

A Study of Vowel Nasalization and Vowel Epenthesis Processes in Cameroon Francophone English

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ABSTRACT

Unlike Cameroon English and Received Pronunciation, Cameroon Francophone English has a number of nasal and epenthetic vowels. Those nasal vowels are generally French ones, as Cameroon Francophone English is heavily influenced by that language. The epenthetic vowels found in Cameroon Francophone English as in many other non-native Englishes are difficult to explain. Part of the data analysed is drawn from past studies (Safotso 2001, 2006, 2012 & 2015; Kouega 2008). This is complemented by the oral reading of some test words by French-speaking Cameroonian undergraduate/postgraduate students and some speech gathered from debates and interventions on various national TV channels and radio stations. Results show that in Cameroon Francophone English, vowel nasalization and vowel epenthesis occur in specific positions. This paper attempts to show how they operate in that variety of English.

Key words: Vowel, Nasalization, Epenthesis, Cameroon Francophone English, Processes, Variety

INTRODUCTION

In the growing world of New Englishes many studies generally limit themselves to segmental analysis (Hung 2000; Gargesh 2004; Gut 2007). Indeed, unlike other levels of analysis such as that of rhythm, intonation, grammar or vocabulary, the study of the consonants and vowels of any language is quite easy. Yet, at supra-segmental level, many languages reveal very interesting features that can be analysed for a better understanding of their functioning. Unfortunately, in the literature, there are for example very few studies on the rhythm and intonation of non-native Englishes (Diez 2005; Vicenk & Sundara 2013; Fuchs 2016). Those features are, however, some of their salient characteristics. The segmental analysis of any non-native variety of English just has to be the foundation for its in-depth investigation. Early studies (Kouega 2008; Safotso 2001 & 2015) on CamFE (Cameroon Francophone English) revealed that vowel nasalization and vowel epenthesis are some of its striking supra-segmental features. Those two features which hamper its intelligibility to native speakers and speakers of other New Englishes, and which are so stable, are a problem which necessitates an in-depth investigation. A close analysis of that phenomenon would better through some light on its functioning. This study therefore aims to look into the vowel nasalization and vowel epenthesis processes in Cameroon Francophone English, which are two aspects of that variety of English so far not fully explored.

REVIEW OF SOME LITERATURE ON CAMEROON FRANCOPHONE ENGLISH

Spoken by French-speaking Cameroonians, who for some two decades now have drastically changed their attitude toward English, CamFE (Cameroon Francophone English) has its stable phonological features which differentiate it from RP (Received Pronunciation), CamE (Cameroon English) and other New Englishes. Some features of CamFE have been studied by Safotso (2001, 2006, 2012 & 2015) and Kouega (2008), and clearly show that it is a new variety of English in its own right. Other works on different aspects of this variety of English include Simo Bobda (2013), Atechi (2015) and Safotso (2016). Those studies respectively discuss the emergence and the standardisation of CamFE, its implication on the future of English in Cameroon, and its atypical evolution with regard to existing models. Simo Bobda remarks that, having been long denied status as a legitimate accent of English in Cameroon by scholars, CamFE pronunciation is fast emerging onto the officially English-French bilingual landscape. Its accent is introduced into the classroom by the very teachers produced in highly rated teacher training institutions (Simo Bobda 2013: 289). Atechi (2015: 25) notes that there is now a large number of CamFE speakers teaching English both as a second and a foreign language in secondary schools and at tertiary level across the country, which contributes in spreading its accent to all the corners of Cameroon. As to which variety between Cameroon Francophone English and Cameroon English will influence the other or take the lead in future, Atechi remains very cautious, because of the complex linguistic landscape of Cameroon and the changes that are taking place in it. Safotso (2016) studied the evolution process of CamFE to show that it is an atypical example to Moag's (1992) and Schneider's (2003, 2007 & 2009) models. All the studies reviewed above testify to the dynamism of CamFE in Cameroon. Section 2 below looks at the method of data collection.

