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Kamtok – Cameroon Pidgin

Seminar paper

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1. Introduction

1.1. Aim of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to show and introduce a variety of English known as Kamtok. The grammatical features and how and where it is used should make this variety a bit clearer and easier to comprehend.

1.2. A pidgin

Kamtok is a variety of English, to be more precise it is a pidgin. Before this variety is described in any detail, the question what actually a pidgin is must be answered.

In a newly created pidgin, the lexical source language is that of the 'dominant' group. Some define a pidgin as a communication system that develops among people who do not share a common language. In the later stages, the pidgin develops, takes in additional vocabulary, and absorbs sentence structure not just from the dominant language, but sometimes also from another language involved. When people are placed in a situation where they can no longer communicate in their native languages, and they do not have adequate access to the foreign language, they develop their own variety - they develop a pidgin. A pidgin can also become the mother tongue of a group of people, and when this happens this pidgin is called a creole. Most pidgins and creoles of the world have not yet been written down and studied, probably because of the relative newness of these languages and the fact that most of their first users were illiterate. Today, however, many educated people speak a pidgin or a creole fluently as their mother tongue or alongside their mother tongue; but because they have learnt an international standard language from which most coastal pidgins are derived, such as Dutch, English, French, Portuguese or Spanish, they can read and write these well, and they do not see the need to codify their pidgins or creoles. One of these pidgins is Kamtok, which still needs to be standardised.

1.3. Kamtok (Cameroon pidgin)

1.3.1. Background

Kamtok is the pidginised English of Cameroon. This English-related language has been a lingua franca¹ in the country since at least the 1880s. The 35-year period since 1966 has seen dramatic changes in the attitude of speakers towards the language. Speakers have always recognised the usefulness of the language but, in early writings, it was frequently referred to as "Bad English", "Broken English" and "Bush English". Today, due mainly to its extended use in Churches and on Radio and Television, it is becoming known as Kamtok from Cameroon Talk, and is taking its place as a recognised medium of interaction.

It is difficult to distinguish between a widely-used pidgin and a creole. The sociological differentiation, often cited, is that a creole is a mother tongue whereas a pidgin is not. However, this distinction is overly simplistic in West Africa where multilingualism is the norm and where the same language can, at any one time, be a mother tongue, a language of wider communication and a first, second, third, fourth or foreign language. This is the case with Kamtok. It is acquired by many in infancy at the same time as their other mother tongue(s) and spoken at a similar speed and with similar flexibility. Many, including clergymen, traders, travellers, gendarmes, soldiers and prisoners utilise it as the most viable means of communication in a country with two official languages, French and English, and a minimum of two hundred mutually unintelligible vernaculars. Other people, including immigrants and expatriates, learn it with varying degrees of proficiency and a few, albeit a diminishing number, still refuse to speak it because they believe it incapable of civilised discourse.

1.3.2. Geography

Cameroon has quite a small population (c. 15.5 million) for its size (475,440 square kilometres), but almost half of its people are under 14, so the population is likely to rise by between 2.5% and 3% per year. Cameroon has large stretches of fertile land, producing good quality cocoa, coffee, tea and bananas. It also has substantial deposits of oil and bauxite. The country shares borders with Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, and it has a 400 kilometre coastline on the Bight of Biafra. Because of its position at the "hinge of Africa" and because of its geographical and ethnic diversity, Cameroon has often been referred to as "Africa in miniature". No one is certain exactly how many languages are spoken in Cameroon but government publications suggest 200, which can be subdivided into perhaps 25

¹ A shared language of communication used between people whose main languages are different

major groups. The official languages are French and English, with Arabic also having high prestige.

Education is prized and at least 60% of the population is literate. The percentage is much higher in urban areas and lower among older rural women. All education is through the medium of either English or French and all young people are expected to be bilingual in the countries official languages. Approximately 50% of the population continues to follow their animist traditional religions, while 33% are Christian and 17% Muslim.

1.3.3. History

It is impossible to be precise about when Kamtok became established as a lingua franca in the country but a variety of it existed in Cameroon at least as far back as 1884 when the Germans annexed the country. The German administration found it necessary to permit Kamtok on the large multilingual plantations they established and a glossary of West African pidgin was published in 1908. German and later Dutch and French priests found it easier in areas such as Bamenda to use Kamtok and their use of it in liturgical contexts added to the prestige of the language.

Kamtok is spoken, in some form, by at least half of the population. There are many varieties of Kamtok including:

- **Grafi Kamtok**, the variety used in the grassfields and often referred to as 'Grafi Talk'
- **liturgical Kamtok**. This variety has been used by the Catholic church for three quarters of a century
- **francophone Kamtok**. This variety is now used mainly in towns such as Douala and Yaoundé and by francophones talking to anglophones who do not speak French
- **Limbe Kamtok**. This variety is spoken mainly in the southwest coastal area around the port that used to be called Victoria and is now Limbe.
- **Bororo Kamtok**. This variety is spoken by the Bororo cattle traders, many of whom travel through Nigeria and Cameroon.

Kamtok is more open to influence from English and French than at any time in its past and its speakers are much happier about using it than twenty years ago. It is accepted by most as a very useful language, the most useful lingua franca in the country. It will certainly continue to change but there is no evidence that it is dying out.

2. Morphology and syntax

Kamtok, the name that is used today to designate the English-based Pidgin spoken in Cameroon, is believed to have evolved as far back as the 15th century, with the arrival of the Portuguese on the West African coast.

Today, Kamtok is the major lingua franca in the country and, in terms of geographical spread, is rivaled by no other national language. In terms of number of speakers, Fulfulde, one of the Cameroonian ethnic languages, ranks first, but is localised to a particular region. Kamtok has developed its own phonological, lexical, and grammatical structures.

2.1. Sources of Kamtok lexis

2.1.1. From borrowing

Even though Kamtok is an English-based Pidgin, its lexicon has drawn from other European languages as well, notably Portuguese, Dutch, German and French. Some West African languages have contributed to Kamtok as well, including, of course, Cameroon national languages. Table 1 below gives some examples.

