Original Paper

The Pronunciation of Contracted Forms in Cameroon English

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Abstract

It is no more news that there is a Cameroonian English with its phonetic, phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic character that singles it out of the myriad of Englishes around the globe. This paper thus seeks to explicate the realisations of contracted forms in the English speech of Cameroonians. Data for the paper were collected through observation and two tape-recorded pronunciation tests administered to graduate/ postgraduate students and teachers of the University of Bamenda who have diverse ethnic origins, specialisations and are, in previous literatures on Cameroon English, labelled as speakers of the Educated variety of Cameroon English. They were thus chosen because they ought to be the example to be emulated by other Cameroonians. The data were analysed mainly qualitatively with Generative Phonology as the theory. Findings reveal that speakers of the five varieties of Cameroon English converge in the production of various contracted forms through phonological processes as monophthongisation, glide formation, vowel insertion, vowel harmony, final consonant devoicing or deletion, diphthong restructuring and rhotacization. The findings are blamed on analogy, L1 interference, pedagogic input, graphology and media influence. The paper is concluded with the recommendation that the most articulated forms of mainstream Cameroon English should be promoted and inculcated in the syllabus as they reflect the speech forms of the majority of Cameroonians.

Keywords: Pronunciation, contracted forms, Cameroon English, phonological processes

1. Introduction

The pronunciation of contracted forms in Cameroon English further imprints the pronunciation hallmarks of Cameroon English. The interesting thing about the renderings of these forms is that at some point, speakers of all varieties consistently diverge from the 'yardstick' native varieties of English (RP and GenAm). They do so through vowel reduction, fronting, epenthesis, deletion and glide formation. Strangely, these discrepancies from the so called standard native varieties are conscious and unconscious. Though they can be attributed to interlingual factors like L1 interference, they seem to be more linked to pedagogic input, graphology, analogy and the influence of media. Most speakers tend to pronounce contracted forms the way they heard their teachers do or what they internalised while growing up. The major problems caused by such pronunciation is multiplicity of divergence such that it is difficult to get a standard that is Cameroonian and the introduction of several spelling errors. The way forward is to lay emphasis on pronouncing and writing contracted forms by both teachers and teacher-trainers.

2. Literature Review

Several authors have made different strides in defining and establishing what CamE really is. They have unequivocally noted that CamE is a national variety of English in its own right; with a phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics that is unique only to its context of use (Ngefac, 2010; Sala, 2010).

Since 1986, several linguists have researched on the phonology of CamE. The earliest linguists came up with the coinage, Cameroon English, and strived to describe the characteristic features of what they termed Educated Cameroon English; a variety whose speakers should be at least holders of a first degree (Masanga, 1983 cited in Mbangwana, 1987). During that era, Simo Bobda (1995) added to the literatures on CamE by further describing and explicating both the segmental and suprasegmental features of CamE phonology though still limiting his concept of CamE as the English spoken by

Cameroonians with at least a university degree (Simo Bobda and Mbangwana, 2004; Simo Bobda, 2011).

Kouega (1999) went a little further to identify different lects of CamE while connecting them to professions and education and settled on the description of speech features of media practitioners in Cameroon. He later focused on graphology which he thought is prime in shaping CamE (Kouega, 2004). Then came Atechi (2006) who tested the intelligibility of CamE vis-à-vis native variety Englishes like RP and GenAm. Like others, he too focused on educated Cameroon speakers but included people of all walks of life.

Ngefac (2010) then questioned the choice of standard CamE and upheld the view that neither the acrolectal nor basilectal varieties should be considered as standard CamE. Rather he called for the recognition of the mesolectal variety as he argued that it is mainstream. Safotso (2012) later extended the meaning of CamE to include the Franchophone variety that, until now had not been included within CamE. He focused on speech characteristics which are considered typically Francophone-like and blamed them on the interference of French. More recently, Ketcha (2018) identified CamE in Cameroon-produced audiovisual materials and concluded that there are five audiolects that concide with real-lfe varieties. He however noted that for audiolects, they can be used phonostylistically to suit a particular role, genre of music or a social status.

For other aspects of CamE, researchers have worked on different aspects including syntax, discourse analysis and grammar (Salla, 2006; Wandji, 2009; Mbangwana, 2008).

Despite the myriad of varieties of works on CamE, no author has even mentioned the pronunciation of contracted forms in Cameroon English. It seems, no researcher paid attention to this peculiarity in Cameroon English. This is thus the research gap this paper seeks to fill; to explicate the phonologically processes and causes of divergence, from native varieties, by CamE speakers in the realisation of contracted forms.

