

The Use of Linguistic Violence on Social Media: The Case of Followers of Selected Cameroonian Facebook Pages

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Abstract

This paper examines the type and intensity of linguistic violence that Cameroonians use on social media pages to express their anger, frustration, disagreement, or hatred towards others. It also explores the causes and consequences of linguistic violence on the face, identity, or well-being of the speaker and the hearer. The paper adopts the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) as the main theoretical framework and uses the concept of face-threatening acts (FTAs) to analyse the linguistic forms and strategies of linguistic violence. The paper employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data from three popular Cameroonian Facebook pages: Mimi Mefo Info (MMI), Cameroon News Agency, and ADE Divine. The paper collects and analyses a corpus of 110 comments from the pages, using a coding scheme based on the types and intensities of linguistic violence, such as abusive language, hate speech, and cyber bullying. The paper finds that linguistic violence is prevalent and pervasive on Cameroonian Facebook pages, and that it varies in type and intensity depending on the topic, the target, and the context of the interaction. The paper concludes that linguistic violence is a serious social problem that needs to be addressed by the authorities, the media, and the public. The paper also suggests some possible solutions and recommendations to reduce or prevent linguistic violence on social media. The paper contributes to the field of linguistic studies and has implications for other fields, such as sociology, psychology, education, and communication.

Key Words: linguistic violence, social media, politeness theory, face-threatening

1. Introduction

The digital age, characterised by the omnipresent dominance of internet discourse and social media interactions, has become breeding ground for the proposition and acceptance of certain violent linguistic forms. Specific to this analysis are Cameroonian Facebook pages, which have become stages for outbursts of linguistic violence among followers. This article adopts Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), along with the concept of face-threatening acts (FTAs), to elucidate the diverse forms and strategies of linguistic violence used on four popular Cameroonian Facebook pages: Mimi Mefo Info, Cameroon News Agency, and ADE Divine. This paper aims at answering the questions: What are the prevalent types and intensities of linguistic violence (abusive language, hate speech, cyber bullying) used by Cameroonians on selected Facebook pages, and how do these patterns vary across different pages and discussion topics? How do Cameroonians employ face-threatening acts (FTAs) within politeness theory to express anger, frustration, or hatred online? How does exposure to linguistic violence on social media affect the online and offline well-being, identity, and social interactions of both perpetrators and victims? The hypothetical contention here is that Cameroonians on selected Facebook pages frequently engage in various forms of linguistic violence, particularly utilizing face-threatening acts targeting negative and positive face needs. This prevalence of linguistic violence negatively affects the well-being and identity of both perpetrators and victims, contributes to online polarization and offline social fragmentation, and is perceived as a significant problem by a large portion of Facebook users.

1.1. Literature Review

Online communication spaces, while offering opportunities for connection and expression, can also become breeding grounds for linguistic violence. Linguistic violence encompasses a range of verbal and nonverbal acts that inflict harm, including insults, threats, and discriminatory language. Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) offers a framework for understanding how individuals navigate positive and negative face concerns in communication. While studies acknowledge the interplay between politeness and linguistic violence (Watts, 2003), further exploration is needed to understand how specific politeness strategies might contribute to or mitigate verbal aggression online. Cameroon boasts a multilingual and multicultural landscape, with French and English serving as official languages alongside numerous indigenous tongues. This intricate linguistic tapestry shapes online interactions, where code-switching and linguistic markers of identity play a crucial role (Ebbole, 2011). Social media pages like Facebook and WhatsApp have gained immense popularity in Cameroon, creating vibrant online communities with their own dynamics and norms. However, issues such as digital divides, unequal access to resources, and the prevalence of "fake news" pose challenges and further complicate online communication landscapes (Fongang et al., 2017).

Studies across Africa reveal diverse forms of linguistic violence online, including hate speech, cyber bullying, and political vitriol (Ololube, 2019; Uwalaka, 2017). These studies highlight the complex interplay of factors such as ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation in shaping online aggression. Notably, research suggests that cultural nuances and specific linguistic features of local languages might influence the expression and interpretation of linguistic violence (Okeke, 2018). Building on existing research, this review underscores the need for in-depth analysis of linguistic

violence in the specific context of Cameroon's online sphere. While previous studies have explored online aggression in Africa, few have focused specifically on Cameroon, taking into account its unique socio-linguistic makeup and the nuances of its online communities. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of how politeness strategies are employed in Cameroonian online communication, both to perpetuate and mitigate linguistic violence, could offer valuable insights.

