

Language Change as a Peace Negotiating Strategy by English-Speaking Students Studying in French-Speaking Universities in Cameroon

Nicoline Agbor Tabe

Department of Bilingual Letters, Coordinator of the Bilingual Training Unit,
Higher Teachers' Training College, University of Maroua, Cameroun.

Abstract: The constant increasing movement of Anglophone Cameroonian students to study in the French-speaking part of the country cannot go unnoticed by linguistic researchers. The mobility of the target population with their language/culture (English) to come in contact with the recipient language/culture (French) must exert some changes on the migrant language usage. This paper investigates the changes in the usage of English in university campuses by Anglophone students studying in some French-speaking Universities in Cameroon as a peace negotiating strategy. The paper equally looks at the difficulties faced by the target students that mount pressure on them to change their linguistic usage behaviour. The language contact mechanisms put in place by the students to cope in their unpropitious learning environs is also of interest to the researcher.

The study is guided by some questions: Are there noticeable changes in the way English-speaking students studying in French-speaking universities use English? How do they manifest these changes? Can changes in usage serve as a peace negotiating strategy among other factors? Following the above, this study is based on the argument that; linguistic change in usage is an ultimately inevitable natural way of negotiating peace and gaining recognition manifested by the target population to adapt to the needs of their new setting.

The domain theory by Fishman (1972) is used as theoretical frame while observation and a questionnaire are data collection strategies.

Possible findings show that the target population change their language even against their wish for the purpose of negotiating peace and gaining recognition in their respective universities. Also, English-speaking students switch or shift from English to French to capture the attention of their lecturers and administration who are above 90% French-speaking, for the purpose of intelligibility and also to a limited extend to fill in their linguistic vacuum.

Key words: Language change, usage, peace negotiation strategies, English-speaking, French-speaking Universities

1. Introduction

Before the creation of the University of Buea in 1993 in Cameroon, there existed only one state university in Yaounde created in 1961 which attracted most young Anglophone Cameroonians to migrate to Yaounde for higher education. Besides the university, most if not all professional higher institutes of learning were situated in Yaounde. Most, if not all competitive entrance examinations registrations and writing centres were in Yaounde and Douala which was even more pushing factor for most young Anglophone Cameroonians to abandon their original settlement for greener pastures and resettled in French Cameroon for the purpose of higher education. The creation of the University of Buea with other five French state Universities did not check the rate of Anglophone constant migration to French Cameroon. This is so, because the conditions to be admitted to the lone Anglophone university of Buea were very strict and elitist which disfavoured many General Certificate Examination (GCE) holders who were expected to score very high points as admission conditions including passing in English as opposed to the French Universities that were open to Cameroonian holders of GCE regardless of their grades, points and to a certain extent, regardless of a linguistic pass. Even with the creation of the University of Bamenda where you need to pass an entrance exams to gain admission into the faculty did not check the migration of Anglophone students to French-speaking universities. Thus, the open door admission policy of the Francophone state Universities acted as a point of attraction for Anglophone youths to move to the French University for easy access to higher education.

The ever constant increasing movement of Anglophone Cameroonians to the French-speaking part of the country for education and professionalism cannot be unnoticeable by linguistic researchers. Many of them have carried out research in relation to contact phenomena such as: Weinreich (1953) Blom and Gumperz (1972), Ferguson (1972), Sankoff (2001), Kachru (1986), Nelde (1980, 1992, 1997), Thomason (1997, 2001), Anchimbe (2006), Agbor Tabe (2016) etc. The mobility of the target population with their language/culture (English) to come in contact with the recipient language/culture (French) must exert some changes on the migrant language usage and attitude. The direct consequence of contact to any language highlighted by researchers in multilingual communities is language change manifested through certain indicators such as code mixing, code selection, interference, borrowing, translation and interpretation, just to name a few.

This paper investigates the changes in the usage of English in university campuses by Anglophone students studying in some French-speaking Universities in Cameroon as a peace negotiating strategy. The paper equally looks at the difficulties faced by the target students that mount pressure on them to change. The language contact mechanisms put in place by the students to cope in their unpropitious learning environs is also of interest to the researcher.

