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Multilingualism in Cameroon: An Expression of Many Countries in One Country

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Abstract

Cameroon is a country with many languages interacting together. The languages have a complex history reflecting its complex culture. This paper focuses on some of these complexities and demonstrate how people belonging to different linguistic groups construct and deconstruct the concept of country using local languages. I will expand on the feeling of belonging to the country when a local language is used. The paper will set the context, provide a historical background of Cameroon, explain the language situation and settle on how the multiple languages spoken in Cameroon make village and ethnic entities countries within a country. It may not be possible to discuss the possible interactions between the multiple languages but levels of interaction of these languages will be established. The notion of country will be explained through the use of the languages and linked to the complexity in the governance process undermining the unity of the people of Cameroon.

Keywords: Cameroon, multiculturalism, languages, complex, country

1. Introduction

African countries are largely made up of autonomous ethnic entities within the nation-state structure. These are territorial entities carved out when Africa was partitioned by European countries in 1884. The partitioning equally split linguistic entities but did not detach them from their linguistic entities. Cameroon has evolved in the same way. The contemporary period has become a central feature of the problematic of nation-building process in Africa. Cameroon has a complex linguistic context. More than approximately 280 languages are spoken in Cameroon. The way these languages are used to discuss the concept of "Country" makes it difficult to state with certainty whether Cameroon is a multiethnic nation, a multinational state or a territory with many nations or a confederation of countries. The analyses of the naming of groups of people, villages and cultural areas will shade light on the concept of the notion of country in Cameroon. Mercado [1] had claimed that Cameroon shows many signs of being a multinational state on multiple levels but did not move further to elucidate her claims. Her arguments presented Cameroon as being a multinational state. This paper sets out to demonstrate the claims that the territory Cameroon is made up of many national territories on linguistic background and expressions.

2. Background of Cameroon

Cameroon is a low-income country. It has a population of over 25 million inhabitants, growing at an average annual rate of 2.6 percent. Cameroon is ranked 144th out of 177 countries in the 2020 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report [2]. More than 40% percent of its about 25 million people live below the poverty line. That is, on less than 1 $US per day). Over 48 percent of this population resides in rural areas. From the map of Africa, Cameroon is located on the border between the western characterized by an English speaking zone of influence (Nigeria) and the Eastern and Southern French speaking zone (Chad, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Congo). The only exception is Equatorial Guinea, which has Spanish as its official language although since 1998 French has become the "second official language" (see **Figures 1** and **2**).

Cameroon has two official languages, English and French. There are eight "French speaking" regions and two "English speaking" regions. The two English regions are the Northwest and Southwest. All ten "regions" were called "provinces" before Decree No. 2008/376 of 12 November 2008. Cameroon is divided into four sociocultural ecological zones which I call linguistic ecologies. The languages all vary and interact with these zones.

The coastal sociocultural ecological zone of Cameroon corresponds largely to the Littoral and south west regions. This region has been the destination for a large number of migrants from different parts of the country. Its attractiveness is the result of its early exposure to European traders and missionaries, the existence of more relatively developed transport and communication infrastructure, numerous opportunities in international trade and in industry. The main towns here are Douala, Nkongsamba, Kumba, Edea, Limbe and Buea. Most of the inhabitants in this zone identify themselves with what is popularly called the Sawa. Sawa was initially created by the Dualas in 1996 to lay claims on some political and social
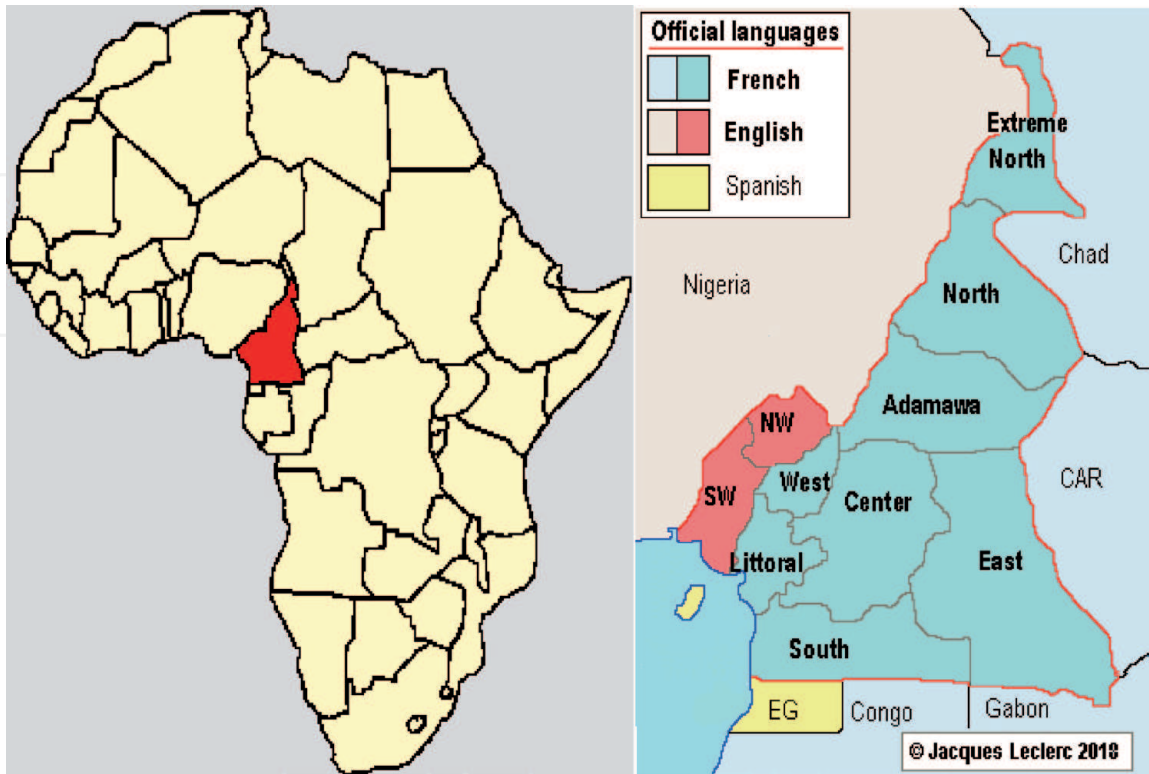

