Neglect of local languages in the Cameroonian education system: Towards an accentuation of the linguistic assimilation policy?

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Abstract

The perpetuation of the colonial heritage makes the Cameroonian education system a system fundamentally alien to its demo-linguistic reality. Despite the existence of more than two hundred local languages, none of them has acquired the privilege of official language status and therefore, they do not constitute the languages of instruction in Cameroonian schools. On the contrary, they are the languages of the French and English imperialist powers, which have the status of co-official languages and are used as languages of communication in education and administration. Indeed, the political genesis of the State of Cameroon made it possible to establish official French-English bilingualism as a guarantor of national integration between the two French-speaking and English-speaking educational sub-systems of the country, thus reducing local Cameroonian languages to only herd and family uses and during official negotiations. However, it is universally accepted that the use of local languages allows effective interaction between the school and the societal environment of the learner. Local languages are therefore development levers which are nevertheless put in the background, thus constituting a worrying linguistic insecurity which threatens the linguistic heritage of Cameroon and, as a corollary, delays the socio-economic development of this country. Thus, in a politico-didactic approach, this article deals with the neglected place of local languages in the Cameroonian education system in favor of French-English imperialist languages.

Keywords: Local languages, Colonial languages, Education system, colonial heritage, Cameroon.

Introduction

Official status of foreign languages and no status for local languages

When we observe the neglected place occupied by local languages in the Cameroonian education system compared to the two official French-English foreign languages, we can easily deduce that these local languages are threatened by living in a context of insecurity and inequality socio-linguistic (Harter, 2005: 93). However, language is an important vector of transmission and preservation of demo-cultural heritage, a major tool for endogenous development and a facilitator of educational, administrative, societal and business exchanges. These indisputable contributions of the language in a country lead to the adoption of institutional measures like the literacy policy which allows the State to have a literate population capable of communicating through one or more several common languages (Tanang et al. 2014). In Cameroon, where there are more than two hundred ethnic groups that come together in their linguistic, sartorial, culinary, artistic, in short, cultural diversity (Aïcha, 2019) and rightly qualified as «Africa in miniature», the choice official languages relate to foreign languages specific to the French and English imperialist powers.

Indeed, Cameroon has an area of approximately 475,650 km² (Makoudjou Tchendjou, 2011). It is made up of 10 regions including 8 predominantly French-speaking and 2 predominantly English-speaking, 58 departments, 268 arrondissements and 58 districts. It should be noted...
that before Decree No. 2008/376 of November 12, 2008, these regions were called provinces. In terms of education, the Cameroonian education system is a set made up of two different and specific educational sub-systems, namely the French-speaking sub-system and the English-speaking sub-system. It is therefore possible to study in one of these two educational sub-systems and obtain equivalent diplomas in accordance with article 15 of the law of 1998. This article specifies that the two above-mentioned sub-systems coexist while each retaining its specificity in evaluation and certification methods, which are those of metropolitan areas. The Cameroonian state therefore enshrines bilingualism at all levels of education as a hallmark of its ideals of national unity and integration. But these ideals fail because of the language policy that does not give value and official recognition of local Cameroonian languages. However, the latter are necessary for the economic and cultural influence of a country and for the expression of state sovereignty. In other words, this multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic country (Dieu and Renaud, 1983), rich in more than two hundred local languages, has not devoted any official status to any of these local languages, nor a legislative consecration, even less regulatory (Tabi-Manga, 2000).

Paradoxically, it is the languages resulting from French and English imperialisms that have been conferred the status of co-official languages of instruction by the Cameroonian Constitution and its multiple constitutional revisions. And, again in this country, all local languages have the status of languages, but none of them have the status of official languages like French and English. Indeed, these two co-official languages also benefit from the policy of promoting French-English bilingualism, hence the disuse of local Cameroonian languages (Bitja'a Kody, 2000: 180). This consecration of French-English bilingualism and the limited place of local languages in the Cameroonian education system is therefore, a determining factor of linguistic insecurity in this country. In other words, this official status conferred on English and French, places these two colonial languages in a position of strength to the detriment of the local Cameroonian languages. In addition to their advantageous status, these two co-official languages benefit from the social function where even the unschooled use them on a daily basis and from the educational function since these two languages are taught in schools. Yet, if they are not cultivated and taught, local languages risk disappearing, bringing with them the disintegration of the culture as well as an original form of thought (Erny, 1977: 170). Also, it should be noted that « colonial education has corrupted the thought and affectivity of the African and stuffed his behavior with a procession of complexes and abnormal reflexes, and by its assimilative character and by the negation of the national culture which leads to a real alienation of the colonized» (Ambroise, 1979: 50).

However, there are scattered experiences of traditional schools and those of training trainers who themselves choose the local language they teach their learners, in accordance with the spirit of article 5 paragraph 1 of law n°98/004 of April 4, 2008 relating to the orientation of education in Cameroon and which underlines the necessary "training of citizens rooted in their culture, but open to the world and respectful of the general interest and the common good". But, there is no official harmonization of the choice of these local languages according to the four cultural areas of the country, much less a consecration of the official status of these languages. As a corollary, local languages are gradually disappearing since there is no transmission from generation to generation of these languages at school, the ideal place for this transmission. It is therefore a threat of extinction hanging over Cameroons rich linguistic heritage (Bitja'a Kody, 2000).

