

LINGUISTIC UNDERTONES OF PROTEST,
COMMITMENT AND ALIENATION: THE CASE OF
PIDGIN ENGLISH IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON
LITERATURE

By

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ABSTRACT

Cameroon literature of English expression has gained its ‘lettres de noblesse’ thanks to an accumulation of several cultural, political, religious, economic and sociolinguistic facts which the writers here have addressed following different approaches. This write-up probes the sporadic but significant use of a hybrid code – Pidgin English in the imaginative experiences of these writers. This is the language which has proven its worth both in personal and intergroup communication, as well as in bridging communication gaps across cultures. Through Giles’ Accommodation Theory, the data for this study, obtained from the Pidgin English excerpts of prominent Cameroon anglophone writers’ texts, were scrutinised with the aim of determining the effectiveness of its use in different contexts. Based on the hypothetical premise that, though the language constitutes an incontestable linguistic resource, its use and total existence is marked by alienation at several levels. The study reveals that through the language, the writers protest; show their commitment through linguistic alienation. This multi-pronged buffer code embedded in active and popular techniques such as songs, proverbs, rhetorical expressions and metaphors, rekindles their artistry, reinforces their poetic license as they lash out against societal foibles and revalorise some socio-cultural habits. Evidently, against the backdrop of linguistic alienation, this paper instigates a review of linguistic policies in favour of this invaluable linguistic resource and pre-empt that Pidgin English holds the future of Cameroon Anglophone Literature.

Keywords: *protest, commitment, alienation, artistry, linguistic resource*

1. Introduction

In a typical plurilingual, multiethnic and emergent postcolonial democracy like Cameroon that proffers an enabling ground for the breeding of innumerable interesting linguistic and sociocultural phenomena, linguists, artists and critics make the most of this rich background as they continue to emerge with fascinating and

thought-provoking publications. They are concerned with the different linguistic, sociocultural, economic, political and religious developments in their different communities; developments which tend to inform and enrich their different linguistic and imaginative experiences. Central to all these issues is the concept of language and its fundamental role in the expression of these experiences cannot be underestimated. This is evident especially in typical multilingual settings where stakeholders grapple with several linguistic choices which make their task more daunting.

The language problem, especially in literature, had earlier been evoked with the question biased on what language for African literature, seen the historical background enshrined in its colonial past. In Cameroon, the language problem has been at the centre of several debates on national language policy, though, the languages used here seem to have been pre-prescribed specific *de factor* and *de jure* roles. This study seeks to probe the use and role of one of the languages – Cameroon Pidgin English (henceforth CamPE) in what has felicitously become known as Anglophone Cameroon Literature (equally referred to as Cameroon literature of English expression and henceforth ACL). Though the generally used and accepted code of expression for writers of English expression in this context is the English language, some of the writers show sensitivity to the linguistic realities of their communities through linguistic admixture – a reflection of national multilingualism. Apart from (re)creating local color through images deeply enshrined in specific cultures, there is a sporadic but significant use of Pidgin English for different designs.

2. Some erstwhile Statements

The following sections review earlier statements on ACL and CamPE.

2.1. ACL: The state of the art

Based on Ambanasom (2003), the roots of ACL were planted in 1959 with the first publication of Sankie Maimo's *I Am Vindicated*. 62 years seem good enough a period for the literature to have attained maturity and to engender stock-taking. Since the early 90s with the liberalisation policies of the New Deal regime which favoured political pluralism and freedom of speech that witnessed the unprecedented proliferation of written and audio-visual agencies, the literary landscape was not untouched. The last decade has witnessed an upsurge in literary production in almost all the genres (novelistic, poetic, dramatic and essayist) as Cameroonian literary writers have been involved in creative adventures in a bid to address some of the major ills plaguing their different communities. But, what exactly is ACL? The tag ACL is obviously one of the consequences of the politico-linguistic divisions of the country – an accident of history and it is therefore often related to literature of French expression produced on the other side of the geographic divide. Descriptions of ACL converge on the fact that it is the literature produced by Anglophones of both the North West and South West Regions, though, that produced by francophones in English often hesitantly intrudes the circle. Besides, though often considered as problematic, it is literature

produced in a superimposed imperial language and culture with the subject matter animating it being the different socio-cultural, religious, economic and political experiences of the people. The literature exhibits development at several levels with diversity at the thematic, stylistic, attitudinal and critical levels. The imaginative works produced here commemorate diversity and hybridity as they explore and experimentally address innumerable societal mores and foibles ranging from neo-colonialism, corruption, capital flight, capitalist exploitation, greed, torture, tribalism, embezzlement, marriage, generational conflicts, feminism, education, succession, colonisation, tribalism, racism, witchcraft, superstition, black magic, justice, politics, history, etc., with the aim of creating awareness and orchestrating positive change at several levels. The foregoing aspects constitute the “anglophoneness” of the literature that has been championed by both prominent and burgeoning writers such as those selected for this study.