Figure 1.
Map of Africa showing the location of Cameroon. Source: https://www.uottawa.ca/clmc/internationalperspective/cameroon.

Figure 2.
Linguistic ecologies of Cameroon.

benefits that they thought they could not obtain. This concept of Sawa was later extended to other neighboring groups of people having similitude with them but not being Duala. Their invitation was extended to ethnic groups that were even unrelated to Dualas but share the Littoral and South-West physical ecology. The linguistic influence spill over westwards to coastal Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, and southwards to the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, the people of this socio-cultural ecology speak the Bantu languages and share cultural traits similar to those of the other Bantus living in the Gulf of Guinea. The influx of populations into this zone has largely offset the traditional social and cultural structure of the native people. The contact of these people with migrant population has also established evolving new forms of social organizations and tremendous changes in lifestyles and languages spoken. The underlying rituals peculiar to people of the zone are still performed. The population of this zone makes up 21.9% of Cameroon's population.

The Sudano-Sahelian sociocultural ecological zone is located in the three northern regions of Cameroon (Adamawa, North and Far North Regions). The Far North on its own is the most populous region in the country with a population of over 3.4 million inhabitants. The region is suitable for livestock farming and the cultivation of cotton, onion, millet, Irish potatoes, groundnuts and white yam. The rivers and lakes are rich in fish stocks and fishing represents a very lucrative activity in the Logone and Chari localities of the region. The North with a population of 2.0 million is the second most thickly populated region in the Sudano-Sahelian zones. Sedentary live is not a recent phenomenon in the Sudano-Sahelian zone of Cameroon. The zone has come under the influence of the Arabic and Nok culture

and the civilisation of the Arabic and Kanem-Bornu empires urshering in Arabic and Haussa Languages. Even before Europeans carved out the territory known today as Cameroon, that marked the beginning of the growth of towns, such settlements already existed in Sudano-Sahelian Cameroon. Examples include Mora, Mokolo, Ngaoundere and Maroua amongst others. That may explain the dense population it harbors compared with other regions in the country. It is equally a melting pot of migrants who over the centuries have moved across the area to and from what are today referred to as Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and the Central African Republic. This has led to the presence of a multiplicity of ethnic groups amongst which are the Fulani, Hausa, Mousgoum, Massa, Gisey and Musey, Toupuri, Mundang, Giziga, Mafa and the Matakam. Though the people here have respective languages, Haussa, Arabic and Fulani are dominantly used as lingua franca.

The next overarching ethnic category of Cameroon are the various people living in the southern part of Cameroon, in the tropical forests. The densely forested sociocultural-ecological zone covers the South, Centre and East Regions. Most of the population in the South Region are mainly the Ekang said to be of the Beti-Fang-Bulu origins. They depend on farming for subsistence. The capital city of Cameroon is located in the Centre Region. The population of the zone represents 25.8% of the population of the country. The people of this zone include the Ewondo, Eton, Fang, Bulu, Bafia, Massa and Bassa. Their languages come from the Bantu language family, and for most of their history they lived in hunter-gatherer societies that moved about the jungles. Some of these ethnic groups still maintain these traditions to this day. About 40% of people in Cameroon identify religiously as Christian, and they make up the majority of the people in the south. Some of the larger Bantu-speaking ethnic groups in the southern jungles include the Bassa, Beti, and the Baka, called Pygmies by European explorers due to a relatively small stature developed from generations living in the jungle. All in all, about 30% of people in Cameroon identify with one of these ethnic groups.

The fourth sociocultural-ecological zone is the Western High Plateau otherwise called Grassfields. It is made up of the Bamenda and Bamileke Grassfield and physically located in the Savana though overlapping into the Forest, Coastal and Sahel ecologies. Farming is the main occupation of these people. They live in mountainous areas and are commonly classified as the Semi-Bantus of Cameroon. The people of this socio-cultural ecological zone are very migratory in pursuit of better economic opportunities. The main ethnic groups here are the Bamileke, Bamoum, Ngemba, Bali, Kom, Moghamo, Ngemba, Nso, Mbum, Widikum and Yamba. Their cultures belong to the Semi-Bantu language family, a unique language group borrowing from many central African language families, and generally practice traditional religions that worship nature and ancestor spirits. About 38% of Cameroonians fall into this broad ethnic category, with the largest specific ethnic groups being the Bamileke and Bamoun.

