Textuality of Idiomatic Expressions in Cameroon English

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Abstract

The meaning of an idiomatic expression cannot be transparently worked out from the meanings of its constituent words due to its figurative and unpredictable nature. Consequently, the syntactic composition and the structural paradigm of an idiomatic expression are supposed to be the same in every context. However, this is not the case in the institutionalized second language varieties of English spoken around the world. In this regard, the present paper aims at showing that the input-oriented syntactic composition and structure of English idiomatic expressions undergo innovative processes such as substitution, addition, and deletion of lexemes or phrases in the grammar of L2 learners of English in Cameroon. This reveals that, the imageable ideas of English idioms do not call up the same conventional lexical and syntactic features in the minds of L2 learners. Every New English context has its rules of constructing English idiomatic expressions as the speakers strive to indigenize and domesticate the English language.

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses the syntactic composition and structure of English idiomatic expressions in the grammar of L2 learners of English in Cameroon to show how they indigenize and domesticate the English idiomatic expressions. Each language has a stock of meaning-bearing elements (lexemes) and different ways of combining them (structures) to express different meanings, and these ways of combining them are themselves meaningful. For instance, the expressions "Please, roll up the carpet" (i.e., to fold the carpet around itself to make it short) and "Please, roll the carpet up" (i.e., to fold the carpet around itself by lifting or raising it) contain exactly the same meaning-bearing elements but they do not have the same meaning. The difference in meaning is brought about by the syntactic paradigm.

Furthermore, Universal Grammar opines that, each language has its parameter settings in combining meaning-bearing elements in order to express meaning. This is what makes one language different from the other. For instance, the two idiomatic expressions "*You can't eat your cake and have it*" (Cameroon English) and "*You can't have your cake and eat it*" (British English) contain the same meaning-bearing elements which convey the same meaning (i.e., "You can't have things both ways"), but do not have the same structural paradigm. In the same vein, the idioms "*Birds of the same feathers flock together*" (Cameroon English) and "*Birds of a feather flock together*" (British English) do not contain exactly the same meaning-bearing elements (i.e., words and morphological forms), but they have the same meaning (i.e., "people with similar interest will stick together"). These different combinations fall into the realm of syntax. The two sentences differ both in terms of the words in them and syntax. The identifying properties of each sentence constitute its

textuality. Thus, "one of the principal goals of text linguistics is to identify, as explicitly as possible, the distinguishing features of each type of text" (Stockwell & Trask, 2007, p. 298).

With regard to the aforementioned, Sinclair (1991), after exploring the manner texts are organized, drew the conclusion that there are two constraints which oversee the speakers' choices to construct a text: the open-choice constraint and the idiom constraint. The first constraint refers to the many views a speaker has in order to come up with sentences according to a given language system of rules. That is, the open-choice constraint is related to a user's ingenuity to fill in a text's slots with an eclectic range of potential and acceptable words. The idiomatic constraint refers to the fixed and closed-ended choice a speaker has in order to come up with sentences according to the rules of the language. In view of this, Moon (1997) identifies a closed-class of multi-word combinations such as compounds (e.g., dining-chair), phrasal verbs (e.g., look down on), idioms (e.g., birds of a feather flock together), fixed phrases (e.g., a couched potato), and prefarbs (e.g., He is a great advocate of…). In this regard, the most representative types of idiom principle (i.e., idiomatic expressions) considered in this paper are idioms and phrasal verbs.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical premise adopted for this study is the World Englishes framework. The domain of linguistics has witnessed a number of foremost and notable evolutions. Among the foremost developments is the 'world Englishes' paradigm. The term 'World Englishes' is often used to point to the institutionalized second language varieties of English that are spoken around the world (Wolf & Polzenhagen, 2009). As this new variety is focused on local identities of various national/regional varieties of English, it is

looked upon as the "linguistics of particularity" (Figueroa, 1994, p. 5).