1.2.Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of linguistic violence on social media platforms (Creswell, 2014). The data for this study were collected from three popular Cameroonian Facebook pages: Mimi Mefo Info, Cameroon News Agency, and ADE Divine. The data was curated from posts dating between January 2022 and January 2024. These pages were selected due to their high user engagement and the diversity of their audience, which provides a rich source of data for analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). The data collection process involved manually extracting a corpus of 110 comments from these pages. The comments were selected using a purposive sampling technique, focusing on posts that generated high levels of interaction and elicited strong emotional responses from users (Palys, 2008). All comments under each high-interaction post were included in the corpus to ensure a comprehensive dataset. The collected data were then analysed using a coding scheme based on the types and intensities of linguistic violence, such as abusive language, hate speech, and cyberbullying. The coding scheme was developed in line with the theoretical framework of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), focusing on the identification of face-

threatening acts (FTAs) in the comments. The language of the comments was predominantly English, with some instances of code-switching between English and French, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the Cameroonian context.

1.3. Conceptual Framework

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is a sociolinguistic theory that focuses on the concept of 'face', which is an individual's social value that comes under risk during interactions, resulting in face-threatening acts (FTAs). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), "face consists of two related aspects: the positive face, or the desire to be liked and approved of by others, and the negative face, or the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions". The theory proposes that language can serve as a medium to preserve social equilibrium and curb potential confrontations. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory has been influential in the field of sociolinguistics and has been used to study politeness across cultures. Other scholars have also contributed to the development of the theory, such as Watts (2003), Ide (1989), and Gu (1990). The theory has been applied to various fields, such as psychology, communication, and education.

Linguistic violence, broadly defined, refers to the strategic use of language to violate, belittle, or disparage another's identity or reputation. Often, this humiliating language constitutes an act that threatens the 'face' of others, infringing on their rights, or compelling them into uncomfortable situations, thereby termed as face-threatening acts (FTAs). The emergence of social media pages, especially Facebook, with vast worldwide connectivity has amplified these issues. In the context of the politeness theory, social media pages like Facebook put users in a unique position where they can afford to either show politeness or resort to rudeness without fearing direct confrontations. The freedom, anonymity, and distance

provided by these pages often result in FTAs where statements can be intentionally or unintentionally designed to attack, defame, or insult others, resulting in linguistic violence. The Facebook pages in focus have varying objectives, ranging from political and social news dissemination (Mimi Mefo Info, Cameroon News Agency) to sports conversations and (ADE Divine), attracting distinct follower demographics.

2. Analysis

2.1. Types of Linguistic Violence

In the corpus of comments from the three Facebook pages (ADE Divine, CNA, and MMI), we can identify several types of linguistic violence, including abusive language, hate speech, and cyber bullying.

Table 1: Type of Linguistic Violence

Type of Linguistic Violence		Frequency
Abusive Language		35
Hate Speech		25
Cyberbullying		50
Total		110

The data reveals a concerning prevalence of linguistic violence on these Cameroonian Facebook pages, with cyberbullying being the most common form encountered (50 instances). Notably, hate speech, despite being less frequent (25 instances), still represents a significant presence. It is important to note that the categories presented in the table are not mutually exclusive, as some comments exhibited characteristics of both abusive language and hate speech. The researchers' coding scheme accounted for the possibility of overlap between these categories, distinguishing them based on the

intensity and target of the linguistic violence. Abusive language was characterized by the use of demeaning, derogatory, or profane language directed at individuals, while hate speech involved the use of biased, prejudiced, or dehumanizing language targeting specific groups or communities. This approach provided a deeper understanding of the linguistic violence present in the data.

2.1.1. Abusive language

Abusive language, characterized by the use of offensive words or phrases to demean or belittle someone, is a prevalent form of linguistic violence in the examined corpus. Here are the rewritten and analyzed comments:

Comment ADE_7: “The decision to substitute Onana for Ondoa was the most amusing spectacle I have witnessed twice.” This comment uses sarcasm as a form of linguistic violence, subtly mocking the decision to substitute one player for another.