3. The linguistic history of Cameroon

Before the balkanization of African which led to the annexation of territories including Cameroon by European nations in 1884, the people of Africa were grouped differently. Africa was made up of empires with boundaries. The nation states stretched over large expanse of territory. There were fewer states and empires whose boundaries and names shifted with the ability to conquer. However, when people were conquered the entire territory including its people were converted into the new empires or states. When the territories were annexed by European countries, the annexation did not consider ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Languages

have emerged and mixed with others. Some of these languages were acquired through colonization, trade and missionary activities.

3.1 Emerging languages from African-Arabic Trade

The Trans-Saharan Trade started long Before Christ. The trade links ushered in the use of Arabic. Arabic led to the extinction of some languages. However, it became a more widely used language with the spread of Islam in Northern Africa toward the Sahelien and coastal areas of Sub-Sahara Africa including Cameroon. Arabic is the dominant language used amongst Islamic believers and converts. The Hausa and Fulbe languages were spread during the Islamic raids orchestrated on the people of Northern Cameroon during the Kanem Borno Empire. It also led to the influx of people from North Western Africa mainly the Hausa and Fulani from Northern Nigeria and Fouta regions of Guinea and Senegal.

3.2 Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Missionary and Trade links

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade came across with the use of Pidgin English. Several authors have established that Pidgin English was introduced in Cameroon about 500 years ago, when the Portuguese traders made contact with Cameroon's coast [3–5]. According to Kouega [4] the period 1400–1800 was when this contact was established. This was the period of slave trade during which the Portuguese employed British privateers [4] to do the trade links. This explains why early samples of Pidgin had lexical items borrowed from both English and Portuguese. The Pidgin English language continued to be used by British missionaries and traders from 1800 to 1884. During this period, Baptist missionaries came to Cameroon and adopted Pidgin for their work. The Missionaries set up churches in which they used Pidgin for evangelization. Mission schools were established and the English Language was used as the language of instruction. Between 1845 and 1887, there were 75 Protestant missionaries in Cameroon. Some of these missionaries came from Jamaica, rather than the U.S. or Britain. During this time an English-based Pidgin grew in the areas where the English influence was felt through missionaries and traders. Pidgin English mixed with local languages and Pidgin English dialects developed. The arrival of the Germans in 1884, as a result of colonization, did not change the dynamics but German was used for administrative purposes. In 1890, the American Presbyterian Missionaries arrived through the South of Cameroon and established missionary activities using Pidgin English. The English-speaking missionaries posted to Cameroon learned Pidgin English to enable them integrate the Cameroon Society to evangelize.

4. Managing languages during the colonial and post-colonial periods

When the Germans annexed Cameroon as a colony in 1884, Pidgin was a fully developed language [4] but they declared the language illegal. Soon the Germans found it difficult to communicate without it. They realized that it would take long to teach a generation of Cameroonians German and be able to work with in the territory. Pidgin English was then used in oral transactions. The German rule was short-lived. At the end of World War I in Cameroon in 1916, Cameroon was divided between the British and the French, with the majority (80%) of Cameroon ceded to French control [6] and 20% to British as a mandatory territory. French Cameroon gained its independence in 1960, and the union of French Cameroon and English Cameroon took place in 1961 [6] after British Cameroon gained its

own independence deciding to join French Cameroon. Bilingualism in English and French was chosen to resolve the problem of multilingualism in the new country and to preserve national unity in a fragile federation [7]. Although it was not accorded official status, Pidgin English remained in and is used [6] for daily business, being the oldest foreign language used across different parts of Cameroon.

Today, Pidgin is mainly spoken in the Northwest, Southwest and Littoral Regions of Cameroon. Its spread is more in the two official Anglophone areas, plus the two adjacent Francophone regions: the Littoral and the West Region and recently the Central Region's main cities [4]. It is also a main Lingua Franca of other main cities of Cameroon, especially in the Northern Regions by virtue of its proximity with Nigeria. Pidgin is spoken even in the predominantly French-speaking capital. Ethnic neighborhoods developed there after reunification in 1961, when Anglophone appointees to federal positions began to move there [8]. After the movement of important public services to Yaounde in 1972, immigration from the Anglophone region turned into a flood and has remained intensive with the War of the Restoration of the State of Southern Cameroon. Anglophone neighborhoods have emerged in main cities and Pidgin English and the English Languages have made major in routes as a result of the settling internally displaced persons in the Majority French speaking territory.

5. Evolving interactions of European and local languages in Cameroon

The history of European Languages in Cameroon dates as far back as the period of Portuguese explorations when they traded in the Gulf of Guinea, starting with the trading in goods then in humans (Slave Trade). They named the territory along the Wouri River as Cameroes, meaning shrimps culled from the Wouri River that they had named Rio dos Cameroes (River of Shrimps). The Spanish Language followed, then the English Language. By the beginning of the 19th Century Slave Trade had ended. American and English Missionaries came across with Christianity to Africa and the English Language was introduced in Cameroon in 1841 [7] through the first missionaries. When Cameroon became a German territory through annexation the German Language was introduced for German colonial administration. The English Language continued to be used as the language of instruction in schools and for missionary work. When Britain and France defeated Germany in 1916, Kamerun was divided into two. Britain took the Western Territory bordering Eastern Nigeria and named it British Cameroons and France took the Eastern Territory and named it French Camerouns. While the English Language continued being used in the Western Territory, The French Language was introduced in the Eastern Territory. The French Language was introduced in 1916 when French influence started after the World War I [6].