English is the world's leading language today. It is learned by hundreds of millions of people from all walks of life in all countries. A recent estimate puts speaker number close to two billion (Schneider, 2011). Though learning English language is spreading rapidly across the globe, it does not maintain its purity in the different settings in which it is used. As it sails across the globe, it embraces the linguistic and cultural values of the different settings in which it is used. It is in this regard that Kachru (1986, p. 31) asserts that, the English language today "is acquiring various international identities and thus acquiring multiple ownerships". It has developed local forms and characteristics, so much so that people enjoy using it in their own way to express a sense of belonging to a place which finds expression through local culture (Schneider, 2011). In this regard, Schneider (2011) upholds that:

> Wherever you go on this globe, you can get along with English. Either most people speak it anyhow, or there is at least somebody around who can communicate in this language. But then, you realize that mostly there's something you may find odd about the way English is used there. If you are abroad English is likely to be somewhat different from the way you speak it: people use strange words; it may take you a while to recognize familiar words because they are pronounced somehow differently; and sometimes people build their sentences in ways that will seem odd to you in the beginning. (p. 2)

This quotation reveals that, English language has sacrificed its homogeneity due to the unique ecological and sociolinguistic realities of each context. Consequently, the 'ecology of language' approach, "as a convenient heuristic metaphor for the explanation of linguistic processes such as language change and the emergence of contact languages" (Wolf & Polyzenhagen, 2009, p. 12), is identified as one of the strands of World Englishes Paradigm. This approach, likened to 'ecolinguistics', which "has strong roots in the sociolinguistic movement, […] goes beyond traditional sociolinguistic concerns in that it views language as part of an overarching ecology which comprises not only the linguistic and socio-cultural values, but also the natural environment" (Wolf & Polzenhagen, 2009, p. 12). This portrays that, "English is no longer just 'one language'; it comes in many different shapes and sizes, as it were, [and] it is quite different in the many countries and localities where it has been adopted" (Schneider, 2011, p. 2). Thus, in order to capture this phenomenon, linguists have come to talk of different 'Englishes'.

The rise of 'new-Englishes' is inevitable and these varieties have arisen to solve the communicative needs of a people. Non-native users of the English language have the right to express themselves in a way that suits them. With regard to this, Kachru (1986) upholds that it will be a 'linguistic genocide' trying to dispossess people of their linguistic rights.

Since English language is now spoken all over the world among various categories of speakers, Kachru (1992, p. 358) has come up with the following "three concentric circles": the Inner, Outer, and the Expanding. "These circles, which represent the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the functional allocation of English in diverse cultural contexts" (Kachru, 1992, p. 356), are normatively characterized as: (i) Norm-producing (i.e., where native speakers set standards of use for non-native speakers), (ii) Norm-developing (i.e., where ESL varieties are developing their own norms and attempting to

institutionalize those varieties as local standards), and (iii) Norm-dependent (i.e., where varieties depend on the norms set by native speakers) users. This distinction shows that:

> "the English language includes at least three types of varieties: (i) those that are used as the primary language of the majority population of a country, such as American and British; (ii) varieties that are used as an additional language for intra-national as well as international communication in communities that are multilingual, such as Indian, Nigerian, Ghanian, Cameroonian, and Singaporean English; and (iii) varieties that are used almost exclusively for international communication, such as Chinese and German English". (Kachru & Smith, 2008, p. 2)

The present study falls within the second type of varieties with focus on the "Cameroonianism" in the domestication of English idiomatic expressions.

3. Methodology

The data for this study comes from the responses provided to a production test administered to 180 ESL learners/speakers of English in Cameroon; and my observations through recordings and field investigations over the past five years. The test consisted of a Multiple Choice Comprehension Task (MCCT), a Gap Test Task (GTT), and a Sentence Correction Task (SCT).

In the MCCT, the respondents were asked to choose an appropriate word or phrase, from the list provided in the brackets at the end of each sentence, to fill in the blank so that the sentence is complete and expresses a complete thought. For example, tokens such as "My aunt often shouts _____ of her voice (at the top, on top,

in high)"; "I came _____ a vase exactly like yours in a Chinese shop (over, above, across)" were used. In the GTT, respondents were asked to fill in each of the gaps provided with an appropriate word or phrase, they deem necessary, best completes the sentence. For example, tokens such as "The students have been _____ their brains over the question for two hours"; "Birds of _____ flock together"; "I will say it again without _____ words"; "The government has come _____ with a wonderful strategy to curb corruption" were used. Each of the sentences contained an idiomatic expression within which a word or phrase was omitted and the respondents were required to provide the omitted word or phrase, in each of the cases, and fill in the word/phrase in the space provided. In the SCT, respondents were asked to correct the sentences given to them, if they find anything wrong with these sentences as regards the Standard British English (SBE) parameter settings. For example, tokens such as "A bird in hand is more than two in the bush"; "You cannot eat your cake and have it" were used to elicit data.

