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## IS CAMEROON'S OFFICIAL BILINGUAL POLICY A MAKE OR MAR?

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### Abstract

From the time of the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, languages, as well as people, have learned to co-exist. It is obvious that when languages co-exist, there is the inevitable tendency of linguistic influence. This is because a language can either be a uniting factor or a factor of division within a given community, especially in a multicultural and multi-linguistic one where such a situation has led to socio-political and economic tension. Thus, leaders of such communities have to plan and implement a language policy that will meet the needs of all members of the community to enhance its corporates. The present article will focus on some of the major reasons that pushed the government of Cameroon to embark on an official bilingual policy, and then evaluate the linguistic situation. The article will equally look at the consequences, especially from a socio-political standpoint and what has today been termed "the Anglophone crisis" in Cameroon. Data for the present article is collected from the literature on the state of official bilingualism in Cameroon, newspaper articles on the prevailing situation in the country, and interviews with actors.

Keywords: languages, multicultural, multi-linguistics, linguistic communities, official bilingualism.

### Introduction

The Republic of Cameroon had, at a given period in its history, to choose its official languages. Indeed the choice of French and English (both colonial languages) was meant to bring two communities together. But as will be shown in this article, this choice sparked off several problems that have had to be handled with much tact. It should be noted that the choice of two 'foreign' languages as official languages in Cameroon was an inevitable socio-political choice that aimed at resolving a problem of language choice.

Official bilingualism as an aspect of both ethnic and cultural pluralism has given rise to communication problems of a serious nature in Cameroon. These problems have prompted the government of the country to initiate remedial programs or language planning programs.

At independence, some countries like Canada, Belgium, Tanzania, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo were conscious of their precarious language situations and so, they opted for state bilingualism in which official languages are used by the citizens in a non-competitive manner.

To understand what bilingualism may mean to society, it may be useful to have certain concepts in mind. Fundamental to Joshua Fishman's thinking is the difference between nationality and nation. He holds that nationalists are "socio-cultural units that have developed primary local concepts, concerns, and integration bonds". By this definition, a nation is "any political territorial unit which is largely or increasingly under the control of a particular nationality". Ralph Fasold thinks there is indeterminacy in Fishman's definition; one may ask how much control a particular nationality has to have over its territory before the unit qualifies as a nation.

Multilingual or bilingual states have problems that unilingual states do not have. On the strictly practical level, difficulties in communication within a nation can act as an impediment to commerce and industry, and be socially disruptive (Fasold 1984:2). More seriously, bilingualism seems to work against nationalism. Given that nation-states are more likely to be stable than bilingual states, and given the importance of language for nationalism, the development of a sense of nation is more difficult for an officially bilingual state than for a monolingual one.

Almost sixty years after independence, though many Cameroonians have become bilingual, a great majority of Cameroonians are still monolingual and fail to understand the importance of a bilingual state. Some monolinguals expect their interlocutors to understand them, because according to them, 'the country is bilingual'. This situation, at times, is cause for concern, which has created conflicts in society. Because the bilingual policy in Cameroon was the lore of individual bilingualism than state bilingualism, some Cameroonians, especially of English expression, have been deprived of their freedom of speech in many public places like in the central administration based in Yaounde, the capital city where French is the dominant language. This is a result of the inadequate language planning policy that is in place in the country.

#### **Language planning and policy**

The language policy a nation adopts depends on language planning carried out by experts in the

science of language. According to Fishman (1973), language planning is an organized pursuit of solutions to language problems in a nation. Its main aim is to provide all the possible language alternatives for policymakers to select the ones that can likely solve all the communication problems faced by citizens of the nation.

Language planning can be handled at two levels: language corpus planning and language status planning (Fishman 1977). At the level of language corpus planning, the focus is on the language as a code with its internal structures comprising spelling or a writing system, grammar, and lexicology. Status planning focuses on the place conferred to a given language by policymakers concerning other languages in the same community. In other words, status planning provides an answer to the following question: which language should be spoken where and for what purpose?

Steward in Fishman (1972) recommends that the assignment of status to a given language in a multilingual nation be based on the function the language is supposed to fulfil. He states that for the function of a language to be specific, an answer must be given to the following question: "For what purpose is a particular linguistic system used as a medium of communication in the nation?" (Fishman 1972: 540). He then proposes the following ten possible functional categories that can guide language planners: Official, Provincial, Wider communication, International, Capital, Group, Educational, School subject, Literary, and Religious. 'Capital' refers to the language that functions as a primary medium of communication around the capital of the country.

It should be mentioned that most of these function types overlap. But what is relevant in Stewart's study is that it draws the attention of language planners to the fact that language planning is a very serious activity for the smooth running of a nation. Thus, it is an activity that must be handled with care. He explains that careful sociolinguistic analysis is a prerequisite because it aids planners to avoid linguistic feuds in a nation. He opines thus:

Multilingual situations may be considered stable when the different linguistic systems are

geographically, socially, and functionally non-competitive. For example, there may be two languages in a given nation which both have a provincial or group function. But as long as they are two languages of two administrative units or different social or ethnic groups, then no linguistic conflict is involved. At the same time, two different linguistic systems may be used by the same people, but if they occupy different functional slots, then there is no conflict. However, language conflicts can occur if this complementary relationship is upset, either by a natural historical process or by direct administrative intervention. (541).

The conclusion drawn from Stewart's analysis is that, in a multilingual setting, language planners must ascertain that the various languages within the polity are non-competitive.

#### **The linguistic situation**

English/French bilingualism in Cameroon can be judged as a historical accident, where both languages have gained institutional favour. Of course, other foreign languages - Portuguese, Spanish, and German, were equally involved in this historical accident. Haven found itself in the face of unplanned foreign language multilingualism, Cameroon opted for the officialization of the two most competitive (given the peculiar politico-historico-strategic circumstances and considerations regarding them) languages: English and French. Thus the country kept to the general pattern of the policies and constraints of newly independent African states.

