Sociolinguistic and Structural Aspects of Cameroon Creole English

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By

Aloysius Ngefac

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To
Edgar W. Schneider
University of Regensburg

For many years of persistent support prior to my Alexander von Humboldt (AvH) stay;
For his unflinching support during my entire AvH stay;
For inspiring and initiating me into the study of Pidgins and Creoles;
For diligently proof-reading every page of this book and making highly insightful suggestions; and
For having a great head and a great heart!

To
Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

For providing me the financial opportunity and resources to accomplish my professional and research goals!

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FOREWORD

> Language exerts hidden power, like a moon on the tides. (Rita Mae Brown[1], *Starting from Scratch*, 1988)

This book by Aloysius Ngefac is the story of the history and development of one of Cameroon's most useful languages: a language known by many names - Pidgin English, Cameroon Creole, Cameroonian, Kamtok, Cameroon Creole English - but universally accepted as a fully functioning tongue, capable of carrying the experiences, needs and hopes of its many users.

Providing new and reconsidered information on a language serves many purposes: it adds to our knowledge of the linguistic creativity of human beings who can mould even the most rudimentary of lingua francas into flexible, vibrant communication systems; it allows us to compare across barriers of both time and space; and it enables us to evaluate theories on acquisition, growth and future possibilities of one more human communication system.

It is clear from every page of his book that Aloysius Ngefac is a scholar who has used, studied and loved Cameroon Creole English. He tells the reader about its origins and evolution, set against a backdrop of informed discussions of pidgins and creoles in general and African varieties in particular. We learn about Cameroon Creole English sound patterns, its structure, its lexical inventiveness, its variety and its likely codification and, throughout the lucid descriptions, respect is paid to other workers in the field and to the Cameroonians who have made the language what it is.

There is, of course, natural speculation about exactly when and where Cameroon Creole English was originally conceived. It may have been as early as the 16th century or as recent as the nineteenth; it may, in part, be a relexification of a Portuguese Pidgin that may go back to the fifteenth century and the earliest days of Portuguese exploration; it may owe more

[1] Brown, Rita Mae 1989. *Starting from Scratch.* Bantam.

than is often appreciated to Sierra Leone's Krio; it is certainly indebted to the speakers of Cameroonian languages who exploited its usefulness as a communication system among Cameroonians and between Cameroonians and speakers of European languages.

If we could only wind the clock back four hundred and fifty years – a mere tick of the timepiece that measures human habitation on the planet – we might be in a better position to evaluate the development of English-related Pidgins and Creoles in West Africa. Was there a viable form of communication English on the West African coast as early as the second half of the sixteenth century? If only we had more information on the language used by John Hawkins and his crew during his three slaving missions to Africa! And yet, because his expeditions were so profitable, there is more information on them than we might otherwise expect. His first recorded visit to West Africa was to Sierra Leone in 1562. J.A. Froude[2], in his lecture 'John Hawkins and the African Slave Trade' tells us that Hawkins and his crew:

> *…sailed in October 1562. They called at the Canaries, where they were warmly entertained. They went on to Sierra Leone, where they collected 300 negroes. They avoided the Government factories, and picked them up as they could, some by force, some by negotiation with local chiefs…*

Froude does not consider the plight of the Africans or tell us much about the language used by Hawkins's crewmen on this particular voyage. In an earlier lecture, however, he describes the makeup of Elizabethan crews. They were:

> *…English from the Devonshire and Cornish creeks, Huguenots from Rochelle; Irish kernes* ['fighters'] *with long skenes* ['knives'], *desperate, unruly persons with no kind of mercy…*

With crew members speaking different languages and dialects, it is likely that a simplified, composite dialect of English would already have developed on the ship and been passed on to some of the 300 Africans during the lengthy voyage and it is probable that elements of the composite dialect were used in contacts with coastal African middlemen. There would certainly have been plenty of opportunities to make use of such a dialect. Between 1562 and 1567, Hawkins made three journeys to West Africa and between then and 1807, in excess of 11,000 ships left

[2] Froude, J.A. 1896. *English Seamen in the Sixteenth Century*, London: Longman, Green and Co.

English ports to travel to West Africa to participate in this most profitable but inhuman trade in African men, women and children.

