

CPE as a Social Practice: Creativity and Dynamism as an Aspect of Communication in Multilingual Contexts.

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Abstract

This paper explores the misrepresentation of third world societies due to lack of actual experience of its contexts. Drawing from the concept language as a social practice, this paper relies on a multi-sited ethnography to argue that attempts to fit multilingual practices into a monolingual framework may not only hinder verbal expression from the masses but also delay development. By focusing on various scholarly works, the article draws from extensive cultural practices that portray a diverse and multilingual country, Cameroon which if allowed to explore her linguistic potentials, may engender greater possibilities of development and communication not just within Cameroon but also across the rest of Africa and beyond. The article shows that linguistic practices of social agent are a way of live and hence, natural for multilingual speakers to a mixed different forms and styles of language and to Tran's language for communication purposes. From this study, CPE is shown to have developed and to have adopted the status of a common language that cuts across linguistic, social and international boundaries. Thus this study identifies the dilemma of reproducing social structures and performing social practices and identities.

Key Words: Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), Identity, language, communication

Introduction

This paper examines misrepresentation of third world countries because of the lack first-hand experience of its background and contexts. The study recognises language as one of the major expressions of identity and 'the historic memory of a people' (Hasanli-Garibova, 2014:310). It is an exploration of the interplay between creativity and constraint, documenting the nuts-and-bolts of structuralism and social construction. With Africa, taken as multi-ethnic, this work uses the Cameroonian culture consisting of approximately 230 to 282 different linguistic groups and, including Cameroon Pidgin English which to many plays the role of a mother tongue (Ayafor 2006, Bobda, 2006, Echu 2006) as a case study. According to the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, the country has more than 240 linguistic groups, found in three main ethnic groups namely the Equatorial Bantus, Semi-Bantus and the Sudanese (Presidency of the Republic). Same would apply in the Congos like most sub-Saharan countries with heavy multilingualism and much linguistic diversity due to the many ethnic groups.

Before independence, Cameroon consisted of French and British mandated territories, taken from the Germans during the First World War. The Anglo-French division, aimed at preparing Cameroon for independence. Today, this divide has served to form two major political identities namely the Anglophone (English) and Francophone (French) identities. French and English are the official languages, which are spoken by 75 per cent and 25 per cent of the population respectively. Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE, arguably a Creole) is a locally developed language not linked with a specific tribe, region, religion, or any colonial heritage but is spoken by almost everyone in the country (Alobwede D'Epie 1998).

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The central question in this paper is whether embracing CPE as official language suffices to reduce the identity crisis in Cameroon and promote cultural heritage and whether, this can also improve the reproduction of Knowledge. This paper suggests that the actual problem seems to be that of a monolingual bias which usually frowns at the usage of two or more languages and the continuous misconception of the official languages as superior (Pavelenko & Blackledge 2004).

This paper considers the perspective of language as a cultural struggle (Agha 2007) to assess the interesting challenge of language as a social practice (Pennycook 2010) as is the case with Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), which is used as a resource to promote cultural identity (Neba et al. 2006, Echu, 2003, 2006). Here multilingual contexts are treated as open-ended and creative spaces for language intersection thereby, bringing to for the Bakhtinian concept of multivocality given that multivocality establishes multiplicity as starting point of language analysis. The multiplicity of CPE is visible in the way this language draws from the many national languages, the two official languages and Portuguese (Todd 1990). Moreover, all ethnic groups in Cameroon make use of this language, bringing into it a specific flavour that reflects the local context. This paper reviews several related concepts which show how a Cameroonian national language, CPE, although often manipulate by state institutions, continues to thrive as way of life and, reflects the lived experiences of social agents.

Cultural globalisation

This section, examines the notion of cultural glocalisation, homogenisation, and globalisation in the construction of the self and the other. This paper puts side-by-side varied and contradictory notions to determine the essence of homogeneity and heterogeneity in postmodern African societies. Given that these notions have already been considerably used in scholarly works, the author closely examines the notion of neighbourhoods, arguing that the global transforms the local in as much as it is itself being transformed by the local. In other words, we live in a historical era wherein the local and the global are co-implicated in complex and unexpected ways (cf. Shi-Xu, 2007). Such analysis will necessarily include an evaluation of notions of scales, place, and territoriality in the construction of different identities in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Looking at Appadurai's view on space (what he to call 'neighbourhood' or 'context'), the notions of heterogeneity and multiple selves become apparent. Like Modan (2007) and Richards, (2003) Appadurai asserts that global and local realities may differ from context to context and from person to person; that is, a person may signal a certain identity in one context but signal a completely different one in another context.

Following from this, Anchimbe observes, 'it deals with identity creation' and not "identity concealment" and the adoption of (extra) linguistic and cultural elements shared within one in-group where one finds his/herself and where one belongs by virtue of birth and/or educational background (Anchimbe, 2007:15-16). Consequently, the construction of identities is a process wherein each generation inscribes onto it, the marks of its time.

Accordingly, Appadurai (1996) recognises the complexities of the question of identity and situates it in the de-territorialised contexts when he defines this concept (of de-territorialisation) in terms such as "the image", "the imagined," and "the imaginary," stating these terms direct us to something critical and new global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined by more concrete purposes and structures), (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organised field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organised practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility [...]. The central problem of today's global interaction is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization. (Appadurai, 1996:31-32).

In this article, the above quote is reverberated in form of monolingual biases on issues of identity construction in multicultural contexts. In view of the differences between the homogenous and heterogeneous literature on the issues of identity, Appadurai recognises that the monolingual-based perspectives have gone far afield with vast empirical facts to bear on their side (cf. Anchimbe, 2007; Shi-Xu, 2007). These homogenous arguments, as circulated by some, international bodies and social scientists, usually focus around Americanisation or commoditisation and sometimes around both these aspects.