Comment ADE_3: “Are you aware of South Korea’s recent nuclear fusion experiment? I understand it achieved temperatures surpassing that of the sun.” This comment, while not overtly abusive, could potentially be seen as a sarcastic remark with a hyperbolic tone.

Comment CNA_35: “Song, I suggest you consider reducing your consumption of marijuana; it might improve your reasoning. You’re embarrassing people with your poor command of Pidgin.” This comment employs direct insults and demeaning language, a clear example of abusive language.

Comment MMI_5: “They seem to desire more bloodshed in the name of warfare... God is watching.” This comment uses

metaphorical language to express disapproval and condemnation, implying a form of linguistic violence.

The above instances show that abusive language on Cameroonian Facebook pages are multi-layered, ranging from direct insults to more subtle forms like sarcasm and metaphorical language.

2.1.2. Hate Speech

Hate speech involves the use of language to express prejudice or discrimination against a particular group of people based on their race, religion, ethnicity, or other social characteristics. Examples from the corpus include:

Comment CNA_25: “Imposing taxes on people while the BETI, BULU & EKANG embezzle money with full confidence knowing that nothing will happen to them because their brother is in power. Nemesis will catch them this particular year.” This statement employs harmful generalizations and negative stereotypes against certain ethnic groups, suggesting a link between ethnicity and corruption. It also carries a veiled threat, potentially inciting violence.

Comment CNA_36: “This life no balance. Lawlessness in LRC has become a Law, At the eave of the collapse of most dictatorial regime. Everything start to fall apart including body part.” This comment contains hate speech, expressing strong dislike and criticism towards the regime in place.

Comment MMI_46: “Religion of peace always fighting war. In Gaza they are reaping what they sowed. What an Islamic scholastic bombastic cataclysmic holocaust.” This statement generalizes about an entire religious group, associating them with negativity and violence. It uses historically loaded terms like "holocaust" in an offensive manner.

Comment MMI_32: “The highest witchcraft is the Cameroon Government.” labeling the Cameroon government as “witchcraft” might incite harmful stereotypes and negative perceptions.

2.1.3. Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying involves the use of digital communication tools to harass, intimidate, or harm someone. It can take many forms, including personal attacks, threats, or spreading rumors. Examples from the corpus include:

Comment CNA_22: “After punishment, what next... they will soon be out of time. Will their sanctions reduce Cameroon’s problem?” This comment expresses frustration and criticism towards the authority. The tone and phrasing could be interpreted as a form of cyber bullying, since it belittles the importance of punishment and sanctions put in place by the authority.

Comment MMI_15: “You know how many times Ni John be morn big pa e own for Ntarinkon? We waka all round town with coffin and die rat inside. Last last Ni die, pa still deh di brush two mop.” This comment is a personal attack on ‘Ni John’, using metaphorical language to mock and belittle him.

2.2. Variations in Intensity of Linguistic Violence

The intensity of linguistic violence in the corpus varies based on several factors, including the topic of discussion, the target of the comment, and the context of the interaction.

2.2.1. Topic of Discussion

The topic of discussion can significantly influence the intensity of linguistic violence. For instance, comments related to politics or

controversial issues tend to exhibit higher levels of linguistic violence.

Comment CNA_25: “Imposing taxes on people while the BETI, BULU & EKANG embezzle money with full confidence knowing that nothing will happen to them because their brother is in power. Nemesis will catch them this particular year.” This comment is a clear example of linguistic violence, expressing strong resentment and accusations towards specific ethnic groups and the ruling power. The language used is aggressive and confrontational, reflecting the user’s anger and frustration.

Comment MMI_32: “The highest witchcraft is the Cameroon Government.” This comment, while metaphorical, is a severe critique of the Cameroon Government, equating it with witchcraft. It reflects a deep-seated dissatisfaction and mistrust towards the government, a form of linguistic violence that can contribute to a hostile online environment.

2.2.2. Target of the Comment

The target of the comment also plays a role in determining the intensity of linguistic violence. Comments directed at public figures or groups often contain more intense linguistic violence compared to those directed at individuals.

