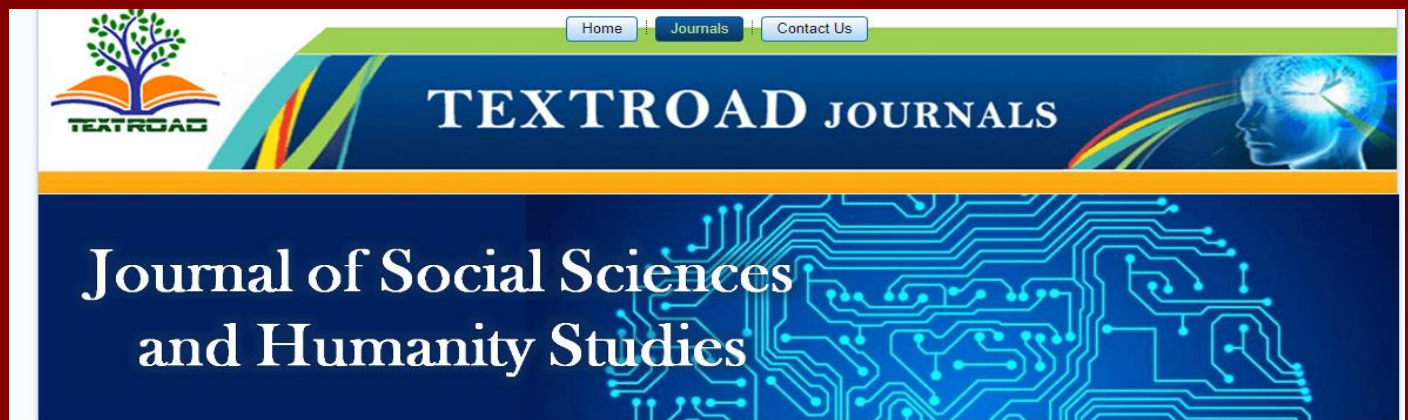


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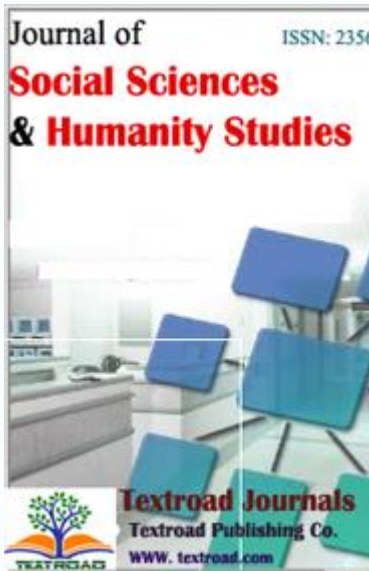
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Challenging the Monolingual Habitus: An Investigation of the Linguistic Practices of Students at the University of Buea

J. Soc. Sci. Hum. Stud. 2021 7(1): 1-9. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text PDF](#)]



Challenging the Monolingual Habitus: An Investigation of the Linguistic Practices of Students at the University of Buea

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ABSTRACT

Although bilingualism is the norm as inscribed in Cameroon's constitution; the case is different at the University of Buea where monolingualism is institutionalized. In this institution, not only the language of instruction is English, but deliberate effort is made to discourage the use of other languages, particularly Pidgin English. In this paper, we investigate the linguistic practices of students out of lecture halls as a demonstration of their quest for linguistic freedom that challenge the monolingual habitus in the institution. To achieve this, a cross sectional study was carried out whereby a 30-item questionnaire was administered to 738 students of the University of Buea, cutting across 9 different faculties. Data were then coded, keyed into excel and analyzed statistically using SPSS, Version 21 and Microsoft excel 2010. Our analysis revealed that at the University of Buea, the rate of multilingualism practice among students stands at 55.3% with Cameroon Pidgin English (43.5%) identified as the most preferred and frequently used language in the institution. From our findings, it is evident that although the institution openly advocates for monolingualism, students' linguistic preferences out of the classroom portray a rooted desire for multilingualism. We therefore recommend that the University of Buea revisits its language policy with a view to rendering it more tolerant towards other languages out of classroom contexts.