The study is guided by some questions:

1. Are there noticeable changes in the way English-speaking students studying in French-speaking universities use English in their respective campuses?
2. If yes then, what are the causes of the change in usage?
3. How is linguistic change manifested by the target population?
4. Can changes in usage serve as a peace negotiating strategy among other factors?

Following the above objectives and questions, the study is based on the argument that linguistic change in usage is an ultimately inevitable natural way of negotiating peace and gaining recognition manifested by the target population through certain language contact mechanisms to adapt to the needs of their host setting.

The domain theory by Fishman (1972) is used as a frame for data collection and analysis. Observation and a questionnaire are data collection strategies while a tape recorder serves as an instrument used in data collection. The target population for this study is English-speaking students studying in French-speaking state universities (University of Yaounde I, Yaounde II, Douala, Dschang, Ngoaoundere and Maroua) in Cameroon excluding students in the language departments.

2. Data presentation, interpretation and analysis

For the purpose of convenience and clarity, data has been presented and analysed based on three main headings namely; problems encountered by the target students in campus, language change as a peace negotiation strategy manifested through domains of usage and language contact strategies put in place to cope with the problem situation.

2.1. Problems encountered by the target students

The difficulties encountered by the target students in their respective campuses range from their low level in French, to poor attitude of the school authorities towards problem solving when the students express themselves in English, poor marks allocation for students writing in English by lecturers who do not understand English, difficulties in communication during classroom lectures, difficulties in note taking, participation during the learning process etc. They will be discussed in turns below.

2.1.1. Low level of students in French

The level of the English-speaking students in French was of importance to this study in order to find out whether the dominant language used in their respective campuses is a problem to them. It equally helped the researcher to know if the students are armed with or are at peace with the language of their educational setting.

Through a questionnaire administered to our target students, investigations were made about their level in French with regards the four main communicative skills (speak, listening, writing and reading). The table below serves as palpable proof of the very low level of mastery of French by English-speaking students schooling in French-speaking universities.

Communicative Answers	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Reading	Total %
Beginner	64	54	80	50	62
Intermediate	32	40	16	40	32

Advanced	04	06	04	10	06
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 1: Level of English-speaking students in French

From the table above, it is clear that 62%, a majority of English-speaking students in the target universities are beginners in French; the language which majority of the students testified that 94% of their courses are being taught in with the exception of English for the purpose of bilingual training. It is also seen that some 32% of the target population are intermediates and only 6% are advanced.

The fact that majority of the students are beginners in French indicates that they are not at peace in the classroom or learning environment as language usage is concern. This further explains why the beginners testify that they hardly participate during classroom lectures and others hardly copy notes during classes since it is dictated in French. For intermediates, they understand to a certain extent and can take down notes in English while the lecturer is lecturing and write some sentences in French which they did not understand in English.

2.2.2. Problems of language and communication

Students were equally asked to identify the problems they face that can make them not to be at peace with their learning environment. Findings from the field reveals that 50 % of the informants identify the problem of language and communication while 22% indicated the problem of recognition, 06%, selected the problem of culture and 12% chose all the above problems. Some students even added more linguistic problems of poor marks allocation for students who write test/exams in English because most of their lecturers do not understand English and so prefer to allocate most of the times average marks for them which often is not satisfactory to the target students.

2.2.3. Poor attitude of the school authorities towards problem solving when the students express themselves in English

Further difficulties encountered by the target students that make them not to be at peace with their studying environment is the attitude of the school authorities when students confront them with problems explaining in English. 86 % of the target students claim that each time they confront their school administration with a problem explaining in English, they do not receive prompt attention. They said their authorities will react only when they insist hesitantly while 14 % said they receive prompt reaction. The delay in reaction exercised by the school authorities is not by bias but probably due to the fact that they do not understand perfectly the problems of the students because of their low level of understanding the language used by the students. Schooling in an unpropitious setting where the migrant language in some situations fails to perform its function, where it affects your academic performance and participation, where it affects attitude towards resolving key problems of mark allocation and mistakes, where the school administrators will not easily listen to you when you express yourself complaining is not a peaceful situation.

