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Disseminating Peace Information through the Print Media in Cameroon: An Analysis of Language Use in Crises Reporting

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Abstract: *The sociopolitical and security crises that have rocked Cameroon for over half a decade still rage on, despite some measures taken by government to orchestrate a steady return to normalcy. Cameroon desperately needs peace now, more than ever before. In view of their consistent and wide coverage of the crises, the media; notably the print, have a pivotal role to play regarding the de-escalation of the violent conflict in order for peace to reign. By examining newspaper reports on crises, this study seeks to gauge the extent to which peace has been, or is being built or put in jeopardy, by language means. Adopting Halliday's (1978) theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, questionnaires were used to elicit data selectively from newspaper readers and the data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The main findings revealed that social actors involved in the crises: government, opposition political parties and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) tend to aggravate the crises even more. Private newspapers blame government and NSAGs for worsening the crises. On their part, public newspapers blame the opposition and NSAGs for the same reason. Hence, both*



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private and public newspapers place the blame more on NSAGs for aggravating the crises. The use of language to build peace in conflict reports was another preoccupation. It was revealed that newspapers largely contribute to the escalation of the crises; using more conflict-inflaming words and phrases than peace-promoting ones. Moreover, their language use in such reports exerts a predominant negative influence on public opinion regarding peace building. To this end and in view of avoiding acrimony, it is necessary for the press to shun inflammatory language use and employ soothing words and phrases which could help to build and consolidate peace.

Keywords: *Print media, crises reporting, peace building, Anglophone crisis, hate speech*

Introduction

Peace is the only life ingredient void of disadvantages. It is the one thing needful at the global, continental, national, community, family and personal levels. Peace building processes require all hands on deck to avert the devastating effects of conflicts which have set human societies ablaze. The role of the media in such processes is crucial and language use is primordial in the promotion of peace. One of the cardinal roles of the media is to inform the public. This is through language use. Language enables the delivery of information and knowledge coded in diverse sociocultural, political, economic and other contexts (UNESCO, 2021). In the context of violent conflicts or wars, the media can manipulate language to either escalate or de-escalate the conflict. This is referred to as war and peace journalism respectively (Galtung, 1969). The United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres (2022) buttressed the importance of peace in his 2023 new year message. He declared that the world needs peace. "... more than ever, peace with one another, through dialogue to end conflict ...". He appealed that peace be put "...at the heart of our words and actions". At the level of online communication, he appealed for peace in order that all societies could enjoy internet "free from hate speech and abuse". Language use is central in these quotations. It is glaring in "dialogue, words, hate speech and abuse". Hence, language is crucial in peace building processes. It is the tool used by the media for information dissemination.



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The Africa Union (AU, 2018) re-echoes the need for peace building by language means in its Agenda 2063. It aspires to build a peaceful and secure Africa through mechanisms that promote a "...dialogue-centred approach to conflict prevention and resolution of conflict." This AU agenda 2063 has as initiative "Silencing the Guns by 2020". Yet wars (sounds of guns) appear to be rather increasing even after 2020. Cases in point include, but are not limited to Darfur (South Sudan), Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Cameroon. For peace to be built through this "dialogue-centered approach", the media have a major role to play. Their reports on violent conflicts have to be couched in appeasing language.

In the specific case of Cameroon, the need for peace seems to be much more urgent than ever, given the numerous sociopolitical and security crises that have rocked the country for over half a decade. From the North to the South, East to West, peace has been seriously weakened; putting social cohesion, national unity and development at stake. The Northern Nigerian Islamic sect, Boko Haran (BH) infiltrated into the northern part of Cameroon (Far-North Region) in 2013 (Mu'azu and Ibrahim, 2016). This was facilitated by the cultural, linguistic and religious ties they share. Thousands of Nigerian refugees also fled BH insurgency at home into this part of the country. In the East Region, the incursion of the Christian Anti-Balaka from the Central African Republic (CAR) compounded peaceful living. They fled from violence that erupted between them and Muslim Seleka (Reliefweb, 2018). In the North-West and South-West Regions, the Anglophone problem which escalated in 2017 has wreaked havoc (Mbuy, 2018). This crisis has adversely affected the eight other Francophone regions (Cheo, 2021). To make matters worse, the violence that ensued from the October 7th 2018 presidential elections has jeopardized peace much more. Militants of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM) who protested election results were arrested in Yaounde (Centre) Douala (Littoral), Bafoussam, Dschang and Mbouda in the West Region (Reliefweb, 2018). Hence, the entire country has been in flames which need to be put out.

