



THE QUESTION OF INTELLIGIBILITY IN MULTIPLE VARIETIES

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Abstract:

Cameroon is a setting for wide varieties of English such as British English (BrE), General American English (Gen Am), Nigerian English (NigE), and Cameroon English. (CamE). The last is itself a language that forms a continuum of varieties. These include Cameroon Pidgin English (CamPE), Francophone Cameroon English (CamFE), basilectal, mesolectal, and acrolectal variants of CamE. In this situation of “survival of the fittest”, it becomes really challenging for varieties like CamE as the government continues promoting the Inner Circle varieties coexisting with it. In this context of multiple varieties of English, it is important to find out the one which is perceived as the most intelligible to Cameroonian speakers. Two methods were used in this investigation. They subsumed questionnaire and tape recording, not to mention the participant observation method. The first is the use of the matched-guise technique. The technique in question is made up of two tape-recorded voices played with different guises. The purpose of the technique is to make the respondents believe that the voices come from two distinct individuals. (see Gaies and Beebe, 1991, p. 157). The first voice the respondents listened to, in this study, is called Reading 1 or R1 for short. The second voice is also termed Reading 2, and the short form is R2. After having listened to the two reading forms, the respondents filled out the questionnaire right away. The tape-recording technique was employed using the text read to the informants. In fact, they were called upon to read the text that was read to them in the course of questionnaire data collection. The reading activity revealed a great deal about their pronunciation features. The first major finding is that although the overwhelming majority of the respondents admitted producing the basilectal features of CamE in questionnaire forms, only a few of the L1-induced variants were found in the data. In a setting with multiple varieties of English like Cameroon, the reading activity could significantly reflect the multiplicity of English varieties from the data collected. Unexpectedly, only CamE, educationally acquired, and very few of its basilectal variants were gleaned from the data. It is also revealed that the pronunciation features learnt through formal teaching are very intelligible to the respondents, in

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particular, and to Cameroonians, in general. In conclusion, it is evident that these results lay bare fundamental implications. First, Cameroonians use L1-influenced forms of CamE in informal situations. In formal contexts, however, they can skilfully shift to educationally acquired features of CamE pronunciation. This is proof of their mastery of the locally developed variety, as they can utilise either variant in its context of use. Second, the only features of pronunciation Cameroonians can produce are the locally developed ones. It is obviously counter-productive to long for exonormative varieties which are far-fetched and miles apart. Finally, educationally learnt features of Cameroon English pronunciation are found to be the only very intelligible variants. This is a call for language planners and other educational stakeholders in English language teaching in Cameroon to take ownership of the issue.

Keywords: intelligibility, New Englishes, World Englishes, basilectal features, educated forms

1. Introduction

Attitudes of traditionalism which plead for a monolithic form of the English language ignore the dynamic nature of language. More importantly, they ignore other context-specific standards. These are views held by linguists such as Prator (1968) and Quirk (1990) whose opinions oppose the idea of recognising New Englishes and standardising them. They argue that there should be only one international standard for purposes of international intelligibility. This claim has been challenged by World Englishes scholars such as Kachru (1991), Jenkins (2000), Kirkpatrick (2007), and Modiano (2001) as on grounds that the real aim of these purists is “*to control, own and teach English according to native-speaker norms*” because the plurality of standard has never been a problem given the fact that different standards abound in the Inner Circle alone. According to World Englishes scholars, native-speaker pronunciation as the only model is therefore unacceptable for many reasons. First, non-native speakers have outnumbered the native ones, and as a matter of fact, most of the worldwide English communication occurs among speakers of the Outer Circle. In this view, features of pronunciation that ensure intelligibility among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds should be prioritised. Second, the discovery of the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) (see Jennifer Jenkins, 2000 and 2003) is likely to pave the way for the standardisation of New Englishes because the LFC’s primary goal is intelligibility among users of these Englishes. The features of pronunciation that are seemingly intelligible are those achieved through educational attainment. Third, the scholars advocate a complete shift from native-like accuracy to intelligibility. They oppose the idea of sounding like native speakers and think that successful and mutual intelligibility should be the central goal rather than sounding Britton or American. In this case, features of New Englishes achieved educationally should be the primary objective.

In addition, some Englishes of the Outer Circle such as Singaporean English, Indian English, and Nigerian English have already established their standards. With the

traditional framework of standardisation this could not happen. Following a new paradigmatic axis of standardisation, relating Standard English to a region and its population is not problematic because it is incumbent upon each speech community to determine the standard of their choice. This brings us to the research questions that follow:

- 1) Which variety fulfils the right to be included from the spectrum of standard Cameroon English pronunciation because they are very intelligibility to Cameroonians?
- 2) Which one(s) are not very intelligible and de facto forfeit(s) that right and why?
- 3) Should exonormative varieties be promoted in Cameroon? Why? If not, why not?

The issue of intelligibility has been a major cause for concern to many linguists (Anderson-Hsieh, 1992; Berns, 2005; Gallego, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Saunders, 2005; Nelson, 1995; Walker, 2001; van Wijngaarden, 2002b; Jenkins, 2000; Atechi, 2006). Some studies investigated intelligibility in relation to comprehensibility, interpretability and accentedness. These three concepts have been subject to a heated debate among linguists on the issue of intelligibility. Before returning to the debate itself, let us look at the meanings of these three terms.

3. The Meaning of the Terms

Successful communication between a speaker and a listener is known as mutual understanding. In this view, one can assert that success in communication is a matter of understanding and being understood at the same time (for more information see Berns, 2008; Jenkins, 2000; Munro & Derwing, 2011; Nelson, 2008; Pickering, 2006; Smith & Nelson, 1985). Such ability of mutual understanding is termed intelligibility. It is mutual in the sense that it is co-produced, or better still, it is “*co-constructed*” (Duranti, 1986; Gumperz, 1992). Because intelligibility-related studies are marked by confusion, Smith and Nelson (1985) think that, for clarification, it should be broken down into intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability, which they define as follows:

- Intelligibility: word/utterance recognition;
- Comprehensibility: word/utterance meaning (locutionary force);
- Interpretability: meaning behind word/utterance (illocutionary force) (Smith & Nelson, 1985, p. 334).

