



Language Changes and the Evolution of Christian Doctrines in Cameroon

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Abstract: This article examines how the world through Cameroon is experiencing rapid changes in the sphere of Christianity and how language is responding to such changes. Language is a tool of communication that enables societal realities to be effected. New doctrines, practices and ideologies conceived by denomination and church planters are advocated via meaningful words and expressions, including absolute adjectives in church names, songs, crusade and sermon themes, to communicate the intended information to participants. Preachers use words and expressions that are captivating enough to appeal to the senses of their followers and potential followers. They use words and expressions that purport to unveil the quality, objectives and mission statements of their churches in an attempt to attract members. Most of the names insinuate miraculous and deliverance practices that seem to meet the needs of potential followers, but the issue is that if the language of persuasion does not meet the needs of the converts at the end of the day, language use will be volatile as converts will subsequently backslide.

Keywords: Christian Doctrines, Evolution, Changes.

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INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that Christianity is one of the religions that exists in Cameroon, and it is normal that things that exist should evolve with time. It is a religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. It was introduced in Cameroon between 1841 and 1845 by John Clarke and Dr Prince (former black slaves from Jamaica in 1841), Joseph Merrick and Andre Fuller (still former black slaves from Jamaica in 1845) and Alfred Saker (British Baptist missionary in 1845). See Mveng (1987:7), Nsoga (2005) slageren (1969:57) and Eyong Eta (1988:50). They were all Protestant Baptist preachers who were later followed by another Protestant mission known as the Basel Mission. The Catholic Church was later introduced on the 25 October 1890, thanks to Andreas Kwa Mbang, a Cameroonian, sent to Germany in 1888 to study bakery and who encouraged 'German missionary conscience'.

Thenceforth, Christianity has gained ground in the country and millions of Cameroonians have been converted. Mbakop (2007:7) says that "figures move from 50% (7.850000 inhabitants; Encarta; Microsoft 2004) to 56.6% (8.886200 inhabitants; Messina and Slageren 2005) of the population". Further studies may even prove that the number has grown more than this especially because Christian persuasion is stronger now more than before. This paper does not do a historical study but focuses on the changes that have occurred in this domain especially between 1990 and 2009; showing how language has been responding to such changes.

It is obvious that missionaries who came in 1841 met Cameroonians who had never known about the existence of a super natural being called Jesus Christ. These missionaries surely met some resistance but managed in different ways to convert many Cameroonians who later continued in the

battle. Some of their persuasive methods included the establishment of schools, hospitals, vocational centres, and evangelistic crusades as well as witness bearing. For example, Joseph Merrick started the first elementary school in Bimbia in 1843 and Alfred Saker later built the Baptist Mission station in Victoria in 1858. The same methods of persuasion and conversion remained almost the same from 1841 to around the early 1960's.

Later on, there was the introduction of a new denomination known as Pentecostalism that came to add to the already existing Protestantism and Catholicism. The emerging church's way of persuasion was to an extent different from the former as Cameroonians started hearing about the existence of practical divine miracles of deliverance and healing without going to the hospital or to a traditional doctor. They were introduced to new ways of worship including wailing, shouting, crying, falling into trances etc. From this time forward the history of Christianity has taken almost a completely different turn with some of the long established denominations emulating certain practices from the emerging ones and vice versa.

Between the early 60's and 90's, the long established churches were conservatives who attempted to resist Pentecostal practices, for instance, the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) came up with the coinage *baptistic* in the early 1990's. This word was coined to convince the CBC Christians to remain firm to their doctrines and not to follow the new wind of doctrines. Baptist youths were warned against the constant saying of unusual *"hallelujah"*, *"praise the lord"*, *"Amen"* during church services. But after the 90s, most of them have gradually accepted some of the Pentecostal doctrines, and the Pentecostal who claimed in their early days to be holier than others, considering classical churches to be unbelievers, have also learnt to accept them and to work in partnership with one another. Today's expressions and words like *"praise the lord"*, *"hallelujah"*, *"Amen"* are used in almost all the churches by Christians at will to claim prophetic declarations. For example, The Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement is very strong in the Catholic Church; lays emphasis on baptism with the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, evangelism and carrying out deliverance. After the above preliminary considerations, this paper proceeds to discuss language changes in the Christian context.

