

# The Phonology of English for Second and Foreign Language Learning



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By

Etienne Dagasso and Faissam Warda

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To Pastor Theodore Andoseh,  
Leader of Christian Missionary Fellowship International.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CamE: Cameroon English

CamFE: Cameroon Francophone English

Con: Consonant

CPE: Cameroon Pidgin English

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELL: English language learning

ESL: English as a Second Language

IPA: International Phonetic Alphabet

L1: First language

L2: Second language

LAD: Language Acquisition Device

V: Vowel

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## FOREWORD

Unlike other languages, English shows a lot of discrepancies in its letter-sound relationship. It follows from this premise that the EFL learner, who unfortunately stands little chances to afford the language outside the classroom environment, needs clues for establishing the link between letters and sounds in the English language. Considering the high degree of unpredictability between letter and sound in English, the uninformed EFL learner would not find it easy to cope with the numerous changes that obtain in the English language. Besides, many EFL instructors<sup>1</sup> are quite scared when it comes to tackling sounds in their language classes. As a result, many learners sail through years of English language study without being acquainted with the sounds of English. Even among graduates, very few show acquaintance with the sounds of English especially when the latter are tackled separately. Such a situation points to the scarcity of phonological input among ESL/EFL learners. This scarcity of phonological input makes many learners stagnate in their ignorance and inadequacy with respect to English speech. Little do learners know that the gap in their knowledge could be bridged had they had more affordable means for an easier study of the language, which is consistent with their specific need.

This book comes as an answer to this longstanding quest for instruction, which would be relevant to an ever-growing brand of English language learners who are by the way partakers with their fellow users of the language from different horizons in an ever-globalized world. The book covers the two conventionally acknowledged parts of phonology namely segments and suprasegments. From the segmental perspective, it highlights a number of letter-sound relationships, which pose many problems to most EFL learners. The suprasegmental aspect of the book

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<sup>1</sup> Most of them are the product of the local English language educational system, which by the way shows limitations especially when it comes to phonology.

devotes itself to issues such as syllable, stress, levels of stress, and phonological processes. The book makes provision for methodological consideration for research students. It also takes up theories in order to inform post-graduate students about current phonological theories such as phonological variation, natural phonology and distinctive feature. The book strives at depicting, with as many examples as possible, a number of somehow regular trends in the language operational system. The peculiarity of the book is that it brings the study of English phonology down to earth, and puts it within the non-native learner's reach. The book attempts at scaffolding the phonology of English to make it more accessible and appealing to the ever-growing number of English language learners, especially EFL learners whose numbers keep increasing with time as peoples from various horizons show more and more interest in this global language. Considering the rising of different Englishes round the globe, there is need to bring to the attention of this growing number of learners the peculiarity of English speech moving from sounds to letters and vice-versa. This constitutes the foregrounding argument to the peculiarity of this book. Any ESL/EFL learner irrespective of nation or continent will definitely not feel disappointed should they read this book.

# INTRODUCTION

Many learners, especially non-native ones, consider phonology quite a scary subject. It is as difficult as mathematics or any other highly scientific subject for literary students. At the mention of the subject, many language learners feel already mentally defeated at the thought of coming to understand it. This situation results in a drop regarding interest in phonology studies as very few students venture into the subject at the post-graduate stage. In addition to this, the most undertaking ones who take up the challenge and undermine the difficult nature of the subject face another problem, that of the exploitability of the available books. Phonology books, especially those dealing with English, seem to be of little use to a good number of students and aspiring masters of the English language. This is because the learners' superficial knowledge turns English phonology books into farfetched pieces of writings whose content is subject to some interpretation. Since no interpretation can be afforded without mastery of the subject, very many language learners hardly succeed to make meaning out of phonology literary productions, which they deem highly opaque and the accessibility of them a chimera.

The reasons foregrounding this state of affairs can be explored for better outcomes in the study of English phonology. Many EFL learners have little phonological instruction or no instruction at all in their language programs especially in Cameroon where the authors of this book live. It should be acknowledged in passing that a plethora of measures have been taken in the country to promote the use of English in the nation. As a matter of fact, all regional headquarters are endowed with a Linguistic Pilot Centre, where citizens from all walks of life are given the opportunity to learn either of the two official languages. In the same vein, bilingual high schools are commonly found in the nation. Under normal circumstances, the current increasing spread of the language in the country and even round the globe ought to go hand in glove with corresponding literacy in the subject. Unfortunately, some challenges still need to be

surmounted for a better language turnout as far as the study of the sounds of English is concerned.