The argument here is that, monolingual and homogenous biases obscure the connections between the processes of social modernisation (Appadurai, 1996) and this according to Hacksley et al. (2007) and Shi-Xu, (2007) limits the appreciation of the hybrid third-world linguistic landscape and as such, other accounts on identity construction are also obscured. CPE is one such third world multi-layered linguistic landscape often ostracised and entreated to be ignored. This notwithstanding, CPE was the language used throughout the German colonial period from 1884-1916 (cf. Bobda 2001) despite all attempts to crush it. Apart from the role of lingua franca CPE plays which draws together speakers from diverse ethno linguistic backgrounds in Cameroon, and in the Diaspora. CPE also serves as a language of trade, of the radio, army, civil service, and the newspaper and, is used by most missionaries in the churches and politicians to effectively communicate messages to a wider population (cf. Ayafor, 2006, Neba et. al. 2006, Echu, 2004, 2003).

While it is important to improve on English and French utilised in the so called bilingual system of education in Cameroon, with respect to teaching methodology, it is equally important for scholars to recognise the role socio-political and historic factors may have on learning and mastery of course material through a specific language(s). While many might have argued that mother tongue is important for students' success at school and Universities, a few scholars of the so-called third world diasporic status (particularly Congo) show how students' identity "(trans)formation in given socio-economic ecologies and real life inform[s] our intellectual approaches to languages contact and language change/creation [...]" (Mufwene, 2001).

In the same vein, it has been shown that students at the University would discuss their lecture preparation, examinations and test in one of the South African indigenous languages before translating and writing it in English, the institutional language for submission (Mai, 2005). This emphasises the need to recognise and accept the various linguistic resources which students create and bring the classrooms in a bit to integrate their socio-cultural, historic, and political schemain order to provide a familiar setting for teaching and learning. This in essence is Tran's languaing, a term which is gradually gaining momentum within African education (Boakye and Mai 2016).

Enduring Attempts to 'Unlearn' CPE

Attempts to discourage the language that had been used as lingua franca in Cameroon since 1880s (Todd²) is what I have dubbed as "attempts to unlearn CPE". In Cameroon, this is still seen glaringly in many institutions where CPE is considered a problem that should be avoided at all costs. For instance, the University of Buea (UB) is filled with billboards prohibiting the usage and speaking of CPE in various forms among which are expressions as: no pidgin on campus, succeed at university by avoiding Pidgin on campus, English, the language that guarantees upward social mobility, Pidgin is like AIDS - Shun it, English is the Password, not Pidgin ... (Dibussi 2006, Bobda 2006).

It is based on these accusations and the stigmatisation against CPE that most Cameroonians think CPE is not fit to be a national language and that any attempt to talk about it internationally is but gibberish (Mai 2012). This attitude has extended even among the Cameroonians immigrants in Cape Town who tend to shy away from CPE and some even argue that CPE is too mean a language to be spoken by the Cameroonians as it destroys their prospects of exploring the English dominating world (cf. Mai 2012). But Mai (2012) has demonstrated that those Cameroonians, who deny CPE in most cases, are very much dependent on this language. Again, Mai (2016) has shown that CPE crosses linguistic, cultural and social boundaries by showing how a group of University students in Cape Town, South Africa continue to use this language to socialise and help one another morally and financially.

Hence, the apparent denial of CPE is so because social actors tend to "live out the requirements of the prevailing ideologies" (Widdicombe, 1998:200) under the illusion that they have freely chosen their way of life. In this way, social actors further confirm how certain languages are appropriated by the state institutions in the construction and negotiation of particular identities. To an even greater extent multilingual Cameroonians tend to confirm that language choices in multilingual contexts are embedded in larger social political economic and cultural systems. This means those of the third world society are either culturally or mentally independent for they are ruled by Western ideologies and religions; their music, ideas and images dominate their airwaves and their minds (Pavlenko and

²<http://www.hawaii.edu/satocenter/langnet/definitions/cameroon.html>

Blackledge 2004, Mignolo 2009, Césaire 1972, Fanon 1967). The above claim is demonstrated in Cape Town when they very persons who renounce CPE, would use the same language in its renunciation (cf. Mai 2012).

This claim is seen as the most futile struggle because one cannot break out of language by finding words that takes their meaning directly from the world, from non-language (Derrida 1995). In other words, CPE is a way of live for most Cameroonians; a social practice, and to deny them the right of speaking and using this language is to kill creativity and discourage scholarship. This article therefore argues that to rejecting CPE and, to deny Cameroonians the right to live out their daily practices. This is tantamount to denying them the right to freely demonstrates their creatively by bringing various linguistic resources into play and, in ways that are also both structured and structuring during the interactional moment (Heller, 2007).

7. Conclusion

Clearly, language is represented as “[t]he words reflect[ing] the way of life, the society in which they are used” (Hasanli-Garibova, 2014). Therefore, utilising only French and English in education as well as in official day-to-day operations may exclude many of the indigenous Cameroonian people from important national issues, such as national development given that many Cameroonians neither comprehend the content of instruments like the Constitution of their country, which is a fundamental legal document that gives meaning to their lives. This causes that the operationalisation of the State to be largely an elitist affair. This notwithstanding, English and French texts reveal multiple influences from national (indigenous) languages including CPE. Such a mix, expresses the extent to which cultural dynamism, linguistic vitality, and language contact may give rise to new forms of expression (Echu, 2006:2). Consequently, CPE apart from facilitating communication in Cameroon could promote creativity educational advancement and enable people to continue to exercise their linguistic rights in a time of globalisation where many languages come into contact.

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