Languages Changes and the Evolution of Christian Doctrines

The following examples insinuate that considerable changes are taking place in the Christian milieu today. Usually, Churches used to have crosses on their top as indicators of church

buildings. They had bells that were rung to alert the people about time for services. Today, we have churches without crosses. We hardly hear the ringing of church bells in the emerging churches. The ringing of bells in most churches have been replaced by the church service programs on the church hoardings, and posters pasted on church walls where those who can read do remind themselves of the weekly program. This may be because many people can afford wristwatches and clocks, read and write and no longer need to be reminded by bells. In towns, for example, somebody who lives in Emana-Yaounde and fellowships in Etouge-ebe-Yaounde cannot be reminded by the sound of a bell. At this level written language plays a better role than sound since sound is limited by distance.

Before, we could hardly see wood built churches commonly known in Cameroon as 'calaboats' but today we have a plethora of them. We have churches in people's houses and in any part of the quarter. Individuals are renting houses for churches. In a quarter a Christian church maybe sharing an apartment with a non-christian who may not feel at ease with the existence of the church that is preaching a contrary doctrine and disturbing their peace. This practice has led to situations where individuals and quarter heads have taken some preachers to police stations for public disturbances, especially as most of the emerging churches worship late at night and make a lot of noise.

The method of church establishment or planting has also experienced some changes. The first denominations as earlier explained, were introduced by men who came from abroad even if some of them were black slaves. This entails that Christianity was a foreign issue before 1841. Those who came from overseas named the Cameroonian churches using their denominational names from abroad, for example, the Roman Catholic Church. The adjective Roman means from Rome. Although, Baptist denominations did not take the names of the countries from where their denomination came, they maintained the word Baptist being the name of their mother denomination, for instance, London Baptist, German Baptist, North American Baptist Conference. This means that the Baptist denominations named their churches according to the locality of the church. That is why we have Cameroon Baptist Convention indicating that it is a Baptist denomination located in Cameroon though it stemmed from the North American Baptist Conference. Even in the villages in Cameroon, the Baptist churches were named according to villages and quarters : CBC Church Elak-Oku, CBC Church Tobin - Nso, CBC Church Nkwen-Bamenda, CBC

Church Etouge-ebe, Yaounde, etc. CBC (Cameroon Baptist Convention).

Today, churches are not only being introduced from abroad, most churches in Cameroon today are created by individual Cameroonians and some by individual foreigners especially Nigerians and Congolese. This means that we have churches in Cameroon that do not have mother churches and missionaries elsewhere in the world as it used to be. Usually, Priests and Pastors are graduates from Seminaries and Theological schools, but now there are preachers who have never attended a bible school. Some of them just leave from one Pentecostal church with bible knowledge gained there, go straight and establish their own churches. Others work as lay preachers under some pastors and are later ordained Pastors without having gone to a theological seminary. They start like family prayer groups, then quarter prayer groups, deliverance ministries and end in full time churches. It is instead at this stage that some preachers seek help from foreign denominations and sponsors.

This laissez faire in church creation has led to the plethora of Christian denominations and churches in Cameroon. In Yaoundé, for instance, we have more than three hundred different church organisations with different church central administrators. One just needs to listen to Radio Bonne Nouvelle, for example, and one will be provided with tangible information about the number of church organisations, especially the Pentecostal organisations in Yaoundé. Also, with just a stroll in town, one can survey and write down the names of churches as seen on hoardings, posters and banners.

The more the churches, the more the lexical choices to name them. The churches are named using absolute adjectives and nouns that describe and define practices and activities that take place there. For example, somebody who is sick and wants to get healed without spending a franc will be attracted to the church called **Free Divine Healing Ministry, House of Solution Ministry** etc. Someone who is possessed by demons and cannot be healed with modern medicine can go to churches named; **Mountain of Fire ministries, Overcomes Ministry, Restoration Centre**. Someone who is in despair can go to Abundant **Life Faith Chapel, Jesus Loves, saves and heals ministries, Fountain of Hope ministries**, etc. Someone who feels unsatisfied with preachings from other churches can go to **“Living Word Fellowship, Full Gospel Mission, Deeper Life Bible Church, True Church of God**. People who need help can go to **Good Samaritan Ministries”**. **Jesus is Love Global Ministry**, etc.

Meanwhile some pejorative names are given to some churches or members of these churches for one reason or the other. For instance, some people who do not really adhere to the practices of emerging churches have given them names like **holy holy, sects, lovy lovy, hallelujah), born again, mushroom, Jesus kwem (meaning at the mention of the name Jesus, people fall down-kwem is onomatopoeic sound made when one falls)**, etc.

