

Chapter 2

‘That-clauses’ in Cameroon English: A Study in Functional Extension

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Abstract This chapter sets out to study some of the functional extensions that have been attributed to Cameroon English (CamE) “that”. This involves two phenomena, namely, that-complements and echo-questions. As for that-complements, it is seen that some verbs in CamE select that-complements in contexts that are not attested in British English. This is the case of what I call “abuse-verbs”, which are re-categorised to rhyme with the verb “say”, thereby having an orienter and content. On their part, echo-questions are achieved following the process of super-ordinate clause deletion. When this happens, the that-complementiser introduces the subordinate constituent clause, which stands alone. This very process is also used for reporting. CamE echo-questions are categorised into yes/no echo-questions and constituent echo-questions. The peculiarity of the category yes/no echo-questions lies in the modal property they have, as they show the speaker’s attitude either of surprise or of disapproval.

The overall conclusion in the paper is that syntactic variation in the New Englishes is likely to be more significantly marked at the level of tasks given to function words than at differences in word order. This is a kind of covert variation, which is subtle. It is shown that this kind of variation is occasioned by local meaning, so that grammatical variation in the Englishes would be caused by local meaning or what purists would call “non-standard meaning” leading to non-standard structures. This is how English adapts to the ecologies of its various habitats.

Keywords *That-clauses* · Functional extension · Syntactic variation · New Englishes · That-complements

2.1 Introduction

The indigenisation of English is, apart from sociolinguistic and ethnographic considerations, a descriptive account of the twists and turns the English language has taken in “new” habitats. It is a clear testimony of language coming to meet a people in a particular region and bowing to its culture (including linguistic conventions)

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and world view. The point in indigenisation studies has been the investigation of the various forms these adaptations take in the various Englishes at all linguistic levels.

As far as Cameroon English (CamE) is concerned, considerable work has been done in this direction in the domains of phonology, lexicology and, recently, syntax and sociolinguistics. Some such outstanding works include Simo Bobda (1994), Sala (2003), Anchimbe (2006), Kouega (2006, 2007), Ouafeu (2006), and Mbangwana and Sala (2009). Researchers in CamE have said in different ways that the scientific and/or social relevance of their investigations is to lay the foundation for an eventual standardisation of this sub-regional variety of West African English. While considerable research findings have been achieved at the levels of CamE phonology and lexicology, the domain of syntax is still indeterminate, barely burgeoning. This situation seems to prevail in other New Englishes, to judge from the call made by scholars the world over for more research in the domain of syntax (see Kirk-Greene 1971, p. 57; Kachru 1992, p. 319; Trudgill and Chambers 1995, pp. 413–414; Hartford 1996, p. 92; Newbrook 1998, p. 57; D'souza 1999, p. 272; Bamgbose 2001, p. 360; Igboanusi 2006, p. 393). In addressing the very issue, Kortmann (2010, p. 418) even puts it more dramatically as “more detailed description of the grammars of individual varieties, not just of the forms and structures available, but also of their uses” is still lacking. It is clear that studies of New Englishes (NEs) will not be complete without due consideration of their syntax. In this light, the purpose of this work is to attempt an understanding of some of the structural and functional extensions that CamE has given to the English *that*-clause. The focus is on two *that*-clauses: *that*-complement clauses and *that*-clauses used for echo-questions and reporting.¹

Syntactic research in the New Englishes also faces some problems. First, unlike phonology and specifically lexicology, syntactic variations are subtle by not always being distinctively marked, and as a result are not readily visible for description. The slimness in overt distinctive marking of syntactic peculiarities in the New Englishes has as corollary a normative problem, that of drawing the line between error and norm. As Sala (2006) argues, syntactic innovations, unlike the multivariate forms phonological (and at times lexical) innovations take, in the New Englishes are typically binary in nature. A feature is either “English” or it is not, and where it is not, then it belongs to the local norm. At the level of pronunciation, the word “Cameroon” has several segmental (/kamerun/, /kamarun/, /kemerun/) and prosodic (depending on whether you place the stress on the first syllable or on the last syllable) variations even in Cameroon, even though sociolinguistic, democratic procedures could help decide which one is most used. But a syntactic category like *wh*-questions in CamE has just one variation from BrE. CamE has “You are going where?” where BrE has “Where are you going?” There is no other variation in word order for this category in CamE. For example, we would not have structures like “*Where you are going?” for the very category, a structure that would be considered an error in CamE.

¹ It should be noted in passing that these structures have also been heard in the English used in Nigerian and Ghanaian films, and could presumably be a feature of West African English.

