

## **Neoculturalism in Language Teaching in Cameroon: The Insinuations of the Teaching of Chinese to Student-Teachers in the Higher Teachers' Training College of the University of Maroua**

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the neoculture in language teaching in Cameroon through the implementation of the teaching of Chinese as a compulsory subject to some departments in the Higher Teachers' Training College (ENS) Maroua . It therefore examines the insinuation of the teaching of Chinese as a compulsory subject to student-teachers in the target school at the official, ethnolinguistic/ethnocultural and professional domains. The target populations are student-teachers who are not of the Chinese Department learning Chinese as a compulsory subject in the target institution. To be more specific, the target population is made up of Cameroonian student-teachers studying in the target school from the Departments of Bilingual Studies, French and Computer Sciences. An active observation of the teaching/learning process of the target classes and an interview of some learners involved are put to good use. Findings reveal that, neoculturalism through the teaching of Chinese has far reaching repercussion at the official, ethnolinguistic/ethnocultural and the professional cultural domains of the student-teachers.

**Keywords:** Neoculturalism, language teaching in Cameroon, insinuations, Chinese, student-teachers

**Introduction:** The jubilation by Cameroonians of more employment opportunities in 2009 following the creation of the department of Chinese in the Higher Teachers' Training College Maroua suddenly disappeared when one begins to ponder on the long term implication of this neoculturalism in language teaching accepted by the target school at various levels. This neoculturalism has not only limited itself to students admitted to be trained as Chinese teachers in Cameroon. The practice has extended its branches to other departments in the institution where some students are forced to study the Chinese language as a compulsory transversal language alongside English and French. This situation further complicates the language contact situation in Cameroon as the official languages are put side by side with Chinese, a foreign language as compulsory subjects. This paper investigates the neoculture in language teaching in Cameroon through the implementation of the teaching of Chinese as a compulsory subject to some student-teachers in the Higher Teachers' Training College, Maroua. It therefore examines the implication of the teaching of Chinese as a compulsory subject to

student-teachers in the target school at the official, ethnolinguistic/ethnocultural and professional domains of Cameroon. The target populations are students learning Chinese in the target institution. The students population is made up of Cameroonians students studying in the target school from the departments of the Bilingual Studies, French, and Computer Sciences. An active observation of the teaching/learning process of the target classes and an interview of some learners involved are put to good use. To better situate this study, it is vital to look at the linguistic contact situation in Cameroon, Language Teaching in the Higher Teachers' Training Colleges in Cameroon and what the researcher consider as neoculturalism in language teaching in Cameroon.

**1. Linguistic Contact Situation in Cameroon:** There exist a mutiplicity of language contact situation in Cameroon. Cameroon is situated in one of the most complex multilingual area in Africa which experience the enriching effects of interference and contact from its neighbours. Cameroon is found in the Central African region. It shares borders with four French-speaking countries namely Chad, Congo, Central African Republic and Gabon. It equally shares neighbourhood with a giant English-speaking country, Nigeria and one Spanish-speaking country Equatorial Guinea. Cameroon has a plural linguistic contact situation wherein English comes in contact with French at the official level, followed by Pidgin English – the most widely spoken lingua-franca which comes in contact with the two official languages and local languages at the social domain. Then, Franglais – a product of language contact in Cameroon and a hybrid created by contact between English and French. There also exists a multiplicity of ethnic languages in Cameroon which are in constant contact with other native languages. The number of local languages in Cameroon are too many to the extent that it is actually difficult to be certain about the exact number. The most recent research on the number of local languages in Cameroon is that given by and SIL (2005) and Lewis (2005). According to SIL cited by Ubanako (2007), Cameroon has over 279 home languages meanwhile Lewis holds that Cameroon has 285 languages. Cameroon also has many vehicular languages which come in contact and co-exist in the same speech community with the ethnic languages on the one hand and official languages on the other side.

The complex language contact situation in Cameroon also extends to the contact situation between the official/local languages and the foreiegn languages taught to Cameroonians like Spanish, German, Italian, Arabic and the most recent Chinese.

**1.1. Language Teaching in the Higher Teachers' Training Colleges in Cameroon:** With regards to language teaching, English and French are taught as official languages and as compulsory subjects to all Cameroonians at all the levels of Education but for the Anglophone subsystem, where French and English are optional subjects in the High School. Also of recent, some local languages are taught and promoted in education at the primary and the higher education circles. Contrary to the official languages, these local languages are not compulsory subjects no

wonder in some universities, there exist no department of African languages. In addition to the above, Cameroonian students are taught some foreign languages stated in the previous part of this paper.