When people come in contact physically and linguistically, two things are obvious, conflicts and change respectively. Nelde (1990) identifies two types of conflicts which are equally evident in contact situations as natural and artificial. The above discomforting situation undergone by the students is a natural conflict which deserves solution for peace to rein in the mind of the target population. Faced with the above language problems and language attitude in an educational environment where 94% of the courses are taught in French with most French-speaking lecturers under grading the target students, the migrants student is totally displeased, discomforted, frustrated and disenfranchised.

Thus, the mobility of the target population with their language/culture (English) to come in contact with the recipient language/culture (French), stated earlier in the introduction, must exert some changes on the migrant language usage and attitude as a way of resolving the problem thereby negotiating peace. The subsequent portion of this paper pinpoints language change as the strategy used by the target population to negotiate peace and to survive with their linguistic discomforting situation in campuses.

2.2. Language change

What is obvious to languages in contact is change and what happens to people in contact situation is change in usage and attitude. This part of the paper pinpoints change in language and attitude adapted by the students to as a way of gaining peace in their unpropitious linguistic environs.

2.2.1. Strategies used by students to re-adapt in campuses

Through the questionnaire, the target students were asked what they do to re-adapt or resolve the problems of language, communication, recognition and to a lesser extend culture. The students were given options to choose and were authorised to tick more than one possibility. They were:

- A- Try to change from using English to French in certain situations for the purpose of communication
- B- Try to make friends with French-speaking students
- C- Try to force yourself in using French during participation in classroom
- D- Try to re-adjust to suit the culture.

While 50% of the population selected A and C, 28% chose B, 18% opted for all the options and 04% of them ticked D. Following the results, it is clear that language change among others is the obvious strategy used by English-speaking Cameroonian students to negotiate peace in their dominantly French-speaking educational settings. Alobwede (1999) and Mbangwana (1999) confirm the influence exerted by the French language on English in Cameroon.

The next worry of this researcher is to know how language change as a peace negotiating strategy is manifested by the students in their different campuses. Domain allocation in language usage is the focus of the next part of this paper.

2.2.2. Use of language in Campus

The different situations in which the target students use English, French or both languages in campuses were of interest to this study in abit to know their language usage attitude. The various situations occurred during their participation in classroom lectures, tutorial classes, group work, test/exams, buying things in campus, seeking the services from the school administration, while discussing with friends and mates in campus. As earlier stated, students change their language and it is manifested through various realms. The target population responded to questions that verified the language they use in campus in different situations. They were given three language options (English, French or both) to choose one in each situation. The table below is a statistical representation of the findings.

Domain of usage	Participation in class lectures	Participation in tutorial classes	Participation in group work	During test/ Exams	When buying things in campus	While seeking the services of the school administration	While discussing with friends	While discussing with mates	Total %
Answers									
English	44	60	22	80	04	28	10	12	32.5 %
French	12	10	30	04	66	20	26	48	27%
Both	44	30	48	16	30	52	64	40	40.5 %

Table 2: Language usage in campus

From the above table, the researcher took interest in situations where the students either change from using English to French or use both languages in campus. By doing so, the scores of the two have been combined together to give a picture of language change by the students. The manifestation of change during their participation in classroom lectures shows that some 56% of students use either French or both while tutorial classes, some 40 % use French or both languages in campus. In a similar vein, some 78 % of students use only French and both languages during their group work, 20% during test/exams, 96% when buying things in campus, 72% when seeking services from the school administration, while 90% when discussing with friends and 84% use either French or both language while discussing with mates in campus. More situations of language change in campus advanced by the students are as follows:

1. When I have a Francophone mate by my side and I am about to buy something and the seller can't understand me well, I mix the languages for my mate to understand me and explain to the seller.
2. When trying to customise my francophone mates to give me handouts in French for subsequent translation.
3. To create acquaintances with Francophone students who don't understand English.
4. Some administrators pretend not to understand English so I am obliged to try French.
5. When copying notes in class since it is dictated in French.
6. When photocopying in campus.
7. The reaction of the administration towards my greeting each time I approach them for a problem pushes me to use French even against my wish to have solution to my problem.
8. Most administrators don't identify with English.
9. When I need explanations of the classroom lecture from French-speaking mates who was participative during the class.
10. To ask for directives or assistance.
11. When I need to explain something in a crisis situation.

