

Hedging in Advertising Communication by Commercial Agents in Inter-Urban Transport Services in Cameroon: A Socio-Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

Consciousness in communication is a sign of maturity as people interact in multilingual and multicultural environments. Not every utterance is appropriate to every audience, especially such utterances that are considered age related. Inter-urban transport agencies in Cameroon are commercial centre par excellence by different marketing agents, who use stylish language to display their different products to potential buyers. This paper examines the use of hedging by these commercial agents as they deploy different techniques in their use of language to prevent minors from decoding the meaning from the words. This paper appreciates the consciousness in the use of language, but questions if the minors who are supposed not to understand the messages actually do not understand. This research was carried out in Bamenda town where children between the ages of five and 10 and adults from 20 years were targeted. An oral test was administered to 100 adults and 100 children in which they were asked to say what they understand from some selected phrases used by commercial agents. The results showed that many of the children could not say what such phrases meant, but some gave the meanings. Some decided not to give, though it was evident that they knew the meanings. Some adults could not also give the meanings. The research, which is grounded on adaptation theory, holds that hedging in the context of interurban buses is a face saving venture and not only a means to obstruct comprehension.

Keywords: Hedging, Communication, Cameroon pidgincreole, interurban, vendor

Introduction

Inter-urban transport buses in Cameroon have become great commercial centres for vendors, especially, of consumables products. They invade buses and brandish their various products with very appealing dictions that catch the sympathy of the audience. In commercial adverts in inter-urban transport buses in Cameroon, commercial agents have learnt to use language in a way that makes meaning fuzzy to the audience the communication was not intended. They are conscious that in the different buses that transport people by day or by night, from one urban town to the other, age groups vary and not all the things they communicate are relevant to everyone. They generally do hedging to communicate to the relevant group and cut others off their communication, especially when dealing with issues considered sensitive within that context such as sexual intercourse, defecation, reference to the genitals amongst others. As Wang (2010, p. 120) posits, “what language users do during the procedure of hedges employment, obviously, is continuously making choices too”. The choices here have to do with who to include in the communicative act and who not to include. When people communicate, they are not always very sure about how the audience will react, so hedging can be considered an appeasement measures to avoid confrontation.

This paper examines the use of fuzzy language by commercial vendors, who have a common way of engaging potential clients in their discourse and the various strategies they deploy to keep their audience attentive and at the same time avoiding hurting their feeling in their use of language. I am going to project the different ways in which hedging is done and whether or not the reason for such fuzzy language is achieved. That is, finding out if little children who are always in the buses that the vendors attempts to keep away from their communication really don't understand the

communication or they only pretend because they are in the presence of their parents or elders. Since hedging is a broad pragmatic concept that covers almost any “expression of tentativeness or possibility or with a softening or downtoning function” (Johansen, 2020, p. 1) cited in Ngwobela et al. (2023), this paper equally brings one important sociolinguistic element, age, which serves as a reason for hedging in public transport vehicles.

Since pragmatic skills have to do with how we navigate through life, communicate our wants and needs to others, and express our thoughts and opinions verbally, and given that this paper is focused on how children and adult comprehend such communication, socio-pragmatic study is an appropriate label for this research. It is important to understand what hedging is and to situate the commercial agents’ communicative acts within the context of Multilingualism.

Literature Review

In this section, literature on understanding hedging, hedging in specific context and advertising communication is reviewed.

Understanding Hedging

The term hedge is said to have been used for the first time in the domain of linguistics by Lakoff in 1972 (Gherdan, 2019, p. 124; Wang, 2010, p 120) as “words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy”. Citing Zuck & Zuck (1986); Brown & Levinson (1987); Hyland (1998); Btoosh (1999); Btoosh (2004); Varttala (2001); Vass (2004); Chavez (2004); Ayodobo (2007); Vazques & Giner (2008); Donesch-Jezo (2010), among others. Taweel et al. (2011, p.170) say the term hedging which was first used to refer to fuzziness has been widened to cover a number of interrelated concepts, namely indetermination, vagueness, indirectness and approximation. Ken (1996, p. 15) holds that hedging devices are

used to indicate a lack of complete commitment to the truth of the proposition, and a desire not to express the commitment categorically.

