

Language of Coercion of the Separatist Fighters in the Anglophone Crisis of Cameroon



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Abstract

Language is a potent tool in crises, often used for violent purposes where the manipulation of lexemes can inflict psychological or physical harm. The Separatist Fighters (SF), during the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon that started in 2016, have managed to instill terror within the communities of the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon (North West and South West Regions) even without physical action or presence. Their frequent verbal messages and speeches shared on social media have been a powerful weapon. This study meticulously evaluates the elements of violence in the speeches of the SF, shedding light on the upheaval they cause in these communities. It delves into the linguistic patterns used by the Separatist Fighters in the Anglophone crisis, explicating the profound influence of their communication tactics. Through purposive sampling, the research focused on two Cameroon regions involved in the Anglophone crisis and exploited data from two towns within these regions. Also, using convenience sampling techniques, data was collected using semi-structured interviews with fifty (50) participants from various occupations, such as administrators, business owners, teachers, traditional leaders and students from Buea and Bamenda. Data was obtained from messages shared on the WhatsApp social media communication forum and an independent news reporting network (mimimefos.com). Twenty (20) lexemes and twenty (20) syntactic expressions were identified, described and analysed using discourse analysis and relevance theory. The study demonstrated that through contextual and cultural context, the morphology and syntax of word forms express the covert message of violence and threat. It strongly underscores the link between language and war, revealing how language is used to propagate violence in the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon through strategies such as labelling and rhetorical devices like exaggeration, euphemism, metaphor, and figurative speech. From the findings, the study recommends that the speech of a chosen group of people be identified and described to understand the ideology of the particular group in crisis or a particular context in society.

Keywords: *Separatist fighters, Anglophone crisis, Coercion, Violence,*

Introduction

The language used in society by individuals fulfils various functions other than its primary function of communication. Language's role in crisis demonstrates its pragmatic function as it portrays its impact on its users and listeners. It equally reveals the speaker's intention on their interlocutor. This notion agrees with Brown and Yule's (1983) (not referenced) view of language as a means through which individuals express their minds

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by communicating their emotions, ideas, intentions, and beliefs. Generally, language influences the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviour of the speaker and the hearer.

Given its significant communicative role, the use of language in conflict situations has been expressed from different perspectives, portraying language as a medium to ignite conflict, hide information, threaten, and instil fear and violence, etc. (Beukeboon & Burgers, 2019; Tiersma & Solan, 2012; Mojaye, 2014; Muluh & Fonghe, 2021). It demonstrates that language is an inevitable instrument in crises as it paints a picture in people's minds, inflicts violence and fear, and creates/terminates actions. This implies that language is symbolic in understanding and resolving crises as its impact either promotes or ignites conflict. This sets the foundation for this research to identify the lexemes and syntactic choices the Separatist fighters in the Anglophone crisis employ in their communicative repertoire. This researcher, therefore, aims to identify and demonstrate how the separatist fighters use language to persuade the population and the La Republique ruling government to do something by using force or threats. This study examines how violence and threats are represented using language by the separatist fighters of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon since 2016. As reported by Ikenga (2006), the effects of this crisis have been the destruction of human lives and natural resources, whose impact reflects the nation's drowning economic and social development.

Language is essential in our daily lives, as it is necessary for communication and social interaction. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that language can also spread discord, violence, and hatred among people. Despite its usefulness, language can also be a tool for adverse impact. The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon is a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. It began with a linguistic conflict between the two English-speaking regions out of the ten regions of Cameroon. Various measures have been put in place to address and mitigate its gravity, including creating a bilingual commission and the special status of the House of Local Councils. Language still plays a significant role as the la Republique Government and the Ambazonian leaders use it to express their ideologies and intentions.

Background to the Anglophone crisis

The crisis experienced in the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon is an ongoing civil war between the Cameroon ruling government (La Republique du Cameroun) and the Ambazonian or Anglophone Separatists. According to Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997), the root cause of the war stems from the marginalisation of the Anglophones by the la Republique government dominated by Francophones. To clearly state, the Anglophone crisis is considered a pursuit of identity and freedom from the suppression of the francophone-dominated Cameroonian regime. This crisis started in 2016 (8 years-) in the North West and South West Regions (former Southern Cameroon) of Cameroon.

