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**Language, Identity, and Linguistic Communication: An Administrative Experiment in Bicultural Cohabitation in Cameroon**

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**Abstract**

On October 1, 1961, the former French-speaking region of Cameroon, *La République du Cameroun,* reunited with the former English-speaking region, *British Southern Cameroons,* to become a bilingual and bicultural nation, namely *The Federal Republic of Cameroon*. English and French were acclaimed the official languages of the state to reflect the linguistic and cultural heritages of the new nation and to safeguard its national unity. As such, the two issues of cultural identity and national integration, henceforth became time bombs that must be either defused to save the nation or allowed to explode liberate linguistic minorities. The former has been overt choice of government authorities for over four decades, much at the expence of the later.

The acclamation of English and French as official languages also became the official language policy of the state locally called *official bilingualism*. However, the policy did not, and is yet to witness elaborate definition, description, and design in the linguistic engineering sense. Thus the implementation of the policy in terms of language planning has been marked by regional and cultural discrimination, political favoritism, and linguage neglect. Consequently, little attention is paid to interlanguage, intralanguage, and other sociolinguistic planning. One arena where the drama of the politics of official language policies in Cameroon might be seen is public service domains. The result of such drama is marginalization of English in many administration functions on account of the numerical inferiority of its speakers. Other neferious consequences include the ‘war’ against pidgin English usage in public service and in education. But pidgin English, a dialect of English, the most widely spoken lingua franca that bridges the communication gap between French- and English-speaking Cameroonians is a linguistic powerhouse asset within the West African socio-economic landscape. Yet, it is targeted and hit with an official ban in domains of government authority.

This paper examines Cameroon’s official language policy within the framework of language maintenance and linguistic conflict resolution, and evaluates the status of English within the context of the promotion of official bilingualism and biculturalism. The paper concludes that there is overt and widespread disparagement of English in official domains in varying subtle ways despite some genuine government actions towards language instruction in the two official languages. While much of the disparagement is inadvertent among the rank and file military and civil service personnel, there is also a deliberate tendency among some decision makers towards a restriction of the functions of English in official circles. This is made indirectly effective by sidelining and restricting English-speaking personnel in official domains, and directly by a preferring and promoting a *frenchification* of the administrative system and bureaucratic procedures in public service domains.