



Deceptive Similarities between British English and Cameroon Pidgin English: A Lexico-Semantic Investigation



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Article history:

Received: 18 January 2017

Revised: 5 June 2017

Approved: 10 June 2017

Published: 11 July 2017

Keywords:

Loan Words;

British English;

Lexico-Semantics;

Deceptive Similarities;

Cameroon Pidgin English;

Abstract

Cameroon Pidgin English has a large stock of words from the English Language, French, Portuguese and Cameroonian local languages. This is as a result of the various historical contacts and economic interactions with these languages. It should, however, be noted that among all these donor languages, the English language tends to be the main lexifier. More than 60% of the words in Cameroon Pidgin English are actually from the English language. English is, therefore, the status language to Cameroon Pidgin English. The heavy presence of English words in Cameroon Pidgin English has always given the impression that it is difficult to draw a neat line between the two. This paper set out to verify the authenticity of this assumption. The results revealed that although a word used both languages look alike in form, the meaning in Cameroon Pidgin English has witnessed significant semantic adjustments from what is conceptually recognized in British English usage. The paper went further to suggest reasons for this phenomenon.

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1. Introduction

Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) is one of the languages of wider communication in Cameroon, a country second only to Papua New Guinea in terms of its multiplicity of languages for a relatively small population (Todd 2008). CPE is used side by side other languages like English and French (official languages), Fulfulde, Arab Choa, Ewondo and Duala (lingua francas), and over 250 indigenous languages. What is, however, peculiar about CPE is that it is not restricted to a particular class of people or to people from a particular region. As Mbassi-Manga (1976:50) asserts, it is a language that “links, at least potentially, Cameroonians from different language groups either educated in French or in English only or non-educated at all in either of these Received Languages”. This has led to a significant increase in the functional load of CPE as it is generally used in both in-group and out-of-group communication in the country. CPE is also a language of intimacy and solidarity especially in domains such as buying and selling, religious teaching and worship and cultural expressions (Menang, 2006).

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Cameroon Pidgin English is a contact language and has as donor languages: the English language, French, Portuguese and Cameroonian home languages. This is as a result of various historical contacts and economic interactions with these languages. CPE has a large stock of words from the English language as opposed to other lexifiers such as Portuguese that can count only a handful of words left in the language. This is an indication that CPE is strongly tilted towards the English language. In fact, [Mbangwana \(1983\)](#) intimates that about 60% of lexical items used in CPE are from the English language. Thus, the English language is the status language to CPE and both have their merits and demerits with regard to the way they are used in Cameroon. Though these two languages share more similarities especially at the lexical level as noted by Mbangwana, it should be abundantly clear that CPE is a language in its own right. Those who seem to see no neat line between the two must have neglected the abundant literature on CPE which demonstrates that there are systematic features at every level of its analysis that set it clearly aside from its status language, English.

The confusion is most evident at the level of the lexis, where most of the words used in British English are also used in CPE. This gives the false impression that the two languages are the same and as such, there is no need to spend time working on the two as if they were different languages. The words may be clearly English in form but when put in context, may express shades of meaning that are quite different from what obtains in the donor language. This paper aims to show that although the words used in British English and CPE look alike in form, the meaning in CPE has drifted somehow from what is conceptually recognized in British English usage. It goes further to give reasons for this phenomenon. These changes, though sometimes baffling, are not unexpected. As [Gibson et al. \(1993:26\)](#) succinctly put it “If a word always stood for only one thing and only one idea, communication will be easy indeed; but words have a way of acquiring many meanings through their use by different people at different places, under different conditions”. Hence, these English words that have moved to another language, CPE have undergone some semantic adjustments to fit the new linguistic context. Even when the context seems to be in consonance with British English usage, the word may not be used in its entirety considering that as a Pidgin, the simplification process may also involve a reduction in the number of meanings obtained by a single lexeme.

With the growing popularity of CPE assuming more functions and statuses in Cameroon, it will just be normal and timely to start investigations of this nature, which clearly distinguish the language from its main donor. This will serve as a giant step in the struggle to come up with a dictionary for CPE usage, as it asserts itself as one of the key players in the complex linguistic make-up of Cameroon.

Background on Pidgin English in Cameroon

Throughout the course of geographic history, exploration and trade have caused various populations of people to come into contact with each other. Because these people were of different cultures and thus spoke different languages, communication was often difficult. Over the decades though, languages changed to reflect such interactions and groups sometimes developed pidgins. CPE developed in this way, out of sporadic contact between Cameroonians and European traders at the coast. History has it that the first contact was with Portuguese traders but because English privateers were employed in huge numbers in Portuguese boats ([Mbassi- Manga; 1973](#)), this affected the type of Pidgin spoken in Cameroon, that is, from a Portuguese-based Pidgin to an English-based Pidgin, as majority of the lexical items in this contact language drifted gradually from Portuguese to English. To reinforce this English domination, the British through the missionaries created some schools in the territory, which paved the way for the formal learning of English. However, given the limited number of schools, very few Cameroonians could afford formal instruction in Standard English. This scenario favoured the spread of CPE to the detriment of Standard English with people borrowing extensively from English to facilitate communication, thus the growth and expansion of Pidgin English in the country and by the time English finally implanted itself, PE had made serious in roots in the country, this time not just being used out of communicative necessity but as a language of intimacy, social interaction, etc.