Sierra Leone was a favoured port of call for European ships mainly because of its excellent natural harbour at Freetown, the third largest natural harbour in the world and the largest in Africa. In spite of its expanse of coast, Africa has few natural harbours and, in the past, small ships needed the security of a port like Freetown if they were to avoid the perils of rocks, coral reefs and tropical storms. The fortress built near Freetown harbour by the Portuguese in 1495 was regularly visited by English slavers and may well have had people there who had the ability to communicate in some form of English. By the end of the 18th century, parts of Sierra Leone had been settled by African Americans who had fought for the British during the American War of Independence, by Jamaican Maroons and by thousands of freed slaves who had originally come from many different parts of West Africa. Their lingua franca became known as *Krio* and the term 'Krio' was also applied to its speakers. Many of the Krios travelled to other parts of Africa, mainly as missionaries, traders and clerks and their descendants can be found in the Gambia, Nigeria, Cameroon and Fernando Po. Creoles related to Krio were also established in these countries but, whereas Fernando Po's *Pichi* has borrowed heavily from Spanish, Gambia's Aku has used English as a linguistic repository.

The links between Sierra Leone Krios and Cameroonians are well documented[3], and the linguistic debt that Cameroon Creole English owes to Krio is apparent at every level[4] and is most particularly marked when Cameroon English and Krio share words and calques from African languages that are not found in or near Cameroon.

Scholars will continue to debate many of the issues raised by this book, issues for example, regarding the genesis and defining characteristics of creoles in general and Cameroon Creole English in particular. Is Cameroon Creole English a pidgin or a creole? Is it a tone language? Is it a variety of English or an African language? How can it best be codified? Many such questions are raised, discussed and evaluated here and readers

[3] See, for example, Gwei, Solomon N. 1966. *History of the British Baptist Mission in Cameroon with Beginnings in Fernando Po, 1841–1886*. B.D. thesis, Baptist Theological Seminary, Ruchlikon-Zurich, Switzerland.

[4] See, for example, Todd, Loreto 1979. 'Cameroonian: a consideration of 'What's in a Name?', *Journal of Creole Studies*, pp. 281-94

will be left with a clear understanding of the power and scope of this language. To date, it has not been fully utilised in education but Ngefac's book may help give the language the status to ensure that, in this field too, it will show its value and versatility. Cameroon Creole English has been used for decades as a medium for religious instruction and as a vehicle for a rich oral culture. It deserves a role in education and, with codification, this role may well be guaranteed.

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PREFACE

The underlying motivation behind the writing of this book is the subjective way Cameroon Creole English has been treated by different stakeholders (government authorities, researchers, and laypeople). Besides the fact that it is generally perceived as 'bush English', the error system of English or a language without any describable and systematic pattern, some people consider it a pidgin, qua a contact outcome with a restricted structure and function. In addition, some government authorities have even decreed the banning of the language in certain official circles on grounds that it is an impediment to the effective promotion of good English in Cameroon. As a result of this type of impressionistic view, very few local scholars are interested in carrying out research on this language and this is confirmed by the fact that before 1990 there were less than five locally produced research works on the language (see Ngefac 2011). This attitude of rejection towards a language that significantly embodies the ecology of Cameroon signals the inferiority complex that some people in this postcolonial multilingual nation often associate with their local potentials.

The fact that most research works on this language have been written by foreign-born scholars (see, for instance, Schneider 1960, 1966, 1967; Dwyer 1966; Todd 1969, 1971, 1986, 1979, 1991; Féral 1978, 1980, 1989; Bellama et al. 1983; and Schröder 2003a & b) implies that the voices of local scholars are significantly lacking in the story of this language. Most of the efforts of local researchers have only resulted in a few scientific papers. Apart from Kouega (2008) and Nkengasong (2016), published books on the language by local scholars do not exist. Kouega (2008) is a dictionary attempt for the language and Nkengasong (2016) is the effort of a literary critic in describing some grammatical features of the language (e.g. word classes, sentence types, and sentence structure). But critical research monographs, like the present book, that situate the description of the language within current thinking in the field of creolistics are significantly lacking. In fact, leading voices in the area of pidgins and creoles (e.g. Gilbert Schneider 1960, 1966, 1967; Hall 1966; Dwyer 1966; Todd 1969, 1971, 1986, 1979, 1990, 1991; Féral 1978, 1980, 1989; Samarin 1971; Mühlhäusler 1980, 1986, 1997; Allegne 1980; Bickerton 1981, 1984; Holm 1988; Edgar Schneider 1990; Chaudenson 1992; Muysken and Smith 1995; Bakker 1995, 2008; Baker 1997; Mufwene

1997, 2001; Faraclas 1996; Lefebvre 1998; McWhorter 1998, 2005; Huber 1999, Thomason 2001; Lefebvre 2004; Veenstra 2008; and Siegel 2008) are seldom heard nor seen in some of these previous works. The scarcity of critical research monographs on this language by Cameroonian scholars has significantly delayed its codification process. This research monograph is, therefore, the voice of a speaker and user of Cameroon Creole English and goes a long way to bring to the limelight many salient sociolinguistic, structural and creolistic aspects of the language, which have either not been addressed at all in previous works or have not been given adequate attention.