KEYWORDS: monolingualism, multilingualism, language policy, language preferences, Cameroon Pidgin English.

INTRODUCTION

The existence of many different language practices in Cameroon due to her multilingual status is reflected in what Tadaadjeu (1) and Simo Bobda (2) describe as 'a Tower of Babel' where individuals carry with them different linguistic practices. This can be pictured in linguistic communities where individuals have bilingual and multilingual language practices. Aronin (3) justifies these practices by positing that the environment, language and speakers are interrelated constituents and that this explains why in multilingual communities, individuals have more than one language practice, given that such individuals are smaller units in communities where the use of many languages is practiced (4). Crystal (5) explains that language can be used in various ways for different functions like the expressive, directive, informational, interactional and poetic functions. Each of these functions can be identified with each language legally or illegally used in a community. However, in a multilingual country like Cameroon, the different languages that co-exist are used for different purposes and functions with speakers preferring one language over the other at certain times for various functional purposes.

Fonka (6) holds that the language situation on Anglophone campuses is reflected in the language trend of Cameroon since in these environments, other languages co-exist with English, the main language of instruction. For his part, Chiatoh (7) analyses the language policy and planning in Cameroon and complains about ineffectiveness as people are not allowed to participate in democratic citizenship. He condemns the marginalisation of minority languages, languages of wider communication and indigenous languages over foreign languages in a multilingual context and calls for the adoption of an inclusive approach when designing the curriculum.

Previous research indicates that the use of Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) is on a steady rise. Hedinger (8) contends that 75% of the population speaks Cameroon Pidgin English (PE) while Ayafor (9) notes that Pidgin English and some indigenous languages in most cases creep into official domains to fill communication gaps because of inadequate mastery of the official languages. Tove (10), for her part, asserts that "Pidgin English or Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE)" is not only used in the English-speaking regions but also serves as a lingua franca in the French speaking regions of Cameroon. She classifies CPE among the nine languages of wider communication

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(LWC) spoken in different geographical regions of Cameroon. Todd (11) suggests that CPE is spoken in some form by at least 50% of the population, while Mbufong (12) argues that over 80% of Cameroonians speak CPE. A recent study by Lando & Ntain (13) shows that, 81.8% of English-speaking teachers use CPE in class to ease understanding, and 78.9% of students prefer using it for peer tutoring to ease communication and understanding.

In an article to overview the language status in Cameroon which calls for the integration of Pidgin English (PE) into national life, Alobwede (14) argues that each household in Cameroon puts in efforts to ban the use of Pidgin English at home leaving most children with the English language as their first language. He also questions who bans Pidgin English in Cameroon and explains that even though the Cameroon government does not encourage Pidgin English, it has no official text banning its use. Alobwede (14) adds that some respondents think that PE should be discouraged as it threatens the position and effective use of English. He then argues that because more than 70% of the population speaks PE discouraging it would mean isolating 70% of the population. This explains why he opines that whether or not PE is discouraged depends on the country's language policy. He further argues that the choice of English and French as official languages has relegated the home languages and PE to the background. This is why he concludes that Cameroon seems to have failed in her language policy.

Apart from the practices mentioned above, there is a tussle between multilingualism and monolingual habitus. Barnard (15), for instance, maintains that '*[m]ultilingualism is the norm, and multilingual peoples are made up of individuals from different linguistic background, whose groups intermarry and pass on both their genes and the linguistic diversity*'. Aronin (16) explains that multilingualism is a complex phenomenon with a broader significance that happens to be one of the most important social practices around the world. She adds that multilingualism is used to mean the use of three and more languages and/or the ability to speak several languages in a particular geographic area. Based on these definitions, Flynn (17) asserts that multilingualism is a 'natural state of humankind'. In this study, we are concerned with both individual and societal multilingualism where individual multilingualism is understood as an individual's ability to acquire, master and use many languages (Aronin, (16) and societal multilingualism which refers to the context, circumstances, manners and routines of use of language in different kinds of communities, organisations or groups (ibid).