The coexistence of English and Pidgin English in the complex linguistic landscape of Cameroon for so many years and the way the language is evolving has raised a number of concerns. One of the recent debates on the relationship between English and CPE is that some kind of restructuring is going on in the language which makes it move more and more towards its status language English ([Sala & Ngefacc 2006](#)). It is claimed that this recent phenomenon is due to the fact that more and more Cameroonians are being exposed to English as compared to the 1960s when formal education in English was scarce. The prediction made as a result of this observation is that CPE and English will in the long run merge, with CPE losing its identity and idiosyncrasies. I follow Sala and Ngefacc, as any other keen observer of the evolution of CPE, that there is some restructuring taking place in CPE

of late, and that this evolution shows an upward movement towards Standard English. That this restructuring is attributed to the increase in the level of education of Cameroonians, the media, and globalization which has exposed Cameroonians to more English, is also not open to any debate. But to see this as a *problem* and a *threat* to the hegemony of CPE, is where we disagree, if not sharply. Change is a natural linguistic phenomenon. Yesterday, CPE was used more as a lingua franca, a link language between people who spoke mutually unintelligible languages, by mostly the uneducated who worked in the plantations. In short, CPE was used out of desperate communicative necessity. Today the level of education of Cameroonians has significantly increased and most of the uneducated people are giving way to the younger generation who now must speak the form of Pidgin English that reflects their level of exposure to English. What most people fail to know is the fact that CPE has along the line acquired other very significant functions that have even relegated the desperation factor to the background. That is, CPE is now the language of intimacy, social interaction, buying and selling, political discourse, etc. Thus the people who use the restructured version of CPE, that is, the younger generation, are no longer using it out of communicative necessity. They love the language, they feel at ease with it, it is like the air they breathe. That is why I beg to differ with the prophecy that CPE is pidginizing or is facing death (Schroder, 2003; Kouega, 2001; Sala and Ngefac, 2006). In the contrary, Standard English is facing death as CPE has now squatted in the domain that was hitherto the preserve of Standard English (Simo Bobda and Wolf, 2003, Chia 2009, Simo Bobda, 2009). The questions I may pose are- How can Pidgin English be facing death or pidginizing when more and more youths tend to see it as a fashionable medium of communication? How can English be threatening the hegemony of CPE when CPE is giving heads of academic institutions, both private and government, sleepless nights and they look for ways of stopping its unprecedented spread into domains they thought were the preserve of English? Many of them think that CPE militates against the proper acquisition of English in manifold ways. How can CPE be facing death or is about to lose its identity and idiosyncrasies when even at the tertiary level of education in this country, the language is on the rampage as it is unseating Standard English in its function as the language of academic discourse? Threatening and sometimes desperate statements on the following signboards in the pure Anglo-Saxon University of Buea, Cameroon testify to the fact that the threat posed by CPE can only be compared to a tsunami.

- a) *No Pidgin on Campus, please!*
- b) *Pidgin is taking a heavy toll on your English; shun it.*
- c) *The medium of studies at UB is English, not Pidgin*
- d) *If you speak Pidgin, you will write Pidgin.*
- e) *English is the password, not Pidgin*
- f) *Speak less pidgin and more English*
- g) *Commonwealth (people) speak English, not Pidgin.*
- h) *Be my friend, speak English.*
- i) *Succeed at UB by avoiding Pidgin on Campus*
- j) *The better you speak Pidgin, the worse you will write English*

Inscriptions of this nature are conspicuous in many public and private higher institutions while other private and government-owned schools have outrightly banned its use in the school premises. Simo Bobda (2009:19) contends that gone are the days that CPE used to consider a “canker worm” and “an impediment to logical thinking”, and that today we are gradually moving to another extreme where Pidgin English, even in university circles, has squatted into domains which were hitherto the preserve of English. He further observes that “while English is fast becoming a foreign language (in the ELT sense of the term with all the consequences), Pidgin English is commonly used by postgraduate students to discuss Shakespeare and Chomsky, or Nuclear Physics”. To further reinforce Simo Bobda's observation, Chia (2009:48) after a thorough investigation of the use of Pidgin in the University of Buea, concludes, “The fear here is that since CPE is making in-roots into the fief of Standard English in this nascent role as a language of academic discourse, it may eventually supplant Standard English”. These are fresh statements founded on empirical evidence, made by linguists who have watched CPE evolve from the 1960s. It is, therefore a bit difficult to understand how the same CPE we are talking about here can be facing death or about losing its identity. It may be safely assumed that it is because the variety of CPE that is most heard now is the youth variety which has a predilection towards English especially at the lexical level, that has made people think that this type of evolution can only militate against the continuous growth of CPE. This controversial situation calls for diligence as a keen look at the way the borrowed items are used in CPE reveals by

far more than what is seen at the surface. The borrowed words undergo some semantic adjustments to suit the linguistic contexts in which they are used as we shall see in this study.

2. Research Methods

Methodological concerns

The data for this study was collected from youths (both students and those involved in Petit trading, woodwork, car repairs, etc), and other Cameroonians of all walks of life in the Yaounde municipality. I did not discriminate the population of the study as the selection of informants was random. However, more data came from the youths given that present trends show that CPE is gradually moving towards English because the users are changing from the older generation to a more youthful one. The data were collected by means of tape-recordings and observation.