The concerns of this book are many. First, a critique of creolistic literature is provided and it is argued that there is the need to redefine the notions of *pidgin* and *creole* and recognize the different routes to creolization, without which the controversy surrounding their defining characteristics is likely to continue. Second, the evolutionary trajectory of the language is traced and its current sociolinguistic situation is discussed. Third, the developmental status of the language is assessed and it is established whether it is just a mere error system of its main lexifier, a pidgin or a creole. Fourth, an orthography that befits the linguistic realities of the language is proposed. This orthography is based on the premise that Cameroon Creole English is an independent language with language-specific aspects that should necessarily be reflected in its writing system, albeit its lexical relationship with the main lexifier. Fifth, the variation that characterizes the language at different linguistic levels is described and the impact of this variation on codification and standardization-related decisions is discussed. Sixth, the phonological and syntactic aspects of the language are described. Through the phonological description, the structural distance between the language and its main lexifier is evaluated. The syntactic analysis further emphasizes this structural distance between the language and English, but also shows the extent to which the language reflects the creole core prototype model put forward by Bickerton (1981) and used by many creolists to evaluate the creole status of many contact languages around the world. Pitting the typological aspects of this language against those of a creole prototype reveals interesting facts about its developmental status, in spite of the criticism against Bickerton (1981).

The writing of this book could not be successful without the financial assistance provided by Alexander von Humboldt (AvH) Foundation and the support from many colleagues and family members. I am particularly indebted to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for granting me a fellowship and providing me a monthly stipend that enabled my family

and I to reside in Germany for many months to carry out this book project. Professor Edgar W. Schneider also deserves my heart-felt gratitude for his consistent support before, during, and after my AvH stay at his department. Because of his great head and great heart, he provided solutions to all my social, academic and professional problems during my entire stay at his department. I also owe a big debt of gratitude to Professor Samson Abangma, Professor Paul Mbangwana, Professor Nicholas Gabriel Andgiga, Professor Loreto Todd, Professor Magnus Huber, Professor Roswitha Fischer, Professor Edmond Biloa, Dr Ayu'nwi Neba, Mrs Sonja Schmidt-Zeidler, Professor Alexander Kautzsch, Mrs Patricia Ngefac, Dr Florian Schleburg, Dr Lucia Siebers, Dr Sarah Buschfeld, Dr Thomas Brunner, Dr Sylvia Reuters, Professor Bonaventure Sala, Professor Hans-Georg Wolf, Dr Lothar Peter, Mrs Maimona Wolf, Professor Christian Mair, Professor Thomas Hoffman, Professor Anne Schröder, Professor George Echu, Professor Audrey Mbeje, Professor Rachel Reynolds, and Professor Sarah Agbor for inspiring me in one way or another. I am also indebted to Tanyi Ngemoh Etienne, Mrs Amomoh Joan, Daniela Ajua Ngefac, Edgar Temate Ngefac, Jonathan-Irving Amomoh Ngefac, Siphora Njuafac Tendongmoh, Dr. Eric Ekembe and Professor John Nkemngong Nkengasong for their assistance. The above-mentioned people share with me the responsibility for the strengths of this book, but I alone shoulder the responsibility for its weaknesses.

Aloysius Ngefac
Yaounde, May 2016

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

Abbreviations

ABI	Ability
ACC	Adversative coordinating conjunction
AD	Adverb
ADD	Adverb of degree
ADF	Adverb of frequency
ADJ	Adjective
ADJV	Adjectival verb
AJ	Adjunct
ANT	Anterior
AP	Anaphoric pronoun
ART	article
cASP	Completive aspect
CC	Coordinating conjunction
CN1	Singular common noun
CN2	Plural common noun
COP	Copular verb
dART	Definite article
DEM	Demonstrative article
DEO	Deontic modality
DET	Determiner
DO	Direct Object
EMP	Emphatic marker
EQ	Equative
HCE	Hawaiian Creole English
HPE	Hawaiian Pidgin English
I	Focus introducer
INTJ	Interjection
IO	Indirect object
IP	Interrogative pronoun
IRR	Irrealis
LOC	Locative
MOD	Mood or modality
npASP	Nonpunctual aspect
OBJ	Object

P	Preposition
PCs	Pidgins and creoles
PDET	Pre-determiner capable of a pronominal function
PM	Plural marker
PN1	Singular proper noun
PN2	Plural proper noun
PO	Objective pronoun
POP	Possessive pronoun
PS	Subjective Pronoun
REL	Relativizer
RP	Relative Pronoun
SC	Subordinating conjunction
SjM	Subjunctive mood
TMA	Tense, mood, and aspect
VIPs	Very important personalities

Symbols

1	First Person singular Pronoun
2	Second person singular pronoun
3	Third person singular pronoun
4	First person plural pronoun
5	Second person plural pronoun
6	Third person plural pronoun

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself […] I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I can accept as legitimate all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself […] and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate (Anzaldua 1987: 59).

