnjoh (1999), the ordinary Cameroonian has come to the conclusion that the whole business of national integration is a smoke-screen perpetuated with the hidden agenda

⁹ Note that, in Cameroon today, the term “Anglophone” is controversial. It should be noted that, in Current English dictionaries, the term is generally used in two ways, in reference to a person who speaks English, especially in countries where other languages are also spoken – see various Cambridge, Oxford and Webster dictionaries, with The New Lexicon Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary (NLWED) of the English Language restricting it to countries where other languages are spoken. Thus, according to usage, following recent examples on the web cited by mirriam-webster.com (accessed for the purpose of this article on 8th December 2022), statements like “This is viewed as crucial to the French-speaking province of Quebec—a vote-rich region and a minority in mostly *anglophone* North America (Paul Vieira, *WSJ*, 31 Aug. 2018)” and “China has overtaken the UK and US as the top destination for students from *anglophone* African countries (Alexandria Williams, *Quartz Africa*, 2 Mar. 2020)” suggest that native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) of English alike are Anglophones. That is, as its morphology suggests: *anglo* + *phone* (= sounding English), the term may simply be taken to refer to anyone who speaks English. However, in the context of NNSs of English, the term has to be restricted to L2 (or ESL) speakers, following work since Kachru (1985) – also see Schreier (2012) and Achiri-Taboh (in preparation), as these are (predominantly) norm developers on the basis of cultural leanings, and like L1 speakers, they are norm providers to any relevant non-ESL speech community in contact (for example, see Chebe et al. (in preparation) for a discussion on Francophone University students of Bilingual Studies visiting the University of Buea in Anglophone West Cameroon for the purposes of immersion). In a nutshell, the defining factor here is norm provision. In this regard, although some Francophone Cameroonians may like to be seen as Anglophones on grounds of having either learned to speak (some) English or acquired it by means of having undertaken the Anglo-Saxon styled education (or simply growing) alongside Anglophone Cameroonians, they are simply not Anglophones as long as they normally have their own norms as Francophones. This is even in cases where they do not speak (good) enough French (as is the case with many Anglophone Cameroonians without (good) enough ability in spoken English). Home background certainly appeals to differences in norm. Thus, Francophone Cameroonians (with a (strong) L2 French colonial home background) are mainly norm-dependent upon Anglophone Cameroonians (with a (strong) L2 English colonial home background) or to a limited extent upon any native/non-native English speaking community (from abroad.

of thwarting all attempts at meaningful change,” then, it is entirely likely that the President’s partial use of English at these points in place and time was actually to calm down the growing tension among Anglophones. If this reasoning is correct, then, in the context of the policy of official bilingualism, however, the implication is that English is gradually being phased out in Cameroon, with its usage in this way being for instrumental reasons of appeasement, rather than for the genius of its constitutional equality in status with French. In the light of the present analyses, therefore, a genuinely more inclusive language policy for Cameroon is required, with the genius of each official language as equal to the other as per the constitution fully respected.

Anglicism

With respect to Anglicism (or code-mixing/intra-sentential code-switching), we reach the same conclusion, although the picture is, however, not so unblemished. Let us now consider the examples cited earlier, namely, *follower*, *Common Law*, *Eurobond*, *fake news*, *fair-play*, and *start-up* that have recently featured in the President’s speeches at different occasions beginning from 2018. To see how they could variably be rendered in French, to start with, leaving the choice of option to be determined by contextual suitability, *follower* has a series of available options, including “adepte,” “disciple,” “fidele,” “partisan,” “suiveur,” and “sympathisant.” For *fair-play*, there are “franc-jeu,” “esprit sportif,” and “jeu regulier.” *Common Law* could be “Droit Coutumier” or “Droit Commun,” and *fake news* “canular,” “informations fallacieuses,” or “infox.” Finally, *start-up* could either have surfaced as “demarrage” or “creation,” and *Eurobond* simply as “Euroobligation.” Observe then, that, in French, there is hardly any fixed equivalences of these words and phrases, with usually many available options to choose from (given the affinity to stylistic expressions and stylish variations in French – see, for example, Vinay & Darbelnet 1995; Otsuji & Pennycook 2011), except rarely for cases like *Eurobond*.

