

Varieties and Consciousness in Usage: Cameroon Pidgincreole and its Speakers

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ABSTRACT

After so many years of its existence in Cameroon and its development into varieties, both national and international scholars are still engaged in the debate about whether the various varieties of Cameroon Pidgincreole (CPC) are mutually intelligible. This article attempts an examination of some existing varieties of CPC English and their various speakers, seeking to know whether speakers of a particular variety are aware of the existence of other varieties around them and whether they do understand such different varieties. The study used questionnaires to get the opinions of the respondents, who were both anglophone and francophone literates. The results indicate that some speakers know about the existence of CPC but not about varieties, while others are aware of the existence of varieties but cannot identify them distinctly by name. This paper is hinged on Microparametric Variation Model of Barbiers, Cornips, and vanderKleij. The results indicate that the question of mutual intelligibility is to an extent a battle among linguists, which does not directly concern the speakers who use this lingua franca daily without noticing differences. This equally indicates that even though there exist some indecipherable elements to speakers, codification and standardisation is quite possible because such elements in most of the varieties do not hinder understanding.

Keywords: *Cameroon Pidgincreole, Varieties, Consciousness, Anglophone, Francophone*

Introduction

The main issue surrounding Cameroon Pidgincreole is no longer whether it is the most widely spread language nor whether it should be banned but rather, it is the question about which variety to adopt if standardisation has to take place. As Epoge (2013) rightly puts it, as the language continues to grow and spread, there is need to continually tract it. There is the need not only to tract varieties, but to examine the use of the varieties. Linguists have tried to bring out the various varieties of CPC existing in Cameroon. Attempts have been made to compare certain varieties with others in order to determine how intelligible they could be (Mbangwana, 2004 and Fonka 2011). Nevertheless, one major problem that I have discovered here is that varieties are mixed up with registers such that what could

be considered as registers are considered varieties. However, I will not go into the polemics of register and varieties as such.

It is equally possible that people can be using a particular variety without actually knowing that it is different from the other ones. If we are conscious of the existence of other varieties, it will enable the different speakers to understand each other. The continuous talk about the incomprehensibility of the different varieties of CPc cannot be illustrated amply by comparing only their written forms. Differences may exist in form but not mutually unintelligible to the different speakers. It is therefore necessary to use empirical evidence to justify whether the different varieties are mutually intelligible or not. Questionnaires were used to get the point of views of users of the different varieties of CPc.

1. Understanding of varieties

The most remarkable and challenging thing about CPc is the fact that it is a vibrant language with more varieties still emerging. Though the idea of a language having many varieties can be argued as being a negative element because it demonstrates how unstable such a language is, it can also be a sign that a language is wide-spread. A variety in Downes' (1998, p. 17) view is a neutral term which simply means any particular way of speaking. He further states that dialects emerge over time by a process of splitting from a single parent variety. To make the idea of language variation clearer, Montgomery (1995, p. 63) employs the following illustration:

A child growing up somewhere in Britain does not necessarily learn a uniform standard form of English as the first language. In the first place, it might not be English at all: it might be Welsh or Urdu or Punjabi. And, even if it is English it may well be a very different English if learnt in parts of Liverpool, Glasgow, Oxford, or Belfast.

Dunbar (2003, p. 230) says one reason for the diversification is "the gradual accumulation of accidental mutations (mispronunciations, unintended slippages of meaning) over a long period of time. He adds that if the process is not accidental, it is deliberate and "deliberate" means under the influence of selection. One additional thing to note about the development of a language into varieties is the fact that "varieties come to represent intimacy and equality if they are most typically learned and employed in interactions that stress such bonds between interlocutors" (Fishman, 1971, p. 221). The users of the various varieties of CPc surely show their intimacy towards their various varieties because it is

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the symbolic value given to a language that determines whether the language is used or not.

With all this in mind, let us turn to the varieties of CPc, which is our focus in this part of the work. CPc has given rise to a number of regional and social varieties over time. We shall focus on regional varieties such as the North West, the South West, the Bororo, and the Francophone, under which are found social varieties such as the Comedic and the Mboko varieties. Though the liturgical CPc will be placed under varieties, it is made clear in our explanation that it is a register and not a variety. We will simply point out some varieties but will not treat them in detail.

