

# Functional Seclusion and the Future of Indigenous Languages in Africa: The Case of Cameroon

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## 1. Introduction

The dilemma of African languages in the wake of globalisation and the continuous empowerment of other languages qua languages of industrialisation, technology and international currency, is one that has occupied one of the most obscure positions in the national agenda of many African states. With less and even lesser attention paid to the functional empowerment of these indigenous languages, since a greater attention is paid to developing and promoting bilingualism (Cameroon), or an imposed second official language (English in Mozambique and French in Nigeria), or a national cross-cultural language (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese in other parts of Africa), the fear of their extinction is becoming higher. As Mufwene (2001) holds, even written languages die, as was the case with Gaelic, Latin, Sanskrit and (Bible) Hebrew. In the face of this, the current wave of standardisation and alphabetisation (SIL, CABTAL, PROPELCA, NACALCO, in Cameroon – see table 2) has to be corroborated with extensive functional duties that will make the languages to maintain a currency proportionate to keeping them alive in the society rather than in the archives.

Earlier works in Cameroon on this topic, (Ngijol 1964, Fonlon 1969, Echu 1999, Alobwede 1998, etc.) strongly call for standardisation, alphabetisation, and teaching of these languages in schools (Njock 1966, Tadadjeu 1975, Chumbow 1980) but do not explicitly advance a functional scheme for them. What will it serve to learn how to write and read a language that will not serve you in any career, or any aspect of national life, nor for integration into any sector, etc.? This therefore ought to be the point of focus, that is, pulling the indigenous languages out of functional seclusion and introducing them into spheres where learning them will be a necessity. However the “linguistic cultural baggage” (Samarin 1984:436) that was brought together with colonialism still reigns whereas it ought to have evolved to the same multilateral (linguistic, cultural, ethnic, etc.) status of the postcolonial states today.

## 2. Language choice and functional delimitation in post-colonial Africa

The whole of Africa, south of the Sahara that had been subject to colonisation was rocked at the close of it by the extant and critical question of language choice for the new nation states. Whereas foreign or, as the case was, forcefully imposed languages were gaining grounds through the colonial education system and the missionary projects operating throughout Africa, the advent of independence was viewed by many as the doorway to complete oblivion of the colonial past. They saw in the choice of English, French, Portuguese or Spanish as national or official language of any African state, a consolidation of what Samarin (1984:436) described as a “linguistic cultural baggage” brought along with exploitation colonialism. In this regard several poignant resistances were raised against the introduction of a language which neither reflected the tongue of the African nor his culture. In Ghana, for example, Kwasi Duodu (1986:3) conceives of it as a misnomer because “the youth, like many other silent Ghanaians, is protesting against an imposed language which prevents him from expressing himself in his own tongue” (“The Language Problem” in *People’s Daily Graphic* 5). On the other hand, a more friendly compromise on the choice of one of the many African languages as official and national language could not be reached. Each tribe that had some political power thought it ought to be her language. This was implicitly a source of discord for the new nations, which were in search of a common and solid identity, strong enough to counter the sad and traumatic memories of colonisation. The case of Cameroon is different but still similar to the rest of the sub-continent in terms of

variegation of languages. Fonlon (1969:9) summarises the language predicament of Africa in his allusion to Cameroon thus: “it is in Cameroon that the *African confusion of tongues* is worse confounded, and it has become absolutely impossible to achieve, through an African language, that oneness of thought and feeling and will that is the heart’s core and the soul of a nation”.

The two streams of thought outlined above, that is, one in favour of a foreign, (ex)colonial language and the other in favour of an African indigenous language, bowed to the authoritative decree of the political rulers who saw in the foreign languages a neutral and non-ethnic weapon of quelling inter-tribal conflicts and ensuring a national identity. Cameroon, for instance, sought for such an identity in French-English bilingualism, Tanzania in English and Swahili, Nigeria in English and three secondary languages, Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa, Mozambique in Portuguese, etc. The first post-colonial president of Cameroon Ahmadou Ahidjo (1964) interpreted the policy of bilingualism in two foreign languages as a progressive strategy in the building of a firm Cameroonian nation.

