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Linguistic (In) Equality, National Unity and Stability in Multilingual Commonwealth States: Cameroon's Experience

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the political function and implication of linguistic (in) equality on the potential of national unity and stability in multilingual Commonwealth States. Official multilingual States may enjoy the enviable reputation of being bilingual or multilingual as the case may be, but run the risk of political instability when all the languages are not treated justly. The risk of politicizing linguistic injustice or inequality is high in multilingual societies where one language is seen to dominate others. In Cameroon, English and French are official languages with equal status. However, the weak institutionalization of linguistic equality has created complexities of inferiority and superiority among Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians, expressed in the struggle between two linguistic movements: French-only movement acting offensive nationalism and English-only movement acting defensive nationalism. Both movements which carry the germs of nationalism are in competition for survival, and in trying to do so, they reinvent political identities based on linguistic affinities. The study finds that linguistic inequality can be interpreted as a form of linguistic injustice and serve political claims that could go as far as questioning the form of the State. However, there is hope. Linguistic diversity can make sense for unity and stability when language communities perceive each other's language as complement.

Keywords: Cameroon, commonwealth, bilingualism, linguistic equality, national unity, political stability

1. Introduction

The ideal model of a nation-state rests in a considerable part upon the belief that each nation-state is a separate linguistic entity (Emerson, 1960:132). However, the number of official languages determines the scope of nationhood. In multilingual States, language can act as a unifying factor depending on how the linguistic communities perceive and behave toward linguistic differences. Politicians and policy makers also have a critical role to play in determining the extent to which language differences make a difference with regards to unity and stability. Linguistic inequality is a reflection of State's failure to ensure equality in the genuine and objective use and understanding of at least those official languages enshrined in the constitution. As society's shaping organism, the State is expected to treat, consider and organise language differences out of anomic paths into a framework that ensures unity and stability.

What is the relationship between linguistic (in)equality and political unity and stability? What are the political functions and implications of linguistic inequality in multilingual Commonwealth States? Has Cameroon's official bilingualism been beneficial or detrimental to national unity and stability? Linguistic inequality represents a danger to political unity and stability because of the risk of it being politicized. The risk of political instability and fragmentation is high in multilingual States with bias language policies and practices. States that have constitutionally endorsed more than one language but fail to put it into practice run the risk of inviting linguistic injustice. The risk of politicizing linguistic injustice is high in multilingual States where one language is viewed as the dominant language. On the other hand, linguistic equality is likely, other factors being equal, to enhance and sustain political unity and stability. There is a positive and constructive correlation between linguistic equality and political unity and stability.

Cameroon is a bilingual Commonwealth State in which both English and French are constitutionally recognized as official languages with equal status.¹ However, the intended or accidental nationwide domination of French has aroused feelings of linguistic underrepresentation and marginalization among Cameroonians of typical English language expression.

To determine whether bilingualism has been beneficial or detrimental to national unity and stability, the behaviour/attitude of Cameroonians from the two linguistic divide towards bilingualism and how it affects their perception and relation to the State and governmental official is examined. It is believed that bilingualism policies affect

¹ It should be recalled however, that the equality in the status of both English and French was expressly recognized and stated only in the third constitution of 1996. The first two others gave a slight upper hand to French. Details are examined in subsequent sections.

people's attitude and perceptions of the State in constructive or destructive ways. The more bilingual one is, the more likely one feels Cameroonian and less contentious one becomes. On the other hand, the less bilingual one is the more contentious and contemptuous one is likely to become. When one speaks a single language in a multilingual setting, the degree of perceiving the other as different is wide.

The work is divided in two main parts: part one examines some theoretical considerations by trying to establish the relationship between language and politics. It also identifies and analysis the key concepts. It traces the historical foundation and evolution of Cameroon as a multilingual Commonwealth State with particular attention paid to English and French bilingualism. The second part examines the impact of official bilingualism on the potential of unity and stability. It observes that although English and French bilingualism led to some form of unity in the country, English-only and French-only movements are threats to the foundation of unity and stability.

1.1. Language, Politics and the Nation-State: Theoretical Considerations

1.1.1. The Political Functions of Language

Language is the primary instrument of social communication (Emerson, 1960:133). The existence of a language is predicated upon the existence of a community of speakers who guarantee they can understand one another (Rajagopalan, 2001:19). As a factor of identity, it is an integral part of the foundation and survival of modern States.² Rajagopalan posits that the idea of nationhood had become closely linked with the concept of a language and the whole equation was summed up in the slogan "one nation, one people, one language" (Rajagopalan, 2001:20). Today, languages and language loyalties are frequently exploited by in-power and out-power political actors to further political ends.

Language has a political identity owing to the fact that it is linked to nationalism. Nationalism is a powerful political weapon that hinges on language and that can degenerate into chauvinism and xenophobia, its flipside (Rajagopalan, 2001:20). Linguistic identity arises from two things: the feeling that you are able to communicate with your fellows and the presence of a stranger/foreigner whose language we cannot comprehend (Rajagopalan, 2001). The language of the foreigner represents the voice of unreason, to be systematically challenged, annihilated. Identity stems from the fact that the very notion of a language is constitutively dependent on the knowledge that there are forms of speech other than the one we are versed with. Identity, pursues Rajagopalan (2001:21) also derives from one's ability to be convinced that the forms of speech are just as comprehensible to its speakers as ours is to ourselves. Historically, if British Southern Cameroons had not had any contact with French Cameroonians, the sense of distinct linguistic heritage, and with it such notions as "unity in diversity", "bilingualism", "one and indivisible Cameroon", simply would not have made sense as it seems to be doing today.

