

Hate Speech: A pragmatic-stylistic reading of online Cameroonian activists

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Abstract

This paper investigates on “hate speech” from a Pragma-stylistic perspective on Twitter and Facebook. The paper sets out to find out the extent to which the manipulation of linguistic resources helps online Cameroonian activists to create the desired impact. The study purposively uses a sample of (155) Tweets and (308) Facebook posts from the 3rd of December 2017 to the end of February 2020 as data for the study. The data was analysed in the light of Austin and Searle (1962, 1969) Speech Act Theory (SAT) and Lawal’s (1995) Aspect of Pragmatic Model. The findings indicate that the majority of hate speech by Cameroonian activists centered on the incitement of violence, ethnic group criticism, accusation, threat, and challenge, the laying of more emphasis on ethnic group criticism and offence. The findings also show that hate speech does not only have a great impact on individuals and the state, but also a drawback on the users’ fear of being arrested by the law enforcement officers.

Key words: Hate Speech, Social Media, Internet Governance, Pragma-stylistic.

Introduction

Electronic mediated communication (hereafter EMEC) has become a great concern by thousands of researchers nowadays. Its growing importance encourages a thorough analysis of different posts by especially social media users from pragma-stylistic view. Among the issues considered in various online discourses, hate speech is prevalent on Cameroon social media such as Twitter and Facebook. This phenomenon does not only appear in Cameroon social media sphere, but has also expanded throughout the globe. In this respect, it is observed in a recent internet survey that a majority (67%) of internet users reports having encountered hate speech or hateful comments online (Forsa, 2017). Besides, research in Germany has revealed that anti-refugee rhetoric on social media has led to an increase in hate crimes offline (Müller & Schwarz, 2018). But then, understanding online hate speech by

most of the researchers is arguably one of the most pressing issues facing the future of global digital media research.

There is a controversy around the definition of online hate speech due to diverse range of countries with often radically different media environments and sociopolitical contexts and histories. In this vein, there are various issues which arouse a number of theoretical problems that are notoriously difficult to pin down. It is important to know how such expressions of hatred should be differentiated from the abundance of other types of content produced online. However, analysing the surface features of the content produced could be what Alves et al. (2015) consider indexical of the deeper affects, emotions, intentions, motivations, feelings, or attitudes of hatred “based on the identified target with a social or demographic group”. In Cameroon, the quest for power and control as well as the desire of politicians to win

elections at all costs is overwhelmingly stronger than the will for the common good. These issues converge in shaping socio-political discourse by ardent users of social media. It is based on this premise that this empirical study seeks to find out the extent to which the manipulation of linguistics resources helps Cameroonian activists to create the desired impact in the nation's socio-political sphere.

Background to the study

The background to this research is related to two key issues namely: the Anglophone crisis and the 2018 post-electoral protest.

The linguistic background of Cameroon

Cameroon is most often referred to as Africa in miniature because in its territory, the majority of the geographical and cultural characteristics of almost all the regions of Africa are found. Additionally, three of the four language groups in Africa are represented within its boundaries (Neba, 1999, pp 65-98). These are the Congo-Kordofanian, the Nilo-Saharan and the Afro-Asiatic groups. The structures of the fourth, that is, the Khoisan have not been found in Cameroon. Amongst these three groups, a total of over 270 indigenous languages exist in Cameroon, a linguistic situation which Fonlon (1969, p.9) has described as "the confusion of tongues". It is due to this notoriously complicated linguistic and geographical area that the Germans annexed and called Kamerun in 1884. The Federal Constitution was set up in 1961 by the fathers of reunification and there were two linguistic groups distinct with the people of each community firmly attached to their colonial cultural heritage in terms of education, judiciary, politics and other social aspects.