He declared:

When we consider the English language and culture and the French language and culture, we must regard them not as the property of such and such a race but as an acquirement of the universal civilisation to which we belong. That is in fact why we have followed the path of bilingualism since we consider not only that it is in our interests to develop these two world-wide languages in our country but that furthermore it offers us the means to develop this new culture ... which could transform our country into the catalyst of African unity.

The outcome of such a complicated weave of languages with a negligible population of 10.5 million<sup>1</sup> (according to the 1987 population census) was the delimitation of language functions and what is described in this paper as the seclusion of the indigenous or native African languages to a sphere of no national relevance. Ironically, these languages, which have no national function, are known in Cameroon as *national languages*. Whatever that means can only be verified from what politicians understand by *nation*. The functional delimitation has come up with such appellations as official language, home language, national language, indigenous language, local language, vernacular language, some of which carry with them certain degrees of derogation. For instance, the notion of *home language* presupposes that it is a type of makeshift, uncouth and ‘frightful’ language meant to be spoken only in the hideout of the home. This impression is actually founded if we consider the *joking* slang that is often thrown at people who speak their mother tongues in public: “Do not call the rain”. Of course, these languages are viewed as acoustically horrible that their use in public is equal to the rain-summoning impact of nimbus clouds. This negative impression is opposed to that reserved for the official language whose name gives it the pride of place in official, national and international transactions. A cursory glance at the language policy of Cameroon will lay bare some of the motivations behind these names and language schemes.

### 3. Cameroon language policy

The independence of Cameroon (East and West) from French and British colonial rule and the subsequent reunification of the two parts seemed to give no option or choice for other languages but French and English. With the complex outlay of native languages and the notorious question of which language ought to be official, the way was made clear for the policy of bilingualism. It was further facilitated by the totalitarian policy of French colonialism. According to Fanso (1989:70) “the policy aimed at assimilating or absorbing France’s colonial subjects to the point where they would actually be Frenchmen linguistically, culturally, politically and legally” and in education as Fonlon (1969:20) adds “it was considered essential that instruction in the other subjects should be in French almost from the first day in school”. The *laissez-faire* approach of the British and their use of indigenous languages in schools were rather met with a clarion call by the natives for education in English. To them English or German was the key to civilisation and teaching them or their children in another language like Duala

<sup>1</sup> These figures correspond to the 1987 census which up to date is the latest and most official. Other figures are approximations generated from the parameters of this census. For more recent figures, we have, 14.4 million by MINEFI in 1999, 15,803,220 million published by the *CIA World Fact Book* in July 2001, etc. A national census is however underway and will publish results by the end of 2005.

was inculcating in them the barbarous culture of the Doualas<sup>2</sup> (Amvela 2001:207)<sup>3</sup>. On the language issue in West Cameroon, Wardhaugh (1987:172) observes that

The British at first used the vernacular in primary education in the one fifth of Cameroon that was theirs. But over the years pressured by the Cameroonians, they began to place more and more emphasis on education in English so that by 1958, vernacular education was extinct.

In promoting its bilingual language education policy, the government has largely disregarded the multilingual makeup of the country. Indigenous languages play only a secondary role, for example, in the wording of Cameroon's revised constitution of 1996 (Sec. I.1.3), this is understandable,

The official languages of the country shall be English and French, both having the same status. The state shall *guarantee the promotion* of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall *endeavour to promote* and protect national languages.

From the italicised portions of the above extract, it is clear that the state has no legal or national obligation to promote the indigenous languages. It shall only *endeavour* and not *guarantee* their promotion, as it is the case with the official languages. So it is explainable why many government bilingual secondary and high schools are created each year (258 for the 2003/04 school year)<sup>4</sup>, the prime minister issued circulars to emphasise the need to translate all government records into English and French, and so forth. It further explains why, although the 1995 *General Conference on Education* (better known by its French name, *Etats Généraux de l'Education*), strongly recommended the teaching of national languages in schools and the 1998 parliamentary bill on general orientation in education and the teaching of indigenous languages promulgated into law N° 004 of April 1998 by the Head of State (Mba and Chiato 2000:5) are still waiting for practical implementation strategies at the ministry of national education. The pilot linguistic centres, which serve as advanced vanguards of the bilingual policy, operate in all ten provinces but have nothing to do with the national languages. Rather international and missionary associations have taken up extensive tasks in the standardisation and alphabetisation of these languages. Much has been done (as will be seen below) by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL, Cameroon), the Linguistic Atlas of Cameroon (ALCAM), the Operational Research Program for Language Teaching in Cameroon (PROPELCA, since 1977), the National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees (NACALCO, created 1989) and the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL) in standardising these languages (see table 2). So from a more general perspective the government policy in language planning in Cameroon, just like most of Africa, is dominated by “the official dominance of ex-colonial languages, the official neglect of indigenous languages, the unsevered colonial umbilical cord, and socio-politically interwoven language-related problems” (Adegbija 2000: 80 and Echu 2003:38).

