

Research Article

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On Lexical Innovations in the Cameroon Media Landscape

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ABSTRACT

There is a noticeable preponderance of lexical neologisms in the Cameroonian media landscape. This paper examines lexical innovations in the English of Cameroonians; emanating from audio visual and print media platforms. The study stemmed from the observation that the lexes in the mass media in Cameroon have varying creations that deviate from Standard British English paradigms. This variance is sometimes glaringly enormous that it results in mutual unintelligibility between Cameroonian and non-Cameroonian speakers of English. The Usage-Based Theory constituted a basis for the identification and analysis of innovations in comparison with standard varieties and further lexico-semantic descriptions. The study used primary data collection procedures with video and audio recordings of news broadcasts and interviews. Diverse lexical processes such as reduplication, interference, compounding, lexical extension, eponymy amongst others were

identified as lexical processes used within this context. The study concludes that these innovations continue to build and extend the corpus of Cameroon English lexicology which cannot be neglected in linguistic analysis.

Key words: *Cameroon English, innovations, lexicon, vocabulary*

1. Introduction

Lexical neologisms constitute a key and regular discussion in mainstream linguistic literature and often appears in a number of websites, newspaper columns and discussion fora, (Fischer 1998, Kemmer 2004, Lehrer 2005, Crystal 2007). The fluidity and flexibility of the English language is evident in its acceptance of new words and concepts into the language. This is not only due to the migration history of the language but also to the flexibility of its lexical rules compared to other languages. It is thus evident that the English language has transcended the realm of ownership by one nation (Atechi 2008, Mbibeh 2013). The English lexicon is one of those key areas where this flexibility is experienced. It is due more to the fact that the lexical categories are more fluid and can readily accept new members unlike grammatical categories which are more restricted to a limited few. Lexical innovations emerge and rapidly proliferate amongst the advantaged group that has privilege and are for instance at the forefront of technological developments before potentially spreading to others (Labov 1994).

The flexible nature of English has resulted in an enormous enrichment of the vocabulary of the language. Such rich vocabulary has made it possible for English users to communicate and express social realities of settler nations with much ease. As a flexible language, English has gained an undebatable status of an international language because it has spread to many more countries than any other language of the world. According to Kachru (1986) many reasons account for the spread of English in the world which include trade, annexation, the quest for new settlements for political refugees and criminals and colonization. This spread has led to the emergence of new varieties to deal with the realities of the outer and

expanding circles of English (Crystal 2003). Within the settler nations, the need to express social identities has led to indigenization processes, lexical innovations and transformation exigencies to conform to local realities (Achimbe 2006, Mbibeh 2021). It is within this backdrop that the present study examines the innovations in lexical processes in Cameroon English as observed in the mass media in Cameroon. It should be noted that nowadays, media platforms constitute an essential vector and promoter of local varieties of English.

2. Background to the study

Cameroon is a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual country with French and English as official languages and other indigenous languages completely different from these two languages (Ngule 2008). The linguistic background of Cameroon is very complex because it has no national language. As such, different languages are spoken in the ten regions of Cameroon. Todd (1984) mentions that there are over 248 languages and an indefinite number of vernaculars in Cameroon. Neba et al (2006) make reference to 286. No fixed number has been determined but it is approximated at 240 to 300 languages. Neba et al (ibid) further remark that 279 of those languages are living languages while 3 are second languages with no native speakers. Nkwetisama (2017) says that as for the official languages, French is dominant given that it is used in eight of the ten regions of the country. Nonetheless, English in recent years has been noted to exert some influence on the French-speaking Cameroonian population not only as a result of government policy evident in the creation of the National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism by Presidential decree No: 2017/013 of the 23rd January 2017 but also in the exigencies of English as a global language. This is seen from the number of French-speaking Cameroonians attending English language medium of instruction (Nkwetisama 2013).

The coexistence of English and French in Cameroon has had consequences on both languages. One example is a new kind of language known as Camfranglais (Ze Amvela 1999) with a mix of English and French. A language Kouega (2008) presents as youthful language. Apart from French, English and Camfranglais, there are other auxiliary

languages used for day-to-day communication such as Pidgin English (Neba 1999).

It is obvious that Cameroonians speak a variety of English or one of the World's Englishes known as Cameroon English (CamE). Evidence to this is the enormity of work that has been done to describe this variety at all levels of linguistic analysis. Simo Bobda (1986), Simo Bobda and Mbangwana (1993), phonology by Simo Bobda (1992), Masanga (1983), at the social-linguistic levels by Mbangwana (2002), Jikong (1996), Kouega (1991), Atanga (2003) just to name but these few.