Notwithstanding, Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003) report that even under the Federal Constitution, the English speaking parts (Anglophones) complained of being marginalised by their French speaking (Francophones) counterparts. The first president of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-1982), succeeded to kill the spirit of multiparty politics practiced in English Cameroon in 1966 after convincing leaders of political parties in both French (East) and English (West) Cameroon into a unique party system and created the Cameroon National Union (CNU) (Mbu, 2006). The Cameroon Federation (of West and East Cameroon) survived till May 20, 1972 when the country became a United Republic and later The Republic of Cameroon in 1984 through a Presidential Decree (Ngalim, 2014; Echu, 2004). The dismantling of federalism by Ahidjo in 1972 is believed to have been the major setback which exposed the marginalisation of Anglophone Cameroonians. Nkwi (2004) holds that the replacement of federalism with a unitary state in 1972 brought a systematic erosion of Anglo-Saxon institutions and traditions that were established in West Cameroon. Wuteh (2014) adds that Article 1 sub 3 of the constitution of the Republic of Cameroon that prescribes English and French as official languages of the country (as a measure to promote and guarantee bilingualism) has been violated due to political bad faith. He also points out that article 59 of The Constitution which states in its revised version that

French and English are to be considered equal still gives English an inferior status.

Teachers from North-West as well as South-West Regions and lawyers on November 21, 2016 started a strike which impacted the Anglophone sub-system of education in the English speaking regions of Cameroon. On that day, heavy confrontations between protesters and security officers especially in the streets of the North West Regional capital was observed. News related to the crisis spread like wild fire on social media provoking diverse feelings. Many individuals without basic knowledge on the practice of journalism started sharing news contents which reached out to the masses with few of them checking the reliability of the information. Such practice led to the escalation of the crisis which later changed into an armed battle between separatists who now call for a complete independence of Anglophone Cameroon (the Ambazonia State) and government military forces fighting to maintain the unity and peace of the country.

The 2018 Post-election protest

The socio-political situation experienced by Cameroonians consisted of peace and stability as they used to praise their country as Central Africa's oasis of peace and security. Nonetheless, the 2018 presidential election has strained by insecurity and violent extremism covering three Regions out of ten. Nine presidential candidates have prepared for the vote on Sunday, the 7th October each of them having an appeasing post-electoral message focused on peace and security. This was made to no avail as the currently institutional and political configurations constitute a well organised and dominating ruling party and leaders. Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) created in 1985 has a strong electoral machine throughout the country and dominating the political arena since 1960. The opposition parties are weak and disorganized despite the rise of new candidates who could have made a difference if they were all united. Maurice Kamto, a leading opposition challenger to President Paul Biya, claimed victory for the 7th October 2018 presidential election regardless a government warning to declare unofficial results. He continued to engage in a series of actions after the constitutional council proclaimed Paul Biya winner. His followers scheduled protests to denounce what they consider as an 'electoral hold up'. On January 26, Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM) supporters protested in several towns and cities to dispute the official election results.

Literature Review

Despite the ambiguous status of hate speech in the academic world, many researchers have looked at the phenomenon from different perspective and indicated that its negative implications for society are clear to everyone. In Cameroon for instance, there is paucity of research on the use of electronic mediated communication. Within Cameroon, social media has been awash with falsehood in the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis as the activists used computer software to distort pictures and superimpose content that depict the messages they wanted to pass across (Ngange and Moki, 2019). Nganji and Cockburn

(2019) have maintained that social media use has loosened the grip of governmental control of media messaging and expanded the public narratives available in Cameroon, yet at the time of the writing, this does not appear to have lessened the impact of the crisis.

Leets (2002) assesses people perceptions regarding both the antecedents and outcomes of hate speech targeted at Jews and homosexuals and found out that hate speech violates the individual's dignity, resulting humiliation, distress and psychological or emotional pain. Nemes (2002) establishes that hate speech creates feelings of fear and discourages people from participating in their community or expressing their opinions. While Sarah (2015) indicates in her analysis that Stereotyping has been the major type of hate speech introduced. Nsereka (2018) examines the implications of religious hate speech for political stability and contends that certain communication practices in parts of the world have undermined people's right to religious freedom and free speech, thereby threatening public peace and political stability.