A considerable amount of the data was collected through observation. Since the inception of this paper, every minute of discussion with people was an occasion to collect lexical items that are used for the study. I equally used my students¹ who lived and spoke Pidgin English with their friends to secretly record their conversations. Some of the data were equally tape-recorded from Pidgin English programs over the media, such as Pidgin News and Coco Rico News.

The words identified in the data as pure English words were selected and analyzed both in English and in CPE from a lexico-semantic perspective. It was, however, discovered that most of the words used by the older generation did not exhibit the type of similarities the ones from the younger generation generated. In the process of analyzing the words, it was discovered that some of the words used by the youths, especially those in Bonamoussadi (a student residential area in the metropolitan town of Yaounde), were too specialized and thus more of slang than typical Pidgin English usage. As [Mbangwana \(2006: 220\)](#) observes, some of these “linguistic inventiveness delight in virtuosity for the sheer fun of it”. The use of these new forms thus becomes an indication of “belonging”. There is, therefore, a conscious or unconscious deconstruction of the English Language. I was careful not to include these in the corpus, although they will eventually spread and get integrated into the language. There are clear indications that this is already happening as most of the words were quite recurrent in the data.

This study is based on [Crystal’s \(1995\)](#) model of describing the semantic change. This model establishes six major criteria for the description of any change in the meaning of a word. The present study focuses on the meanings of lexemes in CPE and in Standard English. The meaning of a word depends upon the conventional sense the users of that word have given the word. The word is therefore what Saussure refers to as the *signifier* while what the word stands for is the *signified*. As Saussure rightly points out, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary; that is, the relationship between, say the word *book* and the thing in the physical world, is not logical. This is to say there is nothing in the form of the word *book* that bears any direct relationship to the *entity* it signifies. As such, the meaning of a lexeme depends upon the acceptability of the word by users of the said word in a particular environment. [Bloomfield \(1933\)](#) states that the meaning of a lexeme can be deduced solely from the situation in which speech is used. [Lyons \(1981:140\)](#) quotes Wittgenstein who says “the meaning of a word is its use in the language”. This implies that the meaning of a word is not static. As Lyons (*ibid*) points out “most everyday words do not have a single clear cut meaning or even a set of meanings” (p.138). However, this variation in meaning does not imply that we do not have certain words in a particular language which stand for something specific (in the conventional sense of the word). In this light, Bloomfield (*ibid*) thinks defining meaning is easier when referring to concrete things as he says:

We can define the meaning of a speech-form accurately when this meaning has to do with some matter of which we possess scientific knowledge. We can define the names of minerals, for example, in terms of chemistry and mineralogy, as when we say that the ordinary meaning of the English word salt is sodium chloride (NaCl); and we can define the names of plants or animals by means of the technical terms of botany or zoology, but we have no precise way of defining words like love or hate which concern situations that have not been accurately classified. (p. 139).

From this, it is evident that the meaning of an expression can be obtained by bringing both the verificationist and the mentalist theories together. The verificationist theory of meaning has to do with what an expression refers to outside a linguistic context, that is, in the physical world. The verifiability of the meaning of a lexeme will relate

¹ I am indebted to Bobdinga Randolph who helped in the collection of some of the data

the lexeme to a concrete noun while the verifiability of a sentence or a proposition will depend upon the truth values of the said proposition. The meanings of abstract words will as such be properly handled by the mentalistic or ideational theory. Here, the meaning of an expression is the concept or idea that is associated with the expression in the minds of users of the said expression. This definition varies from one group of people to another, which makes the language very arbitrary. The arbitrariness of language makes meaning for varying greatly within both linguistic and non-linguistic context. [Geoffrey Leech \(1975\)](#) distinguishes seven types of meaning namely Conceptual meaning, Connotative meaning, Stylistic meaning, Affective meaning, Reflected meaning, Collocative meaning and Thematic meaning. From this classification, it is evident that stylistic, reflected and affective meanings fall under connotative meaning which is also known as associative meaning. Semantics thus covers a wide range of meanings. But these meanings are intricately linked to the conceptual meaning, which is otherwise referred to as the cognitive, logical or denotative meaning. Thus, an evaluation of semantic change is in reference to the conceptual meaning.

The traditional studies of semantic change have had to do with the various ways by which we can evaluate semantic change from a synchronic perspective ([Banjo, 1997](#); [Tabufor, 1997](#); [odumuh, 1984](#); [Mbouya, 2000](#); [Igboanusi, 2003](#); [Anchimbe, 2005](#); [Nchwenwi, 2006](#); [Atechi 2006](#)). The above-mentioned researchers have succeeded in showing how the meanings of words change in a particular time in use. However, the present study is different in the sense that it examines semantic change not in a mainstream variety of English, but how loanwords from English take up new sheds of meaning in CPE. Another point of divergence is that most of the above-mentioned researchers focus on three types of changes; that is, Extension, Narrowing and Shift. This paper examines and describes six types of change with a clear demonstration of how one meaning is different from the other, semantic extension, semantic shift, semantic amelioration, semantic pejoration, semantic deterioration and figurative meaning. The work equally provides elaborate reasons for the occurrence of these changes, which support the fact that the phenomenon of semantic change is a natural linguistic reality. The table is partitioned into five columns: Column one provides the lexemes, columns two contains the part of speech as used in British English, columns three gives the British English meaning of the lexemes, columns four gives the word class of the lexemes as used in CPE while column five provides the meanings of the lexemes as used in the CPE. The only exception to this partitioning is in the presentation of a figurative change in which a sixth column has been added to describe the kind of figurative change.