History recounts that in 1884, during the era of the scramble of Africa, Cameroon gained the status of a German protectorate colony, and the Germans invested in infrastructure such as buildings, schools, hospitals, plantations, and railways (Nkwi & Sopca, 1997). The defeat of Germany during the First World War led to her expulsion from Cameroon, and the League of Nations partitioned Cameroon between France and Britain as mandated territory and later as trusteeship territory under the United Nations. The official language in France was French, and in British, it was English. Both parts considered themselves distinct communities because of their differences in language and culture.

According to Awasom (2000), the British territory comprised Southern and Northern Cameroon. As an outcome of the referendum of 11 February 1961, Northern Cameroon joined Nigeria, and Southern Cameroon joined La Republique du Cameroun, which gained independence on 1st January 1960. Meanwhile, Southern Cameroon gained its independence on 1st October 1961. History holds that the unification of Southern and French Cameroon (La Republique du Cameroun) in 1961 stands as the seed of the ongoing Anglophone crisis. This crisis is rooted in the historical and post-colonial consolidation of the two foreign cultures and languages, the Anglo-Saxon and Gaullic (French) cultures, values and languages. It is worth mentioning that the economic, political, social, and linguistic marginalisation of the majority French over the minority Anglo-Saxons is a manifestation of the problem and not the problem per se. According to Ndille (2021), the Anglophone crisis stems from the failure of successive governments since 1961 to respect the agreement taken during the Foumban Constitutional Conference. This historical rendition of the Anglophone problem since the 1960s escalated to the crisis that started in 2016 and is the hub on which this research is placed, creating the niche on the use of language to communicate and its impact on society.

The ongoing Anglophone crisis began in October 2016 with a strike by the Anglophone Lawyers (Menyoli, 2021), followed by a sit-in-strike by the Anglophone teachers in November 2016 and the violent protest in Bamenda in December of that same year. It later grew into a full-blown- armed conflict between the La Republique du Cameroun armed forces and the non-state armed group known as the Ambazonia fighters. The situation escalated when the activities of the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) and the Cameroon Civil Society Consortium (CACSC) were banned by the ruling government on 17 January 2017, resulting in the arrest and detention of some of its leaders, namely Barrister Nkongho Felix, Dr Fontem Neba, later Ayah Paul Abine and Mancho Bibixy. The ruling government's decision to cut off communication facilities from these two regions, coupled with the street clash between the Anglophone population and La Republique military men on 1st October 2017, cemented the crisis as it led to many deaths. These clashes between the la Republique forces and the Ambazonia Forces have led to a series of formidable decisions and bans from both parties that were communicated to the population to consolidate authority and power. Consequently, the outcome of the crisis has been very detrimental to the physical, emotional, economic and developmental state of the nation and its inhabitants as lives have been wasted and infrastructures destroyed. This situation has negatively traumatised the populations in these two regions (the North West and South West), as the majority have fled to neighbouring towns, regions and countries as IDPs in search of security. At the same time, they are left back home to embrace the brunt of the war, living in and with fear and violence as their constant companions.

Review of relevant literature

Conflict

Research on conflict has traditionally focused on understanding the processes and managing various forms of conflict, including violent and non-violent behaviours and structural factors such as social, political, economic, or cultural conflict. Conflicts are not necessarily harmful; they are healthy and beneficial in increasing awareness of existing

problems and providing a way forward. The positive value of conflict encourages an environment to become better.

Communication is an essential strategy for handling and resolving conflicts. This strategy includes allowing everyone to speak, paying attention to language choice and body language, and focusing on providing a solution. There are four elements to consider when analysing conflicts: the extended context and identity issues, identifying causes, drivers, and triggers, analysing the parties to the conflict, and identifying conflict dynamics. The effects of conflict can be expressed on both sides of a coin. The positive side of the conflict can help individuals and particular groups evolve and develop self-identities that enhance stability. Contrarily, the negative side of the conflict for both individuals and organisations results in the deviation of the goals, lack of motivation, and social loafing. This leads to a toxic environment with a psychological tool for cohesiveness (Coser, 1956). The current study focuses on identifying the conflict dynamics of the Separatist fighters of the Anglophone crisis in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon, identifying its effects on the community.