2. Varieties of Cameroon Pidgincreole

After so many years of identifying and discussing the various varieties of CPC, there is still no agreement as to how many varieties exist in this language. While Ekanjume-Ilongo (2016, p. 154) holds that CPc has five varieties based on regional differences - Grafi Pidgin English, Liturgical Pidgin English, Francophone Pidgin English, Coastal Pidgin English and Bororo Pidgin English, Abongdia (2014, p. 601) on her part claims that “Currently, there are two varieties of CPE: the Anglophone variety and the Francophone one”. Abongdia’s view is correct if varieties are examined only in the light of two major linguistic divides in Cameroon - the English and the French segmentations. However, just claiming that there are two varieties without any further justifying support to it, Abongdia’s (2014) claim becomes not only doubtful, but faulty especially when prior studies like Mbangwana (2004), Fonka (2011) and many earlier scholars like Todd (1982) cited in Mbangwana (2004) have established from proven research that we have more than five varieties grouped into regional and social.

CPc can actually be divided into two segments - social and regional varieties (Fonka, 2011). Under social varieties, we can also find register. Social varieties are those that have come up not just as a result of the need to communicate with people but most importantly, the need to commune with each other intimately. Some social varieties may be spoken and understood only by people of a particular social group. Some social varieties are the Educated variety, the Comedic variety, the Mboko or the park boys’ variety amongst others. Speakers introduce the various changes that are found in the different social varieties consciously so that their varieties look different from others as it is the case with

Camfranglais (Mbangwana 2006 and Fonka 2021). Some social varieties like the Mboko variety end up being unintelligible to some people because the users meant it to be so. In fact, it is very difficult to draw a clear line between regional and social varieties because social varieties grow from regional varieties. There is no social variety area in Cameroon that is not covered by a regional variety.

As for regional varieties, there are first of all two main varieties that can be identified - the Francophone and the Anglophone varieties, which are again subdivided into semi regional varieties like the Northwest, the Southwest, the Bororo varieties amongst others. The following sections take a look at some of the varieties and what makes them stand out from others. Varieties to be examined are the Northwest, the Southwest, the Francophone, the Liturgical, the Bororo, the Comedic and the Mboko varieties.

2. 1 The Northwest Variety

Most literature on the varieties of CPc are subsumed under two regional varieties which Todd, (1982) calls the Northwest and the Southwest varieties, and which we will place under a general label Anglophone Pidgincreole variety in this work. However, Mbangwana (2004, p. 28) ascertains that this classification by Todd was as a result of some distinctive features identified between these varieties. Todd and Jumbam (1992, p. 6) provide the kind of CPc spoken by Northwest adult users of pidgin represented in the book of St. Mark translated by the Bible Society of Cameroon as seen below:

den yi bi begin to tich dem sey di pikin fo man go suffer
plenti ting an di bik bik pipul, weh di bik ticha an di
jews dem klak go denai yi, an dem go kil yi den apta
tri dey yi go komot fo dai

(then he began to teach them that the son of man would suffer many things, and the important, being the Pharisees and scribes would deny him, and they would kill him, then after three days he would rise from the dead).

If the above citation is the North West pidgin as Todd and Jumbam (1992) claim, which was used in translating the New Testament that is supposed to be used by all Cameroonians; it makes us question whether the Bible was translated to be used only by the speakers of the Northwest variety. We will want to know whether all these varieties have been tested and found intelligible to all the speakers before translating an important document using a regional variety. Maybe the claim that Cameroon pidgin varieties are mutually comprehensible Mbassi-Manga (1976) inspired the writers of the pidgin Bible

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to use a regional variety for their translation. Since there has been constant movement between the North Westerners and the South Westerners in Cameroon because of trade transactions and other social factors, it will not be too daring to claim that varieties of CPc are only markers of identity, not harbingers of mutual unintelligibility.

2.1.2 The South West Variety

The southwest variety of Cameroon Pidgincreole is a subdivision of the Anglophone variety. It has been discovered that though this variety looks more like the North West variety, it has differences. The following dialogue which is written by Akombi et al. (1988, p. 35) and quoted in Mbangwana (2004, pp. 28-29) is the South West variety of PE (Fonka 2011).

Defang don mitop i kombi fo rot an dem begin tok. I kombi i nem na Taku. (Defang meets his friend they start talking. His friend's name is Taku.)

Defang: bo, ha na? (Friend, how are you?)

Taku: A day fayn. Husay yu komot? (I am alright. Where are you coming from)

Defang: a komot fo si som ma kombi. (I went to visit my friend).

Taku: weti bi i nem? (What is his name?)

Defang: Ah! i nem na Joe. (Oh! His name is Joe.)

Taku: Huskayn wok I di du? (What type of job does he do?)

Defang: I bi ticha fo kolej. (He's a secondary school teacher.)

Taku: So-o! I di tich weti? (So, what does he teach?)

Defang: I na ticha fo matimatiks. (He teaches mathematics.)

Taku: E-ehe! I di tich fayn? (Is that right! Does he tich well?)