The above definition is accepted by Jenkins (2000).

From the above definitions, it can be understood that for intelligibility to occur, the lexical items pronounced should be identified as such before they are ascribed to what they refer to. This means that if the sound or utterance is not recognised, intelligibility breakthrough does not take place. Comprehensibility, then, involves linking the sound uttered to the meaning it represents. This is what is referred to as locutionary force, as it is the referential value or meaning of the code. Interpretability, on the other hand, refers to the speaker’s implication. In other words, it is the speaker’s intention while producing the utterance. This is known as an illocutionary force.

Besides the above three defined components, other variables still account for intelligibility. These include social and linguistic factors such as accent and identity (see

Kirkpatrick, 2007; Jenkins, 2003; and Levis, 2005). In this view, when intelligibility is said to be primary, the speaker will depart from strong loaded accent to be intelligible. On the contrary, if identity is primary, communication breakdown is likely to occur due to accentedness. This term is defined by Lochland (2011) as the degree of contrast between phonological expectation patterns of a listener and the perceived speech sounds. This is known as the degree of external accent. Accent and identity are, therefore, among other factors that hugely affect intelligibility

3. Current Linguistic Debates

With the unprecedented spread and growth of the Shakespearean language, English has become Englishes, with an estimate of one billion L2 speakers (Crystal, 2000) who use wide varieties for communicative purposes. These varieties are said to be learnt forms of English, and as such they are prepared to be intelligible to everybody, including native speakers. Unfortunately, many of them are reluctant to make an effort for an intelligibility breakthrough with speakers of New Englishes. This is because these minority speakers claim to have the custody and prerogative of the language (Quirk, 1990). On the other hand, Kachru's response legitimises and recognises these varieties in their own right because of the new paradigm where non-native speakers in the world outnumber native speakers by an overwhelming majority.

Intelligibility is not the sole responsibility of either the speaker or the listener. It is rather a matter of both because it is 'co-constructed' (Duranti, 1986; Gumperz, 1992; and Atechi, 2006). The two parties are involved for successful communication to take place. It is in this view that Smith and Nelson (1985:333) state that 'intelligibility is not speaker or listener-centred but is interactional between speaker and hearer'. In this way, if the speaker is not understood, then there is communication failure. That is why they insist that being intelligible automatically involves being understood by a person at a given time in a given situation. Following this reasoning, it is incumbent on both the speaker and listener to join their mutual effort for effective communication to take place, be they natives, non-natives or both. This is also true for Atechi (2006), who argues that an interaction between the two interlocutors, especially a communication involving native and non-native speakers, should be cooperative appropriately and effectively to achieve intelligibility successfully. Mutual intelligibility is a meaningful and successful communication process that takes place between two individuals who co-operate actively. It is, in reality, far from being a mono directional endeavour as it involves two parties. It is rather a bi-directional phenomenon built reciprocally.

Some research works are concerned with intelligibility in the Outer Circle. Jenkins (see, for example, her publications in 2000, 2003 and 2006) is the pioneer in this field of investigation, which has become her area of interest. Her definition, in Jenkins (2000:78), refers to a formal context of situation whereby users of English from different L1 backgrounds interact with one another with "*the production and recognition of the formal properties of words and utterances and, in particular, the ability to produce and receive phonological forms*". Here, learning English is not to speak with native speakers because

most of the learners in these settings never meet speakers from the Inner Circle (Nelson, 1995, p. 276; Kachru, 1991, p. 5). The purpose of learning English, in the Outer Circle, is therefore to ensure intelligibility among speakers of English from different L1 backgrounds. The objective is far from interacting with native speakers. Most of them, actually, will never travel abroad, nor will they meet them in their surrounding environments or anywhere else.

Due to the confusing and problematic nature of intelligibility studies, intelligibility is generally investigated in relation to two other concepts. These are comprehensibility and accentedness. While the former is perceived as the ability of the listener to recognise what is uttered or written, the latter is perceived as a foreign accent in the speech community. Comprehensibility is, thus, understood as the skill of decoding what is pronounced or written (Munro and Derwing: 1995a, b; Derwing & Munro, 1997). According to Smith and Nelson (1985), intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability are hierarchically placed on a continuum, with intelligibility being at the bottom and interpretability at the top. This is how these linguists grade these three levels of communication. Jenkins' (2000) classification, on the contrary, categorises intelligibility as the highest, followed by comprehensibility, with interpretability being the lowest. In effect, the interlocutor needs to read and analyse an uttered or written statement, for example, before understanding (comprehension) and interpreting it (interpretation). In this view, intelligibility is, therefore, the highest, followed by comprehensibility and interpretability.

4. Methodology

Not to mention the method of participant observation, two types of data were collected for this essay. The first is questionnaire data, where the instrument or technique used was a questionnaire. The second was spoken data consisting of the respondents' actual speech productions. Both are taken up in turns.

4.1 Questionnaire Derived Data

This investigation uses the method of the matched-guise technique. The technique in question is made up of two tape-recorded voices played with different guises. The purpose of the technique is to make the respondents believe that the voices come from two distinct individuals. (see Gaies and Beebe, 1991, p. 157). The first voice the respondents listen to, in this study, is called Reading 1 or R1 for short. The second voice is also termed Reading 2, and the short form is R2.

4.2 Spoken Data

The text read to the informants through the method known as the matched-guise technique was the same as the text they were called upon to read. The reading activity laid bare their pronunciation features, which are displayed in 6.2 below.

5. Data Presentation

The data are of two types. These are questionnaire-derived data and spoken data.