Language in conflict

According to Schmid (2002), Conflict is a hostile or adversarial process between at least two individual or collective actors over means or ends such as resources, power, status, values, goals, relations, or interests. The conflict outcomes include victory, defeat, domination, surrender, neutralisation, conversion, injury, or destruction and elimination of the opposite party or the solution, settlement, or transformation of the conflict issue. Languages do not exist in isolation as abstract systems of sign but within the culture of the people. The best instrument for achieving peace and resolving conflict is using languages that honour and respect human dignity, tolerance, truth, and national integration (Jija, 2012). The words used by the separatist fighters to communicate their ideas to the ruling government and the population in the present conflicts in Cameroon shall be examined in this work.

Managing a conflict can be flamed depending on language, for it can be used to destroy, build or reconcile. Studying the functions of language in crisis and how different communicative acts relate to the speakers' goals and outcomes is essential. Words can create both harmony and conflict. Ukaegbu's (2018) research on the role of language in human conflict situates the concept of abusive statements within the pragmatic environment, wherein she examines the role language plays in shaping how conflicts unfold and are resolved. Human beings cannot run away from conflicts, as ninety percent of conflicts are caused by word of mouth.

According to Nelde (2010), political, economic, and social problems are often rooted in Linguistic conflict. That is, conflicts are related to the use of language. The pragmatic approach to language use in conflict considers the structural and linguistic knowledge of the speaker and the listener, the context of the utterance, and other factors. In this research, therefore, attention would be given to some lexemes and syntactic forms made in context situations considering the pragmatic implications, which often promote fear and violence.

Words expressed in speech or nonverbal communication have different meanings across cultures. A statement can have a particular meaning but be ambiguous; this explains why words must be used carefully to convey the exact meaning within a context, given that the meaning one deduces from what he is being told often does not

have significant emotional, social and psychological effects, resulting in unhealthy outcomes. Furthermore, syntactic structures provide partial information required to interpret a sentence (O'Grady et al., 2011). Other vital pragmatic details are needed, such as the speaker's and addressees' background, attitude, and beliefs, their understanding of the context in which the utterance is rendered, and their knowledge of how language can be used to inform, mislead, and persuade.

Language of violence

Violence can be expressed from two extreme fronts, such as murder, that is, death inflicted by man on man, and on the other hand, as an effect of nature when it attacks and cannot be tamed, such as the violence of hurricanes, fires, floods or epidemics. Recent studies have demonstrated how language can assert behavioural-based threats (Kupper & Meloy, 2021). Their analysis showed how thirty written and spoken manifestos were identified and analysed by a lone actor who planned or committed a targeted attack between 1974 and 2021. The findings of this research were applied to a similar situation where a targeted manifesto was used on a social media platform, and they assisted in detecting the message's intent.

According to Ricoeur (1998), what unifies the problem of violence is the multiple expressions produced and the language used to communicate. Thus, violence is expressed in the language used. To him, violence and language are opposites, each perfectly balanced against the other. Language is a tool or code because it does not speak but is spoken. Thus, the spoken word bears the meaning of violence, and the dynamism of language can only be penetrated to understand the expression of violence. Someone must express himself, and the intention of saying something must be said for the meaning to be interpreted as violence. Words belong to a lexicon that only derives meaning when used in varying discourses, as they may reveal violence or threats. The issue of language in confrontation with violence is not the problem of structure but rather the problem of meaning to understand the relationship of man to man inclusively. Ricoeur (1998) posits that language and violence are opposite but mutually influential. In a situation where language becomes a tool of domination and a means through which violence manifests itself, violence arises from an imbalance of power, an integral part of all human political activities.

Methodology

Through a purposive sampling technique, the study was conducted in the two English-speaking regions (NW & SW) of Cameroon, where the Anglophone crisis is ongoing, with a focus on the cities of Bamenda and Buea. The study exploited both primary and secondary data, wherein the primary data was gathered through interviews and participant observation within the communities of Buea and Bamenda. The secondary data was obtained from messages shared on the WhatsApp social media communication forum and an independent news reporting network (mimimefos.com). The study identified, described, and analysed twenty-five (25) lexical choices and ten (10) syntactic expressions. Also, the study used a convenience sampling technique to select fifty (50) participants from various occupations in Buea and Bamenda for the semi-structured interview, including administrators, business owners, teachers, traditional leaders, and students. The participants, evenly distributed between the two towns, represented a mix

of genders. The obtained data was examined to assess how the language used by the separatist fighters affected the community. This examination uncovered how violence and fear were depicted in the separatist fighters' communication and how they impacted the community.

