SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIABLES IN THE *DEGENERACY* OF ENGLISH IN POSTCOLONIAL *(NON-NATIVE)* CONTEXTS

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Abstract

This paper tackles from a broad historical perspective the attitudes, media and strategies of transmission, and the interplay of English and identity in the world today. It traces the negative tendencies towards non-native Englishes resultant from British colonialism to the hangovers and strategic linguistic schemes adopted during colonialism. Here the appellations non-native, postcolonial, indigenised, New Englishes are used interchangeably without purporting to make a profound evaluation of the bias linked to them, especially the non-native. The paper concludes with the note that the claim of degeneracy of the New Englishes was ignited by colonial linguistic projects and later fuelled by social prejudices built basically on colonial skeletons. It has less linguistic evidence and if any exists its roots are strongly founded in colonialism.

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades and especially between the late 1980s and early 1990s various accusations (the Quirk concerns and the Kachru catch) were launched in various directions. Several catchy expressions like 'Liberation Linguistics' (Kachru 1991) and 'deficit linguistics' (Quirk 1988) were coined to describe the itinerary of English in its spread worldwide. Two basic groups cropped to the limelight: the adherents of native speaker norms and the advocates of non-native speaker norms in New Englishes contexts. Whereas the native speaker considered postcolonial Englishes as a *degeneracy* of *his* language (Quirk 1985, 1990, Abbot 1991) and called for a common standard in these areas being the native norm, the non-native proponents (Kachru 1985, 1992, D'souza 1986, Bamgbose 1998,) perceived these varieties as vital proofs of the vitality of a language that had ceased to be the sole property of its native owners.

Why were and/or are postcolonial Englishes considered *degenerate*? Are they actually thus? If yes, who/what is to blame? These questions are fundamental to resolving this query which though seems to be settled is receiving new perspectives

like that of Mufwene (2001) which considers these Englishes to have the same structural evolution processes as the so-called native varieties. This paper visits some of the determinant sociolinguistic variables that have been *forgotten* in the quest for blame in the *degeneracy* claim. These include: the colonialists' intention of (not) teaching English to colonised peoples, their materialistic priorities, the impact of a long existent pidgin English, the abhorrence of English as foreign (intrusive) force, the absence of adequate native teachers, ecology and the linguistic gap, native languages and the physical background, and the (in)dispensability of the colonial language. These factors cannot be overlooked in determining if English out of Great Britain suffered heresy (Prator 1968) or not.

2. Colonialism and the legacy of English

If today English enjoys the status of a 'language on which the sun never sets' it is exceedingly thanks to the colonial empire of Britain. Even though the later international activity of the US in post-World War II era contributed to this spread and consolidation, the initial foundations were laid by Britain's colonial expedition into Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. The work of the religious missionaries, who combed some of these areas even before the arrival of colonial authorities, cannot be neglected. But whereas they limited their intervention to spreading the gospel and winning lost souls for the kingdom of God, the colonial authority engaged in the expansion of boundaries beyond Europe —a move that required much more than just a passive presence.

The colonial governments were therefore concerned, at various levels, with constructing in the colonised people a feeling of *belonging* to the colonial empire. They were called, in the case of British colonies, "Her Majesty, the Queen's subjects". A major weapon that was used, as a double-headed serpent, was language. Contrary to pre-WW1 German annexation that made little efforts to systematically institute German as the official language, the later British and especially French colonisations insisted on complete education projects and language schemes predominantly (for the British) and exclusively (the French) in the coloniser's language. The double-headed weapon was aimed first at inculcating in the indigenes a sense of unconditional attachment to the colonial power and second, it maintained a gap of status quo between them and the colonialists since they, as elaborated below, had little access to the variety used by the colonial masters. In spite of whatever strategies that were attached to the linguistic schemes in these regions, they yielded one thing —the emergence of postcolonial varieties of English. And as Kachru (1986: 1) points out "the legacy of colonial Englishes has resulted in the existence of transplanted varieties of English having distinct linguistic ecologies— their own context of function and usage". Colonialism simply added another dimension to the already complex landscape of languages in colonial contexts. It meant that English, or whatever language that was spread through colonial expansion, was introduced into a contact situation with several other languages. This contact now constitutes the basic landmark for the description of postcolonial English varieties as poor, less educated, degenerate approximations of the native. Let us start with a cursory look at some of the attitudes expressed towards these varieties of English.

3. Attitudes towards the New Englishes

The very many appellations coined for varieties of English that took root after the colonial adventure of Britain is ample proof of the divergent nature of attitudes towards them. These Englishes qua *non-native, new, indigenised, localised, nativised Englishes* represent the often ironically hailed diversity of English but limitedly accepted local norms and standards that accrue therefrom. What therefore is responsible for this?

