

# Non-standard Idioms in Cameroon English Literature and Their Impact on English Language Learning and Intelligibility

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**Abstract**—Drawing data from fifteen works of seven Cameroonian writers of English expression, this paper examines non-standard idioms in this area of English language use laying emphasis not only on the various processes via such idioms are created but also on their impact on English language learning as well as on intelligibility. The findings of the study reveal that these non-standard idioms are obtained via the translation of home languages expressions, coining and modification of Standard British English expressions. Besides, it is argued in the paper that given that in the Cameroonian educational system, English language learners are tested on the basis of native English models, these non-standard idioms can be counterproductive to the learning of English language as well as on the intelligibility of the writers with their readership. The paper intends to contribute to the ongoing debate about the problematic concerning the consumption of non-native English literary works.

**Index Terms**—non-standard idioms, language learning, intelligibility, native English model, non-native English literary works

## I. INTRODUCTION

A certain number of features called non-standard features in Cameroonian literary productions which could be counterproductive to the learning of English language by the readers of these literary productions have been explored in Ayafor (2011). They include the following: tense inconsistencies (e.g. “people said she *will* become a big woman”), dangling modifiers (e.g.: “*Being brilliant in her school* her father had worked hard on his farms), omission of coordinating conjunctions (e.g. “Sanitation was divided into two main groups: cleaning around the compounds and repairing *latrines, cleaning* the paths...”), use of infinitive instead of modal auxiliary (e.g.: “For now, she should be counted out of the selection and the first *to stand*”), unnecessary insertion of “to be” (e.g.: “It is the Lord God that made us *to be* what we are today”), incorrect past participle of verbs (e.g.: “The hospital had *ran* smoothly”), use of verb + adjective instead of verb + noun (e.g.: Children brought up in righteousness can only *breed good*”), comma splice (e.g.: “Ngwe was *restless, she* could imagine the joy and happiness...”), wrong use of apostrophe (e.g.: Now I am able to help my junior *one’s* in primary school”), problem of phrasal verbs (e.g.: “[...] she would leave the house and never *arrive* the center”), wrong use of preposition (e.g. “[...] she dreamt that she was admitted *in* a university”), vocative not separated (e.g.: “That is a very progressive way of looking *at life my daughter*”), run-on sentence (e.g.: “But there is something you must *realize a woman* without man is like a house without a roof or a tree without branches”), just to name these few. (Ayafor, 2011, pp. 53-60).

This study is a follow-up of the one carried out by Ayafor (2011) in the sense that it still dwells on non-standard features in Anglophone Cameroonian literary works. However it differs from Ayafor (2011) in the sense that it focuses on idiomatic expressions, an area where these non-standard features abound and which has not been treated in the previous study. It is posited in this study that readers of novels practice consciously or unconsciously what is known as extensive reading and through the reading of these novels, they learn not only from the issues handled therein (corruption, nepotism, apartheid, moral depravity, etc.) but also the linguistic constructions (syntactic, grammatical, lexico-semantic) used by the authors. This concurs Scrivener (2005, p. 188) when he says:

*There is a great deal of evidence that extensive reading has a powerful impact on language learning. The more someone reads, the more they pick up items of vocabulary and grammar from the texts, often without realizing it, and this widening knowledge seems to increase their overall linguistic confidence, which then influences and improves their skills in other language areas*

Given that these Cameroonian writers are educated speakers of English who are in many cases English language teachers and whose novels are used in Cameroonian secondary and high schools, the tendency for the readers is to consider the linguistic constructions used by these writers as models to be emulated both in formal and non-formal situations. A scrutiny of the linguistic texture of many Cameroonian literary productions reveals that their writings embody a lot of non-standard idiomatic expressions. The questions to be answered in the study are the following: What are the various processes via which these non-standard idioms are created? Given that in the Cameroonian context, learners of English language are assessed on Standard British English, can the exposure of learners to these non-

standard idioms be counterproductive to their learning of English? Can the exposure of English language learners to these expressions hamper the intelligibility of the writer with his readership? If that is the case, what measures should be taken by writers and English language teachers in order to cope with this situation?