1. Background

It is hypothesized and claimed in this book that Cameroon Creole English displays rich sociolinguistic and structural aspects, in spite of the fact that it is often relegated to the background and, sometimes, treated with subjectivity by different stakeholders (government authorities, scholars, and laypeople). One of the hallmarks of relegating Cameroon Creole English to the background and treating its sociolinguistic and structural aspects with subjectivity includes the fact that some official authorities in Cameroon have already decreed the banning of the language in certain official circles (see, for instance, Alobwede 1998, Kouega 2001, and Ngefac 2011), on grounds that it is an impediment to the effective promotion of English in Cameroon. On the campus of the University of Buea, for instance, signboards overtly banning the use of the language

abound, in spite of the fact that the United Nations considers linguistic genocide a crime against humanity. The tendency to relegate Cameroon Creole English to the background and treat it with subjectivity is not very different from the fallacious, but already debunked, view of the older generation that pidgins and creoles are 'a mutilation without plan or rule' (Oldendorp 1777, quoted in Holm 1988: 19) that cannot be studied using normal linguistic theories.

This impressionistic view, in turn, is similar to the colonial mentality that seems to be defining the dreams and identity of postcolonial Cameroonians. In fact, the tendency to reject local potentials, because of the fallacious belief that they are necessarily inferior, is actually what Bokamba (2007) refers to as "ukolonia", a tendency whereby the vision and taste of postcolonial people are still shaped and conditioned by the colonial indoctrination. It should be noted that one of the strategies the colonizers used during the colonial administration was to convince the colonial 'subjects' that their culture, languages, and local potentials were necessarily inferior and barbaric and they had to give them up to embrace the supposedly superior 'ways' of the colonial masters. Though colonialism is now history, the colonial mentality and indoctrination continue to shape the lifestyle and identity of postcolonial people. This largely explains why in postcolonial multilingual Cameroon languages such as Cameroon Creole English and the indigenous languages, which conspicuously carry the supposedly 'inferior' local realities, are mostly treated with contempt and indignation. What explains the fact that Cameroon Creole English, an emblem of local identity, has witnessed very little scholarly interest from local researchers? What explains the fact that a language that significantly unifies the country, as it transcends most social boundaries, is being banned by official authorities, in spite of the fact that the United Nations strongly condemns all forms of genocide, including linguistic genocide? What explains the fact that more than fifty years after independence, neither Cameroon Creole English nor any of the over 285 indigenous Cameroonian languages have been raised to the status of official languages? What explains the fact that the passion in Cameroon is rather for the promotion of English and French to the detriment of languages that are rooted in local constructs? One can, therefore, maintain that the decolonization of Cameroon will become a complete process only when the Cameroonian mind is also decolonized, especially when postcolonial Cameroonians will stop associating their local potentials with an inferiority complex.

Given the subjective attitudinal tendencies Cameroon Creole English has witnessed (see Chapter Three for official efforts to ban the language and misleading nomenclatures given to it and Chapter Four for evidence on the misrepresentation of its developmental status), a book of this nature, which describes its sociolinguistic, creolistic and structural aspects, is not only necessary, but indispensable and timely. These aspects significantly mirror the ecological, sociolinguistic and sociocultural realities of its habitat and reveal the real sociolinguistic and creolistic statuses of the language.