The value of a particular language can only make sense in the midst of other languages and this could imply that language in multilingual States is essentially exclusionary. Knowledge of and the effective presence of languages different from ours predispose us to feel a sense of linguistic superiority and or inferiority, as the case may be, but hardly ever a sense of equality. A bilingual or multilingual State inherently breeds linguistic competition which is the offensive and or defensive struggle among languages for survival. Those who feel linguistically cheated are likely to initiate struggles for linguistic recognition and revalorisation, and in most cases, these struggles are not without political claims. Those who feel linguistically superior are likely to initiate actions to consolidate their linguistic superiority.

Another political dimension of language is its interaction and strategic dimensions. Given that an enormous amount of social and cultural information is encoded in a message and that verbal interaction in a speech community is a cultural event; language reinforces sense of belonging and asserts one's existence in a community. As a political instrument, language is a tool used by political entrepreneurs to gain some form of interest. Political speeches play a strategic role in promoting political interests in several ways. Below are some strategic functions of political discourses: According to Chilton and Schaffner (1997: 212-213) language is used politically to:

- Coerce (laws, edicts, commands, censorship, agenda setting, and making assumptions about realities that hearers are at least obliged to accept)
- Resist, protest and oppose (slogans, chants, petitions, appeals that oppose existing structures)
- dissimulate (divert attention from troublesome and controversial issues)
- legitimize and delegitimize—which are macro functions (quoted in Mazid 2007:353)
- According to Thompson (1990: 60-67) the political functions of language are:
- unification (bringing and keeping people of diverse backgrounds together i.e. a form of unity which embraces individuals in a collective identity)
- fragmentation (fragmenting individuals and groups whose unity may challenge the dominant individuals and groups—also known as divide and rule)
- reification (maintaining status quo as natural) (quoted in Mazid, 2007:353)

Language is political under conditions of isolation or interaction. If language is not used to unify, it is used to fragment, and if it is not used to fragment, it is used to maintain the status quo. In any case, the politicization of language oscillates between these three functions. Unifying language is all about creating feelings of togetherness and belonging to the same fatherland and in bilingual State, this can only be reinforced when both languages are used. Fragmentary language creates feelings of differentiation and other complexities among the different linguistic communities that

² However, it was in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with the emergence of modern nation-states that language began to assume an uncontested political dimension.

undermine the unity and stability of the bilingual State. A strongest political character of language is its ability to reproduce identities and given that identity is almost exclusively a natural claim of politics, language is therefore political. National identity for example is found and sustained in everyday language. The routine use of small words and slangs to describe people of a particular linguistic expression in pejorative or hailing terms only remind them of their national identity. Nationalism operates with prosaic, routine words, which take nations for granted, and which, in so doing, inhabit them (Billig, 1995:93). There are small words rather than grand memorable phrases, that offer constant, but rarely conscious reminders of the homeland, making "our" national identity unforgettable (Petersoo, 2007: 420). One of these banal or small words is the personal pronoun 'we' which Petersoo (2007: 420) sees as of utmost importance in the discourses about nations and national identities. The use of 'we' or 'nous' in Cameroon is a reminder of the existence of the other—"them" or 'eux'. 'Bamenda', 'Anglofous', 'Anglo' used in French-dominated regions to describe predominantly people of English speaking regions only reminds them of their status as people of a different identity or of Cameroonians apart.

1.1.2. Linguistic (In) Equality, National Unity and Political Stability

National unity means the presence of high sense of cohesion and identification with the nation-state. In the context of multilingual States, national unity could be a feeling of belonging to the same linguistic community independent of the linguistic belonging of governmental authorities and one's linguistic belonging. The language of the other is perceived as an asset, and not as a political liability. Political stability is the absence of credible threats to national cohesion and unity. Political stability is normally associated with the life of a State. It is the process by which a State goes about its normal activities unperturbed. As a matter of fact, national unity and political stability feed on each other. Unity breeds stability and stability rests on unity.

Linguistic equality is equal treatment the State gives to two or more of its official languages. In the case of Cameroon, this means an effective attribution of equal socioeconomic, cultural and political status to English and French. Under conditions of linguistic equality, there is no such thing as linguistic bias or linguistic complexes of superiority and inferiority.

The opposite is true of linguistic inequality. This is when the State creates conditions of linguistic inferiorities and superiorities. Linguistic inequality is said to exist in but not exclusive to multilingual States with minority-majority linguistic divides. Linguistic inequality expresses planned or unplanned cultural assimilation which favours the assimilation of minority languages and cultures by a majority dominant language and culture (Chumbow, 2009:27). In multilingual States, linguistic inequality represents a challenge to political unity and stability. In the first place, it is a credible instrument of political propaganda. As noted above, language differentials can be reinvented to create national identities based on linguistic lines and such weaknesses can be exploited to fuel tensions between the various national linguistic communities. Inequality in the use of English and French particularly in official circles probably weakens national cohesion and the feeling of oneness among Cameroonians of the two national linguistic divide.