Muhammad (2018) analyses comments that are offensive, hateful and inciting in tone and demonstrated that users are polarised along regional and religious lines in their comments, posting negative and injurious comments capable of turning the nation against itself. Bilal et al. (2019) address the impact of Hate Speech on Nigerian Economy and established that hate speech impact negatively on Nigeria and aggravate capital flight while socio-political effect in Nigeria is also damming. Besides, Okpara and Chukwu (2019) examine the use of hate speech in Nigeria and concluded that hate speech is a threat to national cohesion and development and therefore should be managed effectively. In the same vein, Adedokun (2019) looks at hate speech and its effects on the Nigerian Communities on Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State and confirmed that hate speech has effect on progress and development of any nation especially Nigeria. Additionally, Elliott et al. (2016) argue that the media can often serve as the direct transmitter of dangerous speech acts which have uniformly led to violent outcomes. Whereas Haque (2014) addressing the problem of hate speech in cyberspace, show that the majority of hate speech tweets recorded were personal attacks and abuse and it was mainly targeting state actors.

Although the review indicates that the studies on electronic-mediated communication, specifically hate speech studies are not numerous in Cameroon, interactions on social media such as Facebook and Whatsapp have proved an excellent resource to a wide range of research tasks out of the country. Following what has been already done, this study investigates hate speech from a Pragma-stylistic perspective on Twitter and Facebook.

Methodology

This work uses the pragmatic-stylistic approach in the elicitation of data along with Austin and Searle (1962, 1969)'s Speech Act Theory and Lawal (1995)'s Pragmatic Model (LPM). This approach specifies the intended meaning of the speaker along with his/her distinctive style. It is therefore assumed that individual mode of expression differs from others. It focuses on a purposive sampling

procedure to select Twitter and Facebook content messages that met the criteria of the concept adopted in the next data analysis section. This purposive sampling pruned a large number of Twitter and Facebook posts selected in order to ensure a sizeable representation. As such, using a smartphone as methodological tool for data collection, 155 Tweets and 308 Facebook posts were obtained from Cameroonian Activists from the 3rd of December 2017 to the end of February 2020 were used for this study. The selection was randomly done since the work is mainly concerned with elements of hate speech. In this vein, the study does not take into consideration the balanced size of posts per each informant. The reason for using these two social networks was based on the fact that the activists performed through these fora and it was relatively easier to obtain data from these sources. They were also selected because they were personalities determined to castigate the socio-political problems in Cameroon in order to incite violence. As such, their Twitter and Facebook content messages were gathered through screenshots.

Results and Analysis

Cameroonian activists use hateful expressions in their various content messages on Twitter and Facebook by adopting some linguistics resources to create the desired impact on the government and individuals. The different concepts to which those expressions are related obtained from the data collected are violence and secessionism related hate speech, offence related, critical, accusatory, threatening and challenging hate speech. These are presented in table 1 (see section 6 below) with their frequencies and percentage.

Violence and secessionism related hate speech

Austin's illocutionary act stipulates that an act is performed by uttering a sentence where the real intention of the speaker is encoded either to promise, condemn, invite, incite or sentence to prison and the Perlocutionary act is the effect the utterance might have. From this perspective, hate speech is illocutionary speech act in the sense that saying is doing something indicating the speaker's or writer's intention. Following this theory with regard to the incitement of violence, it is important to review the aforementioned utterances of illocutionary speech acts under two cases namely the post presidential election protest and the Anglophone crisis. The utterances which incite to protest against the 2018 Presidential election and the system are visible through what they committed to do "we should be ready"; "[...] they said they want 'bullets'. Give them 'bullets'. In other words, I am 100% a proponent of the ground game" and insisting on it "[...] we must intensify the assault both internal and external"; guaranteeing them "No Ambazonia should worry, as I am 100% a proponent of the ground game as a means, and of secession and restoration as the goal; "2020 must be our year of total freedom and despite the pain we must increase the resistance"; we as people must rise up against tyranny of alian rule"; "we must bleed Cameroon military"; "we must buy bullets and guns in self-defense". These utterances support the idea that the Cameroonian diaspora activists use hate speech to incite political

protest. The highest use of the modals 'must' and 'should' is somehow a tool to direct and control the behavior of the people. The structure must or should be the base form of the verb expressed overtly through an authoritative tone. These linguistics resources therefore denote obligation and thus create the desired impact on the sociopolitical context of Cameroon. Such expressions fueled the crisis in the North-west and South-west Regions and what each and every one witnessed after the 2018 presidential election where the main opposition party CRM conducted by its leader Maurice Kamto stood up to protest what they considered as "electoral hold-up". It could have been established that all of the informants were pregnant with violence in support to this political party through their frequent posts on Twitter and Facebook.

