

## Chapter I

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the use of indigenous techniques of communication can have a positive impact on the enthusiasm of the learner of English as a foreign language in Cameroon. By indigenous techniques of communication we mean techniques like role-play, songs, the telling of folktales, riddles and proverbs that are used in most indigenous societies either to help children acquire a first language or for entertainment. The work is intended as a contribution to the search for improvement of student motivation and enthusiasm, whereby they can be responsive as they participate more spontaneously in language learning. It is also intended as a contribution to the search for improvement in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Cameroon. My interest in this research has been substantially influenced by my experience of working for almost a decade with learners of English as a foreign language in Francophone/bilingual secondary/high schools in Cameroon. My work has been teaching English as a Foreign Language to Francophone students of ages 12-18 years. This work led me to the realization that students respond to English language teaching with very little enthusiasm. They make little or no progress in learning the language, much less in communicating in it, despite the diligent use of the structural method teachers are trained in school to use.

The structural approach to language teaching involves the combination of the use of textbooks, tape recordings, filmstrips, slides and classroom presentations (McArthur 1992: 583). The structural approach of the Cameroonian teacher is even more restricted to the textbook, the chalkboard, and classroom presentations because of the unavailability of other infrastructure like tape recordings, filmstrips and slides which should normally be used with this approach. As a teacher I have observed with some curiosity the reluctance with which some of these students come to English language lessons and take part in class activities, if they bother to do so at all. One of the major questions I have often asked myself is why Francophone students find English language learning boring and what could be done to solve the problem of teaching English to them. It was clear that lack of motivation, enthusiasm, and communication were the problems that have to be tackled to help these learners. What, I have tried to imagine, could be done to raise the students' motivation and enthusiasm and make them take a keen interest in the learning of English?

What, I also thought, could be done to make these learners become more communicative seeing that they do not bother at all to use the English language either in or out of school.

I have tried on a number of occasions to tell folktales or teach a song in class when I found the students were bored with the lesson and discovered that the students immediately became alert. Their alertness was probably not for the direct purpose of making any linguistic gain but for the sheer entertainment of listening to a story or taking part in the singing, all of which they seemed to enjoy. Also, with the background knowledge I have in theatre, my involvement with some theatre troops in Cameroon and the results their play-acting has on the people, I have found out that it is always easy to make meaning clear if a situation is dramatized. In class the students enjoy this role-play because they see themselves in different roles and can communicate freely with their classmates, thereby fulfilling my hidden motive of making them communicate in the target language. On their own the students do not attempt to communicate or take part in class activities no matter how many years of English language learning they have been exposed to.

Based on the positive change in the students due to the use of these activities, I hypothesized that the introduction of some indigenous techniques of communication like role-play, storytelling, singing, riddles and proverbs in the classroom might help improve the learning of English as a foreign language. The use of these techniques represents an important aspect of language learning and communication in every culture and frequent means of communication in many societies. Linguists like Lado (1964), Gee (1987), Post and Rathet (1996) have proved that it is beneficial for students to learn a foreign language using the material that they are familiar with and that is found in their learning environment. Storytelling, role-play, songs, riddles and proverbs are found in all indigenous societies and all societies use them in teaching in one way or the other. Their abundance in the Cameroonian society means that they could be used for foreign language teaching/learning in combination with current teaching approaches. As some studies have shown, local literatures in English form an excellent basis for foreign language teaching/learning (Kachru 1986, Talib 1998, Elgar 1998) and indigenous techniques constitute an important base for local literature. Based on the idea of the use of indigenous techniques, teachers and students in Cameroonian schools were asked by means of questionnaires what they thought about changing the existing

manner of teaching/learning English as a foreign language. This change will entail moving from the strictly structural approach, which is presently used in schools, to including some indigenous techniques of communication. This change, it is believed, will help motivate the learners of English as a foreign language, improve their enthusiasm and help them become communicative. To carry out a study in the teaching/learning of English as foreign language in Cameroon however, it is necessary to know what the language policy in Cameroon is.

### 1.1 Language Teaching/Learning Policy in Cameroon

Cameroon is a bilingual country with English and French as the official languages, and very multilingual in its wealth of traditional languages. Education in Cameroon is based on the policy of bilingualism. According to Echu (2004:5),

the policy of official language bilingualism constitutes the main core of Cameroon's language policy. Article 1 paragraph 3 of the constitution of 18 January 1996 states that the official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The state shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country.