Media reports on the sociopolitical and security crises in Cameroon attract attention both nationally and internationally. The crises have been widespread and have so affected the nation



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to the extent that some regions have been declared economically sinister zones. Among them are the East, Far-North, North-West and South-West Regions. Hence, the economic and social life of the nation has been handicapped by crises. Since the crises cut across the entire life of the nation, the government of Cameroon has taken some measures which are geared at causing a possible return to normalcy.

In the wake of Boko Haram (BH) and the Anglophone conflicts wherein some individuals and groups have taken up arms against the state, government has created Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) centers. It has appealed to the armed groups to surrender their weapons and join those centers. This is so that they can be trained and re-integrated into society. A Major National Dialogue (MND) was also convened in a bid to seek a peaceful resolution of the Anglophone and other national problems.

With regard to the Anglophone problem in particular, a Special Status was accorded to the North-West and South-West Regions, issuing from the MND. This status is aimed at reinforcing national unity and cohesion through the recognition of the specificities of certain regions. The intention is to have them better integrated as part of the country.

The media is seen to play a pivotal role regarding the resolution of the above crises which government seeks to quell. By language means through reports, they can either escalate or de-escalate the conflicts. Our target is the print media, notably newspapers and the way they use language in reporting crises in Cameroon. Both public and private newspapers in French and English report the crises at various levels. Their choice of words and expressions matter in view of their contribution to either build or destroy peace. This work therefore, intends to measure the extent to which print media (newspapers) use language to promote (or deter) peace building.

Language use is functional. Its function is to make meaning in specific contexts like those of crises. The part played by newspapers in these crises is essentially language based. In this vein, this work evaluates how newspapers use language to disseminate peace information in order to consolidate peace building. It seeks to determine how social actors in the crises are represented in newspapers. It also attempts to measure the extent to which newspaper language



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use is geared towards building peace in the context of conflict. More, it evaluates how much newspaper language use influences public opinion in view of building peace. In a bid to properly attend to these worries, this study intends to respond to three questions. First, how are social actors in the crises represented in newspapers? Second, what is the level at which newspaper language use in conflict situations is directed towards peace building? Third, to what extent does newspaper language use exert an influence on public opinion regarding peace building during crises?

Literature Review

Media reports on crises appear to hinge particularly on language. It is this factor that determines the role played by the media in either promoting peace or inflaming violence. Lucey and Cochrane (2017) have stated that the role of the media in building peace is often restricted through curtailment of press freedoms, a practice which often generates more conflict. Citing the 2015 United Nations (UN) peace review to illustrate this restriction, Lucey and Cochrane (2017) said opposition journalists often “disappear” and internet blackouts become “common place”. Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and South Western Cameroon were quoted as specific cases in Africa. Indeed, internet blackouts were common in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon in 2017. Newspapers have also reported the disappearance of at least two opposition journalists in Cameroon. Francis Wazizi in Buea in 2020 and Martinez Zogo in January 2023 in Yaounde. Such cases only create more tension and complicate peace building processes.

The role of the media in reporting crises could be depicted as either good or bad; “good” as symbolized by peace journalism and “bad” as exemplified by war journalism (Maweu and Mare, 2021). Language use by reporters in crises situations determines the role of the press. The language of war makes their role bad while the language of peace makes it good. This could be through lexical choices, images colour and font.

Freedom of expression is often viewed as the core of a healthy media and a fundamental human right, vital for a democratic structure (Kuusik, 2010). Such media can only build peace if it is unbiased and balanced to avoid poisoning minds and creating tension. This is possible



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through the use of neutral language. This makes the media an indispensable partner in conflict resolution and peace building (Spurk, 2002). To him, media intervention is justified by the need to prevent hate speech, ethnic cleansing and genocide activities as was the case in the Balkans and Africa in the 1990s. He recommended that the base of a free media structure be laid, one specialized in peace and conflict programmes as focus.

With regard to information dissemination in crises periods, modern media (television, radio and newspapers) have been hailed as reliable sources of information. This, because of the professionalism they bring to news reporting, marked by accuracy, objectivity, impartiality and neutrality (Mu'azu and Ibrahim, 2016, P.4). They noted that in reporting violent conflicts, the media can build peace by giving information on dangerous areas to be avoided, identifying parts of the country on which to take counter terrorism steps, giving information to security agencies to mount check points and identifying safe areas for citizens to take refuge (P.5). They emphasized the need to shun the language of segregation, noting that in Nigeria, reports of Boko Haram insurgency laid emphasis on Northerner versus Southerner; Muslims versus Christians as if they belonged to different nations. They underscored sensitivity to diction in conflict reports in order to avoid further inflaming tension and creating more conflicts or exacerbating the already existing ones.