Table 1. Examples of Kamtok Borrowings

Origin	Original word	Kamtok word	English equivalent
Portuguese	piqueno	<i>pikin</i>	Child
	dache	<i>dash</i>	gift/tribute
	saber	<i>sabi</i>	Know
	palaba	<i>palaba/palava</i>	conference/discussion
French	beaucoup	<i>boku</i>	many/much/plenty of
	stade	<i>stad</i>	Stadium
	bonbons	<i>bonbon</i>	Sweets
	manger	<i>dameh</i>	Eat
Yoruba (Nigeria)	wahala	<i>wahala</i>	trouble/hassle/confusion

	akara	<i>makara</i>	bean cake
	egusi	<i>egusi</i>	pumpkin seeds
Igbo (Nigeria)	okro	<i>okro</i>	the vegetable okra
Kikongo	nkanda	<i>nkanda</i>	hide/skin
Twi	pima	<i>pima</i>	Vagina
Duala (Cameroon)	ngondele	<i>ngondere</i>	young woman/girl
	munyu	<i>moyo</i>	in-law
	nayo	<i>nayo-nayo</i>	Carefully
	mukala	<i>mukala</i>	white man/albino
Fula (Cameroon)	chuk	<i>chuk</i>	pierce/prick
Mungaka (Cameroon)	Ni	<i>ni</i> (a polite manner of addressing a senior male)	(none)
	Ma	<i>ma</i> (a polite manner of addressing a senior female)	(none)
	nkang	<i>nkang/corn beer</i>	maize drink
	sanjap	<i>sanja/rapa</i>	loin-cloth
Bakweri (Cameroon)	mbanjah	<i>banja</i>	ribs/waist
Mandankwe (Cameroon)	ngumsi	<i>mengwin</i>	Locusts
Lamsoh (Cameroon)	mboh	<i>mboh</i>	groundnut paste

Some of the Kamtok words that are assumed to be English-derived may have come from German or Dutch since the three languages are all Germanic, and since the Germans occupied Cameroon for some time. It is worthy of note that most Cameroonian dishes have Kamtok names derived from the languages of the ethnic regions where this various food comes from, e.g. *achu*, *ndole*, *eru*, *ekwang*, *miondo*, *kwa-koko*, *mbanga*, *kum-kum*, *mbongo-chobi*, and *bobolo*.

2.1.2. Normal processes of word-formation

a) Compounding

In order to express some ideas or thoughts, Kamtok uses compounding productively. Examples are *bon-haus* ‘birth + house’ (ceremony to recognize and celebrate the birth of a child), *folo-bak* ‘follow + behind’ (younger brother/sister), *las-bon* ‘last + deliver’ (last child of a family), *mimbo-haus* ‘wine + house’ (bar), *chop-haus* ‘eat + house’ (restaurant), *chopchia* ‘eat + chair’ (successor), and *hayop* ‘high + up’ (pride/ to be proud).

b) Inversion

In some cases, Kamtok inverts the position of English compound words or phrasal nouns to create new words like *koshot* ‘cut + short’ from *shortcut* (‘path’), *tronhet* ‘strong + head’ from *headstrong*, *taihet* ‘tie + head’ from *head tie/scarf*, and *fufu-con* ‘flour + corn’ from *corn flour*. *Reme* ‘mother’ and *repe* ‘father’ are from the French words *mere* and *pere* that have been inverted by syllable inversion.

c) Truncating or clipping

Some borrowed words are shortened and may seem neologisms. Examples are *clando* from *clandestine* (‘illegal transportation’), *mbut* from *mbutuku* (word from local language for ‘a worthless and stupid person’), *nga* from *girlfriend*, *asso* from *associé* (French word for ‘an accomplice’, used in Kamtok to mean ‘my good friend’), and *pang* from *pantalons* (French word for a pair of trousers).

d) Reduplication

Reduplication resulting in a meaning different from that of the original lexical item is another strategy of word formation in Kamtok. Hence there is the reduplication of the conjunction *so* to create an adverb *soso* in sentences like *Da pikin di soso kray* ‘That child is always crying’. The adjective *kain* ‘kind/type’ has been reduplicated but with less change of meaning than is the case

with *so*. *Kainkain* has a plural quality *kain* is missing. Compare *Mi an ma sista get wan kain klos* ‘My sister and I have the same kind of dress’ with *Kainkain klos dem dey fo maket* ‘There are various kinds of dresses in the market’.

e) Neologisms

As noted by several commentators, Cameroonian youths are becoming very innovative in their speech. Examples of Kamtok coinages created from no known source and used and understood by many youths and a few adults include *chaka* ‘shoes’, *buka* ‘to play cards’, *yang* ‘to buy’, *tum* ‘to sell’ and *nyama* ‘to eat’ (probably from the Bantu word for ‘meat’).

2.1.3. Overview of Kamtok lexis

Here are some examples of words from different domains of family, social, and professional life.

Table 2. Kamtok words from the domain of the family

Kamtok word	English equivalent
<i>Papa</i>	'Father'
<i>Mami</i>	'Mother'
<i>Pikin</i>	'child'
<i>Bik-papa</i>	'grandfather'
<i>Bik-mami</i>	'grandmother'
<i>Bik broda/sista</i>	'elder brother/sister'
<i>Smol broda/sista</i>	'younger brother/sister'

Table 3. Kamtok words from the domain of social life

Kamtok word	English equivalent
<i>mimbo-haus</i>	‘bar’
<i>chop-haus</i>	‘restaurant’
<i>njangi</i>	‘a kind of Credit Union’
<i>bon-haus</i>	‘a ceremony to recognise and celebrate birth’
<i>krai-day</i>	‘a funeral/mourning ceremony’
<i>juju</i>	‘secret society/a masquerade’
<i>Fon</i>	‘traditional head of a clan’
<i>Chif</i>	‘traditional head of a village’
<i>ninga</i>	‘slave’
<i>kombi</i>	‘friend’
<i>sevis</i>	‘waiter/waitress’