The titles and attitudes of some preachers have changed. In the early days of Christianity, Cameroonians knew that their preachers were **Reverend Fathers and Reverend Pastors, Priests, Fathers, Pastors, and Missionaries**. These preachers, apart from lay preachers, were supposed to undergo skilled training in schools of theology before being attributed these titles. With the advent of new denominations like the Pentecostal movement in the late 60's some Protestant and Catholic Christians as well as some unbelievers were converted to these emerging churches and some of them became preachers in these new churches adopting titles like **Apostles, Evangelists, under shepherds Psalmist, Demonologist**, etc. When the Pentecostals wind of change started in Cameroon, most people doubted the origin and the capabilities of these preachers and resisted them, but after some time, Cameroonians gradually became used to them and their appellations. Today, it is very normal to be called Evangelist, Apostle, Demonologist, Psalmist, etc.

At first, the word **Sister** as a title in Church was immediately linked to Reverend Sisters in the Catholic Church, but nowadays the appellation **Sister** refers to a female member of the same church; usually known as **sister in Christ** or **sister in the Lord**.

Some changes have been observed at the level of content. The content or subject matter of Christian activities ranges from the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the invitation of people to join individual churches and denominations at all cost. At first the Gospel of Christ was preached to followers putting more emphasis on the message of acceptance, confession, repentance, belief and salvation through faith; and to a certain extent by works. Today messages of salvation are no longer the main focus in most churches. Messages of salvation were reiterated from time immemorial with the preaching of end time messages about the rapture but with the advent of emerging denominations, such end time messages started giving way to messages of prosperity and hope against all impossibilities to the extent that the sick no longer said they were sick, the poor no longer said they were poor, the needy claimed it was well, etc. This led to the composition

of charismatic new songs of praise and worship like this title in pidgin “.. I no go beg for bread” (I will not beg for bead). Today one can see someone living in abject poverty with nothing to eat singing this song to overcome their predicaments. At this point, emotions prevail over reason as well as appearance and illusions over reality; all in a bid to overcome negative feelings. Most of these vulnerable followers believe hopefully in messages of prosperity and end up dying in their misery without looking for natural means of survival. For instance, some patients claim it is well, refuse to seek medical help and die out of negligence. Prophecies accuse partners and relatives of witchcraft practices and thus leading to divorce and family conflicts. Others fast more than their bodies can stand and die owing to hunger all in a bid to get miraculous deliverance from their afflictions. Today we constantly hear messages of deliverance, and healing from demons, sicknesses, curses, bareness, strongholds, poverty, frustrations, etc. The above issues that feature in Christian events are very timely with regards to the problems that people are facing today like HIV/AIDS and other incurable diseases, marriage issues, barrenness, going abroad, demonic and spiritual attacks, poverty, unemployment, etc. The men of God list these problems on their crusade programs and purport to provide solutions to them using words and expressions like *dominion over the things of this world, business opportunities, divine healing, prosperity, elevation, breakthrough, prayers, divine favour, liberty miracles, breaking of curses of barrenness, harvest of babies, if your God is dead try mine* etc. Most often some followers are brainwashed through these charismatic teachings not to go for medical treatment, not to do some types of jobs, deemed sinful, to earn a living, etc. and they believe and die in suffering in the name of waiting for divine intervention. Such people are in church regularly to pray for divine miracles without works.

Also, new doctrines have come up in their messages, for example, women’s empowerment, and gender equality. Owing to the emphases that was greatly put on the issue of female emancipation at the Beijing Conference, questions on gender issues and women’s right are being raised in churches today. Formerly, it was preached, that main Pastors were to be men and that women were just to lead in some church activities like choir groups, women’s union groups, taking care of orphanages etc. For example, the Sisters in the Catholic Church do not consecrate wine and bread into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. In the Baptist Church, only men were trained as full time Pastors. Full time female Pastors are in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and evangelical churches. Nowadays in the emerging churches, we have female Pastors and even Bishops,

for example, Bishop Chantal YOLOGAZA. We have renowned female reverends like Angela Acha-Morfaw, Prophetess Kebila Mary Joso, etc. The CBC now offers theological training to women who upon graduation work as chaplains, church school ministers, child evangelism and women’s department ministers. Although there has been a remarkable change in the Cameroon Baptist Convention as women are now being trained as Pastors, there are still some elements of gender discrimination because women who are trained in the Baptist seminary are not full time pastors but female ministers, they are not ordained as Reverends, and are not in charge of churches. However, other denominations like the Presbyterian church in Cameroon and most Pentecostals have female full time Pastors. Most often in the Pentecostal sphere, the female Pastors are the wives of the main church Pastors especially individually owned churches. On Christian posters we have themes like *Women stand up*. There are also Christian organizations that only women do belong to like *Daughters ablaze, Wailing women, Esther Divine women of Valour*, etc. These female Christian organisations and the former themes encourage women in evangelism and discipleship.