The use of local languages in education is therefore essential for qualitative training if and only if we want the Cameroonian school to harmonize and meet the requirements of its environment, and also, if we want to put an end to this linguistic insecurity which is becoming more and more widespread. It is obvious that local languages are levers of development which are however neglected in Cameroon. The urgency of revalorizing local languages in the Cameroonian socio-linguistic landscape, more specifically in the Cameroonian education system, has led us to write this article, the title of which is: « neglect of local languages in the Cameroonian education system: towards an emphasis on the linguistic assimilation policy? ».

State of the matter and problematic

Cameroon has more than two hundred and fifty languages constituting three major groups that are the Bantu, the Semi-Bantu and the Sudanese. And none of the local languages specific to these groups is officially used as the language of instruction in Cameroonian schools. There emerges the situation of linguistic insecurity (Labov, 1976) where, belonging to the same linguistic community, the Cameroonian local languages experience a feeling of inferiority in the face of the position of strength, even of dominance, of the official French languages; English in daily practice. These two languages, which have supplanted the local Cameroonian languages, result from the double colonization of France and Britain. Securing local languages therefore means securing the cultural identities of the ethnic groups to which these languages belong, and therefore those of the Cameroonian people. Let us reiterate, no Nation across the world has developed with the language of another that is to say with a foreign culture. And in addition, the use of local languages is essential even for teaching, if we really want an effective and efficient interaction between the foreign school and the environment, that is to say, the Cameroonian societal environment (Erny, 1977: 112). This leads us to remember that our educational system continues to be an imported system, poorly grafted onto our socio-linguistic reality. We read there the greatest achievement of the colonizer to have been able to colonize and wall up not our bodies, but our mind, our thought, even our ideas, to the point where, we do not prefer to assert our cultural identity, but rather that of the colonizer by imitating it falsely (Césaire, 1955). Hence the feeling of inferiority that we develop and the consequence of which is contempt for our culture and our language (Fanon, 1961). This is clearly a linguistic insecurity which is mainly linked to a representation of a
gap between what is and what should be (Bretegnier and Ledengen, 2003:4). There is the problem of the status of official languages and local languages as well as their contribution to the efficient and effective development of the Cameroonian education system.

How then can we go beyond the colonial linguistic policy which materializes in official French-English bilingualism to adopt an endogenous, plurilingual linguistic policy which makes it possible to officially devote certain local languages alongside the official French-English foreign languages? Also, how to get Cameroonian political decision-makers to choose local languages in the knowledge of their positive contributions to the academic performance of learners, the political, economic and cultural influence of the country, and not out of spite when adopting the language policy?

Objective of the work

The aim is to show the negative impact of the sustainability of the colonial language policy in Cameroon and the importance of enhancing the cultural roots of Cameroonian learners. From memory, the pre-independent Cameroonian education system had a technique of mastering the local language chosen according to the cultural area, well before learning French or English. This is no longer the case today where the Cameroonian learner confronts the French language or / and the English language directly without making the difference compared to the language of his context or local language (Mendo Zé, 2003: 29). But today, it is commendable to note that there is an awakening of consciousness among the majority of Cameroonians on the contribution of local languages in the endogenous and qualitative education of the learner.

The multitude of writings of Cameroonian intellectuals on this subject is edifying, as is the existence of projects such as the Linguistic Atlas of Cameroon (ALCAM) which had the mission of identifying, describing and classifying local languages, the Atlas Administrative of National Languages of Cameroon (AALNC) whose mission relates to the distribution of languages by region, and the Operational Research Program for Language Teaching in Cameroon (PROPELCA) whose mission is to make language teaching effective local in Cameroonian schools. Also, we will formulate suggestions that will help and enlighten the policies on the benefits of the institutionalization of local languages in the Cameroonian education system, like compensating for the various dropouts and wastage because the child better assimilates the lessons given in his mother tongue. This will facilitate transmission in official foreign languages as he first reflects in his own language.

Understand the historiography of Cameroon’s language policy from the German-British period until the eve of independence

Language policy is any political decision taken to guide and govern the use of one or more languages in the public sphere. In a broad sense, it encompasses two fundamental concepts: language planning and language legislation. Indeed, linguistic planning is above all a political project, that is to say, a set of measures taken by the state to regulate the use of languages in its territory. In this sense, any linguistic development project is primarily political. The way in which we define and carry out linguistic planning depends directly on our conception of language. Clearly, linguistic planning emphasizes the function of social integration and in Cameroon we speak of hundreds of local languages that coexist informally together. Which leads us to recall, following Professor Tabi-Manga, that the law of 1946 excluding local languages from schools and training institutions was never dissolved, despite the successful experiments of the PROPELCA project (we in will speak again). As for the concept of official language legislation, this is the function of making one or more languages official by law in public administration and in education. In Cameroon, language legislation formalized French and English as co-official languages in administration and education.

Promotion of local Cameroonian languages and Its integration as a language of instruction by British pastors and German settlers

As I recall, Cameroon’s first contacts with the West took place around 1472 with the Portuguese who discovered Cameroon across the coast at the banks of the Wouri River. From the coast, they entered the hinterland and discovered a multitude of people and cultures. This opened the country’s entry to other Western countries like England and Germany. Indeed, the 1st language policy for literacy, educational and educational activities and evangelization in Cameroon was developed and implemented by the British Church under the background of «evangelization strategies» by the Baptist Mission in London in 1841 This strategy had five axes: the study of the local language and the habits of the local non-Christian population, the translation and distribution of the Bible in the local language, the training of indigenous pastors who will lend a hand to the religious administration, the establishment of other churches and the use of all possible and appropriate methods of preaching (Slageren, 1969). It is in this context that Pastor Alfred Saker developed the 1st alphabet book in the Douala language as well as the spelling rules for this language. He produced school books in the Douala language, translated and also printed the Bible in this language between 1848-1872. This policy of evangelization and literacy in the local Douala language continued after the arrival of the Germans in 1884. The latter decided to make the local Douala language the second official language of instruction and evangelization in Cameroon alongside the German language.