Table 1: Sample of the interviewed population

S/N	Occupation of Participants	Bamenda-NW			Buea-SW		
			M	F		M	F
1.	Administrators (Mayors, Senior Divisional Officer, & Divisional Officer)	4	4	0	4	4	0
2.	Business owners	6	3	3	6	3	3
3.	Educationists (teachers)	7	4	3	7	3	4
4.	Traditional leaders (elites)	2	2	0	2	2	0
5.	Students	6= 25	3 = 16	3 = 9	6= 25	3=15	3 =10
Total		25			25		

Table 1 shows statistics for the number of people interviewed and their professions. The study involved twenty-five participants from each region, totalling fifty participants. There were sixteen males and nine females from the North West, and fifteen males and ten females from the South West. The data from this sample population were collected and analysed using qualitative methods.

This sampled data includes texts and voice messages circulated on the WhatsApp Online platform and video clips of violent activities on mimimefoinfos.com (an independent news reporting network). The choice to work with these social media platforms was because they provide up-to-date messages and report extensively on the events of the Anglophone crisis.

Also, as a researcher living in both regions and participating in the day-to-day activities of the communities, I keenly observe the reactions and behaviour of the population to the messages and video clips shared on the platforms on the activities of the SF. So, I participate as an observer and a community member. This participant observation approach enables me to capture the impact of language use on the population, which keeps out the phenomenon of the Hawthorne effect or social desirability bias. Applying discourse analysis, I identified and analysed the linguistic features of the language used by the SFs to express violence in the Anglophone crisis, along with its cultural and ideological properties. The ideological perspective here focuses on the reason for the crisis and how the SFs express their ideas.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a qualitative research approach used to analyse the language used by the SF. According to Wodak and Krzyzoaowski (2008), it provides a general framework for problem-oriented social research. Discourse analysis is exploited in this research because it describes and analyses the use of language in a particular context

where societal issues affect individuals negatively. It demonstrates how the context of a communicative event affects the meaning of the language used.

The analysis focused on lexical, stylistic, and contextual analyses. The stylistic analysis examined the fighters' utterances' word choice, sentence structure, and grammar. Studying the word choice and the communication style of these fighters provides evidence that can be used in a criminal investigation that incurs violence, such as in situations of threats, kidnappings, and the demands for ransoms, consequently leading to murder. On the other hand, the contextual analysis identified the social and situational context in which language is used to infer meaning within the context in which it is said and heard. It also revealed valuable information on the relationship between the speaker, the audience, and the setting where the communication occurs (social and cultural context).

Relevance theory

In analysing the meaning and impact of the language used in the crisis by the Separatist fighters, relevance theory describes the communication process of encoding, transferring, and decoding messages and numerous other elements, including inference and context. According to Sperber and Wilson (1995), understanding what someone says is a complex matter of linguistic decoding. It is crucial to identify (a) the speaker's intended message, (b) the speaker's intended implication, (c) the speaker's attitude towards the message and implication, and (d) the intended context of the message. They strongly emphasise that the interpretation of a statement should be drawn from the immediate environment, which includes both the psychological context (the issues or mindset already existing in the speaker's mind before the statement was made) and the physical context (the place and audience involved).

Presentation and discussion of data

Table 2: Used lexemes during the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon

S/N	Labels	Context of usage
1.	Separatists	Appellation refers to the Ambazonia leaders (Issa Tchiroma, former Minister of Communication). "You do not expect the Government of Cameroon to dialogue with separatists who want to chop off part of our country,"
2.	<i>Secessionists</i>	Appellation given to separatist fighters of the North West and South West Regions to reflect their ideological stand.
3.	The boyeses	The term the La Republic Government uses refers to the Southern Cameroon Liberation Activists and their activities.
4.	Ghost Town	The separatist fighters have declared Mondays in these two regions as ghost towns days with or without reason. These fighters also impose lockdown days, sometimes lasting for three days, one week, two weeks, or any number of days according to their decision.
5.	Amba fighters amba boys,	Appellation given to the different armed groups on ground zero in the NWSW Regions.
6.	Ground zero	Northwest and South West (crisis areas) (Amba boys
7	Red Zone	Crisis