In election times, the peace building role of the media is to be taken seriously. The media had a positive impact in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Such a role can serve as a catalyst for non-violent elections in Africa as a whole (Adebayo, 2015). He pointed out that the role of the media can also be negative, quoting Rwanda and Nazi Germany as cases in point. The media can thus, use language that either instigates violence or mitigates existing tension. Regarding the instigation of violence, he signaled that violence in election matters often results from identity – related conflicts. The “us” versus “them” dichotomy often leads to one party being labeled as the enemy. He observed that even inclusive phrases like “us” and “our” were used in Kenya to mobilise people against state inaction in the run-up to the 2007 elections. This pitched the public against government, severely jeopardizing peace in that country. Moreover, post election



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violence was promoted in radio stations through the use of local languages like Luo and Kikuyu.

In Zimbabwe, the then President, Mogabe treated the opposition leader Mogan Tsvangirai and his team of MDC party as “Western puppets”, a term offensive enough to orchestrate violence. Adebayo (2015) opined that the media can build peace by focusing conflict reports on the effects of violence: the killed, the wounded and loss of materials. Such effects could serve as deterrents to further violence and necessitate peaceful living. He reiterated the views of Galtung (1969) and Maweu and More (2021) that peace journalism seeks to highlight peace initiatives that mitigate conflict and actions that engender peace in society. He pinpointed this role as what happened in English-speaking sub-Saharan African countries like Kenya in 2013 and Zimbabwe and Nigeria in 2015 respectively.

In Cameroon, the role of the media in peace building is not taken lightly, especially by Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs). According to the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA, 2020), media can build peace by selecting reporting strategies that would promote peace, not violence. In view of this, reporters on crises need to avoid hate speech and fake news which have the potential of fueling conflict and violence. According to this NGO, fake news particularly aggravated the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. In line with CHRDA (2020), Defyhatenow (2020) underscored the need for the press to build peace when reporting on conflict. They buttressed the fact that reporters have to practise reliable and responsible reporting geared towards conflict prevention and peace building. Reliability entails the dissemination of factual information while responsibility points to appeasing lexical choices. The NGO added that the media can prevent conflict and build peace through the production of unbiased and balanced reports on crises. This is by choosing the right words and expressions without sentiments.

Unethical practices and the use of insulting language constitute potential sources of conflict. Such practices have been deplored by Choves (2011) as not only marring their profession but also instigating conflict. He quoted the then United States Ambassador to Cameroon, Janet Garvey as encouraging the Cameroon Association of English-speaking



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journalists (CAMASEJ) in Buea (2008) to continue to “...improve on reporting in a balanced and fair manner” (Choves, 2011, P.117). These principles of balance and fairness are exercised through linguistic choices. In Choves’ (2011) collection of contributions, the word “gombo” is used recurrently by both media practitioners and civil society. “Gombo” is French for okra. In the context of professional misdemeanor, it is used in Cameroon as a euphemism for bribery and corruption, probably to conceal and attenuate the unpleasant effects of the unethical practice. It is reported to be prevalent among reporters in Cameroon. This is usually done when covering events involving some influential and often wealthy personalities. In such situations, they smother some people with praises (those who feed reporters well) and slander others (those who refuse or neglect to feed reporters). This has often been done through the use of salutary language in the former case and the choice of disgusting lexicon to castigate their targets in the latter. These go a long way to stir sentiments and infuriate their victims sowing seeds of discord and hatred. Indeed, some editors-in-chief of some newspapers have been described as “...agents of bribery and corruption and confusion” (Choves, 2011 P. 54). This probably explains why fairness and balance in the Cameroon press are said to be in “short supply” (P. 47). In crises reports, these ills and lapses tend to be reflected in reporters’ language, making their profession “ugly” as painted by Choves in his book.

The Anglophone crisis appears to have hit Cameroon more severely than any other. Its coverage is said to have become “a staple” on media channels across the country (Cheo 2021). In reporting crisis such as this, reporters inform the public giving detailed accounts of situations through messages, texts and photographs in an objective fair and accurate manner (Cheo 2021 P. 50). In doing this, it is easy to de-escalate conflict and build peace by language means. Citing Lynch and McGoldrich, (2005), Cheo (2021) underscored the burning need to avoid the use of negative adjectives such as “vicious, brutal, cruel, barbaric” and labels like “terrorist, extremist” and “fanatic” in conflict reports. All these words constitute elements of linguistic xenophobia, a phenomenon decried by Nkwetisama (2016) on grounds that it serves as a deterrent to the peace building process, since it fuels tension. Cheo stressed that in a bid to avert fuelling violence,



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reporters need to be neutral and avoid using victimizing language in crises reporting.