3.   Methodology

Data for this paper were collected basically through observation and reading/pronunciation tests. The observation for this paper constituted passive and participant observation. Once I noticed, passively, the uniqueness of Cameroonians in pronouncing contracted forms, I engaged in participant observation; attending different classes, lectures, sermons and conversations just to perceive the way contracted forms are pronounced in Cameroon English, by speakers of different CamE lects.

As far as pronunciation tests are concerned, two reading tests were administered to fifty Cameroonians of all walks of life as well as different tribal and educational levels. The respondents ranged from age 15 to 65 years. Of the fifty respondents, twenty-five were females and twenty-five males. In all, two pronunciation tests were administered to the said respondents. Test I was entitled "Pronunciation of Contracted Forms in Connected Speech" and test II captioned, "Pronunciation of Contracted Forms in Isolation". The first comprised twenty-two sentences, each constructed with a particular type of contracted form whereas the second test consisted of a list of twenty-two contracted forms in isolation; out of sentence contexts. Respondents were purposively selected to represent speakers of all five CamE variaties earlier noted by Ketcha (2014; 2018) and they were required to read out the sentences first before the contracted forms in isolation. While I made sure that the reading was done individually, I tape-recorded all the readings and always starting with test I so that respondents would not know my point of focus and their pronunciation not influenced in any way.

The tape-recorded data were listened to and transcribed, one after another, as produced by the different respondents. The transcribed contracted forms were then isolated, excepted and put on a spreadsheet to deduce the renderings of the segmental features of the forms. The forms were then analysed qualitatively and quantitatively using Generative Phonology as the theory. Al-Hindawi (2018 p. 7) holds that "Generative phonology is an approach of generative linguistics whose aim is to establish a set of rules, principles or constraints efficient to produce the surface phonetic forms of a language and to model the internalized linguistic knowledge of native speakers…". In this paper, the phonological occurrences are defined in relation to native speaker standards and rules are used to capture the productions in CamE.

4.   Presentation of Data

The different contracted forms as produced by the fifty respondents for all the CamE varieties are as follows:

Table 1. Presentation of Data

S/N	Contracted Forms	RP	CamE Renderings
1	I'm	/aɪm/	/am/
			/ajam/
			/a:m/
			/ɛm/
2	I'll	/aɪl/	/awu/
			/aul/
			/au/
			/aiwu/
3	I'd	/aɪd/	/ait/
			/ai/
			/ad/
4	I've	/aɪv/	/af/
			/aif/
			/aihaf/
5	Aren't	/ɑnt/	/arən/
			/arənt/
			/ant/
			/ɛnt/
6	You're	/jʊə/, /jɔ/	/jua/
			/juwa/
7	You'll	/ju:l/	/juwul/
			/juwu/
8	You'd	/ju:d/	/juwut/
			/juwu/
9	You've	/ju:v/	/juf/
			/Juaf/
10	He'll	/hi:l/	/hil/
			/hiwu/
11	He's	/hi:z/	/his/
			/hijis/

12	He'd	/hi:d/	/hit/
			/hiwut/
13	She's	/ʃɪz/	/ʃis/
14	She'll	/ʃɪl/	/ʃiwu/
			/ʃil/
15	She'd	/ʃi:d/	/ʃit/
16	It's	/ɪts/	/its/
			/itas/
17	It'll	/ɪtl/	/itəl/
			/itul/
			/ital/
18	It'd	/ɪtd/	/itat/
19	We'll	/wi:l/	/wil/
20	We've	/wi:v/	/wif/
21	We'd	/wi:d/	/wit/
22	We're	/wɪə/	/wia/
			/wija/
23	They'll	/ðeɪl/	/dewu/
			/del/
			/dewul/
24	They're	/ðɛə/	/dea/
			/dia/
			/deja/
25	They've	/ðeɪv/	/def/
			/dehaf/
26	They'd	/ðeɪd/	/dewut/
			/dehat/
			/deit/
27	There's	/ðɛəz/	/dɛs/
			/dɛris/
28	Shan't	/ʃɑnt/	/ʃarən/
			/ʃarənt/
			/ʃant/
29	Won't	/wəʊnt/	/wun/
			/wunt/

			/wont/
30	Weren't	/wɜnt/	/wɛrən/
			/wɛrənt/
			/wɛnt/
31	Who's	/huːz/	/wus/
			/wujis/
32	Who've	/huv/	/wuf/
33	Who'll	/hul/	/wul/
34	Wouldn't	/wʊdnt/	/wudən/
			/wudənt/
35	Couldn't	/kʊdnt/	/kudən/
			/kudənt/
36	Can't	/kɑnt/	/kan/
			/kant/
38	Don't	/dəʊnt/	/don/
			/dont/
39	Doesn't	/dʌznt/	/dɔzən/
			/dɔzənt/
40	Didn't	/dɪdnt/	/didənt/