Since their independence from colonial administration over the past fifty years, African states were able to choose to continue the exogenous administrative language as the de-jure or de-facto official language-exo-glottic policy, to place an indigenous language beside it as a co-official, mix-glottic, mixed or bilingual policy, or to place the exogenous language by an indigenous one, which would be the national language, or demolect-endoglottic policy (*Document from the British High Commission*).

Cameroon's particularity in this context is that its bilingualism can be characterized as mixed-

exo-glottic, comprising English and French, both of them foreign languages (Ngala 2004:157).

The language situation in Cameroon is very complex. In addition to the numerous home languages, there are two official languages, lingua franca like Pidgin English, Camfranglais, and Fulfulde. Although the exact number of home languages has not been found, *Ethnologue*(2001) concludes that there are 286 languages in Cameroon. Of these, 279 are 'living' languages, three are second languages without mother-tongue speakers and four have died out. No indigenous language dominates as a mother tongue and none is spoken as a mother tongue by more than 4% of the population (Gordon, 2005). Regarding the number of languages, Povey (1983: 7) states that the unexampled complexity of the linguistic situation in Cameroon has long fascinated linguists, though its innumerable indigenous tongues may rather seem a dismaying accumulation to those concerned with practical educational problems. It is hard to determine how many languages are in use within the country's borders. All the usual problems of quantification are augmented by the particular difficulty of establishing the distinction between a language and a dialect in this country.

In another research, Mbassi Manga (1976) holds that there are 285 home languages in Cameroon while Chia (1983: 19) thinks that: using methods such as mutual intelligibility testing, measures of linguistic distance, further socio-linguistic surveys into language use and function, though far from completion, makes one think that there may not be as many as 120 standardized languages in the country.

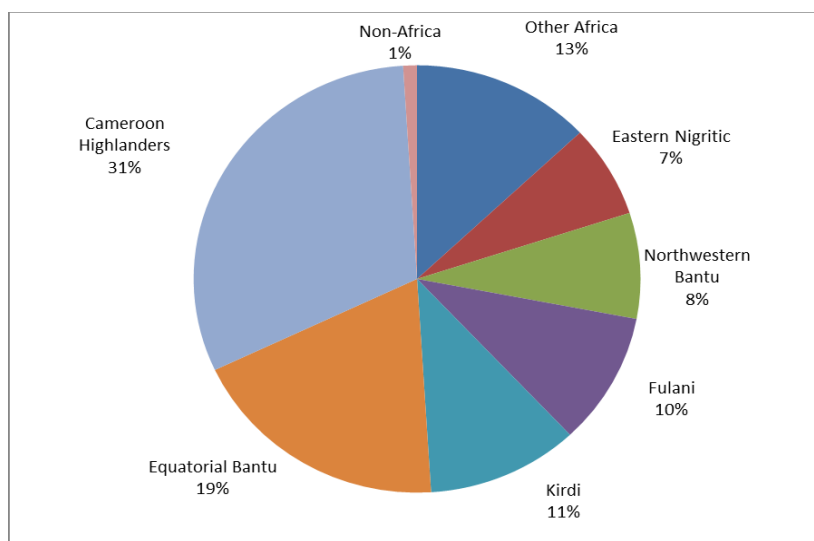
The complication of the linguistic situation stems from the fact that bilingualism in Cameroon can be regrouped under different categories. There is widespread individual bilingualism, that is, the alternate use of two or more languages, (Mackey, 1970) involving the use of more home languages. Such use may be within one language family as in the instance of the Bantu and grass field Bantu languages of the Congo-Kordofanian family. It may even extend across two language families as in the example of bilingualism and trilingualism involving

languages of the Congo-Kordofanian languages and the Afro-Asiatic languages, (Ayafor, 2005). But because of the non-official status of these languages, such bilingualism/trilingualism is not recognized by the state. What is considered official bilingualism in the country is the alternate use of English and French by state machinery as well as by individuals. In terms of ethnic groups, the categorizations drawn from the CIA (2008), and provided in Figure 1 below, are based on very large re-groupings. For example, the Highlanders category (31%) covers both the French-speaking and English-speaking Western region and the English-speaking Northwest region. Similarly, the Equatorial Bantu category (19%) consists of the Southwest region (English-speaking) and the Littoral region (French-speaking).

The Ethnologue website (see Gordon, 2005), meanwhile suggests that the ten most populous

ethnic groups comprise less than one-quarter (25%) of the country's population. The other 75% of the population is made up of 265 different ethnic groups. *Ethnologue* (2001) lists the ten most populous ethnic groups in Cameroon as follows: Beti 12.26% (made up of Fang, Ewondo, Bulu, Mengisa); Fulfulde 4.10%; Ghomala 1.60%; Bassa 1.41%; Bamun 1.31%; Medumba 1.28%; Tupuri 0.77%; Fe'fe' 0.76%; Akoose 0.61%; and Duala 0.54%. These statistics prove that there is no dominant indigenous language in Cameroon and that at independence none could have been used as an official language. Another reason was that the indigenous languages could not be easily adapted to technology or used at the diplomatic level at the time of independence. For these reasons, the best option for the government was to adopt English and French as official languages in the wake of independence which opened the way for bilateral and multilateral relationships.

Figure 1: Main ethnic groups in Cameroon



Source: 2018 statistics from CIA

Other publications like the *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun*, edited by Breton and Dieu (1985) conclude that there are 237 Cameroon home languages. Not only are the home languages too many for one nation, but they belong to different language families as established by Greenberg: The nilo-Congo subgroup to the south and south-west represented by the Bantu languages, and the West Atlantic subgroup, the Nilo-Saharan subgroup

represented by Karuni, Afro-Asiatic subgroup represented by Arabic which is firmly rooted in the Koranic schools of the North (Kale Kofele 1980). Greenberg's findings were confirmed by Chia in the following observation:

The indigenous languages thus defined do not for that matter form a single linguistic family but rather a large number of different linguistic phyla which manifest a vast variety of phonological,

grammatical, and lexical types. Of the four major families into which Joseph Greenburg (1966) groups African languages, the Congo-Kordofanian, the Nilo-Saharan, the Afro-Asiatic, and the Khoisan, only the last of these is not attested in Cameroon (Chia 1983).