Eyoh (1993, p. 107) submits that these writers see themselves in the role of developing the critical consciousness of their society, of mobilizing people for change through the destruction of the “culture of silence” which has so far subjected them to years of oppression. Their role seems to be that of building the foundation of a new society in which social justice and a sense of communal belonging can prevail. To Doh (1993, p. 81), ACL has a particular character - “It is the literature of a patriotic minority trying to set right the wrongs of a hypocritical system – a literature which is largely protect and iconoclastic in nature”. The writers therefore internalise a certain degree of radicalism as their own modest contribution in enacting and contesting societal ills.

Despite its relatively high tone of protest, it is gradually being incorporated into the school curricular with children literature at the elementary stage, and that for adults read and appreciated at the secondary, high school and even university levels. In this way, it is gradually replacing imperial literature and rapidly playing a conscientisation role as the audience is becoming more and more aware of their precarious situation in a problem-infested context.

If ACL has seen the limelight, it has been thanks to unflinching and whole-hearted contributions at several levels. Significant contributions of individuals at the editorial level cannot however be underestimated. Specialised and general media such as journals (the defunct *ABBIA*, *Cameroon Cultural Review*, *The Mould*, *Thunder On the Mountain*), literary clubs such as the University Poetry Club of the University of Yaounde 1, Musinga Drama Group, University of Yaoundé Theatre, God Given Idiots and the Flame Players have and continue to leave indelible marks on the literary landscape. The Anglophone Creative Writers’ Association has equally boosted literary creativity through contests, workshops and conferences during which related issues are proposed, discussed and elaborated. The dissemination of the literary productions has been greatly facilitated by both international (Heinemann, Longman, Macmillan, Kola Press, etc.) and local publishing houses (Buma Kor in Yaoundé, Patron Publishing House in Bamenda, and Editions CLE in Yaoundé). No doubt, the financial assistance from corporate institutions, individual

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and governmental structures such as the Ministry of Culture continues to play an invaluable role in the development of ACL.

The support and attention paid to ACL by committed writers and a very interested readership, and considering the burgeoning productions on the subject, it would be safe to assume that the future of ACL is promising. This notwithstanding, the decried shoddiness of the literature as a result of linguistic approximations which tend to mar its value is being addressed as a conscious attempt to eventually improve on its quality.

2.2. CamPE: The assertive invaluable “buffer” idiom

Described variously by previous researchers as *Kamtok* (Todd and Jumbam 1992, Ayafor 2008) and *Camspeak* (Tiayon 1985), Mbangwana (2004, p. 6) asserts that these are some of the labelings which lend the language “descriptive and evaluative quality that invests it with a badge of identity as a Cameroonised language since it is actively responsive to the linguistic environment of Cameroon”. Besides, the appellations aptly demonstrate the vitality that characterises the language, a no man’s code reflecting different people and experiences, serving innumerable communication exigencies, establishing and fostering solidarity links between acquaintances and strangers alike. It is the code that has fast developed into a quasi-autonomous system with seven sub-varieties (Mbangwana 2004, p. 6-8), assuming a broad range of communication roles, a coherent structure, stability and speakers, thus, explaining the reason for the spread of the language to all the regions of the country. The role of the language in Cameroon has facilitated its acquisition of an identity unique to these speech communities such that it is generally referred to as CamPE – the appellation adopted in this write-up.

Ayafor (2008) outlines the vital functions of CamPE which assumes fundamental roles in the print and electronic media, in advertisement, in music production, in out-group communication mediums like in soap-box electioneering mostly in the anglophone sections of the country, in religion both from the pulpit and literature and in adult literacy programs. CamPE has assumed a national dimension with its tricklings all over the country, serving users’ linguistic needs in their multifarious spheres of interactions, being a mother tongue to some Cameroonians, enjoying a central position and so, can be said to have a national character. Arguing for the legacy of CamPE, Mbangwana (1983) regrettably thinks that official language policies have remained dormant in the face of one of the richest linguistic resources of the country which best conveys their philosophy of life and socio-cultural heritage.

Considered from a synchronic or diachronic perspective, the fate of Pidgin English in Cameroon can be likened to that of an orphan. Despite the adverse environment surrounding the language, it continues to defy adversities and vie for a higher status like other languages (Nkwain 2014). Though the fate of CamPE has been based on functional seclusion, today, it stands unrivaled by other languages used in the country especially when the number of users and its uses are considered. Considering the utility of the language, Mbangwana (1983) argues perceptively and vigorously that the language is a vital

resource to the users and its discretionary use makes it an inevitable asset in the communication system of Cameroonians. It has assumed a national dimension and so, users identify in it a certain essence, thanks to its strong communication force.