METHODOLOGY

The data analysed partly come from past studies (Safotso 2001, 2006, 2012, 2015; Kouega 2008) and from the oral reading of some test words by some French-speaking undergraduate/ postgraduate students of the

Departments of English and Bilingual studies of the University of Maroua (N=40). The Test words for vowel nasalization consisted in a corpus of 80 words containing the sequences –imp, -imp, -emb, -emp, -ent,-enk, etc. for /*ɛ̃*/; -ant, -ang, -enc, -env, etc. for /*ɑ̃*/, and -on, -ond, -ount, -ound, etc. for /*ɔ̃*/. The test words for vowel epenthesis were made up of 35 words containing the sequences –vel, -nel, -ble, -dle, etc. for /*ɛ*/; -ple, -ble, -gle for /*ɔ*/, and –se, -s (in medial and final positions) for /*ə*/. This was complemented by some free speech gathered on university campus and from debates and interventions of French-speaking leaders and politicians on various TV channels and radio stations around Cameroon. The section which follows examines how vowel nasalization functions in CamFE.

VOWEL NASALIZATION PROCESSES IN CAMEROON FRANCOPHONE ENGLISH

CamFE has 12 monophthongs like RP, but with a number of different segments. Cameroon English has only eight (see Safotso 2015:448). These are CamFE monophthongs: /*i*, *ɛ*, *ɛ̃*, *e*, *a*, *ɑ̃*, *ɔ*, *ɔ̃*, *u*, *y*, *ə*/. They comprise the nasal vowels /*ɛ̃*, *ɑ̃*, *ɔ̃*/ which are not attested in RP (Received Pronunciation) but in French. This feature of CamFE is quite stable, and has been identified by a number of previous studies (Safotso 2001, 2006, 2012, 2015; Kouega 2008). Those studies mostly identified the feature without getting into an in-depth analysis of its working processes. Kouega (2008: 116) notes that /*ɛ̃*/ tends to occur where RP /*ɪn*/ is expected; /*ɑ̃*/ is heard where /*ɛn*/ is expected, usually where the letters ‘en’ are present, and /*ɔ̃*/ tends to occur where the sequence ‘on’ or ‘oun’ is present. This is a simplistic way of viewing the complex phenomena that the nasalization of /*ɛ*, *ɑ*, *ɔ*/ in CamFE entails. CamFE speakers nasalize /*ɛ*/ in many contexts as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Contexts where /*ɛ̃*/ occurs in CamFE

Example word	Portion spelling	CamFE form	RP form
<u>Import</u>	IMP	ɛ̃pɔt	ɪmpɔ:t
<u>Impulsively</u>	IMP	ɛ̃pylsivli	ɪmpʌlsɪvli
<u>Imbecile</u>	IMB	ɛ̃besil	ɪmbɪsɪ:l
<u>Employer</u>	EMP	ɛ̃plɔe	ɪmplɔɪə
<u>Emperor</u>	EMP	ɛ̃perɔ	ɪmpəreɔ
<u>Embrace</u>	EMB	ɛ̃bres	ɪmbreɪs
<u>Embassy</u>	EMB	ɛ̃basi	ɪmbəsi
<u>Entrance</u>	ENT	ɛ̃trɑs	ɪntrɑns
<u>frequently</u>	ENT	frɛkwɛ̃li	frɪkwənli
<u>Encouraged</u>	ENK	ɛ̃kureʒ	ɪnkʌrɪdʒd
<u>Encounter</u>	ENK	ɛ̃kɔtə	ɪnkaʊntə
<u>Expensive</u>	ENS	ɛ̃kspɛ̃sɪv	ɪkspensɪv
<u>providence</u>	ENS	prɔvdɛ̃s	prɔvɪdəns
<u>Envelope</u>	ENV	ɛ̃vɔləp	ɪnvələʊp
<u>Environment</u>	ENV	ɛ̃varɔ̃mɛ̃	ɪnvairənmənt
<u>Enlarge</u>	ENL	ɛ̃lɑʒ	ɪnlɑ:dʒ
<u>Enlist</u>	ENL	ɛ̃lɪst	ɪnlɪst
<u>Enrich</u>	ENR	ɛ̃rɪʃ	ɪnrɪtʃ
<u>Enrol</u>	ENR	ɛ̃rɔl	ɪnrəʊl
<u>Province</u>	INS	prɔvɛ̃s	prɔvɪns
<u>Instance</u>	INS	ɛ̃stɑs	ɪnstəns
<u>provincial</u>	INC	prɔvɛ̃ʃəl	prɔvɪnʃəl
<u>Incident</u>	INC	ɛ̃sɪdɛ̃	ɪnsɪdənt