From then on, there were two types of schools during the German period: schools teaching in the Duala language and whose German-Swiss Protestant missionaries from the Basel Mission ensured its effectiveness and schools teaching in the German language and whose missionaries German Catholics with the Pallotine Fathers are responsible for this. With these latter, teaching/instruction in German intensified and the German colonial system began to develop among Catholics. Education was therefore imbued with a high mission, namely that of civilizing Cameroonians considered by them to be indigenous. This civilizing mission also consists in developing in Cameroonian
students, obedience, submission and respect towards the authority of the German Government (Stumpf, 1979: 46). The Catholics occupied more Cameroonian territory to the detriment of the missionaries of the Basel Mission who continued to teach in the schools in the Duala language. Note that the Germans arrived in the Adamaoua region in 1899.

During the German protectorate, at the start, the Germanic Government did not have a linguistic policy of domination, hence the existence of two types of schools that we have mentioned. It was not until seven years later, in 1891, that Governor Von Zimmer adopted a policy of total Germanization of the country and a ban on the local language in educational institutions. This, in order to train native Cameroonian German speaking cadres that the German administration will need. This policy came late and struggled to take hold as Cameroonians continued to use the local language in schools and very few of them learned to speak German (Bitjaa Kody, 2000). However, in 1910, a government decree imposed teaching in German in all schools, going to school was made compulsory for every child, a uniform school curriculum was established and grants were made to mission schools according to the respect for the school program adopted by the government and the percentage of pupils passing the official exam. In 1911, the first official examinations in German were held. As the teaching of German takes more and more form in schools, religious instruction will gradually be taken over. We note that initially the German government had a clear desire to maintain local languages in schools and administration.

Before the outbreak of the 1st World War, a Conference was convened in Berlin whose only item on the agenda was that of the choice of a local Cameroonian language as the official language to be implemented throughout the country alongside the language German. The languages that were offered at this conference were: Hausa, Boulou, Duala, Bali and Pidgin (Stumpf, 1981). Only, there was no follow-up, because Germany was defeated at the end of this war (1914-1918). This defeat of Germany led the League of Nations to entrust the joint administration of Cameroon to its former allies, France and England, on June 28, 1919 (Treaty of Versailles, article 119). Their main mission was to prepare Cameroon for internal autonomy. By the time the German settlers left Cameroon, they left a total of 55,409 students, including 833 in public schools, 3,000 in Baptist schools, 9,000 in Presbyterian schools, 19,576 in Catholic schools and 23,000 in Lutheran schools (Messina, 1992).

**Rejection of local Cameroonian languages and imposition of French and English foreign languages from 1916 to 1960**

When Cameroon passed from the status of a German protectorate to that of the French and British mandate, then of Franco-British supervision and finally gained independence on January 1, 1960, the language of instruction in Cameroonian schools as well as the educational policy were also modified following these changes of status. This country has therefore known throughout its educational history, an evolution which takes into account the domination of these imperialist powers, extending from 1884 to 1959 and the post-colonial period with a continuation of colonial education ranging from 1960 to the present day. Contexts justifying the popular assertion that: « any education system is the image of the society which is responsible for establishing and organizing it ». At the end of World War I and in application of the new status given by the League of Nations in 1916, eastern Cameroon came under French administration and western Cameroon under English administration. As for eastern Cameroon, France took matters into its own hands very early on. Thus, in the educational field, the French administration is the sole actor in national education policy; everything is centralized in his hands. It therefore adopted a new educational policy and clearly defined the teaching curriculum to be applied by French teachers and missionaries. The objective is to introduce civilization within this people which it qualifies as primitive, to spread and impose the French language (cf. the decree of October 1st 1920 formally consecrating French as the only language of education in the eastern part of Cameroon), to train native auxiliaries who will assist the French colonial administration and take over the country's political and economic spheres. It is appropriate to point out that France has applied an extreme, direct and assimilative language policy, which sets aside local languages both in the administration and in schools.

Education should be given only in the French language as specified in the letter from the High Commissioner of France to Cameroon, Jules-Cardre, addressed confidentially to his Heads of constituency on October 11, 1921. Here is an extract from this letter: « the French language is the only one in use in schools. Teachers are prohibited from using the languages of the country with their pupils. It is therefore absolutely necessary that you follow with the greatest care the campaign plan that I have drawn up for you, that you coordinate your efforts, all the efforts and that the methodical and well-concerted clearing (of the other languages) continues without haste. as without stopping (in order to concretize) our will to give to the populations of Cameroon the national language which they do not have and which can obviously only be that of the people to whom is devoted the sovereignty of the country» (Journal Official of the State of Cameroon, 1924). Two objectives were therefore assigned to the school: to provide the colonial administration with indigenous subordinate executives who are interpreters between the local populations and the colonizer and to establish acculturation by bringing Cameroonians to familiarize themselves with the language and culture of the colonizers: «The primordial condition of the success of our domination, of its duration, lies in the more or less rapid use of our language by the natives» (Merleau- Ponty, 1910). The importance of the language in the domination of the Cameroonian people by France appears here.