3. Methodology and theoretical frame

The method adopted in this study involved a systematic reading of some of the literary productions (novels, theatre and poetry) of Cameroonian writers of English expression. The following seven writers were exploited for this write-up - Kenjo Jumbam (*Lukong and the Leopard*), John Menget (*Mimbo Hos*), Bole Butake (*Lake God*), Bate Besong (*Beasts of no Nation*), Anne Tanyi Tang (*Ewa and Other Plays*), Charles Alobwede d'Epie (*The Lady with a Beard*) and John Nkemngong Nkengasong (*The Widow's Might*). Here, particular attention was paid to the writers' use of CamPE. Excerpts of the language were then culled in their various contexts of use for eventual analysis.

This write-up hinges on the *Accommodation Theory* propounded by Giles (1980) and widely used to demonstrate how interactants adjust their socio-cultural and linguistic behavior so as to accommodate others. According to the theory, communicative adjustment is ubiquitous and constitutes a fundamental part of successful social interaction especially as upon entering a communicative encounter, people immediately (and often unconsciously) begin to synchronise aspects of their verbal and nonverbal behavior in order to accommodate others. The theory further expounds on how, when, and why interactants adjust, or accommodate one another and equally addresses the social consequences thereto pertaining. It identifies three main adjustment strategies: convergence, divergence and maintenance. Whereas convergence relates to more accommodating behavior, divergence refers to adjusting one's communicative behavior to be more dissimilar to another's. Maintenance refers to sustaining one's default level of communicating, without adjusting for others. This theory is widely used, for instance, in the investigation of behaviour in naturalistic, mediated and online environments (e.g. Riordan et al., 2013) and in political debates (Romero et al., 2015) to demonstrate how interactions are characterised by convergence, divergence and maintenance.

The choice of the approach in this study is explained by the fact that it accounts for the way writers are informed, show sensitivity to societal events which tend to shape their different imaginative experiences. The approach shows how literary writers' productions tend to reflect the socio-cultural and linguistic experiences of the people in their different speech communities, this, through authorial mouthpieces (characters and dramatic personae's views). This study therefore explores the use of the language in the literary productions of Cameroonian writers of English expression with the aim of determining the effect to which the code is used here, the users and uses of the language in the selected texts of some of the prominent writers hitherto cited.

Commitment and protest as used in this study are related to immediate reactions to societal problems (social, cultural, political, religious, economic, psychological, etc.) with the aim of creating awareness and requesting permanent or temporal solutions to existing problems. This view corroborates Ambanasom (2003, p. 86) who asserts that committed writers “write sensitively, showing great concern for the lot of suffering humanity, people who write with the intention of improving the human condition, of contributing towards the general welfare of the greatest majority”. In such cases, the writers ‘would be seen, in the final analysis, to be advocating a certain line of behavior, to be propounding a certain ideology’ often meant to provoke protest as the parties concerned take up different responsibilities towards positive change.

Alienation is essentially a polysemous and ambiguous entity often used in several disciplines to describe different physical, religious, spiritual, psychological, political, social or economic behavior. It generally has to do with not belonging, side-lining, strangeness, distancing, relegation, unrecognition, disdain and scorn. As a matter of fact, it has negative attributes and submits to societal ills either accidentally or by design. Linguistic alienation as used in this study is akin to loss of linguistic rights, specifically in relation to the use of Pidgin English in plurilingual Cameroon where its use has been relegated to the background and is often considered as a threat as it is affiliated to users with a particular status (low). Attitudes towards the use and users of the language often demonstrate scorn, apprehension and disdain because of unscientific prejudices. Through authorial mouthpieces, writers show their artistry through a demonstration of the use of the language by those described (low status) and when used alongside English, an evident diglossic situation emanates with bias against Pidgin English. It is therefore against this backdrop of alienation that linguists continue to clamor for positive change towards this invaluable linguistic resource through which literalists and linguists alike continue to showcase their artistry, through which linguistic boundaries are breached, thereby, making communication in a crassly plurilingual setting harmonious.

4. Data presentation, analysis and discussions

The following discussion probes Pidgin English use in ACL.

4.1. Pidgin English in ACL: a strong voice of protest and commitment

A critical survey of the literary genres (prose, drama and poetry except the essay) which constitute ACL, demonstrates a sporadic but conscious use of Pidgin English and this is for aesthetic and stylistic purposes. Through the use of this multi-edged weapon, the writers successfully express certain mind frames, experiences, visions of life and above all, divulge certain human predicaments, thereby, circuitously creating the audience’s awareness about specific problematic situations.