The test, which consisted of 30 idiomatic expressions, was administered to 180 randomly selected English-major undergraduate and postgraduate students of the English Department in the University of Yaounde I, the Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) Maroua of the University of Maroua, and undergraduate students from the University of Buea. The distribution of the respondents, according to institution, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents according to University

University	Number of Respondents
Yaounde I	62 (34.45%)
Maroua	58 (32.22%)
Buea	60 (33.33%)
TOTAL	180 (100%)

Table 1 above shows that, 62 (34.45%) of the respondents were from the University of Yaounde I, 58 (32.22%) were from the University of Maroua, and 60 (33.33%) from the University of Buea. This gives a total of 180 respondents who took part in the production test.

Data were also collected through recordings and field investigation. The recordings involved mainly the informal and formal conversations of university students as well as educated speakers of Cameroon English at different social events, conferences, and seminars. Some data also came from some radio and television programs as well as local private and public newspapers. With the assistance of some English language experts in the country, the present researcher identified an impressive number of lexical and syntactic innovations in the idiomatic expressions of ESL learners/speakers in Cameroon.

The data collected through the production test were analysed using a scoring scheme whereby a response that reflected the SBE parameter settings of the idiomatic expressions got a point and any other got no point. Furthermore, feature specifications of the entire data were identified, described, and analysed. The respondents' performance reveals that, the input-oriented syntactic composition and structure of English idiomatic expressions undergo innovation processes such as substitution, addition, and deletion of lexemes or phrases in the grammar of L2 learners of English in Cameroon.

4. Results

English idiomatic expressions are thought to be "relatively frozen and have severe grammatical restriction" (Moon, 1997, p. 47). Consequently, it is commonly taken that they do not license any lexical or syntactic alteration. However, a close examination of them in the second language context in general and Cameroon English in particular, reveals that, they undergo a lot of modifications than might be expected as the data provided by the respondents illustrated in Table 2. The table presents the number of instances and the percentage scored, by the respondents, in setting the Standard British English (SBE) parameters, on the one hand, and in coming up with other parameter settings, on the other hand.

Table 2

Respondents' Performance in the Production of Idiomatic Expressions

University	SBE Parameter Settings	Other Parameter Settings	Total
Yaounde I	392 (21.08%)	1468 (78.92%)	1860(100%)
Maroua	318 (18.28%)	1422(81.72%)	1740(100%)
Buea	360 (20%)	1440(80%)	1800(100%)
TOTAL	1070 (19.81%)	4330(80.19%)	5400(100%)

As can be seen in Table 2, the respondents provided 1070 (19.81%) instances of idiomatic expressions whereby the SBE parameter settings were respected. They also provided 4330 (80.19%) instances whereby the respondents employed other parameter settings in coming up with idiomatic expressions. This result is explicitly captured by the pie chart below.
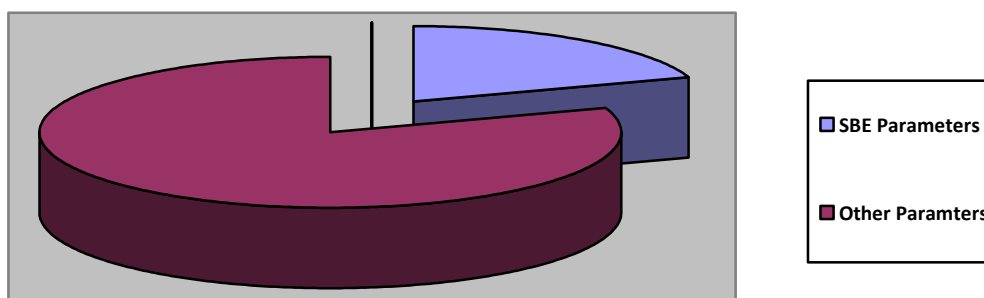
Figure 1

Performance of Respondents in Setting Parameters

Figure 1 shows that, the majority of instances of idiomatic expressions (80.19%), produced by the respondents, do not reflect the SBE input-oriented feature specifications of the idioms examined. They have come up with idiomatic expressions that are lexically and structurally different. Consequently, it will not be erroneous to say that, these respondents have produced a dialectal variety of English idiomatic expressions, evidenced by the indigenization and domestication of the English idioms to suit their socio-cultural and linguistic background or cosmic vision. This is illustrated by the following samples identified in the data provided:

i. *Birds of **the same feathers** flock together.* (for SBE 'a feather', i.e., people with similar interest will stick together).