In and out of regions where the New Englishes are spoken, many negative assertions have been advanced about them. To Kachru (1982: 66) the first enemy of the New Englishes is the nation states in which these Englishes are used. This has rendered the varieties more or less "linguistic orphans in search of their parents". These parents cannot be the *native* varieties because there exist many differences between them. They could and perhaps only have foster parents through their acceptance within these regions. The second major enemy has been the native speaker who seems biased and influenced by the glimpses of victory through colonisation to think *his* language must not be equally shared with the colonised. These two perceptions, which from a superficial view show the defence of one's position, project two major classifications of attitudes towards the New Englishes. One, the native, is highly hinged on colonial hangovers and the other, the non-native, is fuelled by realities in language change and transmission. Fig. 1 below recaptures this rift in perception.
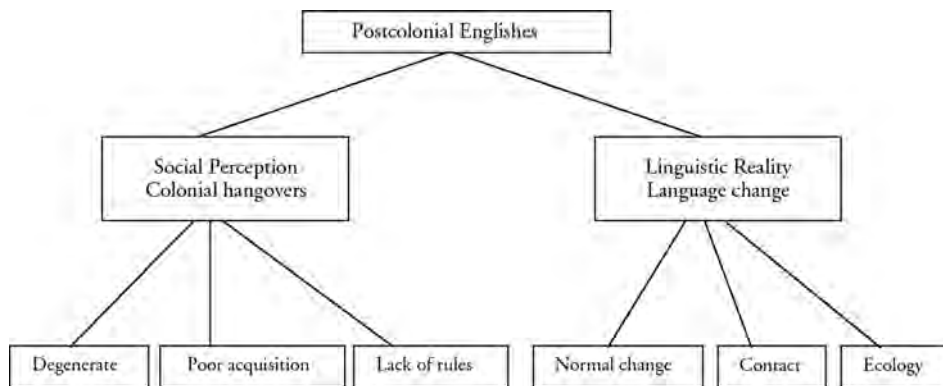

FIG. 1. **Perceptions of Postcolonial Englishes**

The classification in the diagram above shows how important a variable colonialism is in the perception of varieties of English and their media of diffusion in the world. It further indicates how non-linguistic parameters have been used in branding some varieties as *deficit* or *disintegrated* whereas language contact, the claim often used to justify this, is a constant residue of all languages whether colonially generated or not. Moreover, "linguistic change occurs even when no contact of languages is involved" (Mufwene 2001: 11). It becomes clear that whatever changes or variation occurred to English out of its native ecology forms part of the evolu-

tionary process of any natural language. It is not, as has been claimed, the exclusive outcome of non-native contexts nor the destruction of a *too perfect* language by *imperfect* users.

3.1. The Native vs Non-Native Divide

The battle of standards that was at the centre of debates on the New Englishes in the 80s and 90s was grossly rooted on the great divide of native and non-native speakers. While Quirk (1985, 1990), Abbot (1991) and so forth called for a monochrome standard both in writing and speech around the world (however difficult this could be), Kachru (1985: 92, 96) insisted on regions and nations developing individual standards according to the tastes and dictates of their societies. Quirk's (1985) preoccupation is that postcolonial nations do not have enough functions for English and so must not be granted the right to develop a standard for a language that they would not be able to master given their multilingual statuses. This position is tantamount to the fear of seeing English *degenerate*. It is further disputable that English has fewer functions in postcolonial countries. It is nevertheless the official language and is the major medium linking these countries to the rest of the world.

Even earlier than this period, Hocking (1974) made a rather unrepentant declaration about what the standard should be. To him, "the point is that what is correct in a language is just what native speakers of the language say. There is no other standard". His view, which perhaps influenced later proponents of this inclination, awards the native speaker an almighty control of his language. It confirms Chomsky's (1965) consideration of the native speaker as one who can make valid judgements about what is well-formed or ungrammatical in his language. Although this is unquestionable, its assumption in the context of postcolonial Englishes is too estranged to make any much meaning. Furthermore, Hocking (1974) does not realise as Trudgill (1998: 35) does that "most native speakers of English in the world are native speakers of some non-standard variety of the language". In all, with the amount of literature produced on this topic a great consensus seems to have been reached which favours local norms over foreign ones. The defence of a language that ceased to be the sole property of Britain yielded to the recognition of ecologically pertinent factors that rendered and continue to render homogeneity a fairy dream.

3.2. The ELT Industry and the claim of heresy

The ELT (includes ESL, EFL, TESOL, etc.) industry, which today is among the largest and fastest growing, was at its genesis in the 1960s shelled with horrifying missiles born predominantly from the "native speaker's fear of seeing *his* language disintegrate in the hands of (or shall we say, on the lips of) non-native users" (Kachru 1985: 34). This fear, a seemingly coordinated appendix to the colonial strategy of not teaching English too well or at all to colonised peoples, retarded many genuine attempts at vehiculating the language especially in former British colonies. As table 2 shows far less students were engaged in education in English in 1974 as opposed to later years when the stigma of colonialism started disappearing. To Prator (1968) for instance, it was pure heresy to teach English to non-natives

and even worse to grant them the right to 'own' a standard or norm. He (1968: 459) emphatically declares that

> …the heretical tenet I feel I must take exception to is the idea that it is best, in a country where English is not spoken natively but is widely used as a medium of instruction, to set up the local variety of English as the ultimate model to be imitated by those learning the language.

