






**Assimilation of the Anglo-Saxon System of Education in the Conflicted Ambazonia:
Delinking from Colonial Language Ideologies**
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Author/s	John Wankah Foncha¹ & Jane-Francis Afungmeyu Abongdia²	
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Assimilation of the Anglo-Saxon System of Education in the Conflicted Ambazonia: Delinking from Colonial Language Ideologies

John Wankah Foncha¹ & Jane-Francis Afungmeyu Abongdia²

^{1,2} The Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Email: fonchaj@cput.ac.za/ Jane-francisa@cput.ac.za

Abstract

Education is a mind builder and should be taken as a matter of importance in any nation. Following this, the curriculum designer is responsible for building learners' minds. Seen through this lens, this theoretical article intends to project the importance of community schools in conflict-stricken Ambazonia against the backdrop of the French curriculum. Education guidelines are addressed with reference to language planning, policy, and implementation. Additionally, the paper seeks to explain the current situation in Ambazonia and make arguments regarding the community schools' guidelines that aspire for multilingualism, where indigenous languages are taken seriously in teaching and learning. Another point discussed is the transitional authority (Ambazonia Transitional Authority), which was put in place to deal with implementing education guidelines and administrative issues. The paper concludes with the argument that what we think must be transformed into what we do and be shown by what we have done.

Introduction

In all multilingual communities, many people and situations are multilingual. In the case of Ambazonia, there is indigenous multilingualism and multilingualism that includes French and English, which are colonial languages that are perceived as the official languages as well as languages of instruction. Based on this, this article cautions from the onset that it is important to note that there are no stable communities, even in places we think of as homogenous (Nomlomo 1993; Makoni 1999). The hierarchical nature of some languages is responsible for the tilt of balance which necessitates the decoloniality of the curriculum. It is generally accepted that colonial languages often find a way to assimilate existing languages. Ambazonia poses a peculiar heterogeneous language situation that poses many communication problems since there is seemingly no lingua franca within the indigenous languages. However, Ambazonia pidgin English (APE) is used as a lingua franca. This situation is further complicated by the unequal use of English and French that thwarts the idea of bilingualism. The Ambazonia language policy in Cameroon lacks objectives and orientation because it is silent about indigenous languages that do not guarantee the appropriate implementation of multilingualism (Echu 2005). Given this, there was a need for the Ambazonia Governing Council to come up with an education guideline to replace the existing one and to create a sense of entrepreneurship and vocation.

Background

During the colonial era, Britain practiced indirect rule by allowing the use of indigenous languages in administration since Britain recognised and ruled through traditional chiefs. This was the opposite of French rule, which was assimilating Cameroonians and trying to give them an ideology of Frenchness, thereby limiting the use of indigenous languages in administration. In Southern Cameroon (today's Ambazonia), "the territory under British mandate (today Ambazonia), some indigenous languages like Bafut, Duala, Kenyang, and Mungaka were used alongside English in schools" (Bitja'a Kody, 1999: 82), while Britain left the domain of education in the hands of the local authorities and the missionaries, "the French colonial administration assumed exclusive responsibility for the education of its African subjects" (Bokamba, 1991: 183). Needless to stress, all French colonies are victims of this situation, which is a root cause of the ongoing war between Ambazonia and Cameroon.

Abongdia (2013: 13) argues that the "colonization of Africa left many countries with the issue of power dominance, control, and marginalization of smaller states." This remains the case with Ambazonia after she gained independence from her colonizers – Britain, and was later recolonized by her African neighbour – Cameroon, in the guise of federalism and later reunification. Allmann (2009:29) contends that most, if not all, "African countries retain certain aspects of colonialism," particularly regarding languages that have policies aimed at imposing the dominance of European languages. "Hence, the socio-political situation of the different African countries plays a vital role in the beliefs they hold about language(s). Today, English has achieved a dominant position as the global lingua franca and the language of economic and political activities" (Abongdia 2013: 14).

In 1961, during the Fouban plebiscite, there was a name change from the Federal Republic of Cameroon, which comprised La Republique du Camerroun on the one hand and Southern Cameroons (Ambazonia) on the other. There is now a language problem in the Federal Republic of Cameroon area, given that two languages were inherited from the colonial masters: French and English. French was used by four-fifths (80%) of the country, and English by the remaining one-fifth (20%) (Fonlon 1969: 14). According to Abongdia (2013: 17), in the 1961 constitution, "French and English were the official languages: French for the Federal state of East Cameroons and English for that of West" Cameroons (Ambazonia). To avert future rivalry between the two nations, the constitution was obliged to adopt a bilingual French and English language policy. To ensure that both countries were accommodated in the language policy, "bilingualism in these two languages was recommended" for official use, teaching, and learning (Fonlon 1969: 32).