As a follow-up to this, much has been written in an attempt to identify and describe CamE. Wolf (2001:19) does not only see it as a "national variety" but also as "the variety that is used in Cameroon media, literature and educational system and some official domains". Thus, Wolf's view of CamE is directed towards the functional characteristics. Wolf's definition comes close to Mbangwana (1992:93) who sees CamE as the type of English that is used over the Cameroon Radio Television, (CRTV) Cameroon Tribune, Cameroon Post, in literary works, in education, in government and so forth.

In their effort to situate CamE, Simo Bobda and Mbangwana (1993), distinguish it from Pidgin English. They contrast it with the speech of uneducated speakers of English and again with the speech of Francophone Cameroonians who might have a high command of English but who can hardly serve as a reference because they are merely users of a performance variety. Finally, they draw the line on those Cameroonians who have been highly absorbed by other varieties and consequently cannot speak for Cameroon. On reading this definition one remains puzzled as to what in a nutshell is CamE. This puzzle is due to current critiques from purists that CamE has not yet been standardized or codified to meet up with other standard varieties of English.

Masanga (1983) pins it down to the speech that obtains between the secondary school leavers and university graduates. The problem here is; what about those who have never attained the level of Secondary school but who command a high manipulation of CamE. Further, Sala (2003:12)

believes that what can be called CamE is what is used spontaneously and unconsciously by Cameroonians and not what is used under prescription and therefore consciously at the level of institutions. Simo Bobda (1992) stresses that: It is logical to consider Cameroon standard English as that variety of English spoken by the Anglophone Cameroonians who have at least attained and completed the secondary level of education. From all of the above, therefore, one can summarize that CamE refers to that English spoken by the Anglophone Cameroonians who command an acceptable manipulation of it, irrespective of their level of education, status or class. Definitions cited above, the one by Mbangwana (1992) and that by Sala (2003) are particularly informing for this work. But more, the former's because of its urge over the latter with the use of three small but decisive words "and so forth".

Studies have proven that when words are successfully integrated into a language and are used by people of different classes, ages and background, they are subject to various innovative processes (Anchimbe 2009). These innovations reflect their statuses through some works like Simo Bobda (1991) and Anchimbe (2006, 2009) who have argued, this phenomenon is based on the relationship between inner circle English (BrE) and outer circle English (CamE). It is argued in this work that since CamE is a separate variety just like BrE and AmE, the research into the so-called deviant or slang forms as purists will say, have actually made CamE stand aside from these native English (Simon Bobda 1991) which can be comfortably investigated and used as evidence to show the existence of Cameroon English with innate characteristics.

Some of the features earlier considered erroneous, have been consistently used by speakers of English in Cameroon and have thus gained grounds to become part and parcel of mainstream CamE usage. As speakers innovate, renovate and collocate lexical elements in a bit to suit their thoughts, sociophysical and geographical needs; some of these expressions and concepts tend to stay so long that they infiltrate into the general vocabulary. This happens especially when they are developed to suit, not only the immediate subculture in which they are created but the general culture. Mbangwana (1991:53) puts thus:

Language usage is intimately integrated into the social and everyday life of speakers. This is because speakers are guided in their usage by the social realities around them and the meaning they want to express or evoke.

While the common or general culture's choice may be primarily to communicate, subcultures, in addition to this communicative intention, make their choice. Choice of the variety to use, speech style, registers and patterns of expression in utterance as strategic communicative tools and sometimes as weapons to pursue goals, project identity, signal group affiliation, showing solidarity, excluding non-members, protecting personal and group interest, negotiating and understanding. In the words of Giles and Coupland (1991:91) "language is seen as an attribute of group membership, an essential cue for ethnic categorization, an emotional dimension of identity and a means of facilitating in-group cohesion". To suit these many purposes, subcultures thus strive to use any means at their disposal to be creative. That is why they do not only create a lexical item but sometimes borrow. Bobda (1994) says that one may get words that people use which are not found in the English dictionary or which deviate from the way they are used in the dictionary. Having such words to express meanings that cannot be necessarily expressed by those in the dictionary leads to innovation rather than to deviant forms as Simo Bobda (ibid) will postulate. The table below presents some of those items as used in Cameroon English with varying connotations.

Table 1. Items from CamE with different connotations

CamE	SBE
To agress	To assault
To chairman	To chair
The delayance	The delay
Installmentally	In instalment

To jealous	To be jealous
The downer block	The lower block

Source: This table is derived from Bobda (1994)

The presentation of this scenario gives an essential background for the identification of lexical innovations originating from some Cameroonian media houses. In order to do this, the following research questions served as guide.