<u>I</u> nferior	INF	ẽferiɔ	ɪnfɪəriə
<u>I</u> nfection	INF	ẽfekʃɔ	ɪnfekʃən
<u>I</u> nterest	INT	ẽtres	ɪntrɪst
<u>i</u> nfact	INT	ẽtak	ɪntækt

Table 1 shows that /ẽ/ occurs in many contexts in CamFE. Kouega (2008 :116) remarks that it occurs where RP /ɪn/ is expected. This can be verified in many words, e.g. *instance*, *inferior*, *enlist* [ẽstās, ẽferiɔ, ẽlist] for RP [ɪnstəns, ɪnfɪəriə, ɪnlist]. There are many other contexts where / ẽ / occurs in CamFE. It replaces RP /ɛn/, /ɪm/, /ɛm/, /əɪn/, e.g. *expensive*, *envelope*, *import*, *imbecile*, *emperor*, *frequently*, *providence*

[ɛkspɛnsɪv, ɛvələp, ẽpɔt, ẽbesɪl, ẽperɔ, frɛkwɛli, prɔvidɛs] for RP [ɪkspɛnsɪv, ɛnvələp, ɪmpɔ:t, ɪmbɪsɪ:l, ɪmpərə, frɪkwɒnli, prɒvɪdəns]. In spelling, there are also many contexts where / ẽ / happens in CamFE. It generally occurs when the portion of the word is spelt with ‘-imp-, - imb-, -emp-, - emb-, -ent-, -enk-, -ens-, -env-, -enl-, -enr-, -ins-, -inc-, -inf-, -int-’, as highlighted in the table above. It can also be remarked that in most words, this takes place in initial position. Table 2 lists the contexts where / ẽ / occurs in CamFE.

Table 2. Contexts where /ẽ/ occurs in CamFE

Example word	Portion spelling	CamFE form	RP form
<u>T</u> yrant	ANT	tɪrā	taɪərənt
<u>I</u> mportant	ANT	ɛpɔtā	ɪmpɔ:tənt
<u>M</u> angoes	ANG	māgo	mæŋgəʊz
<u>G</u> anglion	ANG	gāgliɔ	gæŋglɪən
<u>M</u> andate	AND	mādet	mændət
<u>L</u> anding	AND	lādin	lændɪŋ
<u>D</u> ifference	ENC	dɪfərās	dɪfərəns
<u>E</u> minence	ENC	emɪnās	emɪnəns
<u>R</u> elentlessly	ENT	relālesli	rɪləntlɪsli
<u>P</u> entecostal	ENT	pātekostral	pɛntɪkɔstl
<u>H</u> enry	ENR	āri	hɛnrɪ
<u>E</u> nrage	ENR	āraʒ	ɪnrɛɪʒ
<u>E</u> nvoy	ENV	āvɔi	ɛnvɔɪ

As with /ẽ/, in CamFE, there are many contexts where /ā/ is heard. It generally occurs as a substitute for RP /əɪn/, /æŋ/, /æɪn/, /ɛn/, /ɪn/, e.g. *tyrant*, *important* [tɪrā, ɛpɔtā] for RP [taɪərənt, ɪmpɔ:tənt]; *bank*, *mangoes* [bāk, māgo] for RP [bæŋk, mæŋgəʊz]; *landing*, *mandate* [lādin, mādet] for RP [lændɪŋ, lændɪŋ]; *Henry* [āri] for RP [hɛnrɪ]; *encourage*, *enrage* [ākuraʒ, āraʒ] for RP [ɪnkrəɪʒ, ɪnrɛɪʒ]. In spelling, the concerned portions generally are ‘-ant-, -ang-, -and-, -enc-, -ent-, -enr-, -env-, -enk-’. It should be noted that for certain words, the choice of the realisation of the portion is between /ẽ/ and /ā/, especially when it is spelt with ‘EN’ or ‘AN’, e.g. *encourage*, *instance* [ɛkureʒ / ākuraʒ, ẽstɛs / ẽstās]. This is certainly due to French, which is the cause of the nasalization of the half-open front vowel /ɛ/ here. Indeed, in French, depending on the word, ‘EN’ and ‘AN’ are either pronounced /ẽ/ or /ā/, e.g. *pendant* [pādā (during), viens [viẽ] (come), *criant* [kriā] (crying), *chien* [ʃiẽ] (dog). Table 3 illustrates the nasalization processes of /ɔ/ in CamFE.