Hedging may also stem from the inner conflict between intention and desire: “being indirect is a mechanism for dealing with conflicting intentions and desires. The general form of the conflict is that the speaker wants to convey M for some reason and he does not want to convey M for other reasons. By being indirect he can convey M in one sense but not in another.” (Pyle, 1975, p. 2). Indetermination, indirectness, vagueness, and modality are different strategies or means of the same phenomenon of hedging (Taweel et al., 2011). This is basically what takes place in buses where the advertising agents use language differently depending on the audience in the bus. Although their adverts are not written, they are professionally produced from a careful blend of words, images and symbols with strong attachment to consumer psychology since the audience is expected to be affected upon (Akpan et al., 2013).

Hedging is regarded differently in different contexts of use. In academics, hedges “imply then, that a statement is based on plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge, and allow readers the freedom to dispute it” (Gherdan, 2019), cautious, annotative expressions of words (Yule, 1996). This paper adheres to Yule’s definition in that it will rather look at the way users apply caution in their use of language for face-saving purposes.

In a more precise manner, Harutyunyan & Sargsyan (2019) hold that hedging is reducing the force of statements, to show doubt and indicate that information is presented as opinion rather than accredited fact. The speakers in this case try to appear humble rather than arrogant or all-knowing. So relevant to this study from Harutyunyan & Sargsyan is the fact that “hedging, being a kind of politeness marker, plays an important role in showing the

differences of its usage from a sociolinguistic perspective, particularly focusing on such social and contextual parameters as gender, class, age, ethnicity, setting” (p.45). This is important as this paper is focused on socio-pragmatic study. It should, however, be noted that since hedging is all about making language fuzzy, hedging devices do not end within the range of modal auxiliaries (e.g. may), main verbs (argue, believe), adverbs (possibly, perhaps), adjectives (potential, probable) and nouns (hypothesis, idea, notion) (Anh, 2018, p. 15); it uses devices based on the context and the academic level of users. The next section in this paper reviews some relevant works.

Hedging in specific context

Hedging has been widely examined in different situations, political discourse, academic discourse, market discourse and a lot more. In this section, I will give a brief review of hedging in some related fields.

To begin with, Akpan et al., (2013) did an aesthetic judgments on four select newspaper advertisements employing the visual analysis approach and hedging it on subjectivity and universal validity planks of Kant’s theory. The four advertisements were selected from two Nigerian dailies, *Punch* and *Vanguard*. The paper concentrates on the visual elements and the aesthetic appeals through colours and textual matters such as capitalization and number of words used and how users appreciate them. The authors conclude that class of the respondents as well as the objectives that the ads were intended to fulfill equally played a dominant role in making some ads more aesthetically appealing than others.

On his part, Wang (2010, p. 121) in his paper points out that hedging takes place because any communication is a kind of activity with some degree of purpose. This will cause interlocutors to adopt some strategies in utterance which are meant to maintain the face of

both sides. Hedge can be used as an effective strategy to maintain the social relationship and preserve the face of communicators. His study looks at hedging from different perspectives- adaptation to the mental world, adaptation to the social world and physical world. In an example of the mental world, he brings a dialogue between a teacher and a monitor as seen below:

- a. Teacher: How many students have come back to school safely?
- b. Monitor: More than thirty.

The Monitor chooses the hedge “more than” as a device to tailor his reply. This frees him from responsibility and keeps the teacher wondering what “more than” really mean exactly.

In their own study which sought to determine which hedging devices were used in government information subsidies about the crisis in Anglophone Cameroon that started in 2016, establish the discourse and communication functions of these hedges, and determine the crisis response postures reflected through hedging, Ngwobela et al. (2023, p 34) adopted a documentation and records method to obtain 83 information subsidies. In this paper, the authors identified six categories of hedging devices which served different discourse and communication roles. Approximators and rounders were used to distance the government from particularly controversial claims about key crisis issues; while contrastive conjunctions served to highlight support for government crisis management strategies, protect government credibility, and diminish the amount of crisis responsibility attributed to the government. Conditionals were used to express beliefs, claims and stances about Anglophone crisis events in a way that restricts potentially controversial interpretations. In all, six categories of hedging devices were used in government information subsidies about the Anglophone crisis. The paper concludes that there is a need for greater synchrony in the use of hedging devices. This wish is actually not possible because as Hyland (1996, p.434) cited in

Anh (2018) holds, “hedging represents a writer’s attitude within a particular context”. Since no two contexts are exactly the same, the hedging devices will not be the same.