8.	General No Pity	Name of one of the fearless leaders of the Ambazonian fighters
9	This struggle	The crisis
10..	Popcorn	The sounds produced by the guns
11.	Grannut (Groundnuts)	Bullets or cartridges for war guns
12.	ekelebe	La Republic military men (Ibo slang meaning policeman)
13.	<i>Field Marshall, generals</i>	Name given to the leaders of the armed groups within the crisis zone
14.	<i>Y'a place dey</i>	recognition of efforts at resisting the enemy
15.	Sugar cane	(gun)
16.	Country Sunday lockdown,	Forbidden days for activities to go on
17-	stick	guns
18	odeshi	Bullet resistant (a term adopted from Nigerian vocabulary)
19.	Bitter kola	Bullets

Table 2 displays a list of words used in the communicative repertoire of the SF from two cities in the two crisis regions. It includes the words and their meanings within their contexts. Some words may have already existed, but their meanings are interpreted differently in the present context.

Table 3: syntactic structures used by SFs during the Anglophone crisis in

S/N	Labels	Context of usage
1.	Two cubes of sugar	The two Anglophone regions of Cameroon (honourable Wirba Joeseeph)
2	where dem dey	Anxious to face the La Republic military but in hiding
3	wata na wata	Non-effects of bullets on them (Amba fighters)
4	No dog, no dey	The enemy is light or weak
5	General No Pity	Name of one of the fearless leaders of the Ambazonian fighters
6.	<i>Y'a place dey</i>	Y'a place dey (recognition of efforts at resisting the enemy)
7.	Shake, shake, no dey.	(résilience)
8.	Sugar cane	(gun)
9	Giv him five cutlass e go confirm.	Beating the underfeet with the marchet
10	Chop ekelebe	Eliminated a La Republique military army
11	Chop radar	Spying on L Republique military
12	We don wound ekelebe	They have killed military soldiers
13	You go climb Sanini or climb free bike	Means of transportation during abduction

14	We don di wise you since	Monitoring someone
15	Since this struggle start you don giv pikin dem how many sugar cane?	Since the crisis started, how many guns have you supported your children
?16?	If you no giv three stick now so we go garri your one hand	Provide three guns, or we cut off your hand (demand for ransom)
17.	Man pass gun	A bullet cannot infiltrate into their body
18.	Dem say your hand dem dirty	You are guilty
19.	Your washing hand na one basket bitter kola	Fine to avail you of the crime accused

Table 3 shows a list of grammatical expressions utilised in the SF's communication in two cities located in the two crisis regions. The list includes the expressions and their interpretations within specific situations. While some expressions may have been used previously, their use in the current context conveys a different meaning.

According to Elgin (1995), the violence carried out by individuals or nations is preceded by some form of violent language. The key agents in the linguistic construction of violence and war are characterised by paradoxes, naming and labelling, and euphemism, among other discourse structures. Hence, language, when carefully used, can mask violence, but when it is not, it embodies violence. A word does not have a single, universally agreed-upon meaning within a speech community. The words used in everyday conversations are figuratively used within the crisis context to express varying meanings. Thus, the meaning of words is best when not considering the general (universal) meaning but from experimentation and observation of how the words are used and their impacts. The separatist fighters create words and phrases representing resistance, violence, threats, and death. Their choice of words bears marks of war, characterised by fear, anger, offended dignity, and a boost in revealing violence.

The language used by the SF is characterised by creativity and replete with coinages, idioms, rhetorical devices, and everyday words receiving expanded meaning. Consider the data below;

Table 5: Words and extended meanings

Word	Meaning	Extended meaning
country Sunday	A particular day dedicated to traditional gods	Forbidden day for activities to go on
popcorn	A type of corn that pops	The popping sound of the corn is used to refer to sounds produced by their guns.
Groundnuts	A legume crop with edible seeds	Bullets for the war guns

The data in Table 5 above demonstrate the use of common words whose meanings are extended to the context of the crisis. For instance, the word "country Sunday" culturally within the Fondoms of the North West region refers to a day set aside for the gods of the land on which no one is expected to carry out any manual activity but stay indoors. Contrarily, the semantic interpretation of this word adopted by the SF imposes a

constraint on the communities from moving out of their homes as a day set aside to mourn the death of their comrades during the crisis. Consequently, the violation of this constraint on this particular day in the two crisis regions has registered a series of bloody encounters between the SFs and the La Republique military (this term is adopted in this study as the SFs use it), leaving several civilians dead as the result of a stray bullet.

