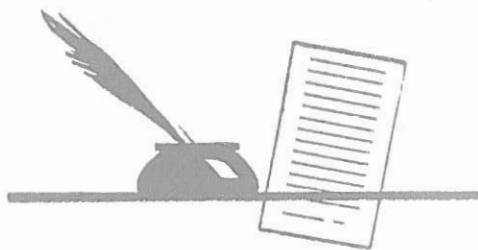


Letters from our Readers



Lingua Franca for Cameroon

Sir,

In the third issue of *Abbia* published in september 1963, M. Tate Tebo comments on J. A. Kisob's article on "A Live Language". In trying to put an end to the awkward situation of the language problem in Cameroon, he states, and I quote, "To begin with, the English meaning for Pidgin English is 'the language or jargon consisting mainly of English words'. (*The Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, p. 933".)

His only historical back-ground of Pidgin-English is his *Advanced Learners' Dictionary*. I would like to state that Pidgin-English is the corrupted pronunciation of the phrase *Business-English* by the Chinese during their early trade with European countries. Some writers have called it all sorts of names according to their taste : *Trade-English*, *Broken-English*, *Bush-English*, *Labourers' Language*, etc. This does not, in any sense, make it the sophisticated language people think.

M. Tate Tebo's gloss of the phrase *Pidgin-English* shows that it is a dialect which is incomprehensible. *Pidgin-English* is really a language of its own with its own system of grammar and sentence construction, which differs from the English structure. In some cases sentences may be patterned in the English, French and German structural systems. To augment that, most of the English derived words have been extended in meaning which to the aspects of the English language contrast in shades of meaning. For example, the word 'lose' : I done loss ma moni. 'I've lost my money'. I done loss. 'I am lost'. Mek yu loss dat faya. 'You, extinguish that fire'. 'Walk' : I bin go for long waka, 'I went on a long journey'. I go waka ma kombi for aftanun, 'I will go to visit my friend this afternoon'. I di go waka for tret fut, 'I am taking a walk for a leg exercise'. We may go on for pages to illustrate some

of these words which have been artistically put by the Cameroonians to fit his means of communication, and may not come to specified points if we do not understand what it is to effect a language.

Looking through this system of grammar and construction we don't seem to find any Nigerian patterns of sentences. There may be a few words derived from Nigerian languages like wayo, gari, etc., which are derived from the Yoruba language, but they are never patterned in the Nigerian dialect structural system of sentences.

In looking through Pidgin-English which is richly developed in the English speaking areas of West Africa one is apt to infer that the structure and patterns vary from place to place. But this, I am not saying that a Pidgin-English speaker from Cameroon will not understand the Nigerian, Ghanian, Liberian and Freetown speakers of the Pidgin-English. As I have said, the structure differs slightly and will be comprehended in a short time.

Why has the Pidgin-English been so richly developed in West Cameroon and in some parts of East Cameroon? This is a question which should be answered authentically by experts like J. A. Kisob who has served as an administrative officer in the labour department and Professor G. D. Schneider (University of Ohio, Athens, U. S. A.) who has completed his thesis in a descriptive analysis of the Pidgin-English of West Cameroon.

In a peep through the Cameroon, a thousand and one dialects confront the medium of communication. The plantation labourer has been the promoter of Pidgin-English. Another agent of the Pidgin-English spread may be mentioned here as the trader. The plantation labour force is recruited from all over Cameroon. These people have their own dialects which may not be understood by others. To break the ice, they shove down to Pidgin-English which is the medium of communication of the majority.

By this medium of communication the children of plantation and city workers, tend to learn Pidgin-English as a first language, but early in their teen-ages learn their mother tongue. If they don't, and I strongly feel there have been no such cases as commented by M. Tate Tebo, the parents have simply fallen asleep at the switch.

He further suggests that publication of our art, folklore, poetry, music, idioms and philosophy through this magazine be done in our dialects. As well as any other Cameroonians I am desirous to know how many of the 120 dialects of West Cameroon he speaks. If he is a linguist, he should consider the situation of others. Why can't this be published in the language of the man-in-the-street? You will no doubt

notice that politicians, social workers, and administrative officers have always found it difficult to communicate without Pidgin-English. Even the Christian Missions, particularly the Catholic, have used this medium of communication to reach the faithful, by translating the Doctrines and the Sunday Gospels into Pidgin-English. Any person who has looked carefully into the language problems of Cameroon will agree with J. A. Kisob that Pidgin-English will best fit as a Lingua Franca.