Gogolin (18) opines that monolingual habitus "*is founded on the basic and deep-seated conviction that monolingualism in a society, and particularly in schools, is the one and only normality, forever and always valid: the characteristic of a nation*" (p. 46). She also defines it as "the deep-seated habit of assuming monolingualism as the norm in the nation" (p. 46). In other words, it is a situation where only one given language is considered legitimate amidst other existing languages in a said community. Gogolin (19) researches on beliefs and approaches regarding language learning as well as multilingualism and multilingual students in educational settings and uncovered the presence of a 'fixed pattern of assumptions' in the educational concepts in German schools which she then referred to as monolingual habitus. This implies that even in multilingual schools, there is an implicit monolingual mindset. In such cases, monolingualism is considered the norm and multilingualism a discrepancy of the norm. According to Gogolin (20), the concept of monolingual habitus is inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's (21) use of the word habitus for a modus which generates dynamic changes in human activity. It refers to the embodiment of social structures that are reproduced through social practices.

At the local level, micro institutions also tend to mimic multilingual practices as seen with the case of the University of Buea (UB). Although the university is officially monolingual with English as its sole language of instruction, on the ground, one observes quite a different reality. While English monolingualism is largely practiced in classrooms, the situation out of the classroom is rather intriguing. Among students, interpersonal interactions for both academic and non-academic purposes tend to demonstrate a preference for languages other than English. In this light, the present study set out to answer these three research questions:

1. What languages do students at the University of Buea use out of the classroom?
2. What are their language practices out of the classroom? Is it monolingualism, bilingualism or multilingualism?
3. What are their motivations for these linguistic choices and practices?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data collection for this study involved random and stratified sampling techniques. The primary participants for the study were chosen through stratified sampling where a cross-section of participants was selected. Stratification was done according to faculties, schools and colleges. 25 departments were randomly selected from the different units of the university as seen on the table below.

Table 1: Summary sheet of participants chosen for the study

Faculty	Number of Departments/programmes	Number of participants
Arts	3	90
Agriculture	3	90
Education	3	110
Engineering	2	90
Health Sciences	3	90
Sciences	5	150
Social and management sciences	3	90
Laws and political sciences	3	90
Total	25	800

In order to ensure representativeness, all departments and programmes under these faculties were scribbled on pieces of paper and balloting was done. After randomly selecting the departments, the researchers obtained their various timetables for the different levels, after which they moved to the different lecture halls hosting students of each of the departments and programmes and randomly administered the questionnaire to those who were willing and ready to take part in the study. Questionnaire administration was conducted during lecture hours so as to ensure that participants were actually university students and to avoid one participant responding to numerous questions. Another reason for administering the questionnaire during lectures in lecture halls was to remain within the scope of the faculties/schools and departments and programmes selected. 10 students from each level were randomly selected to answer the questionnaire. In departments and programmes hosting 3 levels, we had up to 30 participants and in departments/programs hosting 4 levels, we had up to 40 participants.

During the administration of questionnaires, students from departments not selected for the study were not allowed to take part in the exercise. The main instrument for data collection was the questionnaire, which was administered to students. In designing the questionnaire, both open-ended and close-ended items were included, although a majority of the items were close ended. The study design was initially planned to include 800 participants but we ended up with 738 participants who agreed to take part in the exercise. Upon data collection, a purely descriptive and analytical method of data analysis was done. Data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Qualitative data were described and analysed in a narrative manner while quantitative data were coded, keyed into excel sheets, analysed and described using Microsoft excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Statistical analysis was done through numbers, percentages, descriptive tables and charts.