#### 4. Nation, national languages and functions

European colonisation of Africa generated two basic linguistic problems: the first was the forceful imposition of European languages which have created what Robinson (1996:6) terms the “sociocultural dichotomy” of mixed or undefined identity, and the second was the redefinition of the roles of African indigenous languages (Makoni and Meinhof 2003) which basically secludes them to a range of narrow, indigenous, home, domestic and cultural functions of no real impact to the nation state. A picture of the language roles of any African nation will definitely reveal that the indigenous languages are the least employed in national life. Although the apartheid regime attempted to impose Afrikaans as medium of education in South Africa<sup>5</sup> in the 1970s, or Chinyanja that was forcefully imposed in Malawi through

<sup>2</sup> The language is Duala and the town itself is Douala. There is a difference in the orthography.

<sup>3</sup> In 1889 the Bakweri people in the South West Province addressed a letter to the Basel Mission Headquarters in Switzerland to protest against the introduction of education in Duala in their area. They said: “It is quite against the reason that our children should be educated in a barbarous tongue instead of a civilised one like German or English” (Mbassi-Manga 1973:39).

<sup>4</sup> These figures were given by the Head of State Paul Biya in his annual speech to the youths on the eve of youth day, 11<sup>th</sup> February 2004.

<sup>5</sup> This scheme sparked one of the most tragic events in the history of South Africa, the Soweto Massacre of 16<sup>th</sup>

its political backing, these languages still continued to be secondary to English which was and is the official language. It is also relevant to perhaps explain the policies of the imposition of these languages. Afrikaans was imposed as a discriminatory strategy of limiting the black population to the fallow of their own primitivism and ensuring their continuous dominance by the whites. Like the colonialists scheme of not teaching English well to the colonised people in order to maintain the ruler-ruled gap, (Kachru 1986:22, Abdulaziz 1991:395, Mazrui and Mazrui 1996:272)<sup>6</sup> the apartheid-initiated project had similar intentions. In the Malawian case, it was motivated by the desire of a tribal group to remain politically strong by forcing its language on other languages and other speakers. In Cameroon, due to mounting tension between indigenous languages taught in secondary schools and the university, the government found its safety threatened and so took the less implicating solution of abolishing indigenous language teaching in the early 1970s. This was followed by an honorary and inconsequential recognition and appellation of these languages as national languages as agreed upon at the session of the *National Council for Cultural Affairs* (Yaounde, 18-22 December 1974). In spite of this change in name, the range of functions did not increase but was further reduced given that less prospects could ever come for their use since they had been abolished in the education curricular at all levels. This abolition is central to the diminishing roles of these languages as shown on table 1 below and as discussed in the following paragraphs. For reasons of clarity these languages have been regrouped according to functional definition into three groups: official languages, indigenous languages and languages for wider communication.

#### 4.1 Official languages

The statistics published on the literacy rate in Cameroon or in other African countries are based on the ability to read and write one or both of the official languages. None of these is based on the indigenous languages. This is perhaps so because they have no place in official transactions and in the literacy map of the country. In Cameroon, the official languages, French and English, dictate the standard for all education-related jobs, government employment, the media, education, and are continuously encroaching into other spheres hitherto reserved for the other languages. They represent the technological, economical, political, and global world. According to the 1987 census, 53.6% of the population is literate but eight years later, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1995) puts the percentage at 63.4, (75 % for male and 52.01 % for female) in its 1995 estimates. The rising rate of literacy is replica of the government's promotion of these languages and their functional necessity in the lives of the citizens.