Furthermore, Tabe and Njofie (2018) studied headlines of 29 randomly selected Cameroon newspapers in English. Their aim was to find out how linguistic elements, words and rhetorical questions used in reporting the Anglophone crisis portrayed ideologies of reporters and newspaper ownership. They indicated that the discourse of newspaper headlines can be viewed from the position of the headline itself, its boldness, vocabulary and syntax. They revealed that language is an insightful issue which has contributed to amplify the Anglophone crisis. Also, the use of language and the manner in which matters related to the crisis had been raised in the headlines expose hidden identities and ideologies of journalists and newspaper ownership. In analyzing language from newspaper reports on crisis, they considered the use of words and expressions indicating imposition like “must” and “degree”, words expressing tension or panic like “kill, set ablaze, blackout”, and words expressing dialogue such as “crucial meeting, frank dialogue”. They also studied the use of rhetorical questions such as “Are Anglophones truly marginalized? Which Cameroon is one and indivisible?” More, they examined the use of negative ideologies like “shameful military tortured Anglophones, helicopter shoots” (Tabé & Njofie, 2018, PP. 73-79). Their study revealed incompatible ideologies on the part of social actors (public and private) in Anglophone crisis. They signaled that private media see government as the cause and amplification of the crisis through a violation of the 1961 constitution and the use of the gun as the “powerful language of peace” (P. 81). On their part, government newspapers headlined Anglophone actors as criminals fighting for the disunity of the state (P. 81). In a nutshell, the above choices of words and expressions only contribute to fuel more tension and jeopardize the peace building process.

This study makes use of the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a language theory propounded by M.A.K Halliday (1978). It is a theory centered around the notion of language function. This implies that language is used for a purpose. The main purpose of language use is communication. Functional linguists hold that language use is functional. The function of language is to make meanings. They also hold that these meanings are influenced by



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the social and cultural contexts in which the meanings are exchanged. More, they state that the process of using language is a semiotic process, a process of making meanings through choices (Nordquist, 2021). Hence, in communication, meaning is central.

In our case, when reporters write, they intend to transmit messages to readers. These messages are couched in language through the choice of words and expressions. Reporters also choose the font size, image and colour to highlight their messages, which are grasped through interpretation as these elements accompany language to forcefully drive home the meaning to readers. These meanings are determined by the sociocultural context in which the communication events take place. In the case of crises reporting therefore, meanings are influenced by the crises contexts. To this end, reporters in conflict situations either escalate or de-escalate conflict through their choices of words and expressions, font size, images and colour.

Nordquist (2021) further states that systemic linguists have an interest in language, an interest which leads them to advance four theoretical claims about language namely; that language use is functional, semantic, contextual and semiotic. These buttress the meaning potential, reiterated by Caraffel Cayron (2010). He states that the interpretation of meaning constructed by grammar in a particular text is informed by the situation and culture in which these meanings are produced. Hence, the sociopolitical and security crises situation informs meaning in the context of Cameroon.

Methodology

The quantitative survey method was used in this study to gather data from newspaper readers purposively selected across five regions in Cameroon: the North-West, South-West, Centre, Littoral and West. These are all regions which are seriously hit by the crises in the country. The North-West and South-West Regions are predominantly English-speaking and have been particularly affected by the Anglophone crisis. The Centre, Littoral and West Regions are predominantly French speaking. They have been adversely affected by the October 7th, 2018 post-election upheavals; arrest, detention and judgment of protesters. The study also considered newspaper readers in both French and English. Both Francophones and Anglophones were thus,



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involved. This brings in a relatively fair linguistic and cultural balance, making the study comprehensive enough.

Moreover, the 160 respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Only those who read newspapers especially on crises were eligible for selection. Questionnaires constituted a data collection tool for the work. The collected data were presented, analyzed and discussed both quantitatively and qualitatively to ensure reliable results.

Findings and Discussions

Guided by research questions and objectives, the results are presented and discussed in this section.

Table 1: Appraising how private and public newspapers depict social actors in crises situations.

Actors	Private newspapers						Pubic newspapers					
	Positively	%	Negatively	%	Neutrally	%	Positively	%	Negatively	%	Neutrally	%
Governments	36	27.2	68	43.3	32	25.3	79	59.3	35	24.1	31	29.2
Opposition	59	44.6	44	28.0	42	33.3	27	20.3	36	24.1	39	36.7
NSAGs	37	28.0	45	28.6	52	41.2	27	20.3	74	51.0	36	33.9
Total	132	99.8	157	99.9	126	99.8	133	99.9	145	99.2	106	99.8

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

Private and public newspapers depict social actors in conflict situations both positively and negatively. In this study, positivity was marked by fairness, balance, impartiality and neutrality while negativity was marked by their opposites: unfairness, imbalance, partiality and partisanship, expressed through lexical choices. Major actors here are government, opposition and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) notably Boko Haram and Secessionist fighters. While private newspapers downgrade government, rating them negatively; 68 (43.3%), public newspapers paint a different picture. Respondents show public newspapers as portraying government very positively, 79 (59.3). The depiction shows government as positively rated just



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by 36 (27.2%) respondents and neutrally by 32 (25.3%) in private papers. Yet, only 35 (24.1%) and 31 (29.2%) respondents portray government negatively and neutrally respectively, in public newspapers.