Advertising Communication

Communication, as Fonka (2020), puts it remains a chain whereby the speaker transmits a message to the receiver through a channel and receives feedback. Although commercial agents involved in advertisement have a little time to spend with their potential customers, they measure feedback on how much they sell after advertising their products. Ellis (2002, p. 13) opines that one of the hallmarks of successful communication is associated with the notion of being appropriate, that is, providing the right kind of communication to match the right kind of audience. This means no matter how good and important your message is, if it is communicated to the wrong audience, the desired effect will not be achieved. Advertising communication is marketing communication, which according to Bačík et al. (2012, p. 315) “can be described as an interactive dialogue between the organization and customer in the stages: prior to sale, during sale in course, use of the product and continue to the end-use product”. In their examination of the different kinds of advertising communication, Binet & Field (2009) cited in Oñate et al. (2019, p. 113) presents one, Rational Empathetic (Persuasion), which “seeks to capture attention by drawing the interest of the audience by means of novelties and by adding an emotional element to make the message more memorable”. This actually matches with this study because the advertising agents understand that the context under normal circumstances would not be welcoming. This is because they most often come into the buses early in the morning when passengers are tired after travelling a whole night or when the bus is just about to depart and passengers are yet to fully settle. They use emotional elements to lure their way

into the hearts of the tired passengers. By using hedging, advertisers understand that this would avoid confrontation from tired and angry passengers who might hang on any little uncomfortable word to reject their presence.

The language in advertising communication in inter-urban transport buses in Cameroon varies from one linguistic divide to the other. In the French part of Cameroon, the language is French and in the Anglophone part of the country, it is Cameroon Pidgincreole and sometimes a mixture of a few English phrases. Vendors understand the linguistic landscape of Cameroon.

The section that follows presents the theory that this work as adopted.

Theoretical Consideration

Propounded by Hutcheon (2006), adaptation theory is commonly examined from a survival of the fittest perspective because it is the ability of an organism to survive in a new environment. Verschueren (2000, p.55) claims that “using language must consist of the continuous making of linguistic choices”, and the utterer makes choices in different levels for the adaptation to the contextual correlates till some satisfied communicative effects are made. It is no doubt that choice-making and adaptation is the key of the communication flow. Since linguistic constraints differ across languages, speakers must learn them for their communication to be effective (Chang et al., 2012, p. 259). This process of learning is adapting to new ways of using language. According to Piaget (2015), an important implication of Piaget's theory is adaptation of instruction to the learner's developmental level. The content of the instruction needs to be consistent with the development level of the learner. Cherry (2014) cited in Piaget (2015) opines that adaptation process is the inborn tendency to adjust more attuned to conditions

imposed by the environment. This is exactly the situation which leads to hedging by vendors in interurban buses in Cameroon. It is the business environment that has imposed the adjustment strategy. Hedge is therefore used as an effective strategy to maintain the social relationship and preserve the face of communicators (Wang, 2010, p. 121). The adaptation theory is very apt for this study.

Methodology

The main objective of this study is to find out if there is effective hedging in advertising communication in inter-urban transport buses as advertiser attempt to shield minors from aspects of their communication or it is only a face-saving strategy. Data for this study was drawn from inter-urban transport vehicles and from the neighbourhoods in Bamenda town. I did recordings of the various adverts from different commercial agents, especially those involved in selling traditional medicines. From the recordings, elements of hedging were taken and tested on the population. A structured interview was conducted to both children and adults. Children between the ages five and 10 and adults from 20 years were targeted. An oral test was administered to 100 children and 100 adults, wherein they were asked to say what they understand from some selected phrases used by commercial agents. The responses were classified according to the various hedging devices before analyzing. The interview guide had proposed responses to the various questions which were not read out to the interviewees. It was only used by the interviewer to match the responses given by respondents. Structured interviews were conducted in different neighbourhoods in Bamenda by both postgraduate and undergraduate students to whom I gave the instruments and guiding instructions. Since this was an interview, all our targeted respondents provided the needed data for this study. In the case

where a respondent was not ready to provide data, he/she was simply replaced by a willing respondent who made the desire criteria.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