But the question that immediately begs an answer is whether there are significant differences between this research monograph and previous endeavours. It can, in fact, be asserted that the book is very different from previous works in many ways. First, most previous attempts to describe the language are didactic in nature and do not treat the sociolinguistic and structural aspects of the language within the context of current thinking in the field of creolistics or pidgins and creoles. For instance, Kouega (2008) and Nkengasong (2016), the only published books on the language written by Cameroonian scholars, do not situate the description of the language within the context of what has been said in relation to pidgins and creoles by leading voices in creolistics (e.g. Gilbert Schneider 1960, 1966; Hall 1966; Dwyer 1966; Todd 1969, 1971, 1986, 1979, 1990, 1991; Féral 1978, 1980, 1989; Samarin 1971; Mühlhäusler 1980, 1986, 1997; Allegne 1980; Bickerton 1981, 1984; Holm 1988; Edgar Schneider 1990; Chaudenson 1992; Muysken and Smith 1995; Bakker 1995, 2008; Baker 1997; Mufwene 1997, 2001; Faraclas 1996; Lefebvre 1998, 2004; McWhorter 1998, 2005; Huber 1999, Thomason 2001; Veenstra 2008; and Siegel 2008). Since the language does not exist in a vacuum, there is the need to describe it with reference to the leading voices in the area of creolistics and with reference to what obtains in the other West African sister languages.

Second, the language has been described by both scholars and laypeople with a lot of subjectivity. Besides the popular layman view that the language is the bastardized non-standard variety of English (or bush English as some people prefer), some scholarly statements ignore or misrepresent the following facts about the language: (1) that it shoulders the heaviest communicative load in the country; (2) that it is the only language that transcends most social boundaries (ethnicity, level of education, linguistic background, age, and region) ; (3) that it is a significant source of national unity because of its neutral character; (4) that it is emblematic of the historical, ecological, sociolinguistic and sociocultural realities of Cameroon; (5) that it is neither “bush English”

nor the cause of poor standards in English Language; (6) that it is a full-fledged creole, not just a pidgin or a jargon, in spite of the controversy over the definition of a creole language (see, for instance, Mühlhäusler 1997; Bickerton 1981; Holm 1988, Todd 1990, Bakker 2008; Mufwene 1997, 2001; and Siegel 2008); and (7) that it displays systematic and describable structural aspects at different linguistic levels that project it as a language in its own rights, not just an error system or a mere basilectal variety of English. For instance, Bobda and Wolf (2003) reduce the geographical scope of the language to a few regions in the country and the functional or communicative scope to only "humorous topics", in spite of the fact that many scientific works (e.g. Todd 1990 and Mbangwana 1983 & 1991) and other empirical evidence contradict such a view. In addition, Kouega (2008) claims that lexical items in this language are marked by stress, but it is rather tone that generally defines the suprasegmental contour of the language, as in most Cameroonian indigenous languages. Forcing stress into the language is a consequence of not considering the typological or structural distance between the language and English.

Third, most descriptive works on the language are written by foreigners and the voices of local scholars are significantly lacking. The fact that most research works on this language have been written by foreign-born scholars (see, for instance, Schneider 1960, 1966, 1967; Dwyer 1966; Todd 1969, 1971, 1986, 1979, 1991; Féral 1978, 1980, 1989; Bellama et al. 1983; and Schröder 2003a & b) implies that local voices are necessary for a complete story of the language. Besides a few scientific articles published by local scholars, there are only two published textbooks on the language written by local scholars (Kouega 2008 and Nkengasong 2016). Kouega (2008) is a dictionary attempt for the language and Nkengasong (2016) is the effort of a literary critic in describing some grammatical aspects of the language, but the two works remain didactic in nature and do not treat the language within current creolistic thinking.

1.1 Objectives

Considering the above-mentioned reasons that motivated this research endeavour, this book has been written to describe the sociolinguistic, creolistic, and structural aspects of the language. Sociolinguistically, it describes, after an in-depth research, the evolutionary trajectory of the language, which has not been attempted in most previous studies on the language. It also describes attitudinal tendencies towards the language, besides its functional and geographical spreads. In addition, an

orthography for the language is proposed and this orthography integrates the strengths of previous proposals and ignores their weaknesses. Furthermore, the book investigates the linguistic and sociolinguistic variations that characterize the language and examines the correlation between the language and the other languages that co-exist with it. Creolistically, the book assesses the developmental status of the language within its West African perspective. It should be noted that the question of whether West African contact languages are pidgins or creoles has been a heated debate in creolistic literature, but no consensus has so far been reached because of the controversy surrounding the definition of a creole and how it actually differs from other contact outcomes (see, for instance, Mühlhäusler 1980, 1986, 1997; Bickerton 1981, 1984; Holm 1988; Todd 1990; Schneider 1990; Bakker 1995, 2008; Mufwene 1997, 2001; Lefebvre 1998; McWhorter 1998, 2005; and Siegel 2008). Structurally, instead of simply identifying and describing some syntactic and phonological aspects of the language as is the case in some of the few previous studies that have attempted its description, this book describes the structural aspects of the language from a comparative perspective, in order to evaluate the typological distance between the language and its main lexifier, which are considered by some scholars to be in a dialectal continuum. The book, therefore, investigates the sociolinguistic, creolistic, and structural aspects of a Cameroonian contact language that has been significantly relegated to the background by different stakeholders.