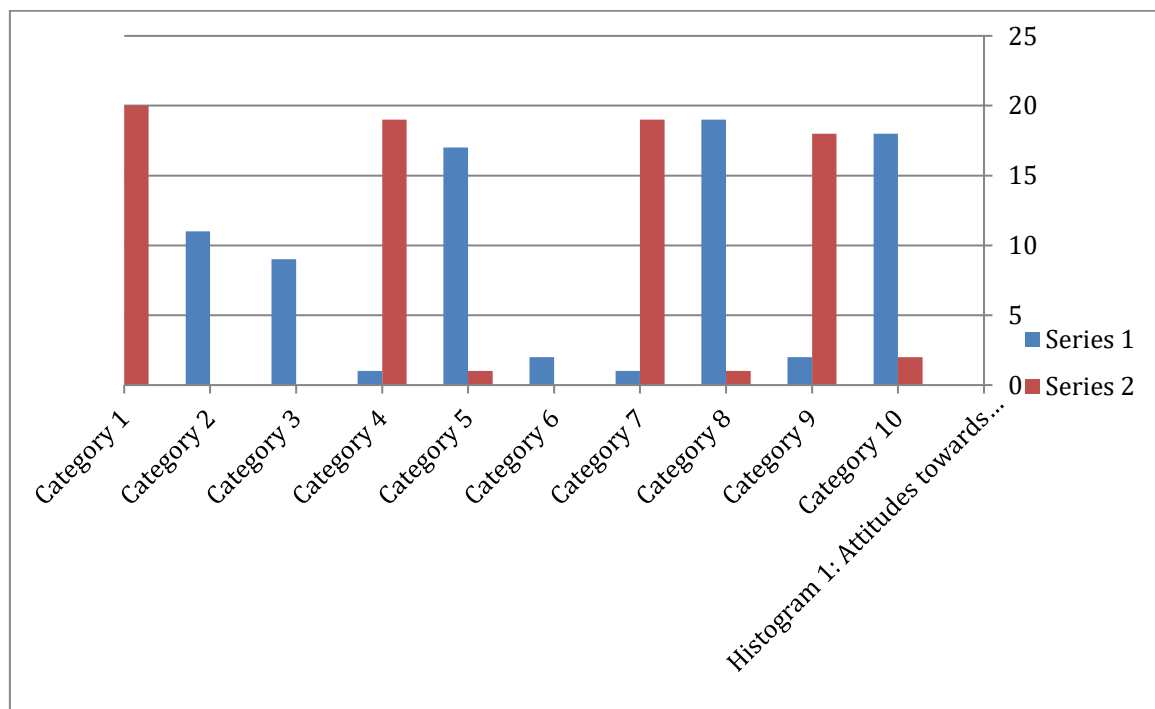
5.1 The Questionnaire-Derived Data from Buea

The data gleaned in this region came from informants whose level of educational attainment is low and those with a good educational background.

5.1.1 Level of Education Less than GCE A Level

The answers to the questions in Table 12 (see the appendix) were used to collect the data for the section.

Histogram 1 below is entitled: Attitudes towards CamE from Buea with Level of Education less than A Level. This histogram can be considered as a sum of the results from the questionnaire filled in by the respondents whose level of education is less than GCE A Level. The histogram deserves to be examined closely, and thanks to the close examination of it, some analyses are drawn.



Histogram 1: Attitudes toward CamE in Buea

The focus of the article is to investigate intelligibility in multiple varieties of English. In this view, 7 bars of the above histogram, from 4 to 10, are considered seriously. Questions d, e and f (see the appendix) are more appropriate than the others in this field. The total number of informants is 20, as can be seen from the histogram.

Starting from 4, the bars show the readings with *very intelligible forms* of pronunciation. The red bar represents R2, and it is as high as 19. The blue bar, however, represents R1, and it is only 1. This finding shows that almost all of the respondents 19

(95%) see in educated CamE pronunciation features a high level of intelligibility. This is a way of categorising Cameroon English sounds into its linguistic continuum, notably those which are intelligible on the one hand, and those which are not on the other. In this light, educated features of Cameroon English pronunciation are recognised as being very intelligible. At this level, it becomes evident that these forms are those that fulfil the right to be included in the spectrum of standard Cameroon English pronunciation. The high level of intelligibility is suggestive of a revelation of respondents choosing the postcolonial variety, for it is intelligible, locally grounded, and more importantly it meets the communication needs of its speakers.

Turning to question e, *Not very intelligible features* are in bar 5 and are represented in blue bar 17 (85%) for R1 and red bar 1 (5%) for R2. This result is a manifest proof that uneducated CamE forms of pronunciation induce intelligibility problems among its speakers. The numerical strength (85%) is indicative of a strong agreement to discredit the L1-induced Cameroon English pronunciation features: they are not very intelligible to Cameroonians. In other words, they cannot be given any priorities.

In category 6, the bars are expected to show the forms that are *not intelligible at all*. The red bar shows 00 which indicates the respondents admit, by this fact, the features in R2 are intelligible. On the contrary, the blue bar 2 (10%) demonstrates that 2 respondents think the forms in R1 are *not intelligible at all*. The implication is that while educated forms remain very intelligible, the uneducated ones are not very intelligible. Yet, they cannot be described as not intelligible at all. This is an indication that they are likely to cause intelligibility gaps among CamE speakers. Consequently, they can be sources of pedagogic concerns.

Category 7 is concerned with the forms of CamE to be encouraged. In effect, the category shows the features that *should be encouraged* because they are intelligible, prestigious and emblematic of Cameroonian culture and identity. In this view, the red bar 19 (95%) represents the forms in R2, while the blue bar 1(5%) represents those in R1. Again, the numerical weight (95%) is highly illustrative of a strong agreement in favour of Cameroon English pronunciation features acquired pedagogically.