At the level of the Anglophone crisis, the perlocutionary acts related to violence incitement are apparent if one considers the agenda of secession formulated by separatists with the goal of separation "separation and restoration as the goal" and the order assigned "give them bullets". The message is unveiled as they have the goal of their acts, they should now "fight! fight! fight!" The activists as the main actors encourage them in the conflict by calling those on the field to keep fighting considering this fight as the revolution. These diverse incitement utterances could be the representative image of fire acceleration in the Anglophone crisis. As perlocutionary act entails the effect that the utterance might have on the hearer or audience, it is important to highlight that these incitement of violence utterances could be the results of what people witness today in the two English part of the country.

Offence related hate speech

In accordance with the theory of Austin's speech-acts, it is important to link offence related hate speech to perlocutionary speech acts. Matsuda (1993) and MacKinnon (1996) argue that words can assault, injure and wound. Butler (1997) also notes that their "formulations suggest that linguistic injury acts like physical injury" (p4). The examples that confirm this point of view were retrieved in this respect and they have different targets such as individuals "I took an oath to chase dictator Biya out of power in Cameroon.", "[...] terrorist Ekema was poisoned in Douala but died in Buea last night". It is observed from the examples above that speech acts could generate some disadvantages from the addressee's angle which implies perlocutionary speech acts. In the same vein, contextual hate speech according to Matsuda et al. (1993) and MacKinnon (1996) could victimize its addressee thereby producing some disadvantages on the recipient. However, Butler (1997, p15) believes in the "auspicious implications" of speech acts when they state that "words might through time become disjoined from their power to injure and be decontextualized in more affirmative modes."

Brugger (2003) pointed out that a more selective insult would not meet the usual requirement that collective insults be directed against every member of the group. In the following examples, there is use of insult directed to the Head of State who is referred to as "terrorist", "dictator", "tyrant", "criminal dictator" and "assassin". This perlocutionary speech has negative connotations upon the

recipient in such a way that it can tarnish his image both at the national and international scene. The style observed in the construction of sentences here is full of dysphemism. These utterances might have strong derogatory impact on the sociopolitical context of the nation. It could be noticeable that the users of such acts were spirited by the madness of growing hatred accumulated over the years.

Critical hate speech

An analysis of data from this section clearly indicates that the activists have largely used hate speech against the Bulu tribe in Cameroon. Their prejudice against the Bulu is similar to Brugger (2003)'s observation who states that all criticisms directed against "the Jews" referring to each and every individual Jew may not be accurate as such general assertions are commonly directed at "many," "typical," or "too many" of the group from the speaker's point of view instead of "all". Attributing everything concerning the state to this ethnic group such as the metaphor "Bulu are Hutu of Cameroon" and "Bulu name", "the Bulu are committing genocide in Cameroon..." may not be accurate. This attitude enhances the act of discrimination and tribalism on the minority group in particular and on all the Cameroonians in general. The frequent address of "Bulu" as an ethnic group on the basis of their political conception can be due to some of the criticism by some opposition parties tagging the ruling party and its leader "as negative governance". This may impart the global image of this tribe in the various posts of the informants on social media.

Accusatory hate speech

According to Lawal's (1995) pragmatic theory, psychological context covers the speaker's state of mind, mood, attitude and beliefs in the situation of an utterance. The psychology in the exposition of context has to do with the state of mind and general disposition of the language user while using language. The use of accusation in the above illustrations by the activists presupposes their intention to distance themselves from what is happening as violence in Cameroon. They have common beliefs that the Cameroon's sociopolitical problems is due to lack of good governance and the failure of democratic system to install "tyranny" transforming the state into a "chaotic regime".

Considering Lawal (1995)'s pragmatic theory, the social context is concerned with the factors that govern the interpersonal relation between interlocutors in a speech event which may include factors such as distance and class. From this point of view, the activists have different targets in their accusation which include individuals "Paul Biya is a dictator who kills his people since 37 years to remain in power", ethnic group "the Bulu are committing genocide in Cameroon...", "who is committing Anglophone's genocide? The Bulu". The informants use linguistics features such as directness and question here to establish their accusation. The Head of state represents the Bulu tribe, the defense forces are under his commandment. As hate speech is used against some groups, this reveals its negative impact on the Bulu as a tribe.