1.2. The Linguistic Identity of Cameroon: Between Official Bilingualism and Private Multilingualism

Multilingualism means the use of more than one language for communication. However, there are varying degrees of multilingualism. It can be classified into three categories: private multilingualism (States with more than one unofficial language and one official language), public multilingualism (States with more than one official language and perhaps none or one private language), and public-private multilingualism (States with more than one language in both public and private realms). Public realm languages are usually imported or foreign languages inherited from contact and interaction with foreigners or colonialist and private realm languages are the indigenous or ethnic languages (Chumbow 2009). Thus in addition to Chumbow's two macro-linguistic disparities (i.e. the public and private realm languages which fit squarely well the private and public multilingual States: one can add the public-private multilingual countries which are the least common.

State/Membership Year	Official Languages	Other Languages	Linguistic Status
Botswana, 30 September 1966 as a Republic	English	Setwana, Kalanga, Sekgalagadi	Private multilingual
Cameroon, 11 November 1995 as a Republic	English, French	Numerous indigenous languages	Public-private multilingual
The Gambia, 18 February 1965 as a Realm – became a Republic on 24 April 1970	English	Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, other indigenous vernaculars.	Private multilingual
Ghana, 6 March 1957 as a Realm – became a Republic 1 July 1960	English	Akan, Adangme, Moshi-Dagomba, Ewe, and Ga	Private multilingual
Kenya, 12 December 1963 as a Realm – became a Republic on 12 December 1964	English, Kiswahili	Numerous indigenous languages	Public-private multilingual
Lesotho, 4 October 1966 as a Kingdom	Sesotho (southern Sotho), English	Zulu, Xhosa.	Public-private multilingual

State/Membership Year	Official Languages	Other Languages	Linguistic Status
Malawi, 6 July 1964 as a Realm – became a Republic on 6 July 1966	English, Nyanja (Chichewa, Chewa)	Lomwe, Tumbuka, Yao, other languages important regionally.	Public-private multilingual
Mauritius, 12 March 1968 as a realm – became a Republic on 12 March 1992	English, French	Creole, Hindi, Urdu, Hakka, Bhojpuri	Public-private multilingual
Mozambique, 12 December 1995 as a Republic	Portuguese	Makhuwa, Tsonga, Lomwe, Sena, numerous other indigenous languages.	Private multilingual
Namibia, 21 March 1990 as a Republic	English	Afrikaans, German, & indigenous languages: Oshivambo, Herero, Nama.	Private multilingual
Nigeria, 1 October 1960 as a Realm – became a Republic on 1 October 1963 – suspended between 11 November 1995 and 29 May 1999	English	Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), Fulani, Ijaw, Ibibio and about 250 other indigenous languages spoken by the different ethnic groups.	Private multilingual
Rwanda, 28 November 2009 as a Republic	Rwanda (Kinyarwanda, Bantu vernacular) French, English	Kiswahili (Swahili)	Public multilingual
Seychelles, 29 June 1976 as a Republic	English, French	Creole	Public multilingual
Sierra Leone, 27 April 1961 as a Realm – became a Republic 19 April 1971	English	Mende, Temne, Krio, Creole	Private multilingual
South Africa, 3 December 1931 as a Realm – withdrew on becoming a Republic on 31 May 1961, rejoined 1 June 1994	11 official languages, including Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, Pedi, Sesotho (Sotho), siSwati (Swazi), Xitsonga (Tsonga), Tswana, Tshivenda (Venda), isiXhosa, isiZulu		Public multilingual
Swaziland, 6 September 1968 as a Kingdom	English, siSwati		Public multilingual
Tanzania, 9 December 1961 as a Realm – became Republic of Tanganyika on 9 December 1962, United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar on 26 April 1964, and United Republic of Tanzania on 29 October 1964.	Kiswahili (Swahili), English,	Arabic, Gogo, Haya, Makonde, Nyakyusa, Nyamwezi, Sukuma, Tumbuka, many other local languages.	Public-private multilingual
Uganda, 9 October 1962 as a Realm – became a Republic on 9 October 1963	English	Ganda, other Niger-Congo languages, Nilo-Saharan languages, Acoli, Swahili, Arabic	Private multilingual
Zambia, 24 October 1964 as a Republic	English	Bemba, Kaonda, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja, Tonga, and about 70 other indigenous languages.	Private multilingual
Zimbabwe, 18 April 1980 as a Republic – suspended on 19 March 2002, departed on 8 December 2003	English	Chishona (Shona), Sindebele (Ndebele), Sotho and Nambya, Shangani, Venda, Chewa, Nyanja, and Tonga.	Private multilingual

Table 1: Linguistic Status of Commonwealth States of Africa

Source: Authors, 2017

This linguistic classification measures the degree of linguistic polarization and its impact on national unity and political stability. It is likely that the more linguistically polarized a country is, the lesser its potential for national unity and political stability and the less polarized it is, the greater the potential for national cohesion and political stability.