Some of the burning and eminent issues addressed by most of the writers are marginalisation and segregation. It is what has eventually been referred to as the Anglophone problem – *inter alia*, an

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unequivocal request for the respect of the terms of the conditions of the reunification of the two Anglophone regions (North West and South West Regions) with *La République du Cameroun* following the February 11th 1961 plebiscite results. The disrespect of the terms of this reunion has left the Anglophone community disgruntled and frustrated as they feel marginalised at several levels such as appointments to key political posts, the biased attribution and distribution of national resources, unbalanced development and many other forms of physical, economic and psychological segregation. Reactions to the situation have been at several levels with the upsurge of political and pressure groups showing total disgruntlement with the prevailing situation. At the literary level, several writers through different approaches have addressed the issue. In these approaches, one discerns two differing solutions to the problem: unconditional secession and the unequivocal respect of the terms of the reunion. The latter solution has been championed by radical revolutionaries like John Nkemngong and Bate Besong in some of their works.

Bate Besong, a self-conscious and militant playwright has developed an apparent revolutionary dramatic technique of expression which has helped in qualifying him as an obscure writer. As if to demystify the claims, Besong (1990), conscious of the people's plight, engages in linguistic simplification through profuse use of Pidgin English – a no man's language, as an attempt to translate his wish to get down to the level of the masses, thereby, putting across the message to a broad spectrum of those concerned. Besong lashes out against the discriminatory and segregationist tendencies of those at the helm of power as the masses endure untold pain and dehumanising conditions. In one of the thought-provoking songs - *Song of the prodigal*, the beasts cry out against this uncompromising situation:

Song of the prodigal

*Goat di chop
For place weh
Dey be tie him
Goat di chop
For place weh
Dey be tie him*

*If I die
I go come back
If I quench
I go come back*

*So my dear frog-
Brother wack
And burn
This damnbrubah Ednuoay
Dear frog-
Brother wack
And burn
This damnbrubah Ednuoay*

*For seeka
Goat di chop
For place weh
Dey be tie him
Goat di chop
For place weh
Dey be tie him (pp. 100-101)*

Through the image of the *goat* grazing where it is tethered, the song highlights the marginalisation of anglophones as compared to their francophone counterparts symbolised by the *frog* (vulgar reference to a francophone) lavishing in the nation's resources. It is revelatory of the strategic positioning of 'the chosen' who do away with state resources with total impunity. The song reveals the playwright's artistry as he effectively moves the masses to use the language they master most to express their dissatisfaction.

On the same subject, Nkemngong (2006) still exposes this marginalisation through unbalanced development inherent in certain parts of the country. To him, such developmental projects are so strategic and unarguably invaluable in that they eventually benefit both the downtrodden and the politically privileged. Ironically and unfortunately, this is not the case with Honourable Mataka Mbutuku who fails to develop the road infrastructure in his constituency and at his death; the transportation of his corpse to his village becomes a nightmare. This provides a propitious context for one of the masses – the driver and again, one of the purported good users of Pidgin English), to express their irritation both with the state of the road and the powers in place. Irately, he lashes out as the convoy awaits helplessly:

'Na dem government no di fix road,' he said. Dem don chop all money for country, but dem no de member seydem go waka for road time weydem go die.' (p.146)

Even the request for the driver to review the amount demanded rather augments the driver's fury as he frantically reminds them of the innumerable injustices they have been subjected to. He insists:

'I no fit move one franc,' said the driver. Na dem government don increase money for petrol. Road no dey but na plenty tax we di pay. Policeman and gendarme dem dey for control for daso take money for driver, book correct or e no correct. This country don ton na wahala! If my moto damage, na me I de loss. Wuna pay weti I want mek I carry the coffin. This country na chop I chop country waka. Na so dem, big people de do. Big man yi coffin heavy too much. Wuna pay the money make I no loss time.' (pp. 146-147)

The authorial mouthpiece here seizes this opportunity to remind and create the awareness of the powers in place about their precarious situation as a result of marginalisation. The use of pidgin is an explicit invocation of the affected to break the silence, to stand up for their rights and to redress their precarious situation. This is done through a language the people identify themselves with and through one of those who feel the pinch of the marginalisation and whose use of the language in such a situation is not surprising. Besides, like in the case of the prodigal song above, the language becomes an effective, virulent instrument of conscientisation, awareness and reawakening.

Cameroon has severally been crowned the most corrupt country in the world. This positioning is indicative of the acuteness of the cankerworm which has eaten deep into the marrow of society. This has been the concern of many writers who, in different ways, seek to paint a vivid picture of the situation as a conscious attempt to rescue it. Once more, Besong (1990) cries out against this societal ill practiced at several levels with untold negative consequences and which has become as innovatory as the different strategies put forth to curb it. Besides, the situation of corruption, embezzlement and bribery is exposed in another inspiring song:

Masked night-soil-men accompanied by Blindman and Cripple appear from the left-wing of the stage and sing.