5.   Discussion

A number of phonological processes are employed by CamE speakers to diverge from RP / native English renderings of contracted forms in English. These include monophthongisation of diphthongs, glide formation/insertion, consonant/vowel epenthesis, vowel reduction/ lengthening, vowel fronting/retraction/rounding, consonant deletion/ devoicing, defrication/ stop formation, schwa deletion and L deletion. These are discussed in turns below.

5.1 Monophthongisation

In the speech of CamE speakers, native English diphthongs are typically monopthongised in most environments, especially in the basilectal and mesolectal varieties. The following table illustrates this phenomenon:

Table 2. Contracted Forms Pronounced Via Monophthongisation in CamE

Contracted Form	**RP**	**CamE**
I'm	/aɪm/	/am/, /aːm/
I'll	/aɪl/	/awu/
I've	/aɪv/	/af/
I'd	/aɪd/	/ad/
They'll	/ðeɪl/	/dewu/

| They've | /ðeɪv/ | /def/ |
| They'd | /ðeɪd/ | /det/ |

The examples above illustrate that the RP diphthongs, /aɪ/ and /eɪ/, respectively in the pronouns *I* and *they* are monophthongised to /a/ or /e/ in CamE. This rendering is caused by the fact that there RP diphthongs are usually monophthongised in CamE (Mbangwana, 1987; Kouega, 1999; Simo Bobda and Mbangwan, 2004). As for the pronunciation of /aɪ/ as /a:m/ was heard in the speech of a few who can be classified as speakers of the RPrised variety. Out of the fifty respondents, 32 (64%) consistently monophthongised /aɪ/ and /eɪ/ in the pronunciation of the contracted forms listed above. Besides, out of the 32 respondents, 5 monophthongised and further lengthened the vowel such that they derived /a:/ from /aɪ/ instead of the popular /a/ whereas 3 more monopthongised /aɪ/ and further raised it to /ɛ/. Those who monophthongise /aɪ/ to /ɛ/ are those who speak Americanised CamE (CamE IV). This indicates that the majority of speakers (32/50) have the tendency to monophthongise /aɪ/ and /eɪ/.   The rendering above can be captured in the following phonological rule"

V V   V

$$\begin{array}{c} + \\ - \\ + \end{array} \left(\begin{array}{c} \text{Syll} \\ \text{Cons} \\ \text{Gliding} \end{array} \right) \longrightarrow \text{[- Gliding]} / \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \text{[+ cons]}$$

The rule reads that diphthongs which are, of course, formed by gliding get to be monophthongised (no gliding at this point) before consonants. The rule can be split into two rules as follows:

V V   V   C
[aɪ] $\longrightarrow$ [a] / _____ [+ Consonantal]

V V   V   C
[eɪ] $\longrightarrow$ [e] / _____ [+ Consonantal]

5.2 Glide Formation, Vowel Insertion and Vowel Harmony

Glide formation is another phonological process that is employed when pronouncing contracted forms in CamE. The following words are examples:

Table 3. Pronunciation of Contracted Forms Via Glide Formation, Vowel Epenthesis and Vowel Harmony

Contracted Forms	RP	CamE
I'm	/aɪm/	/ajam/
They'll	/ðeɪl/	/deja/
They're	/ðeə/	/deja/
We're	/wɪə/	/wija/

| I'll | /aɪl/ | /awu/ |
| They'd | /ðeɪd/ | /dewut/ |

The examples above illustrate that speakers variously form glides, /j/ or /w/, and insert a vowel that must be in harmony with the glide formed. In all, 11 out of 52, making a total of 22%, realised contracted forms in this manner. Regarding this, CamE speakers tend to form /j/ from the RP /ɪ/ of /aɪ/ or RP /ə/ of /ɛə/ in the contracted forms and then insert another /a/ after the yod. Three processes are thus involved; glide (yod) formation, /a/ insertion and, arguably, vowel harmony or as the vowel inserted is likely in harmony with the first vowel. In cases where the glide formed is /w/, the vowel inserted is /u/ which, in this case, is rounded like /w/. One can thus talk of regressive assimilation. This phenomenon can be summarised in the following rule:
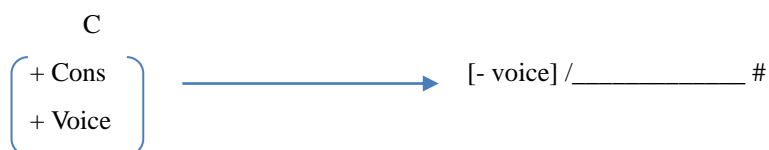
[ɪ]

