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# Explicating some prepositional usages in Cameroon English

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Describing direction and location in Cameroon

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## Introduction

This study investigates a number of non-interference sources of some Cameroon English (CamE) prepositional usages. It is based on the observation that the investigation of causes or sources of *post-colonial Englishisms* (peculiarities of newer varieties of English spoken in former English and American colonies) has so far favoured the interference factor. More clearly, post-colonial English (PCE) specificities have generally been attributed to the influence of the speakers' other tongues on their (English) production (see, for example, Platt et al., 1984; Mbangwana, 1989; Bokamba, 1992; Gramley & Pätzold, 1992; Asante, 1995). Although the interference factor is indeed easily perceptible in CamE, it is interesting to note that other factors might have played a major role in the emergence of English in Cameroon. In reality, there are several non-contrastive causes that could underlie some grammatical constructions of PCE in general and CamE in particular. Many such causes are being studied, especially at the phonological level. However, few studies have been devoted to the non-interference sources of CamE grammatical usages in general and preposition use in particular. This paper will thus examine how CamE speakers use prepositions to express direction and location. From the analysis, non-interference sources of a good number of CamE specificities such as the colonial factor, logicalization, analogy and tacit national norm seem to be some of the autonomous routes unconsciously used by CamE speakers to yield a variety of English that markedly differs from the standardized varieties of British English (StE), officially the target of national education.

## Some factors playing a role in the emergence of post-colonial Englishes

The current literature on PCE describes and acknowledges the legitimacy and the consistency of New Englishes (e.g. Mbangwana, 2004; Ngefac, 2005, 2008; Schneider, 2007; Anchimbe, 2006; Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008). Of this recent work, Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model of the evolution of PCE is of particular note in explaining the emergence and evolution of New Englishes specificities, taking into account different linguistic ecosystems and identity constructs. A number of factors and influences play a role in such an emergence: continuity from StE and from non-standard English, innovation and language and dialect



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contact. The latter factors include simplification, restructuring, exaptation,<sup>1</sup> borrowing, calquing or replication, mixing, etc. (Schneider, 2011: 191). Roughly speaking, the formation of national features in a particular variety of English is a process that ‘leads from the transplanting of English to a new land through a period of vibrant changes, both social and linguistic, to a renewed stabilization of a newly emerged variety’ (Schneider, 2007: 30). Such a process consists of five stages: (1) foundation, (2) exonormative stabilization, (3) nativization, (4) endonormative stabilization, and (5) differentiation. It is unclear whether CamE has already gone beyond stage 3 of its evolution, although it could perhaps be said that it has reached a high phase of its standardization.<sup>2</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that two or more varieties of English (StE and CamE) coexist in Cameroon due to the fact that the ELT industry in the country is still British-oriented and classroom evaluations are based on StE exclusively. It is true that textbooks and other written teaching aids, authored by foreigners and Cameroonians themselves, are culturally indigenized, but they are, to a large extent, still linguistically British-oriented (see Simo Bobda, 1997a). In the same connection, Sala (2003), cited in Mbangwana (2004: 898), is right to suggest that there are two varieties of CamE: (a) the imposed (exonormative) variety which hardly goes out of the classroom setting that engenders and regulates it, and (b) the innovative (indigenized) variety which is acquired in the greater English-using community showing a great deal of creativity and acculturation to local norms. The innovative variety is the more significant site of research for CamE.

## Data collection and analysis

The data to be analysed were collected from primary and secondary sources: the primary sources included first-hand data from well-educated CamE speakers, especially postgraduate students, teachers and journalists. The secondary sources included data from existing literature on non-standard dialects of established varieties of English spoken in the British Isles, especially from Ojanen (1985), based on interviews conducted among speakers of Cambridgeshire dialect. It also included data from existing literature on CamE usage. Regarding data analysis, this study is primarily qualitative and, as such, has a theoretical focus. However, whenever a feature considered as a CamE peculiarity has been tested in the field, quantitative information about it will also be provided. Overall, preposition usages will be analysed

in terms of the following distinctions, even if they are not always watertight: expression of motion and direction, expression of location or position, and omission of preposition. They will be incorporated in the different non-interference sources that will be analysed below.