The first challenge has to do with the language instructors themselves. Very few language teachers in non-native contexts feel comfortable when it comes to delivering a lesson on the sounds of English. Despite the provision of phonology-related lessons by syllabuses, most instructors would scratch over or completely avoid teaching phonology lessons. The fear these instructors face deserves to be sorted out and duly addressed to ensure that the phonological assets contained in various books on the subject should not be lost or left to remain on paper despite the richness of their nature. Otherwise, books will be written but the riches therein would not be duly exploited to the benefit of the learners who on their part ought to change attitude towards the subject.

The second challenge takes up the learners' mindset. Learners need to be encouraged in their phonology input gaining tasks. They should be made to feel confident about a subject they somehow consider inaccessible. They should be told that the subject is not as difficult as it seems to be. Many learners seem to carry along an old negative attitude they had nurtured for years under the influence of many concurrent factors. To some extent, all potential factors accounting for such negative attitude should be sorted out and properly addressed. The old ungrounded prejudices about the subject need to be done away with. In this regard, the teacher plays a critical role. Through encouraging speeches, s/he can take his or her learners out of their mental pit. Such an endeavour would bring about some better dispositions to phonology works.

The third challenge concerns itself with the accessibility of phonology books. This is where the present book situates itself. How many are they who can afford explaining concepts like "onset", "nucleus", "full vowel", "level of stress", "minimal pairs", "phonological processes" and so on and so forth. All these concepts are tackled in phonology studies. Without down-to-earth explanations, the learner would feel defeated even before reading any phonology book. Whatever good the book may be, it would remain cloudy in the sense that very few non-native learners would grasp the excellent content of it. Considering that very many learners are first

and foremost scared at the mention of the subject as stated earlier, books with plainer explanation and context reflecting data are needed. It is along these lines that this book came up with the hope that it will make learners gain more insight in phonology. The book aims at making phonological issues accessible at least to speakers of languages other than English (viz. ESL and/or EFL learners). It serves as a tool for palliative measures towards the appropriation of phonological knowledge. These are measures that would somehow bridge the gaps in the learners' deeper knowledge of phonology. The conceptual contribution of the work in expatiating on phonology concepts, with a focus on phonological processes, should not be neglected as we introduce the book to ESL and EFL learners, the potential consumers of this language input product.

The current book is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter addresses the notion of English language learning and the second chapter defines some key concepts of phonology. Chapter Three discusses segmental phonology; Chapter Four tackles suprasegmental phonology. Chapter Five concerns itself with some phonological processes. In Chapter Six, some phonological rules are provided. The book ends with a review of some phonology-related theories, research domains and phonological research methodology (Chapter Seven) and answers provided to the in-text tasks (Chapter Eight).

# CHAPTER 1

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Every child is born of a heterosexual couple of which each member is endowed<sup>2</sup> with an innate ability to acquire language. The sooner the child is born, without any further effort, s/he is exposed to the language that prevails in his/her up-bringing environment, which is most often that of his immediate parents. From this exposure, the child develops acquaintance with the sound system of his/her mother language. As a result, the tender learner slowly and gradually acquires the language of his/her parents with all its phonological and syntactic intricacies. All this takes place without any difficulty whatsoever to deserve attention. Besides, the child never finds his/her language strange or cacophonous no matter the complexity of its sound system.

Conversely, if a foreigner pays a visit to the home, the child would realize that he or she is in the presence of a new and strange speech. The new language would sound cacophonous to him/her. The child's brain would acknowledge the strangeness of the new language and would label it as such. This would be made manifest in the gaze of the concerned at the foreigner. Should this learner be asked to repeat any part of the speech of the foreign language, s/he would have it tough enough to utter the least sound sequence. S/he would definitely feel embarrassed and wonder where to start. Such embarrassment would stem from the assimilation of sounds that fall outside the spectrum of the learner's common sounds. Considering that phonology concerns itself with the study of sounds, something should be done for an easier accessibility among non-native learners, especially among users of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This applies to all English language learning contexts in Africa, America, Asia and Europe. Whether

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<sup>2</sup> Information drawn from Chomsky's Language Acquisition Device (LAD).

here or there, there is need for potential learners to afford the English language from its phonological component.