On the other hand, in West Cameroon, the British have opted for a language policy that integrates Cameroonians and does not put them outside the education system. This is indirect rule. Local languages were accepted alongside the English language in schools and administration in order to adapt the school to local
realities. In fact, it was the Cameroonian who were at the head of the schools and applied the policy decided by the British administrator. This indirect linguistic policy did not swallow up the local languages in use in the part of Cameroonian territory, subject to British administration, divided into two parts: Northern Cameroon and Southern Cameroon. The north of the British part was integrated into Nigeria during the referendum of 1961 and the south remaining in Cameroon. The two parts of Cameroon were united upon reunification in 1972. The main advantage of this policy was to reduce the necessary British colonial presence by relying on the natives of the occupied territory. The British strategy was thus inscribed in the continuity of the Protestant mission which had existed during the German period. The British administration was much less rigid than the French one.

For the British, it is fundamental that education is provided by four actors: the State, the Indigenous Leader who heads the school, the Church and parents. With indirect rule, the British determined educational policy and the Cameroonian indigenous chiefs ensured its application by making it endogenous to their socio-educational context. Values such as work, honesty, humanism, solidarity, discipline and sports practice were inculcated in Cameroonian students to form and strengthen their characters (Tabi-Manga, 2000: 54). Let us note in parenthesis that the British had a preference for boarding schools, also called boarding school schools. The British administration had authorized the use in schools of two local languages: the Douala language and the Ball language alongside the English language; and unofficially pidgin-English was starting to take off. Until 1943, schools should during the first two years provide instruction/education in the local language of the locality concerned. From the 3rd year, lessons were gradually introduced in the English language.

However, as early as 1956, the British administration categorically prohibited the unofficial use of pidgin-English in schools in its territory. And in 1958, the English administration chose English as the sole language of instruction / instruction, and the local Douala and Ball languages were relegated to the rank of mere local languages without official status. The situation is similar in eastern Cameroon where France had started to draw inspiration from the British experience of adding the local language alongside their language. But this linguistic policy of tolerance was brought to an end by the decision resulting from the Brazzaville Conference of 1944 which imposed French as the only language of instruction and exchange in schools and administration under French domination.

**Impact of religion and the United Nations on the revalorization of local Cameroonian languages and reaction of rejection by the Cameroonians themselves**

Indeed, under pressure from communities of various religious persuasions (Catholics, Protestants, etc.) who preferred the use of certain local languages during their exchanges with the population for more understanding of the message to be transmitted, as well as pressure from the international community under the aegis of the United Nations, France and England were forced to integrate local languages in schools and within the Cameroonian administration. The main reason for this pressure is the relaxation of their language policies which seem quite rigid and dehumanizing as regards France and a little rigid as regards England. Bowing to these pressures from the evangelists and the United Nations, France, for example, through its High Commissioner of the Republic in Cameroon, will grant local languages a place in the education system not as official languages, but as disciplines to be taught in schools as well as optional foreign languages such as English, German, Arabic or Spanish.

The paradox is that it was the Cameroonians themselves who rejected their local languages on the pretext that their languages were obsolete and presented less opportunity than those of the foreign Franco-British imperialist powers. Cameroonians preferred French and English, which gave them the impression of being emancipated. Very quickly, Cameroonian local languages lost all interest and notoriety in schools and no legislative or regulatory text was adopted for their emancipation as official languages or even less as autonomous disciplines to be integrated into the teaching curriculum. This psycho-linguistic extraversion by which these Cameroonians collectively despise their own local languages in favor of the languages of foreign imperialist powers, is harmful and enshrines a dangerous linguistic insecurity for these local languages. The “colonial school succeeded in teaching us to despise our own cultural values and to prefer the Western values. Our languages being part of our cultural values logically fall into this contempt” (Tadadjeu, 1988:13).

Thus, from the colonial period to that before independence in 1960, the linguistic physiognomy of Cameroon highlights, on the one hand, those like the missionaries who want Cameroonians' literacy to be done in local languages. For them, the ideal in the formation of the Cameroonian learner is that both teaching and evangelization should begin in local languages which he masters; this will avoid the intellectual alienation of the learner, even the absolute rejection of his origins and his culture. And on the other hand, those who maintain that the literacy of Cameroonians is done in official foreign languages, that is to say, those of the imperialist powers French and English also German. The main reason, as we have already mentioned, is to facilitate trade with the colonial administration and take advantage of the employment opportunities it offered as well as the prestige of speaking the Western language, the language that comes from elsewhere. It was in this climate in favor of Western languages, to the detriment of local languages, that Cameroon gained independence on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1960.

**Historiography of Cameroon’s language policy from independence to the 2000s: a new impetus of nationalist demand ranging from government inertia to concrete actions.**

After independence, Cameroonian nationalist movements began to demand both independence and the reunification of eastern and western Cameroon. This led the country to internal autonomy in 1959 and
independence; the country then took the name of Republic of Cameroon. These upheavals have impacted on the adoption of languages of instruction in schools in Cameroon. Indeed, if Cameroonian nationalists had campaigned so much for the promotion of local languages as official languages, Cameroon would now have two or three official local languages alongside French and English. The situation remained static until the post-independence period when President Ahmadou Ahidjo launched the PROPELCA project to analyze the different local Cameroonian languages and highlight the most widely spoken for each cultural area of the country.