Category 8, on its part, displays the forms that should be discouraged. Being devoid of intelligibility, they are stigmatised, under-privileged, and cannot serve as emblems of Cameroonian culture and identity. Here, too, the score, 19 (95%), is a numerical strength that indicates a strong unanimity against L1-induced Cameroon English pronunciation forms. This means that the forms of pronunciation in R2 should be encouraged, and the score for this is 19 (95%). By the same token, the forms in R1 should be discouraged, and the score for it is also 19 (95%), as displays the category 8 of the above histogram. This is a clear indication that the respondents prefer Cameroon English to any other varieties and, particularly, long for its pronunciation features achieved through formal education.

Category 9 addresses the issue of standardisation. It exhibits Cameroon English pronunciation forms to be standardised. The red bar in this category, with the score of 18 (90%), reveals the features in R2 *should be standardised*, meanwhile, the blue bar is descriptive of those in R1, with the score of 2 (10%) suggesting that it is rather the

basilectal features that *should be standardised*. The questions that beg answers are: Why do they say it? Are they serious? Are they the most prolific producers of the basilectal forms of CamE? This last is obviously a rhetorical question that does not require any answers. This is so because these basilectal features appear to be unavoidable companions for some people. Coming back to the numerical weight (90%), is indicative of a strong agreement for the standardisation of Cameroon English pronunciation acquired educationally.

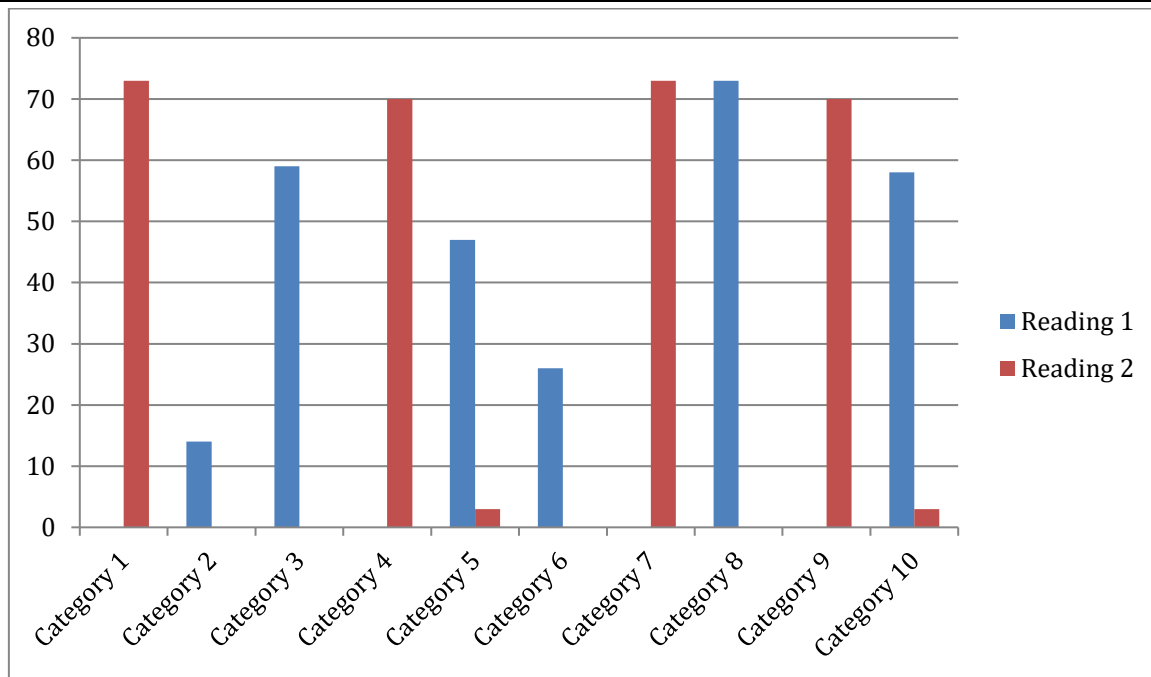
The red bar in 10 shows the features in R2 that *should not be standardised*, the blue one displays those in R1 *not to be standardised*, with the score of 2 (10%) and 18 (90%), respectively. Observing the histogram keenly, it appears that the 18 respondents in support of the educated CamE forms in R2 in category 9 are the ones discrediting the basilectal features in R1 of category 10. Likewise, the 2 (10%) respondents, backing up the forms in R1 in category 9, are those who reject the forms in R2 in category 10. From what precedes throughout the analyses, the continuum of the postcolonial variety of English, comprising features learnt pedagogically and those influenced by speakers' L1 background, alone has been discussed. This is suggestive of the fact that Cameroonians have understood a fundamental thing. They have become realistic in the sense that they refuse to sound foreign as Mbangwana noticed decades ago Cameroonians would ridicule those who chose imitating Britton (Mbangwana, 1987). This prophetic vision aptly holds in the investigation. The fact of being realistic is likely to foster the teaching and learning of CamE because such a pedagogic concern is productive and can assuredly bear the expected fruit which is effective communication among Cameroonians.

The fifth point of the questionnaire is a stand-alone, referential question which queried the respondents to answer whether they also produced the pronunciation features in R1. About 6% of the respondents admitted *always* using the less prestigious forms; 44% admitted *sometimes* producing them; 6% again confessed *rarely* uttering the features; while 44% again denied using or *never* used these pronunciation variants. What is to note here is that more than 50%, that is, up to 56% of the respondents, admit using the basilectal forms of CamE. On the contrary, only 44% of them claimed to have never produced the uneducated features of Cameroon English pronunciation. What the 44% said is even a claim; the reality may be something else. This is the situation that should be addressed pedagogically in formal education.

5.1.2 GCE A level and A level and above

The questions in Table 2 (confer the appendix) are used to glean pieces of information concerned with this section.

The respondents who participated in the data collection using the questionnaire instrument were 73. The information collected is displayed in Histogram 2 below. The histogram, thus, deserves a close examination.