Table 1: Language use in national life

No	Language domains	Official Languages		Indigenous Languages	Cameroon Pidgin English
		English	French		
1	Written media	✓	✓	✗	-
2	Radio	✓	✓	-	-
3	Television	✓	✓	✗	✗
4	Education	✓	✓	-	✗
5	Politics	✓	✓	✗	-
6	Music	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Court and Justice	✓	✓	✗	-
8	Church	✓	✓	-	✓
9	Public examination	✓	✓	✗	✗
10	Administration	✓	✓	✗	✗

June 1976, Johannesburg.

<sup>6</sup> These strategies are quite similar and have the same motivation. In the colonial thinking as Mazrui and Mazrui (1996:272) uphold "many European settlers regarded the teaching of English to 'natives' as a potentially subversive force".

11	Fiction/literature	✓	✓	✗	-
12	Military	✗	✓	✗	✗
13	International relations	✓	✓	✗	✗
14	Business/trade	✓	✓	✗	✓
15	Cultural communication	-	-	✓	✓

Code: the symbol ✓ means Yes; ✗ means No; and - stands for Less

#### 4.2 Indigenous languages

As expressed earlier, the politics of naming these languages reflects squarely the limited and irrelevant domain of exercise to which they are confounded. They are simply home languages or better still, native languages or rather indigenous languages or ironically national languages of no portfolio. This insidious naming pattern still has with it the hangovers of colonialism. Why should a foreign language be official and a native language not be a normal Cameroonian language but must be modified as home, indigenous, etc? Is the notion of native languages in Cameroon or Africa similar or equal to the notion of native English which is often advanced as a prerequisite for many international positions, or used as a dichotomous distinction between authentic English (native) and postcolonial English (non-native)? Are French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese, technically speaking, not indigenous languages too? These questions trigger answers which expose the latent and often unattractive stigma, like “calling the rain”, that these languages are given. As shown on table 1 above, the indigenous languages are the least used in the fifteen national functions tested. In court where the liberty of the individual is decided these languages have no place. So official language non-literates are at the mercy of the law if they do not properly understand the proceedings of the trial or do not have them properly translated into Pidgin English or any other language they may understand. Again, a short slot exists on provincial stations of the state-owned radio for the weekly broadcast of national languages. With just fifteen minutes, averagely, for each language, and given the huge number of languages, this is next to insignificant. Even in cultural communication, Pidgin English and to some lesser extent the official languages are also used especially in gatherings in towns where the audiences are multilingual. So of the fifteen functions listed on table 1, the indigenous languages extrapolate in none. They are strongly used in cultural communication equally like Pidgin English, in music just like the other languages and are less used in the church, in education (taught only in some primary schools) through the supervision of elite groups and not government schemes.

#### 4.3 Languages for wider communication

Bot Ba Njock’s (1966:12) proposal for the creation of “linguistic zones” for the teaching of regional national languages, though not adopted by government policies, fuelled the growth of regional languages of wider communication that had naïvely taken root in several parts of the country. Breton and Fohitung (1991:20) identify Fulfulde (the North), Ewondo (Centre and South), Basa’a, Duala (both in the Littoral), Hausa, Wandala, Kanuri, Arab Choa (in the North and patches of West and North West), and Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE, in Littoral, North West and South West) as languages for wider communication in Cameroon. Focus in this section is on Cameroon Pidgin English because it, contrary to the others, has spread considerably beyond the jurisdiction hitherto identified for it. Mbangwana (1983:87) outlines the importance of CPE in Cameroon in the following lines. CPE is indispensable to Cameroonians irrespective of their educational status, linguistic background, etc.

Pidgin English is very crucial as a communication bridge, for it links an anglophone to a francophone. It also links an anglophone to another anglophone, an educated Cameroonian to another educated one, a non-educated Cameroonian to another non-educated one, and more importantly an educated Cameroonian to a non-educated one.

What remains astonishing is the seemingly eternal disdain CPE is open to in Cameroon. It has the status of a non-literate language and although it is spoken by “people of all levels” (Mbangwana,

1983:90) and is of a “national character”, representing the tongue of “perhaps 50% of the population”, and is changing its nature since it is fast “becoming a mother tongue in some urban communities” (Todd 1986:68), it is not even given the honorary title of national language. Its range of functions (table 1) surpasses the indigenous languages but it is not too better off than them in terms of attitudinal acceptance (Kouega 2001).