In the British Cameroons Territory the British reserved a place for three local languages in schools: Duala, Bali (Mungaka), and Fulani, based on the policy of "Indirect Rule" and in an attempt to avoid uprooting Cameroonians from their culture [6]. Alongside these languages and the English Languages, the Pidgin English prevailed as the lingua franca and the most widely spoken across the board in administration, trade and missionary work. British missions were the first to put Cameroonian vernaculars into writing [6]. The Bible was translated into the three local languages and these languages were used for instruction in schools at initial levels and for missionary work in communities. Although originally more localized, the British policy gradually became less friendly to other Cameroonian vernaculars after four decades [7]. Peoples who spoke languages other than the three resisted and wanted their own languages to be included in the policy. In 1956,

local languages were only used if more than 75% of students spoke the language. Gradually, English replaced the native languages, and English was declared an official language in 1961 at Independence [9]. The British policy was to encourage anyone that could attend school to do so but Chiefs and notables in the British Territory preferred sending the children of commoners to be beaten as used to obtain with slaves.

The French policy on the other hand was to completely convert the people of her territory to French speakers and to replace languages with the French Language and the local cultures with French culture. During the period between the World Wars, although French was used in schools, schools were not intended for all children [10]. They were often established for the sons of chiefs, members of the traditional elite class who would presumably inherit political leadership [10]. Although the schools varied, they always taught French language, French administrative procedures, and traditional laws. Their mission was political aimed at legitimatizing French rule and diffusing spoken French so that colonial administrators would not need interpreters [10] in discharging their duties. From 1920, the French required the use of their language in all schools, and local languages were forbidden [9]. By independence, French was present in school, administration, and other domains [11]. Education was valued for the way it provided access to the social and economic realm of colonial power [12]. French educated children usually found work with Europeans, rather than returning to villages to work in farms [12]. Education, the French language, and power were all closely linked.

French Cameroon gained its independence in 1960, and British Cameroon obtained its independence on February 11, 1961 and joined French Cameroon to form the union of French (East) Cameroons and English (West) Cameroons that took place in on October 1, 1961 [6]. To efficiently manage the territories where the English Language and the French Languages were spoken, "Bilingualism" was chosen to resolve the problem of multilingualism in Cameroon and to preserve national unity in a federation thought to be fragile [7]. It would not have been possible to privilege one of the languages to the detriment of the other. The English and French Languages were enshrined in the Federal Constitution of 1961 as languages with equal status. With the Constitutional amendment of 1996, these provisions were reaffirmed in unequivocal terms. Article 1, paragraph 3, thereof provides that: "The official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The State shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country". This was not just policy as from 1961 (see **Figure 3**).

Actions to support teaching and translation followed. In 1962 a bilingual university was created in the new country's capital, Yaounde. Cameroonian English pidgin remained in use [6] across the territory as a lingua franca, especially for business, evangelism and socializing. To encourage individuals to speak both English and French, the Ministry of National Education instructed that French be taught in all institutions above the primary level in the Anglophone regions, and that English be taught at all institutions above the primary level in the Francophone regions. This led to the widespread of both languages across the country. Though later highly contested because of the management of the bilingualism policy which led to dissension against the central government by people inhabiting the dominantly English Speaking territory in 2016 leading to a problem, crises and a war from November 2017. The response from government was the creation of a National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism in 2017. The issue of languages was going to be handled within the aspect of multiculturalism, language being one of the main aspects of culture. It means managing more than 280 languages spoken in Cameroon.
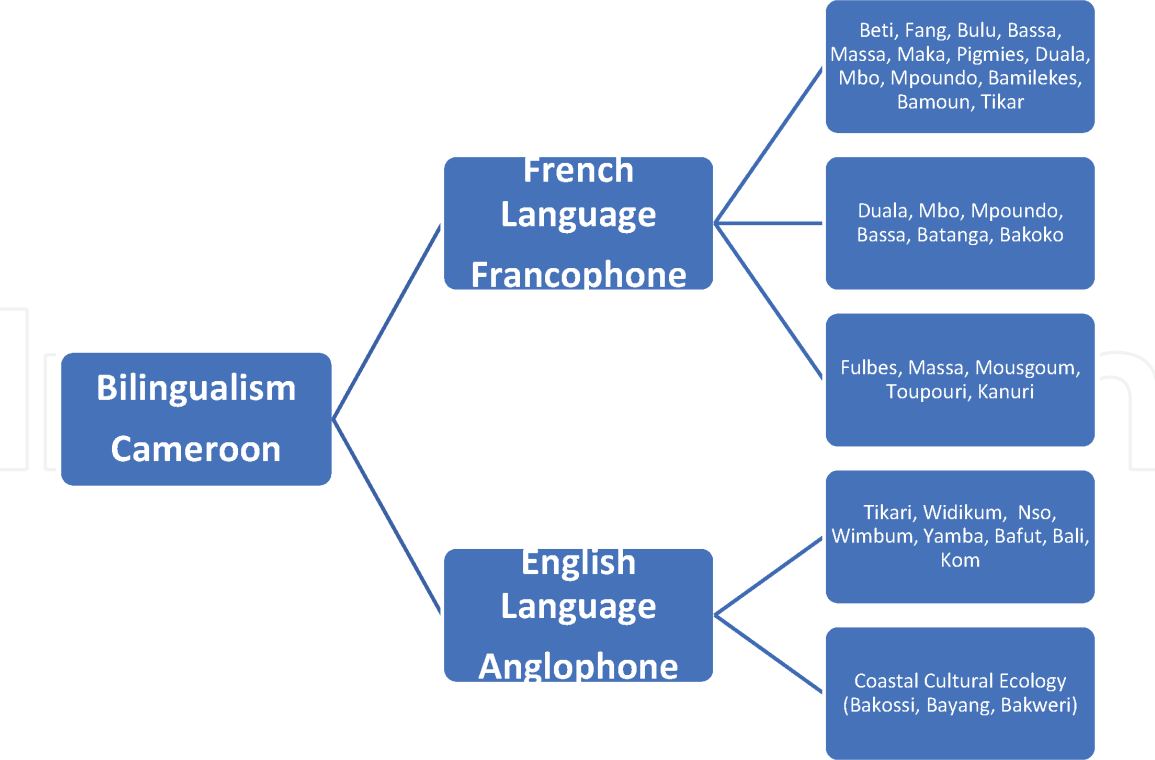
Figure 3.
Stepwise definition of country according to linguistic groupings.