Histogram 2: Attitudes towards CamE from Buea $\geq$ A level

Like in the above section, this is also preoccupied with the issue of intelligibility. That is why the concern of the paper is centred on 7 questions from d to j (confer the appendix below) that correspond to 7 categories from 4 to 10, as can be seen from Histogram 2 above. Categories 4, 5 and 6 tackle intelligibility problems directly.

The first is about the features that are very intelligible. These are found in R2 according to Histogram 2 above. 70 (95.89%) respondents find that these forms are very intelligible. This unanimity is a resounding success for CamE to be locally grounded as a cornerstone for nation-building. The 95.89% intelligibility of CamE to its users is a resounding victory as well because it competes fiercely with foreign lects such as British English and American English. This is an indication that the promoters of foreign varieties of English have not hit the target. They have rather missed it. It is also illustrative of a strong agreement in favour of Cameroon English pronunciation features achieved through formal learning. Observing keenly, the same category indicates 00 (00%) for R1 suggesting that L1-induced pronunciation features fail to collocate with the adjectival phrase *very intelligible*.

The second point corresponds to category 5 which was designed to determine which reading the forms are not very intelligible. These are in R1, as reveals the histogram with the score of 47 (64.38%) and in R2 with 1 (1.37%). Here, not the totality of the respondents agree. But the finding remains significant because up to 64.38% find Cameroon basilectal pronunciation features of English not very intelligible. The finding does not mean 35.62% of the respondents recognise the intelligibility of the pronunciation forms. What it suggests, however, is something deeper than this. This is a crucial problem since absolute majority of the respondents consider the features problematic with regard to their intelligibility.

The third shows *the* forms that are not intelligible at all. These are found in R1 only, and this opinion is held by 26 (35.62%) respondents. What is dramatic is that more than 35% of the respondents found the mother-tongue induced forms of CamE not intelligible at all. If they are not intelligible at all, they are therefore not good candidates for possible standardisation, given that many Cameroonians will not understand when they are uttered. Compared to those with little or no formal education, where only a marginal number of respondents 2 (2.74%) found the uneducated features of CamE not intelligible at all, for educated speakers, more than 35% hold this opinion. This is suggestive of pedagogic concerns that need to be addressed accordingly. Looking at 64.38% not very intelligible coupled with 35.61% not intelligible at all, both, yield 100%. The basilectal features are, therefore, simply not intelligible.

Scrutinising Histogram 2 above, Bar 7 is likely to draw our attention as it was set out to find out the pronunciation features that should be encouraged. It is as high as 73, representing the totality of the respondents. The bar shows the features that should be encouraged which are the ones in R2. This is so because, owing to their intelligibility, they are considered prestigious and are emblems of Cameroonian culture and identity. From the histogram, therefore, these features in R2 are selected for what they are: highly intelligible, very prestigious and really emblematic of Cameroonian culture and identity. In R1, the histogram shows 00. This unanimity is a strong agreement for the rejection and condemnation of the CamE deviant pronunciation features. It can be inferred that the respondents do not want them to be encouraged because of their intelligibility problems, and as such they are not prestigious and cannot serve as the emblems of Cameroonian culture and identity. Educated features of CamE are considered as a vehicle of Cameroonian culture and identity, and for this reason the speakers, in general, and the respondents, in particular, are eager and willing to support and encourage them. More importantly, the respondents find the forms of pronunciation worthy of esteem and prestige, which are often associated with standard features of a language or a language variety.

The last but one category displays *the forms that should be standardised*. Expectedly, the bar indicates that these are also found in R2 with the score of 70 (95.89%). This numerical strength is illustrative of a really strong agreement for the standardisation of Cameroon English pronunciation features acquired educationally. In R1, the bar of the histogram shows 00. This is indicative of a strong agreement for the rejection of the pronunciation features in R1. According to the respondents, the forms in R1 should not be standardised because they are unintelligible and are the features that the respondents would not like to be identified with because they are not associated with any esteem like formal educational exposure. The underlying meaning is that Cameroonian speakers of English know the variety they use and love it. This is the mainstream variety of English whose pronunciation features are achieved through educational attainment. And those who seemingly reject CamE actually do not reject it entirely. They instead scorn the unintelligible mother-tongue-induced forms of it. They actually love, adore and admire the forms of CamE achieved through educational endeavour, which they consider with esteem and prestige. These are the features of CamE they would like to encourage,

promote and standardise because not only are the forms very intelligible, they can also serve as the emblems of the Cameroonian culture and identity.

Categories 8 is concerned with pronunciation features to be discouraged. The category reveals that the forms of CamE to be discouraged are in R1. In fact, the totality of the respondents argue that the forms in R1 should be discouraged because they are stigmatised and cannot serve as the emblems of the Cameroonian culture and identity. This is certainly because they can cause intelligibility failure among CamE speakers.

In the last category, 58 of them concede that the features in R1 should not be standardised. Regarding those in R2, only 3 (4.1%) of the respondents are of the opinion that they should not be standardised. This result is not enough to disqualify the forms in R2. It is rather suggestive of the fact that this is exception that confirms the rule. The rule in this context is positive attitudes toward the standardisation of the forms in R2.

The fifth item of the questionnaire is a stand-alone, referential question that was to determine if the respondents also produced the pronunciation features in R1. The boxes ticked were always, sometimes, rarely and never. And the percentages obtained were 6%, 23%, 28% and 43%, respectively. What is curious about these results is that the percentage meant for always, 6%, is time and again less than that of sometimes, 23%. In fact, a gradation can be seen from always to never, ranging from the least to the greatest number. The sum of 6%, 23% and 28% is equalled to 57%, and this is the percentage of the respondents who confessed producing the basilectal forms of CamE depending on their respective frequency of use. Those who deny using these forms are represented by 46%, which is inferior to the users of uneducated features of Cameroon English pronunciation (57%). These findings reveal a serious pedagogic implication. As a matter of fact, English language teaching in Cameroon is not supposed to waste precious time imposing on learners to drill foreign forms of pronunciation. This is the wrong target. The right and appropriate target is to teach them the educated CamE features and discourage the basilectal ones pedagogically. This is how teaching and learning can be fostered in order to bear the expected fruit.