Threatening hate speech

Searle (1969)'s speech act theory by Representatives or Assertive implies speech acts that commit a speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition such as reciting, asserting, claiming, describing, concluding, reporting, suggesting, predicting, stating, etc. In this study, the activists express their position through acts of threats against different target groups. They do not hide themselves from their action as they claim, predict, describe, state or assert what they intend to do if they are given the opportunity in every period of time determined to affect change in the socio-political context of Cameroon. This is evident by the following example "but believe me and I am not joking, I have him in front of me, he Biya and a gun, I will shoot exactly a bullet in his forehead". The choice of word by this informant conveys an original style as he is confident in his position. This declaration is very strong in the sense that it surely creates emotion on the receiver. Also, the inevitable is still to come as it is observed through this declaration "Cameroon is a pariah State whose demise will come soon. We will write the last chapter of its brutal existence".

They promise death to the head of state "You will have no peace Biya", we shall see where you will be buried" and insisting their future intended action "we will chase you people to the gate of hell". In this action, they seem to protect what they consider as the "Ambazonian citizens". The aforementioned utterances show clearly that the activists are engaged in certain intolerable behavior against the state and its leader as well as some minority groups. They are behaving as if they are the ones who control power to the extent that everybody is under threat. The use of hate speech has great impact on individuals as the case of the Head of State who is attacked by all the informants.

5.6. Challenging hate speech

From the examples above, it appears that the challenge is engaged against the Government by the activists who want the whole world to be informed of her agenda for eventual freedom of what they called "independent Ambaland" in such a way that they will buy "guns and bullets to keep defending". What keeps their determination is the firm conviction that they have a different country and even the whole world knows about and it is impossible to dissolve it in order to join the Francophone part which is supposed to be "another country". Also, they promise through a hyperbolic expression to defeat the Republican army when they stress that "not even a world army will stop Ambazonia from owning the outcome of its independence".

Following Lawal's Aspects of Pragmatic Model, using pragmatic mappings which stipulates that in order to derive meaning from an utterance, one should bear in mind the "knowledge of context". These different utterances imply that the intention of these activists is to go further even against the whole world and the government solutions to obtain their "independence". The context shows it clearly as they keep fighting regardless of the various solutions propounded by the Government. Understanding these activists' intention through implicature or presupposition goes in line with the concept of MCBs propounded by Bach and Harnish (1979) which stipulates that a speech act is performed so that the listener could be able to understand and identify the intention of the speaker. When this eventually occurs, the listener puts certain facts together that will assist him/her to recognize the speaker's intention. As stated above, the results of the different types of hate speech are presented below.

Findings from the Collection of data

The activists used different hate speech that correspond to different frequencies and percentages as shown in table.

Table 1: Frequencies and percentage of hate speech features

Features	Frequencies	Percentage
Offence related hate speech	100	42.01%
Violence and secessionism related hate speech	53	22.27%
Critical hate speech	45	18.91%
Threatening hate speech	21	8.82 %
Accusatory hate speech	10	4.20 %
Challenging hate speech	9	3.79 %
Total	238	100 %

Table 1 above shows the frequencies and percentages of hate speech features found in the corpus of 238 occurrences. The analysis indicates that offence related hate speech largely dominates with 100(42.01%) features. This frequency in the context of Cameroon as was observed, was attributed to the highest degree of hatred accumulated by the activists over some years back. It was at the level where they could no longer withhold their hatred and anger towards the target groups. Their readiness to explode like a bomb and spread everywhere is testified by the following statement "I am full of hate to the extent to be armed". Their claim for a change in the ruling regime was justified by the second position of the use of violence and secessionism related hate speech

with 53(22.27%) against the state. This is also supported by the argument that "chasing is the only solution". Critical hate speech constitute 45(18.91%) while threatening hate speech was 21(8.82 %), and lastly, accusatory and challenging hate speeches was 10(4.20%) and 9(3.79%) respectively.