## II. METHODOLOGY

The data for the study was gathered after a complete reading of the novels. While reading the novels, attention was paid to the expressions which either sound local, or modified by language users. The expressions were identified and gathered. Each expression was scrutinized in order to find out the process through which it has been created (translated, coined or modified). The following dictionaries were used in order to check whether or not the expressions identified are attested either in Standard British English or in Standard Cameroon English.

- 1) *ADOCEU: A Dictionary of Cameroon English Usage*, 2007.
- 2) *CALD: Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 2005.
- 3) *CEED: Chambers Encyclopedic English Dictionary*, 1994.
- 4) *CALDT: Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 2011.
- 5) *HS: Harrap's Shorter*, 2000.

As regards translated expressions, it was deemed necessary to get their donor home language expressions not only from the writers who has used the expression but also from the natives who belong to the same home language community with the writers so as to cross-check the uniformity of the donor language expressions. The expressions were classified under the following headings: idioms obtained from the translation home language expressions, coined expressions and the expressions obtained from the modification of Standard British English expressions. As concerns the choice of the literary works, it was judged impartial to include only the novels written both by male and female English-speaking Cameroonians of the two English-speaking regions of the country (Northwest and Southwest) of various linguistic and educational backgrounds. This implies that no literary work written by French-speaking Cameroonians and translated into English was included among the novels from which data was drawn. The novels from which the data was drawn are identified as follows: *SNS: Son of the Native Soil* (Ambanasom, 1999), *FID: Flowers in the Desert* (Afuh, 2005), *TDH: The Deadly Honey* (Kongnyuy, 2002), *Nyuysham* (Tardzenyuy, 2002), *TWM: The Widow's Might* (Nkemngong Nkengasong, 2006), *NFM: A Nose for Money* (Nyamnjoh, 2006), *NWTD: No Way to Die* (Asong, 1991), *ALOTD: A Legend of the Dead* (Asong, 1994a), *SIH: A Stranger in his Homeland* (Asong, 1994 b), *COT: The Crown of Thorns* (Asong, 1995), *SC: Salvation Colony* (Asong, 1996 a), *TAF: The Akroma File* (Asong, 1996 b), *Chopchair* (Asong, 1998), *COB: The Craps of Bangui* (Asong, 2005) and *DFN: Doctor Frederick Ngenito* (Asong, 2006). For the sake of clarity, the expressions will be presented in tables. The method of data presentation is descriptive and/or comparative. In other words, the expressions are first presented and clues about their meaning(s), donor language expressions (where applicable), their donor languages (where applicable) as well as the source of the expressions (i.e. the novel from which the expressions are drawn) are provided. As regards modified idioms, their Standard British English expressions are compared with the modified expressions so as to identify the elements which have either been added, substituted or deleted in the modified expressions. Also, the processes which govern the modification are provided (addition, substitution, deletion, etc.).

## III. DEFINITIONS OF IDIOMS AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Idioms are “fixed phrases, consisting of more than one word, with meanings that cannot be inferred from the meanings of the individual words” (Fromkin and Rodman, 1988, p. 236). An idiom is “a phrase which has a distinct meaning [...] which cannot be explained from the separate meanings of the different words in the phrase” (Platt et al, 1984, p. 107). Idiomatic expressions can be “a catch phrase for opaque idioms, well-worn clichés, dead metaphors, proverbial sayings, [...]” (Kouega, 2000, p. 231). In effect, what is common to idiomatic expressions is that their meanings “cannot be accounted for as a compositional function of the meanings their parts have when they are not parts of the sequences” (Cruse, 1986: 37). As a whole, an idiom “is a group of words whose meaning cannot be explained in terms of the habitual meanings of the words that make up the piece of language (Todd, 1987, p. 87). He goes further to categorize idioms as follows: **alternative comparisons** (e.g.: dead as a dodo, good as gold), **noun phrases** (e.g.: a blind alley: route that leads nowhere, a red letter day: a day that will never be forgotten), **prepositional phrases** (e.g.: by hook or by crook: by whatever methods prove necessary), **verb + noun** (e.g.: kick the bucket: die), **verb + prepositional phrase** (e.g.: be in the doghouse: be in disgrace) and **verb + adverb** e.g.: (put down: kill) (Todd, 1987, pp. 86-87).