Comment ADE_8: “Honestly that una coach is clueless. But I don’t blame being given a chance as indigenious, just as the Senegalese coach. Better luck next time though.” This comment targets a public figure, the coach, and uses a dismissive tone to belittle his abilities. The language used is less aggressive but still constitutes a form of linguistic violence.

Comment MMI_46: “Religion of peace always fighting war. In Gaza they are reaping what they sowed. What an Islamic scholastic bombastic cataclysmic holocaust.” This comment targets a religious group and uses strong, provocative language. The use of hyperbolic and derogatory terms constitutes a severe form of linguistic violence.

2.2.3. Context of Interaction

The data collected from the ADE Divine Facebook page reveals a diverse range of comments, some of which exhibit linguistic violence in varying degrees. The comments cover a wide spectrum, from playful banter to more aggressive and abusive language. In terms of the thematic context, many of the comments are related to football and Cameroonian national teams, reflecting the high level of interest and passion for the sport among the page's users. The temporal context also plays a significant role, as several comments were posted during or immediately after important football matches, which can heighten emotions and lead to more intense linguistic interactions.

For example, comment 7 - "Benching ONANA against ONDOA is the greatest funny show I ever watched twice" - and comment 8 - "Honestly that una coach is clueless. But I don't blame being given a chance as indigenous, just as the Senegalese coach. Better luck next time though" - both demonstrate a level of frustration and criticism towards the team's management and coaching decisions, which may have been exacerbated by the immediate context of a match result.

Similarly, comments 22-23 - "I like Cameroonians. We all suffer from bipolar. It's just a matter of time before Epassy becomes the villain too" and "Please stop making noise we are trying to concentrate on epassy" - reflect the emotional rollercoaster

experienced by fans, who can quickly shift between praise and criticism of individual players and the team's performance.

The data also includes instances of more explicit linguistic violence, such as comment 1 - "Thank you for this salt wey you di add'am for the injury" - which uses abusive language and metaphors to criticize a player's injury. Similarly, comment 12 - "If Nigeria try win this Match, Anthony Joshua will auffor in Nannnniún" - employs hyperbolic and potentially derogatory language to express frustration with the team's performance.

These examples demonstrate that the context, both thematic and temporal, can significantly influence the intensity and nature of linguistic violence observed in the comments. Understanding these contextual factors is crucial in developing effective strategies to address and mitigate the prevalence of linguistic violence on social media platforms like the ADE Divine Facebook page.

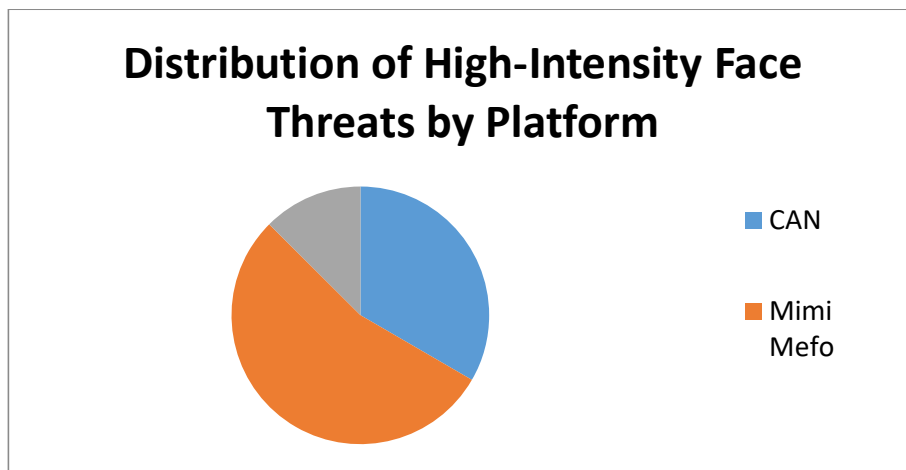


Figure 1: Distribution of High-Intensity Face Threats by Platform

This analysis provides an overview of the occurrence and nature of these positive face FTAs in different Cameroonian pages whose distribution of high intensity threats have been identified above as

CNA: 8 (33.33%), Mimi Mefo: 13 (54.17%) and ADE Divine: 3 (12.50%).