1.2 Research questions

The research questions that guided the investigation are as follows:

- What is the evolutionary trajectory of the language?
- What are the different subjective and biased tendencies that have significantly compromised the real aspects of the language?
- What is the functional and geographical scope of the language?
- How does the language correlate with other languages spoken in Cameroon?
- What is the relationship between the language and its main lexifier?
- What is the developmental status of the language? In other words, is Cameroon Creole English a pidgin, a creole or a mere error system of English?
- Which name is most befitting for this language: “Kamtok”, “Cameroon Pidgin English”, or “Cameroon Creole English”?

- Which orthography befits the structural and sociolinguistic aspects of the language?
- Which sociolinguistic variables account for the linguistic variability that characterizes the language at different linguistic levels? What are the possible implications of this variation for codification and standardization-related decisions?
- What are the structural aspects of the language? To what extent are these linguistic aspects different from those of English and similar to those of other creole languages?
- What are the sociolinguistic, pedagogic and political implications of the real aspects of this language?

1.3 Scope

The sociolinguistic, creolistic and structural scopes of the book are worth defining. The sociolinguistic scope includes the evolutionary trajectory of the language, attitudinal tendencies towards it, its functional and geographical spreads, the polemics involving its name, the relationship between the language and the other languages spoken in postcolonial multilingual Cameroon, and the variation that characterizes it at different linguistic levels, including the implications of the variation for the codification and standardization of the language. The creolistic scope consists in determining the developmental status of the language, by pitting the characteristics of the different categories of contact languages against those of Cameroon Creole English and evaluating whether the language is a creole, a pidgin or an error system of its main lexifier. The structural scope is limited to the phonological and syntactic aspects of the language, given that phonology and syntax constitute the linguistic levels of the language that best x-ray its salient structural and creolistic aspects. This explains why the seventh and the eighth chapters are dedicated wholly to phonology and syntax and it is in the chapter on variation (see Chapter Six) that such linguistic levels as morphology, lexis and semantics receive some minimal attention, even though the focus is still largely on variation and not on the linguistic levels per se. The scope of the work is, therefore, limited to the sociolinguistic, creolistic, and structural (phonological and syntactic) aspects of Cameroon Creole English.

1.4 Sociolinguistic, creolistic and structural significance

The book has a multi-dimensional significance. Sociolinguistically, it describes the status of a contact language in a postcolonial multilingual

context vis-à-vis other languages. In addition, the functional, geographical and temporal spreads of this contact language are discussed. Furthermore, the book investigates the linguistic and sociolinguistic variations that characterize the language and examines the correlation between the language and the other languages that co-exist with it. Besides, the book shows how decisions involving codification and standardization can be influenced by the existence of many varieties of the language. Finally, the orthography proposed in Chapter Five is instrumental in its codification and standardization processes.

Creolistically, the book assesses the developmental status of a Cameroonian contact language within its West African perspective. It should be noted that the question of whether West African contact languages are pidgins or creoles has been a heated debate in creolistic literature, but no consensus has so far been reached because of the controversy surrounding the definition of a creole and how it actually differs from other contact outcomes (see, for instance, Mühlhäusler 1980, 1986, 1997; Bickerton 1981, 1984; Holm 1988; Todd 1990; Schneider 1990; Bakker 1995, 2008; Mufwene 1997, 2001; Lefebvre 1998; McWhorter 1998, 2005; and Siegel 2008). This explains why this book argues that if the notions of *pidgin* and *creole* are redefined and the different trajectories to creolization are recognized, it will be possible to come up with putative sociolinguistic and structural aspects that can define the developmental status of a contact outcome such as Cameroon Creole English. The developmental status of the language is, therefore, established in this book using different creolistic yardsticks, including pitting the characteristics of the language against those of a creole prototype model put forward by Bickerton (1981). The book is also significant in that it traces the anachronistic trajectory of the language and establishes that the genesis and development of the language cannot be accounted for by relying only on the imperfect second language learning theory widely acclaimed in the literature; the relexification theory and the substratal essence also provide difficult-to-neglect clues.

Structurally, the book identifies and describes the phonological and syntactic aspects of a language that is assumed by some people to be the impoverished variety of its main lexifier. These phonological and syntactic aspects of the language provide the yardsticks through which the structure of the language can be contrasted with that of English.