## The colonial factor

### A brief survey of early British influences in the formation of Cameroon English

At the linguistic level, some of the features known today as CamE features can be traced back to the colonial period. As is well known, education is probably the most important instrument for the moulding and spread of a language (or a dialect). In the British colonies in general and in West Cameroon in particular, because of the British ‘hands-off policy’, education was more or less left in the hands of various missions. For example,

[I]n 1943 there were six government schools with 1,160 students, 26 schools of the indigenous administration with 3,175 students, 68 Catholic schools with 5,759 students, 388 schools with 7,766 students run by the Basel Mission, 23 Baptist schools with 1,077 students, and 1 school of the Native Baptists with 177 students (Wolf, 2001: 90).

Those missions might have left an enduring mark on education, as mission schools, especially Catholic schools, had by far more European teachers than the other schools (Wolf, 2001). Many of these teachers at various levels of education were priests, otherwise called ‘school Fathers’ (O’Neil, 1991). Some of them were ‘giving 35 hours of classes per week [...]’, the Mill Hill policy being to place priests in schools as full-time teachers (O’Neil, 1991: 84). The nature of this Mission in Cameroon was unparalleled in any other African colony. For example: ‘In Uganda, where the Mill Hill Fathers also had missionaries, their educational enterprise was not as full blown as in West Cameroon’ (Booth, 1994: xii).

CamE features, mostly at the phonological level, are believed to have been bequeathed by British missionaries themselves. Simo Bobda (1997b, 2006) has widely shown the influences of non-standard British English (non-standard BrE) features on CamE at the phonological level. (Many teachers were non-standard BrE speakers.) More recently, Takam (2011) has started looking at this colonial factor at the syntactic level: more specifically, the influences of non-standard BrE on the uses of the article in CamE.

### Preposition usages in the expression of direction and location

Regarding the expression of direction to or towards a goal, it will be recalled that the movement from one place to another is normally expressed by the preposition (*in*)*to* in StE. However, such expressions as *to go in a place*, *to be admitted in a hospital* are common in some non-standard dialects of BrE and in CamE, where prepositions like *in* and *on* are used instead.

The preposition *in* is often employed in connection with verbs of motion to express motion from one place to another. Ojanen (1985: 184) distinguishes ‘neutral motion’ (where *in* is used with words denoting a building or part of a building) from other types of motion (‘*in* is introduced in phrases where various other implications, such as entrance or penetrating by force, go along with the idea of motion or direction’). The following serve as an illustration:

- (1) When we went *in* there. . . *in* that cottage. . .
- (2) He went *in* the parlour, he come out with . . . a gun.
- (3) Now you get the things on an’ come *in* my room.
- (4) During one of his attacks, a little girl came *in* his house.

The first three examples are found in Ojanen (1985: 184) whereas the fourth is drawn from the dramatic novel *Silas Marner* by George Eliot (1927: 5).

*In* is also frequently used in the instance where the headword denotes an area of land, sometimes with a building:

- (5) You would take meat with you *in* the field.
- (6) If you din’t go *in* the gravel pits, you went *in* Ely militia.
- (7) I used to bike . . . Cambridge, I mean bike *in* Cambridge. (Ojanen, 1985: 184)

It is interesting to mention a common feature that underlies all the instances above: the dialect speakers emphasize the fact that motion progresses ‘from without’ to a ‘point within’, i.e., the destination is inside a building or an area. This is why *in* in all the above examples can normally be replaced by *into* in StE.

In CamE too, all the above cases occur. *In* is used to express motion to or towards a goal, as in the following:

- (8) Mr James Tatab should report *in* Yaoundé before 3rd April. (Simo Bobda, 2002: 1)

- (9) Mr Voma Vincent is informed that his wife has been admitted *in/at* the Central Hospital of Yaoundé.
- (10) The announcement has just been sent *in* a radio station.
- (11) My elder brother’s wife, after negotiations, was finally posted *in* Yaoundé, precisely in GBHS [Government Bilingual High School] Etoug-Ebe.
- (12) It should be noted that a pass in English Language at the Baccalaureate examination is required for admission, not only *in* UB [University of Buea], but also *in* other universities of Cameroon.