According to Kouega (2007: 16), while nothing has been done to protect the indigenous languages, some attempts have been made to promote bilingual competency. Some of the strategies used to achieve this goal are

- Teaching the second official language for four hours a week over the academic year from Grades 1-6 (MINEDUC 2000, 2001).

- All primary school teachers are to teach all subjects in the syllabus, including the second official language (Order No. 21/E/59 of May 1996 organising the Grade One Teacher Certificate Examination).
- The second official language (written and spoken) shall both be part of the First School Leaving Certificate Examination and those of the Certificat D'Etudes Primaires, its French equivalent (order No. 66/C/12 of 16 February 2001).

Concerning the language in education policy, Abongdia (2013: 18) states that:

The language policy in Education depends on the different levels of Education. At the secondary school level, students use their first official language, English or French, as MOI [Medium of Instruction], and the second official language is a compulsory subject in the curriculum. In the final examination in Form 5, the final year of the English secondary schools, the Anglophones write their General Certificate Examination (GCE) in English while the Francophones write the *Brevet d'Etudes du Premier Cycle* (BEPC) [in the fourth year] in French. All papers are written in English and French, except for their second official languages. At the tertiary level, students choose their different faculties, and the MOI is determined by the availability of the lecturers for the given discipline (Simo bobda 2004, Kouega 2007). It is assumed that by the time students get to the University, they will have learnt enough of both languages to enable them to study in either or both languages. However, this does not seem to be the case as most students are not proficient in their second language and can hardly have a fluent conversation, let alone use it as an MOI. [The Bilingual Language in Education Policy] situation allows lecturers to teach in the most convenient language, leading to a situation where a lecturer may teach in one language and students would write in another.

This is the genesis of the language problem in Ambazonia and why teachers went on strike in 2016. Given the numerical advantage French teachers enjoy over English teachers, French became the medium of instruction even in Anglophone schools and courts. This angered teachers and lawyers, leading to the Lawyer and Teacher Strike that eventually led to a school boycott and the armed conflict of 2016 that we still have today. The school boycott went on for two years as people were internally displaced, and conditions were unsuitable for teaching and learning. In 2018, the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGOVC) and other factions of the war of independence came up with the idea of community schools, which started timidly but picked pace in 2022 when the guidelines for these community schools were introduced. As a matter of interest, the AGOVC engaged with private and mission schools and encouraged them to use these guidelines in their curricula, which they accepted and are currently implementing, to the dismay of the defunct Cameroon education system.

Based on the above, this article addresses the type of schooling in the conflict-stricken Ambazonia, focusing on the language of teaching and learning. Given this assertion, two types of schools exist in Ambazonia: government schools operated by the colonial la Republique du Cameroon and community schools founded during the conflict as an alternative to colonial schools. Since 2016, after the strike by Anglophone teachers and lawyers on the issue of language used for teaching and learning and in courts, there has been a banning of schools that were using the separatists' Cameroon curriculum. First, the ban on government schools was an attempt by

the separatists to reinstate the Anglo-Saxon culture in Ambazonia. Secondly, it was an attempt to terminate the mandate of French teachers who do not speak English but were deployed to teach English learners/students content subjects in a language they do not fully understand. Finally, there was also a clash between the civil law practiced by French Cameroon and the common law practiced in Ambazonia.

In 2020, AGOVC was unhappy that learners were not attending school and came up with education guidelines and a curriculum to replace the French system. The guidelines and alternative curriculum were given to private and mission schools and the Ambazonia Transitional Authority (ATLA) to use as a framework for schooling in Ambazonia. Among the changes were a curriculum change and the introduction of English and indigenous languages as the medium of instruction. As a result, community schools picked up steam in 2022, and many learners who had gone to Cameroon for education were returning to embrace these schools.

The number of learners and volunteer teachers is now growing tremendously within the three years of existence of these community schools. The teachers are all English-speaking Ambozonians who teach voluntarily to foster the new vocational curriculum and uplift the Anglo-Saxon education system.

Literature Review

In this section, we intend to provide existing information on the language situation in Ambazonia as well as review issues and insights that have to do with decoloniality, assimilation, and the Community of Inquiry Framework (COI). These will be the conceptual underpinnings of the investigation.