2.2.4. High-Intensity FTAs:

High-intensity FTAs are characterized by their explicit aggression and blatant attacks on the target's face. These comments directly challenge the target's positive face (their need to be appreciated) and negative face (their freedom from imposition), often invoking strong emotional reactions and the potential for further conflict. For instance, on Mimi Mefo, (Comment #5) reads: *Bec they want more blood to drink in the name of fighting war...Ana God di wait una.* (Because they want more blood to drink in the name of fighting war... God is waiting for you.)

This explicit threat invokes divine punishment, directly attacking the hearer's positive face (need to be appreciated) and potentially invoking fear (negative face threat). Its intensity stems from the blatant aggression and religious reference.

CNA (Comment #25)

Imposing taxes on people while the BETI, BULU & EKANG embezzle money with full confidence knowing that nothing will happen to them because their brother is in power. Nemesis will catch them this particular year.

This comment employs ethnic slurs and accuses specific groups of corruption, directly attacking both their positive face (reputation) and negative face (freedom from imposition). The intensity arises from the targeted nature of the attack and the implied threat of future retribution.

2.2.5. Moderate-Intensity FTAs:

Moderate-intensity FTAs exhibit a more subtle level of linguistic violence, often using indirect criticism or moral judgment to

pressure the target to conform to specific expectations. While less overt than high-intensity FTAs, these comments can still have a significant impact on the target's social standing and face. For example, Mimi Mefo (Comment #10) says: *Les enfants de Chantal enjoy le palais et la présidence mieux que Brenda et son jeune frère.* (Chantal's children enjoy the palace and presidency more than Brenda and her younger brother.)

This seemingly neutral statement compares lifestyles, potentially implying unfair privileges and creating social pressure on the individuals mentioned. The moderate intensity stems from the indirect criticism and its potential to damage social standing.

ADE Divine (Comment #18)

Mathias Pogba should develop the attitude of gratitude... He should be remorseful for this act.

This statement employs moral judgment and implies wrongdoing, pressuring the individual to conform to specific expectations. The moderate intensity arises from the subtle shaming and attempt to control the hearer's behaviour.

2.2.6. Low-Intensity FTAs:

Low-intensity FTAs are characterized by their ambiguity and dependence on interpretation. These comments may unintentionally damage the target's face, but their lack of overt aggression makes them less explicitly violent than the high and moderate-intensity examples. An illustration of a low-intensity FTA is comment #43 from Mimi Mefo: *Bobda is a gentle man with no blame, all the videos and pictures we can see how happy those girls with him are, they only complain after kick out, not achieving what let them to him, even with all the complaints girls are still flowing around him* This comment defends an individual while potentially implying negative motivations for the complainants. The low intensity stems

from the ambiguity and its dependence on interpretation, but it might unintentionally damage the complainants' face.

2.3. Linguistic Strategies in Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Online communication poses unique challenges for maintaining a respectful and harmonious interaction between interlocutors. Without the presence of physical and social cues, online users may resort to language that threatens or damages the positive face of others. Positive face refers to the desire to be liked, appreciated, and approved by others. This analysis explores two types of face-threatening acts (FTAs) that target the positive face of the hearer: bald on-record and off-record threats. Bald on-record threats are clear and direct forms of verbal aggression, such as insults, accusations, or threats that do not mince words or show any regard for the hearer's feelings. Off-record threats are more indirect and subtle forms of verbal aggression, such as sarcasm, irony, or humour that imply a negative message or attitude towards the hearer. These off-record threats can be more difficult to detect and respond to, as they often depend on contextual and cultural knowledge.

In the corpus of comments from the three Facebook pages (ADE Divine, CNA, and MMI), we can identify several linguistic strategies employed in the FTAs. These strategies can impact the face (positive or negative) of the speaker and the hearer.

Category	Count	Percentage
Positive Face Threats	51	46.36%
Insults/Name-calling	29	26.36%
Threats/Harm	1	0.91%
Humiliation/Degradation	21	19.09%
Negative Face Threats	5	4.55%
Impositions/Demands	0	0.00%
Threats/Commands	0	0.00%

2.3.1. Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness strategies are used to minimize the threat to the hearer's positive face, or their desire to be liked and approved by others. These strategies often involve expressions of solidarity or compliments. For instance:

Comment ADE_10: "It's obvious his contribution rate to Super eagle's success is even 9... I know players like him may not hit the net but will put opposition under pressure throughout a game. Kudos to the African king."