3. Results and Analysis

Semantic Extension

The meaning of a word is widened ([Bloomfield 1993](#)). That is a word that, at one point in time, applied only to something specific, eventually develops a new meaning or meanings. The original meaning of the word remains but other meanings are added to the word ([Malmkjaer, 2004](#)). The new meaning either moves from describing a part to describing a whole, or from describing a single entity to describing more than one entity. [Crystal \(1995:55\)](#) cites the example of *virtue* which at one point in time was applied only to the male sex; but which applies to both sexes in current usage. [Radford et al. \(1999\)](#) prefer the term *broadening* in the description of such a change. They advance the example of *companion* (a French loan) which once meant “someone who eats bread with another” as indicated by its two principal morphemes *com* (French-with) and *pain* (French bread). The meaning of the word has been broadened to incorporate “someone who goes with or spends much time with another”.

The kind of semantic extension that is examined in this paper is somehow different. This paper shows how the meaning of a particular word in BrE has been extended in CPE. This ties with [Zuengler's \(1982:117\)](#) definition of semantic extension. He says it is the process of adding a new meaning or new meanings to a Standard English word.

Table 1
Extension in C PE

| Word | WC | StE Meaning | WC | CPE Meaning |
|-----------|-----|---|-----|--|
| Member | N | Part of a group or a whole | N | -Same in StE |
| | | | V | -Remember |
| | | | Adj | -Being proud |
| Follow | V | Come after sth or sb | V | -Same in StE |
| | | | Adj | -Having a love affair with sb |
| Chew | V | Grind food in the mouth | V | -Same in StE |
| | | | Adj | -Frown or get extremely serious |
| Honey | N | -Sweet substance produced by bees | N | -Same in StE |
| | | | N | -Bees |
| Neck | N | Part of the body | N | -Same in StE |
| | | | N | -greed |
| Fever | N | Having abnormal high temperature | N | -Same in StE |
| | | | | -Be like or similar to sb or sth |
| Godfather | N | Person who promises to see that a child is brought up as a Christian when the child is being baptized | N | -Same in StE |
| | | | | -An influential person who sees that his protégés are better placed in a society |
| Army | N | Group of soldiers | N | -Same in StE |
| | | | | -A soldier |
| Dry | Adj | -Without moisture | Adj | -Same in StE |
| | V | -Make sth to become dry | V | -Same in StE |
| | | | Adj | -Not having much flesh (thin) |
| | | | | -Scanty |
| Try | V | Make an attempt to do or get sth | V | -Same in StE |
| | | An act of attempting sth | N | -Same in StE |
| | N | | V | -Tempt sb |
| Die | V | Put an end to life | V | -Same in StE |
| | | | N | -Funeral ceremony |
| Belly | N | Part of the body | N | -Same in StE |
| | | | Adj | -State of being pregnant |
| Story | N | A fictional narration | N | -Same as in StE |
| | | | N | -News |
| Hear | V | Perceive sounds with the ears | V | -Same in StE |
| | V | Listen to sth | V | -Understands sth or sb feel sth |
| Country | N | -The nation as a whole | N | -Same as StE |
| | N | -Any area outside towns or cities | Adj | -Primitive behavior or person |
| Stranger | N | Any person you do not know | N | -Any visitor |
| Woman | N | Adult female human being | N | -Any female being |
| | | | | -Wife |
| Man | N | Adult male human being | N | -Any male being |
| | | | | -Husband |
| | | | | -A bottle of drink |
| Hang | V | Attach sth at the top so that the lower part is free or loose | V | -Same as StE |
| | | | | -Commit suicide |
| Sister | N | -A girl or woman who has the same parent as another person | N | -Used to address any intimate woman |
| | | -A woman who shares an interest with you. | | |

| | | | | |
|--------|---|--|---|---|
| Borrow | V | Take sth from sb with the intention of returning it later | V | -Same as StE -Give sth to sb with the intention of getting it back. |
| Uncle | N | -The brother of someone's father or mother -The husband of someone's aunt | N | -Same in StE -Used to address any elderly man |
| Attack | V | The use of violence in order to hurt or kill sb | V | -Same as StE -An act of trying to take the ball from an opponent in football and other sport (tackle) |
| Aunty | N | -The sister of someone's father or mother -The wife of someone's uncle | N | -Used as a title of respect to address any slightly older female especially one who is intimate with you. |
| Cargo | N | Goods carried on a ship or plane | N | Goods in general |

Semantic Narrowing

This semantic phenomenon also called Restriction or Specialization, is a situation whereby the meaning of a word that once applied to things in general, becomes focused on a single thing. That is, a word that was once used in a general sense tends to have a specific meaning. To use the words of Crystal (ibid), "A word becomes more specialized in meaning" Crystal cites the example of *mete* (meat) which in old English, referred to food in general but which now refers only to one kind of food. Radford et al (1999) also give the examples of *girl* and *lust*. *Girl* in Middle English was a young person of either sex. *Lust* simply meant *pleasure*. In current usage, these words have restricted their meanings. *Girl* now means a young person of the female sex while *lust* refers to sexual pleasure. In this paper, narrowing is examined by looking at words, which have a general sense in standard English but have developed a unique or more specialized sense in CPE.