12. Since some French-speaking students don't want to make any effort to use or understand English, I am bound to use broken French.
13. During practicum to explain what I am doing to the lecturer.
14. To seek attention in the school restaurant or canteen.
15. When asking questions in the classroom since I am tired of asking questions in English without having answers.
16. To solve problems of marks since it is delicate.
17. During interclass competitions.

Students were equally questioned if they feel at peace or comforted when they change from using English to French or mix both languages in campus and 90 % of them said yes.

2.2.3. Language usage attitude in campus

Cameroonian linguistic researchers like Ze Amvele (1999) and Atechi (2015) have carried out research related to language usage attitude by Cameroonians which this current researcher equally took interest in. The current paper also looks at the usage attitude of the target students in campus to see if language change occurs as a peace negotiating strategy. The forthcoming table pictures the situation.

Usage attitude	Maintenance of English	Complete shift to French	Alternation between English and French
Scores	32.5%	27%	40.5%

Table 3: Attitude of students towards language usage in campus

The table above summarises the language usage attitude in campus by the target students. While 27% completely shift from English to French in campus, 40.5% alternate between English and French and only 32.5% maintained the usage of English in campus. Notice that faced with this unfavourable linguistic setting, the extremist students either maintain the use of English or switch completely to French in campus while the moderates fluctuates between the use of English and French. One can also say that those who maintain the use of English are those who are beginners or have no level in French while the intermediates fluctuates between English and French and the advanced students in French completely switch to French as a peace negotiating strategy.

2.3. Language contact mechanisms used by the students as indicators of language change

The above section captures the concept of language change as a peace negotiation strategy put in place by the target population. This present section brings to the limelight, the indicators of language change in contact situation such as code alteration, code mixing, code switching, negotiation and approximative translation.

2.3.1. Code alternation

Code alternation is a language change indicator used for peace negotiation in campus by the students. Thomason (2001:137) defines code alternation as:

the use of two (or more) languages by the same speaker. But unlike code-switching, code alternation does not occur in the same conversation with the same speaker.

Instead, bilinguals use one of their languages in one set of environments and the other language in a completely different set of environments.

The fact that majority of the students fluctuate in usage between English and French while others completely switch from English to French in almost all the situations in campus brings to mind the concept of code alternation. The scores on the table 3 above shows code alteration by the students. Most students alternate in usage as they sometimes use English and French in most situations in Campus in general with a score of 40.5%. Further testimony of alternation is buttressed when 48% students said they sometime use French when writing test/exams for several reasons advanced below:

1. To fill in words that I don't know in the other official language.
2. To enhance the understanding of the teacher who can easily understand when I write the keywords and topic sentences in French since some have an attitude of grading paying attention to the words they used in class.
3. Because I copy notes in French, I sometimes unconsciously reproduce it in French during test and exams especially the areas I could not translate in English.
4. To be graded without discrimination since the lecturers don't read when you write in English and you can only be allocated an average score as opposed to when you write using their key lecture sentences and phrases in French.
5. To write words that I don't know their English Translations since I usually copy notes in French.
6. Lack of proficiency in French.
7. Use some French words in bracket during test/exams to make the teacher recognise that I followed up his lectures.
8. Because of alot of exposure to French.
9. To adapt to the language used by majority of people in class.
10. Because teachers always complain of not understanding English.
11. To avoid double stress of translating before reading.
12. During the test/exams, there are some answers that I understand and know their answers only in French.
13. To answer questions that are related to areas of the course that I did not quite understand to put in my own words. So I reproduce what the teacher gave in French.
14. Because all the notes and lectures are given in French.
15. To better express myself in the lecturer's preference language.
16. Because most exams are set in French and some are multiple choices answers and requires short answers in writing.
17. To avoid poor translation of the question to English.
18. Teachers expect the students to give them back what was taught in class. using their words. So translation might be blurry for the teacher.