The movement from one place to another can also be expressed by *in* in CamE. In a field study that investigated the strategies used by Cameroonian students to adapt English to their own worldview, it was found out that 29.33% of the 150 informants selected for the study reported that the preposition *in* in (9) was more acceptable to them, whereas 20.67% of them viewed the StE preposition *to* as preferable (Takam, 2000: 45). Another point of interest is that Old English used the preposition *in* to indicate motion or direction towards the interior of a place. It is from the Middle English period that *into* was used more often and, finally, *into* almost completely supplanted *in* in the 17th century, making the use of *in*, as the expression of motion, obsolete or dialectal (Ojanen, 1985; Leith, 1996).

The preposition *on* also expresses motion or direction to a place in both non-standard BrE and in CamE. In Britain, it is mostly used when the head-word of motion denotes an area of land. Examples from Ojanen (1985: 187) include:

- (13) Some [men] went *on* one farm, some *on* another.
- (14) Farmers used to give them permission to go *on* the field to cleanin’.
- (15) Then we go out *on* the land after that.

In the above examples, the context shows that *on* is employed in the sense of StE *onto*. Apparently, *on* is used in many dialects to denote a surface, to specify that the terminal point of the motion denotes a free area or space. Such a usage occurs in CamE, too, as the preposition *on* is used in the expression of motion or direction towards a goal when the headword denotes a surface or an open area:

- (16) On weekends, it’s important to go *on* the farm with your kids.

- (17) Players have started going *on* the pitch: serious things will begin soon.
- (18) The data used in the present study have been tested *on* the field and, therefore, can be considered as features of Cameroon English.

This type of usage seems to be influenced by what Quirk *et al.* call ‘a cause-and-effect relationship’ between a simple position and destination, as in the following example: Tom fell *on(to)* the floor. As a result, Tom was *on* the floor (1972: 307). One could as well say ‘Players have started going *on* the pitch. As a result, they are now *on* the pitch.’ Apparently, when expressing a location or position in non-standard BrE, the preposition *on* is used with a headword that normally takes *on* in expressions of static location or position while *in* is used with a headword that usually takes *in* in the same context, except for the noun *field* which normally takes *in*.

The preposition *at* is used in CamE, more than in the British Isles, to express a movement from one place to another. It is used in the context where motion expressed by a verb stretches to the point or place denoted by the headword which indicates a building, as can be observed in the following examples by Simo Bobda (2002: 1):

- (19) Mr Awah is requested to come *at* the Ministry of Finance for a matter concerning him.
- (20) All parishioners should report *at* the church premises on Sunday at 4 p.m.

In (9) above, the preposition *at* was preferred by 50% of the informants in Takam (2000: 45). In non-standard BrE, however, apart from *at*, whose usage seems to be limited, *up* and *down* are preferred in the above context. The following two examples are cited in Ojanen (1985: 181):

- (21) They used to go *down* the mill an’ the miller used to grind it.
- (22) Then I come *up* the Salvation Army [building] here.

Normally, *up* and *down* are occasionally used in spoken StE, with reference to ‘all-the-way motion which progresses to a terminal point, i.e., in the senses of “up into”, “up to”, and “down into”, “down to” correspondingly’ (Ojanen, 1985: 182) as: They went *down* town [= they went down to the centre of the town]. Whatever the case, in Old English, the prepositions *up* and *down* were used in the environment where present-day StE has *to* (Ojanen, 1985).

As concerns the expression of location or position, *in* and *on* are usually used. In the British Isles, those prepositions are used with headwords denoting open land and built-up areas. *On* is preferred when the emphasis is laid on the fact that something is situated on a surface or on an open area as in (23). *In*, on the other hand, is used to emphasize the fact that something is situated ‘inside’ or ‘within’ a building or an area, as can be seen in (24) and (25) below:

- (23) There’s one waterpump stand *on* the village green today.
- (24) They used to sell them *in* Kenny’s yard.
- (25) That’s how they come to... have two churches *in* one yard. (Ojanen, 1985: 182)

The same type of prepositional usage is observed in CamE in the context where StE would normally use the preposition *at*:

- (26) Dr Ngwa teaches *in* the University of Buea.

Regarding the omission of prepositions, it could be argued that such omission happens in both non-standard BrE and CamE, whether for the expression of motion towards a goal or that of location. There are at least two main contexts in which prepositions are often omitted in many dialects of English. Firstly, when the headword indicates a building or an area of land, the preposition is frequently omitted in connection with a verb of motion, as in the examples below:

- (27) She used to go Ø Chivers’s farms.
- (28) You go Ø Royston for the fair.
- (29) I used to bike Ø Cambridge (Ojanen, 1985: 182).