Priority given to official foreign languages and attempt to promote local languages in the Cameroonian education system between 1963 - 2000

French-speaking or eastern Cameroon became independent on January 1, 1960, with French as the official language in education and administration. And on October 1, 1961, this part of Cameroon was attached to the southern part of western Cameroon by referendum. In view of this reunification, the Constitution of October 26, 1961 stipulates that the official languages of the Federal Republic of Cameroon are French for eastern Cameroon and English for western Cameroon, which has given rise to a juxtaposition of two states unilingual, federates each with their own education system. But the unification of these federated states of eastern and western Cameroon in 1972, led to the transition from juxtaposed bilingualism to generalized bilingualism where both languages are spoken in both parts of the country while maintaining the fact that the French-speaking part has its own education system and the anglophone part also has its own education system. The two official languages French-English have the same status and functions. It is for this reason that we speak of educational sub-systems; the whole of the two educational sub-systems constitutes the Cameroonian education system. These two languages are effective in all regions of Cameroon and the State is working for its promotion. The supremacy of imperialist foreign languages continues and from then on, the teaching of English was introduced at the level of secondary education in the French-speaking part and the teaching of French in that of English-speaking Cameroon. Even after independence, the languages of the former French and British colonizers remained the languages of teaching and communication; few efforts have been made by the state to promote local languages or to change their status to official languages; because the local, intellectual and ruling elite want to keep their social privileges by defending the status quo (Bijeljac-Babic, 1985:9).

In 1963, three years after independence, noting the worrying increase in illiteracy in his country and in order to remedy it, President Ahmadou Ahidjo launched the national literacy campaign and popular education prosaically called “school under the « tree »”. This school aims to teach people, regardless of their age group, to read and write French and/or English. Note that illiteracy is one of the major causes of poverty, an obstacle to personal development and the country's underdevelopment; because, it is difficult for the illiterate to seize the better opportunities which are available to him and which will change his condition of life. However, the failure of the « school under the tree » campaign will lead the Government to seek another way to alleviate the illiteracy of all Cameroonian. Thus in 1973, the Cameroonian Ministry of National Education will launch a reflection-debate on the introduction of local languages in the educational field and which will bring together Cameroonian linguists. From this government initiative, the project Atlas Linguistic of Cameroon (ALCAM) was born in 1974, which aims to identify, describe, enumerate and classify local Cameroonian languages. This project has identified more than 200 local languages in Cameroon.

Subsequently, in 1978, there was the Operational Research Program for Language Teaching in Cameroon called: PROPELCA. This program aims to study the contours allowing the insertion of local languages in education in Cameroon, starting by highlighting the local languages most spoken by the population in each cultural area, that is to say, languages learned simply without having to go to a classroom. These are languages learned in community within the family, in neighbourhoods, at the market, etc. Among the languages offered by PROPELCA, we cite foulfouldé (language of the Fulani) spoken in the far north in general; boulou and ewondo in the Center-Sud; the Duala and the Bakweri in Douala and Limbé, etc. However, the main languages authentically and indisputably spoken locally and vehicular in Cameroon are Beti-fang and Foulfouldé (Tabi-Manga, 2000). For PROPELCA, it is judicious to opt for teaching methods where it is necessary to teach the local language in an accentuated way at the level of the three 1st classes of the primary school (SIL, CP and CE1) and to decrease at the level of the three upper primary classes (CE2, CM1 and CM2). The two foreign languages (French and English) must be taught in a decreasing way; because, one of the explanatory factors for the lack of success of the education system in Cameroon is the non-mastery of foreign languages in which knowledge is transmitted.

This legacy of the colonial education system, which dissociates the African child from his environment and his own experiences, is a fundamental question that must be faced, with wisdom and vision (Thabo Mbeki, 1999). PROPELCA therefore started from the observation that Cameroonian learners speak their local language outside of school and the administration, very few of whom master the official languages in which knowledge is transmitted. This problem is the main cause of school failure (Sikounmo, 1992). From this observation, PROPELCA proposes that the Cameroonian education system leave its exogenous option of education, to embrace the endogenous one that takes into account our cultural reality, that is to say, to use local languages in education in Cameroon, starting by highlighting the contours allowing the insertion of local languages in education in Cameroon.
It is obvious that even in the local language of the young learner, we can very well explain the lessons of French, philosophy, natural science, history, mathematics, physics, etc. Language is a great cultural vector and the key to any culture is transmitted through the education system (Tadadjeu, 1988). Indeed, among the missions assigned to the school, we have the transmission of knowledge and the teaching of cultural values. And this teaching of values can only be efficient if and only if the Cameroonian learner rediscovers his culture and forges his own cultural identity. For this, it is appropriate that the education system adopts trilingualism in all schools in Cameroon, that is to say, French, English and a local language (choice according to the four cultural areas of the country) transformed in the official language. Thus, while learning about foreign culture in order to open up to the world, the Cameroonian learner learns the values specific to his culture and he remains attached to them. This will undoubtedly remedy the cultural divide imposed by the Western school.