ii. *I will say it again without **mixing** words.* (for SBE 'without mincing words')

iii. *A bird in **hand is more than** two in the bush.* (for SBE 'the hand is worth', i.e., better to have something that is certain than to take risk to get more, where you might lose everything)

iv. *John was caught **right-handed** when he was falsifying the information.* (for SBE 'red-handed', i.e., found doing something wrong)

v. *The students have been **cracking** their brains over that question for two hours.* (for SBE 'racking', i.e., to think very hard)

vi. *You can't **eat** your cake and **have it**.* (for SBE 'You can't have your cake and eat it', i.e., you can't have things both ways)

vii. *What you have done has taken us **from** the frying pan into the fire.* (for SBE 'out of', i.e., when you move from a bad or difficult situation to one which is worse)

The exemplifications above reveal changes inscribed in the way English idiomatic expressions are produced in a non-native setting. These changes or innovations are products of reality in new language speaking context such as Cameroon. When the respondents encounter difficulties in reproducing idiomatic expressions, due to their structural peculiarities, they come up with lexical and syntactic structures that are communicatively comprehensible among themselves. The innovative processes that these idiomatic expressions undergo in the grammar of these L2 learners/speakers include: substitution, addition, and deletion of lexemes or phrases.

4.1. Lexeme Deletion

One of the characteristic innovative features in the structure of English idiomatic expressions, in the Cameroon variety of English, is the deletion of a lexeme (e.g., *Please, don't **bite more than you can chew***). This idiomatic expression "to bite more than you can chew" has witnessed the deletion of the adverb particle 'off' after the verb 'bite'. This makes the syntactic composition of the said idiomatic expression different from the one in SBE (e.g., Please, don't **bite off more than you can chew**). In cases such as this, the deletion process is concerned either with the definite article as exemplified in 1 or with an adverb participle as exemplified in 2 and 3.

1) ***By no stretch of imagination*** *could he be seriously described as an artist.* (for SBE 'by no stretch of **the** imagination', i.e., used to describe things that are impossible to believe, even with a lot of effort)

2) *Please, don't **bite more** than you can chew.* (for SBE 'bite **off** more than you can chew', i.e., to take on more responsibilities than you can manage or to try to do something which is too difficult for you)

3) *Our deepest sympathies **go to** her husband and children.* (for SBE 'go **out** to', i.e., to think and feel sorry for someone)

As the above samples show, the definite article 'the' is deleted in example 1, the adverb particle 'off' in 2, and 'out' in 3. The next innovative process noticeable in the data provided is the addition of a lexeme to the syntactic structure of English idioms.

4.2. Lexeme Inflection and Addition

Lexeme addition denotes the addition of a word within or to the syntactic composition of an English idiomatic expression (e.g., We have to know that "where there is a will, there is always a way"). Within this Cameroon English idiomatic expression, the frequency adverb 'always' is added between the lexical verb 'is' and the noun phrase 'a way'. Besides lexeme addition, there is lexeme inflection. The term "lexeme inflection" is the addition of an inflectional bound morpheme to a word within an idiomatic expression (e.g., *You are pulling my **legs**, aren't you?* (for SBE 'leg')). In this sample, the inflectional bound morpheme 's' is added to the noun phrase 'leg'.

Lexeme addition is noticeable in sample 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 below.

4) *We have to know that 'where there is a will, there is **always** a way'.* (for SBE 'where there is a will, there is a way')

5) *Using computer nowadays is **a child's play** compared to how difficult they were to use ten years ago.* (for SBE 'child's play', i.e., to be very easy)

6) *I would like to thank my publisher, my editor and**, last but not the least,** my husband.* (for SBE ' last but not least', i.e., importantly, despite being mentioned after everyone else)

7) *You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink **water**.* (for SBE 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink')

8) *When you are in Rome, do as the Romans **do**.* (for SBE 'When in Rome do as the Romans', i.e., when visiting a different culture or place, try to do their customs and practices)

9) *Do you think we will be able to meet **up with** our deadline.* (for SBE 'meet our deadline', i.e., to satisfy, fulfil)

10) *This young man has made a **big** name for himself.* (for SBE 'name')

In example 4, the frequency adverb 'always' is added in the internal structure of the idiomatic expression examined. In example 5, the indefinite article 'a' is preceded to the NP 'child's play'. In example 6, the definite article 'the' is introduced before the final adverb 'least'

in the idiomatic expression. In example 7, the NP 'water' is added at the end of the idiom. In example 8, the verb 'do' is added to the end of the idiom. In example 9, the adverb 'up' and the preposition 'with' are added to come up with the phrasal verb (to meet up with), and in example 10, the adjective 'big' is added to qualify the noun phrase 'name'. These additions are made to make the idiomatic expressions comprehensible to the L2 learners/speakers of English. The respondents felt that, there is something lacking to make these idioms complete in thought and structure. Another innovative process feasible in the data provided is lexeme substitution.