Table 2
Semantic narrowing in CPE

| Words | wc | StE meaning | wc | CPE Meaning |
|----------|-----|---|-----|---|
| Wrapper | N | Any piece of material used for wrapping sth | N | A piece of cloth |
| Garage | N | A place where vehicles are kept and repaired | N | A place where vehicles are repaired |
| Farmer | N | A person who grows crops and keeps animals | N | A person who grows crops |
| Truck | N | An open lorry or wagon used for carrying goods | N | An open wagon that is pulled or pushed |
| Artist | N | A person who creates works of art | N | A person who practices creative painting |
| Album | N | A book where photographs, stamps etc are kept | N | A book where pictures are kept |
| Minister | N | A senior member of a government department or a religious order | N | A person at the head of a government department |
| Prefect | N | Head of students or a local government area | N | student leader |
| Palace | N | An official house of a ruler or any large impressive house | N | House of a traditional ruler/king/president |
| Palaver | N | A lot of unnecessary activity, excitement or trouble | N | Unnecessary trouble or disturbance |
| Dull | Adj | Not interesting, not sharp, not | Adj | Not intelligent |

| | | | | |
|------------|-----|---|-----|--|
| | | intelligent, not bright or not clear | | |
| Agency | N | Any business or organization that provides specialized services | N | A business that handles traveling matters |
| Consult | N | Go to somebody for information or advice | V | Go to a medical specialist for health matters |
| Discharge | V | The act of releasing a substance such as gas, liquid from somewhere | V | -The act of releasing semen from the bowels -Grant sb the permission to leave the hospital. |
| Illiterate | Adj | A person who does not know much about a particular field of studies or who cannot read and write. | Adj | A person who cannot read or write. |
| Animal | N | Any living creature that moves, eats and breaths | N | A creature which is not a fish, a bird, an insect or a reptile |
| Girlfriend | | -A girl or woman having a romantic relationship with sb -A boy or a man's female friend | N | - A girl or woman that <i>sb</i> is having a romantic relationship with |
| Breakable | Adj | <i>Sth</i> that is likely to break or easily broken | N | A plate made of China clay |
| Landlord | N | A man from whom you rent a land or house A man who owns or manages a pub or guests a house | N | A person whom you rent a land or house from |
| Product | | A thing that is grown or produced | | A substance used to make sb's hair lighter |
| Society | N | An organization of people having sth in common or formed for a particular purpose | N | An organization of people of using diabolic means to make money |

Semantic Shift

Semantic shift, as the name implies, has to do with a shift in the meaning of a word from the description of one thing to that of another. That is, a word loses its original meaning and gains a new meaning or “moves from one set of circumstances to another” (Crystal *ibid*: 55). In this kind of change, the outcome of the new meaning cannot be concretely explained as the relationship between the old and the new meaning cannot be reconciled. A good example of this kind of change is analyzed by Radford et al. (1999) where a word like *nice* (a loan from Latin *Mencius* meaning *ignorant*) has developed various meanings in the English Language. In the 14th century, it meant *silly* or *wanton*, 15th century, it meant *coy* or *shy*, 16th century, it meant *subtle*, while in the 18th century it meant *agreeable* or *good*. This information implies that the 18th-century meaning is what obtains in present day usage. The words identified under semantic shift in this paper, are words that have shifted from their StE meanings. This kind of semantic shift is what Zuengler (1982:117) defines as the “redefinition of characteristic patterns of a word within the semantic field so that it acquires a new meaning altogether different from its meaning in BrE”.

Table 3
Semantic Shift in CPE

| Words | wc | StE | wc | CPE Meaning |
|--------|----|---|----|---|
| Dealer | N | A person who buys and sells a particular product | N | A person who dupes others |
| Chap | N | Used to talk about a man or a boy in a friendly way | N | -Girlfriend -Also used to address any young girl |
| Chick | N | A baby bird (usually a baby chicken) | N | -Girlfriend |
| Craze | N | An enthusiasm towards something | V | Being mad |