The African continent to which Cameroon is a part is the most linguistically diversified continent with more than 2086 languages of the over 6600 languages of the world (Chumbow, 2009:26). All African countries are multilingual in varying degrees; from three languages in Rwanda and Burundi to over 450 in Nigeria and Cameroon is no exception to this rule. However, unlike many other countries Cameroon has an exceptional linguistic personality. It is officially bilingual and unofficially multilingual. In other words, it is a public-private multilingual State. Besides English and French, which are the official languages, more than 250 private languages (also known as indigenous and religious languages) are spoken by some 20 million Cameroonians (Kouega, 2007). Nigeria may have over 450 private languages but it has officially recognized only English as the public language.

1.2.1. The Accidental Genesis of Cameroon's Public-Private Linguistic Status

Cameroon draws its public-private multilingual status from separate sources. Its public multilingual identity derives from its contact and interaction with foreign agents. Cameroon owes its linguistic uniqueness to its history under foreign administration (Constable, 1974), (British and French Mandated/Trusteeship administrations). Its private multilingual status is somewhat a prehistoric genetic inheritance and the ability of these languages to have resisted the onslaught of imported languages. Cameroon's close to 45 years official contact and interaction with Britain and France left a dual linguistic legacy which makes Cameroon an English and French bilingual country.

Although Germany controlled Cameroon until the end of the First World War, it never left a linguistic impact that Britain and France did after they left Cameroon at independence in the early 60s. The defeat of Germany by joint Anglo-French forces meant that Cameroon had to be divided between Britain, who took 1/5 and France who took 4/5, and above all the introduction of English and French in the respective territories. In February 1961, the British territory of Southern Cameroons voted in a UN-administered and supervised plebiscite to join the French part of Cameroon and Federation was born comprising two federated States: East Cameroon Federated State which was dominated by French language comprised the majority and which was the former French Cameroon Republic and the West Cameroon Federated State which was dominated by English language. According to Constable (1974:233) the two parties in the Federation appear to enjoy rather unequal status in that 4/5 of the population was in the Eastern territory which is also much bigger than the West, and the capital, Yaoundé, is in the French-speaking East, as are the main commercial and industrial activities (Douala and Edea), all of which contribute to make harmonization in educational, political, administrative and judicial fields a major concern.

Compared to public multilingualism, private multilingualism in Cameroon has remained constant over the years and has not been a subject of severe political debate. There are well over 250 different private languages spoken across the different ethno-linguistic communities in the country (Kouega, 2007), including the Pidgin English and *camfranglais* lingua franca, which are appearing as the third and fourth most widely spoken languages respectively. In the midst of this linguistic merry go round, English and French have been constitutionally recognized and accepted as the two official languages although this is with varying degrees of sociopolitical and economic considerations.

1.2.2. The Importance of English and French Bilingualism

According to Omotoyinbo (2016) how prestigious a language is, can be determined by its perceived socio-economic value, its status raising potential, perceived instrumentality, esteemed functions or roles in the nation, its numerical strength, political and economic power, the use of that language in official domains, and its educational value. There are instrumental and strategic advantages of being really bilingual. Bilingualism opens new horizons and new opportunities (Baker, 1997, Cummins, 2000). A State that is officially bilingual stands to gain more than a monolingual State. The benefit is even enormous when the official languages are spoken worldwide. English and French are official international languages—being the working language of the UN for instance, among others. Thus from an international or diplomatic point of view, Cameroon enjoys the enviable reputation of being among the few English and French bilingual States in the world.

Although all languages are important, under particular circumstances some languages can appear to be more important than others. The English language for example is of particular importance for international communication. The importance of English can be examined from political, economic and educational dimensions (Plonksy *et al.*, 2013). Politically, English is an official or working language of most international political gatherings throughout the world and 85% of international organizations use English as the language of official communications (Plonksy *et al.*, 2013:4). Economically, as developing States seek to compete in the global marketplace, English is the language in which most negotiation and marketing schemes must take place. English is also the primary language of academia, as the majority of academic publications are written in English (Plonksy *et al.*, 2013:4-5).

The linguistic status of Cameroon has enabled her to strategize and win partners and membership in multiple international organizations. Cameroon has gained membership in both Commonwealth and Francophonie, partly because of her linguistic status as an English and French bilingual State. Its citizens have gained scholarships and other benefits from this forum-shopping opportunity.

Being 'perfectly' bilingual as Cameroonian enhances a feeling of complete citizenship compared to others who are semilingual or monolingual. Citizenship and the civic culture are also about being able to identify with the official language. In other words, a 'true' citizen is not only one who registers to vote during elections, but one who is able to regularly speak

and be fluent in the official language(s). Identification with language is a mark of citizenship which implies that anyone who fails to do so is an incomplete or quasi-citizen at best. Identification with the official language is not a matter of choice; it is a matter of civic duty and obligation.

Bilingualism provides an opportunity for Cameroonians to create a national identity that eliminates or minimizes the disruptive effects of linguistic affiliation based on ethnicity. From inception, English and French were languages upon which modern Cameroon was created as a unified State. As Kouega (2003:402) puts it the first Cameroon Government of this had one major objective, namely national cohesion: it had to tackle pressing political problems such as management in a situation of federation of States, preservation of power, intertribal skirmishes and so on. It therefore shelved issues such as choosing the Cameroonian language(s) that could be promoted to official status and the only language that was likely to be whole heartedly accepted by all citizens at the time was the language of the ex-colonial master.