6. Multilingual Cameroon

Following from **Figure 3**, there has been a debate on the number of local languages spoken in Cameroon. However an estimated 280 languages are spoken in Cameroon. Cameroon is one of the sub-Sahara African countries that has hundreds of local African languages. Some of these languages are fragmented and overlap into languages spoken in other African countries, given that the partition of Africa did not respect any cultural or linguistic affiliations, cultural or physical boundaries. Following the debates on the number of languages spoken in Cameroon, it is difficult to state the exact number of local languages existing in Cameroon. A Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) publication in *Ethnologue* list 279 local languages [13]. Echu [14] on his part states that there are 247 languages. To him, some of the languages are varieties that emerged from other languages. Onguene Essono [15] furthers that Cameroon is likely to have 250 languages not the claims about nearly 300. See the map of Linguistic Clusters of Cameroon (**Figure 4**).

The *Atlas linguistique du Cameroun* (*ALCAM*) project did a descriptive and geographic overview of the language groups in Cameroon in 1983 providing that Cameroon has 248 languages [16, 17]. Bitjaa Kody [18] holds that there are 282 national languages in Cameroon. These numbers, in their hundreds are strongly contested and claims are made that Cameroon rather has 20 languages and the rest being variants of these twenty different African languages [19]. For that reason the glossonyms may be linguistically reduced. It means that these languages are dialects emerging from very few languages. There is a debate about what a language is and what a dialect is. However, the most commonly used criterion to distinguish a dialect from a language is mutual intelligibility [20]. A language that has several varieties in which the speakers of these varieties can understand each other is a language for those dialects. The varieties are dialects. These varieties may be called dialects which belong to a dialect cluster that frequently is identified with a particular glossonym.
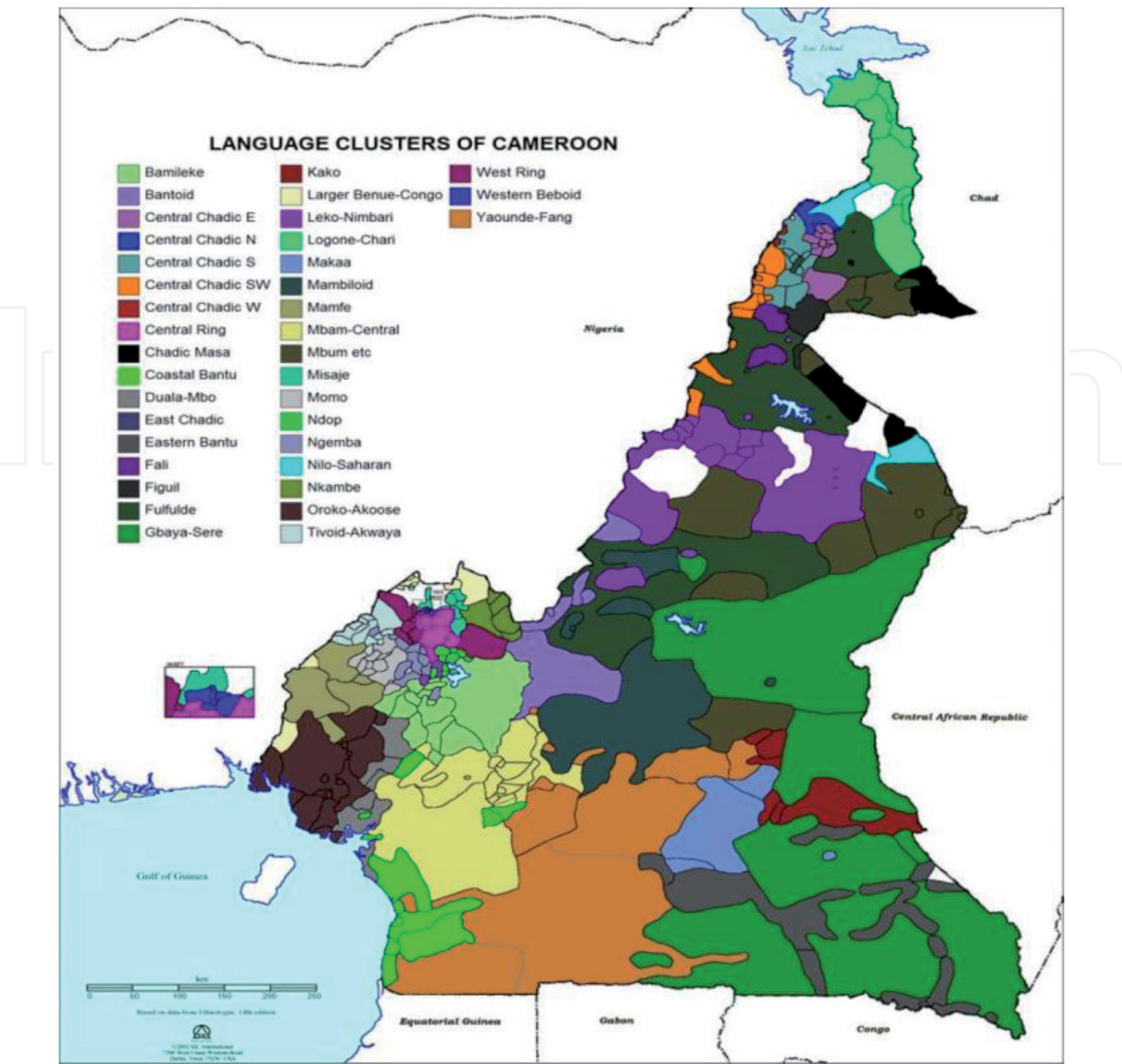
Figure 4.
Linguistic clusters of Cameroon.