1.5 Methodology: the informants, methods of data collection and the analytical approach

This section is dedicated to the description of the informants, sources of data, method of data collection, and a description of the analytical approach for the data. As concerns the informants, they were made up of Cameroon Creole English speakers from different social backgrounds ('educated' and 'uneducated'[1] speakers, Anglophones and Francophones, younger and older speakers, speakers from the different regions of the country and speakers from different ethnic backgrounds). These informants provided the raw data needed for the project through (1) their participation in the administration of the questionnaires; (2) their involvement in conversational exchanges with the investigator and his field assistants; (3) their spontaneous speech initiated by the investigator and his field assistant and (4) through their participation in radio programmes.

The data for this book were collected through different strategies. First, a questionnaire containing a series of sentences and lexical items in English was presented to the informants who orally provided the Cameroon Creole English equivalents, and a tape recorder was used to record their responses (see Appendix 1 for the questionnaire and a randomly selected sample translation). Second, questionnaires containing English Language sentences and lexical items were presented to Cameroon Creole English speakers from different social backgrounds to translate, through the written medium, into Cameroon Creole English (see Appendix 2 for a sample of the questionnaire). Third, free interviews were conducted in which informants were asked to narrate their various life experiences in the language and a tape recorder was used to record their speech (see Appendix 3 for a sample of one of the informants' free speech on different topics). Fourth, some Cameroon Creole English radio programmes were recorded (see Appendix 4 for a sample). Fifth, previous works on the language provided significant data for the project. Sixth, many words and expressions in the language, spontaneously used by speakers without any formal education and exposure to the English language, were collected during a period of over five years (see Appendix 5 for some of the words and expressions).

[1] The so-called 'uneducated' Kamtok speakers simply refer to those without formal education and significant exposure to the English language.

As concerns the analysis of the data, a qualitative descriptive method was generally used, but each of the dimensions of the study had a specific analytical approach. The sociolinguistic dimension of the study consisted in surveying, identifying, critiquing and describing the different sociolinguistic aspects of the language (history, attitudes, spread, co-existence with other languages, linguistic and sociolinguistic variability, etc.), some of which are documented in different empirical studies on the language. The creolistic dimension involved pitting the characteristics of the different categories of contact languages against the structural and sociolinguistic aspects of the language. In addition, the creole prototype model proposed by Bickerton was further used to evaluate the creole status of the language, in spite of the criticism levied against the Bickertonian creole core prototype model. The structural dimension consisted of phonology and syntax and each had a different analytical approach. The phonological analysis of the data consisted in transcribing the data collected from different sources, describing the different segmental and suprasegmental aspects of the language, and highlighting, where necessary, how such aspects contrast with those of its main lexifier (see Chapter Seven). The syntactic analysis involved a qualitative description of some structural aspects of the language (e.g. TMA (tense, mood, aspect) system, use of adjectives as verbs, serialization, complementation, clefting, and sentence structure) (see Chapter Eight).

1.6 Structure of the work and highlights

The book is made up of nine chapters. Chapter One is the general introduction. In this chapter the underlying motivations that led to the conception and conceptualization of the book are discussed. The objectives of the book, research questions, scope, sociolinguistic and creolistic significance, the methodology, and the structure of the book are also the concerns of the chapter. Generally, the chapter introduces the reader to the 'problem', the 'manner' of going about it and the 'matter' of the whole endeavour.

Chapter Two focuses on earlier impressionistic views about pidgins and creoles, the theories that attempt to account for their origin, and the defining characteristics of the different contact outcomes (jargons, pidgins, pidgincreoles and creoles). This chapter is actually a critique or an appraisal of creolistic literature. A discussion of previous impressionistic views about pidgins and creoles and their speakers paves the way for a better understanding of attitudinal tendencies and biases Cameroon Creole

English is currently experiencing, as underscored in Chapter Three. The different theories of pidgins and creoles genesis discussed in this chapter do not only capture part of the polemics characterizing the field of creolistics as regards the origin and nature of these contact outcomes, but they provide yardsticks through which the origin of any contact language, such as Cameroon Creole English, can be accounted for. In spite of the disagreement among linguists and creolists over the definition and characteristics of the different contact languages, the attempt in this chapter to put together the characteristics of these contact languages does not only expose the controversial nature of the field of creolistics, but also provides a necessary critique of the different schools of thought and proposes the conditions under which we can come up with putative characteristics that can determine the developmental status of a contact outcome such Cameroon Creole English and other pidgins and creoles. It is therefore suggested in this chapter that if the notions of *pidgin* and *creole* are redefined and the different trajectories to creolization are recognized, it will be much easier to determine whether a contact outcome is a jargon, a pidgin or a creole.