Theorists have disagreed over the syntactic contents of a New English. Bamgbose (1998) proposes that, for us to ascribe a feature to a local norm, that feature must, amongst other qualifications, be widely used by educated speakers of that variety. To him, the norm is the acrolectal variety. The acrolectal variety may be prestigious, but it is what the educated professionals think is BrE. But unfortunately, it is not always the mesolect, where the majority of speakers fall. The acrolectal is what Sala (2006) calls Institutional English and the mesolect is what he calls Community English. If syntactic variations are binary (after we have taken away learners' performance varieties) then they cannot be placed on a lectal continuum the way we will for phonological features. Deciding, therefore, between error and norm has been the common thread in most debates on whether there is anything like the New Englishes.

2.2 That-complement Clauses

The focus of this section is on that-complement clauses. Naturally, the selection of that-complements in BrE is not an arbitrary affair, depending arguably on the general property of verbs as a whole. When we consider the following possible CamE sentences, we see some variation:

- (1) a. A woman abuses the Isaac's family [that they are black]
- b. He phoned [that he is coming]
- c. He refused [that he is not coming]
- d. He insulted me [that I am a thief]

The bracketed strings in the sentences in (1) vary from the BrE norm in (2). The sentences in (1) share a common feature in that they take that-complement clauses, but do so in a variant manner. In BrE, verbs like *abuse*, *phone*, *refuse* and *insult* do not select that-complements. The closest equivalences of (1) in BrE, therefore, could be (2) below:

- (2) a. A woman abuses the Isaac family (by) saying that they are black
- b. He phoned saying/to say that he is coming.
- c. He refused to come/[the fact that I am his friend].
- d. He insulted me (by) saying that I was a thief.

A close observation shows that the sentences in (1) are generally verbs of saying. But unlike the verbs *say*, *inform*, *promise* and *tell*, which select that-complements in BrE, they do not select that-complements in most standard varieties of English. The difference between (1) and (2) is that, as seen in (3) below, that-complements have introducers such as the verb *say*. In a sentence like "He said that he was coming," the configuration [that...] gives the content of what was said. This could mean that *say* in BrE has no content and simply means *to utter*. The content of *say*, therefore, comes obligatorily with the use of the that-clause. I suggest that verbs like *abuse*,

phone and *refuse* have additional content in BrE. They do not simply mean *to say* but to say in a particular way, or to say a particular thing. Hence, *phone* means “to say over the telephone”, *refuse* means “to say ‘no’” and *abuse* means “to say an unjust or severe thing to somebody or about somebody.” There is no need therefore in BrE to state the particular thing that was said.

However, if the speaker deems it necessary to state the particular thing that was said unjustly, he could insert either the verb *say*, which has no content, or the expression “the fact that” (2c). The use of the expression “the fact that” in BrE heralds a full noun or nominal clause, though many see it as stylistically inappropriate. A that-nominal clause could be a that-clause as seen in (2c): “He refused (to acknowledge) the fact that I was his friend.” The insertion of the verb *say* and *the fact that* are strategies used in BrE to introduce that-complements to verbs that do not (naturally) select them. This is verifiable from the variant nature of (3) below, where “the fact that” is tacked to a verb that selects a that-clause naturally:

- (3) *He wants the fact that I should come.

There is, therefore, something in the non-insertion of *say* and *the fact that* in the sentences in (1). It could be proposed that *abuse*, *phone* and *refuse* in CamE are ranked with *say*, that is, they have no content. They mean [utter - (minus) content] and their content comes in the that-complement that follows them. If we take the case of *abuse*, we see therefore that it means “[say + content]” in BrE and “[say - content]” in CamE. Larson (1984, p. 291) distinguishes between head constituents and support constituents in embedded structures. She argues that some complex sentences have an orienter and content, so that the orienter serves to introduce the content as seen in the way (5) is derived from (4):

- (4) a. The boy said (it) (orienter)
 b. He was hungry (content)
 (5) The boy said he was hungry.

Hence, abuse-verbs are re-categorised in CamE to have the same status as *say* and to have an orienter and content. Larson’s (1984) “orienter” could mean [say - content].

So, in (1) above, the verbs in CamE take complements in a manner different from BrE. This has implications for the Theta Criterion, which holds that “each argument is assigned one and only one theta role, and each theta role is assigned to one and only one argument” in a sentence (see Haegeman 1992, p. 63). This implies that the lexical information contained in a verb determines the number of arguments that such a verb can minimally take to be completely grammatical and meaningful. Therefore, an additional argument is mapped on the verbs’ idiosyncratic structures. According to standard BrE, the clausal complements introduced by “that” are structurally unnecessary. This is because they are formally considered in CamE to be arguments and all the verbs have received enough. For the sentences to be meaningful in BrE, they need to be rewritten as in (2) above.