With this spike in President Biya’s preference for Anglicism only being recent – deep into the Anglophone crisis, one way of looking at it is to assume that he seeks to ensure precision and enhance a better understanding of his message with regards to previous messages, perhaps even to preempt poor quality translation and rendition (as might have been the case, subject to separate findings) in view of the Speech Act Theory (as stated in the preceding main section). Specifically, the President may, at this time, be concerned with the fact that translations are prone to miss out on the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary forces of the original text and rendition. Thus, the usage might in fact be in a bid to spare the effort of looking for the most suitable or more appropriate (or acceptable) equivalence available in the context, English and French being distinct in cultural norms. From a remoteness point of view, though, the usage might as well be for other more specific reasons. For example, he might just have decided to give a vividly more colorful picture of his ideologies or make his ideological stance more expressive by styling his language by means of Anglicism, as allowed by the dynamic nature of French, especially as those like *fake news* had just been made popular by US President, Donald Trump.

Away from precision and being colorful and/or expressive, if the words were seen to represent some new technical processes or some unknown concepts in English, one could

conclude that, to overcome such lacunae, President Biya simply employed borrowing as “the simplest of all translation methods” (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). In other words, if he looked at these words as representing English realities (rather than French), this might well have motivated him to use them as they are in English, since,

[i]n a story with a typical English setting, an expression such as “the coroner spoke” [for example] is probably better translated into French by borrowing the English term “coroner,” rather than trying to find a more or less satisfying equivalent title from amongst the French magistrature, e.g.: “*Le coroner prit la parole*” (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995).

This is certainly the case with *Common Law*, as this is not only how the English legal system is known, but also a (near) direct opposite to the “Droit Civil” (or *Civil Law*) which is how the French legal system is known. With the Common Law, an accused is not guilty until proven so, what is opposite with the “Droit Civil” and stands out as a clear difference in cultural norms. The same can be said of *fake news*, given the English origin of “fake,” following Thu-Huong Ha’s (2017) citing of linguist Anatoly Liberman talking to Quartz, the fact that *fake news* (with false-but-exciting news stories) was first used in the US to achieve high sales (see web page <cits.ucsb.edu/fake-news/brief-history>), and the popularizing of the phrase in the US.

CONCLUSION

As the effectiveness of the much-acclaimed policy of official bilingualism has been disputed on a number of grounds in many studies, with citations of imbalances in the use of the two official languages and resulting tensions that have degenerated into what is now the “Anglophone crisis,” we have examined the former in this article on the bases of historical facts and existing literature. Thus, we have argued that the said policy was only instituted and, since its creation, has continuously been prompted (in preference to one that truly engages national languages) as a way to showcase actively being protective of the identity of the English speaking minority population in Cameroon, the latter having opted, at independence in 1961, to join the then already independent Republic of Cameroun with a French speaking majority population in a federation. Additional support for this position is deduced from official presidential speeches with partial use of English at specific points in place and time that coincide with growing tension among Anglophones. Thus, apart from *SCANWATER* which appears in the President’s speech of 8th October 1997 as the name of a potable water supply company, Anglicism only started appearing in his speeches, in earnest, in early 2018 with the use of *follower* in reference to sympathizers of those in an armed conflict with State security forces. This concentrated employment of Anglicism within the last five years seemingly coinciding with the armed conflict (or so-called “Anglophone crisis”) is, thus, very suggestive that the official use of English in Cameroon is for instrumental reasons of appeasement and other such benefits as may accrue, than for the actual genius of its constitutional equality with French as official languages of Cameroon. Notice that, when Mayag points out in her quoted report of the 2014 speech in Buea that “those present that day lauded the president’s efforts [in

starting with English],” the direct implication is that the President only goes out of his way to use English on such occasions.

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