| | | | | |
|--------------|-----|--|-----|--|
| Claim | V | Demand or take responsibility for sth | Adj | Showing feelings of pride |
| Villager | N | Someone who lives in a village | Adj | A primitive person |
| Dress | N | Clothes | V | Shift or move away from sth or sb |
| Follow-up -- | N | An act of continuing sth | V | Act of provoking sb |
| Chop | V | Cut sth into pieces with a sharp tool such as an axe | V | Eat sth with the mouth |
| Chopper | N | A heavy tool used in cutting sth into pieces | Adj | A spendthrift |
| Mesh | N | Material made of thread of plastic rope or wire | N | Artificial hairs used for plating |
| Napkin | N | Piece of cloth or paper used at meals for protecting clothes and cleaning lips | N | Piece of soft fabric that is folded around a baby's bottom to absorb and hold its body waste (nappy) |
| Council | N | A group of people elected to govern an area | N | A building where councilors work |
| Cosh | N | A short thick heavy piece of metal | N | -An insult |
| Yap | V | Make a high, sharp and irritating sound | V | -Act of insulting sb Denigrate sb |
| Nag | V | To keep disturbing or irritating sb | V | Beat sb |
| Shark | N | Large sea fish | N | A drink |
| Snack | N | A small amount of food usually eaten in the afternoon | V | Act of drinking sth |
| Yore | N | Long ago | N | A lucrative drinking spot |
| Dash | N | An act of going somewhere suddenly | Adj | A boy or man who behaves and dresses in a western way |
| | N | A punctuation mark | N | -A gift |
| | N | A small amount of sth that is added to sth else | N | -An extra amount of sth added to what has been bought |
| Irish | Adj | The people and language of Ireland | N | A kind of potato tubers |
| Jackass | N | A stupid person | N | A person who works too much for another person |
| Banger | N | Sausage | | Marijuana |
| Backside | N | Part of the body (bottom or buttocks) | N | An area behind the house |
| Mannequin | N | -A life-size dummy of a human body used by tailors to display dresses -A woman employed to display new types of clothes | N | A slim beautiful girl or woman. |
| Bodice | N | Top part of a woman's dress | N | Tight-fitting dress |
| China | N | White clay used for making delicate cups plates | N | Low quality good |
| Escapée | N | Sb who escapes from prison or any confining institution | N | A girl with so many lovers (a Casanova) |
| Set | V | Give form to sth | V | Frame sb up |
| Caterpillar | N | Small worms like creature that develops into a butterfly | N | A bulldozer or a dumper truck |
| Original | Adj | Existing from the beginning or newly created | Adj | Solid good, usually made in Europe or America |
| Imitation | Adj | Sth produced as a copy of the real thing | Adj | Sth that is not durable or sth that is produced in Cameroon, |

| | | | | |
|--------|-----|--|-----|--|
| Local | Adj | Belonging to a particular place or affecting a particular area. | Adj | Nigeria, China or The United Arab Emirate (Dubia) Not magnificent or extraordinary. |
| Master | N | The man who has people working for him or person who has a specialized skill in sth. | N | Husband. |
| Mash | V | Crush food into a soft mass. | V | -Trample on sb or sth -Kick someone or sth. |

Semantic Amelioration

This is a situation whereby a lexeme loses an original sense of disapproval and as such, develops a positive sense of approval. Bloomfield describes this phenomenon as Elevation. Radford et al (ibid) use the word *constable* which once meant *an attendant at the table*. The current meaning of the word has been elevated, that is, *a rank in the police force*. Due to the fact that the status of a police officer is overwhelmingly seen as superior to that of an attendant at the table, it implies that the meaning of the word has been ameliorated or upgraded. In this paper, the words I describe as having undergone the process of amelioration are words that have a sense of disapproval in BrE but rather have a sense of approval in CPE. Or, words that are lower in status in BrE but are of comparatively higher status in CPE or better still, are upgraded in CPE.

Table 4
Semantic Amelioration in CPE

| Words | WC | StE meaning | WC | CPE meaning |
|----------|-----|--|-----|---|
| Ruffian | N | A violent and a lawless person. | N | A person who is not gentle. |
| Barber | N | A person whose job is to cut men's hair. | N | A person who cuts and at times washes and shapes the hairs of both men and women. |
| Terrible | Adj | Very unpleasant, and shocking. | Adj | Also very good, striking. |
| bad | adj | Not good | adj | Also fantastic, outstanding |

Semantic Pejoration

Pejoration is the direct opposite of amelioration. This is a situation where a word develops a sense of disapproval. Here, a word that previously had a favorable connotation eventually developed an unfavorable one. Words which were equally neutral eventually developed a negative connotation. Crystal (1999) and Radford et al. (1999) cite the example of *villain* which was formerly used to describe farm dwellers (serfs). In Modern English, the *villain* is used to describing criminals. Another example is the word *notorious*. Crystal (1995; 55) says the word once meant *widely known* and now, it means *widely and unfavorably known*. From these two examples, we notice that the word *villain* has shifted its meaning while *notorious* has maintained part of its meaning. Thus, pejoration can be a single process as in *notorious* or a double process as in *villain*. That is, a word can shift from its meaning before developing a negative connotation, or a word can maintain its basic meaning with a negative undertone. This phenomenon is also known as deterioration, downgrading, and denigration.

This paper examines this semantic situation by looking at neutral words or words with favorable meaning in BrE and contrasting them with the same words in CPE which have developed negative meanings. Crystal (1999) hints that the choice of describing a particular kind of change as amelioration or deterioration “depends on factors that are more to do with personal taste and morality than with language” (1999: 138).