As far as attitude is concerned, it was common knowledge that Protestant preachers do get married if they deem necessary and that Roman Catholic Priests do not get married. Today, new catholic churches have emerged allowing their Priests to get married, if they are willing, for example, *Mariavite Catholic Church, Orthodox Catholic Church* with headquarters at EKIE, led by Monseigneur Mathieu de Jesus, a Cameroonian Priest. They stand on the scriptures that say that chief priest like the husband of Elizabeth in the Bible got married and gave birth to John the Baptist.

Apart from doctrinal changes, we have language extension wherein preachers interpret the gospel attempting to give practical interpretations that suit their context and objectives, for instance, most preaches especially Pentecostal preachers interpret “*Egypt*” as *problems, curses, sufferings* etc. faced by children of God. We hear expressions in churches like *who or what is your Egyptian, meaning what is your problem, sickness, difficulty?* The *stone* is also interpreted as *obstacle, problem or sickness* and *the rolling away of the stone* suggests a breakthrough or the breaking of a curse or stronghold, etc. *The Spirit of Pishah* also called *the spirit of almost there* is formed from the name of the mountain, *Pishah*, where Moses of old stood to have a view of the Promised Land, but without going there. Therefore when people make considerable efforts to succeed in vain, it is believed that they are suffering from the spirit of Pishah.

Moses despite his efforts to lead the children of Israel to the Promised Land ended in vain because he died on that mountain without reaching Canaan. A nicodemus leave or arrival or to leave or arrive nicodemusly means to do it stealthily. To praise God with your husband means to lie with him.

Today some preachers defame others and their doctrines. Mudslinging is the order of the day in most churches where preachers talk openly against the doctrines and practices of other churches. Some non-Catholics preachers that do not believe in Holy Mary, Rosary, Holy Water, etc. criticize the Catholics of idol worshipping. Churches that do not believe in miracles criticize the Pentecostal movement for practising magic, exploiting the people in their desperate situations and playing on the psychology of others, etc. The Baptists are criticised for claiming to be *people of the word*, but who are not practising it as they say.

Most Christian posters today have pictures of preachers, their names and their countries of origin. These pictures and their identities are convincing enough and can persuade others to attend the crusades. Also on the posters, we have symbols like images of *doves, crosses, broken chains, ladders, globes, maps, tress, rocks*, etc. These images speak for themselves, for example, a dove symbolises purity and love, the cross indicates Christ's suffering, death and resurrection, broken chains symbolise breakthroughs; a ladder symbolises prosperity, etc. Preaches use these methods of preaching to attract attention and appeal to the emotions of others.

Attractive and animating sounds when combined with praise and worship songs. Most of the musical sounds are similar to secular sounds that are in vogue, for instance, coupe decale, dombolo, makossa, bikutsi, pop, etc. The singing itself at times has the rhythm of secular songs as compared to Christian hymns that were sung before. The only difference is in the messages as Christian songs praise God while worldly songs mostly focus on man and things of the world. Some people do criticize this modern way of singing but adepts stand on Colossians 3:17 which says that whatsoever you do in word or in act do all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving praise to God the Father through Him.

There are many Christians musicians today in Cameroon compared to the past, for example, Mendo ZE and La Voix du Cenacle, Ronze, Brother Pad, Les Jeunes Moissonneurs pour Christ, Odile Ngaska, Indira Baboke, Elisabet Teke, Ronz, Prince, John Duchant, Ma'a Ze, Mother Stella, Sister Hope in Christ, Akubai to name these few. Christian music is selling these days more than ever especially as it

appeals to the emotions of many. Somebody who is sick, for example, will like to listen to music that says "I Will Never Die" like that sung by Pastor Jonathan Okaroafor and brother Ayoba Muwchili, someone who has a court case may want to sing the song entitled 'Jesus is my barrister, etc. The change has reached a level where worldly musicians now turn to sing gospel songs in order to pull the crowd since most emerging churches now teach their Christians not to sing or dance worldly songs. We have worldly musicians like Petit Pays, Katino, Ama Pierrot, among others who have composed gospel songs to meet with contemporary demands.

Apart from music, the style or élan of dancing to new music reflects the type of dancing in night clubs. If the musical sound is like that of coupe decale Christians will dance like coupe decale, for example, Christians dance the song entitled "Under the Canopy of God" exactly as they dance coupe decale. In fact, we observe the reality of the science of kinesics and proxemics in church during dancing.

Many changes have also been observed on the mass media as a means of communication: Formally, Christians watched Jesus' film as cinema because TV sets were scarce. Billy Graham's preaching was broadcast on videos and people assembled in specific quarters to watch like his live broadcast in 1996.