Community of Inquiry Framework (COI)

The COI is a construct that has attracted a great deal of attention in education because it serves the purpose of collaborative learning. Given this, Garrison et al. (2000) argue that the COI consists of three essential elements: social, cognitive, and teaching presence. These three components fall within the constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. Based on the social affinity of this study, there is a need to create a discursive space to become a learning space of inquiry. Hibbert and Foncha (2019) state that a strategic classroom organisation may foster collaborative learning. This kind of learning is referred to as *defamiliarisation* because it urges students to become curious about the variety of discourses in the language of teaching and learning. This, in a way, requires understanding transliterary frameworks that usually include translanguaging and transculturalisation. While familiarity presents individuals as aliens in diversity, defamiliarization encourages people to look afresh at any given phenomenon.

In the sphere of social presence, individuals present themselves as social and affectionate beings, tantamount to real people with feelings and thoughts. The social presence of the COI enhances the educational pursuit of the learners because it involves and encourages collaborative learning that includes increased social affinity and a great sense of community (Hibbert 2018: 18). In this regard, it is important to note that the social presence does not in any way hinder the

learner's recognition of educational benefits since its sense of community gears towards a particular purpose, which is learning. Therefore, the importance of social presence in the COI is based on the fact that it pays particular attention to diversity (different perspectives and viewpoints). Although social presence alone cannot enhance critical discourse in the learning process, it is almost impossible for critical discourse to develop without a foundation on social presence, like the indigenous knowledge systems and learners' prior knowledge (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes 2005). In this light, cognitive presence enhances increased interaction, a critical component of cognitive presence. Social presence is, therefore, very valuable in the learning process because it establishes effective communication that fosters social bonds. Since every group member feels secure because of the affective bond, there is open communication around personal relationships (Garrison et al. 2006). Given this, cohesion is tied by social presence and perceived outcomes.

Garrison et al. (2001: 162) posit that "cognitive presence is the extent to which learners may construe/ascribe meaning through sustained reflection and discourse." The cognitive presence is known to have stemmed from practical inquiry and critical thinking since the focus of any given phenomenon is based on outcomes. Based on this, cognitive presence begins with identifying a problem for further inquiry. Secondly, the issue identified is explored by the community of learners, both as individuals and as a community, through critical reflection and discourse. Finally, after intensive discourse and reflection, learners tend to ascribe meaning to the ideas raised during their group discussions. Then, the fourth level is where they apply the knowledge acquired to the educational context.

As far as the teaching presence is concerned, Garrison et al. (2006: 163) discuss "the design, facilitation, and direction of the cognitive, social presences to realize personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile educational outcomes." It is vital to stress that three important components characterise the learning process. These include "instructional design and organisation, facilitating discourse, and direct" instructions.

Instructional design and organisation refer to "the planning and design of the structure, process, interaction, and evaluation (Anderson et al., 2001). For the teaching presence to be effective, teaching instructions should be clear to the learners with clear guidelines but no ambiguity. In addition to this clarity, Anderson et al. (2001) view facilitating discourse as student interactions through engagement and participation that help develop learners from the information they acquire through the use of instructional materials. The facilitating discourse is the level of meaning-sharing in areas of divergence and convergence with the sole purpose of disagreeing to agree. In this way, facilitating discourse often leads to developing decision-making skills in the learners, which is a very important item in the learning process.

Lastly, direct instruction is the process of scholarly and intellectual leadership where the instructor is an expert in the field of study with sound content knowledge (Anderson et al. 2000). The expert in direct instruction is therefore required to scaffold learners into their discovery of knowledge.

Multilingualism in Ambazonia

This theme developed to signpost the language situation in Ambazonia. Ambazonia, which constitutes the North-West and South-West regions of the Republic of Cameroon, is seeking total independence, which accounts for the ongoing conflict that led to the boycott of government schools in 2016. When Ambazonia gained independence from Britain on the 1st of October 1961, English was adopted as the official language. At this juncture, Ambazonia, like many independent Sub-Saharan countries with many indigenous languages, took the option for a neutral language to become their official language. In this case, English, their colonial language, was deemed fit to function in this role to avoid conflict within the indigenous languages. This, in a way, was an attempt to lessen financial and material costs. Another reason for the adoption of English was because the indigenous languages were seen as primitive languages and so had no place in postcolonial Ambazonia (Echu 2005). Ambazonia, like many other African countries, is generally characterized by multilingualism, with English - a colonial language - playing the role of the official language and medium of instruction.

It is worth noting that although Ambazonia has over 80 indigenous languages, English is the official language used for tuition, administration, court, and all other official milieus. Also remarkable is APE, a language with a possible national dimension widely spoken as a lingua franca. APE is commonly used for informal and social situations such as churches, streets, marketplaces, motor parks, and social gatherings. It would not be an overstatement to say that using APE is an identity trait of an Ambazonian. The APE's presence has been strongly felt in its socio-economic life since colonisation.