### **The official bilingual policy**

Bilingualism seems to be the most salient cultural inheritance of Cameroon from the joint Anglo-French colonialism. The years following the unification of Southern Cameroon and La République du Cameroun on September 01, 1961, presented an integration problem of great magnitude.

When the authorities decided on an official bilingual policy, language experts, among whom was Bernard Fonlon, elaborated the implementation policy. According to Fonlon, the bilingual policy enshrined in the constitution of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1961 placed Cameroon among other bilingual nations in the world, like Canada and Belgium. He pointed out that though these countries adopted the bilingual policy a long time back, not all Canadians speak both French and English, nor do all Belgians speak French and Dutch, but he went ahead to suggest that Cameroon should be different:

La grande majorité des Canadiens et Belges sont restés monolingues. Un état bilingue ne suppose donc pas nécessairement des individus, des citoyens bilingues. Mais pour nous, au Cameroun, ce serait une méconnaissance des avantages qui s'offrent à nous et un manque regrettable d'idéal que de nous contenter d'avoir créé un Etat bilingue. L'objectif que nous devons viser doit être un bilinguisme individuel grâce auquel chaque enfant qui suit le cycle de notre système d'éducation sera capable de parler l'anglais et le français (1963).

*(A great majority of Canadians and Belgians are monolingual. A bilingual country does not necessarily mean that all individuals or citizens are bilingual. For us, Cameroonians, it will be a non-recognition of the advantages opened to us and the lack of ideal for us to contend ourselves for haven created a bilingual State. What we must target should be individual bilingualism where every child*

*who completes the educational system will be able to speak both English and French).*

This is the recommendation that has governed the bilingual policy in Cameroon since independence. Fonlon outlined the educational system from primary, secondary, and high school to tertiary. According to him English and French should be taught at various levels in such a way that after high school studies, the students should be able to follow courses in English and French at the university level. However, he was aware of the difficulties that young Cameroonians will face as they follow his prescriptions but he still insisted on individual bilingualism:

Normalement une université bilingue dans laquelle un étudiant peut suivre des cours dans chacune des langues à son gré. C'est en fait une double université comme c'est le cas de l'université de Louvain où le néerlandais et le français sont les deux langues d'enseignement (Fonlon, ibid).

*(A bilingual university where every student can follow up studies at ease. It is a double university as is the case in the University of Louvain where Dutch and French are the two languages used).*

In line with such a university, Fonlon argued that this was outside language planning but in the domain of policy implementations: *"J'imagine qu'une telle université est très coûteuse à établir. Le grand avantage du système bilingue que je préconise plus haut est qu'il rend ce type d'université inutile"*.

The bilingual policy Fonlon recommended focused on students from high school, leaving out the majority of Cameroonians who were not following the program. But the practice of bilingualism in the country is based on individual bilingualism where everyone is involved with the obvious consequences. The educational system has so far produced limited results. The reason for the limited results is that the official languages are competitive in various domains following the practice of individual bilingualism instead of state bilingualism. The situation points to the fact that language planning has so far been inappropriate. Other researchers in this domain have expressed similar views. For instance, Tchoungui in Koenig et



al. (1983) opines that the policy of bilingualism is based on two premises: the first error-possibly unintentional at first and attributed to the rush of the planners in the wake of reunification has since become a willful error: it was to assume that all Cameroonians speak English and French, either in the adult or children's generations, an assumption which has not been indicated by any data.

Tchoungui (ibid) in her write-up concludes that the policy of bilingualism as it was stated had a definite target: a bilingual Cameroonian individual and the moribund existence of such creations as the Cameroon Linguistic Centres in Yaounde and Buea is still proof of it. But it has not kept its promise and in fact, little progress seems to have been achieved since independence. The analysis carried out in this paper on data collected about children's generation born with independence and reunification leads us to the following conclusion; twenty years after the historic landmark, bilingualism in Cameroon – at least the type advocated by official proponents – is still more a wish than a reality. (114)

The present paper is evaluating official bilingualism almost sixty years after independence and at the time a crisis, as has never been witnessed in the history of Cameroon, the "Anglophone problem" sprung up, championed by Common-law lawyers and teachers of the former Southern Country. Tchoungui et al. carried out their study of the bilingualism situation in the country thirty-six years after independence. Since then many things have changed. The linguistic centers earlier mentioned have increased in number and are today in eight administrative regions of the country. The centers have produced more bilingual Cameroonians, though the percentage of effective bilingual individuals is still very insignificant as compared to the population of the country.

Jikong (1985) avers that Tadadjeu in Koenig et al. (1983) is equally of the opinion that individual bilingualism has not attained the expected goal despite the various steps so far taken. He writes that it has become apparent that truly bilingual education is implemented only at the university level. Even at this stage, the vast majority of students find themselves ill-prepared for their

secondary school education in a bilingual education system. Language planning studies must suggest some solutions to this problem. (118)

For almost sixty years, no solution had been found to the problem, until the creation of an instrument to provide possible solutions, that is, the Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, created by presidential decree of January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017.

At the level of the population, individual bilingualism has not also produced the expected results because many Cameroonians have not had the opportunity to learn both official languages. This means that most of them can communicate only in their OL1 even with those who do not understand the OL1. Such encounters have generated feuds on many occasions.