Solo: *I fit tief one hundred million. I fit tief five hundred million sef.*

Chorus: *Because ma umbrella dey for capital city.
Because ma umbrella dey for Ednouay city.*

Solo: *I fit bury one million for my ceiling. I fit bury même ten thousand for my ceiling.*

Chorus: *Because Ednouay city don spoil—oh.
Because Ednouay city don spoil—oh.(p.103)*

The song highlights the incredible siphoning of huge sums hoarded away in house ceilings with all impunity. This is the specific situation of government officials who have an ‘umbrella’ (protégé) in Ednouay city - the capital city which is renowned for such ill-practices. More still, apart from siphoning physical cash, embezzlement is evident through the sumptuous activities of those who involve in it as the night-soil-men sing:

All: Tief man!

(They sing)

Give us seven million c.f.a

Na one third

Of your twenty-one million c.f.a

That's why Mr. Mayor, sar,

Give us money make we build

One thousand storey building.

Give we money

Make we buy plenty

Italian Ferraris and

Plenty plenty Pajero motor-car

For this heart of the dragon crisis.

(p.104)

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The dismal situation is rendered more pathetic as, whereas the masses wallow in poverty, want and lack of shelter, the privileged continue to erect mansions and ride in luxurious cars even at the 'heart of the dragon crisis'. Through contrast, the playwright effectively paints a picture of disequilibrium with unequalled distribution of resources. Here, corruption tends to take other innovatory forms as the night-soil-men indicate through another song:

*All: Your Honour Excellency, sah
Give us your sweet banana
Wif make we tori, so
That I fit go to Seoul Olympics
With five athletes
And fifty officials (p. 104)*

Here, they reenact a usual unbelievable scenario where through their spouses, government officials are cajoled and during international sporting events, delegations are constituted comprising more officials than the actors themselves. This provides an enabling opportunity for nationals to travel abroad never to return, to have mission warrants and to award contracts following devious criteria. In the same vein, the playwright does not spare the armed forces and police of the lampoon. Apart from taking bribes as the driver indicates in Nkemngong (2006), they are equally involved in petty bribery-related scandals as the first night-soil-man indicates:

*Third: Prof. you dey smell federal.
The day gendarme
Go catch you, mad man
First: Which kind gendarme?
They go form line
In front Pro. Him door
Every evening to get
Their daily kola. (p.109)*

In this way, criminals go scot free on condition that they provide the necessary 'kola' meant to silence their mouths as they give a deaf ear and a blind eye to such acts. Ironically, the playwright seems to insinuate the fact that these anti-corruption agents use quite an effective weapon to fight against corruption – bribery.

Exploitation constitutes one of the societal vices that has been addressed by several writers through several approaches. Be it socio-cultural, physical, psychological, economic or otherwise, it is one of the tendencies to which a conscious being would be indifferent. Depending on how the pressure is brought to bear on the affected as a result of consequential frustration, one of the ways through which the affected is relieved is through the use of language. The choice of the language probably plays down on the emotions of the interactant(s). This is the role Pidgin English plays in such trying situations. This is the case in Tang (2000)'s second play, wherein Mallam exploits Kechen's almost helpless situation as she comes seeking a magic solution to her problem of childlessness:

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Scene four: Kechen and other women are sitting in a waiting-room in a native doctor's residence.

Boy: (Touching Kechen). Madam, masa sey make you wait small.

Kechen: Okay. Thank you. (To herself). If the renowned gynecologist had succeeded, I would not have been sitting here and listening to 'madam, masasey make you wait small'.

Mallam: (To boy). Tell madam Kechen make ee come inside.

Boy: Madam, malla sey make you come inside. No forget for remove your shoes.

Kechen: I don hear. Thank you.

Mallam: Madam. I think sey you don forget we. Wunadey fine?

Kechen: Yes, but ...

Mallam: I know. I bee tell you say make you come back. But you nobi come. So I be think sey all thing fine. Wait mek I finam. (Throws cowries on the floor and examines them very carefully. Turning to Kechen). Madam your papa ye people demdee vex plenty for sikasey since you married, your massa no di give dem money. (Examines the cowries a second time). Dey wan one swine, one bag rice, mukanjo, salt and tobacco. No forget strong mimbo. Tell your masa. After you give them all these things come back for me and I go give you medicine. After three months you go carry bele. My fee na one thousand frs.

Kechen: Na so ngambe talk?