The issue Prator (1968) seems not to be comfortable with is not English spreading but it spreading to non-natives who will not be able to use it properly. He fears the language would *disintegrate* or *degenerate* if allowed to evolve as an independent model. The cline of fears and exasperations expressed prompts Bamiro (1994: 58) to segment attitudes towards postcolonial Englishes into two schools. The first is the "sociolinguistic reality school" represented principally by Kachru and other advocates of the New Englishes. This school argues for the recognition and unprejudiced acceptance of the New Englishes as part of the diversity of the English language world. It posits above all that English has adopted and adequately sipped into the sociocultural environments in which it is used as a second language to a point that judging it in terms of native standards is absolutely unfair and illogical. The second school which Bamiro (1994: 58) terms the "pedagogic unreality school" and represented by its major exponents Quirk (1985, 1988, 1990), Abbot (1991) upholds that the "New Englishes are nothing but grammars or dialects of errors which are bound to have deleterious effects on the educational systems of many countries where English is used as a second or foreign language". The *degeneracy* claim studied in this paper was extensively sustained by proponents of this school. Their negative attitude towards non-native speakers was perhaps founded on the hierarchical order set in place by colonialism that equated colonised peoples to *tabula rasas* on whom the *civilisation* of Europe had to be written. Besides this, any meaningful assessment of a language out of its native habitat and spread and/or taught by non-native speakers must make enough allusion to change and variation. This like any other type of adaptation (human, environmental, etc.) foregrounds the replication of the new environment on the language which in effect is a favourable mid-range reconciliation between the foreign status of the language and its new habitat rather than a *disintegration* of the language as such. This reconciliation, often treated as *degeneracy*, was in part promoted by some sociolinguistic variables beyond the control of the non-native learners. Some of these have been outlined below.

4. Some sociolinguistic variables in postcolonial English claim

If English can be said to be *degenerate* in postcolonial contexts, the main blame cannot however be directed at the non-native users. This is because the colonial administration through whom English was substantially transmitted foiled the process with a series of strategic projects that unilaterally cared only for their prominence in power and authority in the regions. Change or subsequent evolution of the language in these areas was therefore conditioned by these factors. The

major ones are studied below. While the following variables are considered important to the path of English in these contexts, the ecological factor is not treated in any lesser importance.

4.1. Colonial (mis)conceptions of (not) teaching English well

Irrefutably, language is power or power takes a more decisive turn when it wields language. Language is an important attribute in identity creation and consolidation. It is moreover an effective tool for in-group exclusion and definition. These hints certainly guided the colonialists, among them the British, in the adoption of an ineffective language teaching approach in colonial areas. Whatever language they used with the indigenes was only as good as it made clearly evident the gap and distance between them and the indigenes. Any attempt at using the colonised peoples' language or letting them full access to the colonisers' language was interpreted as tantamount to levelling the great mounts of master-servant, ruler-ruled, privileged-unprivileged, modern-primitive, advanced-backward, etc distinction that existed between them. As Kachru (1986: 22) puts it, the colonialists "insisted on not teaching their language too well to 'non-group' Asians or Africans, the underlying idea being that the colonizer's code, if shared equally with the colonised, would reduce the distance between the rulers and the ruled". This was not exclusively the strategy of the British alone but of most of the colonialists. The Germans in Cameroon exposed this same attitude. Amvela (2001: 206) states that "some [German] officials also feared that the use of English may encourage Cameroonians to behave as the equals of their colonial masters".

The immediate outcome of this policy was the explosive growth of and reliance on Pidgin English: in Nigeria, Ghana, West Cameroon, etc, lingua francas: Swahili in Tanzania and Kenya, Krio in Sierra Leone and Liberia, Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea and so forth. This growth was facilitated by the colonialists who intentionally promoted the use of these languages. In their daily communication with the indigenes they preferred a pidgin, Creole, indigenous language, as the case may be, in a bid to refurbish the master-servant relationship between them. In the case of East Africa, Abdulaziz (1991: 395) reports that "British settlers were most reluctant to use English with their native servants and with Africans in general, as they believed that this knowledge might 'spoil' them in the master-servant relationship that existed". Native languages also flourished but were checked by the generally excessive number in rather small communities such that pidgins, creoles and lingua francas were often invoked for wider communication. This not withstanding, the linguistic foundation laid during colonialism that constituted in less effective usage of the language continued to thrive decades after. Many souring descriptions have been given which point to the state of English in these contexts. One of them is Gyasi's (1990: 24) who bemoans: "English in Ghana is sick. The cancerous tumours are numerous: wrong collocation; false concord; poor spelling … mispronunciation; … wrong omission or insertion of articles, misuse of preposition…". Gyasi's (1990) "cancerous tumours" might simply be some of the leftovers of the colonial experiment of *unteaching* or *misteaching* English as a power regulatory mechanism. While also accepting that societies

be granted the right to use language according to their demands and tastes, which accounts for much of the divergence in English speech today, the colonialists' impact cannot be altogether sidelined. Clearly, therefore, the claim that English suffered *heresy* or *degeneracy* in postcolonial or non-native contexts is prejudiced and socially motivated. As shown on fig. 1, it is simply an attempt to maintain colonially drawn skeletons.