Euphemism

The SFs use euphemisms in their communication repertoire to demonstrate violence against their opponents. Consider the data below:

Table 6: Mild expressions to express harsh activities

Word	Intended meaning
chop ekelebe	Eliminate a La Republic military army.
chop radar	Spying on
gi hi, five cutlass.	Beating the underfeet with a machete
wata na wata	Non-effects of bullets on them (Amba fighters)
no dog, no dey	The enemy is light or weak.
shake, shake, no dey.	(résilience)

The data in Table 6 above express the use of euphemisms in the speech of the SFs in communicating. These expressions are rendered in CPE, the primary language used in communication among the fighters. The Word *chop* in CPE means “eat or to eat” in English, but the phrase “*chop ekelebe*” is used to describe the killing of La Republique soldiers. Also, the simplicity in expressing the effect of the punishment imposed on the victims when they use the phrase *gi hi five cutlass* which means to beat his under feet with a machete. Their choice of words does not demonstrate their actions' severity and effects. Similar to Gray's (1999) argument that the language of war is strategically chosen to conceal the reality of ongoing violence, the language used by the SFs (Separatist Forces) also has similar effects. When they use phrases like "*wata na wata*" to refer to the non-effect of bullets on them, "*no dog no dey*" to describe their opponent or enemy as light or weak, and "*shake shake no dey*" to express their resilience against their opponents, they simplify their views and opinions of their encounters, and their persistence.

Neologisms

The use of language has consequences as it creates and recreates varying shades of understanding. The interpretation of some words and expressions in crises demonstrates violence. Consider the data below:

Table 7: Adopting new words

Two cubes of sugar	secessionists
Amba boys	terrorists
The boyeses the bushes	Ekelebe
General	Field marshall

These words and phrases used in the Anglophone crisis expressed meanings which instigated violence. For instance, the interpreted meanings of the phrases: *two cubes of sugar*, *the boyeses in the bushes*, *amba boys*, *secessionists*, and *les Bamenda*, used in the

Anglophone crisis, radiate violence, which flamed the situation. Consequently, this demonstrated the high use of hate speech, a significant characteristic of the use of language in crises.

Exaggeration and comparisons

Table 8: words and expressions with exaggerated compared meaning

Two cubes of sugar	Two-English speaking region
Groundnuts	Bullets, cartridges
The boyses	Separatist fighters
General, field marshall	Leaders of SFs
No dog no dey	The enemy (La Republic military) is light
Popcorn	The sound produced by the guns during the shooting
Sugar cane	guns

The data presented in Table 8 illustrates words and phrases that convey exaggerated meanings and make comparisons. The choice of words during the crisis expressed much effect and evaluative judgments in their actions against one another. For instance, "cubes of sugar and dog" were exaggeratedly used to dehumanise the persons referred to. The expressions unveiled the less value associated with human life as many people got killed daily. A human being is called an animal dog and is vulnerable to activities that can quickly lead to death. Also, the term two cubes of sugar (a substance that quickly dissolves when put in water) is used metaphorically to refer to the two English-speaking regions out of the ten regions of Cameroon, only fans the situation and propagated violence.

Comparatively, the SFs are labelled and likened to generals in the military corps. This comparison does not reflect the same achievements instituted by the military corps in attaining the rank. However, the fighters adopt their characteristics for the rank to capture the resilience and success in the activities carried out by individual against their opponents. The meaning of words can be understood considering the context in usage. In crises, figurative speech characterises the communicative repertoire used, and the contextual meanings of these words do not reflect their strict or realistic meanings. They are used to add creative flourishes to accommodate the meaning of the concepts they want to highlight. The definitions of these words used by the SFs in the Anglophone crisis are attributed to the composition and manner of the objects to appeal to the emotional and psychological senses of the communities.

Irony is also a communicative strategy the SFs exploit, using words to express the opposite meaning. As reported from the interview, the ransom requested by the SFs after adoption ranges from the figure one stick to any bigger figure. Ironically, "stick" refers to a gun in this context. So, when you are threatened or adopted with the levy of one stick, it is interpreted as the provision for a war gun. The victim is expected to provide money worth purchasing a new war gun. This ironical interpretation of words within the crisis demonstrates the negative effect of the war on the communities, as many have been killed for not being able to provide the ransom. In contrast, others have been rendered wretched and dissolute.