The intelligibility as a parameter requires the establishment of some sort of intelligibility threshold. SIL uses lexico-statistical calculations, questionnaires and intelligibility tests. Seventy percent intelligibility distinguishes dialects from languages. As a comparison, the intelligibility between French and Italian is 89 percent and 75 percent between French and Spanish [13]. The Scandinavian languages would be considered dialects of the same language according to this definition. A social and political feature is frequently added to intelligibility to distinguish a language from a dialect. Cultural, social, political and historical factors may be very heavily involved when a variety of a language has to be considered a language or a dialect. Social and cultural aspects play a prominent role when it comes to language status issues as considered by the speech community, and whether or not a language has and own glossonym. Generally, languages are dialects that have succeeded to politically, economically and militarily impose themselves on a people. The language becomes an abstraction which groups find them as inter-comprehensible dialects. For this reason, there is need for a reclassification of the Cameroonian local languages to fit within Guthrie's classification of languages. This will scale down on the number of languages in Cameroon because many of these are varieties of a language. From a linguistic point of view, the distinction between language and dialect is arbitrary so need another round of classification. The number of national languages in Cameroon will reduce to twenty and even 10. But this hypotheses need verification.

7. Concept of country in languages spoken in Cameroon

However, whether these are languages or varieties, their reference to and expression of belonging to a country point to the meaning of a country in the respective languages. Mercado [1] concludes that at every level of groups of people, Cameroon tends toward being a multinational state, rather than a multiethnic nation. She dismisses the idea of Cameroon being made up of multiethnic groups. She thinks that Cameroon is made up of multinations as illustrated by some selected languages.

7.1 Some examples of village/country naming

Below are some selected languages to illustrate the concept of naming village the same as the people will name a country.

According to **Table 1** above, people refer to their villages as countries. For many, a village is a country when referring to it in mother tongue. The table reveals that people assign the same name to their villages by calling it "country" in their local languages and assign the same or similar name to their "country". The word village in a given language means the same as country. **Table 2** provides details on how people say in their local languages that they are going to the village while referring to going to a country.

7.2 Qualifying a village, country in sentence construction

People have a way of saying in their local languages that they are going to their villages. When people say they are going to their villages or tribal or ethnic territories they say that they are going to their countries. For example the Dualas will say *Mboua*. Yet, when they say they are going to their country, Cameroon, they still say that they are going to *Mboua*. Meaning that *Mboua* stands for village and for country. For speakers of each language this distinction between village, tribal or ethnic territory or territorial entity called country is seemingly not drawn as you will have in the English and other western languages. **Table 2** below is illustrative of this and other examples.

The people speaking these languages call their rulers, Kings.

7.3 Gender and linguistic expression of village and country

One of the key concept that emerged from **Table 2** was related to gender. Villages are referred to as homeland and/or motherland. The Moto of Cameroon is Peace-Work-Fatherland. In French it is *Paix-Travail-Patrie*. The notion of fatherland is also inscribed on the national anthem of Cameroon and other national symbols. The French and English cultures from which modern Cameroon was crafted lay emphasis on fatherland being paternalistic. Through local languages spoken in Cameroon it is the notion of motherland that dominates local dialogs though many of the people claim belonging to paternal than maternal societies. The Cameroon administration refers to its territory as fatherland but local linguistic lexicons lay emphasis on motherland. The multitude of languages in Cameroon create linguistic ecologies and also country ecologies shaped by these languages. Language ecology [21] perspective is created such that it results in shaping a people's thought around their villages and ethnic groups making these to be countries. They naturally stress diverging points of belonging to many countries as the rather than seek common ground'.