4.2. Colonialists' notion of hierarchy through language

Societal stratification is often linked to and/or represented in its language. For instance, the most prestigious dialects or standard of the language is often identified with the socially privileged. Trudgill (1998: 39) in defining Standard English makes clear that "the further down the social scale one goes, the more non-standard forms one finds". What this means is that the various strata that can be identified in society can as well be graded on a linguistic ladder. European colonialists adopted this linguistic ladder framework to widen the distinction gap and to create a social elite situated between them and the common masses. As R.R. Roy and T.B. Macauley (1835) observe, teaching English to colonised people was directed at putting in place "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern, a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in words and in intellect" (*qtd* Kachru 1982: 355).

A new stratum is being added to an already diversified society. In the first place, this suits what is discussed below as deprivation from normal exposure to the language. It further represents the refusal of belonging to a language that is bound to be one's official code of communication. The creation of such a class of people completely subservient to the colonial administration was motivated by fear of subversion and the desire to eternally assimilate and subjugate the colonised. So as Mazrui and Mazrui (1996: 272) clearly state, "many European settlers regarded the teaching of English to 'natives' as a potentially subversive force". Whereas military force played a great role in physically subjugating colonised people, the language policies (whether outlined or implied) adopted a psychological strategy that limited the range of perfection and proficiency of the out-group. This meant poor acquisition and subsequently poor performance in the language. Anybody, whether colonised or not, subjected to such circumstances would end up with the same or highly similar results. The poor rendition of the language must not be blamed on origin or status of speakers but rather on such mitigating situations as conditions of acquisition or transmission, variety of the language involved and the length of the period of transmission.

4.3. Material priorities over linguistic projects

The spread of colonial languages to (ex)colonial regions was not an exclusively linguistic experiment but a fall off from the materialistic incursion. The Green Revolution brought Europe to a sophisticated level with a flourishing industrial output that constantly needed more markets and more raw materials to keep it alive. Markets and raw materials were then found in the territories of Africa, Asia

and the Caribbean. However, this expansion coincided with the expansion of religious missions. So while the colonialists sought for material products and the expansion of political empires the religious missionaries embarked on preaching the gospel. They adopted whatever language could facilitate this objective. This ranged from Pidgin English, native languages to educated English. It must be mentioned that the British colonial administration in Cameroon benefited tremendously from the work of the missionaries who were in the region even before the German annexation of 1884.

The priority of material interests can be seen in the Germans' toleration of Pidgin English and English inasmuch as these languages facilitated the acquirement of raw materials and the construction of roads, railways and plantations. It is interesting that the pre-annexation undertaking and the 1884 annexation treaty between German authorities and Douala chiefs of Cameroon were both done in English and not German (see texts in Amvela 2001: 219-221). The English colonialists were not different from the Germans. They were more interested in consolidating the wealth, given the high costs of WWI, than in putting in place a solid linguistic project based on perfect English transmission. This is further explained by the fact that they tolerated (as opposed to the French who banned) education in native languages; themselves encouraged the use of Pidgin English in several sectors, for instance, trade and religion. Added to the biased vision exposed above, the lack of a devoted linguistic project that matched the creeds of allegiance to the queen and the British Empire recited by the colonised subjects meant a divergent acquisition of the language. This divergent acquisition, which however depicts a natural situation of language acquisition and evolution, has unfortunately been received as a destitution of the language and as, in the words of Whitworth (1907: 6) "linguistics flights … which jar upon the ear of the native Englishman". Miraculously, the native colonialists' decision to *unteach* or *misteach* English as power regulatory mechanism has been forgotten. Non-native background and the status of secondness of the colonial subjects constructed during colonialism have been highlighted as sources of the divergence in English usage around the world. A divergence that has been generally treated as a *destruction*, *degeneracy*, *demeaning* or what Prator (1968) calls *heresy* of the language.