Defang: Yes, i di tich fayn. I skul pikin dem layk i plenti. (Yes, he teaches well. His students appreciate him very much).

These two varieties - the North West and the South West - are placed side by side so that we can see the differences clearly in the following example in Mbangwana (2004).

Table 1: Some difference between the North West and the South West varieties

South West	North West	Educated English
i) Wuna di go fo husay?	Wusay wuna di go?	Where are you going?
ii) Yu don come	Come good	You are welcome.
iii) I di go die	Yi di go cry die (sic)	I am going to a death ceremony
iv) Na massa Joe I pikin	Na pikin fo massa yo	This is Mr (differential) Joe's child.
v) I na we ticha	Na we ticha dis	This is our teacher.
vi) komot fo ya	Grap/ komot fo ya	You should leave this place.

The above differences are structural differences in that they do not stop the various varieties from being mutually comprehensible. This accounts for the reason some scholars like Menang (1979) have decided to look at pidgin spoken in the anglophone section of the country as an entity given that some of these differences highlighted are not really outstanding as to cause incomprehensible.

2.1.3 The Francophone Variety

Another variety of CPc identified by Todd (1982) is the Francophone variety. This variety makes use of French words in Pidgincreole. One thing that is not yet done in this variety is the fact that it is still considered as a single variety, whereas it could be split like is the case with the Anglophone variety that is subdivided into the North West and South West varieties. If we agree with Downes (1998, p. 17) that geographical separation is a causal factor in the differences between dialects, we will certainly agree that the geographical separation that exists between the eight Francophone Regions in Cameroon is gap enough to give rise to varieties of francophone Cameroon Pidgincreole. Nevertheless, we may not have to get into that in this paper; we have to work on the ones we have for now.

These varieties of Cameroon Pidgincreole also make use of French words, English words and words from local languages. This is illustrated by the following pidgin text by Mbassi-Manga (1967, p. 59):

Dis toly fo pickin-plaba de pass plenty dis tam wity weh de hangry
This talk about child problem is happening much this time with that the hunger
fo win pickin mony weh compensation govna-caise dem de pay to to get child allowance that payment government bank they are pay to worker. Na so some konda-poliss-solja, massa Jacob, don toot big plaba jossoh
workman. fossika sey hi bia hangry dam pickin mony fo compensation govna-caiss. Dis poliss-solja marred tou woman, bôt soteeh naoh no-wan no born pickin. Dam plaba fo pickin de hambock massa Jacob pass mack, bikoss nyi-tou want tchop pickin mony fo compensation govna-caiss lackey oll nyi komby weh bôn pickin [sil] ...oll ting pass o.k.and afta dam suplétif-jôjment massa Jacob send dassol oll pepa and certificates fo compensation govna-caiss and hi begin tchôp mony fo dam tou-pickin nem and na nyiou nem massa Jacob bin give fo dam pickin.
(This story about child allowance is a serious matter now with people who are hungry to collect money which is compensation paid by the government to workers.

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This is the reason a policeman, Mr. Jacob, has got himself into great trouble because he has become hungry of taking the money from the government. This policeman has got married to two wives, but none has given birth to a child. The issue of a child has been a thorn in the flesh of Mr. Jacob because he also wants to benefit from the compensation from the government like all his other colleagues who have children... Everything went well and after the judgment Mr. Jacob forwarded all papers and certificate for the money from the government and he began receiving money for the two children and Mr. Jacob gave the children new names)

We do not dispute the above text, but we are sure that if the above text were written today, there would certainly be some differences given that the number of Francophones going in for English language these days is on the increase. The translation given in English is approximate because there are so many words in the pidgincreole excerpt not understood.

2.1.4 Bororo Variety

Another variety of CPc identified by researchers is the Bororo variety. The Fulani cattle rearers of the North and the North West regions speak the Bororo variety. This variety is verified in linguistic works (Todd 1982, P. 20), and is also illustrated through practical dialogue in literary works (Butake 1986, pp. 18-19) quoted by Ayafor (2006, p. 195). The following excerpt drawn from Butake illustrates a dialogue between the Fon and Dewa, the Cattle rearer.

Fon: You bin talk all that foolish? (did you say all that nonsense)
 Dewa: Kai me no talkam no noting. (No! I didn't say anything)
 Fon: Na weti happen? (What happened?)
 Dewa: Cow don go drinki water for Ngangba sai wey na kontri for Bororo. (Cows went to drink at Ngangba, which is Bororo land).
 Fon: For sika sey me tell you for go shiddon dere da wan mean sey na wuna Kontri? (Because I told you to go and live there, does that mean it is your Land?)
 Dewa: No bi gomna don talk sey na place for cow? (Did the government not say it is grazing land?)