The accessibility of phonology requires treatment with tact as English language learners hold different statuses in their learning depending on who they are and where they learnt or are learning English and whether the context is a monolingual or multilingual one. It follows that much effort would be expected from the learner to appropriate English inasmuch as it is not his or her first language. From the foregoing, we shall differentiate between the two famous non-native wings of English language learning (ELL) statuses namely ESL and EFL.

### **1.1. The ESL and EFL learner**

Language learning contexts differ from one environment to another. Some contexts are monolingual while others are multilingual. For instance, learning English in Chad cannot be the same as learning it in Rwanda. In other words, greater effort is needed in teaching English in Chad than in Rwanda. Chad hosts more than 120 indigenous ethnic groups against 2 ethnic groups in Rwanda. However, in terms of status, the Chadian and Rwandan English learner hold the same status. This is so in the sense that both have no opportunity to use English outside the classroom environment. The difference between EFL and ESL is established on the basis of whether the language is found in the social fabric of the society in which English is learnt. This implies that a learner of a given language may or may not pick up the language s/he is attempting to learn depending on whether s/he has direct contact with the speakers of his/her target language or not. In other words, when the target language prevails in all walks of life, that language is said to be an L2 in general and ESL if the language in use happens to be English. The L2 is a language one learns or acquires immediately after the L1, which under normal circumstances is one's mother language.

From the foregoing we can situate ESL learning context in the world. Learning English as an L2 applies first and foremost for newly arrived people who undertake to learn English in England, America, Australia, New Zealand, etc. In all these countries English permeates in all walks of

life. It should also be noted that English can be learnt as an L2 in countries like Nigeria, South Africa, Singapore, Australia, Ghana, India, etc. where English is spoken almost everywhere (church, market, office, travel agencies, etc.) in addition to the fact of being used as the language of instruction. In such settings, the learner stands more chances to use the second language (English in the present case).

Conversely, should the learner hardly have any contact with other speakers in the learning context, English would be a foreign language in that context. This gives room to the term EFL (English as a Foreign Language). A language is referred to as a foreign language when it is neither learnt immediately after the first language or mother tongue nor encountered in the near environment of the learner. Unlike the second language, the foreign language is taught as a subject in school. As such, the second language is used to teach other subjects and even sometimes used to explain the foreign language (especially in the grammar translation teaching method). Therefore, English as a foreign language serves in countries where the language is learnt for business purposes (as in China) or diplomatic purposes (like in Chad). Thus, an EFL learner is a learner who lives in one of the countries where English is heard almost nowhere apart from the classroom situation as in China, Chad, Gabon, etc.

In this vein, apart from the settings where native forms of English are spoken (the United Kingdom and the United States of America), any other country where English is spoken or taught is classified under either an ESL or EFL language learning setting. However, Cameroon is still an atypical case study (Safotso, 2016). In Cameroon, one can distinguish between four categories of English learners. Before delving into details about these types of Cameroonian English learners, we shall consider the linguistic presentation of this country.

Cameroon is a country that is referred to as Africa in miniature. This appellation results from the fact that Cameroon's sociocultural, economic and linguistic spectrum is widely diversified. As far as linguistic diversity is concerned, more than 250 local languages are spoken in the country (Kouega, 2007). The languages found in Cameroon can be grouped under



four main linguistic statuses: the official languages, the lingua francas, the national languages and the mixed languages.

- **The official languages of Cameroon**

There are two official languages (French and English) in Cameroon, which is an officially bilingual country. This has come into existence as one of the consequences of colonisation. Since 1916, the year that marked the departure of the German power from the country because of its defeat in the First World War, Cameroon was put under the administration of both France and the United Kingdom. France ruled over eight of the current ten Regions and the United Kingdom reigned in the two other Regions (the North-West and South-West). French and English were thus spoken separately and respectively in these two parts of the country: Francophone and Anglophone Cameroon. However, although Cameroon is now an independent nation, French and English, which were left as linguistic legacies from these colonial powers, are now the languages officially used in every domain (media, administration, education, health, etc). Nonetheless, official bilingualism only started during the reunification of Francophone Cameroon and Anglophone Cameroon in 1961. Thus, as English (for Francophones) and French (for Anglophones) gain more and more value in the sight of the citizens of the country, the Government of Cameroon has set up several bilingual schools in the nation to encourage the learning of both official languages. Nowadays, the number of bilingual citizens is continuously growing. In 2005, for instance, 11.6% of the population of Cameroon could speak both English and French (Tanang and Efon, 2013), which would have greatly increased by now; for positive attitudes towards English (for Francophones) and towards French (for Anglophones) are fast growing (Faissam Warda, 2023).