According to Wancha Titus, a professional translator, translators and interpreters who are supposed to be flag bearers of state bilingualism in Cameroon are sidelined in every aspect of their profession to the advantage of monolinguals who encourage social bitterness with utterances such as, "*Je ne comprends pas votre anglais là*". This occurs mostly in government offices in Yaounde, the capital city, where many Cameroonians are expected to travel to solve problems related to their administrative careers.

Wancha starts his point. He holds that one of the major reasons accounting for the assertion that state bilingualism is a mere slogan resides in the way in which high-level appointments are carried out in the civil service. It is not a secret that monolingual top civil servants – Presidents, Ministers, Secretary Generals, Directors, Governors, and Senior Divisional Officers – still litter our landscape in their majority.... In a bilingual country, one of the major criteria for appointment would have been bilingual competence. Other factors however account for this and that is why a completely English illiterate divisional officer can serve in Su-Bum without any qualms.

He adds that bilinguals who are generally well trained and are in category A2 of the civil service are discriminated against in appointments and that they

are underused even though their services are indispensable for smooth communication among all the citizens. A good example of this is seen in the administrative structure of government ministries. While other professions within the administration are structured from the position of executive officer to that of full director, translators can only get to the position of sub-director, given that the highest translation structure in the administrative ladder is a unit (i.e. the equivalent of a sub-department). Worse still, some of the positions of translators in the administration are occupied by language teachers who do not have adequate training to occupy the positions. This has sometimes led to the wrong translation of official documents.

A careful analysis of Fonlon's principle of individual bilingualism and early bilingualism reveals that it was based on the quest for national integration and economic considerations rather than on the principle of non-competitiveness between both official languages. According to Baker (1993), bilingual education considers several parameters. He holds that bilingual education, whatever form it takes, cannot be properly understood unless it is connected to basic philosophies and politics in society. Bilingual education does not just reflect curriculum decisions. Rather, bilingual education is surrounded and underpinned by basic beliefs about minority languages, minority cultures, in-migrants, equality of opportunity, the rights of individuals and the rights of language minority groups, assimilation and integration, desegregation and discrimination, pluralism, and multiculturalism. (247)

This approach to bilingualism can be more explicit if the philosophies of equal opportunity and the rights of individuals are analyzed. The reality underlying these philosophies is that in selecting the languages of education in a multilingual society like Cameroon, the selection should be guided by the fact that every member of the society has his inalienable right to the choice of his/her language. As Baker (ibid) puts it; just as there are individual rights in choice of religion, so it is argued, there should be an individual right to choice of language. Just as there are attempts to eradicate discrimination based on color and creed, so people

within this orientation argue that language prejudice and discrimination need to be eradicated in a democratic society. (249)

In this case, the individual's freedom in the choice of a language will depend on the possibilities provided by language planners and policymakers. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in Cameroon where the French language has had precedence over the English language. In many higher institutions of learning, the English language learner has no choice but to grapple with the French language to acquire knowledge. Because the policymakers were guided by the principle of national unity, they imposed both English and French as compulsory languages of instruction for every Cameroonian, irrespective of their background. In some institutions of learning, like the combined military academy, known by its French acronym as EMIA, French is the language of instruction for every learner. Echu (1999:196) puts it in the following terms:

.....certains Anglophones se sentent marginalisés. Le constat est pire au niveau de l'armée qui est ouvertement unilingue, l'anglais n'ayant presque pas de place au sein de cette institution. Ainsi, les jeunes recrues anglophones sont obligés de suivre leur stage entièrement en français dans les centres d'instructions.

*(Some Anglophones feel marginalized. It is worst at the level of the army which is overtly monolingual with the English language having no place. Thus, young Anglophone recruits are obliged to follow studies in the training centers in French).*

An English-speaking colonel had this to say, "I receive my documents in French and I reply to them in French. I have forgotten much of my English". This shows how much damage the neglect of the English language and the dominance of the French language have done to the English-speaking personnel in the Cameroon Armed Forces. The monolingual status of the Armed Forces is paradoxical and contradictory to the constitutional demands of bilingualism in Cameroon.

Research has proven that national unity and integration can be achieved without language uniformity. Thus, language diversity and national unity can co-exist as is the case in Switzerland, Luxemburg, and Singapore. Baker defends this point in the following words; within the 'language as a resource orientation, there tends to be the assumption that linguistic diversity does not cause separation or less integration in society. Rather, national unity and linguistic diversity can co-exist. Tolerance and cooperation between groups may be as possible with linguistic diversity as they would be unlikely when such linguistic diversity is repressed (253).

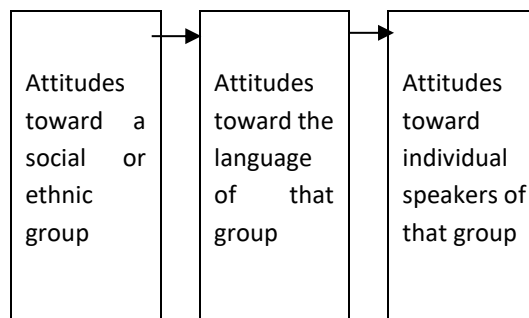
The orientation emphasizes the fact that the languages of education in a multilingual setting should be based on the idea that each member of the society has basic human rights including the right to choose a language to achieve a goal, rather than the aim to achieve unity and make every member of the society bilingual. The pertinence of the concept of language as an inalienable right is illustrated by a court case brought against the San Francisco School District in 1970 on behalf of Chinese pupils. It is stated in Baker that; "the case concerned whether or not non-English speaking students received equal educational opportunity when instructed in a language they could not understand. The failure to provide bilingual education was alleged to violate both the protection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964" (250).

Judgment was finally passed in 1974 by the Supreme Court in favor of Chinese pupils. Since then, language rights have been carefully respected in the United States through the 'broadening of the goals of bilingual education to include the possible maintenance of minority languages and culture'. For such a situation to be avoided in Cameroon, decision-makers should take the necessary steps to respect every child's right to a language of instruction even if it is very important for an individual to be bilingual or multilingual in modern advanced technological languages like English and French.