Table 4. Kamtok words from the domain of professional life

Kamtok word	English equivalent
<i>ticha</i>	‘teacher’
<i>hedmassa</i>	‘headmaster/head teacher’
<i>polis</i>	‘policeman’
<i>kapinta</i>	‘carpenter’
<i>washnait</i>	‘night watch’
<i>darekto</i>	‘Director’

<i>bikman</i>	‘important personality’
<i>bikman fo wok</i>	‘boss’
<i>noss</i>	‘nurse’
<i>dokta</i>	‘doctor’
<i>kombi fo wok</i>	‘colleague’

2.2. Parts of speech

2.2.1. Nouns

Unlike in English, Kamtok nouns do not take plural forms through inflexions. Plurals are always expressed in the noun phrase through the addition of the plural marker *dem*. Even when there is a numeral in the phrase indicating plurality, the plural marker is still used. Hence, singular *man* becomes plural *man dem*, *wan buk* becomes *tu buk dem* or *plenty buk dem*, and so forth. Abstract nouns are expressed by explanatory noun phrases or relative clauses, e.g. ‘imagination’ would be *weti wey man de tink*, literally ‘what one thinks’.

Synonyms do exist in Kamtok. Some examples are given in Table 5 below:

Table 5. Kamtok synonyms

Kamtok word	Synonym	English
<i>Tek taim</i>	<i>lukot</i>	‘be careful’
<i>Kassingo</i>	<i>ken</i>	‘cane’
<i>Kotrot</i>	<i>koshot</i>	‘shortcut’
<i>Kwa</i>	<i>poket, hanbag</i>	‘pocket/handbag’
<i>Nyongo</i>	<i>famlah</i>	‘secret society that practises witchcraft/witchcraft’

There are some homophones in Kamtok: *aks* meaning 'to ask' and 'an axe', *taya* meaning 'a motor tyre' and 'to be tired'. Since these involve different parts of speech (nouns and verbs), the homophony/homonymy is tolerated. Gender is expressed by adding the prefix *man-* and *woman-* to the noun in question. Hence *man-pikin* 'male child' and *woman-pikin* 'female child', *mandog* 'dog' and *woman-dog* 'bitch'. Some nouns in Kamtok are reduplicated. When this happens they either maintain their functions as nouns or become adjectives. Examples are *sansan* 'sand', *bia-bia* 'hair', *koro-koro* 'scabies', *pala-pala* 'wrestling', *pof-pof* 'doughnuts', *chuku-chuku* 'thorns' and *kenen-kenen* 'a slimy vegetable'. Used as adjectives, one can have *san-san boy* 'irresponsible fellow' or 'rascal', *biabia ches* 'hairy chest', *koro-koro fut* 'scabies-infected leg', *chuku-chuku bif* 'thorny animal' (e.g., porcupine), and *kenen-kenen rot* 'slippery road'.

2.2.2. Pronouns

Personal pronouns in subject function are *A* 'I', *yu* 'you', *I* 'he/she/it', *wi* 'we', *wuna*, 'you' (plural), and *deh* 'they'. Object personal pronouns are *mi* 'me', *yu* 'you', *yi* 'him/her', *am* 'it', *wi* 'us', *wuna* 'you' (plural) and *dem* 'them'.

The relative pronoun in Kamtok is expressed by the words *weh* and *se*, whereas *se* is not a relative pronoun but a complementizer, i.e. a subordinating conjunction introducing an object clause, or a clause complementing a predicative adjective as shown in the examples below. *Weh* is used to link two propositions. The equivalent of *weh* in English is expressed by the words *what*, *who*, *whose*, *whom* and *that*. The context of use differentiates these meanings. In the following examples two sentences are given in each case and then linked with the relative pronoun *weh*. Note that the subject of the second clause is not omitted.

Weh as 'who'

(1) a. *A di tok fo Lum.*

b. *I di silip fo trenja rum.*

c. *A di tok fo Lum weh I di silip fo trenja rum.*

'I am talking to Lum who sleeps in the guest room.'

Weh as ‘whose’

- (2) a. *Nji don si da kapinta.*
b. *Yi wok tin dem don los.*
c. *Nji don si da kapinta weh yi wok tin dem don los.*
‘Nji has seen the carpenter whose tools are missing.’

Weh as ‘whom’

- (3) a. *Na Massa Paul dat.*
b. *Yu bi gif tu bak simen fo yi.*
c. *Na Massa Paul dat weh yu bi gif tu bak simen fo yi.*
‘That is Mr. Paul to whom you gave two bags of cement.’

Weh as ‘which’

- (4) a. *Wi don put ol pent fo haus.*
b. *Yu bi bay am yeseday.*
c. *Wi don put ol pent weh yu bi bay am yeseday fo haus.*
‘We have used all the paint which you bought yesterday on the house.’

Weh as ‘that’

- (5) a. *Mike no go drin wata.*
b. *Da wata komot fo wel.*
c. *Mike no go drin wata weh yi komot fo wel.*
‘Mike will not drink water that comes from the well.’

Weh meaning ‘that’ or ‘which’ can be used interchangeably. The other relative pronoun, *se*, which can be translated as ‘that’ in English, is usually used with verbs expressing an opinion or attitude.

- (6) a. *Wi mimba se Piskops dem get plenty moni.*

‘We think that Peace Corps are very rich.’

b. *Wi sabi se tumoro na bik dey.*

‘We know that tomorrow is a public holiday’.

c. *A bi di fi a se ma pikin don mis rot.*

‘I was afraid that my child had lost the way’.

In Kamtok the word *on* is added to possessive adjectives in order to form possessive pronouns. Possessive adjectives in the language are *ma* ‘my’, *ya* ‘your’, *yi* ‘his/her/its’, *wi* ‘our’, *wuna* ‘your’ (plural) and *dia* ‘their’. They precede the nouns they determine, for example *ya moto* ‘your vehicle’, *dia haus* ‘their house’. Possessive pronouns, therefore, are *ma on* ‘mine’, *ya on* ‘yours’, *yi on* ‘his/hers/its’, *wi on* ‘ours’, *wuna on* ‘yours’ (plural) and *dia on* ‘theirs’. Ownership can also be expressed by the use of *get am* or simply by *get* preceded by an object pronoun.