Similarly, the opposition is portrayed in private newspapers quite positively by 59 (44.6), negatively by 44 (28.0) and neutrally by 42 (33.3%) respondents in private newspapers. The same opposition is depicted positively by just 27 (20.3%) respondents. It is rated negatively by 36 (24.8) and neutrally by 39 (36.7) respondent respectively, in public newspapers. In private newspapers, NSAGs are described positively by 37 (28.0), negatively by 45 (28.6) and neutrally by 52 (41.2) respondents respectively. The same NSAGs are painted very negatively 74 (51.0), positively by a negligible 27 (20.3%) and neutrally by 36 (33.9%) in public newspapers. Government is rated very positively in public newspapers and very negatively in private ones. Both public and private press rate NSAGs very negatively, indicating the negative role they play.

Table 2: Appraising social actors with regard to building peace (BP) and inflaming conflict (IC)

Actors	Private newspapers				Public newspapers			
	BP	%	IC	%	BP	%	IC	%
Government	41	29.9	70	45.7	73	52.8	22	15.3
Opposition	65	47.4	33	21.5	48	34.7	49	34.2
NSAGs	31	22.6	50	32.6	17	12.3	72	50.3
Total	137	99.9	153	99.8	138	99.8	143	99.8

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

Lexical items denoting unity and friendship like “oneness” and “children of one nation” were associated with building peace (BP) while the use of dehumanising language such as “untamed dogs” and “terrorists” was associated with the inflammation of conflict (IC).

Public newspapers attributed the peace-building enterprise more to government, 73



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(52.8%) than to opposition, just 48 (34.7%). It is even far less with NSAGs, 17 (12.3%). These papers attributed the inflammation of conflict very highly to NSAGs, 72 (50.3%). This is followed by the opposition, 49 (34.2%). Government is rated least in public newspapers with regard to the inflammation of conflict, 22 (15.3%). This seems to indicate that government is not to be blamed for the conflict.

Like in table 1 where government is appraised very negatively by the private press according to respondents 68 (43.3%), it is associated more with inflaming conflict 70 (45.7%) than with building peace; just 41 (29.9%) in private newspapers. The table shows the opposition as more responsible for peace building 65 (47.4%) than government 41 (29.9%). It however presents the opposition as inflaming conflict by 33 (21.5%). The least in the table is NSAGs. They are more associated with inflaming conflict 50 (32.6%) than with building peace, 31 (22.6%). Private papers attributed the conflict more to government while public newspapers blamed it more on the NSAGs. This probably explains why some government officials refer to them in public newspapers as “terrorists”. This blame game appears to be directly linked to, and influenced by the various newspaper ideologies. Sponsoring may equally have a role to play here. Government sponsors and public newspapers determine the reports they give. This is not the case with private papers.

Table 3: Assessing how language use in public and private newspapers in French and English is geared towards peace building

		SA	%	A	%	NA	%	DA	%	SDA	%
Private	Fren	13	14.1	32	20.9	29	20.5	25	27.1	11	35.4
	Eng	35	38.0	46	30.0	42	29.7	20	21.7	04	12.9
Public	Fren	19	20.6	28	18.3	28	19.8	25	27.1	10	32.2
	Eng	25	27.2	47	30.7	42	29.7	22	23.9	06	19.3
Total		92	99.9	153	99.9	141	99.7	92	99.8	31	99.8



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Source: Researchers' field work, 2022.

Table 3 above assesses how language use in private and public newspapers in the two official languages is geared towards peace building. With regard to language use by private newspapers in French, 30(20.9) agreed, 29 (20.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 25 (27.1%) disagreed while only 13 (14.1%) strongly agreed and 11 (35.4%) strongly disagreed. For public newspapers in French, 28 (18.3%) agreed, 28 (18.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 25 (27.1) disagreed while only 19 (20.6%) strongly agreed and a few, 10 (32.2%) strongly disagreed.

With regard to peace-building language use in English, respondents' ratings showed 46 (20.0%) agreeing, 42 (29.7%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing, 35 (38.0%) strongly agreeing while just 20 (21.7%) disagreed and a negligible 4 (12.9%) strongly disagreed for private newspapers.