Today, people can afford TV sets and cables and can now watch and listen to preachers from any part of the world in their homes. We know of *Emmanuel Television* owned by Senior Prophet T.B Joshua (of blessed memory) of Nigeria who's preaching and practices are appealing to the senses of many including many Cameroonians. People testify of leaving Cameroon for Nigeria in search of miracles of all sorts from the Synagogue Church of All Nations. We have the *Love Channel* by Pastor Chris. Pastor Chris writes Christian Literature titled the "Rhapsodies of Realities" that is sold also in Cameroon and his ministry has also been established in Cameroon called *Jesus Christ Embassy*.

We also have Christian Radio and Television stations that evangelize Cameroonian people, for instance, *Radio Bonne Nouvelle, Radio Reine, Radio Voice of the Cross*, among others.

Corporate and calm prayers that were led by Pastors, Priests and church elders are gradually giving way to mass and bee prayers wherein everybody prays aloud at the same time. Prayers are done with a lot of force today than ever before. During prayers, people shout, cry, wail, fall, vomit

etc. These practices were scarcely observed before the advent of Pentecostal churches.

Today, we hear a lot of healing and deliverance testimonies. We hear about the resurrection of the dead after prayers, we hear about the lame who have been made to walk and the blind who have been made to see owing to prayers. Also HIV/AIDS patients are said to have been healed miraculously thanks to prayers, and so on. We were told that such testimonies existed during the ministry of Jesus Christ but with the arrival of Pentecostal churches these stories are said to be real today. Although, unbelievers are still tempted to ask if it is true that the lame, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, HIV and AIDS patients, the dead are really being restored? They claim to only hear the testimonies but when they ask to see the people in particular who have been healed, they hardly find them. This makes some of the preaching methods doubtful to inquisitive and hard hearted observers. The ambiguity in the healing testimonies is great as observes even doubt miracles that are obvious claiming that they have been planned earlier.

Moreover, preaching is done using verbal and non-verbal resources. Preachers speak when preaching oral sermons in church and at crusades. They also prepare their sermons in writing - they write tracts and other Christian literature, they write church programs and announcements using linguistic codes that are well known to their members e.g. English, French, Bulu, Ewondo, Eton, in the case of churches in Yaoundé.

They also communicate using non - verbal means like gestures. During sermons, we see them jumping, kneeling, acting etc. They pass certain messages on tracts through drawings and pictures. For example, an image of a caterpillar and a butterfly which are drawn to represent the life of a Christian. A caterpillar representing an unbeliever and a butterfly representing a believer.

CONCLUSION

To sum it all, drastic changes have been observed in the area of Christianity in Cameroon and most changes are accompanied by words and expressions to justify them. It will not be an overstatement to say that most of these changes have come with the advent of the emerging churches. However from the time Pentecostalism emerged in Cameroon to around 2015 the messages of prosperity and deliverance were the talk of the day but owing to intensive teachings and criticisms by classical churches who almost lost most of their Christians to the emerging denominations as well as owing to false prophets and false prophecies that hardly came to fulfilment, most run away Christians

are returning to their former classical churches after awaiting miraculous happenings in vain and some preachers of emerging churches are reformulating their messages. Most of them now begin with messages of repentance and salvation before continuing to miracles unlike between the 80s to 2015 where emphasis was on miracles and prosperity gospel. The passing of time unveils hidden realities. Some heresies are being unveiled and cancelled, for example, the charismatic song in pidgin English "Satan comot for road ooh, I carry God ye power, my motor no get brakes, if I jam you, you go die" in this song Satan is asked to give way to the believer because the believer is possessing the power of God and his/her car does not have brakes and if they jam Satan he will die. The place of Satan reserved by God is in hell fire, which Christian can claim to kill him? Falsehood in the content of the gospel is being revealed too as time goes on. For instance, if you convince someone to come to your church and become rich, get married, get healed, travel abroad, get a job, among others and the person abandons their former church to yours for such reasons and at the end they do not obtain what took them to your denomination, they may obviously get disappointed and backslide because they have not achieved what they wanted. Although there is power in Christian persuasion as (Ndi E. 2013) suggests, let preachers preach the undilute word of God and allow the Holy Spirit to convict souls. They should not preach under any self-centred pressure of converting members at all cost using any plausible strategies because if they use all kinds of strategies, through attractive themes of miracles and prosperity to seduce or convert followers, at the end of the day though language might have met its purpose of persuasion, conversion will be short lived and their efforts to maintain and sustain followers will be volatile.

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