Table 5
Semantic Pejoration in CPE

| Words | WC | StE meaning | WC | CPE meaning |
|-----------|-----|---|-----|---|
| Dealer | N | A person who buys and sells a particular product. | N | A person who dupes people. |
| Charm | N | Feature or quality that pleases people. | N | A local concoction believed to have a spell on a particular person. |
| Wonderful | Adj | Very good, pleasing or enjoyable | Adj | Also very unpleasant, strange and frightening. |
| Primitive | Adj | Original, uncontaminated, | | Uncivilized |

Figurative Use

Crystal (1995:55) describes this kind of change as “a shift in meaning based on an analogy or likeness between things”. This kind of change can take the form of a metonymy, a metaphor, a synecdoche, hyperbole or a litotes. An example of this kind of change given by Crystal (ibid) is the word *crane* which is the name of a bird with a long neck. The physical appearance of the bird has led to the use of *crane* as *a piece of equipment with a long stretch which is used for lifting goods*. Bloomfield (1933) gives a number of ways by which figurative change can occur. One of which is the use of the word *jaw* to refer to cheek. This is a metonymy as an attribute of cheek has been used to refer to the entire cheek. It should be noted that not all types of figurative languages affect the meanings of the word. This is because we have figures of speech that “extend the meaning of words (tropes) and those that merely affect their order or their impact upon an audience (schemes). The former types are those of importance to this study.

Table 6
Figurative Usage in CPE

| Words | WC | StE meaning | WC | CPE meaning | Figure of speech |
|---------|----|---|-----|--|------------------|
| Satan | N | The devil | Adj | Same as in StE -A very wicked person | Hyperbole |
| Honey | N | Sweet nectar produced by bees. | N | -Same in StE -Bees | Synecdoche |
| Door | N | A passage that is opened and closed so that sth or sb can get in and out of | | -Same in StE -The entire house of or sb's room | Synecdoche |
| Motor | N | A device that uses petrol, gas or electricity to make it work | N | A car | Synecdoche |
| Machine | N | A piece of equipment designed to do a particular job with the help of electricity gas | N | -Same in StE -A road vehicle with two wheels driven by an engine (motorcycle) | Metonymy |
| Tendon | N | A strong band of tissue in the body that joins a muscle to a bone | | - Same as in StE -A person who is highly resistant | Metaphor |
| Towel | | A piece of fabric or paper used for drying things | N | -Same in StE - A particular type of meat | Metaphor |
| Skin | | The layer of tissue that covers the body | N | -The entire body of an animal | Synecdoche |
| Ground | N | The solid surface of the earth | | -Same in StE -The earth | Synecdoche |
| Calabah | N | A large tropical fruit | | The outer skin of this fruit used as a container | Synecdoche |

Reasons for these Changes

A number of factors could account for the different changes observed in the use of lexical items above. This section critically examines some of such factors.

The Low Mastery of the Lexicons of a Language: This is one of the principal causes of semantic change. This is either due to the fact that the user of the language is still a child or because the language is not the first language (L1) of the user. In the case where the user is a child, there is usually the tendency to over-generalize certain usages. For example, the child may refer to any hairy animal with four legs as a dog (Todd, 1990). In the case of the latter where we have an adult speaker learning the language as a second (L2) or third language (L3), the linguistic burdens of handling these languages may not be easy to cope with. As such, he/she may end up having a low mastery of the lexicons of either of the languages. This implies he will try by all possible means to express his thought using his limited vocabulary. In trying to do this, some words may be over utilized while others may be underutilized.

The Nature of some Words: Some lexemes have several meanings. These types of lexemes are generally classified as polysemic or homonymic depending on the relationship between the several meanings of a single lexeme. Having a good mastery of all the meanings of words of such nature is not easy especially for non-native speakers of a language as they may tend to use only the central meaning (relegating the derived meanings) of a polysemous word or have a knowledge on only one of the meanings of a homonymic word. This is the case with words such as *fight* which is used in CPE to refer only to the exchange of physical confrontation between people.

The Influence of other Languages: When languages come into contact and are obliged to co-exist in the same environment, there is the tendency for features of one language to interfere in another. This usually cuts through all the levels of language analysis although it is most noticeable at the phonological level. As for semantics, which is the focus of this paper, the presence of lexical items with similar forms (spoken or written) but different meanings in different languages may cause the users of these languages to transpose the meaning of an item in one language and use it in another. For example, the presence of French and English in Cameroon may make users of English to carry the French meanings of words such as *supporter* (to bear) and *ignorant* (to be ignorant about something) and use them in English. These types of words are referred to as false friends. Use examples from the corpus

The Avoidance of Taboo or Unpleasant Words: Some lexemes are avoided in certain contexts because they are believed to be embarrassing or offensive or their use can cause harm in certain situations. These are lexemes that dwell on issues such as sexual intercourse, death, and physical, or mental abnormality. The difficulty in using such lexemes in certain milieus leads to the use of certain words within the same language or the creation of certain expressions that sound euphemistic. In the case of the former, the different words assume new meanings, which if used continuously may become a norm. Some of the words examined under semantic extension and shift are as a result of this phenomenon. For example, we have the use of the lexeme *rod* to refer to the *penis*.

Chance Error in Articulation: Even though phonological deviance, many fail to make the listener understand exactly what is being referred to by the speaker, it can still lead the listener to something which is within the scope of the language in question. That is if a speaker pronounces the word *bird* as /bed/ instead of /bɜd/ the fact that something like /bed/ exist in the language may, in the long run, make the meaning of the lexemes *bird* to be given to the spoken form *bed*. If the error is made by a group of people continuously, it eventually becomes a norm in a new variety. In this new variety, the *bed* will either become a homonym meaning. – *a piece of furniture used to sleep or rest on* and *a feathered animal with two wings and two legs*. Or, *bed* and *bird* can eventually become homophones while maintaining their respective meanings. In the first case, the meaning of the lexeme *bed* has changed. This usually leads to ambiguity as a word in one accent will be perceived as quite a different word in another accent.