According to M. Tebo, he feels it is a borrowed language and it will be degrading and shameful to copy it. He forgets that the two National languages used now in Cameroon are foreign. If other African Nations can adopt or borrow Lingua Francas, why can't Cameroon? East Africa has Swahili, Central African Republic and the Congo have Sango which is widely spoken along the eastern border of East Cameroon, and Freetown, Creole, which may be referred to here as Pidgin-English. He is like most English people who think that the Queen's language is being debased in the picture of Pidgin-English. The Cameroonian should be praised for his efforts at extracting from another language, words which have been cleverly developed into a language which drips from the lips of its speakers 'Tap, tap, tap, like roba fall for kop for Meanja'.

Most Cameroon dialects, as well as African dialects, are tongue twisters and in his suggestion M. Tebo has not stated whether experts should study and advise in the Pidgin-English or in a native dialect. Why criticise when we can't render help? Mek wi sabi sey Got whe i gif man koro-koro, na i go gif finga for krasham. Let us be positive in our suggestions and give J. A. Kisob the green light.

There is no Cameroonian who hasn't the national feeling M. Tebo has. We can also be proud of borrowing a foreign language and playing around with it to create a language of ours. Let's note that there is no language in the world that is effected without borrowings from other languages. Day done klin, mek wi lef sanja for bet tek kruba. ('It's dawn, let's be up and doing'.)

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Sir,

... It is with great pleasure that I received the September and December issues of Abbia, and in which I certainly see your guiding hand. It seems to me that Abbia, as well as being intrinsically of great interest and instruction, is also a real vehicle for the expression of the renaissance in a new form of Cameroonian artistry of a written form, the means by which Cameroonian poets and writers may become known to their own people and to the literary world as a whole and by this Abbia is a significant publication. It is certainly very useful to me in my own researches on education and attitudes in Cameroon.

I was particularly interested and excited by your article "A Case for Early Bilingualism". I think this is a major work and could form a policy guide. I have quoted you, with full credits, in a paper of my own: "Language, Schools and Political Administration in the Cameroons" (the plural usage of the word 'Cameroons' to denote the various zones during the various historical periods). I am very interested in your ideas about an early start. I see that on a base of French and English language instruction if done well at the teacher training and secondary school level, teachers going out to the primary schools could certainly start French or English teaching and, if guided by very specific schemes of work, could create a certain familiarity with French or English (depending as to whether in East or West Cameroon) vocabulary and usage as base either for casual use or for further, institutional studies. How long would this take? I note that you underline the priority and immediate need. I would think, therefore, that as well as the French and English teaching going on now at the secondary and teacher training levels (and has therefore been any thought of a special inspectorate for this, to make certain that such bilingualism is effectively fostered, to aid in staff recruitment for this teaching, and to give technical and methodological advice?) there should be a continuous series of special, intensive courses in East Cameroon for 'English'-trained teachers from West Cameroon, and in West Cameroon the same type of language courses for French-trained teachers from East Cameroon; a side-effect would also be greater national feeling of united and mutual appreciation. At the same time each course should be totally, in classroom and in accommodation and in recreation, in either French or English as the case might be, and with not only language instruction but also aid in how best to teach language at the primary level (this to be followed by action on the part of the suggested 'bilingual inspectorate' staff and the effective, continuous distribution of English and or French language manuals and topical publications including newspapers). I think a crash-program of

this kind is essential if French-English bilingualism is to be achieved, and with high standards rather than any satisfaction with a sort of bilingual-Pidgin which might otherwise emerge (not that I am not a keenly interested, student of the growth of Pidgin, and I must say Jack Kisob's analysis of Pidgin in its four varieties is very provocative)...

H. O. H. VERNON-JACKSON

Lymington Hants,
England.

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Dear Sir,

Speaking on behalf of the teachers in my managerial area, I would like to express my thanks for your quarterly "Abbia". It gives us thoughts and ideas which stimulate an interested teacher.

In the last issue N° 6 however we could not get the full benefit from the article on the Lamidates of Tchamba and Tibati because it was all in French. Only a few teachers who recently came from training know some French but not enough to "exploit" such a scientific contribution. On the other hand it is so important for us here in West Cameroon to have materials on History — especially on Cameroon History — because the English books we have mostly centre on Nigeria. Could it not be possible that this article was printed in English in N° 7? There would be no need to re-print all the pictures or the maps. Only the text — perhaps even in a small print — would be necessary.

I am sure that not only teachers in my area, but in all parts of West Cameroon would appreciate this translation.

E. SCHMIDT,

Manager,

Basel Mission Schools
P. A. Bali, West Cameroon.

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