Public newspaper ratings for English showed that 47 (30.7%) agreed, 42 (29.7%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 25 (27.2%) strongly agreed while 22 (23.9%) disagreed and only 6 (19.3%) strongly disagreed. Hence, though with varying figures, the level of agreement that language use in public and private newspapers in French and English is inclined towards peace building is not low. This is followed by those who appeared to sit on the fence, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. However, a no-negligible number strongly agreed that English use is geared towards building peace in those newspapers. Though few, those who strongly disagreed that the use of French is geared towards peace building dominated those who do same for English. This implies that English was more used for building peace than French.

Table 4: Newspapers whose language use helps to build peace in Cameroon

		Frequency	%
A.	Public	19	13.2
B.	Private	51	35.6
C.	Both A and B	43	30.1



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D.	None	30	20.9
	Total	143	99.8

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

Table 4 above indicates the newspapers whose use of language is liable to build peace in Cameroon. Private newspapers were rated top in this domain, 51 (35.6). This was followed by those who considered language use by both public and private newspapers as likely to build peace. Yet, 30 (20.9%) felt that neither private nor public newspapers language use was likely to contribute to peace building in Cameroon.

Curiously, as low as 19 (13.2%) respondents indicated that public newspapers used language in a way that could facilitate peace building. The implication is that public newspapers tended to fuel conflict while private newspapers struggled to appease by language means. This could be explained by the fact that more inflammatory language was used by public officials in public newspapers than observed in the private press.

Table 5: Conflict-inflaming lexical items used in newspapers (arranged thematically)

Themes	Words/phrases	Frequency	%
War	Terrorists	26	13.9
	Neutralize	10	5.3
	Clean Bamenda	8	4.2
Violence	Lrc. Rapist soldiers	05	2.6
	Kidnappers	06	3.2
Division	Separatists	18	9.6
	Secessionists	15	8.0
Hatred	Ambazonians	06	3.2
	Anglofools	04	2.1
	Francofools	03	1.6
	Anglofous	03	1.6
Provocation	Indivisible	13	6.9



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Bandits	09	4.8
Cockroaches	07	3.7
Les Bamenda	06	3.2
Two cubes of sugar	06	3.2
Dogs	08	4.2
Come no go	07	3.7
President elect (for CRM leader)	05	2.6
Sardinard	04	2.1
Les Beti	04	2.1
Anglo-Bami	03	1.6
Rebels	07	3.7
Minority	04	2.1
Total	187	99.2

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

The table above displays the words and phrases used in newspapers and which are liable to inflame conflict in Cameroon. Arranged thematically, such an inventory reveals the extent to which newspaper language use can further jeopardize peace in Cameroon, even in conflict situations. The theme of war is at the top. Lexical items associated with it portray the language of war. In the list, the word “terrorist” is most frequently used. 26 (13.9%) times. Once someone is tagged a terrorist, (noun) they qualify to be eliminated. Hence, the wave of killings in the country. Neutralize is next. It is a verb used 10 (5.3%) times to refer to the killing of terrorists. The exercise dubbed “operation clean Bamenda” was one in which all suspected identified “terrorists” in the town of Bamenda were systematically “neutralised” by the military. It was used 8 (4.2%) times.

Next to war is the theme of violence. Lexical items associated with it were “La Republic du Cameroun” (LRC) Rapist soldiers 5(2.6%) and kidnappers, 6 (3.2%) respectively. The former (LRC) was linked with military and the later (kidnappers) with Non-State Armed Groups



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(NSAGs). Words associated with division were separatists, 18 (9.6%) and secessionist 15 (8.0%). They had gained currency and were frequently used to refer to those who wanted to split the country by breaking away. Words connected to hatred were Ambazonians 6 (3.2%), Anglofools, 4 (2.1%), Francofools, 3 (1.6%), and Anglofous 3 (1.6%) respectively. These expressed Anglophones' and Francophones' dislike for each other. Such a mutual dislike is likely to ruin mutual co-existence, destroying living together.

In the theme of provocation, words used ranged from outright insults to pejorative and derogatory lexicon. Insults included, but were not limited to bandits 9 (4.8%), cockroaches 7 (3.7%), dogs 8 (4.2%), and rebels, 7 (3.7%). Pejorative words were indivisible, 13 (6.9%), used to provoke and denigrate activists of secession; President elect, 5 (2.6%) used to deride CPDM militants and claim victory for Kamto in the October 2018 presidential elections and minority 4(2.1%) used to reduce Anglophones to an insignificant and uninfluential minuscule group. Words with derogatory and negative connotations were: les Bamenda and two cubes of sugar, 6 (3.2) each; come no go, 7 (3.7%), sardinard, 4 (2.1%), les Beti, 4 (2.1%), and Anglo-Bami, 3 (1.6%) respectively. All these could destroy harmonious living together.

Table 6: Evaluating how public and private newspapers in French and English portray biases in their conflict reports.