To gain insights into the qualitative analyses, a theoretical framework was used to obtain detailed knowledge on the motivation for students' linguistic preferences. The theoretical framework adopted was Hymes' (22) Ethnography of communication based on its social and cultural practices, beliefs and approach for analysing patterns of language use within speech communities. The theory's eight tenets represented by the mnemonic device of the SPEAKING grid considered as heuristic, provided an adequate framework for understanding the choices students make in an academic environment where classroom instruction is predicated on monolingualism. Through these components, we were able to get greater insights into the motivation for a speaker's language code, choice or style; setting, participants, ends or purpose, acts, key, instrumentals, norms and genre. The tenets of this theory also helped us to better analyse and explain the motivation behind certain linguistic concepts such as monolingual habitus, multilingualism and code-switching discussed below.

RESULTS

The findings in this study are presented in two parts; the first part focuses on quantitative data (presented on tables above) that seek to answer research questions 1 and 2 and the second focuses on the motivations of respondents for a particular linguistic choice or practice which is aimed at answering research question 3. The findings obtained in this study are presented according to the three main research questions asked. The findings for all three research questions are presented in tables and described. For better understanding, findings on the third research question are further presented in themes and discussed. In the presentation, each table is preceded by data description.

Table 2: Languages used by students out of the classroom in the University of Buea

Language	Frequency	Percentage
CPE	320	43.4 %
English	288	39.0 %
French	90	12.4 %
Camfranglais	15	2.1 %
National languages	13	1.8 %
Total	726	98.4 %
Missing	12	1.6%

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As it can be observed on the table above, of the 726 respondents who responded to this question, 320 (43.4%) disclosed that CPE is the language they frequently use out of the classroom, 288 (39.0%) pointed out that they frequently use the English language out of the classroom, 90 (12.4%) said that they frequently use French out of the classroom, 15 (2.1%) revealed that Camfranglais is the language they frequently use out of the classroom and, 13 (1.8%) disclosed that they frequently use national languages out of the classroom. The data shows that CPE is the most spoken language with a 43.4% rate of response and national languages are the least spoken languages with a 1.8% response rate.

Table 3: Language practices out of the classroom at the University of Buea

Number of languages spoken	Frequency	Percentage
One	76	10.2
Two	254	34.5
Three and more	406	55.3
Total	737	100

The table above shows the language practices of students out of class at the university. The data show that of the 737 respondents who took part in the study, 406 (55.3%) speak three and more languages, 254 (34.5%) speak two languages and 76 (10.2%) speak only one language out of the classroom. These findings indicate that 55.3% of the students are multilinguals, 34.5% are bilinguals and 10.2% are monolinguals. Based on the definition of multilingualism, it is evident from the results on table 3 that students at the University of Buea practise multilingualism. It should be noted that the focus on table 3 above was on individual multilingualism, where individuals were asked to identify the number of languages they spoke. Both individual and societal multilingualism are inferred from the said table.

Table 4: Language use based on motivation and function

	Function of language	Language	Frequency	Percentage
1	Frequently used out of class	CPE	320	43.4 %
2	Number of languages spoken out of the classroom	Multilingualism	406	55.3%
3	Languages frequently used with peers in the classroom?	CPE	255	34.6%
4	Used for academic purpose	English	370	50.1 %
5	Language often used for academic interaction with peers?	CPE	334	45.3%
6	Used with support staff	English	447	60.6 %
7	Chitchat and entertainment	CPE	320	43.4 %
8	Co-curricular activities	CPE	360	49.1 %
9	Language use to please friends	CPE	408	55.3 %
10	Used with relatives or tribes people	Mother tongue	303	41.1 %
11	Used with business persons	English	469	63.6 %
12	Used with unfamiliar students	English	554	75.1 %
13	Used with lecturers familiar to u	English	629	85.2 %
14	Used with older students	English	514	69.6 %
15	Language used for interaction when relaxing with friends	CPE	348	47.2 %
16	Classmates of same age	CPE	314	42.5 %
17	Classmates of opposite sex	English	510	61.9 %
18	Classmates of same sex	CPE	342	46.3 %
19	Language use with students from the Anglophone background	English	419	56.8 %
20	Language used with students from the Francophone background	French	395	53.5 %
21	Language of interaction with postgraduate students	English	631	85.5 %
22	Language to be encouraged out of class	English	558	75.6 %
23	Motivation for language preference/use	Peer influence	311	43.7%

The table above summarises the multilingual language practices of students at the University of Buea. It is worth recalling that the objective of this paper was to investigate the linguistic practices out of lecture halls on the University of Buea campus that upholds institutional monolingualism. Although the institution openly advocates for the use of a single language, the students out of the classroom are naturally multilingual. Findings obtained revealed that students at the University of Buea practice multilingualism out of lecture halls as they use languages such as English, French, indigenous languages and CPE.