[j] / _____   [a]

[ə]
[ɪ]
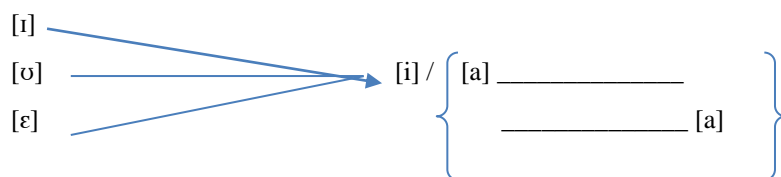
[w] / _____   [u]
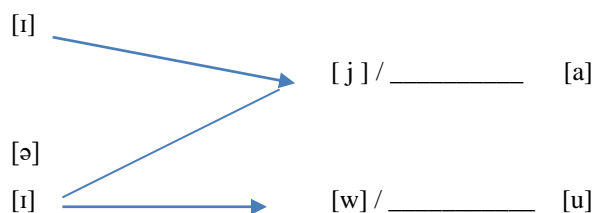
5.3 Final Consonant Devoicing

It is a common phenomenon to devoice consonants, especially final consonants, in the course of pronouncing contracted forms. This corroborates with previous researchers who upheld the view that final consonants are devoiced in non-native varieties (Simo Bobda, 1994; Atechi, 2006; Ketcha, 2014). The following examples illustrate this occurrence:

Table 4. Pronunciation of Contracted Forms via Final Consonant Devoicing

Contracted Forms	RP	CamE
I've	/aɪ/	/af/, /aif/
He's	/hi:z/	/his/
She's	/ʃi:z/	/ʃis/
She'd	/ʃi:d/	/ʃit/
They've	/ðeɪv/	/ðef/, /ðeif/
We've	/wi:v/	/wif/
Who've	/hu:v/	/wuf/
Who's	/hu:z/	/wus/
There's	/ðɛəz/	/dɛs/

The following rule captures this occurrence:

C

⎡ + Cons ⎤
⎢ + Voice ⎥ ⟶ [- voice] / _____ #

The rule states that voiced consonants are devoiced at word-final positions in contracted forms.

Final Consonant Deletion

It has been attested that consonant cluster simplification in CamE includes final consonant deletion (Simo Bobda and Mbangwanana, 2004). Similarly, there is the tendency to delete the final consonant of a consonant cluster in contracted forms. The following are examples:

Table 5. Final Consonant Deletion as a Process of Pronouncing Contracted Forms

Contracted Forms	RP	CamE
weren't	/wɜnt/	/wɛrn/
couldn't	/kʊdnt/	/kudn/
can't	/kɑnt/	/kan/
shan't	/ʃɑnt/	/ʃarən/
Wouldn't	/wʊdnt/	/wudən/
Doesn't	/dʌznt/	/dɔzən/
mustn't	/mʌznt/	/mɔzən/

The following rule captures this singularity:

[t] ⟶ [ø] / [n]_____ #

The rule above states that [t] is deleted after [n] during the pronunciation of contracted forms in CamE.

5.4 Diphthong Restructuring

Diphthong restructuring is another way speakers unconsciously employ when pronouncing contracted forms in English. Diphthong restructuring is a major occurrence in CamE like other non-native varieties as reported by other researchers (Mesthrie and Shaw, 2008; Simo Bobda, 2004). The following words exemplify this phenomenon:

Table 6. Pronunciation of Contracted Forms via Dipthong Restructuring in CamE

Contracted Forms	RP	CamE
I'll	/aɪl/	/ai/
I'd	/aɪd/	/ait/
I've	/aɪv/	/aif/
We're	/wɪə/	/wia/
They're	/ðɛə/	/dia/, /ðia/
You're	/jʊə/	/jua/

As illustrated in the table above, though RP diphthongs are not monophthongised in the cases above, they are simply restructured as /ɪ/, /ə/, /ʊ/ and /ɛ/ are respectively realised as the non-native /i/, /a/, /u/ and /e/. The data for this paper reveals that those who restructured rather than monophthongise diphthongs are speakers of the Near-RP (CamE III) variety. Such speakers consciously strive to avoid monphthongisation of diphthongs. Of the 50 respondents, 10 of them. The phonological rule capturing this occurrence can be stated as follows:

[ɪ]
[ʊ] ──────────→ [i] / [a] _____
[ɛ]   _____ [a]

5.5 Rhotacization

Another peculiarity is rhotacization of some contracted forms. This is done by inserting /r/ to connect the elements/ words in each set of contracted forms. The table below demonstrates this singularity:

Table 7. Pronunciation of Contracted Forms via Rhotacisation in CamE

Contracted Forms	RP	CamE
aren't	/ɑnt/	/arənt/
there's	/ðɛəz/	/dɛris/
weren't	/wɜnt/	/wɛrənt/
where's	/wɛəz/	/wɛrənt/
shan't	/ʃɑnt/	/ʃarənt/

The examples above prove that there is rhotacization of contracted forms in the English of CamE speakers. The words above, with the exemption of the last, have silent "r" but in CamE, respondents rhotacize the words. As far as the last word is concerned, there is a /r/ insertion probably caused by analogy with the first word in the table. After there /r/ insertion, there is also schwa insertion. Again, the rules have to be ordered as schwa insertion feeds on /r/ insertion. This finding correlates with the already established one that silent letters are often pronounced in CamE (Simo Bobda and Mbangwana, 2004). The following rule summarises this occurrence in CamE:

[ø] ──────────→ [r]/ _____   [n]
                                    [i]
          [ə]/ [r] _____ [n]
                              [s]
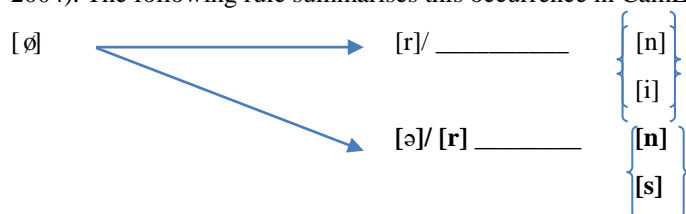
5.6 Conclusion

The pronunciation of contracted forms in CamE take a divergent perspective from native varieties as RP through several phonological processes; monophthongisation, diphthong restructuring, glide formation, vowel epenthesis and rhotacization. Where more than one rule is involved, the rules are ordered. These productions further consolidate the character of CamE as one with a unique pronunciation through processes different from RP and other native varieties. In some cases, these divergent renderings have the ability to induce learners into spelling errors such as spelling "I'm" as "am" since in CamE it is mostly pronounced as /am/ or /ajam/. The major causes for these divergences have been blamed on linguistic (spelling-pronunciation inconsistencies, L1 interference, social status) and paralinguistic features (Mbangwana, 1987; Simo Bobda, 1995; Ketcha, 2018). Whatever the case, I suggest that the most occurring productions/pronunciation be adopted for the Cameroonian classroom context without tampering with their spellings. Thus, the mesolectal productions should be preferred over the basilectal and acrolectal ones since they (mesolectal features) are more popular and accepted nation-wide (Ngefac, 2010).

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Appendices

Appendix A

TEST I: PRONUNCIATION OF WORDS IN ISOLATION

Dear respondents, here is a test on English Pronunciation. Please, I would like you to read out the following words. All the information from this test will be kept confidentially and used exclusively for research without disclosing your identity.

A.   Personal Information

1.   Gender …………………………………………………………………………………...

2.   Age …………………………………………………………………………………………

3.   Educational Qualification …………………………………………………………………….

4.   Specialisation/ Area of Study …………………………………………………………………

5.   Occupation …………………………………………………………………………………

B.   *Instructions*: Read out the following words:

1.   Where's

2.   Aren't

3.   Won't

4.   Shan't

5.   I'm

6.   We're

7.   Weren't

8.   They'd

9.   he'll

10.   he'd

11.   we've

12.   who've

13.   who's

14.   wouldn't

15.   I'd

16.   It'd

17.   She's

18.   You're

19.   You'll

20.   I've

Appendix B

Test II: Contracted Forms in Connected Speech

Instruction: Read out the following sentences.

1.   Where's the black bag?

2.   I aren't the person in question.

3.   You will travel, won't you?

4.   We shall travel tonight, shan't we?

5.   She said that I'm her brother.

6.   We're very united.

7.   We weren't the people they had been waiting for.

8.   They'd forgotten my name already.

9.   We'd eaten before their arrival.

10.   We'll go shopping soon.

11.   I've seen the lady this morning.

12. I'll tell you the truth.

13. I'd decided to run for president then.

14. Do you think that I'm a fool?

15. It's raining cats and dogs.

16. It'd rained all night before the flood.

17. It'll be ok.

18. You're not my enemy.

19. She'll come over this morning.

20. You've taken my book away.