Bilingualism has an empowering capacity. It facilitates cross-linguistic communication and predisposes individuals to socio-cultural comfort. Bilingualism is the passport to national acceptance and socio-national integration. Thus a 'perfectly' bilingual is one who is able to wield influence and limit the influence of others on them. According to Duquette (2015:636) being really bilingual allows young people to integrate fully into mainstream society, and contribute further in building a society that fosters unity through diversity. It helps people realize that majority language norms, while essential to ensure a functioning and unified society, does not mean that everyone should always speak the same language, live in the same culture, and think the same way (Duquette, 2015:636). Bilingualism as a means is not only viewed as an instrument of communication, but also as an instrument to political power, economic attainment and social prestige. Although, formally, the status of bilingualism does not determine who has access to political power in Cameroon, there are signs that in the nearest future it is going to be so.

2. Bilingualism: Implications for National Unity and Stability

2.1. The Scope of Official Bilingualism in Cameroon

An Official language is defined as one or more languages that a country utilizes as an official form of communication in education, government, or commerce. UNESCO defines official language as a language designated by law to be employed in the public domain (Plonksy et al., 2013:5). This is distinct from a national language, which is a "language spoken by a large part of the population of a country, which may or may not be designated an official language (UNESCO, 2013). English and French are the official languages in Cameroon. This implies both English and French have been encoded and endorsed by law as the language to be used by all Cameroonians in their public transactions.

2.1.1. The Constitutional Dimension of English and French Bilingualism

Although English and French are constitutionally proportional, as per the 1996 constitution (the latest in force), it is important to note that the Federal constitution gave a pride of place to French without refusing to endorse English as an official language. In the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon of 1st September 1961 English was considered as second language (the weaker language). Article 1, paragraph 3 states « Les langues officielles de la République Fédérale du Cameroun sont le français et l'anglais. » In Article 59, paragraph 2, it is stated that « La constitution ainsi révisée sera publiée en français et en anglais, le texte en français faisant foi ». The phrase « le texte en français faisant foi » implies constitutional endorsement of the preeminence of French. It authenticates the French version of a constitutional document. This policy relegated the use of the English language in Cameroon to the second position after French.

In the Constitution of the United Republic of Cameroon of 2nd June 1972, the linguistic diversity of Cameroon is first of all hailed as value in the Preamble (see first sentence) and in Article 1, English and French are again recognized as official languages. However, Article 39 still maintained the primacy of French when it rules that « La présente Constitution sera enregistrée et publiée au Journal Officiel d l'Etat en français et en anglais le texte en français faisant foi » The 18 January 1996 Constitution however, addressed linguistic inequality in its Article 1, Subsection 3 when it emphasizes equality between English and French. It states that:

The official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The State shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavour to protect and promote national languages.

It was expected that Article 69 of 1996 constitution, like Articles 59 and 39 of previous constitutions, as seen above, would emphasis the primacy of French. It did not. Rather, it endorsed the unconditional equal status of both languages when it states that the law shall be registered and published in the *Official Gazette* of the Republic of Cameroon in English and French. This implies that of the three major constitutions that have shaped the life of the State in Cameroon, only one (1996 Constitution) really explicitly endorsed linguistic equality. The 1961 and 1972 Constitutions were disproportionately in favour of French. Constitutionally speaking therefore, Cameroon has witnessed 35 years (1961-1996) of linguistic inequality characterized by the official belief that French language was foremost. Meanwhile, linguistic equality is some 20 years only.³

³ This change however, might have been due to the alarm raised by the All Anglophone Conference of 1993 in which the constitutional preeminence of French was condemned and a resolution was taken to make French and English equal languages.

2.1.2. The Bureaucratization of Official Bilingualism

The bureaucratization of official bilingualism is the process by which governmental officials try to promote English and French in public circles. Public authorities formulate and enforce laws that encourage Cameroonians to study and be fluent in both languages. The fate of English and French bilingualism in Cameroon was also shaped by governmental officials. Governmental officials issued decisions on rights and access to both English and French languages in Cameroon (Constable 1974, Enama 2016, Fasse Mbouya 2012, Kouega 2007, and Kouega 2003). Decrees and laws were enacted to promote the use of both languages in public spheres such as public schools and public ministries. Decrees, instructions, circulars and service notes have been issued in various ministries to promote bilingualism among Cameroonian civil servants and in the public service as a whole with varying degrees of effective implementation. However, it is the education sector (Ministries of Basic Education, National and Higher Education) that is making considerable efforts towards bilingualism. As a matter of fact, nothing compels civil servants to be bilingual whereas students and pupils have to try to be bilingual to succeed in their exams and to do so with flying colours.