Idioms are lexico-semantic constructions which are very prolific in non-native English contexts. They are attested in many non-native varieties of English. Platt et al (1984, pp. 107-110) provides some examples of idioms in Papa New Guinean English (e.g., to be two-minded: to be in two minds, to be open-minded; to pass the hard times: to have a hard time, to pass a hard time, etc.), in Sri Lankan English (to put a clout: to give someone a clout; to put a telephone call: to make a telephone call; to put a feed: to have a good meal, etc.) in Singaporean and Malaysian English (to shake legs: to be idle), in Nigerian English (to declare surplus: to host a party), in East African English (to be on the tarmac: to be in the process of finding a new job). Cameroon English is also rich in terms of idiomatic usage as the following examples

listed in Kouega (2000, pp. 233-235) indicate: sons and daughters / all elements of (of a tribe): member of a tribe; come good: greeting addressed to a guest; catch you: leave taking utterance equivalent to “good bye”; I’m coming: I am going out now; excuse me: utterance made by an affected person in response to the utterance “sorry”; to throw water: to offer drinks; to be on seat: to be present in one’s office; to chase a file: to speed up the processing of one’s document; to put to bed: to have a baby; to give someone a snake beating: to beat somebody to. The sources of idiomatic variations in non-native contexts are many. In Nigerian English for instance, Adegbija (2003, pp. 48-49) has identified six sources, namely analogical creation (e.g. public dog), native source translation equivalents (e.g. to wet the ground), personality related (e.g. sidon look attitude), media instigated source (e.g. hidden agenda), slang origin (e.g. to flashy).

#### IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The write-up on many Cameroon English literary works embodies a lot of non-standard idiomatic expressions. A scrutiny of these expressions reveals that they are created via several processes. Three major processes which govern the creation of these idioms have been identified and the expressions grouped as follows: idioms obtained via the translation of home language expressions, coined idioms and the idioms obtained via the modification of Standard British English expressions. As concerns the idioms obtained via the modification of Standard British expressions, it has been observed that the modification are obtained via substitution, addition and deletion. Also, it is worth indicating that more than one process is also involved in the creation these modified idioms (e.g. substitution and addition, addition and deletion, just to name these few). For the purpose of clarity, these expressions will be presented in tables. Table 1 includes the expressions which are obtained via the translation of home language expressions, Table 2 comprises the expressions which are locally coined while Table 3 is the presentation of the expressions which are obtained via the modification of Standard British English expressions.