Mallam: (Irritated) Na so ngambe talk. Last time I ask you for come back. But you nobi come. Today you di ask me whether na so ngambe talk. I no think sey you want carry bele.

Kechen: Mallam no vex. I just ask. I go do as you tell me. (Opens her bag and hands over a sum of one thousand frs to Mallam). Okay, I go see you next month.

Mallam: Madam waka fine. God go help.

Kechen: Thank you. (Exits. To herself). How many times must I placate my father's relations? I will do as Mallam says. But I will not tell McOkete. He does not believe in traditional doctors. I will tell him that I want to visit my grandmother. He will accept. (pp. 46-47)

The playwright's choice of the use of the code is obvious as it effectively captures and conceptualises the complainant's mind frame, idealises typical interactions and above all, the traditional doctor falls squarely in the bracket of those who have been associated with the use of the language. Though literate, Kechen cannot pretend to insist to use the English language with the doctor since it would make for an incongruent communication situation. The playwright castigates the exploitative tendency of the doctor who, like other cohorts, desperately manipulates clients in dire need of their services. The writer equally castigates the naïve attitude of Kechen, just like all those who shun modern medical solutions to such problems to the advantage of charlatans. Kechen is even so naïve to understand that the doctor cannot help and she is determined to be dubbed twice. Is the choice of the language meant to insinuate or confirm the allegation that it is the language of rascals, crooks and conmen? This is obviously far from the question. Besong (ibid) is more categorical in his evocation of the problem as Cripple insinuates:

Cripple: Monkey will do

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*The derty work
Gorilla go dey wack. (pp.105)*

This is replicated rhetorically in typical pidgin-proverbial terms by the first night-soil-man when he expresses his frustration:

First: *(his hands on the head)*
O me die-man, innocent Anglo
Monkey work gorilla chop. (pp. 106)

This effectively heightens the pathetic situation of the vulnerable Anglophone who is exploited at different levels to the advantage of his francophone counterpart.

The economic crisis which followed the devaluation of the CFA franc and the effects of the Structural Adjustment Program all had a grievous impact on the economy and living standards in general as civil servants' salaries were slashed by almost 50%. Economic hardship set in and life became a matter of survival. Besong (1990) decries this situation through the comments of Blindman, the Cripple and First night-soil-man:

Blindman: *Agbada go,*
Crisis come.
Cripple: *But C.F.A go*
De flow.
First: *Ah, this country*
Hard too much. (pp.107)

Though physically impaired, Blindman is able to 'see' the magnitude of the crisis. Again, through contrast, the playwright juxtaposes the present and the former regime symbolised by the image of Agbada (favourite outfit of the former President) and insinuates that the old regime was better as the new one ushered in economic crisis – 'Agbada go, Crisis come.' The first night-soil-man does not mince his words in his depiction of the crisis.

The question of nationhood and identity is equally preoccupying in multi-ethnic Cameroon. The proliferation of about 250 ethnic groups and home languages further complicate the existing situation. Besong (1990) equally addresses this situation through the song of the night-soil-men in which they clamor for their identity:

First: *And give us professional*
Identity cards, Sir.
(They sing)
Give us professional
Identity cards, sah
Your thirty million budget
Sah, na salary for category
Nough tanglo-night-soil men
For five billion

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*Centuries
So give us professional
Identity cards, sah. (pp.110-111)*

To him, the Anglophone suffers marginalisation and exploitation because his status is not clearly defined. They are put under 'category nought' and this is the root cause of predicaments such as poor salaries, poor jobs and eventually, poor living conditions.

Butake (1986) dramatises the precarious situation of farmer/grazer conflicts which stretch across the North West Region especially where cattle encroaches farmlands destroying food crops. The traditional rulers always provide grazing land to cattle rearers who in turn compensate them with cattle. Whenever there is encroachment, the general belief is always that it is the Fulani herdsman's cattle and not those of the ruler(s). This is the uncompromising situation in which the ruler finds himself in the following excerpt:

Fon: *You been talk da foolish talk?*
Dewa: *Kai! Me no talkam no noting Mbe. Allah! Me no talkam no noting*
Fon: *Na weti happen?*
Dewa: *Cow don go drinki water for Ngangha sai wey na kontri for bororo.*
Fon: *For sikasey me tell you for go shiddon dere da wan mean sey na wuna kontri?*
Dewa: *No be gomna don talk sey na place for cow?*
Fon: *Which gomna, you bloody fool? You look the palaver we you don bringam for my head?*
Dewa: *Allah! Me no bringam no troubu for Mbe.*
Fon: *You go pay all da chop weh you cow don choppam.*
Dewa: *No be na ma nyun, Mbe! Na you nyun do choppam corn.*
Fon: *Shutup you mup, you bloody fool! (pp.18-19)*