4.4. Impact and pull of Pidgin and/or Creole Englishes

Trade colonial expansion that debuted in the late 15th century heralded by Portuguese merchants installed Pidgin English along the coast of West Africa (Schneider 1974, Mbassi-Manga 1976, Mbangwana 1983). Although the Spanish, Swedes and Dutch were also involved their appearance on this coast was less regular compared to that of the Portuguese who engaged in the trade of diverse articles including spices (pepper), gold and slaves. When the British finally replaced the Portuguese on this coast following the build up to the abolition of slave trade, one of the pidgins that was used by English privateers on Portuguese boats gained more expansion. As rightly explained by Mbangwana (1983: 80),

> inasmuch as the British were the first advocates of the abolition of the slave trade
> and at the same time practised the 'factory and trust' system of trade, which

brought them into very close contact with the native inhabitants, a language contact interaction emerged which served as a linguistic medium of communication.

The work of the missionaries further compounded this medium since it, beyond the scope of the notoriously many and diversified native languages, provided a broader spectrum of communication with the indigenes.

The arrival of the Germans in Cameroon after the 1884 Berlin conference did not create any much difference in the place and vitality of Pidgin English. Similarly the end of the slave trade marked the emergence of a more stable and mother tongue-like variety of Pidgin English. This was in communities such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Fernando Po basically made up of resettled slaves. Menang (1979) advances that the variety of pidgin used by these communities eventually turned out to be not just a medium of contact and communication but a practical mother tongue for a group of divergent people who found themselves bound to live forever together. The German colonialists did much to impose their language on the Cameroonian natives, opening German-medium schools in Douala (1887), Victoria (1897), Garoua (1906) and Yaounde (1908); declaring German the only language in all education-related transactions after the Douala Educational conference (1907); issuing a special ordinance on April 24th 1910 "with the stipulation that grants-in-aids from the government to mission schools would be restricted only to those who adopted the government school programme based on German…" (Chumbow 1980: 284) and officially making the use of English illegal by March 1913 (Amvela 2001). In spite of all these rather radical measures, the colonial administration was unable to proceed in German given that it meant dismantling the whole edifice of Pidgin English constructed over several centuries. So it literally tolerated its use in the plantations, the road and railway construction sites, and sometimes used it as a contact code with the population.

When the First World War ended and Britain was rewarded with Cameroon, Pidgin English rather grew faster following the free language system adopted by the British. Even in ESL, the aim was not to recreate British English in colonised areas. Some reasons have been advanced above. Inasmuch as English was interpreted as a socially superior language its encroachment to the circles of communal and interpersonal transaction was limited. It is in this domain that Pidgin English triumphs. Its long existence as a contact and friendship code gives it more recurrence than English and partly explains why English expression is often considered dwindling or non-proficient. The table below exposes proficiency in these languages through ability to speak them. While only 1% of 433 people in Bamenda speaks only English, as much as 24% speak only Pidgin English and 43% both. This indicates that many more come into contact with Pidgin English than do with English; as many meet Pidgin English before any contact with English.

It is worth noting that all of the towns surveyed above are in the English-speaking part of Cameroon. Interestingly, more people speak French and Pidgin English in all of these towns than speak only English. This indicates that the lack of proficiency in the language, if this can be equated to the *degeneracy* claim, must be interpreted as a matter of language priority by the users rather than as a basic feature of

TABLE 1. **Percentage of adults who speak official languages and Pidgin English in Cameroon (1983)**

Town	No. of resp.	Pidgin only	English & Pidgin	English, Pidgin & French	French & Pidgin	English only	Total % of population
Victoria	371	29	50	16	2	—	97
Buea	185	11	49	29	11	—	100
Kumba	364	38	46	10	4	—	98
Mamfe.	87	29	53	16	2	—	100
Bamenda	433	24	43	20	11	1	99
Kumbo	99	38	43	11	2	—	94

Source: curled from Koenig (1983: 51)

postcolonial Englishes. In Kumba, a predominantly business town along the Nigeria-Cameroon border, for instance, the difference between the pidgin only percentage (38%) and the English and pidgin percentage (46%) is less than 10%. But this is far larger in administrative headquarters like Bamenda where the difference is 19%, Buea 38% and Victoria (present day Limbe) 21%. In these towns reside state-employed workers, students and workers in education-related private jobs. *Degeneracy*, if at all must be admitted should therefore be founded on the preferences speakers give to languages in their quest for economic survival. It is not exclusively depended on native and non-native statuses as claimed by Hocking (1974), Prator (1968), Quirk (1990), Abbot (1991) among others.

4.5. Abhorrence of English as icon of invasion and exploitation

Like any intrusive force in communities of people, English suffered repudiation and abhorrence in colonial and postcolonial states. Such a staunch resistance to the colonial languages took strength from the fact that the African continent was considered an empty set into which colonial civilisation with all its components had to be stuffed. For instance, the *tabula rasa* approach of the French that "aimed at assimilating or absorbing France's colonial subjects to the point where they would actually be Frenchmen linguistically, culturally, politically and legally" (Fanso 1989: 65), was certainly bound to meet with opposition. It was like wiping out any footage of the precolonial heritage and replacing it, like writing on a virgin sheet of paper, with the European cultural and linguistic heritage. The expression of abhorrence ranged from prohibiting African children from attending European schools, humiliating those who spoke English in non-official contexts to refusal to use the colonial language in certain (official) contexts. In Ghana, for example, Kwasi Duodu (1986: 3) in his support for the use of a Ghanaian language as official medium declares.