This promotion of bilingualism does not however mean that the students learn both languages simultaneously. It means that in the Cameroonian educational system one of the official languages is the medium of instruction and the other is studied as a subject as part of the curriculum (Chumbow 1980:293). The two official languages do not have an equal official status because the French language is more officially used than the English language and spoken by the majority of Cameroonians (Mbangwana 1989, Schmied 1991, Wolf 2001). According to Schmied (1991:17), "in Cameroon, English is taught in all primary and secondary schools for nation-building purposes, to link Francophone East to Anglophone West Cameroon, but it is not used as a medium in the East". This, according to Simo Bobda (2001:8), shows why

up until the late 1980s, the motivation of Francophones to learn English was quite low. This could be blamed partly on the lack of serious pressure from government to do so. At the beginning of the third millennium, there is still no scramble to learn English as such. For example, the total number of Francophones learning English in the various language centres is far

below 10.000, which is insignificant compared to the total population of 12 million Francophone Cameroonians

We can, therefore, see that the lack of motivation and enthusiasm to learn English as a foreign language existed and still exists among Francophone Cameroonians. As confirmed by Mbangwana (1989:320), "most educated Cameroonians speak one or the other language and some both, but both languages remain official languages of education, law, diplomacy and politics". Since these two official language are not learned simultaneously it can be seen that the educational policy in Cameroon does not compel its citizens to become bilingual, a reason why most Francophone learners show a nonchalant attitude towards learning the English language. However, because the English language is a subject in the school curriculum and English is an international language, there are students who take an interest in it and parents who encourage their children to learn it.

Apart from being a subject in the school curriculum, learning a foreign language in Cameroon is an important practical concern since every Cameroonian is always bound to come in contact with the other language especially in official situations. The unenforcement of the government official policy of biligualism does not however, help in motivating the learners. This is because most students are only compelled to learn the English language as part of the curriculum and in order to pass their examinations and not for the use of the language in practical everyday activities. Even when English is only studied for examination purposes, a failure in the English language test does not necessarily mean a failure in the examination, so most of the students are not forced to and do not show much enthusiasm in learning the language. The fact that in the Teacher Training College emphasis is put on the use of the structural approach to teach the student-teachers also means that not much thought is given to their future teaching of that language for practical everyday use. There is therefore the production of incompetent and less than willing speakers of the English language from the Cameroonian educational system, although learning a language among other reasons is principally learning to communicate in it.

Bilingual education is considered to be an essential part of secondary education for all students in Cameroon, which means that everyone who goes through secondary/high school education in Cameroon is expected to be able to communicate in both English and

French. This is, however, not the case. As confirmed by Simo Bobda and Tiomajou (1995:74)

[It] is an exaggeration to talk of bilingual education in Cameroon given that what we call bilingual schools are merely two distinctive, monolingual (one French-speaking and the other English-speaking) educational institutions, which have nothing in common apart from the fact that they are located on the same premises.

For purposes of using the languages in the society after leaving school every Cameroonian student is expected to learn English and French languages respectively in school. Unlike previous the purpose of language teaching worldwide which used to be to equip learners with the ability to read a foreign literature, the aims are now predominantly to provide them with the competence to speak and otherwise communicate for practical purposes. This holds true for every society. There is, therefore, a call for a change in methodology in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Cameroonian schools from the purely structural, to what will render the learners communicative. This calls for the use of the communicative approach to language teaching. The communicative approach is a teaching approach for the expression of meaning, interaction and communication in the target language (Larsen-Freeman 1986). With this approach learners are taught to model their language on what they will encounter outside the classroom. However, because the adoption of the communicative approach into schools in the developing world has its constraints (Gahin and Myhills: 2001), this approach could be combined with indigenous techniques from the learner's environment and the structural approach, which the Cameroonian teacher normally uses.

As a state school teacher in Cameroon and a part-time teacher in the British Council Language Teaching Center, I have observed with curiosity the way adult Francophones flock to the British Council Language Teaching Center to learn English when they have a job which entails the use of this language. It was realized that these adults are the same students who showed very little enthusiasm in learning when they were taught English in the secondary/high schools but who now need the language in their jobs. It was assumed, therefore, that there must be a way of improving on the present way of teaching/learning English as a foreign language in secondary/high schools to make the students more enthusiastic and make them take the learning of English language seriously. This improvement will have to introduce innovative techniques