## 5. Government policy towards indigenous language education

The days immediately after independence proved to be the best for the survival and empowerment of indigenous languages in Africa. They were regarded and treated as that envious entity that was entirely African after the contact effects and hybrid outcomes of colonialism. After the war of which language to adopt had been won by the pro-(ex)colonial languages advocates, it was now time to compensate for the indigenous languages by teaching and encouraging their use in several sectors of life. For instance, Bassa was taught in the Jesuit College Libermann in Douala, Ewondo in Catholic Colleges, la Retraite, Chevreuil, Mimetala and Le Sillon in Yaounde and so forth. At the Federal University of Yaounde, the languages, Duala, Basaa, Ewondo, Bulu, Fulfulde and Fe'efe'e were taught between 1970 and 1977. Cameroon, for instance, showed off with the slogan “Africa in miniature” in reference to its many and diversified languages and ethnicities. Unfortunately, this attachment, at least on the political front was forced to break when friction started building between speakers of taught languages, thereby considered privileged and users of untaught languages. The defence of tribal identity, one of the hurdles faced by the colonial government especially the French, was resurfacing and this time seemed more threatening than before (Bird 2001).

After deciding to halt indigenous language education, the government became ruthless in enforcing the decision. So it had to suppress all projects in this direction. It was both administrative and forceful. As Momo (1997) explains, typewriters, books and a duplicator were seized from a school opened by Chief Djoumessi of Dschang by government authorities because the school continued to teach these languages after they were banned. Momo (1997:13) describes this seizure as “an act of vandalism in a period when the government did not take account of cultural treasure” (translated by Bird 2001:8). The Cameroonian example is not isolated. The Ethiopian king Halle Selassie prohibited not only the teaching of indigenous languages -- because they hindered his “nation building” projects (Bulcha 1997) -- but destroyed all literature in the Oromo language. These are extreme cases to the linguist but are perhaps normal to the African politician who up to date holds the language issue under his armpit. Hundreds of carefully designed models<sup>7</sup> for the introduction and integration of indigenous languages in the educational curricular are piled on government shelves. The political agenda has always been above the linguistic.

Secondly, the Cameroon government, besides the many honorary decrees and laws passed in favour of these languages, is actually not actively involved in their promotion. The recommendations of 1995 *Etats Généraux de l'Education* and the parliamentary bill that was promulgated into law N° 004 in April 1998, prioritising the teaching of indigenous languages still lack implementation texts (texts of application) for their adoption in school curricular. Therefore, none of these languages falls under any government educational scheme. Rather language committees and international bodies, especially SIL and NACALCO, have introduced them in early primary school within given language communities. Since they are taught out of the curriculum, they have no state recognised role, or qualifying examination, or end-of-course examination. Table 2 makes a recap of the situation of the indigenous languages. Although the state is not completely involved, more than half of the 270 living languages (i.e. 166 languages) have been standardised. A few have major reading literatures translated into or written in them – the New Testament and other portions of the Bible. The number of standardised languages indicates that if indigenous languages had to be adopted in the educational curricular now, less technical work will be necessary.

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<sup>7</sup> Bot Ba Njock's (1966) model of “linguistic zones”, Tadadjeu's (1975) “extensive trilingualism”, Chumbow's (1980) early mother education model, Todd's (1982) preference for Pidgin English, just to name these few, have plausible answers to the language issue that has since the late 1970s been pushed to the background in national policies.

Table 2: The situation of indigenous languages in Cameroon

Status of language	Number of languages
Standardised languages	166
Taught in primary schools	36
Translations of the whole Bible	18
Translations of the New Testament	40
Translations of portions of the Scriptures	30
Extinct languages	4
Nearly extinct languages	11
Living languages	270
Total number of languages	285

Compiled from *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)

The most dismaying fact, certainly, is that the government has no official figure for the number of indigenous languages spoken in Cameroon. Over the years a series of figures have been advanced based on approximations, the line between language and dialect, mutual intelligibility and the language families represented in the country. The government has neither adopted one of these figures<sup>8</sup> nor funded broad base research into the issue. This neglect evidently speaks for itself and eloquently explains why indigenous languages are a forgotten entity, shouldering roles that do not contribute to any aspect of the state.