As professionalization is concerned, teachers in Higher Teachers Training Colleges are trained to teach mostly official languages and some foreign languages. While in ENS Yaounde, teachers are trained to teach the above languages including some African languages, in the others: ENS Bambili and Maroua, there exist no Department of African languages. In our target school, ENS Maroua, student-teachers are trained to teach English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Arabic and the most recent Chinese. While in some state owned professional schools students are trained to teach the two official languages and some local languages, in others more attention is given to the official languages and foreign languages.

**1.2. Neoculturalism in language teaching in Cameroon:** One cannot define neoculturalism without looking at the meaning of the root word-culture as used in this paper. Culture is the way of life of a people, their conception of life or their customs. Culture might be official, professional or ethnic conception of a people. Culture classified by Tseng (2002) in terms of the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language can be individual, social or target. Talking about individual culture, one can say that, each individual community has a culture developed from a personal history and conception of the world while social culture composed of histories of others, be it individual or community and their conception of the outside world which is that of other people and their environment. Target culture on its part is the culture of the second/foreign language being learned which is Chinese. As regards the teaching of Chinese to students studying in ENS Maroua, the official culture of the learners is that of English and French, the professional culture is that of pedagogy and the ethnic culture is their local cultures. Peirce (1992) contends that, each individual will always create his/her own unique meaning based on their different cultural experiences. Neoculturalism as used in this paper simply means the acceptance by the state for student-teachers to be taught a new foreign language in a professional state-owned higher institute of learning. Since language is culture, then teaching/learning a new foreign language is thus learning a new culture. This idea is strongly supported by Cam Alptekin (2002) who contends that: learning a foreign language becomes a kind of enculturation where one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers. Before the creation of the University of Maroua (UMa), the language departments that existed in the lone ENS (Yaounde) were: English and French as official language Departments, whereas, Department of national languages including Spanish, German, Italian and Arabic existed as foreign language departments. In ENS Yaounde, only English and French were compulsory transversal courses which are taught to all the students as a Bilingual Training course to promote the official linguistic policy of the state. No foreign language was taught as a compulsory subject. It was

limited to only students who are admitted to be trained as teachers of these languages. Contrary to the above culture, the creation of ENS Maroua saw the birth of a new culture in the language teaching profession in Cameroon which the researcher considers as neoculturalism.

In 2010, the Department of Chinese was created in ENS Maroua wherein Cameroonian students were admitted to be trained as Chinese teachers. This neoculturalism has not only limited itself to students admitted to be trained as Chinese teachers in Cameroon. The practice has extended its tentacles to other departments in the institution where students are forced to study the Chinese language as a compulsory transversal language alongside English and French (for the purpose of bilingual training). In ENS Maroua, Chinese has been instituted as a compulsory transversal course taught to student-teachers of the following Departments: the Department of Bilingual Studies, English, French, Foreign Languages and Computer Sciences and more especially to all the levels one and four students. The teaching of Chinese to student-teachers in the Higher Teachers' Training College of Maroua has its implications at different cultural domains which will be the focus of the subsequent section.

**2. The insinuations of the teaching of Chinese to student- teachers in the Higher Teachers' Training College of Maroua:** The aftermath of the teaching of Chinese as a compulsory subject to student-teachers in the target school can be reflected at various cultural sphere in the country. In this section of this paper, we will centre our examination on the official, ethnical and professional cultural implication of what the researcher considers as neoculturalism in language teaching in Cameroon.

**2.1. Official cultural repercussions:** Neoculturalism as explained earlier has its repercussions on the official cultural domain of the state. Some of the official cultural implications are: Language conflict as an official transversal course and Language conflict in usage at the official milieu.

**2.1.1. Language conflict as an official transversal course:** The fact that Chinese is instituted as a compulsory transversal course in ENS Maroua insinuates that: Chinese, a foreign language will be competing with English and French as transversal language. It equally implies that, Chinese ( a foreign language) is rated higher than the national languages because so far, there is no higher institution of learning where a local or even a vehicular language is imposed as a compulsory course. Such a practice is amazing and it has made the researcher to question whether the language policy makers took time to ponder before allowing such practice to go on at a time when alot of debate is going on about the promotion of our local languages which are gradually disappearing. This situation makes one to ponder whether the language policy makers have sold their consciences to the extent of promoting and embracing a foreign language and culture at the expense of our local languages and cultures.

**2.1.2. Language conflict in context of usage at the official melieu** According to Giles, H et al (ed) (1977) and Giles and coumpland (1991), when languages are in a contact situation, there are bound to be

consequences in inter group relationship and conflict in context of usage. Language conflict in context of usage at the official setting is a consequence of neoculturalism in language teaching in Cameroon. Instead of the use of the official languages in all ceremonies organised under the canopy of ENS Maroua, Chinese is used in official ceremonies organised by the Chinese teachers and students of the target school and authorities of the Confucius institute in Maroua. This conflict can equally give rise to domain allocation of language usage. The big question pertaining to domain allocation of usage is: which language is supposed to be used in official ceremonies in the target state-owned institution and in which context or situation? Thus, one can say that, Chinese is not only competing with the official languages in the teaching field, it is eating dipper into official settings. The teaching of Chinese to students in ENS Maroua also has ethno-cultural allegations.