4.3. Lexeme Substitution

The learners' grammar is characterized by idiomatic expressions wherein a lexeme, in the SBE idiom, is substituted for another word [e.g., *It is said that 'silence **means** consent'* (for SBE 'gives')]. The process of lexeme substitution noticed in the data include: (i) the adjective 'one' is substituted by a definite article (e.g., *Paul and John are 'two sides of **the** coin'*); (ii) the adjective 'red' for the adjective 'right' (e.g., *John was caught '**right-**handed' when he was falsifying the information*); (iii) the noun 'sun' for the verb 'shine' (e.g., *We will go for sight-seeing tomorrow, 'come rain or **sun**'*); (iv) the preposition 'of' for the adverb 'off' (e.g., *I would like you to do the best 'to wash your hands **off** the scandal'*) etc.

The samples given above reveal that, the substitution of a lexeme is as a result of the fervent striving of the respondents to tie the wordings of an idiomatic expression to its meaning (e.g., "*John was caught **right-**handed when he was falsifying the information*" and "*We will go for sight-seeing tomorrow, come rain or **sun**"*). The influence of the respondents' socio-cultural and linguistic background is not negligible as seen in "*Beauty **lies** in the **eyes** of*

the beholder" and *"Please, stop beating **about** the bush".*

The foregoing analysis portrays that, the English idiomatic expressions, in the grammar of L2 leaners/speakers in Cameroon, are characterized by recurrent lexeme substitution as illustrated by 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 below.

11) *I will say it again without **mixing** words.* (for SBE 'without mincing words')
12) *Paul and John are two sides of **the** coin.* (for SBE 'one').
13) *The students have been **cracking** their brains over that question for two hours.* (for SBE 'racking', i.e., to think very hard)
14) *John was caught **right-handed** when he was falsifying the information.* (for SBE 'red-handed', i.e., found doing something wrong)
15) *Please, learn to cut your coat according to your size.* (for SBE 'cut your coat according to your cloth', i.e., buy things that you have sufficient money to pay for)
16) *We will go for sight-seeing tomorrow, come rain or **sun**.* (for SBE 'come rain or shine', i. e. nothing deter or stop us)
17) *Men of your calibre don't wash their dirty **lenience** in public.* (for SBE 'don't wash your dirty laundry in public', i.e., make public things that are best left private)
18) *I wish you more **grease** to your elbow.* (for SBE 'more power to your elbow', i. e., have courage)
19) *Have you sensed **fowl** play in the game?* (for SBE 'foul play', i.e., a crime committed)
20) *Life is a vicious **cycle**.* (for SBE 'vicious circle')
21) *I would like you to do the best to wash your hands **off** the scandal.* (for SBE 'wash your hands of the scandal', i. e., dissociate yourself from the scandal)
22) *What you are doing will wipe the smile **off** Mary's face.* (for SBE 'of', i.e., make her less pleased)
23) *Don't you know that too many cooks spoil the **soup**.* (for SBE 'broth', i.e., many people trying to do something make a mess of it)

24) *Please, stop beating **about** the bush*. (for SBE 'around the bush', i.e., not discussing what is important)

25) *We have to keep our ear **on** the ground*. (for SBE 'to the ground')

26) *Jonathan made no bones **of** the incident*. (for SBE 'about the incident')

27) *I can't quote the exact statistics for you **offhead**, but they are there for you to see in the report*. (for SBE 'offhand', i.e., without looking for information and without thinking carefully; immediately)

28) *He told her from the **onset** he wasn't interested*. (for SBE 'outset', i.e., the beginning)

29) *The government has **come out with** a wonderful strategy to curb corruption*. (for SBE 'come up with', i.e., to suggest or think of an idea or plan)

30) *Opportunity **comes** but ones*. (for SBE 'knocks')

31) *Mary is putting the **cat** before the horse*. (for SBE 'cart', i.e., doing something the wrong way)

32) *Let's make a **run** down the memory lane*. (for SBE 'stroll')

33) *You are taking me for a **right**.* (for SBE 'ride', i.e., deceived by someone)

34) *Beauty **lies** in the **eyes** of the beholder*. (for SBE 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder', i.e., different people will find different things beautiful and that the differences of opinion don't matter greatly).