> If we can't decide on one Ghanaian language for the country after twenty-nine years of independence, then why shouldn't a borrowed language be 'butchered' … the youth, like many other silent Ghanaians, is protesting against an imposed language which prevents him from expressing himself in his own tongue.

Duodu (1986) implies that the youth, like many other Ghanaians are resisting English. Of course resistance would lead to lack of proficiency in the language since it is considered alien. Tchoungui (1983: 114) exposes the outcome of the adoption of a French-English bilingualism policy in Cameroon. To her, it "evinces a remarkable inability to live or to think out of well trodden colonial tracks, it actually opts for more educational wastage as children scrambling for more education are schooled in languages other than their own, or worse, in languages alien to their own cultures". This negative perception, that reached fever pitch at the close of colonialism in the late 50s and early 60s, increased community and missionary work in the direction of promoting indigenous languages. This in part explains why up to 166 of the 270 living languages in Cameroon have been standardised (*Ethnologue*). However when national unity became threatened by the continuous empowerment of native languages and its corresponding political and social superiority, education in indigenous languages was banned in Cameroon in 1965. This ban that was enforced by forceful actions including confiscation of technical equipment and pedagogical environment, for instance in Dschang in 1966 (see Momo 1997), increased abhorrence for the official languages thereby limiting the extent of attachment to them. In this light therefore, lesser people became interested in English and the few who engaged in learning it did so with a rather reckless attention.

4.6. Absence of native teachers

Given that Britain practised distance administration with fewer British men on colonial ground, there was the stark absence and paucity in the number of native teachers to teach English to the indigenes. Moreover, the few that were available were too busy with colonial exploitation schemes to dedicate much time to teaching English to many Africans or Asians. This explains why only scores —a generation of interpreters— were educated and charged with vehiculating the language further. Similarly the missionaries easily adopted Pidgin English or Creoles and in some other cases the indigenous languages to spread the gospel.

If it can be truly claimed that English suffered *degeneracy* in these contexts, a substantial blame must be directed at the colonial authority for not providing enough native teachers to properly teach it. But if the language continues to be taught by non-natives as it has been since the end of colonialism, it would be bound to reflect the ecology of the areas in which it is being used. As reiterated below, this is not negative or detrimental; it simply adds a creative dimension to the language that exposes its vitality and adaptability.

4.7. Deprivation from exposure to English

It is undoubtedly true that colonialism was central to the spread of English. It is however also true that colonialism, as shown above, moulded the cline of performance and proficiency in the language. In the transplanted native varieties of English, transplanted so many centuries ago —America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the colonised people were allowed sufficient access to the language. There was, especially in the cases of America and Australia, the settlement of substantial

native English speakers. This colonisation pattern is different, in terms of its linguistic agenda from later ones witnessed in Nigeria, Kenya, India, etc, where "sparser colonial settlements maintained the precolonial population in subjection and allowed a proportion of them access to learning English as a second, or additional language" (Leith 1996: 181). The limitation of access to educated English meant the acquisition of the language in whatever manner possible and with whatever imperfection that could bring.

Even long after the colonialists were gone, many people were still far from exposed to the language. As late as 1974, education in English was still not completely accessible even in British ex-colonies that had English either as the only official language (Nigeria, Ghana) or together with other language(s) (Kenya, Tanzania, India, Cameroon and South Africa). This is evident in the following statistics, which reveal the number of students enrolled in English-medium schools in six British ex-colonies. Of a total of 195.452 million people only 14.9% (29.3 million) of the students were enrolled in classes with formal instruction in English. This number simply adds to that of other users of the language.

TABLE 2. **Access to English in 1974**

Country	Total pop est. 1974 (million)	Students enrolled in English (million)	Percentage
India	90.486	17.6	19.4
Nigeria	52.895	3.9	7.3
South Africa.	22.458	3.5	15.5
Kenya	11.208	1.7	15.1
Ghana	8.631	1.6	18.5
Tanzania	9.774	1.0	10.2
Total.	195.452	29.3	

The population estimates above are curled from the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) African Population Database while the student enrolment statistics are supplied by Gage and Ohonnessian (1974, 1977). The total populations exceedingly drown the numbers of those studying in a language that is considered official to the nations. Only 3.9 million students out a total population of 52.895 million in Nigeria and a similarly small number, 3.5 million of 22.458 million people in South Africa, were added to the existing number of users of the language in 1974. Although such factors as the lack of schools, insufficiency of teachers, lack of educational motivation and so forth can be used to explain the insignificant number of those learning English, it can also be blamed on the colonial policy. This policy created a linguistic elite that served as a link between colonialists and the colonised. It drew the line between the languages or varieties reserved for them and those open to the indigenes. This implicit distinction distanced English from the people who thereafter considered it the colonialists' code. This is especially the case in Tanzania and Kenya where (Ki)Swahili was promoted even

more than English. It is not therefore surprising that only 10.2% and 15.1% of the total population was engaged in English instruction in Tanzania and Kenya respectively. For Kachru (1985) the above figures are impressive. However, the truth behind them can only be judged if the length of the colonial expedition is revoked. British colonial expansion in all of these areas lasted above half a century. Besides the work of the missionary churches and that of the colonial administration in instituting education and literacy, much was left undone given that only a microscopic elite benefited from it. And as said above it was directed at creating an educated minority elite for the expansion of the colonial administration and for the continuity of the colonial heritage even after independence.