Also in 1994, as a prelude to the preparation of the Estates General on education, all ten provinces of Cameroon were called upon to vote for or against the introduction of local languages in education. The response was unanimous: all the provinces voted in favor of their introduction. And during the Estates-General on Education which took place in May 1985, it was recommended that the Cameroonian Government include local languages in education. Hence the constitutional consecration of January 18, 1996 in Article 3 which, for the first time, mentions local / national languages: « The Republic of Cameroon adopts English and French as official languages of equal value. It guarantees the promotion of bilingualism throughout the territory. It works for the protection and promotion of national languages ». The Orientation Law of April 14, 1998 in its article 5 will reiterate the need to insert these languages into the Cameroonian education system in order to ensure the training of citizens rooted in their culture, open to the world and respectful of the interests general. This textual consecration continues and in 2007, with the new reform on the Competency-Based Approach, reflections were carried out in order to see the modalities of inserting courses on National Languages and National Cultures at the level of secondary education. School in Cameroon therefore continues to be a colonial, selective and political heritage which raises the issue of securing local languages in the face of the dominance of foreign languages inherited from colonization.

**From 2000 to the present day, local languages still do not have the status of official languages in Cameroon, despite the multiple language policies adopted**

Cameroon is rich in more than two hundred and sixty local languages, none of which has a legal consecration so that it can be transformed into an official language alongside French and English. Although PROPELCA has made it easier for the Government by identifying the local languages conducive to becoming official languages and instructing the Government to proceed upstream, with the training of teachers who will have to teach these languages in schools. It is in this sense that some training of trainers schools train teachers of these local languages because our history can inspire us to define our training needs and the type of man to be trained (Epah Fonkeng, 2004). Today, the Government tends to reconsider the place of culture in its education system and affirms: « all the languages spoken in Cameroon are an integral part of our heritage; that Cameroon undertakes to implement the reforms necessary for the introduction of Cameroonian languages in education after popular consultation leading to a consensus on the most appropriate modalities; that the functional and permanent literacy program in the national language will be developed» (Cameroonian Charter of Culture, 1991). In addition, it places the responsibility for choosing these languages and monitoring their applicability to the decentralized powers; or even to the Regions (2004 law applicable to the Regions). It's still not a question of giving them the legal status of official languages, but rather, of inserting them as a teaching discipline.

Despite these linguistic legislations, it is evident that the Law of 1946 continues to be in force and the Cameroonian Government is making a lot of effort for the promotion of French-English bilingualism and very little effort for the evolution of local languages into languages official. The colonial legacy continues, therefore, so doe’s language policy. And with regard to this official French-English bilingualism, Cameroon is a member of both La Francophonie and the Commonwealth. Today, a sad observation emerges: despite the consecration of French-English bilingualism, very few Cameroonians are perfectly bilingual and even, the correct expression of French or English, both orally and in writing. It's not easy for most Cameroonians. New languages have been created from the contact between the two official languages and the local ones; we cite Franfouloudé (mixture of Foulfoulé and French), Pidgin, Camfranglais (mixture of local dialect, French and English), etc. It is important to point out that in schools; Cameroonian learners make use of these composite languages to the point of linguistic insecurity in the proper use of French and English. But this linguistic insecurity differs from that of local languages where some authors come to speak of the theory of the dead language, that is to say, of languages which disappear by default of its use by the population.

The death of a language (Mounin, 1991) with regard to the linguistic situation of Cameroon is a gradual disappearance of one or more local languages due to its non-use by several people and over a long period of time. Also, this disappearance is facilitated by the dominating presence of another external language which therefore leads to the decline of these local languages. This biased consideration of local Cameroonian languages by the Cameroonian Government is gradually leading to the abandonment of the expression of certain local languages. This neglect or the non-spoken language of a language therefore leads to its disappearance (Bitjaa-Kody Z. D., 2000). Hence, the
theory of the death of local Cameroonians languages, limited to herd and family use, risk really disappearing if the conditions for their emergence, and even their survival, are not taken. Clearly, officially, these languages have no official status, therefore, they are not official languages used in education, or in the audio-visual press and even less in the Cameroonian administration. In the minds of the majority of Cameroonians, social success is synonymous with speaking the official languages inherited from the French and English imperialist powers.

The recent deployment of the Cameroonian Government which seeks through its laws to insert these local languages as a subject to be taught in schools on the same basis as Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, etc., is a major proof that local languages Cameroonians are endangered. It is a gesture of rescue that the Government has adopted even though it is itself, through the content of its educational and linguistic policies, through the promotion of French-English bilingualism to the detriment of local languages that the latter disappear. All this reflects an obvious linguistic insecurity (Haugen, 1962).

**Understanding the linguistic insecurity of local languages in the education system: securing local languages means securing the cultural identities of Cameroonians**

Linguistic insecurity in Cameroon is explained by the fact that the two languages inherited from colonization and possessing a strong technological culture, dominate the two hundred and sixty local Cameroonian languages by practically monopolizing the country’s language policy. Hence, Cameroon is membership in Francophonie, for the heritage of French; and the Commonwealth for English. Article 2 of the Government Instruction of 1996 specifies that «from the date of publication of this instruction, laws, decrees, decisions, instructions, circulars and memoranda will be prepared, signed and published in French and in English». As for the Government Instruction of 1998 in its article 38, it is said: « our Constitution stipulates that Cameroon is a bilingual country which adopts English and French as official languages of equal value and which guarantees the promotion of bilingualism throughout its territory. The Prime Minister, members of the Government and public officials at all levels are required to work for the development of bilingualism. The Secretary-General of the Presidency of the Republic is especially responsible for the promotion of bilingualism: he designs and draws up the bilingualism policy at the national level, ensures the linguistic quality of acts taken by the public authorities and, if necessary, he proposes to the Head of State any measure aimed at improving the use of these two official languages». We also cite the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, created in 2017, headed by former Cameroonian Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musongue. This body works more for French-English bilingualism. What about our local languages?

