Introduction

The purpose of this study is to measure the intelligibility of Cameroon English speech to British and American English speakers and vice versa, and to analyse the major causes of intelligibility failure when speakers of these varieties of English interact. Focus is on segmental and supra-segmental phonology. The study was motivated by a number of concerns: the trepidation nursed by some scholars that the emergence of non-native varieties around the world would cause English to disintegrate into mutually unintelligible varieties in the way Romance languages devolved from their Latin ancestors; the fact that previous studies on intelligibility were centred on the traditional approach which considers non-native varieties of English to be deficient, and not different from native varieties and the debate on the level of phonological analysis that is considered the greatest threat to intelligibility between native and non-native speakers. Five tests were designed for the study, namely Test I (connected speech), Test II (reading passage), Test III (phonemic contrast elicitation), Test IV (nucleus placement in words) and Test V (nucleus placement in sentences)

With the emergence of non-native varieties of English across the globe, the concept of intelligibility has attracted the attention of many scholars. However, the majority of major works on the concept were carried out some decades ago (see Bansal 1969; Tiffen 1974). These studies were carried out with the traditional notion of intelligibility in mind, that is, the tendency of seeing native English speech as prestigious, correct, and intelligible and the sole norm that must be emulated by non-native speakers**.** The non-native varities were thus seen as substandard, incorrect, unintelligible and needed remediation at all cost. Thus, the findings and the comments made reflected the conventional wisdom of the time. The present study deviates markedly from this line of thought. It sees intelligibility from a bi-directional perspective whereby the participants in the communication act put in equal efforts to make the process a success. We hope to be able to provide illuminating insights to the concept of intelligibility with regard to the relationship between native and non-native English speech, using Cameroon English (henceforth CamE), British and American English (hereafter BrE

and AmE) as a case study. This bi-directional approach is in line with new developments in respect of the relationship between the new and older English varieties. Gone are the days systematic new English features were seen as mistakes that needed to be corrected at all cost, when native English accents were imposed on non-native learners of the language. If the new English varieties are now being recognised and accepted as varieties of English in their own right, then concepts like intelligibility should follow suit as well. The investigation on the intelligibility of native speech, will demystify the previously held belief that only non-native speech should be tested for intelligibility. An investigation of this kind is even more imperative, given that the number of English language speakers in the outer circle significantly outweighs those of the inner circle. In short, a lot has changed with regard to the so-called native/non-native speaker dichotomy, which needs to be reflected when studying intelligibility, one of the main areas of controversy in the field.

This study can be used for a number of purposes. In general, it can be useful to the linguist and to those particularly interested in the concept of intelligibility. It can also be useful to those linguists who are taking up the task of establishing a neutral variety of English in order to enhance international intelligibility. It will also be of interest to those scholars who still see intelligibility from a one-sided perspective.

The work is organised into six chapters. The first chapter covers the background on non-native varieties of English. The main issues discussed here include the identification of non-native varieties of English, problems of standards, as well as pedagogical and attitudinal concerns. Chapter II centres on the review of literature on intelligibility. Attention is paid to factors that hinder and aid intelligibility, as well as intelligibility testing. Chapter III concentrates on English in Cameroon. It takes a look at the historical background and the linguistic situation, as well as some salient phonological features of CamE. Some previous findings on intelligibility are also reviewed and the unexplored areas are brought to the fore. Chapter IV focuses on the research design for the work. It dwells on the test material used for

the study, the speakers and the recording procedures, as well as the listeners and the listening procedures. Chapter V centres on the scoring process and intelligibility scores as well as data interpretation. Chapter VI takes up the analysis of the main causes of intelligibility failure between CamE and native English speakers. The conclusion summaries the findings, and examines the implications of the findings for pronunciation teaching/ learning in Cameroon. It equally looks at pronunciation teaching/learning in Britain and America in the light of English as an International Language (henceforth EIL), and finally suggests areas of further research.

The appendices include background information on the 40 informants, the test material for all the ten tests, the CamE speakers' spontaneous speech texts, BrE and AmE speakers' speech texts, data on intelligibility failure speaker by speaker, etc.

CHAPTER ONE: Background to the Study

1.1 Introduction

The English language has always been on the move since it arrived England in the 5th century from northern Europe. It has not only spread to settlement areas but also to exploitation areas. Commentators have shown no hesitation in labelling English as a global language, an international language, a world language and world lingua franca. Kachru (1986) sees the spread of English in terms of three concentric circles representing different ways in which the language has been acquired and also how it is currently used. The three concentric circles are the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle comprises the traditional historical and sociolinguistic bases of English in those areas where it performs all functions. In this circle, English is used as a mother tongue or first language. Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa belong to this circle. The Outer circle comprises the areas or countries that were colonised by Britain. In these settings, English plays a vital role as a second language in a multilingual milieu. The English-speakers in these areas first acquire a mother tongue or first language before learning English. They are often referred to in the literature as non-native speakers of English. Countries like Nigeria, English-speaking Cameroon, Kenya, Singapore, India, etc. belong to this circle. The Expanding Circle is made up of nations that recognise the importance of English as an international language. They give English a priority position on the list of foreign languages learnt. Germany, France, China, Gabon etc. fall into this category. The spread of English around the world shall be briefly examined in two major phases, namely, the spread to settlement areas and the spread to exploitation areas.