Language	Speakers	Linguistic ecology	Naming of village	Naming of country
Itanghi-Kom	Kom	Grassfield	Ilah	Ilah
Laimbue	Laimbue	Grassfield	Inah	Inah
Aghem	Enah	Grassfield	Enah	Enah
Bufu	Bafut	Grassfield	Alla'a	Alla'a
Funghom	Funghom	Grassfield	Enah	Enah
Fe'fe'e	Bafang	Grassfield	Mbeh	Ngwe
Medumba	Bangante	Grassfield	La	Nge
Ossananga	Sanaga	Forest	Edongo	Edongo
Oku	Oku	Grassfield	Eblam	Kitum
Beti-Akonolinga	Yebekolo	Forest	Dja'a	Nnam
Beti-Akonolinga	Mvog Nyengue	Forest	Djal	Nnam
Bulu	Bulu	Forest	Djal	Nlame
Ewondo	Ewondo	Forest	Ndjal	Nnam
Beti	Ewondo	Forest	Adzeu	Nsi
Kapsiki	Kapsiki	Sudano-Sahelian	Melme	Hedi
Laka	Laka	Forest	Bbee	Bbee
Lamso	Nso	Grassfield	Lam	Kitum
Bamileke	Yemba	Grassfield	La'ah	La'ah
Bamoun	Bamoun	Grassfield	Nju	Ngou
Maka	Maka	Forest	Ndeun	Name
Ngemba	Ngemba	Grassfield	Nkpwav	Bongne Lah
Ngoumba (Pygmies)	Ngoumba	Forest	Gware	Nlamboh
Toupouri	Toupouri	Sudano-Sahelian	Touloum	Touloum
Bamileke	Baham	Grassfield	Lack	Ngoun
Beti	Ntoumou	Forest	Nnam	Efoussi
Fang	Fang	Forest	Nnam or Djal	Si
Banen	Tunen	Forest	Pounong	Hitik
Grassfield	Nabelema	Grassfield	Lah Grafit	Ngo lah
Bana	Bana	Grassfield	Ngul meh	Hidi
Eton	Eton	Forest	Atann	Nnam
Fali	Kangou	Sudano-Sahelian	Rii	Deesii
Bassa	Bassa	Coastal	Mambine	Log Yem
Duala	Duala	Coastal	Mboua	Mboua

Table 1.
The naming of villages and countries and villages in some local languages of Cameroon.

7.4 An example of negotiated ethnic identities and renegotiated new countries

The socio-cultural or identity dimensions of people shape the negotiation of ethnic identities. There are a few glaring examples in Cameroon. This situation has created what has come to be known as Sawa, Laakam, Bamenda, Nordist and Essingan

Language	People	I am going to my village	I am going to my country
Itanghi-Kom	Kom	Min du ilah or Min du a mi ilah I am going to my village	Min du ilah or Min du a ghes ilah I am going to my village or I am going to my country
Laimbue	Laimbue	Ma ndu inah	Ma ndu inah
Aghem	Enah	Mo ndu enah	Mo ndu enah
Bufu	Bafut	Mo gwi alla'a	Mo gwi alla'a
Funghom	Funghom	Mo ndu enah	Mo ndu enah
Fe'fe'e	Bafang	E dzeubu mgul mbeh	E dzeubu mgul mbeh Ngwe
Medumba	Bangante	La	Nge
Ossananga	Sanaga	Nguendam na edongo ya me Je vais dans mon village	Nguendam na edongo ya me Je vais dans mon village
Oku	Oku	Min ndu eblam	Min ndu ikitum
Beti-Akonolinga	Yebekolo	Ma ke a dja'a	Ma'a dou gane a dja'a dame
Beti-Akonolinga	Mvog Nyengue	Ma ke a dja'a	Ma ke nnam wom
Bulu	Bulu	Ma ke a dzal dam I am going to my country	Ma ke nlame wom I am going to my village/country
Ewondo	Ewondo	Ma ke ndjal wam I am going to my mother's village	Ma ke a nnam wam I am going to my village/country
Beti	Ewondo	Ma ke adzeu dam I am going to my mother's village	Ma ke a nnam wam I am going to my country
Kapsiki	Kapsiki	Melme	Hedi
Laka	Laka	Bbee	Bbee
Lamso	Nso	Lam	Kitum
Bamileke	Yemba	Mem si noh a la'ah nsah	Mem si noh a teuh la'ah mem
Bamoun	Bamoun	Me nan gono nkon nju	Me nan gono si nkon ngou
Maka	Maka	Me keu ndeun me nyion wam	Me keu name wam
Ngemba	Ngemba	Me reh lah	Me reh lah
Ngoumba (Pygmies)	Ngoumba	Meh quee gware	Meh suuh quee gware mah yah I am going to the village of my mother
Toupouri	Toupouri	Ndi raw biilegee mani manbi no	Ndi raw biilegee mani manbi no
Bamileke	Baham	Ga bou go'o lack gafie mama I am going to my mother's village	Ga bou go'o bink ngoun lack mama I am going to my mother's land/village
Beti	Ntoumou	Ma ke nnam nya wom I am going to my village	Ma ke nnam wom I am going to my maternal or mother's village
Fang	Fang	Ma ke nlam wom or Ma ke djal dam	Ma ke si jam
Banen	Tunen	Mi nou hakana ou Poame pounong I am going to my village	Mi nou hakana a hiame hitik I am going to my village/country
Grassfield	Nabelema	Me eula lah grafit	Me Ngo lah
Bana	Bana	E dzeubeu ngul meh	E dzeti hide leu mgurngeu I am going to my mother land

Language	People	I am going to my village	I am going to my country
Eton	Eton	Me te ke atann wommo I am going to my village	Me te ke a nnam wommo I am going to my village
Fali	Kangou	Mi tayke mba Rii I am going to my village	Mi tayke Mba deesii I am going to my village/country
Bassa	Bassa	Min Que. mambine I am going to my village	Min que I log yem I am going to my village/country
Duala	Duala	Nde au Mboua I am going to the village/country	Nde au Mboua I am going to the village/country

Table 2.
How people say in their local languages that they are going to their villages as opposed to I am going to my country.