TABLE 1:  
IDIOMS OBTAINED FROM THE TRANSLATION OF HOME LANGUAGE EXPRESSIONS

N°	Idioms	Donor language expressions	Meanings	Donor languages	Sources
1	To vomit one’s heart to somebody	Lə (inf. marker) trɔ̃h (throw)nti (heart) ghi (poss. Marker) cəm(all) abɔ̃ (onto) ɲwɔ̃ (somebody)	to tell somebody all what one knows about an affair	Nweh <sup>1</sup>	TAF, p. 121
2	To spit in somebody’s face	Lə (inf. marker) trɔ̃h (throw) bətei (spit) asə (face) ɲwɔ̃ (somebody)	to disgrace somebody	Nweh	COT, 32
3	To have heads	lə (inf. Marker) bɔ̃ɲ (have) atú (head)	to be reasonable	Nweh	COT, p. 47
4	To throw excrement into the face of something /somebody	lə (inf.marker) mɛ’ (throw) mbit (excrement) asə (face) ɲwɔ̃ (somebody)	to disgrace somebody	Nweh	ALOTD p. 45
5	To have eyes and ears	lə (inf.marker) ɲa’tə (open) m í(eyes) ma (and) betunji (ears) mɔ̃ (somebody)	to be alert, vigilant, reasonable	Nweh	COT, p. 134
6	To grind pepper on somebody’s head	ɲwɔ̃ (grind) só(pepper) t ó(head) wa (somebody)	To beat somebody	Ngie <sup>2</sup>	SNS, p. 67
7	To open one’s mouth and talk	lə (inf.marker) co’ (open) neù (mouth) ɲsonj(talk) ei (him/her)	to say nonsensical things	Nweh	ALOTD, p. 202
8	To drill books into a child’s head	lə (inf.marker) yihi (put) akatei (books) at ú (head) ɲwa (somebody)	To impart knowledge to a child	Nweh	DFN, p. 60
9	To be sick in one’s Head	ləghua (illness) atú(head)	not being reasonable	Nweh	DFN, p. 93
10	To rub somebody with excrement	Lə (inf.marker)lɔ̃ (take) mbit (excrement) njɔ̃ (rub) ɲwɔ̃ (somebody)	to disgrace, disturb somebody	Nweh	SIH, p. 23
11	To wash the genitals of the chief	lə (inf.marker) soh (wash) acena (sex/buttocks) fua (chief)	to have sexual intercourse with the chief	Nweh	COT, p. 64
12	To remove the chair from under somebody	lə (inf.marker) cɔ̃’ (remove) alanɲa (chair) acèn (sex/buttocks) ɲwɔ̃ (somebody)	to snatch the throne	Nweh	COT, p. 98
13	To have four eyes	ke (to have) si (eyes) kwe (four)	to be a member of an “evil society”	Lamnso <sup>3</sup> and other Grassfield languages	TDH, p.138
14	To be four-eyed	ke (to have) si (eyes) kwe (four)	to be a member of an “evil society”	Lamnso and other Grassfield <sup>4</sup> languages	TDH, p. 60

TABLE 1:  
IDIOMS OBTAINED FROM THE TRANSLATION HOME LANGUAGE EXPRESSIONS (CONTINUATION)

N°	idioms	Donour language expressions	Meanings	Donour languages	Sources
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15	To see one's flower	nə yɪ (inf. Marker) fə la wə (flower) tsjə (personal pronoun)	to menstruate	Ghomala <sup>7</sup> 5 and other Grassfield languages	COT, p. 145
16	To know a lot of books	Lə b ó (inf. marker + very) (know) akatei (books) nzə`	to be highly educated	Nweh and other Grassfield languages	COT, p. 64
17	To have bad mouth	Lə (inf.marker) bɪ`ɪ (have) (mouth) tɪbɪ`ɪ (bad) ncù	to say unpleasant things about people	Nweh, Grassfield languages	SC, p. 89
18	To cry for somebody	Lə (inf. marker) lɛ (cry) (somebody) ɲwɪ	to organize a ceremony in memory of a dead person	Nweh, Grassfield languages	COT, p. 82
19	To give people one mouth	ina' (to give) co (mouth) fɛ (one)	to make them unanimous, united, for a common cause	Ngie	SNS, p. 177
20	Someone with two hearts	wa (man) ne (with) fiɲi (heart) bje' (two)	someone who is not unanimous with other people of the group, a traitor	Ngie	SNS, p. 177
21	To buy one's head	Lə (inf. marker) ʒwə (buy) tũ (head)	to bribe or give money to somebody in order to avoid or prevent a situation	Nweh, other Grassfield languages	TAF, p. 132
22	To expose one's anus in the market	Lə (inf. marker) cu (show) (sex/buttocks) ɲwɪ (somebody) ac əna (market) asã	to expose one's private problems, life; not to take precautions	Nweh	Chopch air, p.106
23	To eat pepper from somebody's hands	Ikod (inf. marker + eat) abuge (hand) úso (pepper)	to be beaten severely by somebody	Ngie	SNS, p. 19
24	To look at water on cocoyam leaves	in ê (inf. marker + look) (leaves) nàɲ (cocoyam) bɪɪɲ	to have hopes which will not be fulfilled	Ngie	SNS, p.48
25	To receive one's pay in a hat	Inumo (inf. marker + take) (money) akɛ (in) daɲ (hat) ɲkap	to have a good salary	Ngie	SNS, p. 140
26	To sit on the stool	Lə (inf.marker) ɲaɲ (sit) (chair) lə fuɪ (chief) alaɲa	to be crowned as the chief	Nweh, Grassfield languages	COT, p. 60
27	To sleep a woman	lə (inf.marker) noɲ (sleep) mə ɲwi (woman)	to have sex with a woman	Nweh, Grassfield languages	SIH, p. 279