5.2 The Spoken Data from Buea

The article is about the question of intelligibility in a multiple varieties. The varieties subsume British English, American English, Nigerian English, educated Cameroon English and uneducated Cameroon English. Yet, the discussion has, so far, been centred on the last two only. This is so because it is believed in this investigation that the pronunciation features the respondents, in particular, and Cameroonians, in general, can produce are only those from these varieties. This can be better understood in light of the data presented below. These data are of two types: vowels and consonants as discussed below.

5.2.1 Realisation of Vowels

The vowels in the table below have been gleaned from the data. They are made up of CamE sounds, comprising educationally acquired Cameroon English pronunciation features, and CamE deviant sounds, composed of locally developed pronunciation

features which bear the stamp of speakers' local linguistic backgrounds (Quirk, 1990). The two features are displayed side by side with their respective scores and percentages, as Table 1 indicates. As Table 1 illustratively displays, the informants could produce features from these two variants only. In fact, Inner Circle vowels and apico-dental fricatives as well, which are characteristic features of these varieties, are completely absent from the data. The table deserves to be examined closely because the sounds, it shows, reflect the respondents' speech productions gleaned from newly collected data.

Table 1: Acceptable and unacceptable vowels from Buea

No	CamE sound	Deviant form	Example	CamE rend.	Occu.	%	Dev. form	Occ.	%
1	e	i	name	nem	40	100%	nim	00	00%
2	e	a	learn	len	40	100%	lan	00	00%
3	ɔ	u	boat	bɔt	37	92.5%	but	03	7.5%
4	i	e	mean	min	38	95%	men	02	05%
5	ua	ɔ	Joan	dʒuan	37	92.5%	dʒɔn	03	7.5%

As can be seen from the above table, CamE sounds and their corresponding deviant form counterparts are the only pronunciation forms that feature in the table above. Scrutinising the table keenly, it can be observed that two CamE deviant forms, notably /i/ and /a/, have not been produced by the respondents in Buea. In fact, just like in other New Englishes, the diphthong /ei/ is simplified to /e/ in educated Cameroon English pronunciation. A further deviation that converts /e/ into both /i/ and /a/ as in 1 and 2 has, interestingly, not been found in these data. The sound /e/ in words like fame, tame, name has been produced 100% correctly. The range of occurrence of the deviant features is 3 and 2, as is displayed in Table 1. Similarly, the nurse vowel has been simplified in New Englishes to the sound /e/ in words like turn, learn and heard. CamE is no exception. The /e/ is also pronounced /a/ in CamE strong loaded accents. In these data, the /e/ is uttered correctly by the respondents, as can be seen from the above table in 2. These two instances of correct pronunciation features can be seen in 1 and 2 of Table 1.

One of the salient characteristics of New Englishes is neutralisation of long versus short vowels, which is a vowel distinction characteristic of Inner Circle varieties. In CamE, for example, many vowels are shortened or replaced by short vowels. A typical example is the simplification of [I, i, i:] to /i/.

With the above consideration in mind, words such as seem, team, need and mean are rendered with /i/. Big, sit and hid are no exceptions. However, a CamE deviant form /e/ is substituted for /i/ in words like *mean* and its derivatives, as can be seen in Table 1 number 4; the score of 2 (5%) was obtained. The /i/ sound was recorded 38 times, with a percentage of 95%.

In CamE, the sequence oa is uttered /ɔ/. This is true for words like coat, goat and boat. A deviation occurs when /u/ is substituted for /ɔ/. In 3, for example, the occurrence of the substitution of /u/ for /ɔ/ was 3 and yielded 7.5%. The /ɔ/ sound, on the contrary recorded 37 times and yielded 92.5%.

A sequence of “oa” is, in effect, pronounced in two different ways in Cameroon English. The most common is /ɔ/, which is heard in words like *loan*, *moat*, *boat*, *moan* and *coat*. The other form of pronunciation is /ɔa/ diphthong, which is also heard in many words. *These* include biblical names such as Joah, Noam, Moab, Boaz and Noah. Unexpectedly, the same sequence is uttered /ua/ if the name is Joan. In fact, it is pronounced /ua/ to clearly distinguish it from the male name *John*. The /ua/ here is not an L1-induced pronunciation form. It is an education shaped variation that reflects shifts educated Cameroonian speakers exhibit in pronunciation features, differentiating CamE from other varieties. This is due to the fact that the postcolonial variety, just like other New Englishes, did undergo internal restructuring processes thereby developing phonological features that equip the speakers with communicative tools to quench their linguistic thirst. That is why one can agree with Simo Bobda (1994) who observes that CamE has reached its autonomy at all linguistic levels. For every context, the restructuring has provided a specific response, hence, the notion of “context specific” (Kachru, 2006). In the field of phonology, these context-specific examples include *education shaped variations* which can also be referred to as *pronunciation shifts*. This helps avoid homophony of some words that can impair intelligibility. A typical instance is John /dʒɔn/ versus Joan /dʒuan/. The educationally acquired divergent feature /ɔ/ as a substitute for /ua/ is also not a basilectal pronunciation form. It is a variation moulded by education and contact with varieties of Inner Circle Englishes such as British English and American English. By referring to Table 1, in 5, the occurrence for the substitution of /ɔ/ for /ua/ was also 3 and yielded 7.5%. The sound /ua/ on its part gleaned 37 and yielded 92.5%. The key result the table indicates is that CamE sound speech productions considerably predominate over deviant form productions. This illustrates the fact that while the first belongs to mainstream Cameroon English sounds, the second is associated with ethnic pronunciation forms that signal lack or little formal educational attainment. The numerical weight of Cameroon English sounds is indicative of the respondents’ educational exposure as most of the speech productions reflect pedagogically acquired pronunciation forms.