The above is the Bororo variety from the Anglophone area of the grassfield. Now, in yet another variety the dialogue takes place in the market between a Francophone woman and a Bororo woman in the Mbouda Subdivision of the West region (Mbangwana 2004, p.33).

Bororo buyer: Mamia, na moch yu di sellam dis yu kago? (Woman, for how much do you sell these goods?)
 Bamileke Seller: Na danso (daso) sik sik hundred. (I sell them for six hundred francs each).

BB: Mi, a gib am foa foa hundred, yu ya? (I will pay you four hundred francs each, do you hear?)

BS: Si am eh, no hala. Mua nwan hundred tek yuk ago, na yu nyun. (look, do not take offence. Just add one hundred francs and you have it).

The identification of this variety is an important step because it will cause us to answer related questions and in the course of doing so get to know more about what is not yet discovered about this variety. As of now, we cannot tell whether the Bororo variety spoken in the Francophone section of the North region for example, is the same as that spoken in the anglophone section of the North West region. One wonders whether one should adhere to the claim of national integration by Mbassi-Manga (1976) and conclude that a Bororo man from the North will understand a Bororo man from the North West when they speak pidgin. Another question to answer is whether the general appellation Bororo variety fits the bi-geographical nature of Cameroon.

2.1.5 Liturgical Variety?

One of the most difficult things to believe in is that there was a special type of Pidgincreole used for liturgy. By bringing out the Liturgical variety as a type of pidgin, Todd (1982) cited in Mbangwana (2004) surely meant it possesses qualities, which are different from other varieties. The question we must answer before fully accepting the existence of another variety in Church is whether the people who speak CPc outside the church are different from those in the church such that they will need to shift from other varieties outside to a specific variety while in the church.

Many researchers have actually written so much about CPc and religion. The most obvious point in almost all research works is that one of the main objectives of CPc was to spread the word of God. Kelly (1980, p. 293) posits that "the recent examples of pidginisation in the Catholic liturgy in Cameroon have been models of acceptability and nonpendantic, sensible throughout". Menang (2006, P. 232) says Pidgin English was identified and its uses diversified when Baptist missionaries of London and Jamaica founded mission stations in the coast of Cameroon.

Mbangwana (2004, p. 27) acknowledges Todd's (1982) different varieties of Pidgincreole, amongst which is the Liturgical variety. No excerpt is, however, used to identify this variety from others like it is done for other varieties. In Mbangwana (2004,

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p. 27), he quotes Todd's (1979) general statement about the use of CPc in the church when she says the following about the Catholic Church:

The Catholic Church in Bamenda uses PE in prayers, sermons, and catechumen classes and even for marriage ceremonies. She further discloses that there are moves urging the Catholic Church to use PE to celebrate Mass and that it is the language of the confessional even in far remote areas.

All the illustrations above justify the use of CPc as language for liturgy in Cameroon. Though we are not convinced that in the South West region like in the North West region, the variety that is used in the church is different from the variety used in the day-to-day interactions in these areas, we want to point out clearly that what is called Liturgical variety is simply a register; there is nothing in Cameroon as the Liturgical variety. If it is considered a variety, it means that eventually we will have other varieties such as the hospital variety, the political variety amongst others based on the various professions because each profession has particular words that distinguish it from others. Not all these differences are varieties. The definition of a register may be more illustrative of the fact that the CPc used in the church is a register rather than a variety. "Registers are a set of language items associated with discrete occupational or social groups" (Wardhaugh, 1998, p. 48). There are different types of registers. He illustrates this by indicating that surgeons, airline pilots, bank managers, sales clerks, jazz fans and pimps employ different registers. In such cases, specialised items emerge for certain specific fields (Montgomery, 1995). This indicates that the type of pidgin common only to the medical field, political campaigns, tax collectors, just to name a few, constitutes different registers and not varieties.

2.1.6 The comedic variety

This is a very new and a very interesting variety of CPc used on most private radio and television stations in Cameroon. As its name suggests, it is a variety that creates fun through which information is passed out to the public. This variety is more captivating than any of variety already mentioned. The comedic variety is used by Canal 2 International Television and Suede FM Radio Station amongst others. Canal 2, a Douala-based TV channel uses this variety in a programme called "Scratch Your Eye". In this indirect news item, newspapers from the various press organs are reviewed in a more

captivating manner such that even people who do not usually listen to news will want to listen to the fun and end up listening to the news.