Secondly, prepositions are omitted when short answers to questions asked by another person are required. This usage is illustrated by the following examples:

- (30) (*Interviewer*: Where was the school?) West Wickham.
- (31) (*Interviewer*: Where did you get the bread from?) The baker up there (Ojanen, 1985: 182).

In CamE too, the two cases occur, mostly in the non-standard language. In fact, the omission of prepositions is not surprising in many dialects of English. Prepositions are frequently absent in colloquial speech in general, in the above context.

Since many instances of variation in prepositional use are normally frowned upon in more formal circles, can it be concluded that they are just the language of the less well educated of the

working class? It is really difficult to say. But Gramley and Pätzold (1992: 377) caution:

It would be a mistake (...) for the impression to arise that such non-standard forms are somehow strange or unusual merely because Standard English, and therefore the written language, does not include them. The contrary is the case. All of them are very common. Indeed, many of them may be the majority forms.

As observed in this discussion, a sizable portion of educated CamE speakers use motion and locative prepositions in much the same way as speakers of certain non-standard dialects of Britain. Such usages might have been transplanted during the colonial era by missionaries as shown above.

## Logicalization

Logicalization is a strategy used by speakers of a language to unconsciously 'rectify' features that could be considered irregular, odd or abnormal in terms of the general patterning of the language. Simo Bobda (1997b, 2001), who coined this concept, defines it as a strategy that 'refers to the use of a feature which, according to the speaker, better reflects the semantic content of the utterance' (1997b: 299). Through this strategy, CamE speakers restructure and reorganize some StE features to suit their own perception of the world.

Locative prepositions and prepositions expressing motion to or towards a goal better explain some seemingly odd aspects of English in terms of the general logic or patterning of the language. The following examples are quite illustrative:

- (32) Mr Tampa was already *in/inside* the bus when his wife came.
- (33) Rioters prevented the minister from entering *in/into* his office.
- (34) [...] accompanied by the provincial Chairman of the Football Federation, the presidents of the two clubs walked down from the VIP stand *onto* the pitch (Schmied & Nkemleke, 2010: 43).
- (35) The shop owner followed them *onto* the road, according to close sources and engaged two of them who wanted to escape by a township taxi that was also stolen (Schmied & Nkemleke, 2010: 43).

*In* and *inside* in *in/inside the bus/train/plane* (travelling) seem to be preferred in CamE to the StE *on*. In fact, *in* and *inside* seem to better reflect the semantic content of the utterance, as StE uses *on the bus* to mean that the person referred to is 'inside' the vehicle. Respondents in the study

mentioned above preferred *in the bus* (61.33%) and *inside the bus* (34.67%) in consideration of what they regard as the literal meaning of such phrases. StE *on the bus* was deemed appropriate by only 4% of them (Takam, 2000: 44). *To enter in a place* (10%) and *to enter into a place* (52%), on the other hand, were preferred by the majority of the respondents, against 38% for the StE verb *to enter a place*. In fact, the compound preposition *into* seems to better illustrate the idea of the movement to an enclosed place like an office. In (34) and (35) too, the compound preposition *onto* is defensible as a choice based on explicitness. *On*, being a locative preposition, shows that the persons referred to touch the line or the surface (Quirk et al., 1972). *To* on the other hand expresses motion towards a goal. So in the two sentences, there are both the idea of moving from one place to another and that of coming into contact with a surface. Hence, the preference for a compound preposition that explicitly shows the two meanings.

A good number of cases examined above could equally well illustrate the strategy of logicalization. The movement from one place to another is normally expressed by the preposition (*in*)*to* in StE. However, such expressions as *to go in a place*, *to be admitted in a hospital*, *to send an announcement in a radio station* are very common in CamE. They are also interesting cases of the arbitrariness of English. Such arbitrariness leads to the general restructuring observed in CamE. The logic behind such a construction is that the place referred to in *to go* or *to be admitted in a place* is an enclosed space, and thus there is the idea of trying to find oneself 'in' that place.