The official language policy

The official language policy created today's conflict between the Republic of Cameroon and Ambazonia. Accordingly, on the 18th of January 1996, article 1 paragraph 6 of the constitution declared that

[t]he official languages of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The state shall guarantee the promotion of Bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavor to protect national languages.

Although the Constitution of Cameroon aspired for Bilingualism, no mechanism was put in place to make it work. Despite the constitution providing equal status to both languages, French always had a *de facto* domination over English in media, administration, and education. The factors responsible for such dominance include population, high-ranking positions in the government, and no guarantees for the rights of minority languages. This dominance led to the assimilation of the Ambazonian identity, which is at the core of the fight for separation (total independence) today.

As mentioned earlier, the official bilingualism policy created a French/English divide, one of the major causes of the conflict that started in 2016 (Echu 2005). Given this, the official bilingualism that was supposed to be a unifying factor resulted in disunity and conflict. This was seen as a threat to the identity and culture of the English-speaking Cameroonians, who, in fighting

for complete independence, have taken the name Ambazonia. Hence, the uprising of lawyers trying to protect the common law and teachers fighting to safeguard the Anglo-Saxon system of Education. Moreover, in the early 90s, there was an attempt to annex the two Anglophone provinces of North-West into the West region and South-West into Littoral Provinces, which accounted for the agitation and creation of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), a political party posited to fight against the injustices of the ruling government.

As mentioned earlier, English and French were made the language of instruction from primary schools through the university level. However, according to Echu (2005), bilingual education practice in Cameroon was plagued by many problems. The was that there were more French teachers than English-speaking ones due to numerical advantage, with a ratio of 80%:20% (Njeck 1992; Tambi 1973). This accounts for the disgruntled attitude of Ambazonians towards using English in teaching, administration, and the courts; hence, the outbreak of the conflict.

Another factor that made bilingualism problematic in teaching and learning was the system of evaluation deemed unreliable as students tended to blame failure on the linguistic competence of the lecturers, leading to frustration and mutual suspicion between speakers of the two languages.

Thirdly, bilingual training in schools and universities was poorly organised and lacked the necessary infrastructure, facilities, and motivation, resulting in a system that did not promote excellence (Bilola 1999). Also important to note is the distinction between the French and English education systems because these two parties practised different methods of assessments. Finally, the implementation of language policy portrayed the complete absence of language planning and zero attempts at developing both languages. As such, it has escalated to the point where English speakers took up arms to liberate their geographical territory since they wanted their court proceedings to be in English and the language of learning and teaching.

Decoloniality

Ngugi wa Thiongo'o (1996) posits that colonialism completely captures the thoughts and imagination of the colonised. This is to suggest that coloniality is mental control at its best. Based on this, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 63) argues that "the worst kind of colonialisation is the epistemological one that is hidden in institutions and discourses that govern the modern globe." However, it is important to note that institutions like churches, schools, and universities still propagate coloniality in our lived experiences.

According to Maldonado-Torres (2007: 243), coloniality is understood as that which survives colonialism:

In contrast to colonialism, coloniality refers to a long-standing pattern of power that has emerged as a result of colonialism, but that defines culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration.

Based on this, coloniality is a product of colonialism that takes into cognisance the indigenous knowledge system of the people in question and the application of such knowledge in their lived

experiences. Therefore, for indigenous knowledge to come to the fore, there is a need to decolonise the minds of colonial ideologies. Given this, Maldonado-Torres (2007: 262) argues

the decolonial turn is about making visible the invisible and analysing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflection of the invisible people themselves.

This is meant to suggest that individuals need to take their prior knowledge seriously since this is the lens through which they understand the world.

Discussion

According to the community schools' guidelines, English is the language of teaching and learning. In addition, indigenous languages are being taught as a subject from elementary schools up to the GCE Ordinary Level. In light of this, Granville et al. (1997: 7) argue that

students have left school with a less than full competence in English (the language of power) and an inflated view of its importance and value. Schools have given students a high regard for English without giving them full English knowledge. In addition, schools have done little to bring about a revaluing of African languages for Education.

Based on the above quotation, all indigenous languages are treated with contempt, and no outright effort is being made to develop these indigenous languages. Based on this, it is evident that there is an "unproblematized teaching and promotion of English, to the exclusion of African languages" (Granville et al. 1997: 7).