It is necessary to notice that that-complements generally explain the content of an abstract and intellectual event described by an abstract verb. Hence, in English, mono-transitive verbs can be classified into two groups: those that can govern that-complements and those that cannot. Consider the following expressions in which the verbs govern that-complements:

- (6) a. He expects that ... (expectation)
 b. He thinks that ... (thought)
 c. He wants that ... (desire)
 d. He remembers that ... (remembrance)

The transitive verbs in the above expressions govern that-complements and can as well govern NP-complements. As seen from the words adjacent to them in brackets, what the that-complements express can be nominalised. For instance, what someone expects is an *expectation* and what someone remembers is *remembrance*. A close look at the verbs shows that they are verbs, not of state, but verbs that express a mental event. *Expect*, *think*, *want*, *remember* and *feel* express mental events. They are also abstract verbs by not being concrete or ocular, that is, their events are not observable. They, therefore, have corresponding abstract nouns that describe or define what the that-complements express. When we say as in (6a), "He expects that ...", the sentence can be rephrased as "His expectation is that ...". It is, therefore, assumed that that-complements in BrE generally express the content of the events described by the verbs, giving them the status of content-clauses. One other characteristic of the expressions in (6) is that their subjects do not play the role of agent, as no action is involved in the verbs.

On the contrary, typical verbs of action in BrE do not select or govern that-complements as seen in the ungrammaticality of the following examples:

- (7) a. *He ate that ...
 b. *He built that ...
 c. *He slapped that ...

Even in a sentence like "He saw that the boy was lying", *saw* entails a different meaning which is more intellectual than ocular, by indicating a mental perception. The question is why action verbs in English do not select that-complements. I assume that that-complements have the function of describing the abstract content of abstract events. They are themes that are not concrete, but intellectual. It would, therefore, be tautologous and vague if one said, "I expect an expectation" or "I want a desire." What expectation or what desire is what is expected in object position. "That" is a complementiser signalling the explanation of the content of the abstract event. Action verbs do not need this because an action is visible and observable. Also notice that a physical event cannot be performed on an abstract object. Hence, sentences like the following in (8) are not grammatical, unless we use extra-linguistic knowledge, or give the verbs abstract interpretations:

- (8) a. He ate the insult.
 b. He built his honesty.
 c. He fought the temptation.

Finally, the conclusion one could draw here is that *that* in that-complements has the features [+ explanation (of content)].

As stated above, the CamE variant embedding in (1) above is an instance of overgeneralisation of the lexical entry of *saying*-verbs in BrE. The verbs lack content and the variant complementation results from the fact that that-complements provide contents of abstract events. It is postulated that the problem is intensified by evidence from the languages that co-exist with CamE. Consider the sentences in (9) below from Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE):

- (9) a. John kosɔ me say a get big head.
 John abuse me that I have big head
 “John abused me that I have a big head.”
- b. E deny say e no di come
 He refuse that he NEG ASP come
 “He refused that he is not coming.”

The use of *say* to mean *that*-complement in CPE could have an incidence on the feature [+ explanation (of content)] of *that* in CamE as seen above. The structures in (9) are supposed to have been borrowed from indigenous languages. Consider the sentences below from Lamnso, a language spoken in the North West Province of Cameroon:

- (10) a. Wu kùu mo dzi m wa ker kitu ki faŋ- in
 he abuse me that I ASP have head that big ASP
 “He abused me that I have a large head.”
- b. Wu ten dzi wu yo? wa wiy- i
 he refuse that he NEG ASP come ASP
 “He has refused that he is not coming.”

The use of the double negative in (10b) buttresses the supposition that *refuse* is [- content] in CamE. While *refuse* means *say* ‘no’ in BrE, it simply means, *say* in CamE in this context. Thus, the negation on the embedded clause in (10b) has no effect on CamE *-refuse*, as would be the case in BrE, where *refuse* is inherently negative. It can be concluded that in CamE, because of the analogy from other BrE verbs and evidence from local languages contemporaneous with CamE, *abuse*-verbs such as *curse* and *abuse* have no content, unlike in BrE. *Refuse* and

phone too lack content. In addition to the above verbs, *mock* and *laugh* can be included as seen in (11):

- (11) a. He mocked me [that I failed my exams.]
 b. He laughed (at) me [that I had no money.]