3. Research Questions

1. What are the new lexical items from the Cameroonian media landscape?
2. Why are the lexical items used?
3. What lexical processes are involved?

4. Theoretical Framework

The Usage-Based theory was used to identify and analyse lexical innovations in the Cameroon media landscape. This theory propounded by Ronald Langacker (1987) was further developed and valorized in the explanation of language acquisition and use by the likes of Tomasello (2003). This theory considers language to be an embodiment of social human behavior that seeks explanations within a given context. As the name indicates, this theoretical perspective incorporates the basic insights that usage has an effect on linguistic structure. It thus contrasts with the generative paradigm's focus on competence to the exclusion of performance and rather looks to evidence from usage for the understanding of the cognitive organization of language. Thus, usage patterns, frequency of occurrence, variation, and change are all taken to provide direct evidence about cognitive representation. Usage-based theory postulates that the units and structure of language emerge out of specific communicative events and strives to avoid relying on innate knowledge specific to the domain of language. This perspective is relevant to the discussion of lexical innovations in Cameroon English that emanate from communication contexts in the media landscape.

6. Method of data collection

Between the period January 1st and May 1st 2022, keen observation and systematic recording was done. This recording was with the aid of audio visual gadgets such as tape recorder and phone audio recorder to record programmes broadcasted over radio and television. A note book was also used, which served the purpose of note-taking. Over 30 programmes were recorded from CRTV talk show programmes and this was followed by a reading of a cross section of newspaper titles of English language newspapers where key statements were sorted out to constitute the corpus for analysis. Information recorded included the programmes themselves, date of broadcast and duration of broadcast. This was followed by a transcription of the recorded data.

The analysis involved an identification of novel lexical items with a display of innovation vis a vis the English language. Further cross checking was done to ascertain that the item was recognized by other users of Cameroon English. These included 10 speakers who were purposively identified. Their task involved identifying the item and saying what meaning they attached to the item. To ensure authenticity and reliability, the features that were collected for analysis were those very recurrent in the speeches of journalists and their interlocutors and in the selected newspapers. The frequency of use in line with the Usage Based Theory constituted a yardstick for identification. The procedure of data analysis comprised descriptive processes. Items identified were organized under the key lexical items before a description of the processes involved was done.

7. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the analysis of data. Focus is on key innovative lexical items identified as well as the lexical processes involved.

7.1 Reduplication

Reduplication is a word formation process whereby a new word is formed from repeating a word. It can be partial or complete reduplication. From the recordings gotten from TV programmes, we found mostly complete reduplication in the linguistic creativity in Cameroon as shown below;

1. One has to be very careful because there are many '*yahooyahoo*' out there.
2. *Coro Coro* is ruling the world out there, so everyone has to respect the over twenty prescribed preventive measures from the government.

1-This refers to young guys who are always ready to use fraudulent means to make money. Another word synonymous to *yahoo yahoo* is scammer or swindler.

While 2 refers to the Covid-19.

7.2 interference from Pidgin English

The use of pidgin English (PE) continues to spread in Cameroon. In most households, and local settings, it is the only language spoken and understood by all. One can say that it is the language widely spoken in Cameroon. That explains why the following utterances were identified.

3. -'*Neighbor help Neighbor*'

This is a phrase that has a semantic extension which means to have sex with the wife of a neighbor in his absence

4. - That man is behaving primitively; he is a '*villageman*'

This phrase shows how local and primitive someone is.

5. - Achidi Achu had a policy of '*scratch my back I scratch your back*'

This is induced by Pidgin English to mean mutual assistance.

The Guardian Post Newspaper reports, refer to the former Prime Minister shortly after his death as a man who was fun of the expression '*scratch my back I scratch your back*'.

6. - '*Small no be sick*' is good for catarrh.

It is used to refer to a small round balm used in curing catarrh and many other diseases like cough and cramps.

7. - This child is very stubborn. I instructed him to '*left back*' and wash my dresses, but he did not wash them for me.

Left back here is used to mean stay behind.

8. - Please I am not interested in any '*a hear say*'.

Ahear say is from the English expression '*hear say*' meaning a gossip or something that one has heard but does not know the veracity of it. Induced by PE, the 'a' is added to it to yield '*a hear say*', that is very common in Cameroon English

7.3 Shifts in meaning

Broadcasters, journalists and users of the electronic media in Cameroon tend to use certain words for reasons that may not be easily explained in a descriptive study of this nature. This shift in meaning occurs in CamE when an English word acquires a meaning altogether different from its meaning in standard British English, like in the following examples gotten from the corpus.