Table 3. Contexts where /ɔ/ occurs in CamFE

Example word	Portion spelling	CamFE version	RP version
<u>C</u> ontribution	ONT	kɔtribɔʃɔ	kəntrɪbjʊ:ʃən
<u>C</u> ontrol	ONT	kɔtrɔl	kəntrɔl
<u>C</u> ountry	OUNT	kɔtri	kʌnrɪ
<u>C</u> ounting	OUNT	kɔtin	kaʊntɪŋ
<u>B</u> oundary	OUND	bɔdari	baʊndəri
<u>P</u> ounded	OUND	pɔdɛd	pʌʊndɪd

<u>Conclusion</u>	ONC	kɔ̃klyʒɔ̃	kɔ̃nklɔ̃:ʒɔ̃n
<u>Concrete</u>	ONC	kɔ̃kɾit	kɔ̃nkrɾit
<u>Monday</u>	OND	mɔ̃de	mɔ̃ndɔ̃
<u>Condom</u>	OND	kɔ̃dɔ̃m	kɔ̃ndɔ̃m
<u>Construct</u>	ONS	kɔ̃strɔ̃k	kɔ̃nstrɔ̃kt
<u>Demonstrate</u>	ONS	dɛmɔ̃nstret	dɛmɔ̃nstret
<u>Convoy</u>	ONV	kɔ̃vɔ̃i	kɔ̃nvɔ̃i
<u>Conversion</u>	ONV	kɔ̃vɛʃɔ̃	kɔ̃nvɛ:ʃɔ̃n
<u>Son</u>	ON	sɔ̃	sɔ̃n
<u>Electron</u>	ON	elɛktrɔ̃	ɪlɛktrɔ̃n
<u>Long</u>	ONG	lɔ̃	lɔ̃ŋ
<u>Gong</u>	ONG	gɔ̃	gɔ̃ŋ
<u>Conference</u>	ONF	kɔ̃fɛrɛns	kɔ̃nfɛrɛns
<u>Confuse</u>	ONF	kɔ̃fyz	kɔ̃nfju:z

Table 3 shows the various contexts where /ɔ̃/ happens in CamFE. As with /ɛ̃, ɔ̃/, there are many contexts where it occurs. It generally happens in replacement of RP /əɪn/, /ʌn/, /aʊ/, /ɒn/, /ɔŋ/, as in the following examples from the table: *control, condemn* [kɔ̃trɔ̃l, kɔ̃dɛm] for RP [kɔ̃ntrɔ̃l, kɔ̃ndɛm]; *country, Monday, son* [kɔ̃tri, mɔ̃de, sɔ̃] for RP [kɔ̃ntri, mɔ̃ndɔ̃, sɔ̃n]; *pounded, boundary* [pɔ̃dɛd, baʊndɔ̃ri]; *condom, convoy* [kɔ̃dɔ̃m, kɔ̃vɔ̃i] for RP [kɔ̃ndɔ̃m, kɔ̃nvɔ̃i]; *long, gong* [lɔ̃, gɔ̃] for RP [lɔ̃ŋ, gɔ̃ŋ]. In orthography, these are the portions concerned ‘-on-, -ont-, -ount-, -ound-, -onc-, -ond-, -ons-, -onv-, -ong-, -onf-’. As a general rule, it can be observed that –ON- and –OUN- are pronounced /ɔ̃/ in CamFE (see Safotso 2015: 384). If the pronunciation of –ON- as /ɔ̃/ can be attributed to French, that of –OUN- has no explanation, as such combination does not exist in that language. The next section analyses the vowel epenthesis processes.