- **The lingua francas**

Originally, lingua franca was a kind of mixed language (attested pidgin) of trade used in eastern Mediterranean coast based on the Italian, Greek and Arabic languages. In current linguistic and sociolinguistic use, it is a “general term for a second acquired language system that serves as a means of communication between speakers of different first languages (or

extremely distinct dialects), [...] as well as naturally or artificially mixed languages having arisen from several individual languages” (Bussmann, 2006: 687-688). In this respect, some scholars including Tabi (2000), and Boum & Sadembouo (1999) attest that there are about five main *lingua Francas* in Cameroon:

- The Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), mainly used in the North-West and South-West Regions. This language is known as the most widely spoken *lingua franca* in Cameroon.
- The Basaa language, spoken in the Littoral, Centre and South Regions;
- The Duala language, spoken in the Littoral and the South-West;
- The Beti-fang language, spoken in the Centre, South and East Regions;
- And the Fulfulde language, spoken mainly in the Grand-North (the Adamawa, North and Far-North Regions). These researchers group these Cameroon *lingua francas* into two wide groups namely the minor *lingua francas* and the major *lingua francas*.

### **The minor *lingua francas***

The languages classified under this group referred to as minor *lingua francas* include the Shuwa Arabic, Bulu, Duala, Hausa, Kanuri, Mungaka and the Wandala languages. These languages are considered as Minor *lingua francas* because their speakers tend to be conversant with at least one other *lingua franca*: the major *lingua franca*.

### **The major *lingua francas***

The languages referred to as major *lingua francas* include the Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), the Fulfulde language and the Beti language. The Beti language “is the group name of a cluster of mutually intelligible languages spoken in the forest zone in the southern half of Cameroon [...] which can be said to be represented by Ewondo” (Kouega and Baimada, 2012: 11). Among these *lingua francas*, the Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) and the Fulfulde language are the most used in the country: thus, they are the main *Lingua Francas*.

### - **The national languages**

Cameroon is a country that has a great wealth of indigenous languages. It is quite difficult to state the exact number of national languages in this Africa in miniature. Kouega (2007) claimed that there are about 250 spoken languages in this country. Kouega and Baimada (2012) estimate about 300 coexisting languages in Cameroon. Actually, other scholars identify less and others identify more than 250 spoken languages in the country. This is partly due to divergent views on the classification of languages as whether they are varieties of other languages or independent languages on their own. In fact, the languages spoken in Cameroon include some 58 Afro-Asiatic languages, 187 Niger-Congo languages, 4 Ubangian languages, and 2 Nilo-Saharan languages (Tanang and Efon, 2013). In addition to these national languages, other foreign languages came into the country as a result of colonisation. These languages from the overseas include German and Spanish in addition to French and English. Nonetheless, the linguistic repertoire of Cameroon is surprisingly not finite. Many other languages including Chinese and Italian have been paving their way into the Cameroon infinite linguistic spectrum. Addressing this issue is not however indispensable to the notion of English as either second or foreign language.

### - **The mixed languages**

To date, there is one emergent mixed language in Cameroon: the Camfranglais. The latter is a language mostly spoken by the youth. Some people even refer to it as the youth language with varying denomination: Camfranglais, Francamglais, Francamanglais (Eloundou Eloundou and Tsofack, 2016: 282). By definition, Camfranglais is a mixed language made up of terms coming from many languages including French, English, Cameroon Pidgin-English and some Cameroon local languages. In this vein, Mulo Farenkia and Tatchouala (2016: 205) define this mixed language as a “parler hybride...une pratique socio-langagière complexe, qui se nourrit des mélanges de termes issus du français, d’anglais, du pidgin-English et des langues autochtones camerounaises et qui s’énonce dans une syntaxe faite de néologies diverses”. This definition can be translated as follows: hybrid language... a complex socio-linguistic

practice, which grows up from the mixture of terms drawn from French, English, Pidgin-English and Cameroonian native languages and that is enunciated in a syntax full of multiple neologies.

In fact, even its orthography (cam-fran-glais) shows that it is formed from Cameroonian languages (the first syllable “cam-“, a clipping of the word “Cameroon”), the French language (the second syllable “-fran- a clipping of the French word “français”) and the English language (the last syllable “-glais”, representing the last syllable of the French word “anglais” (English)). Camfranglais is “a linguistic code used by youth to show their belonging to the generation, their friendship, and their (equal) social class in different settings such as school environment, cinema, restaurants, families, etc.” (Mulo Farenkia and Tatchouala, 2016: 206). It is also worth mentioning that Camfranglais is mostly spoken by francophone Cameroonians (thus including CamFE speakers: the typical EFL Cameroonian learners). It is a way of both codifying talks and running away from the complex French and English grammar rules. Camfranglais<sup>3</sup> can be said to be a linguistic appropriation of the French and English languages by young Cameroonians: a form of linguistic nativisation of the colonial languages.

