

Original Research Article

A Harmonized Code System for Cameroon Pidgin English

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Abstract

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Cameroon Pidgin English is widely spoken in Cameroon. Some people even have it as a mother tongue. Cameroon Pidgin English is informally used among family, friends, clients and also in some churches. Cameroon Pidgin English is not only spoken but also written. We find this written version in WhatsApp chats, sms', billboards and christian literature. The researcher noticed that in all these avenues, the orthography versions of Cameroon Pidgin English are many. Some versions have English language orthography, others have an orthography similar to our Cameroon languages, others are spelt exactly the way they are pronounced. Examples are as follows: "God he go join all people for all country, and he go give them peace for God he king - country." (Extract from a Catholic Sunday Missal). In this version, the orthography is mostly English. Consider another example from a WhatsApp group chat: "I see as e di progress and e b di still type na e weh I say make I wait. But e b like sey e don land. "In another, "A hear say torning coco go dey for Sunday. "These differences in orthography are of interest to the researcher. Data were collected from WhatsApp group chats, sms', billboards, christian literature and random translations from some individuals. This study attempts to describe the differences in orthography and raise an awareness of a need for a unified code system for Cameroon Pidgin English. It is true that developing some Cameroonian native languages will help preserve the languages. It is also true that upgrading the use of the English language will solve some language problems, given the decline of the English language in the country (Abang E. (2020)). However, it should be noted that Cameroon Pidgin English has become the mother tongue of many Cameroonians. Cameroon Pidgin English is used by many Cameroonians and has the structure and some vocabulary of some Cameroonian native languages. Therefore practically, Cameroonians identify more with their Pidgin English than with the standard English language. It is with this argument that this study justifies its preeminence over the study of the English language.

Keywords: Harmonized, code system, Cameroon Pidgin English

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon Pidgin English is widely spoken in Cameroon. Some people even have it as a mothertongue. Cameroon Pidgin is informally (Romaine Suzanne, 2005) used among family, friends, clients, and also in some

churches. Cameroon Pidgin English is not only spoken but also written. We find this written version in WhatsApp chats, sms', billboards, and Christian literature. The introduction of this paper will be closely followed by a

statement of the problem, then the objectives of the research. The methodology comes immediately after, to inform the audience on the research design used. We will have a justification of the study before the presentation of data. Discussions will follow before conclusions made.

Statement of the Problem

The researchers noticed that in all the aforementioned avenues (WhatsApp chats, sms', billboards and Christian literature), the orthography versions of Cameroon Pidgin English are many. Some versions have English language orthography, others have orthography similar to some Cameroonian languages, and others are spelt exactly the way they are pronounced.

Objectives

This study attempts to describe the differences in orthography and raise awareness of a need for a unified code system for Cameroon Pidgin English. And also to propose a suitable code system for Cameroon Pidgin English.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research. Data were collected from WhatsApp group chats, sms', billboards, Christian literature, and random translations from some Pidgin English speakers. Data were analyzed descriptively.

Justification of the Study

It is true that developing some Cameroonian native languages will help preserve the languages. It is also true that upgrading the use of the English language will solve some language problems, given the decline of the English language in the country (Abang E. (2020)). However, it should be noted that Cameroon Pidgin English has become the mothertongue of many Cameroonians (Gratien G. Atindogbe and Evelyn Fogwe Chibaka (2012, pg 216) and Hans Fonka (2019 pg 100). Cameroon Pidgin English is used by many Cameroonians and has the structure and some vocabulary of some Cameroonian native languages. Therefore practically, Cameroonians identify more with their Pidgin English than with the Standard English language (Vakunta Peter, 2017).

Leonel Fongang (2019) proposed an orthographic convention for Cameroon Pidgin English. The orthographic convention he proposed draws from the General Alphabet of Cameroon Languages (GACL). According to him, it suits Cameroon Pidgin English because of

accuracy, consistency, familiarity and harmonization. However his study did not take into consideration that there were several varieties of the written form of Cameroon Pidgin English, not just two, which needed harmonization. Besides, "designing orthography for a language is an essential part of its status and corpus planning (Mensah E, Ukaegbu E and Ngong B. (2021).

N. Neba, Evelyn Fogwe Chibaka and Gratien G. Atindogbe (2006) view Cameroon Pidgin English as a blessing in disguise. This is because the general perception of Cameroon Pidgin English is that, Cameroon Pidgin English is a non-standard language and should thus not be used in school premises. The authors hold a contrary view that Cameroon Pidgin English should be adopted as a pedagogical language in cities and other urban centers in Cameroon. Therefore in liase with the present paper, a unified code system should therefore be established. It is with these arguments that this study justifies its preeminence over the study of the English language.