If one was to attach the importance of vocational studies to the ongoing teaching and to learn in Cameroon, it is evident from the above that students leave schools with less than full competence. This is meant to suggest that Cameroon schools focus more on theoretical knowledge than practice in all the subjects. Therefore, someone who studies agriculture may be appointed the Provincial Delegate of Arts and Culture. In this case, the content is not deemed important, but the qualification matters. Based on this, "vocational training helps one develop practical, immediately relevant skills that open doors in the job market. Vocational learners acquire both theoretical knowledge as well as practical skills, which better equips them for the workplace" (Thwala 2022: 4).

Generally, it is believed that when people express themselves in their mother tongue, they do not think, but, when they speak in an L2, they must reflect first and think in their L1 to ensure that the message is correct and well communicated. Although some researchers argue that advanced learners go beyond this, it may not always be the case. However, the indigenous languages in Ambazonia have poor status in the eyes of parents and learners who would prefer the use of L2 (English). Hibbert and Foncha (2019: 30) argue that "[t]he diverse nature of classrooms leads to the use of many languages simultaneously; known as translanguaging which in this case is the process where multilingual users employ languages in an integrated way." In this instance, indigenous languages play a facilitative role in easing the understanding of concepts and content that does not attempt to develop these languages. The indigenous languages are directly linked to the learners' indigenous knowledge system, which is tied to their prior

knowledge that forms the basis for their understanding. As mentioned above, the aspiration for the practical use of language aligns with Thwala's (2022) assertion that one should be properly prepared and skilled enough for a chosen career.

The South African Language in Education Policy "recognises that our cultural diversity is a valuable national asset and hence is tasked, amongst other things, to promote multilingualism, the development of the official languages, and respect for all languages used in the country" (DOE 1997: 1). This is in line with the guidelines of the Ambazonian community schools' guidelines which encourage the use of mother tongue in teaching and learning. However, communities vary, and this variation is tied to language and culture, the lens through which individuals read the world (Abongdia & Foncha 2017; Foncha et al. 2016). In this regard, understanding among the learners is perspectival since it is influenced by semiotics in the different language trajectories. The Language in Education Policy also states that

the inherited Language in Education policy in South Africa has been fraught with tensions, contradictions, and sensitivities underpinned by racial and linguistic discrimination. A number of these discriminatory policies have affected either the learners' access to the education system or their success within it (DOE 1997: 1).

This is also the case in Ambazonia, where the Language in Education Policy is fraughted by an attempt at assimilation and the most important reason for the fight for total and unconditional independence. In addition, the Cameroon system of education resonates with the fraughted nature of the language policy, given that the French curriculum does not have a vocational outcome but is rather theoretically based.

In addition, the Language in Education Policy further uses the following guidelines for the use of languages in learning and teaching:

1. All learners shall offer at least one approved language as a subject in Grades 1 and 2.
2. From Grade 3 (Std 1) onwards, all learners shall offer their language of learning and teaching and at least one additional approved language as subjects.
3. All language subjects shall receive equitable time and resource allocation. 4. The following promotion requirements apply to language subjects:
 - i. In Grades 1 to Grade 4 (Std 2), promotion is based on performance in one language and Mathematics.
 - ii. From Grade 5 (Std 3) onwards, one language must be passed.
 - iii. From Grade 10 to Grade 12, two languages must be passed, one on the first language level, and the other on at least the second language level. At least one of these languages must be an official language.
 - iv. Subject to national norms and standards as determined by the Minister of Education, the level of achievement required for promotion shall be determined by the provincial education departments.

Ambazonian community schools are based on similar guidelines. The difference is that community school guidelines are a tacit agreement, and there is no clear implementation method in place, as

with the case of South Africa. According to Anchimbe (2011: 81), "colonialism had two major impacts on the linguistic status of the country. First, while it is complicated, the multilingual landscape through the introduction of written languages whose functions were different to those of the local oral indigenous languages also increased opportunities for constructing linguistic (and social) identities."

Conclusion

We conclude that Education is responsible for how people think and act. Hence, curriculum needs to be designed in a way that will influence the way that it impacts the thinking and actions of all students. Ambazonia community schools are a step in the right direction since the curriculum is designed to lead to self-governance in terms of entrepreneurship, vocation, and development. This is evidenced by the creation of ATLA, which oversees the education guidelines implementation, another step in the right direction. The guidelines aspire for the intellectualisation of indigenous languages, which is a way of promoting diversity and seeking solutions to this effect. This is meant to suggest that the community project aims to solve the communities' problems, starting with the indigenous languages rather than oversimplifying academic qualifications. Thus, thoughts must be transformed into action.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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