(7) a. *Dis pusi na ma on.*

‘This cat is mine.’

b. *Dis pusi na mi get am.*

‘I am the owner of this cat.’

c. *Na mi get this pusi.*

‘I am the owner of this cat.’

A reflexive pronoun is used in a statement when the agent and patient of an action are identical, that is, when the subject and the object of the sentence refer to the same person. In Kamtok, the reflexive is formed by adding the expression *sef-sef* to the object pronoun in question.

(8) a. *Yu sef-sef yu go go fo hospitel.*

‘You’ll go to the hospital by yourself.’

b. *Yu bi kuk de chop yu sef-sef.*

‘You cooked the food yourself.’

c. *Yi sef-sef bi wash de klos dem.*

‘He/she did the laundry him-/herself.’

Unlike in English, where the reflexive pronoun can only occur in clause-final position, in Kamtok it can occur after initial subjects or in final position. When a reflexive pronoun does occur in initial position, the subject pronoun can still be used in the same clause, as in example (8a) above. In example (8c), the subject pronoun *yi* has been omitted to portray the flexibility of usage of reflexives in Kamtok. Reflexive pronouns can also be used for emphasis. In (9a) and (9b) they stress the subject of the sentence:

- (9) a. *Peter yi sef-sef bi kol mi fo chop-haus.*
'Peter himself invited me to the restaurant.'
b. *Darekto yi sef-sef tek wi go pati.*
'The Director himself took us to the party.'

To make the emphasis even stronger, a preceding particle *na* is added to the noun phrase:

- (10) a. *Na Peter yi sef-sef bi kol mi fo chop-haus.*
b. *Na Darekto yi sef-sef tek wi go pati.*

A related form involves the object personal pronoun to focus on the VP:

- (11) a. *A di go mi fo mimbo haus.*
'I am going [me] to the drink parlour/bar.' (i.e. I *really* want to go to the bar)
b. *I di chop yi.*
'He/she is eating [him/her].' (i.e. he/she is actually eating, despite all)
c. *Deh di vex dem.*
'They are angry [them].'

The negative marker *no* does not change the position of the emphatic pronoun, as illustrated in (12):

- (12) *A no di go mi fo mimbo haus.*
'I am not going [me] to the bar.'

2.2.3. Verbs

The verb fo bi ‘to be’

This verb has four forms: *bi*, *na*, *di* and *dey*. *Bi* is often used with subject pronouns, as equational copula. *Na* is often used to identify people and places (identificative copula). They function as copular verbs in the simple present.

(13) a. *Yu bi big man.*

‘You are an important personality.’

b. *Wuna bi sikul pikin dem.*

‘You are school children.’

c. *Ma papa na ticha.*

‘My father is a teacher.’

d. *Bamenda na big taun fo Cameroon.*

‘Bamenda is a big town in Cameroon.’

Di is used as an auxiliary verb denoting progressive aspect:

(14) a. *A di shidon witi ma anty.*

‘I’m living with my aunt.’

b. *Deh di tok kontre tok fo klas.*

‘They’re speaking vernacular languages in class.’

Dey is used as a locative copula:

(15) a. *Ma mami dey fo maket.*

‘My mother is in the market.’

b. *Wuna famili dem dey fo Nigeria.*

‘Your families are in Nigeria.’

c. *Moni no dey fo ma broda yi kwa.*

‘There is no money in my brother’s pocket.’

The verbs get ‘be’, laik ‘like’ and sabi ‘know’

These verbs do not use the auxiliary *di* in the present tense, as they are statives rather than action verbs. Examples:

- (16) a. *Ma kombi get sikin.*
 ‘My friend is fat.’
 b. *A laik ma pikin.*
 ‘I love my child.’
 c. *Yu sabi yi papa.*
 ‘You know his/her father.’

The verbs fit and wan

These are auxiliary verbs and can be used in different ways. Firstly, *fit* can be used as a polite way of making requests. Secondly, it can be used to indicate the ability and the will to do something, as illustrated in (17a)–(17d). *Wan* is used to express an intention, a desire, or a wish, as in (17e).

- (17) a. *Wi fit go sinima dis nait?*
 ‘Could we go to the movies this night?’
 b. *Yu fit gif mi mimbo?*
 ‘Could you give me a drink?’
 c. *A fit kuk rais.*
 ‘I can cook rice.’
 d. *Ndikum no fit draif moto.*
 ‘Ndikum cannot drive a car.’
 e. *Pasto wan preya fo yu.*
 ‘The Pastor would like to pray for you.’

Verb reduplication for intensity

In the following sentences the reduplicated words are used as verbs only. They often signify or emphasize a continual occurrence of a phenomenon. Note that the sentences would still be correct Kamtok sentences if the words were not repeated. However, their implications and meaning would be different. Compare (18a) and (18b) with (18c) and (18d) below:

- (18) a. *Ren di fol fol.*
 ‘It is raining all the time.’

b. *Fo shap monin, wuman dem di hori hori fo go fam.*

‘Early in the morning, women are always in a mad rush to go to the farm.’

c. *Ren di fol.*

‘It is raining.’

d. *Fo shap monin, wuman dem di hori fo go fam.*

‘Early in the morning, women hurry to go to the farm.’

Repeated verbs with the object pronoun am

This construction is used to emphasize a contrast, as in (19):

(19) a. Q: *Yu bi trowe da sup?*

‘Did you throw away that soup?’

A: *No-oh, A no bi trowe am fo trowe am; A bi drink am fo drink am.*

‘No, I didn’t throw it away; I drank it instead.’

Sometimes the resulting sentence structure from these repeated verbs expresses the passive voice, which otherwise would be considered absent in Kamtok. The third person plural subject personal pronoun *deh* must be used in this case:

b. Q: *Deh di kuk soya, no bi so?*

‘Soya is boiled, isn’t it?’

A: *No-oh, deh no di kuk am fo kuk am; deh di bon am fo bon am.*

‘No, it is not boiled; it is roasted.’

c. *Deh no di pawn fufu fo pawn am; deh di ton am fo ton am.*

‘Fufu is not pounded; it is stirred.’