As the examples above illustrate, there are varied ways in which lexemes are substituted in order to come up with innovative English idiomatic expressions that are appealing and comprehensible to this group of learners/ speakers. Not only do idiomatic expressions undergo lexeme deletion, they are also subjected to phrase substitution.

4.4. Phrase Substitution

One of the innovative features that characterize English idiomatic expressions of L2 learners/speakers in Cameroon is the tendency to substitute a phrase, within the idiomatic expression, for another. The substitution could either be a prepositional phrase for another prepositional phrase [e.g., *I don't want anybody to drag my name **in the mud***. (For 'through the mire')] or a noun phrase for another noun phrase [e.g., *You cannot bite **the finger** that feeds you*. (For SBE 'the hand')]. An insightful look into the way these phrases are substituted points to the fact the socio-cultural and the linguistic background of the learners play a pivotal role. The learners are striving to give a local coloration to the idioms as the complementary samples below further illustrate.

36. *Mabel and Jonathan need to put **a full stop** to their relationship*. (for SBE 'an end /a stop')

37. *The Chief took the law **into his hands***. (for SBE ' into his own hand', i.e., to defy the law)

38. *My aunt often shouts **on top** of her voice*. (for SBE 'at the top')

39. *Birds of **the same feathers** flock together**.*** (for SBE 'a feather', i.e., people with similar interest will stick together)

40. *What you have done has taken us **from the frying pan**, into the fire*. (for SBE 'out of the frying pan')

The substitution of the SBE phrase, in an idiomatic expression, for another is a testimony of language change and identity construction as it is exported to another context. This is done to enable the idioms to fit within the cultural and the linguistic atmosphere of the new users. Another feature noticeable in the data that contributes in building this socio-cultural and linguistic atmosphere is the transformation of the idiomatic expressions.

4.5. Transformation of Idioms

The term 'transformation' here denotes almost complete change of the syntactic composition of an idiomatic expression. In this case, the

idiomatic expression undergoes a greater change of wordings as samples below illustrate.

44. *Paul **has put his feet into hot waters***. (for SBE 'is in hot water or has got into hot water')

45. *He is striving to **have a good name***. (for SBE 'make a name', i.e., to become famous **)**

46. *A **bird in hand is more than** two in the bush*. (for SBE 'bird in the hand is worth two in the bush', i.e., better to have something that is certain than to take risk to get more, where you might lose everything)

47. *You can't **eat your cake and have it***. (for SBE 'You can't have your cake and eat it', i.e., You can't have things both ways)

48. *In politics, you scratch my back, **I scratch your own***. (for SBE 'You scratch my back and I will scratch yours', i.e., Meaning if you do something for me, I will return the favor)

49. *This is a game for all **ansundry***. (for SBE 'all and sundry', i.e., each and every one)

50. ***Action speaks** louder than words*. (for SBE 'actions speak louder than words', i.e., what people actually do is more important than what they say)

The innovations in the idiomatic expressions in the grammar of these L2 learners/speakers of the English language reveal that, the input-oriented syntactic compositions of English idioms undergo mental processes that generate novelty in their output. This novelty turns to give quasi-autonomy to the variety of the English language produced. This is a common scenario in situations where a language is used out of its native context whereby the new users strive to domesticate the language.

5. Discussion

The syntactic composition of English idiomatic expressions results from the explicit attempt by grammarians to tidy up the inherent fuzziness and indeterminacy of spoken as well as written syntax. Consequently, the input-oriented English

idiomatic expressions demonstrate a heightened awareness of norms and 'correctness'. In spite of this, the use of idiomatic expressions in everyday conversation of L2 learners/speakers of the English language is often marked by the transgression of pre-determined syntactic compositions and structure, and is frequently in contradiction to the lexical and syntactic structure of the grammar of the SBE. This warrants the need for a simple research for lexical and syntactic forms in authentic data in order to approach the real variety of language objectively. The present study, therefore, has investigated the lexical and syntactic innovation processes that the English idiomatic expressions undergo in Cameroon English in a bit to indigenize and domesticate the English language.