VOWEL EPENTHESIS PROCESSES IN CAMEROON FRANCOPHONE ENGLISH

In RP, Roach (1991: 79-83) mentions /l, n, m, ŋ, r / as syllabic consonants. A syllabic consonant is one which stands at the centre of the syllable in the absence of a vowel element as in *pedal, sadden, history* [pɛdɫ, sædŋ, hɪstɹɪ]. In non-native Englishes, the epenthesized vowel is generally inserted before those consonants. Simo Bobda (1994: 25-28) reviewed a number of New Englishes in which this phenomenon occurs. They include Indian English (Platt et al. 1984), Malaysian English (Wong 1982), East African English (Hancock 1984), West African English (Todd 1984), South Asian English (Kachru 1984 & 1986). For Example, in Indian English, *glass* and *play* are pronounced [gɔ̃las, pɔ̃lai] for RP [glɑ:s, pleɪ] (Platt et al. 1984: 43); in South Asian English, *school* and *station* are pronounced [ɪskul, ɪstɛʃɔ̃n] for RP [sku:l, steɪʃən]. Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7 show some contexts where vowel epenthesis occurs in CamFE.

Table 4. Contexts where /ɛ/ occurs as epenthetic vowel in CamFE

Example word	Portion spelling	CamFE version	RP version
<u>Travel</u>	VEL	trɛvɛl	trævɛl / trævəl
<u>Colonel</u>	NEL	kolɔ̃nɛl	kɔ̃:nl / kɔ̃:nəl
<u>Novel</u>	VEL	novɛl	nɔ̃vl / nɔ̃vəl
<u>Camel</u>	MEL	kɔ̃mɛl	kæml / kæməl
<u>Parcel</u>	CEL	pɔ̃sɛl	pɑ:sl / pɑ:səl
<u>Panel</u>	NEL	pɔ̃nɛl	pænɛl / pænəl
<u>Able</u>	BLE	ɛbɛl	eɪbl / eɪbəl
<u>Table</u>	BLE	tɛbɛl	teɪbl / teɪbəl
<u>Temple</u>	PLE	tɛmpɛl	tɛmpl / tɛmpəl
<u>Paddle</u>	DLE	pɔ̃dɛl	pædl / pædəl
<u>Mingle</u>	GLE	mɪŋgɛl	mɪŋgl / mɪŋgəl
<u>Ankle</u>	KLE	æ̃kɛl	æŋkl / æŋkəl
<u>Sizzle</u>	ZLE	sɪzɛl	sɪzl / sɪzəl
<u>Castle</u>	TLE	kɔ̃stɛl	kæstl / kæstəl
<u>Wednesday</u>	ES	wɛdnɛsdɛ	wɛnzdɪ

In Table 4, it can be observed that /ɛ/ generally occurs as epenthetic vowel in CamFE in the word penultimate position where RP /ə/ is optionally expected followed by /l/, as in *saddle*, *constable* [sədəl, kɔ̃stəbəl] for RP [sædl / sædəl , kənstəbl / kənstəbəl]. In connected speech, it would happen where the syllabic /l/ is expected. This feature is also observable in CamE (Cameroon English).

In orthography, the portions concerned are: ‘-vel, -nel, -mel, -cel, -ble, -ple, -dle, -gle, -kle, -zle, -tle’. The insertion of the epenthetic /ɛ/ in *Wednesday* [wɛdnəsde] for RP [wenzdɪ] follows no particular rule, and can be attributed to spelling pronunciation. Table 5 lists the contexts where /ɔ/ occurs as epenthetic vowel in CamFE.

Table 5. Contexts where /ɔ/ occurs as epenthetic vowel in CamFE

Example word	Portion spelling	CamFE version	RP version
<u>People</u>	PLE	pipɔl	pi:pəl / pi:pəl
<u>Temple</u>	PLE	tɛmpɔl	tɛmpl / tɛmpəl
<u>Table</u>	BLE	tebɔl	teɪbl / teɪbəl
<u>Able</u>	BLE	ebɔl	eɪbl / eɪbəl
<u>Needle</u>	DLE	nɪdɔl	ni:dəl / ni:dəl
<u>Cradle</u>	DLE	kredɔl	kreɪdl / kreɪdəl
<u>Pimple</u>	PLE	pɪmpɔl	pɪmpəl / pɪmpəl
<u>Mingle</u>	GLE	mɪŋgɔl	mɪŋɡl / mɪŋɡəl