## Analogy

Some non-standard use of prepositions expressing movement from one place to another and some locative prepositions may stem from faulty analogy. A form of overgeneralization, analogy may refer to simplification or regularization, whereby a speaker of a language simply overextends a specific rule to contexts where it does not apply. In fact, many peculiarities of PCE result, at least at the early stage, from analogy of StE forms with similar constructions:

- (36) What time are you leaving *to* Douala? (Simo Bobda, 2002: 50)
- (37) Intensive preparations continue in Akono, *in/at* the outskirts of Yaoundé.
- (38) An IMF-World Bank evaluation mission is scheduled to arrive Ø Yaoundé today.

- (39) After three hour's drive, we arrive Ø Cardiff the capital of Wales. It is the third biggest town in the UK. It is quite marvellous. In fact, I'll tell you Yaoundé and Douala are villages here (Schmied & Nkemeleke, 2010: 41).
- (40) The Minister of National Education, who visited *in* the south west province, was told in almost every locality in Ndian that it was the first time a government minister was setting foot in forty years!

In (36), *to leave to a place*, which might stem from the analogy with *to go to a place*, is regarded as a better expression of direction or movement *to* that place than StE *to leave for a place*. The expression *in the outskirts of* in (37) is probably analogical with such expressions as *in the neighbourhood of*, *in the town of* or *in the city/region of*. In the fieldwork mentioned above, only 24% of the respondents believed that the StE equivalent *on the outskirts* was more meaningful. CamE speakers often omit a preposition where StE needs one. For example, the expression *to arrive* in (38) and (39) above is rarely used with the postposition *in*. It might perhaps stem from the analogy with the verb *to reach*. So the synonymous expression *to reach a place* might be the source of that *Cameroonianism*. English-speaking Cameroonians further use a preposition in the context where StE omits it. It is the case with the verb *to visit* in (40). *To visit in a place*, preferred by many Cameroonians, might result from the analogy with the expression *a visit in a place*.

### Linguistic nationalism or the pressure of a national norm

Linguistic nationalism here should be viewed as the protection and defence of peculiarities and specificities of one's own variety of language, local English for this case. Many Cameroonians, as well as other 'Outer Circle' citizens, tacitly refuse linguistic 'westernization' (Kachru, 1986: 7) in favour of a more local variety of English. Even Cameroonians who have attained a high level of education are often observed to resist speaking or, at times, writing StE. They may know that a given feature is not established in the standard, but still stick to that local feature as a sign of linguistic identity.

### Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, it can be said that, if CamE deviates from StE, to an extent, it does so

in the same way many non-standard dialects of established Englishes also deviate from StE. It can therefore be speculated that the colonial factor, through mission education, played a major role in the transplantation of many of those dialectal uses of motion and position prepositions. Logicalization and analogy are also possible routes that CamE speakers use to tacitly rid StE of a number of apparent inconsistencies. Cameroonians tend to straighten up some of those inconsistencies at the prepositional level.

More generally, if a great number of Cameroonians, irrespective of their level of education, tend to still produce the same features, which are generally regarded by traditional linguists and purists as evidence of falling standards (see for example Ayafor, 2011), it might mean that such features are being established as CamE peculiarities and should normally be considered as such, even in the ELT industry. In fact, although the classroom material is still British-oriented in the country, CamE speakers consider, at least tacitly, their variety to be preferable, especially out of the classroom environment. It is not uncommon to hear Cameroonians say that their target is CamE and not SBE. From Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model, this might correspond to a stage close to stage 4, Endonormative stabilization, where the existence of new local norms is being claimed by insiders and recognized abroad. Many of the features analysed in this paper are invoked by CamE speakers as a source of national identity and pride. ■

### Notes

1 Exaptation, also called functional reallocation, is a tendency 'in which a form available in a feature pool is "recycled" to adopt a new function' (Schneider, 2011: 195). The author gives the example of *fit* that is used in Cameroon to express a polite request as in *We fit go to cinema?* 'Shall we go ...?' It would be said, however, that such an example is not really used in CamE. It is rather a feature of Cameroon Pidgin English, a different language.

2 According to Schneider (2007), CamE has just moved into phase 3 of the Dynamic Model. He however believes that 'it seems barred from making further progress by the overwhelming competition of French and by the fact that the region where it really thrives lacks statehood and thus, the option of an independent identity symbolized by the language. English is under pressure from Pidgin in the Anglophone part and from French elsewhere' (2007: 218).

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