The deprivation set up at colonialism and inherited at independence accounts in part for the varieties of English spoken in these areas. It thwarted every possible prospect of native-like varieties taking root and mounted the foundation on which these indigenised varieties are built. However, it also accentuated the cry of *degeneracy* of the language that was issued in the late 70s and 80s and re-echoed in the 90s. According to estimates by Graddol (1997: 11), while English received a tremendous increase in users around the world, second language users still numbered far less compared to the populations of their countries. How can it be explained that less than half (43 million) of the population of Nigeria (90 million) speak English although it (up till 1995) was the only official language? The following table further reveals how stagnant percentages of users of English have been.

TABLE 3. **Speakers of English as second language (1997)**

Country	Total pop. Est. 1990s (millions)	English users (millions)	Percentage
India	130.985	37.0	28.20
Nigeria	90.987	43.0	47.20
South Africa.	37.066	10.0	26.90
Kenya	22.214	2.576	11.50
Ghana	14.466	1.153	7.90
Tanzania	16.227	3.0	18.40
Total.	311.945	96.729	31.08

Of a total population of 311.945 million people from the six countries only 96.729 million (31.08%) understand English. Ghana records the least score with only 1.153 (7.9%) of its 14.466 million population being able to use English even though it is the official language. Only less than a third of the populations of India and South Africa, and even less than a quarter of Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania, as shown on Graddol's (1997: 11) statistics can be considered second-language speakers of English. This does not of course mean the rest of the population are first-language speakers because in essence there are none except for a handful in South Africa. Although this might be explained by the fact that the official languages are used basically for official functions that do not often concern the common man,

these statistics beat down the long-sung story of literacy. It further lays bare the limited initiatives made to promote the use and extensive acquisition of the language. One of the outcome of this has been the common believe that English in these areas is *deficient* or *degenerate*.

4.8. The gap between foreign English and the sociocultural environment

Languages like living organisms evolve in a given ecology. This ecology, which has an internal and external component, regulates in several consistent ways the life and evolution of the language. Ecology simply refers to the sociocultural and geophysical landscape within which a language evolves. Mufwene (2001: xii) arrives at a distinction between the external ecology that covers the socio-economic and ethnographic environment together with "the contact setting and power relations between groups of speakers" on the one hand and the internal ecology that extends to "the nature of the coexistence of the units and principles of a linguistic system before and /or during the change" on the other. Both are equally significant to judging how elaborately a language has changed in its new habitat. The New Englishes basically emerged from the transportation of English to new ecologies where it had to exist. Its successful existence meant it had to adapt to and adopt from these new ecologies in order to represent them properly. Kachru (1992: 2) clarifies that

> once English was adopted in a region … it went through various reincarnations that were partly linguistic and partly cultural. The reincarnations were essentially caused by the new bilingual (or multilingual) settings and by the new contexts in which it has to function.

Reincarnation or nativisation or indigenisation (it has been termed differently), of English in these contexts serves to fill the gap caused by the foreign status of the language in its new context of existence. It has to reflect and be reflected by the physical realities and the sociocultural emblems of the society of which it is now an integral part. Along the West African coastline several vocabulary items are shared which do not belong to the British English vocabulary. These include *bitter-leaf, corn-chaff, bush-meat, head-tie, watch-night, chewing-stick* and so forth (see Anchimbe 2004). Although all of these words are English if treated individually, they have been compounded in a way that reflects the region in which they are used. It is no longer strange to find native language words and other neologisms created to fill communicative gaps in second or foreign language contexts. The recreation of the ecology in language may extend beyond simply the creation and addition of new words to larger linguistic units as collocational preferences, analogical creations, sentence structure and discourse patterns. It might and often generally result in extensive restructuring of the language to suit the communicative habits of the speakers. So restructuring in this manner must not be *pro rata* to non-native or postcolonial heritage. Mufwene (2001) and Schneider (2000) uphold that the restructuring patterns are basically the same in all languages whether termed Creole, koinés, pidgins, non-native or native. In a nutshell therefore the evolution of the New Englishes cannot be singled out as cases of *degeneracy* or *deficiency* since English itself has had as much contact in Britain as any of the Englishes out of Britain.