Presentation of Data

Extracts from Some WhatsApp Chats

- (1) 'I see as e di progress and e b di still type na e weh I say make I wait. But e b like sey e don land.'
- (2) "please I nodi understand Mary again ohhhhhh"
- (3) "Which be say you no di understand Mary"
- (4) "Sandra dong last talk ei true"
- (5) "That is eh. We're celebrating someone's achievement , how we get for commot for dey start nah with you being lonely and needing a husband while you're still young□"
- (6) "na the tin pass me too so. So Susan get to resolve e loneliness na for forum?"
- (7) "Mo u don even c weri sef?"
- (8) "Dier ris more ohh"
- (9) "Na only Chloe change style"
- (10) "That marret be really boil□□"

In the above examples, let us take note of the following spellings: I, e, b, weh, sey. These same words are spelt differently in other versions.

'I' sometimes is written as 'a'

'E' sometimes is written as 'yi' or 'he'

'B' sometimes is written as 'be'

'Weh' sometimes is written as 'wey' or 'way'

'Sey' sometimes is written as 'say'

'don' sometimes is written as 'dong'

Let us consider another example,

- (11) 'A hear say torning coco go dey for Sunday.'

Here we notice that 'I' in the first example is represented here as 'a'. 'Sey' in the first example is represented here as 'say'. Some sources would represent 'torning' as 'turning'.

Extracts from SMS'

(1) 'I beg make dem put moontiger for room cos of mosquitoes. E dey for that drawer for room. I dey road di cam.'

(2) "No be them sey no yaourt □"

(3) "Eske Accra be dey involve for the matter? □"

(4) "Hope sey no man amongst us di still chop eru, cornchaff etc"

(5) " na them this. Over like eru and cornchaff□□□"

Let us take note of the following spellings from the above sms: I, dem, for, e, dey, that, cam. Here again, we see how some written forms are different.

'dem' sometimes is written as 'them'

'for' sometimes is written as 'fo'

'that' sometimes is written as 'dat'

'cam' sometimes is written as 'come' or 'came' or 'kam'.

Let us consider another example,

(6) 'I be send message for Jeff e fone fo ask am but e neva read d message since dat tym.'

Once more, let us take note of the following spellings: I, be, for, e, fone, fo, neva, d, dat, tym.

'fone' sometimes is written as 'phone'

'neva' sometimes is written as 'never'

'tym' sometimes is written as 'time' or 'tyme' or 'taim'

'd' sometimes is written as 'di'.

Extracts from Christian Literature

'God he go join all people for all country, and he go give them peace for God he king - country.'

(Extract from a Catholic Sunday Missal)

Here again, we are called to consider the following spellings: he, all, people, for, country, them. The spellings here are mostly tilted towards the English orthography.

'all' sometimes is written as 'ol' or 'oll'

'people' sometimes is written as 'pipol' or 'pipo'

'country' sometimes is written as 'contry' or 'contri' or 'kontry' or 'kontri'.

Let us consider a second example, still from a Catholic prayer book.

'... how e been be for begin, e must be just now, for all time, and for life weh e no go finish, Amen.'

(Gloria Patri in Cameroon Pidgin English)

Let us note the following spellings: how, e, been, be for, must, now, all, time, life, weh.

'how' sometimes is written as 'haw' or 'ha'

'been' sometimes is written as 'be'

'must' sometimes is written as 'most' or 'mos'

'now' sometimes is written as 'naw' or 'na'.

'time' sometimes is written as 'tym' or 'tyme' or 'taim'

'weh' sometimes is written as 'wey'

DISCUSSION

From the data presented, it can be noticed that there are

some words that have different spellings. For example, 'dem' presented sometimes as 'them'

'for' presented sometimes as 'fo'

'that' presented sometimes as 'dat'

'cam' presented sometimes as 'come' or 'came' or 'kam'.

'B' presented sometimes as 'be'

'Weh' presented sometimes as 'wey' or 'way'

'Sey' presented sometimes as 'say'

It should be noted that the difference in orthography is not influenced by its environment. Proof of this is when we have 'weh' and 'wey' in the same prayer book which refers to the same thing (that), in English language. Secondly, we notice that the differences in spelling are influenced by either the English orthography or the exact way the words are pronounced. Even when it comes to the exact way the words are pronounced, we still find several varieties. Examples include:

'Weh' presented sometimes as 'wey' or 'way'

'cam' presented sometimes as 'come' or 'came' or 'kam'.

'time' sometimes is written as 'tym' or 'tyme' or 'taim'

'how' sometimes is written as 'haw' or 'ha'

'must' sometimes is written as 'most' or 'mos'

'now' sometimes is written as 'naw' or 'na'.

'all' sometimes is written as 'ol' or 'oll'

'people' sometimes is written as 'pipol' or 'pipo'

'country' sometimes is written as 'contry' or 'contri' or 'kontry' or 'kontri'.

'E' sometimes is written as 'yi' or 'he'

CONCLUSION

The question now is, given that Pidgin English is inevitably used by many Cameroonians as a form of communication in conversations, in the markets, in churches and in both written and spoken forms, should we therefore have a unified code? If yes, we propose the adoption of the variation that stems from the direct pronunciation of the words. This is because from the data collected, the variation that stems from the direct pronunciation of the words gives the Pidgin English language, its own identity. It would thus not be mistaken for or likened to poor English grammar.

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