The spread to settlement areas had to do with the massive movement of English people to these areas. This spread was first witnessed on a domestic basis: the spread around the British Isles. The major and most significant movement was to America, which commentators like Crystal (1997) point out that this marked the turning point of the spread of English around the world. For instance, he reports that when Bismarck was asked what he

considered to be the most decisive factor in modern history, he answered: "the fact that North Americans speak English". Today, America has the largest native English-speaking population in the world. English equally spread to other settlement areas like Canada, the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

In contrast to settlement areas, exploitation areas were not repopulated with British settlers. They had adopted English for administrative purposes and initially the population continued to employ the local languages and this resulted in a multilingualistic situation. The status of English in the two areas is therefore different. English is seen in the exploitation areas as a second language (ESL).

The spread of English to exploitation areas has ushered in a very fascinating area of research on the English language during the last two decades or so. This is because the spread has led to the emergence of several varieties of the language all over the world. English has thus assumed a myriad of functions, statuses and forms in these new ecologies. These new varieties are variously called New Englishes, non-native varieties, Third World Englishes, etc. to contrast with the native varieties. This exciting twist witnessed by the language has raised a number of concerns; prominent among which is the trepidation researchers have raised concerning how the language is disintegrating into mutually unintelligible languages - the example being the way Romance languages devolved from their Latin ancestor. In this connection, the concept of intelligibility has attracted the sustained attention of researchers.

In this chapter, whilst reviewing literature on intelligibility, it would be rewarding to examine closely related issues to this concept. The identification of the new Englishes, pedagogical and attitudinal problems, as well as some salient characteristics of these non-native varieties of English will be underscored. The concept of intelligibility can hopefully be better understood against this background.

1.2 Identification of New Englishes

As a starting point, we shall identify non-native varieties of English from a geographical and societal perspective. The issue of identification of the New Englishes has been very

problematic, due to the confused way in which characteristics of these Englishes are distributed across the whole non-native English-speaking world.

1.2.1 Geographical Identification

The identification of non-native Englishes has been one of the major headaches in the domain. This is more so due to the differences between the sociolinguistic and cultural backgrounds of these new settings. Each non-native English environment seems to have its own sociolinguistic realities that make the identification of the non-native varieties problematic. Although these New Englishes have many features in common, there are some striking differences that do not permit us to see them as homogenous in nature. Thus, it is not strange to describe them using the labels Yoruba English, Nigerian English, West African English, African English, and Third world Englishes/New Englishes/ Non-Native Englishes.

When we take a close look at the labels used to describe the English varieties above, they predict a certain degree of confusion with regard to their geographical identification. Many researchers think that varieties of English should be identified from the ethnic perspective. They base their argument on the fact that one of the major characteristics of non-native Englishes is the influence of local languages (see, for example, Spencer 1971, Tiffen 1974, Wells 1982, Bailey and Görlach eds. 1984.) If this argument is accepted, then the label Yoruba English (Nigeria) is appropriate. The proponents of this approach contend that it is more appropriate. They argue that identifying a variety from an ethnic perspective guarantees the variety's homogeneity. In their consideration, homogeneity cannot be achieved if the variety is identified from a national perspective. These national varieties tend to be influenced by many ethnic accents, such as Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa in the case of Nigeria.

The above description, though convincing, is not totally satisfactory. A lot of shared linguistic characteristics cut across ethnic boundaries and occur nation-wide (Tiffen 1974:19). When discussing the range of accents identified in Nigeria, he suggests that

all have a Nigerian accent, which varies to some extent according to the speaker's mother tongue. But there are some features of Nigerian speech, which appear to be uniform throughout large parts of the country, irrespective of the mother tongue.