From the words used by advertisers, it is noted that they use figures of speech such as hypallage or transferred epithet and metonymy, euphemism, synecdoche and uncertainty.

Vendors' use of Hypallage or Transferred epithet

It is a figure of speech in which the syntactic between two terms is interchanged. This means transferring human qualities to a thing or a thing's qualities to human. In our data, vendors do this when they talk about current seizing not referring to light but to human sexual activity. Equally, when they say *Bamenda get fiva* (Bamenda has fever), it is a human quality transferred to a place.

Table 1: Use of Hypallage or transferred epithet by Vendors

Expressions	Adults			Children	
	responses	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<i>korent siz</i> (Current seizes)	correct	55	55	40	40
	incorrect	45	45	60	60
	Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Bamenda get fiva</i> (Bamenda has fever)	correct	85	85	100	100
	incorrect	15	15	0	00
	Total	100	100	100	100
<i>na yi weist</i> (sexual strength)	correct	95	95	50	50
	incorrect	5	5	50	50
	Total	100	100	100	100

From table 1, the expression *koren siz* (current seizures) as in the sentence *Yu wan go tu minit wit yur patna, korent sis* (As you go for two minutes with your partner, current seizures) refers to weak

erection during sexual intercourse. Out of the 100 adults interviewed, 55(55%) and 45(45%) gave correct and incorrect responses respectively. As for children, 40(40%) gave the correct option while 60(60%) gave an opinion that corresponded to the incorrect options. The expression *Bamenda get fiva* (Bamenda has fever) as in *ivin as wi don enta Bamenda fain, Bamenda **get fiva**. Mek wi kontiniu de prei* (even though we have entered Bamenda safely, Bamenda has fever. Let us continue to pray) is transferring human attribute to a thing, which in this case, contextually refers to war in Bamenda. In the various responses, 85(85%) and 15(15%) adults had correct and incorrect responses respectively. As for children, all the 100(100%) had the correct response. The expression *man pikin na weist*, in the expression *Man pikin **na yi waist**, no be noise* (A man is his waist, not noise), which means man is known from his sexual strength or resistance is understood more by adults than children. For adults, 95 (95%) and 5(5%) gave the correct and incorrect options respectively, while 50 (50%) each gave the correct and the incorrect options. The data presented here present something peculiar- in the case of *korent sis*, more adults understand what it means than children, although 40% is not a small percentage to understand what is intended to be hidden, but in the case of *Bamenda get fiva*, all the children got the right answer. This particular expression is surely not meant to hide anything from children than to sound stylish and polite and reduce fear as passengers enter Bamenda, especially those entering after a long time. While this can be considered the biggest surprise in the data, it only reveals that you cannot hide from people what is a common reality to them. It equally reveals that we only think children are ignorant about certain things because we have not interacted with them. This is the case with *man pikin na weist* where as high as 50% of children interviewed understand the expression.

Vendors' use of Metonymy

Metonymy is a **figure of speech in which one objector idea takes the place of another with which it has a close association**. In fact, metonymy means “change of name.” As a literary device, it is a way of replacing an object or idea with something related to it. Three expressions in which vendors used metonymy are *no kontakt* (No contact) as in the sentence *Drink African Panacia 7 to 21 deis, **no kontakt**, no alcohol* (drink African Panacia for 7 to 21 days, no contact, no alcohol), *woman skin* (female body) as in *No put yur hand fo yur **woman skin*** (do not put your hand in your female skin) and *Pa Tanto* (Male name) as in *Wen **Pa Tanto** no de respond, yur woman no fit respekt yu* (if Pa tantoh does not respond, your wife will not respect you). The usage according to commercial agents is not what these names actually mean as indicated in bracket; the names and expressions are replaced with others which have close associations.