**Language Attitudes**

When a language (s) is imposed on a people, there are two possible ways of viewing the reaction of the people. On the one hand, there is the mentalist approach, which views the phenomenon as an internal, mental state which may give rise to certain forms of behaviors, and on the other hand, the observation of the responses to certain languages, that is the use in actual interactions (Appel and Muysken 1990). Hoffman (1992:26) defines attitudes as, "Self-identification or identification by others, i.e. whether a bilingual feels herself or himself totally at home or identifies with his or her languages, and whether the individual is accepted by others as belonging to both the one and the other linguistic community".

Attitudes are expressions of negative or positive feelings towards a language. They could also extend to language users and language communities. Figure 2 below illustrates the formation of language attitudes.



Robert Bunge (1992) in the following excerpt presents language as the psyche of a people:

Language is not just another thing we do as humans; it is the thing we do. It is a total environment; we live in the language as a fish lives in water. It is the audible and visible manifestation of the soul of a people. A people's language is a system of thought and expression peculiar to that people and is the outward expression of manifestation of people's view of the world. Language is the key through which the psyche (soul) may be understood. Through the structure of the language, phenomenological data are strained and even altered in accord with a manner the people can comprehend and make part of their worldview. (376)



Language is thus a conceptual tool. It is a way of seeing with the eyes of the heart and the mind, in what Scot Mamaday (1970) a Kiowa writer calls reciprocal appreciation. This means that the native language and the tribal lore and wisdom are embodied in that language. It is the very heart of identity.

From the above perspectives, it is not surprising that the concept of official language bilingualism as adopted in Cameroon has met with stiff resistance, given that the idea of embracing a second language on an equal footing as one's language may be seen as a threat to one's language and culture. Thus, for an individual to embrace a second or third language, he or she must be highly motivated to do so. Such motivation can either be integrative or instrumental.

#### **Language Attitudes in Cameroon**

As shown above, the implementation of the bilingual policy in Cameroon has given birth to communication problems at various levels, the most recent being the 'Anglophone problem'. Most critics think that this problem was born out of frustration and what the Anglophones consider the marginalization of their language and culture. Ronald Inglehart and Margaret Woodward (1982), in their article titled *Language Conflicts and Political Communities*, write that the likelihood that linguistic division will lead to political conflicts is particularly great when language cleavages are linked with the presence of a dominant group that blocks the social mobility of members of a subordinate group, at least partly based on language difference.

The poor handling of the official bilingual/bicultural situation in Cameroon has generated Anglophobia and Francophobia in the country. The situation goes as far back as 1961 when both *La République du Cameroun* and *Southern Cameroon* were reunified to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The 1961 reunification of the two Cameroons was agreed on some terms related to the running and the nature of the State. Ngoh (1988: 236 – 239) writes that during the Fouban Conference of 17 – 21 July 1961, it was held that there had to be an equitable partition of state affairs by the majority Francophone population and the

minority Anglophone population. After this date, an Anglophone was given the position of vice president of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Unfortunately, after the setting up of the unitary state in 1972 by a francophone President, the Anglophones lost the position of vice president. The country's name changed from the Federal Republic of Cameroon to the United Republic of Cameroon. In 1984 there was another constitutional change of the appellation from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon (*La République du Cameroun*). The new appellation became a bone of contention. Anglophones got the impression that their identity had been lost in the Union, given that the new appellation was the original appellation of the Francophone section of the country before reunification in 1961.

The change of name came as the straw that broke the camel's back. Some Anglophones developed the feeling that their language (English) and culture were endangered. This gave birth to pro-Anglophone movements like the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM) and the Southern Cameroon National Conference (SCNC), which set out in the late 80s and early 90s to redress what they thought was an injustice. According to Mbuh (1993:110), the poor handling of official bilingual policy in the country contributed to the students' upheavals in the 90s at the University of Yaounde. The federal university, which was preferred to regional universities because of foreign financial assistance, turned out to be French-orientated because of the unequal importance given to English and French as languages of instruction in the various departments.

Since the 70s, Bernard Fonlon had been worried about the fact that the federal university created in 1961 might become a French-orientated university if official language bilingualism was not harmonized. Not only did the university become a French-orientated university, but also other educational and vocational sectors in Cameroon. In 1993, the higher education reform saw the creation of regional universities. Today, of the eight state universities, two (the universities of Buea and Bamenda) are Anglo-Saxon, two (the universities of N'oundere and Dschang) are French-orientated,

and four (the universities of Yaounde 1, Yaounde II, Douala, and Maroua) are bilingual.

Several research endeavors carried out by researchers at different levels in the said bilingual universities have indicated that there is a problem with the language of instruction in the different institutions of learning. Bessem Victorine worked on the topic, "Official Bilingualism in the University of Yaounde 1" in 1996 and arrived at a similar conclusion. Ali Usmanu Rih-Reh equally worked on the topic, "*Official bilingualism in higher education: an investigation into the use of English and French as Languages of Instruction in the National School of Administration and Magistracy and the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences*". He administered a questionnaire to 10 lecturers and 40 students from the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM) and to a similar number of lecturers and students in the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (FMBS). The questionnaire was intended to obtain information about the informants' proficiency in their second official language (OL2), how they coped with the use of OL2 as a medium of instruction, and their opinion on the indiscriminate use of the two official languages for instruction. After analysis, the researcher came out with some findings.

Ali Usmanu stated that the results of his data analysis confirmed his hypothesis which was that the bilingual education practiced in ENAM and the FMBS was problematic because both students and lecturers were not proficient in their OL2 and so could not effectively communicate. This adversely affected the student's academic performance and equally rendered teaching, and especially studies, very strenuous.