This argument supports the use of national labels when describing the varieties of English like Nigerian English, Cameroon English, and Singaporean English. Mbassi-Manga (1973) bases the number of varieties of English upon the number of countries where English is used as a second language. Simo Bobda (1994) however confounds this, saying that this division based on political or national boundaries is not completely satisfactory, as research shows common linguistic characteristics cutting far beyond national boundaries. This assertion is based on the fact that most features that are reported in Ghana, Nigeria, etc. are also commonly heard in Cameroon (see Spencer 1971 Sey 1973). These findings are made available thanks to the research carried out on the different national varieties by Schmied (1991a, 1996); Simo Bobda (1995, 2000a, 2001a); Simo Bobda, Wolf and Peter (1999); Wolf and Igboanusi (2003). A dearth of such data already exists. These studies help to provide answers to some pertinent questions concerning varieties of English in the world in general and Africa in particular. Having seen that we can conveniently talk of West African English, there are still a good number of features that cut across the whole of English-speaking Africa. Thus, it is not strange to come across labels like African English. Schmied (1991a) and other publications like those cited above show that although the varieties of English in Africa exhibit a great deal of differences, there are certain features that cut across the whole English-speaking continent. Simo Bobda (2000a: 254) observes that the following patterns of restructuring are common to all African English accents: RP /iː, ɪ/>i, RP /uː, ʊ/>u, RP /ɔː, ɒ/>ɔ. This renders the following pairs homophonous in all African Englishes: *beat, bit; fool, full; port, pot*. The Non-application of vowel reduction, consonant cluster simplification, glide formation, etc. are among other phonological processes that characterise African English. Simo Bobda (2000a, 2001a) can be referred to for a more comprehensive picture of phonological features that cut across the various English-speaking regions of Africa.

It is worth noting that contrary to the thought that the influence of indigenous languages account for almost all the features of a New English, research has proved that African deviations from native English phonology are not all caused by the influence of the user's source language (Simo Bobda 2000b: 124). He outlines three kinds of evidence to support this assertion: firstly, some vowel distinctions in native English that are found in African languages are neutralized in the direction of a local form of pronunciation. Secondly, some native English sounds are attested in African languages and occur in the same environment but are vitiated in African English. Thirdly, although almost all African languages have the same seven-vowel system, /i, e, a, ɛ, ɔ, o, u/, the substitution for non-occurring native English vowels are not the same throughout African Englishes (Simo Bobda 2000b: 125). On the basis of the above points, it will not be surprising to find features that cut across most, if not all, the new Englishes. Simo Bobda (2000a: 253) observes that many New Englishes in fact share most of the features common to all African accents of English. For example, features like the pronunciation of RP /ɑː/ as /a/, the merging of /iː/ and /ɪ/ as /i/, the occurrence of spelling pronunciations like parl[i]ament, bom[b]ing, s[w]ord, s[au]thern, etc. are shared by most if not all the New Englishes. The identification of non-native Englishes is therefore a very complicated but equally rewarding endeavour. This is more so because most of the New English varieties and sometimes, whole regions still suffer from great lack of literature (see Peter 2003:129; Peter and Wolf 2003). We shall now examine the new Englishes from a societal perspective.

1.2.2 Societal Identification

In the domain of New Englishes, research has shown that the education level of speakers of such a language plays a vital role with respect to the different types of English spoken within that variety (see Criper 1971, Sey 1973). Scholars agree that there is a correlation between the level of education and the type of English used. The fact that writers tend to label national varieties as, for example, Ghanaian Educated English (Sey 1973), Cameroon Educated English (Masanga 1983) show this. The qualifier, *educated,* that precedes English is meant to

provide a contrast to those varieties that lack this aspect. When talking of a New English variety, we are indeed referring to the educated variety spoken in that linguistic setting. In a non-native English-speaking country, like Cameroon, there are about four sub-varieties of English, namely the English of Francophone Cameroonians who are seen as users of the performance variety of CamE; the English of Cameroonians influenced by the native accents; the English of uneducated Cameroonians, and lastly the English of educated Cameroonians. The last variety is used by researchers as representative of CamE as a non-native variety of English. The level of education of the speaker is a major determining factor in this case.

However, Simo Bobda (1994:9) asks how much education is required to quantify the label 'educated' and a representative of a local norm. In CamE, Masanga (1983), like Sey (1973) for Ghanaian English, sees the GCE Ordinary level as the basic qualification, but this seems not to provide a satisfactory answer to the question, as Masanga himself confesses:

> ...this does not necessarily imply that every Anglophone Cameroonian who has attained this level of education automatically speaks Cameroon Standard English (CSE).

Still on the question as to where to set the level for what we call educated, Platt et al. (1984:165) quote Boadi (1971), who makes the following comments about English in Ghana:

> A few years ago most people who had spent eight to ten years at elementary school could get a reasonably good job because they could claim that they were educated. Now the position is different; present day primary school leavers and certain categories of G C E "O" level holders are said for many purposes to be "illiterates". In a desperate effort to look for the educated norm, some people have turned to university graduates and sections of the community who have professional qualifications. The difficulty with this criterion is that it leaves out a relatively large section whose use of English is undoubtedly what one would like to describe as educated.