Radio stations like Suede FM, a private radio station situated in Douala, also reads news through comedy. Because of this conscious effort to make news lively, they have consciously given that programme a blend name "infotainment", which literally means information and entertainment. Humorously captivating items used during news reading are funny songs sung by comedians, short comments, and complete digressions from a particular news item to another thing amongst many others that we cannot describe. Since the programmes on the television and the radio mentioned above are run by the same persons, radio news was recorded to represent this new variety (Fonka, 2011).

Fo botom beley, beley botom, dei wei yu foget fo prun pam tri, na da dei wait mimbo di disapia. Mi na pa Tom, bot if yu kol mi Malinwan weh yur wan ai lok, yu get wan col bier. I don open botom beley, de ting de swit laik kon chap wei mi a di chop fo ma Gliniam. If yu di chop da kain Kon chap da mins sei yu get fo wei mbangem boot. Neibo, neibo, a sei ndon di ndon don hapen. Taxi draiva wuna no go get sens? Wen man tek wuna fo kus, yi di kajol wuna, i dei laik sei man pikin don ton na wuman nau sef. Na yi wei hapen fo Francis wei dem tek yi fo kus den dei teik yi fo bar bai mimbo put a smol drop of melison in de proper of sleeping sickness. (Comic relief- chiai! Pa Tom beley de bon ndon) na tru, beley di bon ndon. hen yi bi drinkam, yi slip sotei jek wan fut fo op laik yi wan du mapu. God punish yu. Dem teik yi taxi slais witam laik okro. Douala fain bot if yu no scratch yur ai yu no go si am.)

The above excerpt is just a single news item recorded on the 20th July 2008. In fact, there are many side comments found in the above news item which cannot be expressed in writing. When the side comments come in to disrupt the news, the comedic news reader joins in and makes some noise before coming back to the original items of the news. At times the comic relief serves as a transition from one news item to the other.

The new thing about this variety that is not found in other CPc varieties is that the users intentionally distort the words or phrases to create comedy. There is no chronology in the putting together of the news items as the reader dives from one different news item to another as if they were the same pieces of information. On Canal 2 for example, the title of this programme is written 'Scratch Your Eye', but the comedian at times starts by changing Scratch to 'Scelas', giving the impression that he is an illiterate, confirming the notion that Pidgincreole is a language for illiterates and that pidgins were corruptions of

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higher languages (Holm 2000, Meijer and Muysken 2009). CPc is spoken by everybody; it is the context of usage that separates the different users. While some use it on daily bases, others use it only in "must do situations". We should note here that unlike the regional varieties that vary from each other because of the influence from the many local languages, which are unintelligible to those not versed with them, the comedic variety is a creation aimed at attracting people to get information in an amusing and comfortable atmosphere that would have been boring. This kind of pidgin makes use of pure French words, English words and indigenous words.

2.1.7 The Mboko or Park Boys' variety

Park boys or Mboko are made up of usually male youths, most of whom are thieves or simply those who practice a ruthless life. Most of them spend their time at bus stops and they possess wonderful linguistic manoeuvres that are intelligible only to members of their groups. The general population is cut off from Mboko CPc variety because the style is uncommon to those who are not members of that group. Since this group is made up of mostly youths, this speech variety is usually placed under the youthful variety of CPc. Ordinary youths who understand this variety are those who take time to learn this new usage. The above variety is the type of CPc that Lapiro de Mbanga (a Cameroonian musician of late) used to expose and hurl insults at the excesses of some top government leaders and other general issues. The use of this variety is illustrated in one of Lapiro de Mbanga's songs entitled *Over Done* (Fonka, 2011).

Ova don na mbut
 Ova sens na niese, ova sens na nier
 Ova tontu na ndutu meilleur
 Tu much njaraba na problem
 Dis motumbo na hep dey di kas fo ol ma compis wey dem dei fo wah fo ol
 kan kan nangai. Yes, fo ol ma oun pipo wey dem dei fo zwa fo sai ba sai.
 Bombo, wuna teme, wuna gogolo, sep dans la corbeille wuna saka daso
 becus dey di go mandate de bole...
 No bi yu, yu no ba bon, no bi yu, mbut man no tel mi
 No bi yu, no bi yu, yu no ba bon, no bi yu yu no fit sho me ndongo.
 Mbombo, som glasa man weh don nok sote yi begin hip bris don come
 mitop mi weh a don kale kape fo ma oun mapan dans les konge weh a dei
 ma oune lan élan daso onze devant onze. Rapidement nier sep begin vibrer
 mi aswa aswa dans le ciba. kengue wan memba fo motion me dans le meme
 bebe. Aman, as dan man don less sens, i tink sey a bi gibier...