The analysis also revealed that students and lecturers alike had problems with the bilingual system of education in both institutions. In ENAM, 80% of the students' respondents declared that their knowledge of the OL2 was just average or below average, while in the FMBS, 50% of the sample students echoed those of ENAM, indicating that they were not proficient enough in their OL2 to effectively follow courses in it. The students confessed that they faced difficulties in taking down

notes, translating from OL2 to OL1, comprehension of lectures, etc. This resulted in poor academic performance on their part. Thus, one can hardly talk of objective evaluation under such circumstances.

The results of the above research endeavor show that students in many higher institutions of learning in Cameroon do not enjoy the basic human rights of freedom of choice of language to acquire vital knowledge. Like in higher institutions of learning, the bilingual policy is equally a hindrance to English-speaking students in Cameroon in entrance examinations into these institutions. The difficulty for these students is at the level of the translation of examination questions, given that the questions are first of all set in French before they are translated into English. At times they are not even translated. Dora Yila Shely carried out research for a post-graduate diploma in 1989 on the topic, "*The translation of some public service examination questions in Cameroon*". She discovered several wrongly translated questions. Here are some of them.

1. a) French: Sur un mécanisme, on a relevé les indications suivantes sur les pièces.  
b) Translation: They have picked up from a mechanism the following indications on the pieces.  
c) Accepted version: *The following instructions were found on parts of an appliance.*
2. a) French: Qu'entend-t-on par outil de mesure simple et outil de mesure avec vernier? Pour chaque cas donnez un exemple.  
b) Translation: What do you call by simple measurement tool and by measurement with vernier? Give an example of each.  
c) Accepted version: *What is a simple measuring tool, and a vernier measuring instrument? Provide an example for each.*
3. a) French: les adjuvants: définition, modes d'action, condition d'emploi.  
b) Translation: adjuvants: definition, method of action, use conditions.

c) Accepted version: *Define a catalyst. How does it work? When is it used/employed?*

In the Herald Newspaper N°679 of Wednesday, October 28, 1998, on page 4 was an article by Emma Ngu, captioned, "ENS not for Anglophone science students". In the article, the author accuses "the domineering Francophone rulers" of doing everything imaginable to "keep Anglophones in their place" by barring them from admission into the Department of Science of the Yaounde Higher Teacher Training College. He was infuriated because no single Anglophone had been admitted into the Department in the entrance examination organized that year. He lashed out thus; "If this is not a deliberate ploy why was it that all the questions at the examination were in French? Yes, 'Cameroon is bilingual' they would sing. Have the questions ever come exclusively in English? And when the unfortunate Anglophone candidates dared to plead even for some verbal translation, they were told in no uncertain terms to keep quiet. A bilingual country? Any real Anglophone who still believes in that is living in a cloud cuckoo land. Bilingualism is a euphemism for Francophones and impoverishing Anglophones. A clear one-way traffic".

The author's anger was justified. It was earlier mentioned in this paper that the choice of language(s) of education in a multilingual society such as Cameroon, should be governed by some parameters, the most important being the individual's freedom to choose the language he/she knows best. This happens when policymakers provide possible opportunities to avoid the competitiveness of languages in various functional domains (Jikong, 1995).

From the author's analysis, it is clear that he had been following up on the bilingual process in higher education over the years, reasons why he can recount the fate of Anglophone students in the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Yaounde. This is how he makes his point:

What makes the situation even more vexing is the fact that the Francophone hegemony just plows on, ignoring this long-standing problem that faced generations of intelligent Anglophone students. Anglophone science students would have

strings of A-grades at the A/Level and not be able to grope through the "Faculté des Sciences"! Unequivocally illogical.

Such bitterness tends to reflect the state of mind and feelings of most of those who have encountered language or communication problems as a result of the national bilingual policy in Cameroon. The classroom is intended to help learners acquire knowledge to serve society. To serve society, there must be communication.

In many government offices in the capital city, Yaounde, many Anglophones especially the elderly ones who have never had the opportunity to learn French, face communication problems. An elderly Anglophone civil servant who had traveled from the South West Region to Yaounde for administrative purposes tried to obtain information from a Francophone state agent in an office. While he spoke in English, the agent responded in French. When he told the agent that he could not express himself in French, the agent told him, "*puisquetu ne parles pas français et moi je ne parle pas anglais, c'est match nul*". Though the elderly man did not understand what the agent said, he could deduce from the way the state agent said it, that the latter was not ready to assist him because of the language barrier.

Another Anglophone retired civil servant who traveled to Yaounde to see about his entitlements, said he had spent several months fumbling in the Ministries and ended up understanding three sentences in French.

- le patron n'est pas là.
- les machines ne marchent pas.
- Revenez demain.

Though it was all fun when he recounted his ordeal, his experience reflects what monolingual Anglophones encounter in government offices occupied by monolingual Francophones. In other areas of public life, language malaise is equally felt. In the English section of the country, most administrative officers are Francophones, some of whom neither speak nor understand the English language.

At the outbreak of what today is termed the 'Anglophone problem' in Cameroon, Cardinal Christian Tume, in The Times Journal Vol. 03 N°220 of Monday, January 30, 2017, page 08 called on the ruling government to listen to all shades of opinion on the ongoing crisis in the country. The then 86-year-old prelate on Radio France International, on Tuesday, 24 January 2017 had this to say:

I am trying to understand what is happening because I spent nearly thirty years of my life as a priest and bishop in French-speaking Cameroon and I am from Anglophone Cameroon. I try to understand both sides. It is now young people who have not yet become aware of reunification and have started to protest about working conditions, the conditions for living together, and they want us to go back to where we were at the beginning of reunification. That is federalism. The central power no longer wants this. So this is where we are and there is tension.