Hence, the idiosyncratic properties of the above-mentioned verbs are re-categorised in the direction of native languages. The sentences are formally correct, though with a variant structural organisation. This is, therefore, an example of English yielding to pressure from indigenous languages, which is testimony to the creativity of bilingual and multilingual speakers. It is necessary to mention, in passing, the existence in Cameroonian indigenous languages of predicates such as “smile a dry smile”, “laugh a terrible laughter”, “abuse an abuse”, “lie a lie”, “die a good death”, “live a life” and “cry a cry”. In these cognate object predicates, the complement is a copy of the verb’s information. These are cases of the lexical properties of verbs in indigenous languages in Cameroon. Occasionally, we find these kinds of properties in the very verbs in CamE.

2.3 Super-ordinate Clause Deletion for Echo-questions

In BrE, echo-questions are used as a reaction to a statement or to a declarative sentence. Speakers who wish that their interlocutors should repeat part of their statements use them. Forming echo-questions in BrE does not call for any re-ordering of constituents in the sentence. Echo-questions are realised by a process whereby *wh*-words resume the base positions of the constituents in questions. Other transformations include supra-segmental adjustments, a secondary phonetic issue in which a drawn rising tone is placed on the last word, be it a *wh*-word or some referential expression. Consider the sentences (12)–(14):

- (12) a. Thomas ate the banana.
 b. Thomas ate what?
 (13) a. Thomas slapped the thief.
 b. Thomas slapped whom?
 (14) a. Thomas is coming at noon.
 b. Thomas is coming when?

Sentences (12a), (13a) and (14a) are declarative sentences and the (b)-sentences are echo-questions. The variation of the *wh*-words according to the syntactic position and the quality of the noun replaced shows that the listener has recognised the exact element in the sentence and needs to have it repeated either for emphasis or because he did not get the constituent in question.

The data from CamE show some variation as far as echo-questions are concerned. Consider the following sentences (15)–(16):

- (15) a. I am going home.
 b. That you are going where?
- (16) a. Thomas is going home.
 b. That who is going home?

(15b) is an echo-question in CamE. The only relation it shares with BrE is that a *wh*-word is generated at the base position of the echoed constituent. Also, there is a drawn rising tone on the last word as is usually the case for (12b) above. However, an additional transformation is also applied as seen in the presence of “that”, which introduces (15b). According to the BrE-norm, the construction is deviant for two reasons. First, “that”, a complementiser, introduces a subordinate constituent clause and cannot, therefore, stand alone in any utterance, lest it sounds like a sentence fragment. Second, in BrE grammar, apart from cases of echo-questions discussed above, *wh*-constituents cannot be generated or be the target of movement where their landing sites, a precondition for that generation, that is, the COMP-position is blocked. “Where” in (15b) will have to move to the same position with “that”. The doubly filled COMP (DFC) filter filters out such constructions the way they have been analysed in BrE. WH-movement can only attract the auxiliary to that position. Two *wh*-words or elements cannot land in the same place, given that the auxiliary and the complementiser “that” are both hosted by COMP. It is important to notice that, because CamE *wh*-words generally prefer the base position, it is possible to have direct questions in subordinate clauses in CamE as in “He said that he is going when?” The above arguments show that (17) is impossible:

- (17) *Where that are you going?

Having motivated the fact that (15b) is “deviant” in BrE, we now turn to the situation as it is in CamE. I do not assume that sentence fragments are a feature of CamE. There should, therefore, be a context that recovers the grammaticality of what is absent in (15b). Echo-questions are situations in which a speaker has uttered something and the listener wants to have a particular constituent of that sentence repeated. Echo-questions are, therefore, strictly conversational and may involve a defect in the transmission of an idea. It is posited that what is absent from (15b) is some notional main clause, probably [you say ...]. Hence, the original forms of (15b) and (16b) would read as (18) and (19) below:

- (18) (You say) that you are going where?
 (19) (You say) that who is going home?

The postulation of the notional existence of the verb “say” in a deleted super-ordinate clause is borne out because it is a universal property of echo-questions to repeat what someone has said and have them repeat and emphasize a portion of it. If (18) and (19) are taken to be the “original” full utterance, then (15b) and (16b) are realised by a rule that deletes the main clause. Let this rule be called “Superordinate Clause Deletion” and be stated as follows:

- (20) Superordinate-clause deletion: Delete the super-ordinate clause to have an echo-question.

When the rule in (20) applies, (18) and (19) will be the deep structures of (15b) and (16b) above, respectively. These kinds of transformations are not licensed in BrE where the cyclic node principle applies. As shown in Radford (1981, p. 200), rules apply strictly in a bottom-to-top order, that is, they apply to subordinate constituents before applying to super-ordinate ones as formalised in (21):

- (21) Cyclic principle: Any rule application whose domain is D must precede any rule application whose domain includes D. (Radford 1981, p. 200).