The Arbitrary Nature of Language: As mentioned in chapter three, the relationship between words and what the words actually represent in the physical world is not logical. Words are merely symbols that people of a particular community agree upon to represent the realities existing within the realms of the said community. This implies that any word can be used to represent anything provided it is accepted and used within the community. If for example the word *cat* is used to refer to an area where studies are carried out, there is nothing within the structure of a language that prohibits it from being used in that sense. Everything in language thus boils down to acceptability. This can be considered as the main reason for language change in general

The method of Acquisition: The change in the meanings of some words is due to the method through which the language is acquired. When a second language is acquired or learned from incompetent users or instructors,

the errors made by these instructors will definitely feature in the speech of the learners and in the long run, it may become a norm. Todd (1990) has advanced the nautical jargon theory to strengthen this point. The theory holds that Africans and Asians initially acquired European languages from sailors who had developed a common denominator language because they were of different linguistic background. This implies that what was passed onto Africans and Asians, were not the cream of European languages. This is also referred to as the Relexification theory.

Cultural Inclination: The communal nature of most African societies is such that addressing an uncle as an uncle or a step sister as step sister is usually regarded as a violation of some “ethical values”. There is as such the extended use of names pertaining to the basic family structure; that is, *father, mother, brother, and sister*. It is normal in most African traditional societies for somebody to address his first, second or even third cousins as brothers or sisters. Likewise, addressing your mother’s sisters and friends as a mother is normal. Hence, all the lexical items expressing biological relationship have witnessed an extension.

The Influence of Brand Names: Brand names have a powerful influence on the ways the realities around us are named; especially things that are foreign to us. Access to the proper names of some assets is mostly through education; usually specialized education. When this is not the case, the users resort to the labels on the assets. For example, most uneducated Cameroonians know of *Molnex* not *Blender* or *Liquidizer*. Likewise, *Caterpillar* is used instead of *bulldozer*. In a CPE sentence like “*caterpillar dem di fix de road.*” The *caterpillar* in the sentence is not referring to a *small worm-like creature*, which is its appropriate name, but to *bulldozers* or *dumper trucks* which are branded as *Caterpillar*. Peters (2004: 546) hints that when the brand names of a product are continuously used in place of the product as if it’s the only product of its kind in the market, the brand name of the product will eventually merit a place in a dictionary.

4. Conclusion

It has now been clearly established that although the English Language is the highest donor of words to CPE, most of these words have undergone some changes in their meanings. This may equally imply that perhaps the meanings of some words from other sources have developed some changes. The probability of this being true is very high considering the fact that PE is the most widely used lingua franca in Cameroon and this, notwithstanding, PE has not been standardized, neither has it been codified. But, one thing remains very clear that in the case of a codification, the various alterations which exist in CPE must be accommodated to a certain extent.

The data so far examined are items that mostly feature in the speeches of typical users of CPE. As mentioned above, some of these users are quite conscious of these variations and as such, they sometimes (in certain milieus) avoid some of them. The result is the Anglicization of PE which of course narrows the degree of intelligibility between these users and some classes of people.

However, some of these changes are bound to spread to other areas and other varieties of PE. The gradual diffusion of linguistic change, in general, is a strong indication that even though this study is mostly based on the PE of the youths, some of the changes examined have already circulated over wider areas and have existed for a relatively long time in use than others. Those that one can say, without much inconvenience, that is still very peculiar to the youths (as of now) are words such as *chap* (girlfriend) *escapee* (a flirt), *brain* (to woo a girl) and *bilingual* (a homosexual). These may be considered by some people as slangs, but the speed at which some of these items are spreading is indicative of the fact that they can no longer be considered as mere slangs. [Seidl and McMordie \(1988:12\)](#) in talking about the changing attitudes towards languages say: "several words which were considered to be slangs in the past have gradually been upgraded in status and are now considered informal or colloquial. Much of what was labeled informal in the past is now considered neutral in style".

Others like *member* (remember, being proud), *cargo* (goods) and *borrow* (borrow, lend) have strongly established themselves in the speech production of most (if not all users of CPE). Likewise, others such as *chop* (food) and *stranger* (visitor) have spread over national boundaries as they feature in both Nigerian and Ghanaian PE and have equally been regarded as constituting some varieties of English. What this means is that some of the changes still peculiar to the PE of the youth may in future, spread not only to other varieties of PE but also to the main variety of English such as Cameroon English.

My prediction is that as Pidgin English is evolving towards the Pidgin of the youths, most of these lexical items that look specialized will form the very basis of the CPE that will now be described. Since the youths are conscious of what they are doing and know that they are using this language not out of any communicative necessity, but out of their love and affection towards the language, it will be difficult to have Standard English supplant this medium that is instead making in-roots into domains hitherto the preserve of Standard English.

Acknowledgements

1. I am indebted to Bobdinga Randolph who helped in the collection of some of the data.
2. This paper was written during a research stay in Germany funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

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