**2.2. Ethno-cultural repercussions:** The positive ethnocultural implication of the teaching of Chinese to Cameroonians student-teachers will normally give room to the integration of indigenous artefacts and cultural components in teaching. This assertion is supported by many researchers. Sociolinguistic theories such as that of Swain and Canale as cited by Omaggio (1986:7) and that of Anderson, Sapiro and Montague (1977) cited by Tseng (2002) have underscored the importance of integrating multicultural in Foreign Language learning. According to the Schema learning theory and the cultivation theory, success in language learning is conditioned upon the acquisition of cultural knowledge: language learners acquire cultural background knowledge in order to communicate, and to increase their comprehension in the target language (op. cit). According to Susan C, and Uzarski J (2009), integrating indigenous culture in teaching a multicultural class not only educate learners about indigenous people in their own country and throughout the world; it also make learning a foreign language relevant for indigenous students in mixed cultural classrooms. Cam Alptekin (2002) also holds that, integrating indigenous culture in foreign language learning offers a multidimensional perspective or experience for the learners as it gives learners experience of another language, a different way of coping with reality and enables learners to use the foreign language as it is used by the native speakers. Contrary to the above views of teaching in a multicultural setting, the teaching of Chinese to student-teachers in the target school rather produces ethnocultural shift, ethnolinguistic identity admixture, nonce borrowing and death.

**2.2.1. Ethnocultural shift:** Giles, H et al (1977) hold that, when languages are in a contact situation, there are bound to be consequences at the levels ethnicity and inter group relationship. Ethnocultural shift which is a subpart of ethnicity and inter group relationship is one of the insinuations of the teaching of Chinese as a compulsory subject to our target population. This is a situation in which a foreign language teacher fails to integrate the indigenous culture of the learners and thus concentrates only on the target culture of the language under study. The Chinese teacher lacks the knowledge of the local culture of the learners.

The implication of this attitude is cultural shift. When the Chinese teacher is teaching, she does not make reference to the local cultures of the students. She limits her examples to that of the target culture. This means that the students shift from their social and local culture to that of Chinese. This is visible as the learners are given Chinese names different from their ethnic cultural names which they use during their Chinese classes with their Chinese teacher. These Chinese names are not only used during classes. They are also used out of class with other students learning the Chinese language and when ever they meet their teacher. It is equally used during official ceremonies organised by the Confucius institute. During her teaching, she teaches only the target culture through Chinese songs, names, dressing, folklore and films. Thus, one of the ethnocultural allegation of the teaching of the target language to Cameroonians is the shift from local and official cultures to the target culture during classes. This can be described as a kind of mental colonialism, assimilation, neocolonialism or neoculturalism which Africans should frown at rather than smile at.

**2.2.2. Ethnolinguistic identity/Chinese admixture:** This is another implication of the teaching of Chinese to Cameroonians. Widdowson (1998) holds that: when teaching a foreign language, instructional materials and activities should have suitable discourse samples pertaining to native well as non native speakers interactions cited by Cam Alptekin (2002). Such a practice leads to linguistic admixture. Ethnolinguistic admixture simply means that within a long period of time, Chinese is going to interfere in the official, vehicular and local languages in Cameroon. If linguistic shift continue for a long time, learners will start mixing Chinese in their official, vehicular and local languages. This admixture is going to affect area in which the target linguistic culture is distant from the local ones such as the areas of pronunciation and writing where these languages are distinct.

The pronunciation of Chinese is very distant from the pronunciation of the Cameroonian languages. This is because there are many words that are orthographically similar but differs in pronunciation and meaning which create confusion and frustration in the learners' attempt to use the language. If one looks at greeting in Chinese, it will be seen that, good morning (Li Dà ' àn), good afternoon (Li Dà ' àn), good evening (Li Dà ' àn) and good night (Li Dà ' àn) are written almost the same. This and others are the areas in which Cameroonian languages can encounter negative tranfer from Chinese.

Just like the pronunciation, the Chinese writing is also divergent from that of Cameroonian languages not leaving out English and French. Drawing instead of writing. For examples if you look at the way the Chinese draw the months of the year, the days of the week and numbers, one will see that it contrast sharply with what operates in the official linguistic culture of the learners. While in English and French, words are written using letters, in Chinese, words can be written and drawn. This also, is a possible area of inteference and thus the implication of the teaching of Chinese to Cameroonians.