		Always	%	Sometimes	%	Rarely	%	Never	%
Public	Fre	44	33.5	34	21.9	06	13.6	/	/
	Eng	32	24.4	41	26.4	15	34	/	/
Private	Fre	42	32	32	20.6	08	18.1	/	/
	Eng	13	9.9	48	30.9	15	34	03	100
Total		131	99.8	155	99.8	44	99.7	03	100

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

Table 6 above shows the degree at which the language of conflict reporting was fraught



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with biases in public and private newspapers in French and English. It indicates that public newspapers in French used biased language always 44 (33.5%), sometimes 34 (21.9%), and rarely, only 6 (13.6%) times. At no time did they fail to use biased language; hence, never was zero. Similarly, private newspapers in French used biased language always 42 (32.0%), sometimes 32 (20.6%), and rarely, just 8 (18.1%) times. They never failed to use it; never was zero.

Conversely, public newspapers in English used biased language always, 32 (24.4%), sometimes 41 (26.4%), and rarely 15 (34%) times. On their part, private newspapers in English used that language just 13 (9.9%) times, sometimes, 48 (30.9%), rarely, 15 (34%) and three (03) respondents indicated that they never used it at all.

These figures indicate that newspapers in French were more biased in their language use when reporting crises than those in English. This could be indicative of the linguistic divide at the level of reporting crises events by newspapers in the country. Also, public newspapers in English were more prone to always using biased language 32 (24.4%) than private ones in the same language 13 (9.9%). Such a disparity could be attributed to ideological inclinations and the influence of administrative authorities on the public press. Whatever the language, the frequency shows the practice of biased reporting to be always, sometimes and rarely; hardly never. This contributes in no little way to inflame conflict and jeopardize peace in the country.

Table 7: Peace-promoting lexical items used in newspapers (arranged thematically)

Themes	Words/phrases	Frequency	%
Love	Brothers and sisters	04	3.3
	People of the same family/nation	05	4.1
	The head of state is a father	03	2.5
	Stop hate speech	04	3.3
	Cameroon is a loving country/nation	05	4.1
Unity	Vivre ensemble/living together	06	05
	Cameroon is one and indivisible	09	7.5



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	Unity in diversity	04	3.3
	We are one	05	4.1
	National unity	03	2.5
Reconciliation	Dialogue	13	10.8
	Negotiation	05	4.1
	Swiss tacks	04	3.3
	Mediation	04	3.3
	Conflict resolution	06	05
	Peace makers	04	3.3
Harmony	Co-existence	04	3.3
	Tolerance	03	2.5
	Social justice	06	05
	La paixreigne	04	3.3
Development	Progress	03	2.5
	Nation building	05	4.1
	Peace building	06	05
	Education is key	03	2.5
	Give them pens, not guns	03	2.5
Total		120	99.9

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022.

Table 7 above is a display of the various words and phrases used by reporters in newspapers and which could enhance peace. They are categorized according to themes and portray how much peace could be promoted by language means in conflict times. The first theme is love. Phrases associated with it are: brothers and sisters, 4 (3.3%); people of the same family or nation, 5 (4.1%); the Head of state is a father, 3 (2.5%), stop hate speech, 4 (3.3%) and Cameroon is a loving country or nation 5 (4.1%). These are appellatives, declaratives and an imperative respectively. The next theme is unity. Associated with this theme are: vivre ensemble or living together, 6 (5%); Cameroon is one and indivisible, 9 (7.5%); unity in diversity, 4



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(3.3%); we are one, 5 (4.1%) and national unity 3 (2.5%). Next to the theme of unity is that of reconciliation. It is essentially made up of nouns; dialogue 13 (10.8%), negotiation, 5 (4.1%); Swiss talks, 4 (3.3%), mediation 4 (3.3%), conflict resolution, 6 (5%); and peace makers, 4 (3.3%). Harmony is another theme in this categorization. The nouns: co-existence, 4 (3.3%), tolerance, 3, (2.5%); social justice, 6 (5%), and the declarative: “La paixreigne” (Peace reigns), 4 (3.3%) are connected with it.

Development is the last, but not the least theme in these categories. Progress, 3 (2.5%), nation building, 5 (4.1%) and peace building, 6 (5%) are nouns linked with it. These are in addition to the declarative, “Education is key, 3 (2.5%), and the imperative: “Give them pens, not guns”, 3 (2.5%). This is a prescription which gives preference to education rather than war. Education builds (develops) while war destroys (ruins). These five themes are interconnected and even interdependent. When people love, they are united. When they are united, they tend to reconcile easily when and if conflicts and disagreements crop up. When they reconcile, they jointly contribute to develop their communities, societies and nation.

Table 8: Effects of the language of crises reports on readers’ views.

Effects	Freq.	%
Positively	43	28.8
Negatively	106	71.1
Total	149	99.9

Source: Researchers’ field work, 2022.