Note that in Kamtok the verb *kuk* is used to mean boiling or steaming only. Other methods of cooking like grilling, roasting and baking are called *bon* ‘burning’. Cooking in hot oil is called *frai* ‘fry’. When food is cooked and ready, the Kamtok word is *don* and not *kukt* ‘cooked’, e.g. *De planti don don* ‘The plantain is cooked/ready’.

The verb get fo ‘must/have to’

Get fo is used when giving directives. It expresses obligation. The use of *get fo* in giving orders is more polite than its synonyms *mos* and/or *mostu*. These have the same function as *get fo* but appear to be rather impolite.

(20) a. *Yu get fo rid ya buk.*

‘You have to study.’

b. *Beri mostu maret dis man.*

‘Beri must get married to this man.’

2.2.3.1. Verb tense and aspect

The past

The past simple is formed by using the auxiliary *bi* + Verb.

(21) a. *Yesedey A bi go fo maket.*

‘Yesterday I went to the market.’

b. *Ma sista no bi go fo maket.*

‘My sister did not go to the maket.’

The recent past or present perfect and the unspecified past are marked by the auxiliary *don* + Verb. As unspecified past, it is used to ask whether one has ever done something or not. Sometimes the word *bifo* ‘before’ is added at the end of the question. The negative of *don* is *noba*.

(22) a. *I don si dokta.*

‘He/she has seen the doctor.’

b. *Paul don sik plenty.*

‘Paul has been very sick.’

c. *Yi bele don poch bifo?*

‘Has he ever had diarrhoea?’

d. *I noba si dokta.*

‘He hasn’t seen the doctor.’

Adding the auxiliary *bi* to the recent past marker *don* and the main verb forms to the past perfect: *bi + don + Verb*.

(23) a. *Ren bi don fol bifo wi komot.*

‘Rain had fallen before we went out.’

b. *Kao no bi don chop ol kon fo fam taim weh de pikin dem bi kam.*

‘The cow had not eaten all the corn in the farm when the children came.’

The imperfect *be + di + Verb* is used to indicate actions begun in the past but not necessarily completed as in (24a), for habitual actions as in (24b), and for two past actions taking place at the same time as in (24c):

(24) a. *Tif pipol dem bi di run foseka se polis bi kam.*

‘The thieves were running because the police came.’

b. *San-san boi dem bi di hambok woman dem plenty.*

‘The rascals were disturbing women a lot.’

c. *Tif pipol dem bi di brok yi haus taim weh yi bi di slip.*

‘Thieves were breaking into his house when he was sleeping.’

The future

The simple future tense in Kamtok is formed by adding the auxiliary *go* to the main verb: *go + Verb*.

(25) *Ngwing go go holide fo Limbe nex wik.*

‘Ngwing will go on vacation to Limbe next week.’

The progressive aspect of the future is obtained by adding the auxiliary *di* to the future marker *go*: *go + di + Verb*.

(26) a. *Taim weh a go inta Njangi, a go di chop kola.*

‘When I join the “Njangi” group, I will be eating kola nuts.’

b. *Pipol dem no go di kam fo ma haus fosika se a no get moni.*

‘People will not be coming to my house because I have no money.’

2.2.4. Adjectives

The position of adjectives in Kamtok sentences is the same as in English. They can be used both attributive as in (27a) and predicative as in (27b):

(27) a. *Ma kombi get **bik** fut dem.*

‘My friend has big feet.’

b. *Ma kombi yi fut dem **bik**.*

‘My friend’s feet are big.’

Possessive adjectives are: *ma* ‘my’, *ya* ‘your’, *yi* ‘his/her/its’, *wuna* ‘your’ (plural), *wi* ‘our’, and *dia* ‘their’. They precede the nouns they determine, e.g., *ma papa* ‘my father’, *wuna moyo* ‘your father-in-law’. Certain reduplicated forms are used as adjectives and adverbs, and can modify both nouns and verbs depending on the context of the sentence.

(28) a. *Pipol dem for kontre get **fain fain fashon**.*

‘Villagers are well behaved.’

b. *Da Pa di **wok fain fain**.*

‘That elderly man works well/hard.’

c. *Shu get **nyu nyu kombi dem**.*

‘Shu has new friends.’

d. *Shu don jos **kam nyu nyu**.*

‘Shu has just recently come.’

2.2.5. Adverbs

Adverbs in Kamtok include *simol-simol* ‘slowly/softly/gradually’, *sofli-sofli* ‘slowly/steadily/calmly’, *popo* ‘really’, *kwik-kwik* ‘quickly’ and *ova* ‘very/too much’. Unlike in English, *ova* can both precede and follow the verb it is modifying. All other adverbs, however, are post-modifying only.

(29) a. *Ma bik broda di chop **ova**.*

‘My elder brother eats too much.’

b. *Ma bik broda di ova chop.*

‘My elder brother eats too much.’

d. *Wuna di waka sofl i-sofl i.*

‘You are walking slowly.’

e. **Wuna di sofl i-sofl i waka.*

2.2.6. Prepositions

The most common preposition *fo* can take the Standard English (StE) meaning of ‘to’, ‘at’, ‘in’, ‘on’, ‘about’, and ‘from’. The meaning depends on the context of use. The following sentences illustrate this fact.

(30) a. *A di go fo ma wok.*

‘I’m going **to** my place of work.’

b. *Pikin dem di pley futbol fo stad.*

‘The children are playing football **at** the stadium.’

c. *Piskops don wok fo Cameroon fo long taim.*

‘The Peace Corps have worked **in** Cameroon for long.’

d. *Ha fo ya wok witi fama dem?*

‘What **about** your work with farmers?’

e. *De kapinta yi wok tin dem dey fo tebul.*

‘The carpenter’s tools are **on** the table.’

f. *Wuna komot fo England?*

‘Do you come **from** England?’

When *fo* is functioning as ‘to’, it can be omitted from a sentence without causing any change of meaning, e.g. *A wan go Ø taun* is exactly the same as *A wan go fo taun* ‘I want to go to the town’.