The Roman Catholic Cardinal told RFI, "*The appointment of Francophone judges who do not have a mastery of the English language and who render their judgment in French is an indication that Cameroon law is not applied in Cameroon*". He pointed out that in his native constituency of Bui, the senior divisional officer; the divisional officer, and the first deputy are all Francophones in a region where 99% of the population speaks only English. He continued by saying that there are Francophone university lecturers who teach in the Anglo-Saxon universities of Buea and Bamenda without any mastery of English. There is a need to reform the education system.

It was reported that in Tiko, a town in the South West Region of the country, a gendarme officer was sent to take statements from a suspect after an incident. The gendarme interrogated the man in English but took down the statement in French. After taking down the statement, the gendarme asked the suspect to sign, but the suspect refused because he could not read and understand French and therefore could not be sure that what was written was what he effectively said. The gendarme got angry and presented the statement in court without the suspect's signature.

The gendarme's reaction exposes the problem of language loyalty. His action implied that so long as something is written in French, it is authentic and cannot be contested. As a government agent in a bilingual context, the gendarme had the obligation to interrogate and take down the statement in the language the suspect understood. The journalist who reported the story concluded in the following words; "Francophone civil servants who work in the Anglophone territory must accept that to be properly understood and to work effectively, they ought to learn to speak and communicate in English, not in French. Should they insist on speaking French to an essentially English-speaking population, they must bear the corresponding risk of not being understood".

The continuous language feud which has characterized the Cameroonian society since reunification in 1961 got to its apogee in November 2016 when both Anglophone lawyers and teachers launched two strikes actions that led to the "Anglophone crisis". On 20<sup>th</sup> November 2016, lawyers of the Anglophone Common law legal system launched a strike that paralyzed all the courts in both Anglophone regions of the North West and South West for the following reasons.

- The non-translation of the OHADA laws;
- The non-existence of a Common law bench at the Supreme Court;
- The non-existence of an Anglophone section at ENAM;
- The transfer of Francophone magistrates who do not master the English language, to preside in Anglophone law courts.

A week after, on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2016, the Anglophone teachers' union launched another strike action. Among their grievances were:

- The non-respect of the Anglo-Saxon subsystem of education;
- The transfer of francophone teachers, who do not master the English language, to Anglophone schools to teach English subjects;

- The recruitment of francophone lecturers in Anglo-Saxon universities.
- The high number of Francophone teachers in Anglo-Saxon technical schools.

The reaction of these two professional bodies was a result of the hegemony of the French language over the English language. From 20<sup>th</sup> November 2016, there was a stalemate that brought to a standstill classes and other activities in the two Anglophone regions of the country. The situation gave birth to a 'consortium' of the Anglophone civil society, which to some extent became the voice of the people. The consortium ordered Anglophone lawyers to boycott all chambers and court sessions, called for disobedience by the public of the NW and SW regions, organized 'ghost towns' in the NW and SW regions, and ordered the interruption of classes in the regions.

For over three months, the government 'lost' control of the Anglophone regions. In response to the prevailing situation, the government took some measures.

- The militarization of the regions;
- The suspension of the Internet in both Anglophone Regions;
- The imprisonment of the consortium leaders and other Anglophones.

The consequences of the government's decision were immediately felt in the two regions. Businesses were affected which saw a drastic drop in revenue, parents refused to allow their children back to school because of the presence of the military, registration for and the organization of the 2017 G.C.E Ordinary and Advance Levels were compromised. Faced with the embarrassment, the government decided to take measures to put an end to the stalemate.

#### **Palliative measures to resolve the problem**

To solve the crisis and restore its authority, the government took some palliative measures. The government announced the recruitment of 1000 bilingual science teachers for Anglophone technical schools and the disbursement of two billion CFA francs for lay primary schools for the 2017 academic

year. An Ad Hoc committee, headed by the Director of Cabinet at the Prime Minister's office, was put in place to address issues related to education. The committee multiplied encounters with the teachers' unions to look for ways and means to come out of the crisis. The Minister of Higher Education signed decree N°17/00090/MINESUP on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2017 creating a Department of French Modern Letters in the Higher Teacher Training College of the University of Bamenda.

Concerning the demands of the Anglophone lawyers, an English version of both the OHADA law and the Penal Code were produced after an encounter between the Minister of Justice and keeper of the Seals and the Anglophone Lawyers' Association. The Post Weekender Newspaper N°01795 of Friday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2017, page 7, stated that on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2017, there was an official ceremony during which the Minister of Justice handed the English version of the OHADA Treaties and the Penal Code to bailiffs and notaries. Still in line with this, a French newspaper, REPERE N°514 of 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017 quoted the Minister of Justice as saying:

Depuis le 24 novembre dernier, le Secrétaire permanent de l'Ohada a remis au Cameroun la version officielle en langue anglaise d'un certain nombre d'Actes Uniformes Ohada. Donc, puisque votre profession sur le plan international vous permet d'intervenir en anglais, je vous remets à titre symbolique cette version anglaise des Actes Uniformes Ohada, pour que vous soyez également le mieux outillés possible face à votre clientèle étranger.

*(Since November 24, the OHADA permanent secretary handed an official English version of the OHADA Acts to the Cameroon government. Given that on the international scene, your profession warrants you to intervene in the English language, I am hereby symbolically handing to you this English version of the OHADA Uniform Acts which will help you to be better equipped vis-à-vis your foreign client(s).*

To resolve problems related to the use of the official languages, the President of the Republic, on Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2017, signed Decree



N°2017/013 of 23 January 2017 to lay down the Establishment, Organization, and Functioning of the National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multilingualism (NCPBM).