The third research question sought to find out what the motivations for students' linguistic choices and practices at UB are. To facilitate understanding in this second part of data analysis, the motivations have been segmented into themes which are then interpretation and analysis.

Motivation for students' linguistic preferences and practices

With regard to students' linguistic choices and practices, respondents identified some vital reasons why they have preferences for some languages and consequently their linguistic practices. These are to code, maintain and promote culture, peer influence, integration and inclusion, linguistic accommodation, respect for staff and institution's policy and ease of comprehension. We now briefly present each of these.

To code message, maintain and promote cultural heritage and identity

Respondents who indicated that their language of preference out of the classroom is one of the national languages attested that they used it to code their messages and to communicate with relatives/tribes' people in a uniquely relatable manner. They also explained that they did so to promote their mother tongues, maintain and uphold their cultural heritage and identity. They also expressed that they used the language because of the love they have for it. The following excerpts are responses from respondents: *I use my mother tongue to show my culture, it is a way to showcase my love for the language, I use it to promote my culture, language and identity.*

Peer influence

A majority (43.7%) of the students said that one of their main reasons for preferring CPE to any other language out of the classroom was peer influence. They explained that most people around them feel more comfortable interacting in CPE, so they join the trend. No wonder Atechi (22), calls it the language of intimacy. One of the respondents said: *'I speak Pidgin because my friends like it. All my classmates communicate in Pidgin so I have no choice. Pidgin is the language of the youths and I am one'.*

Integration and inclusion

Some francophones disclosed that their reason for speaking the English language and CPE were to help them easily integrate into the Anglophone community that is flooded by these two languages. According to Giles (23), individuals use the convergence strategy to adjust their communicative behaviours to be more similar to those of their interlocutors as indicated in the above case. Here are some responses obtained from students' questionnaire: *I speak English because I am in English University. I use English because I want Anglophones to understand my points since it is an anglophone school.*

Linguistic accommodation

The respondents who preferred French (item 18 on table 4) explained that it was for accommodation reasons. Most participants who preferred French out of the classroom explained that they did so because they wanted to converge and make the few Francophones feel at home given that most of them (Francophones) had difficulties speaking the lingua franca (CPE). Most francophones who preferred French explained that it is the language they feel free interacting in and the language they easily understand. Some of the responses extracted from the questionnaire are: *I use French because I want to make francophones feel free since they don't know pidgin. I want French people to better understand me.*

Academic interaction and development of language skills

A majority of respondents (50.1%) indicated that they preferred English during academic interactions in item 2 on table 4 respectively. They explained that the frequent use of English facilitate its learning and also helps in developing their language skills. Some responses extracted from students' questionnaire were as follow: *Speaking English will help improve on my vocabulary.*

Respect of social status and respect for institution's policy

Some respondents explained that they preferred English when talking to people like support staff of the university, persons older than them, lecturers, people of the opposite sex and postgraduate students for the sake of respect of age, sex and social status as seen in items 6, 12, 13, 14 and 17 on table 4 above. Examples of excerpts from respondents read as follows: *I use English to respect the policy of using English in UB; They are my lecturers and English is the best language I can use to show that I respect them.*

Ease of comprehension

Findings further revealed that students used CPE out of lecture halls when doing assignments and in situations of peer tutoring to ease understanding of concepts that were not understood during formal teaching in class. Because CPE is a user-friendly language, students preferred its use during peer tutoring to any other language. Again, the fact that CPE is the most used language of interaction out of the classroom could stem from the motivations given by some respondents as follows: *CPE is easy to speak, ...does not have rules, it is good for fun, jokes and entertainment.*