**2.2.3. Nonce borrowing:** Nonce borrowing is also an ethnolinguistic consequence of the teaching of Chinese to the target population. This is a term first used by Weinreich (1968:47). It is a situation in which second language learners start including second language lexical items in their conversation with fellow bilinguals in their original first language. In the target school, such situation is occurring already. Students testify that they use nonce borrowing with their friends and mates when they want to hide what they are conversing from other friends, teachers and relatives. Students also said they use it when they want to hide their appointments with their lovers. For instance in making a dating programme with a female student, a male student from the Computer Sciences Department said this: “Mimi, see you at 'wùyé’” instead of: “Mimi, see you at midnight”. One can see that the student has borrowed a linguistic item from Chinese in conversing with a friend to hide their appointment from others around them thereby making use of nonce borrowing. This attitude is responsible for linguistic borrowing when it goes on for a long period of time. Thus, nonce borrowing is one of the insinuations of the teaching of Chinese as a compulsory subject to student-teachers in ENS Maroua.

**2.2.4. Ethnocultural/ethnolinguistic death:** Another ethnocultural contention of the teaching of Chinese to Cameroonians is that it can lead to the death of the ethnic culture. Ethnocultural/ethnolinguistic death is the direct consequence of ethnocultural shift. If the practice of giving Chinese names to Cameroonian students continue for a very long period of time, some Cameroonians will gradually abandon and forget their local cultural names thereby maintaining the Chinese names. This palpable situation of cultural shift and can lead to ethnocultural death or lost of identity if such a practice continues for a very long time. While looking at the situation of Cameroon native languages, Lewis (2005) holds that, there exist four extinct and eleven nearly extinct languages in Cameroon. The teaching of Chinese as a compulsory subject to some students in the target institution can be compared to adding fuel to an existing flame that will promote further linguistic and cultural loss.

**2.3. Professional cultural repercussions:** Professional cultural repercussions are the aftermaths of the teaching of Chinese as a compulsory subject to student-teachers of some Departments in ENS Maroua that affects the professional input and language needs of the trainees. It has to do with professional language need digression and input extension.

**2.3.1. Professional language need digression:** Another professional cultural implication of the teaching of Chinese as a compulsory language to student-teachers of ENS Maroua is professional language need digression. This is a situation in which student-teachers are taught a language that do not have a direct bearing with their prospective profession. That is, student-teachers of other Departments who should concentrate on mastering their official languages which are the languages of instruction in their professional world to be, are distracted with a new foreign language which does not satisfy the

immediate professional linguistic need of the learners.

**2.3.2. Professional input extension:** Professional input extension is also another implication of the teaching of Chinese to student-teachers of other departments as a compulsory subject in ENS Maroua. It simply mean that, the input that student-teachers are expected to acquire is added. It is surprising that a teachers' training school where learners abroad are being trained on how to teach, in Cameroon, trainees are being taught the subject to teach, the media of instruction to use and to make matters worst, a foreign language which has no bearing to their profession to be. Looking at the input of the target students, one can see that their input is extended leaving the trainees with limited time to concentrate on their pedagogic courses. This burning worry makes one to ponder if such a practice in a state-owned professional school is an indicator of lack of planning by the educational authorities to reflect the wants of student-teachers in the said institution.

A possible reason for accepting such a linguistic practise might be due to the fact that the Chinese are carrying many infrastructural constructions in the country and they are willing to do more profiting business with Cameroon. Looking at the situation, it is palpable that, the Chinese are not coming to Cameroon because they love Cameroon. They are rather coming to Africa as a whole to sell their culture in exchange for their services offered to African. One wonders if such reasons are worth pushing the ethnolinguistic culture of a state to the periphery while bringing to the centre a foreign culture. Besides, is the above reason worth the payment of the trained Chinese teachers who will not have schools to teach Chinese and who will go on retirement at the ages of sixty? Or is this also insinuating that the state will institute the teaching of Chinese at the basic and the secondary education levels before our home languages? Of recent, there was a programme on the Cameroonian National Radio Station where graduates from the Chinese department of ENS Maroua posted to the North West Region of the country were interviewed about the teaching of Chinese in secondary schools where they are posted. Thanks to this programme listeners were made to know that the teaching of Chinese is eating deeper into the educational circle since the language is taught to some secondary school students in Bamenda while the local languages are left with no fate at this level.

**Conclusion:** The insinuation of the teaching of Chinese as a compulsory subject to student-teachers in ENS Maroua affects the official, ethnolinguistic and professional cultures of the learners in particular and thus, the culture of the country as a whole. While at the official level, it has paved the way to language conflict at the level of teaching and usage, at the ethnolinguistic/ethnocultural sphere it has caused: ethnocultural shift, ethnolinguistic/Chinese identity admixture, nonce borrowing and death. At the professional cultural level, it has given way for professional linguistic cultural digression and professional input extension. This neoculturalism has provided a propitious situation for language contact with several repercussions as shown above.

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