5.2.2 Realisation of Consonants

Some CamE consonant sounds have been gleaned from the data. They are displayed in Table 2 below. It should be noted here, too, that all the consonants, in Table 2, are typical to Cameroon English sounds. Consonants characteristic of Inner Circle Englishes such as the apico-dental voiced as well as its voiceless counterpart are completely absent in the data. This, alone, is a significant finding suggestive of Cameroon English speakers’ restricted ability to produce only the consonants of the speech community. Despite the promotion of foreign sounds, they remain distant and far-fetch to CamE speakers. Consequently, change in the present-day teaching is a must. That is why this investigation calls for a teaching paradigm shift because targeting those pronunciation features has proven counterproductive. The new teaching paradigm, however, has to aim at the teaching and learning of the sounds Cameroonians can produce.

Table 2: Acceptable and unacceptable Consonant sounds from Buea

No	CamE sound	Dev. form	Example	CamE rend.	Occ	%	Dev. form	Occ.	%
1	p	b	peter	pita	40	100	bita	00	00
2	b	p	bitter	bita	38	95	pita	02	05
3	dʒ	tʃ	George	dʒɔdʒ	40	100	tʃɔtʃ	00	00
4	n	l	mini	mini	40	100	mili	00	00
5	t	tʃ	teacher	titʃa	35	87.5	tʃitʃa	05	12.5
6	ʃ	tʃ	crash	kraʃ	40	100	kratʃ	00	00
7	tʃ	dʒ	church	tʃɔtʃ	40	100	dʒɔdʒ	00	00
8	mb	m	plumber	plɔmba	38	95	plɔma	02	05
9	z	s	assume	azjum	34	85	asjum	06	15
10	z	s	comparison	kɔmparizin	34	85	kɔmparisin	06	15
11	s	z	goes	gos	34	85	goz	06	15
12	z	s	December	dizemba	38	95	disemba	02	05
13	j	h	huge	judʒ	34	85	hjudʒ	06	15
14	sl	sil	slaps	slaps	40	100	silap	00	00

Table 2 above displays CamE sounds along with CamE deviant forms of pronunciation from Buea. Scrutinising the table helps notice that some deviant forms do not feature in the data. These include the deviant features in numbers 1, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 14. The CamE forms have been produced 100% correctly. These findings are indicative of the respondents' educational attainment.

Still, from Table 2 in number 2, /p/ a voiceless consonant, was turned to its voiced counterpart /b/, with the occurrence of 2 yielding 5%. The /p/'s occurrence was 38, with a percentage of 95%. The frequency of /p/, as can be seen from Table 2, is substantially higher than that of /b/. More importantly, it is also more intelligible than /b/ in this context. In effect, voicing and devoicing are typical characteristics of educated Cameroon English pronunciation features.

In CamE, the instance of palatalization occurs when /t/ combines with /j/ as in nature, picture, and feature. In 5 above, for example, the combination of /t/ and /i/ resulted in /tʃ/ in words like *teacher* and its derivatives. Its occurrence was 5, yielding 12.5%. As this sound is likely to impair intelligibility, it is relegated to deviant features of the local variety. But the /t/'s occurrence was 35, with 87.5%. This sound is very intelligible in this context, and as a consequence, it can be included in the spectrum of standard Cameroon English pronunciation because it is acquired through formal education which associates it with esteem and prestige. The /tʃ/ sound, on the contrary, is not considered with esteem or prestige. Consequently, it forfeits the right to be included in the spectrum.

In educated CamE, stem-final /b/ and /g are heard. This is true for words like /plɔmba, bɔmba, tɔmbɪŋ, sɪŋga, haŋɡɪŋ/ *plumber, bomber, thumbing, singer, hanging*. In 8 above, the sound /mb/ was produced with the occurrence of 38, yielding 95%. The sound /m/, where /b/ is silent in the cluster mb as in *thumbing*, occurred 2 times and yielded 5%. In fact, the deletion of /b/ in this context can, of course, induce intelligibility gaps because, as can be seen from the neighbouring sounds, CamE has systematically and carefully restructured the vowels and maintained the consonants in these words. In this way,

deleting /b/ tends to be odd and unintelligible. Uttering /b/ or /g/ appears to be more intelligible. This is, particularly, so because unless the vowel sounds of these words are like those of the Inner Circle forms, they will not be intelligible to the speakers of the Outer Circle varieties, nor will they be so to those of the Inner Circle ones. These are, therefore, educated features of CamE that fulfil the right to be included from the spectrum of standard Cameroon English pronunciation. The sounds /m/ and /ŋ/, with the deletion of /b/ and /g/, on the contrary, forfeit that right as they fail to be very intelligible.

The restructuring of CamE has reached its apex. It is, certainly, for this reason that Simo Bobda (1994) concludes that Cameroon English pronunciation features have achieved their autonomy at all linguistic levels. A typical example is that of word-medially, /s/ sometimes occurs for /z/ and vice versa. These processes are known as voicing and devoicing phenomena. They actually occur not only word-medially, no does it take place with /s/ and /z/ only. In 9, for instance, the sound /z/ is heard in words like *assume*. The occurrence of 34 was recorded and yielded 85%. The deviant /s/, on the other hand, occurred only 6 times and yielded 15%.

Similarly, in 10, the /z/ sound, in *comparison*, had 34 occurrences and yielded 85%. The deviant /s/'s occurrence was 6, yielding 15%. The sound /s/ is heard in regular plurals, third person singular in the simple present, as well as the possessive apostrophe s ('s). A clear illustration is in 11 above, where *goes* was uttered with /s/. The /s/ was recorded with 34 occurrences, producing 85%. The deviant /z/ in this context occurred 6 times and yielded 15%. In 12 words from the same table above, words such as *prices*, *choices* and *December* were produced with /z/. This sound /z/ occurred 38 times and yielded 95%. The deviant /s/ occurred twice and yielded 5%.