Yet it is necessary that we go beyond the experiences here and there of training and educational institutions, so that we go beyond the heterogeneity that we read there for homogeneity of the choice of local languages to teach by all schools belonging to the same geographical area. Because, as we have already mentioned, there are primary and secondary schools that teach one or two local languages of the geographic area in which these schools are located. This is the case of the classical and modern high school of Ngaoundéré which teaches optionally for learners the Fulfuldé, Hausa and Dourou languages. The high school in Burkina teaches another language there, and the majority of establishments do not teach these local languages, but rather prefer foreign languages like the Chinese language, the Italian language for example. It is for this reason that we affirm that, despite its multiculturality, the Cameroonian Government has deliberately neglected its local languages. There is hardly any official program to promote local Cameroonian languages as is the case with French and English which are foreign languages.

Consequently, if language is fundamentally a crucial element of social organization and the development of a country (Djité, 1991: 122), then finding palliatives to this linguistic insecurity becomes vital for the emancipation of an entire people, or even a whole country, more precisely Cameroon. Because « a people can only know the destiny that its educational system has forged for it, when this is an authentic local product, there is no need to worry as it harmonizes with the requirements of its environment. But, its ruin begins the day when a victorious enemy from afar undertakes with determination to impose on him an education in accordance with his imperialist designs, foreign to the mentality of his victims, ignorant of their local realities and their basic needs» (Sikounmo, 1992: 7). This last point characterizes the Cameroonian education system which is a colonial heritage, an import from outside whose languages of instruction are those of the foreign imperialist powers. This Cameroonian multilingualism, characterized by inequality in relations with the two co-official languages, generates linguistic conflicts (Ebongué and Angélíne, 2018).

Local languages occupy a neglected place in education in Cameroon, which is nevertheless one of the most plural in the world, linguistically, culturally and ethnically. Made up of around two hundred and sixty local languages, it is on the contrary the foreign languages, French and English, resulting from Franco-British imperialism which constitutes the two official languages of education and communication in Cameroon. This institutional and official bilingualism cannot lead Cameroon towards its real economic take-off. What makes us optimistic is to discover that, a few years after independence, Cameroonian linguists studied certain local languages, identifying their scripts in order to introduce them to primary and secondary schools in Cameroon; this, with a view to generating sustainable development and development for all in a secure linguistic environment.

**Pragmatic presentation of the trilingualism policy in education in Cameroon: a well thought-out proposal to be adopted by the Government for a successful trilingual education.**

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In Cameroon, there are two major languages which have the status of official languages: French and English (Shell and Wiesemann, 2000: 39); on the other hand, there are about 100 local languages, but no local language in this country is officially considered in the education system as a language of instruction. To overcome this, we are proposing the trilingual education policy which has many advantages. Thus, after presenting the policy of linguistic assimilation in the Cameroon education system in an informative manner, we will develop the palliative solution that we have found through the adoption of trilingualism in education. This solution will undoubtedly remedy the neglect of local languages where, despite the existence of more than two hundred local languages in Cameroon (Breton and Fohtung, 1991; Bitjaa Kody, 2003), none of these languages has acquired the privilege of official language status and therefore do not constitute languages of instruction. With trilingualism, it is not a question of eliminating the languages of the French and English imperialist powers which have the status of co-official languages and are used as languages of instruction in Cameroon schools. It is about promoting local languages alongside these two co-official foreign languages. Because, as Tadadjeu pointed out, access to basic knowledge through the use of local languages is the keystone of an education system which, while reflecting the socio-cultural relations from which emanates and in which is part of daily life, will at the same time ensure a wider opening of minds to other horizons.

Therefore, in this subsection we will show how this policy of trilingualism in education will be applied; and how this local language policy will remedy the problem of linguistic assimilation and the mortality of certain local languages because, the valuation of a language indisputably leads to that of the culture it conveys since these two concepts are linked (Assoumou, 2007) all presented the teaching of the language as equivalent to the teaching of culture.

**Acceptance of trilingualism in the Cameroonian education system and the option of local languages of instruction according to the different socio-cultural contexts in Cameroon.**

To make efficient and optimize the training of learners in Cameroon, it is appropriate that the Government adopts a reflective trilingual education. Indeed, drawing inspiration from the PROPELCA proposal we have already spoken about, it can adopt by cultural area, the most widely spoken local language and harmonize it at the level of all educational institutions in this cultural area. Indeed, Cameroon is made up of four cultural areas which are: Sudano-Sahelian, Fang-beti, Coastal and Grassland. Each of these cultural areas has its own peculiarities which constitute its specificity and richness. Note that the expression cultural area refers to a geographical whole within which we find on the one hand cultural features such as language and religious practice and on the other hand common material features such as custom and fashion. life of the population. Thus, the local language to be adopted in education is the language most spoken by the population of each cultural area.

Therefore, there are four local languages that must be adopted by the legislature in order for them to acquire the status of official languages or even co-official languages in education.