The only things found in his pidgin that make one to think that it is Pidgincreole are words such as *bi, na, dem, sai, don, daso* amongst others which are grammatical words common in CPc. This particular excerpt takes more from French language than from English. This, however, doesn't mean that the Mboko variety is more linked to French than to English; the above excerpt is made by a francophone. The Mboko variety produced by an Anglophone takes more from English than from French as seen in the following excerpt from another musician called Awilo from the North West region (Fonka 2011):

Repe yu don taya

Repe yu don taya Dadi

Repe yu don taya Papa

Yu get fo go rest o Mama

Dis contri don pass yu cheri

Yu get fo go rest o Mola

Dis contri don pass yu Papa

Hehei, grand Mboko fo Ngola yi dey fo changé premier ministre dem fo Ngola leke Caleçon fo nga. Mais qui va changer le changeur ? Message fo dey pour ceux qui ont les oreilles. Na dey weh a get fo confirmer agenda fo Fon Doh Gagwanyi fo Balli weh yi be sey yi no bi fit fo go ngata fosika sey hi bi 'ya', "certificate of non conviction" fo big grama. Na yi weh grand Nkomkoma fo Ngola, yi too dey fo marché Mokolo, hehehehe (laughter), fo chercher les charger le mots sey yi must buy new constitution fo tanap fo..... 2011 hehehehe (laughter). Oh les Camerounais vous êtes où? C'est grave à Yaoundé, le Cameroun des grandes ambitions. Les choses à vérifier. Pikin dem fo Bamenda, fo Kumba fo Limbe, Ni John, Ni Fru, Ni Ndi and yi Pikin dem fo Ntarinkon fo parti fo Ngom dem sey 2011 e go bi na sendof fo wan parti system weh yi don minoté ol man fo Mboko hier.

This kind of language as is the case with Camfranglais or “slanguage” as Mbangwana (2006, p. 220) calls it "induces friendliness or intimacy in a very profound way" among its speakers. While the Comedic variety tries as much as possible to lure people to listen to information, the Mboko variety, through the use of unfamiliar words, cuts off communication from the general public, who are not versed with such words. The following section briefly exams the theoretical underpinnings of the present analysis:

Theoretical consideration

The Model of Microparametric Variation, which takes into consideration the distribution of syntactic variables in geographical areas and formal analyses of syntactic properties

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(Barbiers, et al. 2002), is the ground on which this work stands. Under the parametric variation approach, speakers make choices about particular constructions. Variations in CPc, especially geographical, are generally syntactic in nature, though lexical and phonological variations are also very evident. Since this study is not solely about variation, but more on consciousness about the existence of variation, this theory becomes relevant in the sense that as Henry (2002) based on data from acquisition of British English explains, children do not just acquire a single grammar; they acquire “variable forms at an early age” (2002, p. 278), and they “have learned the statistical distribution of forms at an early age” (2002, p. 279). If CPc is the language that is generally acquired at infancy as different scholars have indicated in their various works, it means children acquire the variable form at an early age and should therefore be aware that there are varieties that exist in CPc. Wardhaugh (1992, p. 2) acknowledges that, “anyone who knows a language knows much more about that language than is contained in any grammar book that attempts to describe the language”. Speakers of CPc certainly know much more about the various varieties that exist, even if they do not name them as scholars who have done so much research in them do. Henry (1995) cited in Green (2007, p. 27) presents a model within syntactic theory that can account for variation with Belfast English (BE) and differences between that variety and Standard English. The parameters in BE, according to Henry, are set such that the verb can occur in the position to the left or right of the subject in imperatives, and certain positions are available to the subject. This theory is applied to show only elements about the knowledge of variation by the speaker.

3. Methodology

To find out the opinions of Cameroonians about their knowledge on varieties, a nine item questionnaire was issued. Fifty copies of the questionnaire were issued to students of the University of Yaounde I. Twenty five of the them were in French and were answered by geography Level Two Francophones. The other twenty five were in English and were answered by Anglophones doing geology in Level One. Though only 50 copies of the questionnaire were used, we think they are enough to give us the information needed because even if we were to issue one thousand copies, they would still not be enough sample for a population of over twenty five million inhabitants. Of the fifty copies issued

out, forty nine were returned. We decided to use geography and geology because they are not involved in the study of languages and will certainly not know anything or much about varieties if they are not actually in contact with them. It is easy for anybody studying language to say things based on the influence of lectures in class rather than personal observation. There was no discrimination between Anglophones and Francophones because they are all Cameroonians and should have some awareness of the most widely used lingua franca in Cameroon (Atechi and Fonka, 2007). For the analysis of the data, questions needing 'Yes' or 'No' answers were analysed in groups and presented on the same table whereas those with multiple choices were analysed differently.