Table 2: Use of Metonymy by Vendors

Expressions	Adults			Children	
	responses	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<i>No kontak</i> (No sex)	correct	75	75%	50	50%
	incorrect	25	25%	50	50%
	Total	100	100%	100	100%
<i>woman skin</i> (Vagina)	correct	85	85%	10	10%
	incorrect	15	15%	90	90%
	Total	100	100%	100	100%
<i>Pa Tanto</i> (penis)	correct	95	95%	50	50%
	incorrect	5	5%	50	50%
	Total	100	100%	100	100%

Table 2 shows that adults generally understand the expressions used by vendors more than children, although the latter also show great understanding in some cases. In the expression *no kontak* (no contact) which refers to no sex, 75 (75%) of adult had it correct while 25(25%) gave the incorrect options. The expression *woman skin* literally means the woman's body, but it is used here to mean vagina. 85 (85%) and 15 (15%) of adult gave the correct and the incorrect options respectively. So many children didn't understand this as only 10 (10%) of them provided the correct option while 90 (90%) gave the incorrect options. In the last expression, *Pa Tantoh*, which literally refers to the name of a male, is used here to mean penis. More adults again 95 (95%) provided the correction option while only 5 (5%) did not know what *Pa Tantoh* means. As for children, 50 (50%) understood what it means and the same percentage did not know.

The data for metonymy shows that adults, as rightly judged by commercial vendors, understand the hedged expressions more than children. It is also noted that none of the expressions has a 100% score of correctness, indicating that even adults do not understand all the expressions. The only one with the lowest rate of comprehension is *woman skin* (Vagina) with only 10% of children able to understand. Others with about 50% indicate that a comfortable number of children understand the language commercial vendors in interurban buses do not want them to hear. What this also means is that adults need to be careful when they communicate among children in a language they think is reserved for adults. Children may not react when elders speak because they also want to hedge their feelings and fool the adults into thinking that they don't understand. In most of the cases here, it will not be wrong to say that hedging is "expressing and showing politeness and

modesty” (Taweel et al., 2011, p. 173) not hiding the message from children in this case.

Vendors also use euphemism and synecdoche as an attempt to hide message from children and show politeness and modesty to parents or adults in the buses as seen in the following section.

Vendors’ use of euphemism and synecdoche

All languages have polite or euphemistic terms and phrases. Polite usage is used to deal with harsh or vulgar expressive forms. Vulgarisms are culturally defined as unacceptable forms of expression in most circumstances of public discourse, although they are acceptable in many informal settings (Shaw, 1989, p. 76). As for synecdoche, Ghosh (2019, p. 379) defines it as “a change of name, one term being substituted by another, but with this difference, that the substitute must not be an accompaniment of the original thing”. Table three presents data on how adults and children make meaning out of euphemism and synecdoche as used by vendors in buses.

Table 3: *The use of euphemism and synecdoche*

Hedging devices	Expressions	Adults			Children	
		responses	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Euphemism	Tu plei (have sex)	correct	95	95%	50	50%
		incorrect	5	5%	50	50%
		Total	100	100%	100	100%
	technical unemployment (cannot have sex)	correct	25	25%	10	10%
		incorrect	75	75%	90	90%
		Total	100	100%	100	100%
Synecdoche	liv smol ston (excrement)	correct	20	20%	50	50%
		incorrect	75	75%	50	50%
		Total	100	100%	100	100%

The euphemistic expression to play (have sex) is understood by 95% of adults but not understood by 5%. As high as 50% of children understand the expression *Yu bi addicted tu drog **tu plei** wit yur patna* (you are addicted to drugs to play with your partner). In yet another euphemistic expression, *teknikal onemployment* (cannot have sex), which is found in the sentence *Tell mama sei you **dei teknikal onemployment** until afta 21 deis* (Tell your wife that you are on a technical unemployment until after twenty one days), both the adults and the children could not really understand the meaning. The data displayed on table 3 shows that 25(25%) of adults gave the correct option while 75(75%) of adult gave the incorrect options- have no job (35%) and No idea (40%). As for children, 10 (10%) gave the correct option while 90(90%) gave the incorrect option- have no job (80%) and No idea (10%). It should be noted that the other options not found on the table but analysed have simply been merged under correct and incorrect.