TABLE 2:  
COINED IDIOMS

N°	Coined expressions	Meanings	Sources
28	To have the mouth and ear of somebody	to be the emissary or representative of somebody	COT, p. 175
29	To run before one can walk	not to do things with a lot of anticipations, to be very anxious	NFM, p. 82
30	To clean somebody's eyes	to flatter somebody	ALOTD, p.304
31	To oil somebody's hands	to bribe somebody	ALOTD, p.304
32	To rub somebody's mouth	to bribe somebody	SNS, p.143
33	To be born at the right moment	to be lucky, fortunate	TDH, p.143
34	To know each other as man and woman	To have got the opportunity to see each other's nakedness or nudity	Nyusham, p. 53
35	To burn one's (woman) womb	to become sterile	FID, p. 66
36	To post a girl to somebody (man)	to send her to live with a man as his wife without his approval	NWTD, p.214
37	To put wings on something	to make it go fast	NWTD, p.95
38	To speak with so much vinegar on one's tongue	to speak violently	ALOTD, p.150
39	To wash the male side of one's womb	to give birth to male babies	COT, p.206
40	To be the only cock to crow	to be the only person to give orders, the only person whose voice can be heard	TAF, p.84
41	To be somebody's sperm	to be somebody's offspring	COB, p.145
42	To be on somebody's neck	to request something from somebody persistently	TWM, p. 60
43	To be somebody's first piss	to be somebody's first child	DFN, p.131
44	To sing a different song	to say different things	DFN, p. 132
45	To walk on one's head	to be proud	SIH, p.70
46	To speak grammar	to speak an educated variety of English	SIH, p.92
47	To dig a woman	to have sex with a woman	SIH, p.63
48	To eat plantains every day	to have sex with the same partner every day	NFM, p. 20
49	To have traffic jam in one's head	to be thoughtful	FID, p. 132
50	To drag the crown into the gutters	to alter the prestige of the crown	ALOTD, p. 222