Here, the playwright castigates the dictatorial attitude of the Fon who refuses to take up responsibility following the destruction of maize plants by his cattle but rather shifts the blame to Dewa because of his vulnerability as a lay herdsman. This depicts the fate of cattle owners in the whole region who are always pitted in a war at two fronts – the first with the authorities who provide land and the indigenes whose crops are often destroyed. The use of Pidgin English in this context is understandably explicated by the illiterate status of both participants who share only this code. Again, it drives one to share the conception that the language is alienated to the illiterate. However, in Dewa's use of the language, one easily captures the variety Mbangwana (2004) elaborately describes as Mbororo Pidgin English - a variety which can be systematically differentiated. It equally demonstrates the flexible nature of the language as it easily accommodates different sociolinguistic realities.

The foregoing analyses are better construed through the adjustment strategies of convergence, divergence and maintenance outlined in Giles (1980)'s Accommodation Theory. For instance, in the songs in Besong (1990),

users of the language adjust their linguistic behaviour towards a successful demonstration of their collective predicament (convergence) and in the same vein, the downtrodden adjust their communicative behaviour to show how noticeably different (divergence) they are from others as a result of discrimination. Similarly, the resoluteness of the driver in Nkemngong (2006), Kechen in Tang (2000) and both the Fon and Dewa in Butake (1986) is better understood through the third accommodation strategy – maintenance. Against odds, these users maintain their stance (linguistic behaviour) without adjusting for others. The predicament of the users in the texts can be perceived as clear cases of estrangement as the following section demonstrates.

4.2. The users of Pidgin English in ACL: A case of linguistic alienation

In order to justify certain claims related to the use of Pidgin English in Cameroon, it is important to examine the different users of the language in the literary works of Anglophone Cameroonians. As has been noted, the sporadic use of the language in literary works is by design and for specific effects. At the linguistic level, a critical examination of the different users (characters or *dramatis personae*) through which the writers express their world outlook reveals the fact that these users constitute a bulk of those who have been felicitously associated or tagged as the ‘owners’ of the language.

In determining the users of the language, Menang (1979, p. 54) distinguishes three groups of users: a first group comprised of marginal users who constitute the uneducated bulk made up of farmers, craftsmen and unskilled labourers. Their use of the language is restricted to traders, strangers and non-natives as the indigenous languages were strong in village circles. These users acquire the language as their second language as is the case with most francophones and anglophones in rural areas. The second group is constituted of normal users who make up a bulk of the speakers of the language and who use it in a wide range of situations. These speakers reside in the cosmopolitan areas which draw speakers from different ethnic backgrounds and so, to them, Pidgin remains the only contact language. Other speakers identified under this group include mixed population of plantation workers, those in companies and industries which all constitute heterogeneous communities. Most of these users are semi-literates who do blue collar jobs like mechanical works, electronics, shop keeping, urbanised craftsmanship, driving, etc. Apart from the use of the language at home, they equally use it at work place, in commercial transactions and in the church. The last group constitutes educated users who master either English or French or both languages and make use of Pidgin as a complementary language in informal transactions. They are composed of white collar workers who demonstrate much flexibility in their use of the language which is molded so as to suit specific contexts. This group equally constitutes users who show much hypocrisy in their attitude towards the language as they usually claim that they do not use the language when interviewed for research purposes but do so in informal transactions.

The above categorisation done about three decades earlier gives the impression that the use of the language is given to almost all Cameroonians. However, for the most part and unfortunately, today, there is total alienation in the association of the use of the language to specific users who constitute a bulk of illiterates and those who do menial jobs. This is aptly reflected in ACL wherein authorial mouthpieces are easily identifiable within this category of users. The Pidgin English user(s) in each text is supposed to constitute a microcosm in a macro sphere of users. This is aptly reflected in the following table:

Table 1: *Users of Pidgin English in ACL*

AUTHOR	TEXT	CHARACTERS	STATUS
Anne Tanyi Tang	<i>My Bundle of Joy</i>	Mallam	soothsayer
		Boy	vulnerable 'apprenti sorcier'
Alobwede d'Epie	<i>The Lady with a Beard</i>	Mr. Okore and his in-laws	drunks
John Menget,	<i>Mimbo Hos</i>	Ali	drunk
Kenjo Jumbam	<i>Lukong and the Leopard</i>	Unnamed character	villager
Bole Butake	<i>Lake God</i>	Dewa	a Fulani cattle rearer
Bate Besong	<i>Beasts of no Nation</i>	Fon	illiterate traditional ruler
		Cripple	beasts
		Night-soil-men	
		Blindman	
John Nkemngong	<i>The Widow's Might</i>	unnamed character	driver