One of the biggest surprises in this research is with the expression *liv smol ston* (excrement), which only 20% of adults who are expected to understand actually understood, whereas 50% of children actually understood. In the full expression *Woman yi oun fain plenti pas man pikin yi oun bikos wen yi shidon fo pis, yi go **liv smol ston** fo de pleis* (a woman's penalty is higher than that of a man because when she sits to urinate, she would leave a small stone (excrete) there), vendors are unaware that euphemism and synecdoche are word-play strategies commonly employed by youths to hide information from adults. The only purpose they serve in this situation is that they are aimed to avoid shock and sound elegant, pleasant, and dignifying or refined (Mbangwana, 2009, p. 137). If children could have such understanding, youths would probably have a 100% comprehension. This simply means the vendors are attempting to hide information where youths get their information.

It is however a good thing that they deem it necessary to sound pleasant to their potential customers. For the euphemistic expression *teknikal onemployment* (cannot have sex), which both the adults and the children did not understand, it is clear that adults are used to direct language than euphemistic expressions as I have indicated earlier in this section. Since that particular expression has to do with sex, and children are not yet involved in it, the euphemistic expressions for sex are new to them. Youths who are involved in that activity would have done better because this might be one amongst the many expressions they use in concealing their involvement from parents. The last part of this data examines hedging by means of uncertainty.

Falahati (2008, p. 51) says that authors through the use of hedging devices and showing uncertainty, try to show the degree of accuracy of their statement and save face in case of probable falsification of their claim. The use of uncertainty by commercial vendors in buses is certainly also meant for defence if any person reminds them of their force claim. In the statement, *ivin dou wona don taya, mek wona ekskius mi for a few minutes* (Even though you are tired, spare me a few of your minutes). The question here is, how few are few minutes? Few as used by vendors here simply means indefinite. In this hedging devise, the following options were presented for them to choose the correct one- 1-5 minutes (b) 5-10 minutes (c) 10- 20 minutes (d) indefinite time. The correct option here is indefinite time because vendors, especially those with traditional medicines will not know how long they will stay in the bus. I had the following results for adult and children respectively- 70 (70%) and 50 (50%) for correct option and 30 (30%) and 50 (50%) for incorrect options. What I understand from this is that both children and adults are probably versed with the phrase *few minutes* and they are aware that the minutes are as few as the vendor wants,

not as the passengers in the bus want. Like in the previous hedging devices, every other option that is not correct is placed under incorrect. Figure 1 presents the options of the respondents.

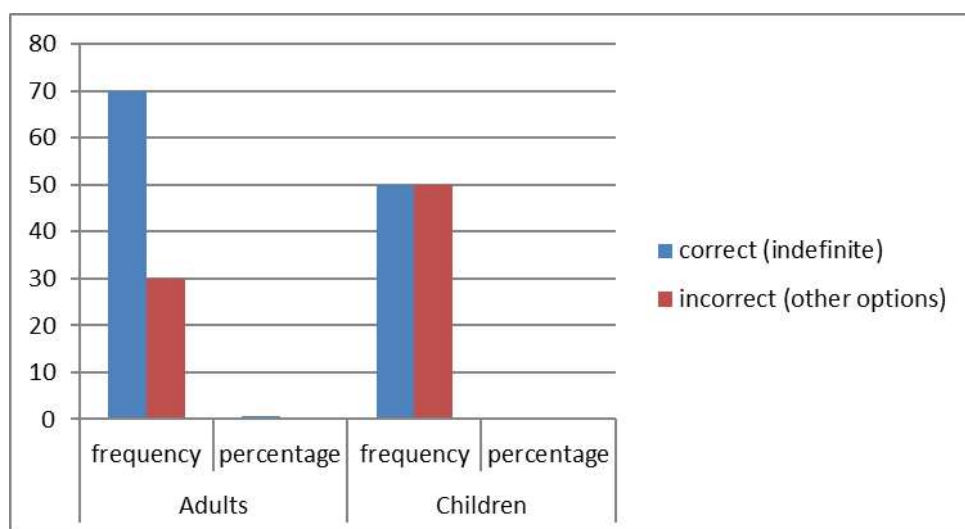


Figure 1: *Few minutes*

The vendor simply does not want to say how long he/she would stay because his/her stay depends on the response of the passengers towards the product they are advertising. What we should note here is that adults understand the phrase **few minutes** more than children do. The next section examines the success rate of hedging between adults and children in our case study.