In response to one of the questions, what do you think about the messages circulated on the WhatsApp forum on lockdown, threats, killings and activities of the SF? All the administrators expressed that such messages were intended to disrupt the nation's peace and hinder the government's efforts to maintain peace and order. They mentioned that the government had implemented security measures to ensure the smooth operation of the state during the lockdown and ghost town days in certain parts of the cities in the regions, despite the impact of the threats and activities of the SF. However, they acknowledged the associated risks, as some colleagues have died while working on the prohibited days.

In response to the same question, the twelve business owners from both towns indicated that the lockdowns, threat messages, and killings by the SF had instilled fear in society, negatively affecting their businesses and leading to low turnovers. They reveal that 90% of business owners have experienced reduced business activities and profitability due to frequent lockdowns and ghost town days, which restrict mobility and business operations. Many people have resorted to frequent travelling out of the cities, which has led to an increase in business in the transportation sector, constituting 10% of business activities. In addition, two business owners in the transport sector mentioned that the SF had burned down their transport cars, significantly impacting their business. Others testified that their shops had been burnt down, resulting in a loss of business capital, leaving them unemployed and insecure.

The responses from the different groups were almost the same, with varying severity. The teachers expressed that they have been the primary victims of the activities of the SF because they forbid the operation of schools. The teachers, in their responses, revealed that these threats, demands for vast amounts of financial ransoms, and killings have been very traumatising to them. They shared the sad experiences of colleagues who had been killed because they were caught doing the job as teachers. Consequently, many have fled to neighbouring towns and cities within and out of the country for security, making many educational institutions dysfunctional.

The traditional leaders' responses expressed fear and violence of the unknown. They said they were at a crossroads of ensuring the well-being of their people and peace in their chiefdoms and Fondoms. The two traditional leaders from the North West indicated that they had to flee out of the Fondoms for safety reasons as they became targets of the SF, and this is the situation with many traditional rulers and elites from this region. Hence, their absence leaves the community vulnerable to violence and subjugation by the SF.

On the part of the students, all responded that they were petrified and unsure of the future and quality of their education, given that the numerous lockdowns, ghost towns and killings distorted the learning process. Three out of the twelve students explained they had to drop out of school because of the threats and killings of some schoolmates they witnessed. Four others revealed that they had to relocate to neighbouring towns to pursue their education, which is challenging and traumatising.

Discussions

The words communicate the realisation to take or about to take personal action to express the necessity and exaggeration to attack. Considering the particular context of the crisis, the effects of the use of language by the Separatist fighters can be expressed in two opposite ways: constructive and positive or destructive and damaging. The

discourse analysis of the features of the language used by the separatist fighters in the ongoing Anglophone crisis reveals that language plays a significant role in escalating the situation as it is associated with violence and intimidation. Responses to the interviews indicate that the communication strategy of the fighters aimed at asserting their control and authority over the communities is characterised by abominable acts and pain inflicted on their victims and the communities. This has led to resentment, lack of trust, and the settlement of personal grievances among the inhabitants, thereby losing the goal of the crisis.

The context of language determines the meaning it expresses; words are assumed to have core and fuzzy meanings (Goddard, 1996). While the majority probably understands the core meaning, the other meaning is only derived within a particular context involved with specific interlocutors. Lexically, the Separatist fighters demonstrate a technique in their communicative repertoire where common words also become technical terms, demonstrating their relevance within the context of usage. For instance, words such as popcorn and groundnuts and edible foodstuffs consumed to sustain a healthy life refer to the sounds produced by the guns and the bullets or cartridges for their war guns, which are used to destroy life. Considering the relevance of these terms, the ordinary meanings are abandoned for the compositional meaning (behaviour), which is used figuratively within the context of the crisis. This demonstrates the semantic expansion of lexemes within the community, which is used comfortably within a given context, and communication will not be misconstrued. The relevance of the choice in communication reveals the linguistic fingerprint of the Separatist fighters, which stamps them as unique in communicating. They solely make use of Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), mixed with some words borrowed from the local, national languages of the regions; consider the words below;