The above linguistic behaviour by students is in line with Hymes' (1968) *Ethnographic Approach* to communication where he indicates extra-linguistic co-relates such as the participants, the locale, the topic, the setting, role relations, the tone, the intention and pressure from environment can be accountable for the choice of a code in such a multilingual setting.

Further indicator of language change used as for peace negotiation by the target students is code mixing which is the concern of the next part of this paper.

2.3.2. Code mixing

According to Mackey (1968), it refers to "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of the bilingual as a result of their familiarity with more than one language in contact, i.e., as a result of language contact". For Thomason (2001), code mixing is intrasentential switching. Code mixing' is therefore, closely related to negative transfer, unconventional borrowing which occurs at the intralingual level. It can also be seen as the intrusion of single lexical items or structures of one language into another during a speech act. Some two questions asked to the students during the field research intended to know if students notice that they mix English and French within a sentence in class when asking questions or participating in classroom lectures and also when writing tests and exams. The charts below are a representation of the state of affairs.

Code mixing in class when asking questions or participating in classroom lectures

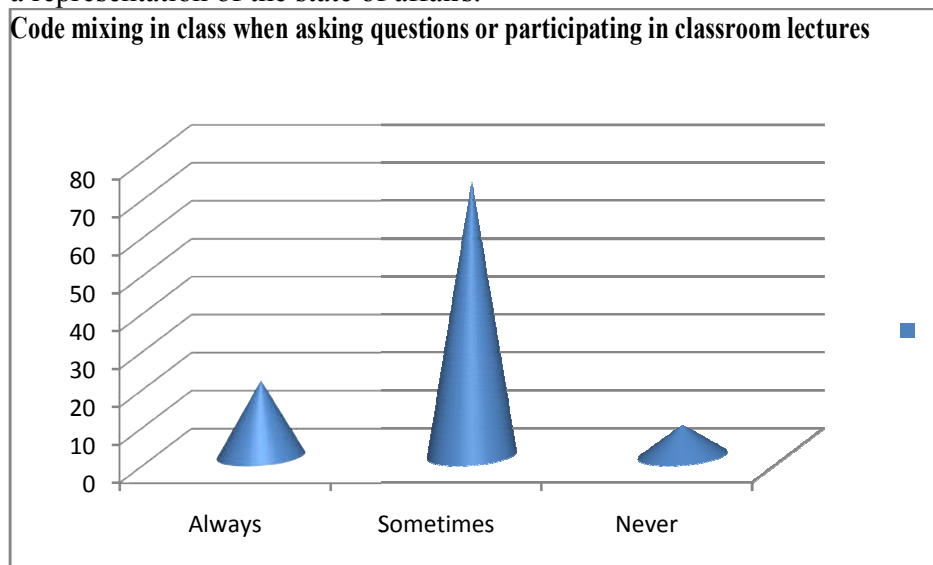


Chart 1: Code mixing in class when asking questions or participating in classroom lectures

In the first case, some 72% of the students ticked sometimes and some 20% of the respondents ticked always and only 8% said never. Reasons such as: to enhance the understanding of your lecturer and/or mates, to gain recognition from your lecturer and/or mates, to be assertive and to fill in a word(s) that I do not know in the other official language where advanced.

In the second case which had to do with code mixing during test/exams, the following results came out.