Its Article 1(2) stipulates that the Commission will be under the authority of the President of the Republic. Article 3(1) states that the Commission shall be responsible for promoting bilingualism and multiculturalism in Cameroon to maintain peace and consolidate the country's national unity and strengthen its people's willingness and day-to-day experience concerning living together. Article 3(2) stipulates that the Commission shall:

- a) Make recommendations on issues relating to the protection and promotion of bilingualism and multiculturalism to the President of the Republic and the Government;
- b) Monitor the implementation of constitutional provisions establishing English and French as two languages of equal status and especially ensuring their use in all government services, semi-public bodies as well as any State subsidized body;
- c) Conduct any study or survey and propose measures likely to strengthen Cameroon's bilingual and multicultural character;
- d) Prepare and submit to the President of the Republic draft instructions on bilingualism, multiculturalism, and togetherness;
- e) Popularize the regulation of bilingualism, multiculturalism, and togetherness;
- f) Receive petitions against discrimination arising from non-compliance with the constitutional provisions on bilingualism and multiculturalism, and report thereon to the President of the Republic.

Given that Cameroon's bilingualism as well as its diverse cultures are under threat from political manoeuvres and are demanding protection from increasing injustice, the NCPBM will be charged with ensuring that the cankerworm does not go deep into the veins of Cameroonians. It will make sure English and French remain official languages of equal status and as such should be used interchangeably in public places without any stigmatization. It should whip up the interest of every Cameroonian in speaking both

official languages while at the same time making sure all official documents are written in both English and French.

NCPBM will not only strengthen existing bilingualism but will as well uphold the rich and diverse culture of the country. With this, a sense and feeling of superiority or inferiority that greatly frustrated the essence of living together will be a thing of the past and Cameroonians from all backgrounds will be expected to feel important, have a sense of belonging, and hopefully jointly contribute to the social, political, cultural and economic development of the country. With NCPBM, the hitherto practice of important information in both public and private places and road signs solely in one language (depending on where one is), people pushing off others from public services because they are of one language or the other could change for the good of all.

Bilingualism is a constitutional prescription and consequently the responsibility of every Cameroonian. It is not only the affair of government officials or people holding government positions of responsibility. Bilingualism is not an issue for Anglophones, neither is it only for Francophone Cameroonians. In the same manner, the cultural identity of a people should not be looked at from a negative perspective. People must not link certain behavioral patterns, such as wickedness, gluttony, dirt, primitiveness, etc. to certain cultural groups. The creation of the NCPBM is a serious challenge for all Cameroonians to enhance their love for bilingualism and promote national culture.

In an interview granted the *Guardian Post Newspaper* N°1106 of Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2017, page 5, the UN Special Representative to Central Africa lauded efforts put in place by the government to handle the grievances of teachers and lawyers in the North West and South West regions of the country. He equally commended the creation of NCPBM which he sees as a permanent body to tackle related problems. He encouraged Cameroonians to be bilingual, saying that bilingualism is wealth that has to be exploited for the stability and integrity of the country.

One cannot say that the creation of NCPBM will be a magic solution to all existing problems. The government's reluctance and slowness in taking certain major decisions have created doubts in Cameroonians, especially Anglophones, who think that these measures are simply to calm down the prevailing situation and that nothing concrete will be done. Interviews with some public actors equally show that there are skeptics who do not think that this is a solution to the problem.

The *Times Journal* Vol. 03 N°220 of Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017, page 9, reports that the first vice president of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), Joshua Osih blasted the creation of the Commission and advocated extensive decentralization as a possible solution. Osih thinks that the acceleration of decentralization in conformity with existing legislation would have been a much more effective measure to take within the framework of the Anglophone crisis than the option preferred by the President which consists in the creation of NCPBM. He believes that the crisis is far from being a language problem and that the federalism demanded by Anglophones principally touches on the fundamental issues of governance and management.

As reported by the same Journal on page 10, Cameroonian historian and political analyst, Achille Mbembe thinks that in creating the Commission, the President is simply going through the motions, especially as the current crisis is not merely about language expression. Mbembe highlights the necessity of a complete overhaul of the current way of functioning. He points out that the "only way by which this would be forestalled is through federalism of one sort or the other". Although he recognizes the cultural identity of Anglophones, he thinks that the federalization of powers in the country should not apply to merely the Anglophone section of the country, but it should touch on the entire country which, to him, has been in the doldrums since reunification.

### **Conclusion**

It is understood that there are no ready-made solutions to linguistic problems, but basic research in all forms is necessary for approaching the

complexity of national linguistic situations. Possible solutions can be found to problems (linguistics) within the framework of language planning studies. Planning as a tool for the attainment of political, economic, social, and cultural goals are essential characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup>-century societies.

On an academic level, specialists in language planning work out ideas and modes, which are theoretical patterns for generalized or illustrative situations (Fishman 1974), but on a practical level, these same specialists may face constraints when it comes to administrative decisions which spell out practical requirements unknown to those working in a purely academic environment.

In effect, language planning studies are based on real problems, but the decision-making processes will adapt and modify the planning from the political standpoint to balance theory against actual practice. Despite these constraints, language planning has been successful in resolving linguistic problems around the world and it can also be useful in the Cameroon context.

Although there seem to be numerous linguistic problems in Cameroon, two of these are most important to me and so have to be tackled by decision-makers:

- Developing an official multilingual national communication system, and
- Determining a satisfactory technical and educational process for implementing the official bilingual policy.

Relating to the above-mentioned problems is an underlying one, that of strengthening national unity within the boundaries of the country. Language planning, no matter how theoretical, must always be justified by its capacity to reinforce national unity and integration.

It is hoped that this article would spur decision-makers to clearly define and reform the language policy in the country by indicating how language should be used and in what cases. Wishful intention, as shown by the government on several occasions, should be transcended by a concrete policy. In this light, Tenjo-Okwen (1987) thinks that

firms from English-speaking countries should be allowed to establish in Cameroon. He holds that if this is done, and since people would have to solicit jobs from such firms, they would be obliged to learn English to occupy some of the lucrative positions offered by these firms. Unless there are enough material incentives at stake, Francophone Cameroonians will hardly realize any need for learning their second official language which in this case is the English language.

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