## 6. Language promotion and functional relevance

The central question in any language promotion scheme, no matter what language or level it may be, definitely is the functional relevance of this language to people who use it, those who are called upon to use it and those who may be attracted to it. Of what relevance is it to learn to write and speak a language for the sake of it? Mufwene (2001) believes the survival of any language depends on its strength to provide socio-economic survival to its users. When people shift from their own language to another because it provides livelihood, they endanger their own language. In the 1970s and even later, the defence of indigenous languages was “equated with moral uprightness, while the use of English [official languages] is practically necessary, but morally suspicious” (Makoni and Meinhof 2003:9). Even today, this abstract moral consciousness still exists. Some linguists brand the official languages as killers of indigenous languages, they blame the impotence of government policies to protect these languages, propose complicated and sometimes convincing models for education in and teaching of indigenous languages but do not tackle the heart of the matter.

Ngijol (1964), Njock (1966), Fonlon (1969), Chumbow (1980) Tadadjeu (1975), Alobwede (1998), Echu (1999), etc strongly call for standardisation, alphabetisation, and teaching of these languages in schools. Alobwede (1998) advocates the recognition of these languages as semi-official languages as a means of pulling them out of the cold of limited usage. Njock (1966) and Chumbow (1980) use the psycholinguistic presupposition that the acquisition of an indigenous language psychologically arms the child better for the acquisition of English or French later in school. All of these studies insist on the establishment of writing systems for the over 270 living languages in Cameroon. SIL, as shown on table 3, organises regular meetings for actors involved at various stages

<sup>8</sup> Different researchers have advanced varying figures for the number of indigenous languages in Cameroon. Mbassi Manga (1976) puts it at 285 extant languages; Chia (1983:19) uses classificatory paradigms like “mutual intelligibility testing, measure of linguistic distance, ... sociolinguistic surveys [of] language use and function“ to come up with “120 standardisable languages“; Dieu and Renaud (1983) talk of 236 languages; Breton and Dieu (1985) in the *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun* advance 137 languages and Tadadjeu and Mba (1996) declare they are 248 indigenous languages. *Ethnologue* as table 2 indicates holds there are 285 languages of which 4 are already extinct.

of this standardisation. Again, the central question is, if all of these languages are written, of what importance will they be to users, or to Cameroonians? A response to this question certainly has to take into account the creation of reliable avenues for the lucrative application of, if not all, then some of the indigenous languages. The next part of this paper is based on some of the possible functional resources that could be of importance to such a revitalisation scheme.

Table 3. SIL Indigenous languages teacher training seminars for adult literacy

Province	Languages	Participants	
		2001	2002
Adamawa	Dii, Fulfulde, Karang, Tikar, Mambila, Gidar, Vite, Kuo	46	64
Centre	Beti (Ewondo, Bulu)	15	21
East	Meka, Kako	14	09
Far North	Mafa, Podoko, Mofu, Fulfulde	102	87
Littoral	Bakoko, Basaa, Duala, Fe'efe'e, Ghomola', Medumba	77	75
North West	Aghem, Bafut, Meta', Kom, Lamso', Nkwen, Yamba, Limbum, Mundani, Noonu, Oku	243	265
South	Beti (Bulu)	-	11
South West	Denya, Kenyang, Ejagham, Akoose	10	07
West			92
Total	37 Languages	568	634

Source: *SIL Annual Literacy Report, 2002-2003* (edited by Cathy Davison)

The response to the work of SIL as shown by the statistics above is favourable. Only one province, North, was not represented during the years covered. The North West and Adamawa provinces register the most significant increase in the number of participants from 2001 to 2002. This report covering 37 languages posits that if government efforts are directed in this direction, excellent results will be guaranteed, especially if designed on the employment model proposed below.