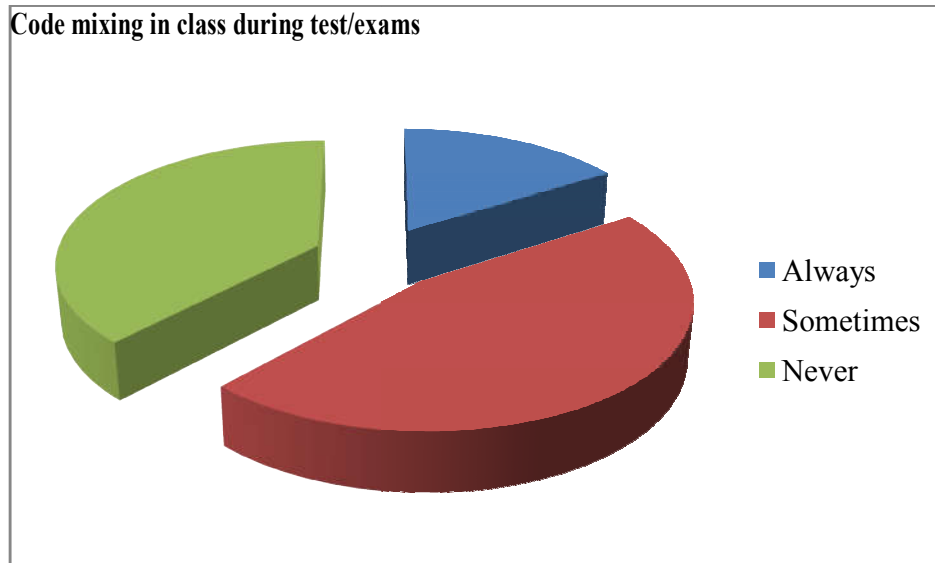


Chart 2: Code mixing in class during test/exams

The above chart indicates that, while 46% attested mixing codes sometimes, 16% chose always and only 38% claimed never to mix codes during the above situation. Reasons advanced by students are: to make the teacher understand what I have written, to facilitate marking for the teacher, to please the teacher by using the language he understand and to emphasize on keywords or topic sentences.

Further indicator of code mixing was seen through some randomly collected sentences made by the target students in campuses during the observation phase of the data collection process. The English versions of the French words used by the students in their sentences are translated to English in brackets below.

- 1- My binôme (pair partner) is sick.
- 2- I am coming from the scolarité (admission office).
- 3- I have a problem with my documents at the scolarité (admission office).
- 4- Please, can I know my matricule number?
- 5- Please Sir, you have not treated my requête (complaint).
- 6- The student had a fight with a BIR (RIB) over an ENS (Higher Teachers' Training College) female student.
- 7- I am on stage (internship) at GBHS Maroua.
- 8- I ended with my my teaching practice stage (internship) last week.
- 9- Peter was convocado (summoned) at the police station.
- 10- I was convocado (summoned) for a case at the police station.
- 11- Paul wrote many concours (entrance exams) this year.
- 12- I am preparing to write five concours (entrance exams) this year to try my luck.
- 13- ENSYaoundeconcour (entrance exams) was very difficult.
- 14- The exposition (presentation) in class was appreciated by the teacher.
- 15- The exposé (presentation) groups have been created by the lecturer.
- 16- Our group exposed (made a presentation) in class.
- 17- He has given TPE (personal work) topics to the students.
- 18- Our group has five TPE (personal work) topics to work on during the weekend.
- 19- My bordereau (receipt) is missing.

- 20- The bordereau number (reference number) has not come.
 21- My revendeur (sales agent) is cheating on me.
 22- That revendeur (sales agent) got me angry.
 23- I am going to deposit (submit) my documents at the Department.
 24- We have to deposit (submit) our dissertations before the end of this month.
 25- He is the best démarché (search agent) in town in terms of house searching.

2.3.3. Code switching

Code switching (intersentential switch) is also further indicators of language change portrayed by the target population. The following chart gives a palpable picture of the situation.