Table 8 above presents the manner in which the language used in reporting crises affects readers’ views. Out of the 149 respondents who answered this question, 106 (71.1%) indicated that their views were negatively affected. This equally has a negative impact on peace building. Hence, newspapers can influence readers’ views and reactions. Only 43 (28.8%) respondents indicated that their views were positively affected by conflict reports. Negative views were more than double this number. This demonstrates how much peace is hampered through negative reports.



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Table 9: Readers' perception of newspaper reports on crises

Crises	Promoting peace	%	Fueling tension	%
Boko Haram	50	45.8	33	20.6
Anglophone crises	31	28.4	66	41.2
Post. Presidential election	28	25.6	61	38.1
Total	109	99.8	160	99.9

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

Table 9 presents readers' perceptions of reports of the crises rocking Cameroon with regard to promoting peace and fueling conflict. Declarations like "Peace is priceless, war does not pay" promote peace while words such as "misguided individuals, two cubes of sugar" fuel tension. Concerning Boko Haram, 50 (45.8%) respondents indicated that the reports were likely to enhance peace while 33 (20.6%) said the reports could rather fuel tension. Regarding the Anglophone crisis, 31 (28.4%) signaled that reports could facilitate peace while 66 (44 (3.3%), 1.2%) said the reports were liable to fuel more tension. Concerning post-presidential election crisis, 28 (25.6%) signaled that reports could promote peace whereas 61 (38.1%) indicated that they (reports) could rather fuel tension. With the exception of Boko Haram, respondents' perceptions of reports on the Anglophone and post-presidential election crises were rather alarming. The reports were said to be more likely to fuel tension than to promote peace. There was therefore, need to pipe down conflict-inflaming reports and to heighten peace-enhancing reports on conflict in order to consolidate peace building. The total figures indicate that this swing is possible if reporters focus more on peace than on conflict.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how newspapers use language to disseminate peace messages in their crises reports. Given that meaning is crucial in any communication event, Halliday's (1978) theory of Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) was used, since it hinges so much on the meaning potential of language in context. The context here is that of the crises rocking Cameroon. The analysis sought to determine the extent to which newspapers build peace or fuel tension by language means in their crises reports.



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Newspaper readership in crises contexts have much to do with identifying the role played by the actors involved in the crises. In our case, there were three groups of actors; government opposition, political parties and Non State Armed Groups (NSAGs), (Boko Haram and separatist fighters). Respondents appraised the role of these actors in crises in Cameroon as reported in public and private newspapers. Using negativity and positivity as yardsticks, the results swung to either side depending on whether the actors were portrayed by private or public newspapers. Government was rated negatively in private newspapers; 68 (43.3%) respondents as opposed to 35 (24.5%), in public ones. Yet, public newspapers were evaluated to portray government very positively; 79 (59.3%) respondents against just 36 (27.2%) in private papers. The opposition was positively rated in private newspapers 59 (44.6%) respondents as opposed to 27 (20.3%) in public ones. Its negativity rating was 44 (28%) in private and 36 (24.8%) in public newspapers respectively. NSAGs were very negatively rated in both public and private newspapers: 45 (28.6%) in private and 74 (51%) in public newspapers respectively. These results were also reflected in the building of peace and inflammation of conflict by social actors as judged by respondents. Government was associated more with conflict inflammation; 70 (45.7%) than with peace building; 41 (29.9%) in private newspapers. Conversely, it was associated much more with peace building; 73 (52.8%) than with conflict inflammation, just 22(15.3%) in public papers. Private papers attributed more peace building to the opposition; 65 (47.4%) than conflict inflammation; 33 (21.5%). Yet, public papers were judged as tagging the opposition slightly more with conflict inflammation 49 (34.2%) than with peace building; 48 (34.7%). NSAGs were blamed for conflict inflammation in both public and private papers; 50 32.6%) in private and 72 (50.3%) in public papers respectively.

Regarding the promotion of peace in public and private newspapers in the official languages, there were some discrepancies. It was revealed that newspapers in English were more inclined to building peace than those in French. The level of agreement shows 46 (30.0%) for private and 47 (30.7%) for public in English as opposed to 32 (20.9%) for private and 28 (18.3) for public in French. Moreover, an assessment of newspaper language use was done in



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connection with peace building. It was revealed that private papers were more inclined to peace building than public papers; 51 (35.6%) for private as opposed to just 19 (13.2%) for public papers.

With regard to the influence exerted on public opinion by the language of crises reports, results indicated a predominant negative influence. Respondents' assessment stood at 106 (71.1%) negativity rating as opposed to just 43 (28.8%) positivity rating. This implies that newspaper language use during crises is more inclined to fueling tension than mitigating conflict.

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