Chapter Three situates Cameroon Creole English within the historical and sociolinguistic realities of Cameroon. Specifically, the evolutionary itinerary of the language is traced; the polemics involving the name of the language are critically examined; the spread and functions of the language are discussed; the impressionistic views about the language and other attitudinal tendencies are presented; and the correlation between the language and the other languages spoken in Cameroon is underscored.

Chapter Four focuses on the developmental status of Cameroon Creole English and establishes that the language is not a variety of its main lexifier, but a full-fledged creole, by virtue of its different sociolinguistic and structural aspects. First, the large-scale plantations set up by the Germans during the German colonial administration (1884-1916), predictably, bred a conducive atmosphere for a creole or a 'complex' language to develop, given that there was a certain degree of a sustained contact similar to the one that characterized the settlement colonies where most prototypical creoles were created, coupled with the fact that the linguistic situation in these plantations and other areas of Cameroon was 'complicated' by the linguistic inputs of the numerous freed slaves who migrated from Liberia and Sierra Leone to Cameroon for employment at these plantations (see Mbangwana 1983). The linguistic impact of these slaves and the sustained contact that may have prevailed in these plantations cannot be overlooked. Second, the existence of many native

speakers of the language, as revealed in different empirical studies, is a further testimony for the creole status of this language. Third, the fact that the language is a main medium of communication for both children and adults in many urban areas shows that it is capable of expressing the full worldview of the speakers and it is only a contact language that has reached the creole stage that can perform this communicative function. The fourth evidence is the 'complexification' of its structure as seen in the following: the significant resemblance it bears with a creole prototype, the fact that it has an SVO-word order typical of other creole languages, and the fact that it displays other structural characteristics found in radical creoles such as Sranan and Saramaccan.

Chapter Five proposes an orthography for the language, based on its language-specific aspects and the fact that it is a full-fledged language. The chapter makes an appraisal of previous suggestions and argues that the orthography that befits the realities of the language should accommodate the segmental and suprasegmental aspects of the language and should necessarily be different from the English orthography, given that they are not varieties of the same language. Apart from the fact that this orthography justifies the spelling style adopted for the work, it will go a long way to enhance the codification process of the language and provide guidance for future writers, given that so far there are as many writing styles for the language as there are writers. The merit of the orthography proposed in this work is the fact that it integrates the strengths of previous proposals (see Ayafor 1996, Sala 2009, and Ngefac 2014), but emphasizes the aspects and autonomy of the language.

Chapter Six discusses variation in the language at all linguistic levels and attempts to correlate it with different sociolinguistic factors. The existence of variation at different linguistic levels (phonological variation, lexical variation, morphological variation, syntactic variation and semantic variation) actually results in well mapped out varieties of the language (e.g. the 'educated' variety, the 'uneducated' variety, the grafi variety, the sawa variety, etc.), some of which have already been mentioned in some previous studies (see Todd n.d.). The existence of different varieties of the language raises the question of which variety needs to be prioritized in the codification process of the language and which of the varieties is the best candidate for standardization (See Chapter Six for an answer to these questions).

Chapter Seven lays bare the phonological aspects of the language. The vowel and consonantal systems of the language are identified, described

and illustrated with examples from most of the varieties that constitute the dialectal continuum of the language; the vocalic and consonantal processes that characterize the language are examined; the syllable structure and its tonal aspects are analyzed, and it is finally argued that the phonological system of the language is significantly different from that of its main lexifier. The chapter also makes a critique of some previous statements on the phonology of the language.

Chapter Eight x-rays the syntactic aspects of the language. Specifically, the TMA system of the language is described according to the Bickertonian creole prototype model and it is concluded that it bears a significant resemblance with this model, in spite of the existence of a few differences. The chapter also describes other verbal aspects of the language, such as serialization, the use of adjectives as verbs, and its copular system and there is significant evidence that the language is similar to other creoles, such as Haitian Creole, Hawaiian Creole English, 'Nigerian Pidgin English', 'Ghanaian Pidgin English' and Mauritian Creole, especially as far as the copular system of the language is concerned. In addition to the verbal system of the language, other syntactic aspects such as relativization, complementation, clefting, and sentence structure are analyzed and the results show that Cameroon Creole English is very different from English, but very similar to other creole languages.

Chapter Nine is the general conclusion that recapitulates the 'problem' that served as the underlying motivation for the project, summarizes the way the 'problem' has been tackled, and presents highlights of the investigation. In addition, the findings and the main arguments raised in the work are further situated within sociolinguistic and creolistic literature. Furthermore, the political and pedagogic implications of the work are discussed.