4. Users knowledge about varieties

After looking at the methods used in collecting and analysing the data for this study, we now find out whether the speakers (Cameroonians) know about the existence of varieties and most importantly whether they do understand the different varieties.

In item one, which was meant to find out whether our informants speak and understand CPc, thirty four of the forty nine informants speak and understand CPc while fifteen of them do not. This gives 69.38% and 30.62% respectively. We should note that even among those who said 'No' to speaking and understanding of CPc, there are people (Francophones) who understand but do not speak. In the second question, they were asked to say whether there are Cameroonians who speak CPc varieties that they do not understand. Again, thirty four answered 'Yes' and fifteen said 'No', giving 69.38% and 30.62% respectively. The above information is represented on the table below.

Table 2: Cameroonians who speak varieties they do not understand

	Options	Yes	No	Total
Question 1	Number of respondents	34	15	49
	percentage	69.38%	30.62%	100%
Question 2	Number of respondents	34	15	49
	percentage	69.38%	30.62%	100%

From the table we can see that a greater number of our sample population speak and understand CPc.

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A follow up question was for those who said they do not understand the Pidgincreole English of some Cameroonians. They were asked to say what makes them not to understand some speakers of CPc. Of the three different responses given, four respondents said when the person is too fast, eleven said when the person's Pidgin is different from theirs, twenty three said when there are words they do not understand while eleven did not choose any and did not propose any. All the above figures represent 8.17%, 22.45%, 46.93% and 22.45% respectively. Most of the respondents say they do not understand because speakers use words in their speech that they do not understand. We should note that this is specific to CPc. The various varieties of English language are at some point incomprehensible because of new words introduced into the language or words pronounced with another accent different from the speakers of the same language from different geographical locations, different age groups or different statuses.

One of the most important questions was to know whether they have ever heard about varieties of CPc. In this question, thirty seven of the forty nine informants said 'Yes' and twelve of them said 'No', giving 75.51% and 24.49% respectively. The above question was actually meant to lead informants to their revelation about varieties they claim to know. This question four was rather directly linked to question seven which sought to know whether varieties perturb intelligibility. Twenty six informants, representing 53.06% answered 'Yes' and twenty three, representing 49.94% said 'No'. Curiously enough, of the fourteen respondents who said in question one that they neither speak nor understand CPc, three of them said varieties in Pidgincreole English perturb understanding. The question one may want to ask is how they manage to know that since they claim they do not speak and do not understand CPc. If they really don't speak and understand, they will not know whether varieties disturb intelligibility or not. This takes us back to the hypocrisy in the use of CPc (Kelly 1980, Atechi and Fonka 2007, Atechi 2011 and Fonka 2014). This hypocrisy is further highlighted in the use of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) by Egbokhare (2003, p. 26), when he says, "some of those with the so-called negative attitude toward NP are speakers of NP themselves, who have been schooled and nurtured to believe that their linguistic heritage is some form of dislocated and malformed language". The above respondents are surely speakers of CPc who pretended in question one that they do not speak the language. This attitude can be further subsumed in what

Atechi (2011) calls varied and confusing especially given the complex sociolinguistic and cultural landscape of the country.

In question nine, we asked the informants whether they have ever spoken to somebody in CPc and the person did not understand them. Fifteen said 'Yes' and thirty four said 'No', giving 30.63% and 69.38% respectively. 69.38% is enough to show that although varieties exist, they do not hinder understanding. In answering this question, respondents forgot that in question seven they said varieties disturb understanding. If varieties as they claim are not mutually intelligible, most of them would have answered 'Yes' in question nine. To further show how hypocritical my respondents were, we noticed that three of them who said in question one that they neither speak nor understand CPc said in question nine that they had spoken to some Cameroonians in Pidgincreole English and they did not understand it. How could they have spoken in a language they do not understand and do not speak? This is hypocrisy. The three questions analysed above are presented on the table below.

Table 3: Incomprehensibility reasons, knowledge of varieties and refusal to respond in CPc

	Options	Yes	No	Total
Question 4	Number of respondents	37	12	49
	percentage	75.51%	24.49%	100%
Question 7	Number of respondents	26	23	49
	percentage	53.06%	49.94%	100%
Question 9	Number of respondents	15	34	49
	percentage	30.63%	69.38%	100%

Another question which set in more confusion was question five, where informants were asked which variety of CPc they speak. Twenty four of the forty nine informants did not know the varieties they speak, thirteen said they speak simple pidgin. The rest of the twenty two informants gave the following varieties - Mboko variety, Bamenda variety, Kumba variety, Cameroon Pidgin variety, and Francophone variety. The thirteen

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informants who said they speak simple pidgin can be added to those who did not know the variety they speak because there is no variety of CPc called simple. In fact, we can be very categorical in saying that most Cameroonians do not know the varieties of CPc they speak. It is true that some know about the existence of varieties, but not varieties within Cameroon. This is the reason some said they speak Cameroon Pidgin, indicating that they know about the other varieties like Nigerian Pidgin, Ghanaian Pidgin and so on.