9. - She is a very beautiful *chap*. I love her.

A *chap* according to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary refers to a *man*, the meaning has been shifted from a man to mean a girl friend. This phenomenon is extensively observed in Cameroon English.

10. - That man is a *trouble-shooter*, he has been coming and troubling me here these days.

Rather, the British English equivalent is *trouble-maker*. This is because a *trouble-shooter* avoids and settles problems, while a trouble maker always remains troublesome. It was found that in CamE, the meaning of trouble-shooter has been shifted to mean someone who looks for trouble.

7.4 Compounding

Unlike loan translations, compounding uses elements of English, generally without the influence of other languages. This process is very common in the English of Cameroonians especially in broadcasting where people speak spontaneously. The following are good examples of compounding:

11. -Most married men prefer to give priority to their '*side chicks*' than to their wives.

This means a concubine. People only have '*side chicks*' when they are married.

12. -The City Mayor for Bamenda negotiated with president of the '*achaba union*' to call off the strike action.

This refers to the organization or group of bike riders.

13. -Sinners should repent, else they will die and go to '*hell fire*'.

This is making reference to hell.

14. -Most Cameroonians prefer to take '*African panacea*' when they are ill because it is affordable.

This refers to some concoctions made from natural herbs. This concoction is said to be a cure for many diseases such as hypertension, cough, catarrh and fever.

15. -Costumers in Marche' abattoire like buying part of meat with '*biscuit bone*'.

Above is referring to 'brisky bone' in SBE English. It is referred to as biscuit bone because it is as soft as biscuit.

16. -'Yahoo boys' spend money extravagantly in night clubs.
Young boys who use unorthodox way to make money like scammers.
17. -Most youths spent their money in 'livescore'.
Refers to the newly established institution where people gather to watch football matches. In these places, gambling occupies a central position.
18. -Because of corona lock down, the ministries of education have resorted to establishing platforms for 'tele teaching'.

Refers to recently organized online classes on CRTV by the ministries of Education in Cameroon. These classes came about as a result of covid 19 pandemic that was a trait to humanity. It was found by these ministries that children will be vulnerable to the deadly pandemic if they are allowed to go to school
19. -'Press hour' is a very interesting and insightful program of the CRTV.
A weekly CRTV program that is broadcast every Sunday.
20. -Most 'okada men' connive with secessionists against the state.
Refers to bike riders

7.5 Extension in meaning

They focus on those words that are taken from the English language itself but their meanings are those of other words in the language (SimoBobda 1994) calls this intra-English extension. The following are some good examples:

21. = your wife has two sets of twin, you should be a good 'shooter'.
22. =he never wants to see any 'skirt' passing around.
23. = he does not allow any 'skirt' that he sees.
24. = that lady is very beautiful. She has a wonderful 'tail light'.

25. = he was hypnotized by her '*gendarme pockets*'.

26. =she has a nice *signboard*.

From the above constructions, it is evident that the words are employed with semantic extensions to avoid obscenity or vulgarity. All these words are above SBE words. But in the above situation in Cameroon English, they have been given completely different meanings that may raise the threshold for understanding of a native speaker.

21. In 21= above, 'shooter means someone who is sexually vibrant.

22. In 22= above, 'skirt' refers to a woman.

23. In 23= above, 'skirt' also means woman.

24. In 24= above, 'tail light refers to buttocks. As the tail light of a vehicle indicates beautifully, so is the buttocks of a woman. Besides, the tail light is always last behind, so is the buttocks of a woman that wags like a tail light.

25. In 25= above, 'gendarme pockets' refer to heaps of a woman. As the heaps extend to the sides, so are the pockets of a gendarme officer.

26. In 26= above, 'signboard' means the face of a woman. As everything of a signboard is read from the front, so is the face of a woman that projects her beauty.

We also hear a miscellaneous of semantics extension in Cameroon English like:

27. Many young men who still succeed in scamming nowadays must have '*involved*'. 'involved' in this construction means to join a sect or to be initiated.

28. There are many guys out there who live from '*picking pockets*'. 'Picking pockets' in this context means to steal. So these guys steal as a means of making money.

29. That man has bought a new car. I think he has '*hammered*'. To 'hammer' in this construction means to make money.

30. Scamming is very sweet when one succeeds to '*pick*'. To 'pick' in this situation means to receive money after scamming.