If D is taken to be the subordinate clause, then no rule in English will involve the main clause and not involve the subordinate clause. Radford (1981) further explains that a node which can be the domain of application of at least some rules is called a cyclic node. Every cyclic principle is, therefore, a cyclic node. A cyclic transformation is one that obeys the cyclic principle stated in (21). Seen from this perspective, (15b) and (16b) are not cyclic transformations and are, therefore, ungrammatical in BrE.

From another perspective, if (15b) and (16b) are considered to be cases of ellipsis, then they could be acceptable. Quirk et al. (1994, p. 883 ff.) define ellipsis as a grammatical omission, and state that it operates according to the principle of verbatim recoverability. This means that the actual words whose meaning is understood or implied must be recoverable. Among the conditions cited by Quirk et al. (1994) to govern the *ellipting* of material in a sentence are textual and contextual recoverability. They continue that the *ellipted* construction could be grammatically defective as in the sentence, "Thanks", which could mean, "I owe you my thanks" or "I give you thanks." In the latter case, ellipsis is only formulaic in status. It can, therefore, be concluded that the derivation of (15b) and (16b) in CamE is formulaic and does not depend on some pre-stated material.

Talking about incomplete sentences, Lyons (1987, p. 175) says: "The ellipsis that is involved in their derivation from the alternative versions of the same sentences... are purely a matter of grammar and are independent of the wider context." He distinguishes between grammatical completeness and context completeness. Context completeness is governed by supplementary rules for the deletion of contextually determined elements in the sentence from which the utterances of correct discourse are derived. Hence, "Got the tickets?" is derived from "Have you got the tickets?" Again, the fact that the deleted subject and verb are contextually completed does not rule them out of grammatical considerations.

The question one needs to ask is whether all languages have common principles of ellipsis. Larson (1984, p. 315) concludes that languages do not have the same rules concerning when information may be left implicit. Hence, as to the kind of words whose meaning could be left implicit, it is a language-specific issue. In English, textual recoverability is the surest guarantee of ellipsis as in "She cannot sing, so she won't tonight." Hence, leaving the super-ordinate clause implicit in echo-questions in CamE is peculiar to this variety of English.

It is also important to note at this point that the rule “delete the super-ordinate clause” is not used solely for echo-questions in CamE. It is also used for reporting as seen in (22):

- (22) a. [Your father has asked me to tell you] that you should come.
 b. Thank Thomas for the effort he is making [and tell him] that he should continue in that way.

If we remove the bracketed strings from (22), we will have the sentences (23), which are typical CamE sentences:

- (23) a. That you should come.
 b. Thank Thomas for the effort he is making that he should continue in that way.

The sentences in (23) are typical CamE sentences. They show that the rule “delete the super-ordinate clause” is also a strategy for reporting, whereby the deleted verbs must be a “say-verb”. But how is reporting linked to echo-questions? It is suggested that echo-questions are one way of reporting because the speaker reports his listener’s utterance to him or her (the listener), replacing a constituent with a wh-word. Hence, “That you should come” is a sentence derived from “(He says) that you should come.” In the same vein, “That I should do what?” is an echo-question derived from, “You say that I should do what?”

Let us somehow conclude that the context of echo-questions and of reported speech, as demonstrated above, recovers the lost super-ordinate clause and leaves the subordinate constituent clause to read like an echo-question in CamE. The question now is why CamE has to resort to this derivation, given that the same procedure used in BrE to derive echo-questions could be used in CamE as seen in the *wh-in situ* rule. I propose that the reason is the avoidance of ambiguity since wh-questions are realised in CamE using the same formal organisation like echo-questions in BrE as seen below in (24).

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (24) BrE echo-question | CamE direct question |
| a. You are going where? | a. You are going where? |
| b. You are looking for whom? | b. You are looking for who(m)? |
| c. You ate what yesterday? | c. You ate what yesterday? |

Two question-types cannot use the same structural patterning. They need to be distinctive as is the case in BrE where the choice is between reordering the words and allowing the wh-word *in situ*. Also consider the question-type in the following sentences (25)–(26):

- (25) a. I am going home.
 b. That you are going home?
 (26) a. Will your Highness not sleep?
 b. His Highness will not sleep.
 c. That he will not sleep? (*The Crown of Thorns*, Asong 1995, p. 152)

Structural and Sociolinguistic Perspectives on
Indigenisation

On Multilingualism and Language Evolution

Anchimbe, E.A. (Ed.)

2014, XV, 213 p. 13 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-007-7880-1