DISCUSSION

Based on the statistics presented in table 2 above, more than five languages are used by students at the University of Buea campus, namely; CPE, English, French, Camfranglais, and a variety of national languages respectively. This finding is in conformity with Tadjadjeu (1) and Simo Bobda's (2) description of the linguistic practices in Cameroon as the Tower of Babel playing host to many languages exist. The University of Buea can, therefore, in this light, be considered as Cameroon in miniature. Again, the findings on table 3 further reiterate that multilingualism (55.3%) is the main linguistic practice out of the classroom, at the University of Buea. This finding contradicts Gogolin (19) who opines that monolingualism in schools is the one and only normal, forever and always valid practice. However, results show that it is not the case at the university of Buea. The possible reason for these multilingual practices could be the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students. Students who come from multilingual family backgrounds tend to behave in almost the same way in an environment where they find the same variety of languages used; they transfer their home/family linguistic practices to whichever environment that accommodates such linguistic practices. This finding is in line with one of Hymes' (24) tenets in the *Ethnography of Communication* which explains that for any communicative event to be effective, participants have an important role to play as they define which language to use and which speech pattern to follow.

Also, the results on table 2 show that the most spoken language out of class is CPE (43.4%) and the least spoken are national languages. Although Alobwede (14) argues that each household in Cameroon makes an effort to ban the use of Pidgin English at home the language as per results of this study still reigns supreme among other languages at the University of Buea, Cameroon. Moreover, most students come from homes and geographical settings where CPE is either their mother tongue or a lingua franca. Therefore, when they converge in a university setting with little or no rules guiding their linguistic choices out of the classroom, they go for the language they are used to speaking, that is, CPE. Another possible reason for this linguistic preference as seen from the findings could be due to the fact that CPE is a lingua franca in Cameroon, especially in the Anglophone regions of the country where it is mostly used to ease comprehension during peer tutoring. This finding, tallies with Lando and Ntain (13), who examine the language of peer tutoring in some higher institutions in Cameroon and find that 78.9% of students preferred CPE because they find it much easier discussing assignments and lessons taught in class. These findings corroborate some of Hymes' (24) tenets in *Ethnography of Communication* which theorise that participants choose a language to be used based on the events, type of events, the purpose and personal goals as seen in the case above. Findings also revealed that students prefer and use CPE because it is a language they acquired from childhood and because it forms part of their cultural heritage and identity, it is quite difficult to do without it. No wonder Ubanako (25) contends that CPE is a carrier of identity, especially the Anglophone identity. Findings further show that students prefer using CPE because of the nature of the setting/situation (out of the classroom). They explained that though they find themselves in a formal environment, on-campus canteens and shops are informal venues which give them the latitude to choose whatever language they want as seen in items 1, 7 and 8 of table 4. This can serve as an explanation to why Hymes (24) posits that setting, which includes the time and place, can play a vital role in the language choice and speech pattern of individuals.

Data on language practices at the University of Buea showed that students used a number of languages out of the classroom to fulfil certain functions. These findings presented on table 4 corroborate those of Mbangwana (26), who examined the spoken aspects of English and concluded that British English (BrE) recommended by the government is often mixed with or superseded by other languages such as CPE, French and the national languages. These different linguistic behaviours are often determined by the context and/or motivation. The language preferences identified were CPE, English, French, Camfranglais and national languages respectively. For those who said that English was their preferred language of interaction out of the classroom at the UB as seen in items 6, 12, 13, 14 and 17 on table 4 above indicated they did so to respect the institution's language policy, respect lecturers, support staff, postgraduate students and those older than them. These findings are in conformity with one of Hymes' (24) tenets in his *Ethnography of Communication Theory* which states that the language used in any communicative event is determined by the participants such as the speaker, listener, including their personal characteristics such as age, sex,

social status and relationship with each other. On the part of students who indicated that French was their most preferred language of interaction out of the classroom, results showed that their motivation for doing that was for purposes of linguistic accommodation and integration. This finding is in accordance with Giles (23) convergence strategy in which individuals could adjust their communicative behaviours to mimic that of their interlocutors.