Table 9: Words formed from Indigenous local languages and CPE

Words used	origin
ambe	Amba (from Bafut)
ngvin	Amba (from Kom)
manyi	Local bomb (Ngemba language)
larrisa	La Republic ...
dis boy dem	Amba fighters (CPE)

The data in Table 9 above reveal some words borrowed from the indigenous language where they operate, new coinages and CPE. The text discusses a figurative style's morphological and syntactic features that manipulate language and utilise an idiosyncratic spelling system. An example provided is the expression "no dog no dey," where the pronunciation of "no dey" can be homophonically spelt as "no day," leading to a different meaning from its original usage in the expression. The syntactic structure of the phrasal expressions is also highlighted as devoid of articles, numbers and gender.

Regarding Linguistic development, language is not fixed, as it can change and be acquired at any given moment or situation. Considering the stylistic analysis of the language used by the SF, language develops, as demonstrated by the semantic expansion of words used during the crisis. This has led to the incorporation of new words and the maintenance of new or additional meanings to fit the context concern. However, with few orthographic variations and lexical differences, the language used by SF

demonstrates a hemogenic effect of language across cultural and national boundaries. The language is a mixture of English, CPE, and Cameroonian national languages.

Furthermore, the names and titles upheld by the leaders and members of the SF reveal their origin, their achievements as individuals and their manner of operating against their opponents. For example, names such as General No Pity, General Armour Car, General Stan, General Big Number, etc., reflect the activities carried out by the individuals and their recorded successes achieved. More so, from a stylistic perspective, the set of mannerisms serves a communicative purpose. As it reflects the highest rank in the army, Air Force and Marine Corps, the term General addresses fighters outstanding in their duties during the crisis. For instance, the fighter by the name No Pity was identified as one who was fierce and eliminated his targets without pity or any consideration. He gained the nomenclature "General No Pity" in his recorded success. Likewise, the appellation "general armour car" is borne by an efficient individual who brought down the sophisticated military car (the Armour Car) used by the La Republique military. Thus, the way language is used makes it unique to that individual. Consequently, contrary to how this highest rank in the army is earned, other fighters observe the set of markers of the SF generals, and the use of the term increases as others try to uphold the prestigious title within the group. In contrast, others are unfortunately eliminated at the battlegrounds.

The communication strategy employed by the security forces in the crisis areas has been observed to create an environment characterised by fear, violence, and unpredictability, posing a significant threat to the peace and stability of the affected communities. As a result, the communities feel defenseless, confronted with the difficult choice of either complying with the demands of the security forces or seeking refuge in other regions within the country or neighbouring countries to ensure their safety. According to Sasu (2023), there has been a notable surge in Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria, with over 88,279 refugees documented between 2018 and 2023. This influx of refugees has placed a significant strain on humanitarian resources. It has raised concerns about the long-term impact of the crisis on both the displaced population and the host communities.

Significance

Documenting and analysing the language of violence and threats used by the separatist fighters in the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon can assist in detecting and abating targeted violent actions. Using a documentary linguistics approach, this research provides information and explains the communicative implications of a crisis. A lawyer or investigator can further exploit this information in a legal context to add more evidence to a legal proceeding.

This study explores the various ways people in conflict use language among themselves and about one another, with particular reference to the Separatist fighters in the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. It provides evidence highlighting how language expresses violence and fright in a crisis. When these language-related characteristics are identified, they can be used to understand the gravity of the crisis, curb criminal actions, and provide solutions to existing problems.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated a link between language and war, and it is almost impossible to understand what words stand for at the semantic level, even though some are shaded in euphemisms. However, in a more contextual and cultural context, the morphology and syntax of word forms are described, expressing the covert message of violence and threat. During a crisis, ideologies are expressed through language to rationalise or justify the acts of war, such as contempt for others, violence and pride. The communicating pattern and naming of the SF leaders and members in the Anglophone crisis in the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon serve as their fingerprints. It demonstrates recognisable characteristics within the context in which it is used. Consequently, the style becomes a fixed property and a source of identification of the SF. Linking this communicative style to forensic linguistics provides distinctive characteristics of the fighters, making them stand out from their opponents.

The study reveals how language is used to propagate violence in the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon through strategies such as labelling and rhetorical devices like exaggeration, euphemism, metaphor, and figurative speech.

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