A close examination of the data reveals that, these users embark on a series of innovative processes such as substitution, addition, and deletion of some words and phrase as well as the addition of inflectional morpheme to some lexemes in order to indigenize and domesticate the SBE idiomatic expressions. There is a marked tendency for them to reshape these expressions so that they can really suit their intention and context of situation. For instance, the idiomatic expressions *I don't want anybody to drag my name in the mud* (For SBE 'through the mire'); *You cannot bite the finger that feeds you* (For SBE 'the hand'); *You can't eat your cake and have it* (for SBE 'You can't have your cake and eat it', i.e., You can't have things both ways); *Birds of the same feathers flock together* (for SBE 'a feather', i.e., people with similar interest will stick together); give a local coloration to the idioms. In addition, the expressions *John was caught 'right-handed' when he was falsifying the information*; *We will go for sight-seeing tomorrow, 'come rain or sun*; *I would like you to do the best 'to wash your hands off the scandal'*; are as a result of the users' fervent strive to tie the wordings of

idioms to their meanings. These features identify them in their area of usage. Consequently, they portray that, every New English context has its rule of constructing and using English idiomatic expressions as they experience influence from socio-cultural forces.

This study enriches variation in new English, especially in the case of Cameroon English. The respondents process the structural paradigm in such a way that a novelty in structural composition is orchestrated and normalized within their linguistic context. They have discarded the SBE idioms syntactic composition and structural paradigm and have come up with a quasi-syntactic structure and composition that gives them an identity. This serves as a window in the creation of a distinct discourse of the English spoken in Cameroon.

The findings of this study are in line with those of the previous studies in the sense that, the learners do not employ a single strategy when they encounter a new idiomatic expression. They seem to apply a heuristic model in the subversion and appropriation of the English language. They freely deploy different linguistic strategies to indigenize and domesticate the borrowed medium they employ. Their usage ties with Achebe's (1963, p. 348) claim that "I have been given the language (English) and I intend to stretch it to accommodate my African thoughts". In this way, non-native users of English in Cameroon subvert, appropriate, and decolonize the language to express their African experiences and worldviews.

Furthermore, it can also be postulated that, the slight modifications of SBE idiomatic expressions in this non-native circle can be attributed to the insufficient exposure of these non-natives to the "exonormative models" (Kachru, 1986, p. 21). Many idioms use metaphors or comparisons to make simple ideas more vivid. For instance, to say "*You are*

making a mountain out of a molehill" is a more interesting way of saying "You are exaggerating". In the same way, "*Let's take the bull by the horns*" is a more vivid way of saying "Let's face this problem". These are static expressions which function as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be transparently worked out from the meaning of its constituent words as a result of their figurative and unpredictable nature. Even if you know the meanings of all the words in the phrase "*Let the cat out of the bag*", you cannot guess the idiomatic meaning of the whole expression. The meaning of such an expression (i.e., "to reveal something publicly which is supposed to be a secret") must only be learnt separately. As a result of this, Ghazala (2003) opines that:

> Idioms are all in all metaphorical and cannot be understood directly; they should not be taken literally in the sense that their meanings are not the outcome of the individual meanings of their constituent words taken collectively. Their syntactic form is actually fixed and cannot be changed or described. (p. 204)

This stipulation clearly points out that, the syntactic form and composition of an idiom is fixed and cannot be changed. In this regard, the mastery of the lexical and structural paradigm of idioms is primordial in language acquisition in order to maintain its figurative and unpredictable nature. This breeds successful communication in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This argument is supported by the fact that, idioms add grace and exactness to the language, while at the same time, help the learners of the language to achieve fluency and communicative competence. For instance, if someone does not want to say where he got some information, he can say explicitly that "*a little bird told him*". Also, if someone is in a dilemma, we could say explicitly that he is caught "*between the devil and the deep blue sea*". With regard to this,

researchers such as Yorio (1989) and Ellis (1997) hold that, adequate knowledge and appropriate use of idioms in an L2 are important indicators of L2 communicative competence.

As an addendum to the foregoing discussion, it is healthy to point out that, idioms are usually derived from the social history of the language community and they offer a good guide to the cultural concerns of that society. This is evidenced by the fact that conventions differ across cultures; so, straightforward images in one culture do not need to be self-evident in another.

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