Implications on policy and practice

The fact that CPE is the most preferred language of students out of lecture halls, as observed in the present study as well as in previous research such as Lando and Ntain (13) implies that it is a user-friendly language, especially among the youths. Given its steady use in co-curricular activities, it can be postulated that given an enabling policy environment, it could later become a lingua franca for co-curricular activities at the university. The findings also imply that the on-campus campaign against CPE on billboards has not succeed. The use of CPE out of the classroom by a majority of students is proof of the fact that students master and love the language. Our findings show that students use CPE during peer tutoring to ease comprehension. This simply means that although the English language is the official language of the institution, CPE plays a vital academic function among students who prefer it for better comprehend material taught in the English language.

Also, the fact that English is the main language of communication out of lecture halls during co-curricular activities such as assignments is an indication that students in this situation continue to accord respect for it as an official language and language of academics. This further explains the respect students still have for the English language and the institution's language policy. This also implies that even with the multilingual influence of the environment, students still uphold and respect, to some extent, the monolingual language policy of the institution. Findings also disclosed that some individuals used the English language to accord respect to their interlocutors. This implies that language could be used as a tool to enforce respect depending on which language and for whom it is used. The findings, therefore, imply that CPE is a language that commands respect and could be used not just for the purpose of interaction but also as a means to appeal to interlocutors.

Findings equally showed that some particular languages (especially indigenous languages and Camfranglais) could, perhaps, be used to code messages. This implies that language could be used as a tool of exclusion, disunity and discrimination. Coding a message to exclude others could cause disunity as many might misunderstand the code to mean that they are being discriminated against. Besides creating disunity languages can also bring about unity since some languages such as indigenous languages are used to promote cultural heritage and identity. This is evident from the result of the study where some students explained that when they speak a particular language with their peers it *'helps build trust and rapport'*. Again, the use of languages other than English for co-curricular activities could help promote confidence and self-worth among speakers. Once speakers notice that there are no restrictions especially on language use in particular communities, they tend to feel free and do all they want and wish in a light hearted manner. This could also promote social inequality among individuals as some people may feel unqualified to associate with others because they can neither speak nor understand the other's language.

Besides on practice, implications on policy are also evident. The fact that results show that multilingualism remains the order of the day with many different languages spoken on campus is an indication that language managers at the university have not succeeded in controlling students' language choices on campus. This further suggests that the monolingual language policy instituted may not be the most appropriate policy for such an institution since students violate it and adopt a more plurilingual practice. Moreover, students' resistance to the institution's policy through their preferences signals the need for a more liberal policy. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the monolingual policy instituted at the University of Buea has failed and so needs to be revisited. According to Takam and Fasse (27), the greatest means of implementing official bilingualism policy has been through formal education. However, this is not the case at the University of Buea where the monolingual policy is instituted. It is clear, therefore, that the lack of institutional backing for the adoption of a multilingual policy that accommodates CPE, leaving speakers with no choice than to pick and choose the languages in which their social and academic exchanges are most convenient. The results and implication on policy further reinforce Alobwede's (14) argument that Cameroon seems to have failed in its language policy.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to investigate how the linguistic practices of students out of lecture halls at the University of Buea constitute a challenge to the monolingual habitus promoted by the institution. After a careful analysis of

data collected with the aid of questionnaires, findings indicate that students practice multilingualism with the existence and use of languages such as CPE, English, French, Camfranglais and national languages out of the classroom for different purposes. From our findings, it is evident that although the institution openly advocates for monolingualism, students' linguistic preferences out of the classroom portray a rooted desire for multilingualism. We therefore recommend that the University of Buea revisits its language policy with a view to rendering it more tolerant towards other languages out of the classroom context.

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