

Challenges Faced by Cameroonian Linguistic Communities in the Promotion, Preservation and Maintenance of Local Languages

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Linguistic research has demonstrated the importance of indigenous languages in National development. UNESCO (1951), Chumbow (1987), Bamgbose (1990) etc have discussed the role of national languages in nation building through education. Fishman (2001) demonstrates beyond doubt that the death of any language means the death of valuable aspects of the culture and identity of its speakers. As a result, many conferences have been organised on African languages as tools for national development. The 23rd West African Linguistic Society congress held on the theme “African Linguistics and the Development of African communities” while the 24th Congress on its part had as central theme “Globalisation and the Future of African Languages”. Despite this overwhelming evidence and the resulting linguistic works that have been produced on Cameroonian languages, the crusade is not yielding significant fruits in Cameroon, a country with over 273 indigenous languages (Gordon 2005). The challenges involved must be identified and solutions provided to ensure that Cameroonian languages assume their role in the development of that society. This paper demonstrates that attitudes of linguists who are opponents to mother tongue education, multiplicity of languages, opposition from educated elites, dialectal variation, and lack of funding are key issues that must be addressed urgently to ensure that the enormous linguistic literature available is effectively utilised. The paper proposes that conferences and discussions among linguists are like converting a convert; which will never provide the necessary solutions. Rather, more attention needs to be given to non-linguists: policy makers, elites, funding agencies etc who will be appropriately educated to cease from being obstacles to facilitators. Only then can the dream of making African languages veritable tools of nation building, culture preservation and identity assertion be realised.