As said above, there are four categories of English learners in Cameroon according to the linguistic background of the learner and the type of school attended. In fact, there are two systems of education in Cameroon: the anglophone system (based on the British model of education) and the

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<sup>3</sup> Camfranglais, which is a mixture of the Cameroon two official languages (English and French) and the national languages of the country that mainly include the Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), the Ewondo language and the Basa language, is coined by young Cameroonians to affirm their belonging to their generation, their particularity as compared to the old generation, their want of hiding information from the other generation (especially the old one) and their desire to be free from any linguistic (grammatical) constraints (morphological, syntactic and lexico-semantic rules that govern the languages of the western world (English and French)). The burst-out of the Camfranglais is like a decisive outbreak of a global resistance against the governing rules of the languages from the overseas. The ardent want for liberty is even shown through the appellation of this mixed language which varies at the speakers’ guise. It can either be called Camfranglais, Francanglais or Francamanglais. Eloundou Eloundou and Tsofack (2016), and Mulo Farenkia and Tatchouala (2016) have a deeper elaboration on this.

francophone system (based on the French model of education). Thus, the four categories of learners are determined, in one way, by these systems of education. The following are identified: the anglophone learner from an anglophone subsystem of education in Cameroon (a pure Anglophone Cameroonian), the anglophone learner from a francophone subsystem of education, the francophone learner from an anglophone subsystem of education and the francophone learner from a francophone subsystem of education.

#### **A – The anglophone learner from an anglophone subsystem of education.**

The anglophone learner, from an anglophone subsystem of education, is a Cameroonian from the two anglophone regions of the country, who either schooled or schools in these regions. This learner is a reinforced Anglophone. In this part of the country, the learner is in the same learning condition as any other ESL learner from Nigeria, South Africa, Singapore, etc. There is an ideal ESL learning situation in Cameroon, the 1<sup>st</sup> degree of Cameroon ESL learning context. Anglophone Cameroonian citizens whom Gam Nkwi (2007) refers to as fluent English speakers from the North West or South West Regions of Cameroon, inclined to the British ways of behaving (culture), are from this learning and social environment. This is a category of ESL learner or speaker Cameroonians commonly refer to as “pure anglophone”. We call learners from such categories the *reinforced Anglophones*.

#### **B – The anglophone learner from a francophone subsystem of education.**

Some parents in the anglophone regions of Cameroon may decide to send their children to French system of education. The learners live in a purely anglophone area but study in a school where English is just a school subject. This is atypical to both ESL and EFL learning situations. We refer to these learners as *francophone-made Anglophones*.

### **C – The francophone learner from an anglophone subsystem of education.**

With official bilingualism being promoted by national language policy in Cameroon, bilingual high schools are created almost everywhere in the country. With the growing desire of being versed in the two official languages of the country (English and French), francophones are rushing for English. This is manifested through their choice of anglophone schools. This case is also atypical to both ESL and EFL learning situations. The learners live in an area where English is not spoken apart from the classroom situation. However, English is the language of instruction (that makes it feature as an ESL situation), but not used in any other situation out of the classroom. We refer to this category of learners as the *anglophone-made Francophones*.

### **D - The francophone learner from a francophone subsystem of education.**

This last category of learners is in a typical EFL learning situation in Cameroon. These learners (and learning situation) of English constitute the first (hardest) degree of EFL as far as remoteness from the target language is concerned. In this book, we call this category of learners *reinforced Francophones*.

So, the four types of ESL/EFL learners in Cameroon are the *reinforced Anglophones*, the *francophone-made Anglophones*, the *anglophone-made Francophones*, and the *reinforced Francophones*.

In the following sub-headings, we shall throw more light on these concepts (ESL and EFL learner) by drawing from more authoritative and acknowledged voices in the field of second language learning.

#### **1.1.1. The ESL learner**

Selinker (1972) holds that any language that is learnt subsequent to a first language is associated with L2 learning. The ESL learner is therefore any learner for whom English is not a native language. In other words, that learner's L1 is a language different from English, the very language s/he