31. My friend did not come to my birth day party, so I have '*booked*'. To 'book' someone in this construction means to bare grudges against someone.

7.6 Eponymy

It refers to a person, place, or thing after whom or which someone or something is, or is believed to be named .Eponyms abound in Cameroon English.

32. *Niat Foundation* has donated thousands of kits to local populations in the West Region.

An organization in the West Region of Cameroon named after the president of the Senate Marcel Niat Jifenji.

33. *Dangote Cemencam* produces cement at very low cost.

A cement company owned by Dangote which is named after him.

43. *C-Chantal Biya Foundation* has promoted artificial insemination in Cameroon.

Named after the first lady of Cameroon Mrs Chantal Biya.

35. *BiyaCovid Aides* is one of the measures taken by the government to combat covid 19 in Cameroon.

A kind gesture given and named after the Head of State president Paul Biya.

7.7 Conversion

Conversion is one of the word formation processes evident in the linguistic creativity of lexical items in Cameroon English. conversion is as seen below.

36. Students, most at times spend their time '*facebooking*' instead of reading for exams

To discuss with friends or relatives by using Facebook.

37. Student should not to '*whatapp*' during school hours.

To discuss using Whatsapp

38. Recalcitrant students always ask their family members *to 'momo'* them.

Send money using the mobile money app

39. - scammers always like *to emo*.

To communicate using a newly created social media application known as Emo; on this application is boldly engraved the name of the application.

From the above points, it is visible that *facebook*, *whatapp*, *momo* and *emo* are nouns; but in Cameroon broadcasting programs, there is a zero derivation that occurs. This zero derivation brings about the linguistic process known as verbing.

From speeches of Cameroonians, one can get expressions like: *I am on facebook*, *facebooking*; *I like whatsapp*, *I whatsapp everyday*; *my emo is too slow*, *but I emo everyday*; *I prefer MTN momo to Orange momo*. *I momo daily through MTN*. From the above descriptive explanations, it is seen that these words are used both as nouns and as verbs.

7.8 Clipping

As clipping is a word formation process of forming a new word by dropping one or more syllables from a polysyllabic word. It was also found from the data collected that this process of linguist creativity is also conspicuous in Cameroon English.

40. *boko* is one of the highest challenges the Cameroonian government has ever faced.

41. *coro* is one of the deadliest diseases ravaging humanity in recent times.

42. the government has been taking stringent measures curb the spread of *covid*.

43. *amba* is a serious trade to the forces of law and order in Cameroon.

From the above construction, it is evident that the word 'coro' is clipped from 'corona', 'boko' from boko haram, 'covid' from 'covid19' and 'amba' clipped from 'ambazonia', a fictional territory described by secessionists.

7.9 Cameroonianisms

At this point we found words which are imitation of Standard British lexis but have been 'Cameroonianized' to suit the linguistic realities of the context. Corder looks at these words to be errors from an error analysis perspective. He sees these words as deviations from the Standard English norms and takes the purists standpoint that these deviations should be corrected. However, within the context of use as expatiated by functional frameworks that we use in this paper, such creations are meant to serve a purpose and if they so do then they constitute linguistic features of the English of a people that we cannot afford to neglect. Some of those examples used within the context include

Colang to mean tights

Chap (young girl) to mean chap (young boy)

7.9.1 Buzzwords

These are words or phrases, new or already existing that become very popular for a period of time. Buzzwords retain their meanings when used in a given context. The outbreak of Covid 19 has led to the emergence of buzzwords which have greatly enriched the lexical landscape of Cameroon English. These buzzwords include: *quarantine, lockdown, social distancing, masks, sanitizer, hydro chlorine isolation, pandemic, Covid vaccine and hand washing*. While these words are used within the context of the fight against Covid 19, they are also used in varying

contexts that are not necessarily health contexts. This is because they are find expression almost everywhere.

8. Conclusion

The aforementioned discussion has so far established that Cameroon English is undergoing lexical innovation as seen in the new words derived from the media landscape. This paper only adds to ongoing descriptive analysis of the English spoken within this context. The peculiarities reminiscent in the lexical items discussed and the lexical processes involved go a long way to give an identity to the CamE Variety. It is therefore evident that we do not need any bells to ring or trumpets to sound for us to accept the existence of this variety of English as re-echoed by Mbibeh (2013). It is high time Cameroonians accepted this variety and use Cameroon English with the pride that goes with it. There is even no choice again given the enormity of literature and given the presence of the variety in the media as exemplified by this research paper.

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