TABLE 3:  
IDIOMS OBTAINED FROM THE MODIFICATION OF BRITISH ENGLISH EXPRESSIONS

N°	Modified expressions	Donour expressions	Lexes/morphemes affected	Processes involved	Sources
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51	To bite the <i>finger</i> that fed somebody	to bite the <i>hand</i> that fed somebody	finger < hand	substitution	SNS, p. 69
52	Without <i>mixing</i> words	without <i>mincing</i> words	mincing < mixing	substitution	NWTD, p. 186
53	To put a <i>full stop</i> to something	to put an <i>end</i> to /a <i>stop</i> to something	full stop < end/stop	substitution	NWTD, p. 216
54	To put a <i>final full stop</i> to something	to put an <i>end</i> to /a <i>stop</i> to something	final full stop < end/stop	substitution	NWTD, p. 218
55	To fall cats and <i>hens</i>	to rain cats and <i>dogs</i>	hens < dogs	substitution	ALOTD, p.256
56	To cut one's <i>goat</i> according to one's size	to cut one's <i>coat</i> according to one's size	goat < coat	substitution	COB, 131
57	As sure as <i>morning follows night</i>	as sure as <i>hell</i> / as sure as <i>eggs is eggs</i>	morning follows night < hell / egg is eggs	substitution	DFN, p. 43
58	As you make <i>ya</i> bed, so shall you <i>die</i> on it	as you make your bed, so shall you <i>lie</i> on it	ya < your / die < lie	substitution	SIH, p.215
59	to sing someone's <i>song</i>	to sing someone's <i>praises</i>	song < praises	substitution	FID, p. 29
60	to leave somebody <i>to himself</i>	to leave somebody <i>alone</i>	himself < alone	substitution	COT, p. 64
61	To put one's shoulder to the <i>plough</i>	to put one's shoulder to the <i>wheel</i> or to put one's hand to the plough	either shoulder < hand or plough < wheel	substitution	COT, p. 85
62	To be on night	to be on night <i>call</i>	"call" is deleted in the modified expression	deletion	SIH, p.85
63	To make a <i>big</i> name for oneself	to make a name for oneself	"big" is inserted in the modified expression	addition	NWTD, p. 47
64	To take the law in one's own <i>wicket</i> hand	to take the law into one's own hand	"wicket" is inserted in the modified expression	addition	ALOTD, p. 39
65	To poke one's <i>noxious</i> nose into something	to poke one's nose into something	"noxious" is inserted in the modified expression	addition	Nyusham, p. 133
66	Where there is a will, there is always a way	where there is a will, there is a way	"always" is inserted in the modified English proverb	addition	COT, p. 182

67	To shout <i>over</i> somebody's <i>head</i>	to shout <i>at</i> somebody	"at" is replaced with "over" and "head" is inserted in the modified expression	substitution, addition	NWTD, p. 46
68	To put one's <i>feet</i> into hot water	to be in hot water or to get into hot water	"to be" or "to get" is (are) replaced with "to put" and "one's feet" is inserted in the modified expression	substitution, addition	Chopchair, p.55
69	To have one's <i>feet</i> in water	to be in <i>hot</i> water	"to be" is replaced with "to have", "one's feet" is inserted into the modified expression and "hot" is deleted in the resulting expression	substitution, addition, deletion	COT, p.121
70	To have a <i>good</i> name	to make a name	"make" is replaced with "have" and "good" is inserted in the expression	substitution, addition	NFM, p. 82
71	To be <i>at</i> somebody's <i>very</i> nose	to be (right) <i>under</i> somebody's nose	"under" is replaced with "at" and "very" is inserted in the modified expression	substitution, addition	SNS, p.148
72	one good turn <i>always</i> deserves another	one good turn deserves another	"always" is inserted in the expression	addition	Nyusham, p. 153

It is important to note that what is common with the expressions presented in Tables 1 and 2 is that they are drawn in the Cameroonian sociocultural context. As stated earlier, they are either obtained via the translation of home language expressions (n=27) or via coining (n=23). The reasons which might have motivated this lexical creativity can be linked to the need-filling motive (Hockett, 1958, p. 405) and the relexification of home languages or simply in the insufficient exposure of speakers to exonormative models. What is equally worth noting about these expressions is that almost all of them have not yet gained national currency. In effect, they are not yet integrated the dictionary of Cameroon English usage (Cf. Kouega's (2007) *A Dictionary of Cameroon English Usage*). With regard to modified idioms (n=22), it can be observed from Table 3 that modification can be obtained via substitution (n=11) (e.g. to bite the *finger* that fed somebody < to bite the *hand* that fed somebody, without *mixing* words < without *mincing* words), addition (n=5) (e.g. to make a *big* name for oneself < to make a name for oneself, to take the law in one's own *wicket* hand < to take the law into one's own hand), deletion (n=1) (e.g. to be on night < to be on night *call*), substitution and addition (n=4) (e.g. to shout *over* somebody's *head* < to shout *at* somebody) and finally substitution, addition and deletion (n=1) (e.g. to have one's *feet* in water < to *be* in *hot* water). The modification of these idioms can be linked to the insufficient exposure of speakers to English exonormative models (Kachru, 1986:21). As concerns the domains under which these expressions fall, it can be said that they can be classified under the following lexical registers: sex, love and marriage; effrontery,

cheek and unpleasant situations; appearance and description; administration, education and communication; money, finance and bribery as well as customs, traditions and magic.