According to Kouega (2003), the promotion of bilingualism policy in Cameroon was characterized by three major phases which include the pre-1975 phase, the phase between 1975 and 1996, and the post-1996 phase. Although Kouega's interest was in the domain of primary school education, it is important to note that the three phases also reflect a general trend. Phase one was introduced to bring an end to the French-only and English-only movements that used to be the medium of instruction in French and British Southern Cameroons before 1961. From this period, French, which used to be the medium of instruction in Francophone schools before Reunification, was introduced into Anglophone schools; similarly, English, which was the language of education in Anglophone schools, was introduced into Francophone schools (Kouega, 2003:409). This effort was also extended to other areas. The official press was produced in two versions, one in French and the other in English, and the national radio broadcasted programmes in French and English at regular intervals, meanwhile courses were taught in the only State university in either French or English depending on the availability of teachers; at the secondary education level French was a subject in Anglophone schools and so was English in Francophone schools (Kouega 2003:409).⁴ The second phase within the area of primary education was the introduction of English/French in the curriculum and the extension of the hours per week taught from 1.5 to 2.5 hours for 30 weeks, and last phase was the introduction of dual-language schooling program (Kouega 2003:409).

Policies to promote bilingualism were intended to institutionalize bilingualism. Unfortunately, official bilingualism is weakly institutionalized and this is because of the absence of a formal system of reward and punishment. This has left many Cameroonians, to think that bilingualism is an individual (personal) affair.

2.1.3. The Meaning of Being Bilingual in Cameroon

There are several approaches to defining bilingual: fluency-based and regularity-based approaches. Chan and Abdullah (2015:56) propose the following definitions: A narrow definition of a bilingual is that he or she is able to grasp and perfectly understand two languages; a wider definition of a bilingual is one who uses two languages to communicate. Bilingualism is also the regular use of two languages, rather than fluency (Enama Belilibi, 2016:21). However, the reality is that bilingual has several social interpretations. The term 'bilingual' is applied by people in different ways (Chan and Abdullah, 2015:56). For some, it means an equal ability to communicate in two languages. For others, it simply means the ability to communicate in two languages, but with greater skills in one language. In fact, it is more common for bilinguals, even those who have been bilingual since birth, to be somewhat 'dominant' in the use of one language.

The failure to institutionalize bilingualism in Cameroon has led to individual interpretations of what it means to be bilingual. There are at least three definitions or understandings of a bilingual Cameroonian. The first is that a bilingual is anyone who speaks and understands both English and French fluently and regularly, and this category is arguably the least represented. This category is directly in line with Constitutional prescription that talks of equality in both English and French. A bilingual in this sense is often called 'perfectly bilingual' or 'parfaitement bilingue'.

The second is that a bilingual is anyone who speaks either English or French but understands the other. The constitution stipulates that both English *and* French are official languages. This implies that a 'true' Cameroonian from a linguistic perspective is that person who can speak and understand both languages without exception. The constitution does not talk of English or French or English and/or French. Yet the practice on the field indicates that the constitution has been misinterpreted to mean English or French or English and/or French. From a constitutional perspective, any Cameroonian who accommodates only one of the languages is indeed violating the constitution. In fact anyone who gives preference to one language is predominantly quasilingual or semilingual, to use the expression of Valadez and his colleagues (2000),—not bilingual in the sense of the constitution. Semilinguals are bilinguals who display limited proficiency in their two languages due to deficiencies in competences including size of vocabulary, correctness of language, degree of automatism, ability to create neologisms, meanings and imagery and mastery of the emotive and cognitive functions (Valadez *et.al*, 2000). This category argues that Cameroon and not Cameroonians is said to be bilingual. Even those who are educated usually display a dominant French language and underdeveloped English language skills, or vice versa (Enama Belilibi, 2016:19).

The third category is made of those who perfectly grasp only one of the languages and make very little or no effort at learning the other language. Cameroonians in this category usually feel contented with one language and are likely to treat the other language with contempt. They have the tendency to justify their being unable to master and accommodate both languages on the grounds that it is Cameroon that is said to be bilingual, and not Cameroonians. This linguistic

⁴ For details on the promotion of bilingualism policy in primary schools, see Kouega 2003.

incivility or quasi-bilingual attitude has caused many to minimize bilingualism i.e. the genuine willingness to accommodate both English and French.

So one begins to see that from inception, the language issue was politicized given that majority of Cameroonians interpreted it as a matter of choice and not a matter of obligation. Bilingualism is only limited to the extent that Cameroonians as individuals permit. Bilingualism lies in the eyes of the beholder—such is how bilingualism is best represented. It implies that Cameroonians have the leeway to make a choice between English and/or French which means that linguistic choices can be made for political interest.

2.2. English and French Bilingualism as Factor of Unity

Unity and political stability in a multilingual State can be understood from the perspective of the contact theory. According to the contact theory, personal interaction with people from linguistic groups other than one's own, whether as neighbours, friends, relatives, or coworkers breaks down stereotypes, produces cross-cultural understanding and over all better intercultural relations. The idea is that more contact between individuals belonging to antagonistic social groups (defined by custom, language, beliefs, nationality or identity) tends to undermine negative stereotypes and reduce prejudice, thus improving inter group relations by making people more willing to deal with each other as equals." (Forbes, 1997: ix, cited in Adsett and Morin, 2005).

Chumbow (2009:29) also argues that linguistic diversity is rarely in itself the cause of tension, conflict, disunity and war. In his view, linguistic related conflicts are ultimately caused by problems of social, economic and political power inequalities between linguistic communities, not by the languages per se. The implication is that if linguistic diversity does not bring war, it can contribute to peace and unity.