Code switching from one paragraph to another during test/exams

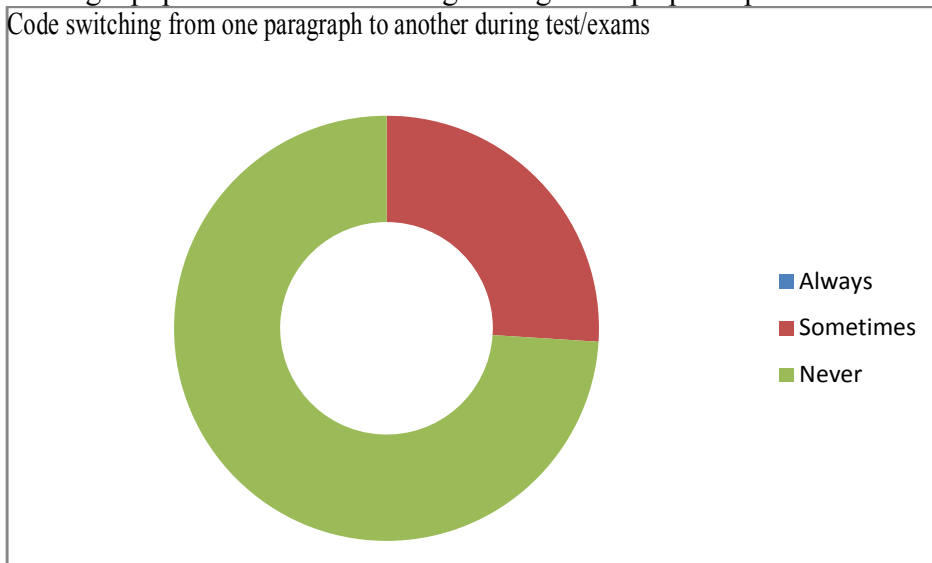


Chart 3: Code switching from one paragraph to another during test/exams

The above chart depicts that 74% of the population said they never switch from English to French from one paragraph to another when writing test/exams for same reasons given above for inter-sentential code mixing while 26% opted for sometimes and non of the students selected always. The fact that no student said he or she always switch codes is obvious because switching codes during test or exams is not accepted in the Cameroonian Educational system. Students are expected to choose one language and be consistent in during evaluations. Also, during the observation phase of classroom lectures, it was noticed that the students ask questions in English and when they notice negative facial reaction of their lecturer and mates, they attempt to explain in French there by practicing a temporal shift to enhance understanding. This brings to the limelight the use of approximate translations mentioned by Nkwain (2013) used by the target students as a negotiating strategy used in campuses.

2.3.4. Negotiation

Given that most target students are beginners in French and still force themselves in using French during classroom participation earlier indicated in 2.1.1., spotlight the notion of negotiation as a peace negotiating strategy used by students in campuses. Thomason (op.cit:142) has this to say about negotiation as a language change mechanism.

The 'negotiation' mechanism is at work when speakers change their language (A) to approximate what they believe to be the patterns of another language or dialect (B). Crucially, this definition includes situations in which speakers of A are not fluent in B, as well as situations in which they are. ... If both A speakers and B speakers engage in

the 'negotiation' process, the result will be either two changed languages ... The most striking cases of 'negotiation' are those in which nobody in the contact situation knows anybody else's language, because that is where A speakers' beliefs about B's structure are most likely to be mistaken.

The fact that most English-speaking students are beginners in French, negotiation as stated above is likely to occur as they are left with no option rather than forcing themselves in using French which they do not master yet. The 50% of students earlier stated as those who try to force themselves in using French to cope with their linguistic challenges in campus testifies the use of 'negotiation' as a peace negotiating device.

3. Conclusion

The study that was guided by some questions (Are there noticeable changes in the way English-speaking students studying in French-speaking universities use English? If yes then, what are the causes of change? How is linguistic change manifested? Can changes in usage serve as a peace negotiating strategy among other factors?) has provided answers to the questions during the data presentation, interpretation and analysis part of this paper through three key subheadings namely; problems encountered by the target students, manifestation of language change as a peace negotiation strategy and indicators of language change.

Findings reveals that the target population change their language for the purpose of peace negotiation manifested through several indicators namely; code alternation, code mixing, code switching, negotiation and approximate translation. Further findings indicate that student practice intrasentential and intersentential switch from English to French to capture the attention and gain recognition from their lecturers and administration that are above 90% French-speaking, for the purpose of intelligibility and also to fill in their vocabulary vacuum.

All in all, this study confirms the hypothesis which argues that linguistic change in usage is an ultimately inevitable natural way of negotiating peace and gaining recognition manifested by the target population through certain language contact mechanisms to adapt to the needs of their host setting.

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