At the present state of research these expressions can only be considered as non-standard features given that they are neither attested in Standard British English nor in the dictionary of Cameroon English usage. However, as usage constantly evolves, it is possible that these expressions gain national currency and gradually find their way in Standard Cameroon English usage.

## V. DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

As mentioned earlier, the exposure of readers to these non-standard idioms can constitute a hindrance to their learning of English language. These idioms are either indigenized lexico-semantic constructions (idioms in Tables 1 and 2) which are either proper to the home language communities of the authors who use them or which have not yet gained national currency. The idioms presented in Table 3 (i.e. modified idioms) can simply be considered as errors in English language use which are due to the fact that the speakers are not sufficiently exposed to the native English norms. It is worth pointing out that as regards the use of Standard British English idioms in non-native contexts, language users, due to their insufficient exposure the native norms modify native English idioms through several means. The study carried out by Ishaq Akbarian (2003, p. 49) on the problems that Iranian learners of English as a foreign language face in the learning of English idioms is instructive in this respect. The researcher has grouped the problems faced by Iranian learners of English as a foreign language in the use of native English idioms under semantics, structural features (word order, syntactic, grammatical errors) and lexical errors (omission, addition and substitution of lexemes) (Ishaq Akbarian (2003, pp. 55-56) and drawing from the works of Henzl (1973) and Kellerman (1977) he has attributed these errors to the unpredictability of the figurative meaning of idioms, the use on non-interactive situations in the teaching of idioms to learners, the insufficient teaching of English idioms in non-native contexts, the variance in formality, colloquialisms, situational appropriateness of English idioms (Ishaq Akbarian, 2003, pp. 52-53).

It is important to indicate that as concerns the official languages to be taught in Cameroon, although the constitutions of 1972 and 1996 simply talk of English and French as being the official languages of Cameroon, there is, however, a common belief and practice among language teachers, planners, policy makers and students of English that the standard to be pursued is the Standard British standard because of the country's colonial and historical past (Ubanako, 2011, p. 230). Therefore, no room is given to indigenized constructions in formal situations, even Standard Cameroon English which is a documented variety of Cameroon English is not yet accepted by English language teachers in formal situations. This concurs Simo Bobda (2002, p. vi) when he points out that "while acknowledging the legitimate emergence of an autonomous variety of English in Cameroon, I believe that we are still, in many ways, dependent upon British and American norms. Our educational and professional successes are still determined by these norms". On the basis of the above clues, it is obvious that these non-standard idioms are considered as instances of wrong English usage by the English language teachers. Therefore, when they are spotted out in students scripts, English language teachers simply cancel them since they are instances of wrong usage. Students, to their greater dismay, are confused because these expressions which they use and for which they are penalised in their written examinations are used in the novels which they are constantly exposed to and these literary works are written by people who are either English language teachers or English-speaking Cameroonians who are universities postgraduates. For instance, Linus Asong, the author of *The Crown of Thorns*, Shadrack Ambanasom, the author of *Son of the Native Soil*, Nkemgong Nkengasong, author of *The Widow's Might*, Francis Nyamnjoh, the author of *A Nose for Money*, author of *The Deadly Honey*, Margaret Afuh, the authoress of *Flowers in the Desert*, just to name these, few are postgraduates. To be more precise, the first four authors are Doctorate Degree holders and University Professors. The novels of the first two authors are being used in the Cameroonian Secondary and High school of the Anglophone sub-system of education. The first three authors have taught English language in Cameroonian secondary schools for many years before starting teaching literature at the tertiary level of education (i.e. universities). The last novelist (i.e. Margaret Afuh) is an English language teacher. So, when Cameroonian English language learners read their works, they consider their English language use as the models to be emulated. They are confused when their English language teachers consider some of the idioms that they use and which are used in the novels of these writers as instances of errors. Why should English language learners be exposed to these non-standard idioms if these expressions are considered by English language teachers as errors in language use? In addition to the impact on English language learning, it can be asserted that these non-standard idioms can be the source of much unintelligibility between the writers and their readership. In effect, these expressions have not yet gained national currency in Cameroon. They can easily be understood by readers who belong to the same language community with the authors. This is true of the expressions which are translated from the novelists' home languages and those which are coined. This therefore implies that even Cameroonians who do not belong to the same home language community will find it difficult to understand the meaning of these expressions. Consequently, the message conveyed by the authors can easily be obstructed by these expressions. What can therefore be done in order to cope with this situation?