To some extent, official bilingualism has preserved some form of unity in Cameroon. Bernard Fonlon (1969) (himself a bilingual Cameroonian) already saw in bilingualism a cultural factor of unity. According to him "one people, one language" that is heard in countries like Israel, for instance, is not an empty political slogan. The unifying power of language is that it not only binds together, in heart and mind, the people whose property it is, it not only give them a distinctive personality, but, when a language acquires the enviable fortune of becoming a medium of wider expression, at the world level, it serves to bring closer together the far flung people that use it (Bernard Fonlon, 1969:25). At independence, nearly all African states became a patch-work of linguistic and ethnic groups which became united through an official language. In essence, the best fit approach to enhance and consolidate national unity in multiethnic societies of Africa at independence was to have a foreign or better say a neutral language that acts as the language of all without necessarily jeopardizing other private languages. Even though in practice, English and French bilingualism in Cameroon is far-fetched, they enhance a sense of collective bilingualism among Cameroonians. Through collective bilingualism, there is a general feeling that every Cameroonian needs and has to be bilingual without exception. One reason for advocating bilingual education in Cameroon is to instill a sense of integration and equality among Cameroonians, apart from viewing bilingual education as a step towards gaining the means to communicate socially and effectively. Chan and Abdullah (2015:56) demonstrate that when students gain fluency in the language that is used in mainstream society, it enables them to integrate and feel connected to their peers and society. The road to effective bilingualism may be long and winding, but Cameroonians, in their large majority, perceive English and French bilingualism as forming part of their vision to be Cameroonian and important to the Cameroonian identity.

At the symbolic level, major identification papers are in both English and French. The National Identity Card, the Passport, the Voter's Card, is in English and French. Letter head inscriptions in major official documents bearing the signs and symbols of the institution, the seal and motto of the Republic of Cameroon are in both languages. These make Cameroonians feel at least symbolically that they belong to the same linguistic community and hence nation.

2.3. The English-Only and French-Only Movements as Threats to Unity

The English-only and French-only movements are about language restrictionism and reductionism. These are movements that set to holistically establish or regain the importance or preeminence of one language. They set to create the exceptionality of a particular language. These movements are opposed to the English-French-only movement which is what is expected to be, at least from an after 1996 constitutional standpoint. Underlying these movements is the fact that proficiency in both languages is not equated to political loyalty to Cameroon. Instead, the movements produce competing nationalism feelings which threaten national unity. In a study of language attitude towards the State in the French-dominated province of Ontario in Canada, Duquette (2015:636) finds that the mastery of only one language limits human contact and cross-cultural understanding. In such movements an attempt is made to appropriate one language, promote it through persuasion or force or prevent it from influence, make of it one's personal property and identity, and when the ripe time comes, it is used as a weapon against the 'other'. English-only and French-only movements are out to reassert language differentials and to remind the State that although all may be citizens of one country, they have different linguistic backgrounds. This implies that apart from the national identity, there is an infra identity based on one's belonging to a particular linguistic community. In a context of language-only movements, national identity co-exist with infra-national identity which is perceived as a threat to the feeling of oneness, "unity in diversity" because it rests on linguistic particularism. In Cameroon, where Francophones constitute the linguistic majority and Anglophones the linguistic minority, both movements co-exist and compete for sociolinguistic power and representation. The English-only and French-only movements in reality express some form of defensive and/or offensive nationalism in the web of linguistic ethnocentrism.

2.3.1. The French-Only Movement and Offensive Nationalism

The French-only movement is said to have emerged as a result of the fear of the onslaught of English language. Crystal (2004) reported that the English language has become the common language of the world, with approximately 1.4 billion users across the globe. This implies that if English language continues to spread like wildfire, the French language risks extinction.⁵ In fact, French language is on the decline and even in the Francophone world. The most striking examples are found in Africa: south of the Sahara. Countries which formerly had large French-speaking populations are making the switch to English due to its relevance in Southern Africa, as well as internationally (Plonksy et al., 2013:7). As an official language of the African Union and as an international language, English is more important for the continent than French. There is an increasing fear that French is being relegated to the background as second language. It has even been argued that in two decades, French may not be spoken in Africa at all, and according to Plonksy et al. (2013:7) that reality seems possible in Rwanda, where “only a minority of the population speaks passable French” and where English has, since 2008, been emphasized in academic and political life.

The spread of English is not only seen as an empowering force but also as an imperialistic tool. In the view of Plonksy and his colleagues, the real reason for the triumph of English is the triumph of the United States and it can be argued that the growing importance of English is a way in which the power of the United States is wielded, and this linguistic power is a new, post-colonial way of spreading influence (Plonksy et al., 2013:17).

In Cameroon, underlying the French-only movement is the fact that to be Cameroonian is first of all to be able to be proficient in French. This French-first ideology means that proficiency in French is equated with political loyalty to Cameroon as a State and what it means to be Cameroonian. This implies that an emphasis on the use of another language could be attacked as a barrier to learning French and could be viewed as a threat to national unity.

The first two constitutions as examined above emphasized the authenticity of French over English, and even with the advent of the 1996 Constitution which talked of linguistic equality, nothing much has changed. French is the dominant language in public services in spite of the efforts made to bureaucratize bilingualism. Some official documents are by default written exclusively in French. When French language is taught as a dominant and compulsory language in schools, this is a French-only movement. Those who receive this education grow up to be more fluent in French, usually at the expense of English.