Although *fo* functions as a preposition in its own right, it can also be attached to other prepositional words to indicate location of places and things. Thus we have *fo kona* ‘close to/near’, *fo midul* ‘in the middle of/between’, *fo ontop* ‘on top of/on’, *fo onda* ‘under’, *fo bak*

'behind' *fo bifo/fo fron* 'in front of', *fo wuman han* 'to the left', *fo man han* 'to the right', *fo oposit* 'opposite/across', *fo insai* 'inside', and *fo opsai* 'outside'.

2.3. Sentence structure

2.3.1. The simple sentence

As in English, simple declaratives in Kamtok follow an SVO pattern:

(36) a. *Pikin di kray.*

'The child is crying.'

Unlike in English, where the negative *not* or *n't* occurs after the first auxiliary, in Kamtok the negative marker *no* is placed in front of the verb phrase.

b. *Pikin no di kray.*

*'The child not is crying.'

Similarly, with interrogatives there is no subject-operator inversion in Kamtok. In speech, only the rising intonation differentiates the question from the statement, while in writing, only the question mark does the same.

c. *Pikin di kray?*

'Is the child crying?'

Wh-words, however, are also used to ask questions. A selection of Kamtok *wh*-words in Table 6 below:

Table 6. Kamtok *wh*-words

Kamtok	English	Question
<i>Weti</i>	'what'	<i>Weti yu di do?</i> 'What are you doing?'
<i>Wusay</i>	'where'	<i>Wusay yu di go?</i> 'Where are you going?'
<i>Wishtaim</i>	'when'	<i>Wishtaim sikul di klos?</i> 'When are schools closing?'
<i>Way</i>	'why'	<i>Way da boi di ron?</i>

		'Why is that boy running?'
<i>Ha</i>	'how'	<i>Ha yu dey?</i> 'How are you?'

The particle *na* can sometimes be used alongside *wh*-words, for example *Na weti dis?* 'What is this?' or *Na wusay yu komot?* 'Where are you coming from?'

Question tags do not vary according to the tense of the verb in the preceding statement. There is just one question tag for all statements, *no bi so*:

- (37) a. *Yu laik fo chop wata-fufu an eru, no bi so?*
'You like to eat wata-fufu and eru, don't you?'
- b. *Da wuman dem bi mami-pikin dem, no bi so?*
'Those women are nursing mothers, aren't they?'
- c. *Wuna go bay moto smol taim, no bi so.*
'You will soon buy a car, won't you?'

2.3.2. Comparison

Words used to express comparison in Kamtok are *pas* (< pass), *laik*, *rich* (< reach), and *no rich*.

With nouns:

- (38) a. *A get klos dem pas yu.*
'I have more clothes than you.'
- b. *Mofor get trosa dem laik Anye.*
'Mofor has as many trousers as Anye.'
- c. *Massa Ndikum no get moni rich Massa Nde.*
'Mr. Ndikum doesn't have as much money as Mr. Nde.'

With adjectives:

- (39) a. *Ma sista yi rapa fain pas ma mami yi on.*
'My sister's loin-cloth is nicer than my mother's.'
- b. *John yi fut dem bik rich Peter yi on dem.*

‘John’s feet are as big as Peter’s.’

c. *Dis rod **no** long **rich** da ada wan.*

‘This road is not as long as the other one.’

With verbs:

(40) a. *Susana di bay nyanga tin dem **pas** Mary.*

‘Susan buys beauty products more than Mary.’

b. *Ngwe sabi ayon klos **pas** yi big sista.*

‘Ngwe does ironing better than her elder sister.’

c. *Lum no di gif moni fo yi mami **pas** Siri.*

‘Lum doesn’t give more money to her mother than Siri does.’

With adverbs:

(41) a. *Yu di soh kwik-kwik **laik** mi.*

‘You sew as fast as I do.’

b. *Dis pikin di tok sofl i-sofl i **pas** yi papa.*

‘This child speaks more slowly than his father.’

c. *Wuna no fit wok tron-tron **rich** wi.*

‘You cannot work as hard as we do.’

Superlatives exist in two forms relating to superiority and inferiority. The former is marked by the expressions *pas ol*, *taim no dey*, and *pas mak*, the later by *atol-atol* and *no smol*. They express the highest degree of comparison.

(42) a. *Sikam rapa fain. Nangeria wax fain pas sikam. Bot Holan wax fain **pas mak** / Holan wax fain **pas ol**/Holan wax fain **taim no dey**.*

‘But Holland Wax is the best.’

b. *Da telo no sabi mak klos **no smol**/Da telo no sabi mak klos **atol-atol**.*

‘That tailor doesn’t know how to embroider at all/not the least.’

Much of the published work about Kamtok has been of sociolinguistic nature, but very little has been done in the field of linguistics. Cameroonian linguists debate whether Kamtok has reached a status fit enough to be given official recognition by the government of Cameroon. If this happens, it could then be treated like any other Cameroonian national language. It is hoped that a scientific study of the language will shed more light on its nature and quality, and consequently enhance and improve the quality of the debate.

3. Phonology

As one of Cameroon's languages of wider communication, Kamtok today bridges the linguistic gap among an estimated one quarter to one third of the country's rural and particularly urban populations. The language is used intensively among the inhabitants of the so-called English-speaking provinces of the North West and South West which account for at least one fifth of Cameroon's total population of about 15 million inhabitants. It is also fairly frequently used in most parts of the French-speaking Littoral and the West Provinces which are adjacent to the two English-speaking provinces. Outside these four (out of ten) provinces, Kamtok is found in varying extents in urban centres.

Kamtok's role as a medium of interethnic communication has already been emphasized. On the basis of the linguistic survey data, it was found that Cameroon could be divided into four *lingua franca* zones: a Kamtok zone, a French zone, a Fulfude zone and possibly a Fang-Beti zone. The Kamtok zone was found to be matched only by the French zone in the size of its population.