Given that the Cameroonian educational system still relies on native English norms as regards the teaching of English language, in order to draw students attention on them (especially idioms translated from home languages and coined ones), writers should either provide in their novels footnotes or a glossary which explain the meanings of these non-

standard expressions and they should indicate that the expressions are not native English expressions. Also, language specialists and educational authorities should design a dictionary of Cameroon English literary usage so as to put at the disposal of students a document which contains and explains the accepted Cameroon literary English lexis and expressions. By so doing, students will not be penalised any more for having used in their write-ups expressions which are used by Cameroonian writers in their literary works.

As regards modified idioms, it is important to indicate that these modifications more often than not are done unconsciously by the writers. They are therefore recommended to have their novels edited by professional editors before they publish them. In the course of editing them, the editors will spot out these modified idioms and will provide the Standard British equivalents. Given that some of these novels feature in the official list of novels to be used in Cameroonian secondary and high schools, while reading them in class with students, teachers should spot out the expressions and draw students' attention on the fact that these idioms are non-standard expressions and should therefore not be used in formal contexts (during official exams, test of English language proficiency (e.g.: TOEFL), formal letters, recruitment tests, just to name these few). Also, syllabus designers should make sufficient provision for the teaching of Standard British English idioms in the English language syllabus for secondary and high schools. This will urge teachers to prepare lessons on idiomatic expressions and design adequate materials for their teachings. This will facilitate the exposure of English language learners to Standard British English expressions.

## VI. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing study, it can be retained that various non-standard idioms abound in the write-up of Cameroonian writers of English expressions. Besides, it is found that several processes are put at work in the creation of these idioms. While some are obtained via the translation of home languages expressions, others are obtained via coinages and a sizeable proportion of them are obtained via the modification of Standard British English expressions. This lexicosemantic creativity has been attributed to factors such as the need-filling motive, the relexification of home languages and the insufficient exposure of speakers to exo-normative norms. Moreover, it has been demonstrated in the study that taking into consideration the fact that the Cameroonian educational system still depends on native norms, the exposure of English language learners to these non-standard expressions cannot only be counterproductive to their learning of English language but can also go a long way to hamper intelligibility between the writers and its readership. It is suggested in the study that writers should provide either footnotes or a glossary which explain non-standard expressions that they use in their literary works and draw readers' attention on the fact that they are non-standard English expressions. Also, they should have their works edited by professional editors before they have them published. English language teachers should attach a lot of importance to the teaching of Standard British idioms in their vocabulary lessons. This will make learners familiar with Standard British English expressions. Furthermore language researchers and educational authorities should work out a glossary or a dictionary of Cameroon literary English which will provide the entries of lexis and expressions accepted in Cameroon literary English so as to provide learners with a list of accepted lexis and idioms that they can use in their English language and literature tests.

### Notes:

- 1-The Nweh language is a Bantu language spoken in the Southwest region of Cameroon.
- 2-The Ngie language is a Bantu language spoken in the Northwest region of Cameroon.
- 3-Lamnso' is a Bantu language spoken in the Northwest region of Cameroon
- 4-In Cameroon, Grassfield languages are the languages spoken in the West and North-west regions of Cameroon
- 5- Ghomala' is a Bantu language spoken in the West region of Cameroon

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