It should be noted that not all of these four local languages will be used in all Cameroon schools. In fact, it is trilingualism for each cultural area; therefore, a local language alongside French and English in each cultural area. The trilingualism that we advocate here goes beyond functional and extensive trilingualism; it is therefore a theory based on the mastery, orally as well as in writing, of three languages: the local language of the cultural area concerned and officially adopted by the Constitution, and the two official foreign languages that are French and English. In addition, during the first three years of primary education, education must be strictly given in the official local language of the cultural area concerned. After these three years, taking into account the French or English part, French or English is gradually introduced. Let's develop pragmatically.

Indeed, the Sudano-Sahelian cultural area is located in the northern part of the country. This is the Far North made up of three regions: the Adamawa region (Ngoundéré), the North region (Garoua) and the Far North region (Maroua). These three regions have for common linguistic denominator: the Foulfouldé language which is fundamentally the language specific to the Peuhl. Indeed, this language "assumes a utilitarian function. It accompanies the progress of Islamization but it is also used for commercial transactions on the market of the plains where more and more mountain populations remain pagan. It is also the unofficial language of administration in this region. This is a dominant language whose expansion correlates with the political destiny of an ethnic group (the Foulife / Peuhl) and of a religion, Islam "(ORSTOM, 1983). This means that the local language to be officially adopted concerning this cultural area is Foulfouldé.

The Coastal Area is made up of the Great Bantu people found in the coastal region. Here, we offer the Douala language. Linguists with the legislator will be able to decide on the choice of one of these two proposed languages.

The Fang-Beti area is located in the tropical forest of the Center, East and South of the country. In this cultural area, we offer the Beti language.

Grassland area is the area specific to the Bamilekes and English speakers of the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. The official local language we offer here is Pidgin-English.

**Importance of didactic materials and teaching curricula concerning the local languages which will acquire the status of co-official teaching languages.**

Clearly, the policy of trilingualism in linguistic planning in Cameroon will allow the development of a new physiognomy of the Cameroon school where Cameroonians will be educated in the cultural values of this country and will be effectively rooted in their culture. Also, beyond identifying the languages that will be used in education, it will be necessary to think about the production of school textbooks as well as teaching curricula for the four local languages offered for
official language status. Publishers must ensure that the content of these textbooks effectively conveys Cameroonian values. In this way, parents’ prejudices about the need to use local languages in the transmission of knowledge at school will be erased. Let us reiterate, after colonization, a good number of Cameroonians were resistant to teaching local languages to their offspring in schools; which has led to its use being reduced to the family circle and gradually dying out. In order to compensate for these languages which are dying out, we have proposed this trilingualism in the education system.

The education system is a major vehicle for promoting languages. This system revitalizes a language and increases the number of its users. Clearly, the development of local languages through the education system will make it possible to resolve this problem raised by dead languages or languages which are gradually becoming extinct. In short, language is a socio-educational product, a human resource which can bring money to those who exploit it (Mba, 2001: 39) such as the Publishers of school textbooks in local languages who will benefit from funding and support the purchase of these books by the parents of the learners. The trilingualism must be officially adopted in the Cameroonian education system, and why not move towards quadrilingualism if this is in favor of the teaching of local culture.

Conclusion

Fight cultural imperialism, promote cultural roots and adopt trilingualism in the Cameroonian education system

The present article that we have just developed is entitled: « neglect of local languages in the Cameroonian education system: towards an emphasis on the linguistic assimilation policy?». Among the ideas developed, we examined the notion of linguistic insecurity which is the corollary of the rather neglected place that the Cameroonian education system gives to its local languages, unlike the prominent place given to the official French-English languages which are nevertheless foreign languages. However, the use of some local languages with official language status in education in Cameroon, such as Douala and Ball, dates back to the time of German colonization. After the Germans, the French and British imperialists wanted to linguistically degermanise the country. From then on, local languages no longer had the status of official languages; only French and English have acquired this status, thus raising the problem of efficiency and effectiveness of the country’s language policy. However, tapping into our sources, our cultural identity is a necessity for the type of man that the Cameroonian state wants to train. For this, Cameroon must go beyond what it received from the colonial period, which excludes the official use of languages other than those of the Franco-British settlers in education and administration. It must now ensure a legislative consecration of official languages to some of our local languages so that they are integrated harmoniously and clearly into our education system.

To the Government, we propose the official adoption of trilingualism: the two official foreign languages and the chosen local languages. This constitutional consecration will give value to the consideration that everyone will have of our local languages. It is only in this case that we will indeed have Cameroonian learners open to the world and well rooted in their culture. Ki-Zerbo (1990) is therefore right to say: « where the tree is rooted, it draws from the depths of the underlying culture, but it is also open to multifaceted exchanges; it is not walled up and sealed. So it is by being deeply rooted that we are ready for all openings». In other words, it is quite possible for the Cameroonian Government to promote French and English without neglecting the local languages which constitute the linguistic identity of the Cameroonian people. It is important that the status of local languages in Cameroon changes to evolve into official languages according to the naturally most spoken languages by cultural area. Being open to the world does not mean abandoning its culture and therefore its language. We are aware of the current dilemma of some Cameroonians supporting the current evolution of the status of local languages into official languages and others rejecting this change of status by preferring the current situation. The Cameroonian Government should be inspired by the endogenous linguistic model of Nigeria, Senegal, etc., which have established official language status for some of their local languages according to the linguistic diversity of these countries. It is only at this price that the linguistic emancipation of Cameroon will begin; this was reiterated during the 2nd Reflection Workshop on Cameroon’s National Language Policy (UNESCO, 2020).

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