Apart from French and English which are Cameroon's official languages, Kamtok enters into frequent contact with several of Cameroon's more than two hundred indigenous languages. Users bring into their Kamtok idiolects various features that derive from both the official and indigenous languages that they use in different circumstances. This has given rise to an impressive number of Kamtok accents. These horizontal forms of variation have resulted in slightly differing varieties of Kamtok that are being described after analyses conducted mostly at the phonological and lexical levels. The distinction between "Anglophone" and "Francophone" Kamtok has been established on this basis. Other regionally more restricted varieties have been identified within these two broad varieties.

The nature and extent of variation in Kamtok is also determined by the extent of the speakers' formal education in English and exposure to situations in which English is used. Such considerations have led to the identification of so-called "educated" and "uneducated" varieties of Kamtok. The "educated" variety is said to be more elaborate in its form and richer in its choice of words many of which are borrowed directly from English in both their form, meaning and pronunciation. The "uneducated" variety is less elaborate in form and contains fewer occasional borrowings from English.

Contextual variation arises mostly from the uses to which Kamtok is put, but the nature and frequency of forms of variation arising from function still have to be thoroughly investigated. Some functional varieties of Kamtok have however been suggested: ecclesiastical, commercial, technical, and in-group. One such variety with an in-group function that has caught recent scholarly attention is "Camfranglais". It is popular among school-age youth and school leavers, and, as the name suggests, comprises an intricately woven combination of expressions from indigenous languages, from French and from English. It is an evolving linguistic phenomenon that deserves to be carefully studied.

What makes variation in Kamtok so difficult to track is the fact that it remains largely unstandardized. There have been attempts to describe it by various researchers, who have focused on its grammatical and lexical features. No formal grammar or dictionary has yet come to be accepted by users as a guide that lays out norms that are worth respecting. Kamtok thus remains everybody's language and each person uses it to the best of his/her ability and almost at leisure. This makes the task of description quite onerous. The present descriptive survey focuses on those features that are found in the speech of a cross-section of Kamtok users. As most of these users are found within or near the English-speaking provinces of Cameroon, examples will be drawn from the broad variety that tilts towards what has been termed "Anglophone" Kamtok. It has been taken care to get rid of the description of features that are considered random borrowings from English, particularly those that may pose problems of intelligibility to less 'educated' users.

The next sections of Kamtok phonological features focus particularly on Kamtok sounds, the distribution of these sounds in speech and on certain prosodic² features such as stress and tone.

² from prosody: the part of phonetics which is concerned with stress and intonation as opposed to individual speech sounds

3.1. Kamtok sounds

Initial studies of Kamtok phonology reveal that the language has 6 vowel sounds and 21 consonant phonemes. Kamtok thus makes use of almost as many consonants as English, although Kamtok and English consonants are not quite the same. As for vowel sounds, Kamtok has barely half the number used in English.

3.1.1. Kamtok vowels

Table 7. Description of the vowel phonemes of Kamtok

Sound symbol	Description	Examples
i	High unrounded front Vowel	Compare /si/ ‘see’ and /so/ ‘so’
e	Mid unrounded front vowel	Compare /tek/ ‘take’ and /tɔk/ ‘talk’
a	Central low unrounded vowel	Compare /man/ ‘man’ and /mun/ ‘moon’
u	High rounded back vowel	Compare /put/ ‘put’ and /pɔt/ ‘pot’
o	Mid-high rounded back vowel	Compare /lo/ ‘low’ and /lɔ/ ‘law’
ɔ	Mid-low rounded back vowel	Compare /lɔk/ ‘lock’ and /luk/ ‘look’

3.1.2. Kamtok consonants

Table 8. Description of the consonant phonemes of Kamtok

Sound symbol	Description	Examples
p	Voiceless bilabial stop	Compare /put/ ‘put’ and /fut/ ‘foot’
b	Voiced bilabial stop	Compare /big/ ‘big’ and /dig/ ‘dig’

t	Voiceless alveolar stop	Compare /ti/ ‘tea’ and /bi/ ‘bee’
d	Voiced alveolar stop	Compare /dig/ ‘dig’ and /big/ ‘big’
k	Voiceless velar stop	Compare /kuk/ ‘cook’ and /buk/ ‘book’
g	Voiced velar stop	Compare /gɔn/ ‘gun’ and /sɔn/ ‘sun’
m	Bilabial nasal	Compare /man/ ‘man’ and /pan/ ‘pan’
n	Alveolar nasal	Compare /nek/ ‘neck’ and /tek/ ‘take’
ŋ	Velar nasal	Compare /tiŋ/ ‘thing’ and /tin/ ‘tin’
ɲ	Palatal nasal	Compare /ɲus/ ‘news’ and /tʃus/ ‘choose’
f	Voiceless labiodental fricative	Compare /fam/ ‘farm’ and /lam/ ‘lamp’
v	Voiced labiodental fricative	Compare /vot/ ‘vote’ and /got/ ‘goat’
s	Voiceless alveolar fricative	Compare /si/ ‘see’ and /ti/ ‘tea’
z	Voiced alveolar fricative	Compare /zip/ ‘zip’ and /kip/ ‘keep’
ʃ	Voiceless pre-palatal affricate	Compare /ʃem/ ‘shame’ and /sem/ ‘same’
h	Voiceless glottal fricative	Compare /hama/ ‘hammer’ and /fama/ ‘farmer’
tʃ	Voiceless pre-palatal affricate	Compare /tʃuk/ ‘pierce’ and /buk/ ‘book’
dʒ	Voiced pre-palatal affricate	Compare /dʒam/ ‘scarcity’ and /fam/ ‘farm’
r	Alveolar trill	Compare /riva/ ‘river’ and /liva/ ‘liver’
l	Dental alveolar liquid	Compare /lɔŋ/ ‘long’ and /rɔŋ/ ‘wrong’
j	Palatal glide	Compare /jam/ ‘yam’ and /lam/ ‘lamp’
w	Bilabial glide	Compare /wan/ ‘one’ and

3.1.3. Consonant clusters

Consonant clusters do exist in Kamtok. In some forms of Kamtok speech, /s/ can precede /p, k, t, m, n, l/ in words such as: /spun/ ‘spoon’, /skul/ ‘school’, /stik/ ‘stick’, /smɔl/ ‘small’, /snek/ ‘snake’ and /slak/ ‘weak’.