Educated CamE users systematically delete /h/ when it occurs with /j/. In 13 above, the sound /h/ was, as expected, deleted in words like *huge*, *human* and its derivatives. The occurrence of this instance was 34 and yielded 85%. The deviant CamE form where this /h/ is not deleted occurred 6 times and yielded 15%.

6. Conclusion

The concluding section is subdivided into three parts: answers to the research questions, summary and recommendations.

6.1 Answers to the research questions

From the question: Which variety whose variant sounds fulfil the right to be included from the spectrum of standard Cameroon English pronunciation because they are very intelligible to Cameroonians?, it is found that the answer to this question is unequivocal in the sense that the educated features of the postcolonial variety, being the best candidates, have successfully passed the test with a frequency range of 85% to 100% passing through 87.5% and 95%. In fact, it is clearly stated by an overwhelming majority, in some cases, and by 100%, in others, that educated postcolonial pronunciation features of English are found to be the only very intelligible sounds to Cameroonian speakers of world language. The term only is not stated yet, it is implied because no other variety

was found to be highly intelligible to Cameroonians. This is a testimony that supports the educated variety of CamE, as its forms can solve communication problems in Cameroon.

More importantly, the only forms of pronunciation that the respondents can produce are the CamE ones. It therefore follows that those that are intelligible to them are logically the ones they are familiar with and can produce.

Which varieties are not very intelligible and are de facto excluded from the spectrum of standard Cameroon English pronunciation? The first is obviously the uneducated CamE, which is found to be unintelligible to CamE users and which is, therefore, likely to induce communication breakdown. The variety looks like the educated one, especially in terms of vowel sounds. But it differs markedly from the educated CamE through its ethnic induced consonant sounds.

Others include exonormative varieties such as British English and American English whose vowel sounds were quite nonexistent in the data of this investigation. These are far-fetched features of pronunciation that cannot be used by Cameroonians. Additionally, the Inner Circle apico-dental fricatives, both the voiced and its voiceless counterpart, do not feature in the linguistic repertoire of the Cameroon English continuum.

Should exonormative varieties be promoted in Cameroon? Why? If not, why not? From what precedes, the answer is no for at least three reasons.

First, CamE users cannot produce exonormative vowels, nor can they pronounce some of their consonant sounds. Obliging them to attempt what is impossible is not counterproductive only. But, it is also and mainly against nature. How can a speech community, endowed with educationally acquired pronunciation features which are grounded locally to meet the communication needs of its speakers, long for another speech community?

Second, most Cameroonians are not well exposed to foreign varieties like British English and American English as they are to CamE. Expectedly, these speakers of global language can produce sounds of the variety they know and use on a daily basis.

Third, targeting the educated variety of CamE is being realistic and, more importantly, productive because it is tantamount to aiming at an achievable goal.

6.2 Summary

It is found that 44% and 43% of the respondents with little and good educational attainment, respectively, are the only ones who never produced the ethnic forms of CamE pronunciation. More interestingly, though, the majority of the respondents acknowledge producing mother-tongue-induced forms, 56% of less educated and 57% of well-educated CamE speakers, they can avoid them in a formal context like data collection thanks to their formal education.

Vowels and consonants emanating from the data are quite typical of CamE features of pronunciation. It is a combination of pronunciation features associated with good educational exposure and those that bear the stamp of mother-tongue influence.

The basilectal features of CamE can impair intelligibility, and as such they should be discouraged pedagogically. In this view, they cannot be seen as the emblems of the Cameroonian culture and identity. Nor can they be projected as standard over the educated ones.

Educated features of Cameron English pronunciation, on the contrary, are very intelligible. They should, therefore, be encouraged through pedagogical efforts. In Cameroon, they are the best candidates for a possible standardisation and stand the best chance of any English forms. The intelligibility issue prepares them to own a place of choice in the minds of Cameroonians who consider them as emblems of national culture and identity.

The exonormative features are far-fetched to CamE users, as they cannot articulate their vowels as well as some of their consonant sounds.

6.3 Recommendations

From what precedes it, logically, follows that educated features of Cameroon English pronunciation stand the best chance to be promoted throughout the national territory. The obvious reason is that these are the only very intelligible sounds found in the phonological repertoire of the respondents, in particular, and CamE speakers, in general. These intelligibility-based forms of pronunciation are highly recommended, and language planners, as well as other stakeholders in the teaching and learning industry in Cameroon, should make them a priority in teaching assessment. National examination bodies such as the GCE Board and Office de Baccalauréat. All educational stakeholders should prioritise the educated features of CamE as long as effective communication is maintained.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix

Table 12: Buea < A/L

Questions	Reading I	Reading II
a) In which reading the forms are good and should be promoted in schools?	00	20
b) In which reading the forms are acceptable only?	11	00
c) In which reading the forms are unappealing and should be discouraged?	09	00
d) In which reading the forms are very intelligible?	01	19
e) In which reading the forms are not very intelligible?	17	01
f) In which reading the forms are not intelligible at all?	02	00
g) In which reading the forms should be encouraged	01	19
h) In which reading the forms should be discouraged	19	01
i) In which reading the forms should be standardised?	02	18
j) In which reading the forms should not be standardised?	18	02

Table 14: Data from Buea ≥A level

Questions	Reading I	Reading II
a) In which reading the forms are good and should be promoted in schools?	00	73
b) In which reading the forms are acceptable only?	14	00
c) In which reading the forms are unappealing and should be discouraged?	59	00
d) In which reading the forms are very intelligible?	00	70
e) In which reading the forms are not very intelligible?	47	03
f) In which reading the forms are not intelligible at all?	26	00
g) In which reading the forms should be encouraged	00	73
h) In which reading the forms should be discouraged	73	00
i) In which reading the forms should be standardised?	00	70
j) In which reading the forms should not be standardised?	58	03