2.3.2. The English-only movement and defensive nationalism

The English-only movement emerged as an attempt to limit the onslaught of French and reassert the importance of English as a language of a set of Cameroonians apart. Proficiency in English is first of all equated with the fact that one is first of all Southern / English Speaking Cameroonian, Anglo Saxon Cameroonian, before being Cameroonian. Like the French-only movement, this implies that the use and teaching of French, or English by predominantly French Speaking Cameroonians could be attacked as a barrier to learning of English and could be viewed as a threat to national unity. Proponents of the English-only movement argue that the struggle is aimed at resisting a form of linguistic assimilation from French domination. The English-only movement perceives French as an imperial language, given that it is the language of the majority. The movement is therefore seen as a struggle against French imperialism and domination.

The English-only movement is said to be an attempt to establish a form of linguistic justice by revalorising English. Anglophones have resented the domination of French in official expressions, symbolic expressions and representations of State's artifacts. In informal interactions, Anglophone stereotypes and clichés are commonplace and Anglophones have associated this to French domination. As a minority language, English suffers from feelings of cultural assimilation.⁶ It was in 1968 that Georges Orwell first recognized that “modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble” (Orwell, 1968:128). Taking the necessary trouble means “political regeneration” which implies widening the scope of those involved in the fight against bad English beyond professional writers (Ibid). Defenders of the English language in Cameroon feel that as their linguistic identity, English is in trouble because it is being imitated by unqualified English language professionals. Thus the *Francophonisation* of English is the process by which unqualified professionals (usually those of predominantly French language expression) involve in the teaching of English to pupils and students undertaking the English sub-system of education.

In essence, the English-only movement is an attempt to limit the influence of French over English and in so doing French and Francophones are excluded from carved-out English-only territorial spaces. The English-only movement operates by *Anglophonising* pre-established norms and institutions in Cameroon. In the domain of education for example, Anglophones' request for the two State Universities (Universities of Buea and Bamenda) situated in the Anglophone regions to be Anglo Saxon is not only an indication of an attempt to preserve English/Anglo Saxon culture and identity, but, also, it reflects an attempt to exclude French and mainstream Francophones. In the same direction, petitions to

⁵ Today, 26 countries in sub-Saharan Africa use English either as an official language exclusively (like Nigeria and Ghana) or as an official language alongside another African language (like in Kenya or South Africa). English is also used for communicative purposes in some 53 countries in Africa (Negash, 2011; World Factbook, 2013).

⁶ According to Chumbow (2009:27) linguistic inequality is an expression of cultural assimilation (planned or unplanned). As he puts it, Cultural Assimilation is an ideology which favours the assimilation of minority languages and cultures by a majority dominant language and culture. Cultural assimilation is a process whose finality (within the context of a hidden or open agenda), is the loss or death of the minority languages and cultures, usually within the space of three generations. Furthermore, Cultural assimilation whether ideological or not, is the result of the unfavourable balance of power against the minority language and culture. The dominant language and culture usually assimilate the weaker language where dominance is determined by such factors as the prestige status of the language, the number of valourising functions (economically viable domains in which the language is used), etc.

government against the teaching of English and English language subjects by mainstream Francophone teachers in secondary schools and universities, particularly in Anglophone regions symbolize an exclusionary attempt to restore *Anglophonism* at the expense of *Francophonism*. Anglophone lawyers have also petitioned government against the influence of the French legal system over the English legal system. The civil law, they argue, which is the French legal system is incompatible with the Common law system, which is the English legal system in operation in Anglophone Cameroon. The transfer of Francophone magistrates to preside over courts in Anglophone Cameroon is viewed not only as a threat to Anglophone legal system, but perhaps, most importantly, the request that these magistrates be retransferred in Francophone regions is even more of a threat to bilingualism and a frustration to attempts of Francophones who try to be bilingual by working in Anglophone regions. Through these attempts not only is French being rejected or neglected, but, bilingualism itself is under attack. When English is taught as a dominant and compulsory language in schools, this is an English-only movement. Those who receive this education grow up to be more fluent in English, usually at the expense of French.

3. Conclusion

Official bilingualism might have earned the enviable status of Cameroon being a bilingual country, but the effective practice of bilingualism has essentially remained an individual affair or the affair of society outside the State. The weak institutionalization of official bilingualism might have maintained political stability but might be failing to sustain or at least reinforce national cohesion. Weak institutionalization has created complexities of inferiority and superiority among the two linguistic communities. Anglophone Cameroonians have felt the French-only offensive movement and developed, as counter measure an English-only defensive movement. Both movements which carry the germs of nationalism are in competition for survival, and in trying to do so, they reinvent political identities based on linguistic affinities. Today, linguistic inequality in multilingual Commonwealth States can be interpreted as a form of linguistic injustice and serve political claims that could go as far as questioning the nature of the State. Given that linguistic diversity is vulnerable to political instrumentalism, it is incumbent on multilingual States to stress the need for its citizens to interpret language diversity in terms of complementarities. This can be accomplished through a system of rewards for those who make genuine efforts to be effectively multilingual.

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