Discussion of the findings

The analysis of the results above clearly show that the activists used Twitter and Facebook with different types of hate speech. These findings are buttressed by Leets (2001:314-316)'s study which concluded that although online hate speech is unlikely to incite short-term effects,

it carries with it a potential for long-term harmful consequences. It is in this connection that Cameroonian diaspora activists use Facebook and Twitter to disseminate hate speech and the Cameroonians are more active in getting information through this medium. This findings lead to a closer understanding of the consequences of hate speech, relativizing its effects on different audiences and types of speech as the activists' tweets and Facebook messages as public posts are potentially addressing a multitude through the targeted audiences. Following the perlocutionary effects produced on the Anglophone regions, it could appear that even when the war will end, there, there may still be long-term negative consequences to the crisis.

The findings also confirm the results of Leets and Giles (1997) and Leets (2003), who found that instances of direct hate speech were considered more harmful by members of the out group who nevertheless remained unaware of more subtle instances of indirect hate speech considered damaging to the group. Activists' criticism of the regime, its political party, the form of State and Bulu tribe may lead to a negative picture on professional opportunities and multiculturalism put forward by the government. This is ascertained through some citizens who are afraid to discuss sensitive political issues for fear of reprisals, notably the potential for a return to a federal system that would grant the Anglophone regions more autonomy or the regions' outright secession (Freedom of speech in the world, 2018).

Nemes (2002) argues that hate speech can provoke pain, distress, fear, embarrassment, isolation, etc. Following this argument, it is undeniable in the Anglophone regions that pain, distress, fear, embarrassment and isolation seem to characterize the lives of most people living there specifically and the nation as whole. This is because hate speech seem to be fueling conflicts. Isolation is observed through hate speech users as they fear the Government and hide in European countries and USA. The Government is seemingly experiencing embarrassment for all the measures that have been taken since the beginning of the crisis from the use of defense forces through the major national dialogue to eradicate this phenomenon but to no avail. The State has lost some public edifices such as schools, hospitals, markets, roads and the military and civilians as well as many houses that have been destroyed and need to be reconstructed.

In Binny et al. (2018)'s observation, the hateful accounts express more negative sentiments that are more profane. Proponents of hate speech use a variety of words that express envy, hatred, negative emotion, swearing. In this connection, the results might suggest that the Cameroon governmental agenda is scheduled towards disseminating hate speech online to apply the law on their users. Therefore, this study supports the argument that sources of hate speech generally target groups opposing them regardless of whether their sources are from the regime in power or not. The groups targeted by hate speech in this study are, the regime which is in power, the Bulu ethnic group and even those who support the regime. Okpara and Chukwu (2019) observed that hate speech is a threat to national cohesion and development and therefore should be managed effectively. The presence of threatening hate speech supports this argument as the

following utterances illustrate: "Cameroon is a pariah State whose demise will come soon. We will write the last chapter of its brutal existence" "[...] not even a world army will stop Ambazonia from owning the outcome of its independence".

Conclusion

This study has looked at "hate speech" from a Pragmstylistic perspective on Twitter and Facebook. The results of the analysis from Cameroon Facebook and Twitter revealed that Cameroonian activists use hateful expressions in their various content messages on Twitter and Facebook by adopting some linguistic resources to create the desired impact on the government and individuals. The findings also showed that the activists use violence and secessionism related hate speech, offence, critical, accusatory, threatening and challenging hate speech. The linguistics resources used to create the desired impact were mainly modal verbs. Findings from empirical investigations indicate that hate speech is prevalent on social media platforms and has impacted the socio-political situation that prevails in the nation. Although hate speech has negative implications on the social media in Cameroon, perpetrators cannot be constricted to conform to legal implications and ethical standards of human nature considering the wide spread usage of social media by the citizens. It is therefore an urgent duty for the government to prohibit hate speech in Cameroon especially on the emerging new media such as Twitter and Facebook. This work is centered on the use of online hate speech by Cameroonian activists from pragma-stylistic view. It has some shortcomings that can be a springboard for further research. For instance, other instruments of data collection could be used since this study was limited only to Facebook and Twitter content messages. Besides, this is a synchronic study and the limitations comes in when there is need to see how Cameroonians have progressed in their sociopolitical constructions and how they behave. A diachronic study in this respect will bring in a comparative analysis which will be more interesting. It can also be important to find out the implications of the advent of social media as compared to their inexistence in those days.

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