As with /ɛ/ studied in Table 4, in CamFE, /ɔ/ occurs as epenthetic vowel in the word penultimate position where /ə/ is optionally expected followed by /l/. What determines the choice between /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ is hard to find. But in spelling, it can be remarked that the choice operates only when the portions concerned are ‘-ple, -ble, -gle’, e.g.

temple, *able*, *mingle* [tɛmpɔl / tɛmpəl, ebɔl / ebəl, mɪŋgɔl / mɪŋɡəl] for RP [tɛmpl / tɛmpəl, eɪbl / eɪbəl, mɪŋɡl / mɪŋɡəl]. In orthography, ‘-dle’ is another portion of the word where /ɔ/ operates as epenthetic vowel. In CamFE, /ə/ is also one of the epenthetic vowels. Some of the contexts where it takes place are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Contexts where /ə/ occurs as epenthetic vowel in CamFE

Example word	Portion spelling	CamFE version	RP version
<u>Has</u>	S	hazə	hæz
<u>Was</u>	S	wɔzə	wɒz
<u>Is</u>	S	izə	ɪz
<u>Does</u>	S	dɔzə	dʌz
<u>Summarise</u>	SE	sɔmarazə	sʌmərəɪz
<u>Sensitize</u>	ZE	sɔsɪtazə	sɛnsɪtaɪz
<u>Because</u>	SE	bɪkozə	bɪkɒz
<u>Must</u>	ST	mɔsə	mʌst
<u>Have</u>	VE	avə	hæv
<u>And</u>	D	andə	ænd
<u>But</u>	T	bɔtə	bʌt

It can be observed that /ə/ takes place as epenthetic vowel in final position of certain words. It is one of the peculiar features of CamFE. It happens where nothing is expected in RP. It can be remarked that this generally happens after /z/ in final position, e.g. *has*, *because* [haz ə, bɪkozə] for RP [hæz, bɪkɒz], but it can also be observed with other words such as *and*, *but*. Cameroon French, that the speakers of CamFE speak, is certainly the cause of this problem which is not observed in CamE.

Indeed, in Cameroon French, the letter E, which normally is silent in final position of words in native French, is articulated, e.g. *patate* (potato), *mange* (eat), *assiette* (plate) [patatə, mɑ̃zə, asietə]* for native French [patat, mɑ̃z, asiet]. So, the few cases listed above are just indicative, as the epenthetic /ə/ in final position can occur with any word in CamFE. Table 7 looks at the contexts where /ia/ operates as epenthetic vowel.

Table 7. Contexts where /ia/ occurs as epenthetic vowel in CamFE

Example word	Portion spelling	CamFE version	RP version
<u>Spatial</u>	IAL	spasial	speɪʃl / speɪʃəl
<u>Essential</u>	IAL	esɛsɪasial	ɪsɛnʃl / ɪsɛnʃəl
<u>Commercial</u>	IAL	kɔmɛsɪasial	kəmɜ:ʃl / kəmɜ:ʃəl
<u>Special</u>	IAL	spɛsɪasial	speɪʃl / speɪʃəl
<u>Credential</u>	IAL	kredɛsɪasial	kɪɪdɛnʃl / kɪɪdɛnʃəl

/ia/ is a CamFE and CamE diphthong, e.g. *Asia, India* [esia, india] for RP [eɪʃe, ɪndiə] (Safotso 2015: 449). It occurs as epenthetic vowel before the final RP / ɪ / əɪ /. This is certainly induced by spelling, as the portion concerned is -ial- as shown in the table above. This feature is not particular to CamFE, but is also present in CamE.

CONCLUSION

In short, vowel nasalization and vowel epenthesis are two of the salient features of CamFE. Their processes are quite complex. There are many contexts where they take place in that variety of English. Those contexts are consistent and predictable, and can give room for some generalisations. If the vowel nasalization can generally be attributed to French as all the vowels concerned are attested in it, the cause of the insertion of the epenthetic vowels is hard to find. Nevertheless, since the epenthetic vowels like the nasalized vowels do not occur haphazardly in CamFE, this paper has thrown some more light on the functioning of those aspects of that variety of New Englishes.

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