Success rate of hedging between adults and children

From the data presented and analysed, a cumulative percentage of the success rate of hedging considering only the level of comprehension shows that, only 63.63% of adults understand expressions they are all expected to understand and as high as 41.81% of children understand expressions they are not meant to understand.

Table 4: Cumulative comprehension rate between adults and Children

respondents	Desired choices	Frequency	Percentage
Adults	expected to be understood	1100	100%
	Actually understood	700	63.63%
Children	Not expected to be understood	1100	100%
	Actually understood	450	41.81%

The eleven expressions used for this study had a total frequency of 1100. Considering that the vendor are using adaptation strategies in order to save face, all 100 adults on the one hand were expected to understand the expressions with a frequency of 1100 (100%) because they are potential customers the vendors were targeting. All the 100 children on the other hand were expected not to understand the hedges with a frequency of 1100 (100%). As recorded on the cumulative table, adult understood only at the rate of 63.63% while children, against expectation understood at the rate of 41.81%. Following the definition of hedging by Yagız & Demir (2014, p. 260) as a “tentative language to avoid any certainty or to mitigate the statements to able to avert possible criticism”, it will not be wrong to claim that hedging in Cameroon in interurban transport buses is to mitigate the statements to able to avert possible criticism. This means the intension is not only to completely cut children off communication, but also to appear appealing to their parents.

Summary of the findings

Language scholars should be able to master their environment and know why people do things the way they do, especially when language is at the centre. It is easy to laugh over jokes like those produced by inter-urban transport vendors without noticing that they are actually playing with language to keep their potential customers

awake. It is also important to indicate that the language deployed by these vendors in the anglophone region is Cameroon Pidgincreole (CPc). The reason here, though was not investigated in this study because it has sufficiently been investigated in other studies on CPc, is due to the fact that it is a common lingua franca that cuts across all linguistic divides in Cameroon (Atechi & Fonka, 2007; Ayafor, 1996; Fonka, 2022; Mbangwana, 2004; Ojong Diba, 2021). All the phrases in which hedging devices were embedded were in CPc and from several vendors. It was also observed that some of the phrases were a mixture of English and CPc, indicating the multilingual nature of the environment in which they were found.

The environment in which vendors operate is made of people of different age groups and the same diction cannot be applicable to everyone. The vendors have learnt to adapt in order to be acceptable in their business environment. The theory of adaptation is very apt here as it fosters acceptability.

Some of the hedging devices used by vendors like euphemism turned out to be understood more by children than adults. This shows that in a multilingual and a multicultural environment, there is no monopoly of knowledge as everyone is opened to different sources of empowerment. The fact that children may not react to some of the phrases used by vendors does not mean they have not understood; they know their environment and need to portray a face-saving attitude.

Conclusion

Apart from Ngwobela et al. (2023), I have not seen any other works on hedging on the Cameroon linguistic sphere. There is a vast array of research opportunities on this subject in academics, politics and culture, just to name a few. While interurban transport buses are increasingly becoming commercial centres and vendors are

sometimes received with resistance by passengers, who are customers, the former have learned to use appealing language which at the same time recognises age difference. With the results which show that not all adults understand all the expressions that are required of them and that some children understand expressions that are not meant for them, the question is whether there a need to colour language? This paper is of the opinion that it is necessary for the sake of politeness and face saving, an act which vendors have learnt to do so well. As a socio-pragmatic study, sociolinguistics elements such as age, in this case adult and children, was used and in terms of pragmatics, the different politeness strategies show that hedging is a strategy to maintain the social relationship and preserve the face of communicators.

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