The eighth question was meant to find out whether Cameroonians are ready to learn varieties they do not understand. Informants were therefore asked what they would do in a situation in which the person with whom they are communicating understands and speaks a different official language and different variety of Pidgincreole English. Of the various opinions given, three people said they will use an interpreter, twenty five said they will guess the meaning, two said they will ignore the speakers and 8 of them said they will learn the new variety. All these represent 6.13%, 51.02%, 4.08% and 38.77% respectively. With only 38.77% ready to learn the new variety, it is not encouraging enough but not surprising too because since they do not know what they will gain from speaking this language, there is no reason wanting to learn it. Chia (2009, p. 48) however, points out that Cameroon Pidgin is "... a full blown language with sophisticated structure and a multiplicity of social functions". These functions even go beyond social as the language is used by students in expressing their ideas in both arts and science subjects at the Universities of Yaounde I and Buea (Simo Bobda, 2009). This information is better illustrated on table three for better understanding.

Table 4: Readiness to study unintelligible varieties

Opinion	Use interpreter	Guess meaning	Ignore speaker	Learn new variety	Total
No respondents	3	25	2	19	49
Percentage	6.13%	51.02%	4.08%	38.77%	100%

5. Varieties and linguists

Quite a good number of Cameroonians know about varieties of CPc, but we cannot say with exactitude the percentage because as we said in our analysis, informants do not say

exactly what they know. We think that we should not cling to the difficulties varieties are likely to cause because such difficulties do not completely obstruct intelligibility. Even in cases where understanding is obstructed, Cameroonians can learn as indicated on the table 4 above. Muhlausler (2001, pp. 160-161) posits that, "if we regard each language as a result of a long history of human endeavour to gain knowledge of the world, we may begin to see why linguistic diversity is an invaluable resource rather than an obstacle to progress". Though we are talking about varieties of the same language rather than individual languages, we still need to know that diversity within the same language is an invaluable resource which expresses the development of a language. Varieties of Pidgincreole English should remain, but it is time to look for a variety to empower for standardisation rather than keep complaining always about mutual unintelligibility between varieties. I agree with Mbangwana (1983, p. 90) that Pidgin has a national character, making it the language of every Cameroonian. With this mindset, picking a variety that is already most widely used and making it standard for national use is ideal. When English and French were to be made official languages in Cameroon, nobody cared whether they were comprehensible or not. Today, people are no longer forced to speak those two official languages; they go for them due to their instrumental motivation. As Cameroonians learn these languages, so too can they learn aspects of CPc that pose problems of understanding if its functions are made official in Cameroon. When Ekanjume-Ilongo (2016, p. 158) says "many children in Urban centres speak or at least understand CPE, so introducing it as a medium of instruction would present little difficulty", she does not say which of the varieties would be best. This, in my opinion, simply means even though we have different varieties, which do not impede communication, there is actually a CPc that can be used in school. It is clear that the battle over which variety is spoken in what part of the country is a fight among linguists and not among users, most of whom do not even know what variety they are using. All they know is that they are speaking CPc. The struggle is simply because "Education seems to be the only public domain where there are visible signs of rebellion against CPc" (Fonka, 2022, p. 135).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have looked at various varieties of CPc and most importantly the imposing nature of new varieties - Mboko variety and Comedic variety amongst others,

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which have come to add to the functions of CPc that of entertainment. We have indicated our stand concerning the existing liturgical variety of CPc. The simple fact that there is no available excerpt anywhere to justify its independence from other varieties is enough to say that it is not a variety. It has been indicated by most of our informants that Cameroonians speak CPc and a lot more understand but cannot respond. As for the existence of different varieties, it is also seen from the information analysed that Cameroonians are aware that CPc has varieties, but they do not know the varieties that they speak. This explains the reason most of them said they speak simple pidgin and normal pidgin, which are varieties that do not exist. Since they do not know what variety they speak, it is therefore clear that variety is not their focus but rather a fight among linguists. This is proved by the fact that in spite of these varieties, there is mutual intelligibility between most speakers of the different varieties. Since the existence of the various varieties is not a problem to speakers, the inability of researchers to standardized or properly codify CPc should not be connected to the existence of many varieties. Since speakers do not even know the varieties they speak, any adopted variety for codification and standardization will do.

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