Source: *Culled from the indicated literary works*

As such, driver in Nkemngong (2006) becomes representative of drivers to whom the use of the language has been attributed. Apart from a handful of degree holders and school dropouts who are in the profession for lack of anything better, a bulk of them constitutes illiterates who show total mastery of the language as their First Language. Dewa in Butake (1986) represents the host of fulanis and other herdsmen who constitute highly marginalised socio-cultural groups who make profuse use of this contact language to commune with the outside world. Though, following greater conscientisation on the importance of formal education, their use of the language remains a communicational prerequisite. Tang (2000)'s Mallam falls in the category of the innumerable soothsayers, healers, charlatans, conmen, crooks, rascals, bandits, smugglers and many of those illiterates and semi-illiterates who make use of the language amongst themselves or in their provision of daily services to clients. The case of the villager in Jumbam (1975) enjoins that of other villagers, illiterate or not, who see in the language an inevitable linguistic instrument of personal access especially at first encounters with non-

acquaintants. The drunks in Alobwede (2005) and Ali's case in Menget (1980a) are complimentary evidence to the fact that there is linguistic alienation in relation to the use of the language. The drunks, like all drunks during drinking sprees, make profuse use of the language just as their companions. They are not therefore different from fools and, like the night-soil-men in Besong (1990) who are reduced to a state of nothingness; their constant use of the language is significant. The night-soil-men, Cripple and Blindman are alienated as they are invisible, name-ridden and often simply referred to as 'anglos'. Their use of Pidgin, allegedly an Anglophone property, is equally 'alienatory'. The marginalisation of these characters who are reduced to 'shit' is commensurate to total debasement of the language. As a matter of fact, it is the language of 'shitology' (Bate Besong's depiction of messiness) and used with those without any identity and fit for an awry community of deformed and ugly creatures like blindmen, lepers, beggars, night-soil-men and cripples.

5. Perspectives: The future of Pidgin English in ACL

Following dedicated research on Pidgin English in Cameroon, available literature on the subject pinpoints to the fact that the language constitutes a 'veritable linguistic menu' (Mbangwana 2004, p. 23), an invaluable linguistic resource to reckon with at several levels of appreciation. Despite the lukewarmness in according the language its rightful place in the linguistic map of the country, from every indication, the linguistic tides are gradually and surely turning in favour of the language as efforts towards its standardisation continue to galvanise. Already, the sporadic, yet not timid use of the language in literary works is complimentary evidence attesting to the potential of this linguistic resource. In Cameroon, the paucity of literature of Pidgin expression is worth mentioning, though, it is not completely inexistent. Though whole anthologies in pidgin such as Menget (1980b) and Todd (1979) have received little publicity, probably because of the biased attitude towards the language, they constitute glimmers of optimism, indicative of the fact that an exclusive literature of Pidgin expression is not an unrealisable dream. The eventual standardisation of the language and probably its upgrading as a national language constitute significant steps in further propelling it, thereby, making mavericks to discover its true potential.

6. Conclusion

Writers of English expression show total sensitivity and commitment to issues plaguing human existence in their various societies. They imaginatively address these issues which merit critical attention in varying ways and through different approaches. In doing so, these writers show their artistry through a rare technique involving the skillful use of a code which effectively communicates users' mind-sets, which paints vivid, realistic and ideal pictures of language use situations akin to those of almost all competent members in the different speech communities depicted. From the foregoing, it is safe to claim that the use of pidgin in ACL is illustrative of a typical case of artistic and

experiential truthfulness where writers imaginatively reenact empirical scenarios to attain different objectives. This write-up demonstrates that this code constitutes a veritable linguistic resource whose value has not been fully exploited. As a matter of fact, what has been revealed about the language constitutes just a tip of the iceberg as this invaluable code does not only guarantee intergroup and personal communication, it, no doubt, holds the future of ACL.

Importantly, amongst the shades of attitudes towards the use, users and existence of the language in Cameroon, that which regards the language with scorn, disdain and condescension stands out clearly. This is the school of thought that relegates the language to the background because of unscientific, prejudicial and unverified reasons, despite the attempts and efforts of certified linguists to showcase the potential of this linguistic resource. This notwithstanding, the contribution of Cameroonian writers of English expression towards propelling the language has been felt. This contribution seems to be two-pronged: demonstrating the status of the language through authorial mouthpieces who constitute a bulk of the 'rejects' by society and at the same time seeking to discard previously held prejudices related to the language by valorizing it. In fact, if the language were meant for the illiterate and the downtrodden, the question which readily comes to mind is why learned, prolific and venerated scholars continue to use the language? As Doh (1993, p. 83) avers that the future of Cameroon literature is Anglophone, this write-up predicts that the promising future is entrenched in Pidgin English.

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