Consonant clusters are also formed by /p, b, f, k, g, d, s/ preceding /l/ and /r/. Here are some examples:

/pleja/ ‘player’	/preja/ ‘prayer’
/bred/ ‘bread’	/blak/ ‘black’
/flai/ ‘fly’	/frai/ ‘fry’
/klin/ ‘clean’	/krai/ ‘cry’
/glad/ ‘glad’	/gras/ ‘grass’
/draiva/ ‘driver’	/slip/ ‘sleep’

3.1.4. Some phonological processes

Consonant devoicing

Words of English origin undergo certain changes when they are adopted into Kamtok. One of these changes is the devoicing of final consonants such as /d, g, v, z/ to produce [t, k, f, s]. When pronounced in isolation, words like /gud/ ‘good’, /big/ ‘big’, /bad/ ‘bad’ and /bed/ ‘bed’ sometimes retain voice on the final consonant, but when they are followed by a word with a voiceless consonant at initial position, the devoicing is obligatory. Consider these examples:

/het pan/ ‘headpan’
/gut tɔk/ ‘good talk’
/bik cɔp/ ‘big chop’
/bat tiŋ/ ‘bad thing’
/bet pan/ ‘bed pan’

Final consonant devoicing has also been observed to occur systematically in words such as:

/muf/ from English /mu:v/ ‘move’

/tʃus/ from English /ɛkskju:z/ ‘excuse’

/twef/ from English /twɛlv/ ‘twelve’

Cluster simplification

Consonant clusters in English can occur at the initial position, in the middle or at the end of the word. Kamtok words hardly have consonant clusters at final position. As a result, when Kamtok adopts English words, their final consonant clusters are usually simplified through the deletion of one or more consonants. The following examples illustrate final consonant deletion:

English /graʊnd/ > Kamtok /graun/ ‘ground’

English /hænd/ > Kamtok /han/ ‘hand’

English /læmp/ > Kamtok /lam/ ‘lamp’

English /sɛnd/ > Kamtok /sen/ ‘send’

English /fɜ:st/ > Kamtok /fes/ ‘first’

English /mʌst/ > Kamtok /mɔs/ ‘must’

English /ænd/ > Kamtok /an/ ‘and’

English /kɔrɛkt/ > Kamtok /kɔrek/ ‘correct’

Resurfacing of /ð/ and /θ/

These are two English consonants which are usually replaced in Kamtok by /d/ and /t/ respectively. Like some diphthong-like sounds discussed above, these sounds are increasingly resurfacing in the speech of English-Kamtok bilinguals, particularly in recent loans from English. If the trend persists, /ð/ and /d/ and /θ/ and /t/ will come to be considered as being in free variation in words such as /ðis/ and /dis/ “this” and /bɜ:θ/ and /bɜ:t/ “birth”.

4. Orthography

The Roman alphabetic script can, with certain modifications, be used as the basis for writing Kamtok. Since the English version of the Roman alphabet could not meet all the needs of the

Krio sound system, the two vowel symbols /ɔ/ and /ɛ/ were added. Krio words were then spelt phonetically but with 'ny', 'ng' and 'ay' representing /ɲ/, /ŋ/ and /ai/.

The same system can be used for Kamtok but, since Cameroon is bilingual in English and French, some conventions from the French spelling system may be adopted. Differences in the spelling of sounds represented in English by the same letter can be made with accent marks as in Table 9.

Table 9. Differentiation of vowel sounds

Sound	Spelling	Kamtok	English
/ɔ/	ô	sôm	some
/o/	o	ston	stone
/ɛ/	è	sèf	self
/e/	é	mék	make

As can be seen from these examples, there is no need for a final silent 'e' at the end of Kamtok words. The other three vowels, a, i and u, can be simply spelt by their corresponding letters.

Diphthongs exist in Kamtok and can be spelt using the two vowel letters that make up the sound if the diphthong is followed by a consonant in the word, or by using the first vowel letter and letter 'y' or 'w' if the diphthong ends the word, as in table 10.

Table 10. Managing diphthongs

Sound	Spelling	Kamtok	English
/ɔi/	a) oi	nois	noise
	b) oy	boy	boy

/ei/	a) éy	dey	day
/au/	a) au	haus	house
	b) aw	haw	how
/ai/	a) ay	hay	high

Consonants are easier to handle. The letter 'y' would correspond to the English 'j' sound, 'kw' would replace the English 'qu', and 'ks' would replace the English 'x'. The /tʃ/ sound can be spelt with 'ts', hence no need for a letter 'c' in the Kamtok alphabet. Since /tʃ/ is an affricate which involves complete closure as for plosives followed by slow release as for fricatives, the plosive /t/ and the fricative /s/ can be used. The letter 's' at the end of a word should not cause any confusion as to whether the word is plural or not because in Kamtok 's' is not a plural marker. For example, they do not say 'girls', they say 'gèl dèm'.

5. Conclusion

Cameroonian Pidgin English, discussed in this paper, is a linguistic entity of Cameroon. Its speakers usually call it pidgin or country talk and linguists refer to it as Cameroon(ian) Pidgin (English), but recently the media has begun to use Kamtok, to stress that it is local and useful, despite having no official status. It is an English-based creole language spoken by about 5% of Cameroonians (as native speakers of the language), while an estimated 50% of the population speaks it in some form. It is a blend of English, French and indigenous languages. Kamtok has various forms, reflecting the age, education, regional provenance, mother tongue, and linguistic proficiency of its users. It has relatively high prestige, and is preferred informally among Africans of different ethnic groups, ranking just below French and English as a vehicle for mobility from rural villages into modern urban life. It sustains a world view, culture and way of life. It facilitates social intercourse among people who originate from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. It is rich, exciting and vigorous. Kamtok accommodates grammatical distortions and deviations from syntactic conventions. It is one of so many mixed languages that exist on the African continent and that shows the linguistic/cultural richness of Africans.

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