## 7. Functional revitalisation of indigenous languages

African applied linguistics and especially language planning is torn between the preferences and authorities of two actors. On the one hand are the linguists who spend time in libraries, laboratories and villages to devise alphabets and propose integration schemes and models for indigenous languages. They make proposals, individually in research papers and collectively in language committees, professional associations and seminars on the language issues. On the other hand are the politicians who from an exclusively political perspective judge the feasibility of these models based on the only criterion of safeguarding the triumph of the political authority. Since the power lies in their hands, they have always won. The decision to *honorarily* name Cameroonian languages as *national languages* can only be politically explained because it has no linguistic backing.

The creation of attractive domains for the use of these languages could trigger a change in the political thinking and erase the fearful stigma that the promotion of linguistic diversity is a source of discord. The first proposal in this direction necessarily requires the reconciliation of the title *national languages* with the corresponding cognate *national functions*. In the words of Njock et al (1974:128) "Cameroonian languages can, despite what one might think, contribute to the harmonious development of our country and to national unity". Certain linguistic functions linked to national unity must be dedicated to them within their respective communities. In order to ward off potential inequalities, the issue of choosing one out of the 270 living languages should be countered through the unilateral consideration of these languages as one. This means references to Cameroonian languages performing national functions must not be guided by naming individual languages. This may be made easier if the orthographies existing for these languages are synchronised to a point where literacy in one leads to the ability to at least read another or the rest. From this take off point, other more important national duties can be designated to them.

With time and following the success of models, especially those based on trilingualism (Tadadjeu 1975), it could be thought of dedicating specific domains of usage to them. For instance, the military in

Cameroon uses only French. Since employment is scarce in Cameroon, one of the major pre-requisites for local council, community-based jobs could be mastery of an indigenous language. Although this means punishing children born in towns and in inter-tribal marriages, it equally means safeguarding the linguistic heritage of the nation. In this manner, the indigenous language will be a source of economic reliability for the speaker who must cling to it if he must keep that source.

Qualification for jobs with an indigenous language requirement cannot however continue to be imaginary. Questions such as the proficiency level, communicative ability in the language will certainly arise. This is because for selection of qualified candidates to be effectively done, these aspects need to be tested as well. At this time when non-governmental projects are teaching some indigenous languages in schools, it would be a safe and prospective step if the government assisted this scheme for the subsequent implementation of the model of employment explained above. This would require that the government encourage more than ever before the standardisation and alphabetisation schemes of SIL, NACALCO, etc so that the number of participants in seminars, such as that on table 3 may increase.

Language planning issues are never implemented in a rush. But while this might be due to the long-term process of testing and retesting models, it must not be compromised for the political stamp, which considers diversity as a source of discord.

## 8. Conclusion

It is true that English, French and the other (ex)colonial languages have not YET endangered any African language (Mazrui and Mazrui 1998, Mufwene 2001), it is also true that the duration of this state of affairs is not YET known. If we consider that the rate of urban migration in Africa is increasing, that new contact codes are emerging or rather gaining more force, for instance, *franglais* in Cameroon, (Kouega 2003), that English and other non-African languages are becoming Status Mother Tongues (Alobwede 1998) or Pride Foreign Tongues (Anchimbe 2004) for many children in urban centres, that some African countries are poised on adopting second non-African official languages (English in Mozambique, French in Nigeria), that linguists are toothless bulldogs in language planning issues (*Asmara Declaration* has had no effect) and that identity concealment in multilingual settings calls for a neutral language like English, etc, then will we be aware that the future of African languages is threatened both by other African languages (Chinyanja in Malawi for example, see Moyo 2003) and by the non-African qua official languages. These non-African languages, for example the worldwide rush for English, tempt with a green horizon of opportunities that oblige people to drift towards them. In fact, the factors (some quoted above) that used to protect the indigenous languages are giving way to the attractive encroachment of the languages of technology, trade, science, and international interaction. Less youths, than before are found in the villages, the life expectancy is drastically reducing and the risk of epidemics has not reduced despite diversified attempts at keeping it low. The immediate consequence of this is that the old people who now can be considered as mobile dictionaries of the languages may die without transferring them to the young. If this happens, then it would not have been provoked by the conflicting notions of killer languages or killer speakers but by natural tendencies attached to economic survival. However, if economic survival avenues are created for these languages in the manner similar or more profound than the one proposed in this paper, then their future may be guaranteed or at least their death date may be postponed.

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