Restructuring follows several ways. In the New Englishes, it adopts predominantly a straightening approach. It seeks to name the referent as accurately and descriptively as possible. One common example is the ascription of the *s-plural* to non-count nouns such as *advices, furnitures, equipments* just to name these. So rather than use many words just to create plural as in *pieces of advice,* most New Englishes simply apply the *s-plural.* This reduces the number of words (*advices*) and above all resolves a long (and perhaps illogical) explanation for exemption to this rule. In the table below, different words for the same referent from three Englishes are presented. These are Cameroon English, British English and American English (see Mbangwana 2002: 123-130 for more). Different restructuring processes account for the differences in the appellations. In CamE *concierge* may have been supplied by French, *roommate, face towel* and *cargo train* by exact descriptions of either the referent or what they are used for. A *roommate* is someone with whom you share the same room (see also *classmate*, *age mate*, *desk mate*, etc.); a *face towel* is used in cleaning the face and a *cargo train* carries cargo. Each appellation follows the priorities of the society.

TABLE 4. **Lexical variation in three varieties of English**

British English (BrE)	American English (AmE)	Cameroon English (CamE)
House of Commons	House of Representatives	House of Assembly
Lodger	Roomer	Roommate
Public prosecutor	District attorney	State counsel
Town hall	City hall	Municipal/City Council hall
Face flannel	Washcloth	Face towel
Goods train	Freight train	Cargo train
Pig-sty	Hog-pen	Pig fence
Caretaker	Janitor	Concierge
Sitting room	Living room	Parlour
Vest	Undershirt	Singlet

The differences in appellation do not make the varieties inappropriate media of communication within their communities. They do not show either whether any of the varieties is less effective than the other(s). What we must ride home with is that languages and/or varieties possess the capabilities of reacting to and adapting to the changes and tastes of the societies in which they are. Such changes or adaptations do not necessarily indicate negative turns in the language because if a language must spread, it must also be ready to change. Many factors have been cited above to illustrate how the change in the New Englishes, which has been interpreted by some biased linguists as *degeneracy*, was triggered by certain sociolinguistic variables. But is this true?

5. Is postcolonial English *degenerate?*

After the above mitigations on the status of English, the overall question is, is postcolonial English *degenerate*? A legitimate answer to this question is found beyond the realms of social prejudice and bias that over the years veiled any genuine investigation. As Singh et al. (1995), Mufwene (2001) among others truly demonstrate there is adequate linguistic evidence that non-native English varieties evolve in the same evolutionary patterns as other normal (native) varieties. Language development, evolution, change and the contact variable are common to all language contexts not only the postcolonial. To consider them detrimental only in the postcolonial contexts is to shut out the many processes involved and to put into question theories of language evolution and change. It is simply the phobia of *our* language in *their* hands.

The phobia of the native speaker hatched social prejudices towards these varieties. Moreover colonial schemes, as explained above, moulded the cline of change. The prejudice gave the impression that non-native Englishes posed intelligibility obstacles. This orchestrated cautionary pieces of advice like the following from Trudgill and Hannah (1994: 122) who advance that "native speakers travelling to areas such as Africa or India should make the effort to improve their comprehension of the non-native variety of English ... rather than argue for a more English-type English of English in these areas". In a similar manner, Adegbija and Bello (2001: 105) advise that "as speakers of English move from one part of the English-speaking world to another, they need to make greater allowances for apparently unorthodox Englishes, senses and usages of words in their English lexical repertoire". Indisputably the focus here is on native speakers and the fear that they may not understand non-native or what Adegbija and Bello (2001) term "unorthodox Englishes". No measure is taken for non-native speakers travelling to native or rather "orthodox Englishes" areas, whereas intelligibility is a mutual exchange and not the ultimate burden of the non-natives. This technically implies that the *degenerate* variety (as postcolonial English is believed to be) must live up to the normal —a perspective that has transformed research in the New Englishes to panoramic judgements of how *deviant* from native (British) English these varieties are.

6. Conclusion

Postcolonial Englishes are not as *rough* as thought. Instead there exists more logicality and easy-to-apply rules in these varieties, like the *s-plural* above, than in British English. While the sociolinguistic variables studied in this paper ignited a process of change and evolution, the ecology rolled the dice as in all contexts of language contact. These simply point to the vivacity of the language. So, "rather than act as if the language is being debased", Yule (1996: 64) proposes that "we might prefer to view the constant evolution of new terms as a reassuring sign of vitality and creativeness in the way a language is shaped by the needs of its users". Of course this foregrounds a broad range of differences across societies that use English. Difference of this nature has often been generally interpreted as a breakdown in inter-

national communication. This has not been the case, at least in writing, because the whole English language world is intricately linked through the language in education, diplomacy, publications, trade and business, aviation and so forth. Ogu (1986: 93), therefore rightly concludes that "difference or variation is not a deficiency, receptiveness is not necessarily a submission and that complementarity is what makes relationships between languages [varieties and users] possible and pleasurable".

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