awareness where they respectively represent people belonging to languages groups of the Coastal, Bamileke Grassfields, Bamenda Grassfields, Sudano-Sahel and Forest cultural ecologies. Let us take the case of the Sawa. Sawa was originally used by the Duala to refer to themselves as seashore dwellers but in the context of the 1996 post council electoral crisis it was extended to related peoples such as the Bakweri, Mongo, Pongo, Malimba, the Bakoko and Bassa of Douala city, Bodiman and Ewudi. Sawa became a political and social movement and eventually carved out and denoted a territory. This territory eventually included other peoples in the Littoral and South West Provinces[1] not necessarily located along or near the coast were also integrated in the movement. These included the Mbo, Bakossi, Yabassi, Balong, Oroko and Bafaw and far off Bayang in Manyu Division. Prior to 1996 therefore the term Sawa was almost inexistent as a term to describe a local regional and cross regional awareness. The French colonial administration had prohibited any such initiatives and favored fragmented identities. Before this, in 1992, after the parliamentary elections when a representative from the southwest was a migrant from Bassaland but representing the people of Tiko, he led a movement to unite the Bassa ethnic groups into creating a Bassa country called *Pays Bassa*. The Sawa and Bassa initiatives are identity awareness motivated crisis expressed through protests. At this stage none of these groups of ethnic entities thought of Cameroon but as being countries that needed to expand their territories using political and social protest against other ethnic entities which they thought were dominating and making gains out of the minorities. Yenshu-Vubo [22] thinks that an awareness of political marginalization is definitely at the basis of the protests but in its original form, it does not exist as an ethnic movement. Before colonization territorial expansion of countries was negotiated through war. But the Duala, Bassa, Beti, Bamileke, Nordists expansion was negotiated via political and social protest using the weaknesses in state legislations to gain territory and expand their respective countries within a larger concept of a country, Cameroon. To legitimize this and satisfy these movements of ethnic renegotiation and territorial expansion, the revised Cameroon constitution of 1996 enshrined the natives and settlers concepts. This gave the idea to the natives that they were minority and could only gain protection if they supported the governing party and were loyal to state institutions and the settlers to be considered by natives as majority and usurpers of their political power and opportunities.

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[1] What is now called Regions were called Provinces at the time of the 1996 post-electoral council election crises.

Language sets a platform of unity [23] and translates into regional movements by elites who stress a convergence of interests through language and equate similarity of predicament with similarity of identity [24]. One cannot doubt that there is a degree of similarity in culture and language within the region but that does not translate automatically into a collective awareness but is constructed to trace new political boundaries and interest. For the Sawa, it is the convergence of the crisis of modernization that forged the new ethnic identity by building it into a common cultural heritage symbolized by the *ngondo* festival. But this has hatched other parallel festivals with new country boundaries drawn within the Sawa country. The *Ngondo* was initially a Duala festival but the aftermath of the 1996 protests translated it into an assembly uniting such peoples as were perceived as related to the former.

It is this invented Sawa identity that transforms a political movement into a cultural one and uses the cultural to consolidate the basis for political claims. The Duala elite, who invented this term, as the leading faction of the coastal peoples, thus attempted to carve an ethnic political base for themselves which their members could not guarantee in the geopolitics of Cameroon. It is in this sense that Yenshu Vubu's [22] assertion that dominant classes are the agents of cultural models gains all its meaning. Varieties of a language serve as the base of the construction.

7.5 Village, country and motherland: Implications for national unity

Cameroon exist in a context of fragmented ethnic entities. These are expressed in the disconnection between the Moto of the country and the linguistic expressions of naming villages and a country as being the same. Firstly, when the Moto of Cameroon is written, it refers to Cameroon as fatherland but when people talk about the village and country they mean motherland as opposed to fatherland. Secondly, people call their villages, countries, paradoxically, not drawing a distinction. When people from respective villages say they are going to their village, they mean that they are going to their land of birth.

8. Conclusion

None of the official languages in Cameroon serve as a unifying language. Rather, each of the official languages unify people across the former colonial boundaries and colonial languages of French and English. The lingua franca, Pidgin English leading and some local languages like Fulani, Duala, Ewondo, Haussa and Fulani and Bassa serve the purpose of unifying people around the physical and virtual territories bordering the main people who speak these languages. This motivates people speaking these languages to have a sense of belonging to some country beyond, with no properly defined country because of the linguistic affiliation. The Duala speakers claim belonging to a Sawa country (*Pays Sawa*), the Ewondo speakers claim belonging to the Beti country (*Pays Beti*). The Bassa speakers claim their belonging to the Bassa country (*Pays Bassa*). The Haussa and Fulani speakers claim their belonging to the Northerners (*Nordists*). Pidgin English is the local language that is widely spoken across all regions. The varieties of dialects in languages make a case for people to consider their villages and ethnic groups as countries. Though bilingualism is what the Cameroon administration created to unify the two former colonial territories, it does not replace the language divide and it is not a language but a policy difficult to apply. The trend of divisions and regroupings into different territories called countries within the country, Cameroon, is prominent amongst the former French Territory or East Cameroon. French and English are linked to a two territories, which were previously two different countries from 1916 to 1961.

People still live in this colonial divide determined by these two languages though the names assigned to the two territories have evolved for over 105 years. Ethnic languages denote other countries within Cameroon putting into question its unified identity in a linguistic diversity that submerge the good intentions of bilingualism.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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