This comment employs positive politeness by expressing appreciation and admiration for the player's contributions, even if they may not have scored goals. The use of the term "African king" is a compliment that elevates the player's status and shows solidarity with their identity.

Comment CNA_41: "This Malachi guy is one of, if not the best minister in Cameroon. Have been following up this dude for some time now. Very bilingual and fluent in both English and French, always available with the press to give an update of any public incident regarding health and hospitals like the case of the pregnant woman in Douala. More grace to you Sir and God bless you for the job you are doing."

This comment also uses positive politeness strategies, such as praising the minister's abilities and language skills, as well as expressing appreciation for their work and invoking blessings. These expressions serve to enhance the target's positive face by highlighting their positive qualities and reinforcing their status and importance.

Comment MMI_12: "This is humility!! This is realness!! This is the man of the season!! There is plenty to learn from

him. With all the Wealth he chose to be real!! No faking. Some people with a couple pounds in their accounts will be renting hotels, trying to live lavishly to please a people who are only interested in what they see on the media and nothing beyond that."

In this comment, the use of exclamations and superlatives, such as "This is humility!!" and "the man of the season," convey admiration and respect for the individual being discussed. The contrast drawn between the target's humility and the ostentatious behavior of others further strengthens the positive politeness strategy by highlighting the target's virtues.

Through these positive politeness strategies, the commenters aim to mitigate the potential threat to the targets' positive face and promote a sense of solidarity and appreciation, even in the context of a social media platform where linguistic violence may be more prevalent.

2.3.2. Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness strategies are used to minimize the threat to the hearer's negative face, or their desire to be autonomous and free from imposition. These strategies often involve indirectness or hedging. For instance:

Comment ADE_8: "Honestly that una coach is clueless. But I don't blame being given a chance as indigenous, just as the Senegalese coach. Better luck next time though."

Comment CNA_22: "After punishment, what next... they will soon be out of time. Will their sanctions reduce Cameroon's problem?"

Comment MMI_1: "Cameroon again on the spotlight for negative energy."

Mimi Mefo (Comment #36)

God shouldn't allowed Eto to roll this beautiful Continent Cameroon, Eto politics might be worst than that of president Paul Biya, let Paul Biya roll for the next 1000 years, Eto might be dangerous, he is full of tribalism.

This comment employs name-calling ("dangerous") and negative attributions ("tribalism") towards a specific individual (Eto'o). It also indirectly insults the hearer by suggesting their preferred candidate is worse than the current leader. This constitutes a moderate-intensity bald FTA, attacking the individual's reputation and positive face needs.

2.3.3 Off-Record Strategies

Off-record strategies are indirect speech acts that allow the speaker to avoid direct responsibility for the face-threatening act. These strategies often involve sarcasm, irony, or metaphors. For instance:

Comment ADE_1: "Thank you for this salt wey you di add'am for the injury."

Comment CNA_35: "Song abeg try reduce the rate way u di smoke mbanga maybe u go get sense. Waka di disgrace people them with pidgin whe you no know."

Comment MMI_5: "Bec they want more blood to drink in the name of fighting war...Ana God di wait una."

CNA (Comment #3)

And recently the Cameroon officials voted Yaoundé as the cleanest city in Cameroon. (said sarcastically)

This sarcastic statement mocks the officials' decision, implying it is untrue or based on self-serving interests. It constitutes a low-intensity off-record FTA, indirectly criticizing the hearer's actions and undermining their positive face.

Mimi Mefo (Comment #13)

Really funny, the kids are happy seeing their uncle, and playing with him. (regarding a politician visiting children)

This seemingly positive statement uses humor to mock the politician's actions, implying they are superficial or performative. This constitutes a low-intensity off-record FTA, indirectly criticizing the hearer's behavior and potentially damaging their positive face.

ADE Divine (Comment #12)

No one forced Njie to sign for Cameroon. (regarding the player's performance)

This seemingly neutral statement implies the player is responsible for his own performance, potentially shifting blame away from coaches or the system. This constitutes a low-intensity off-record FTA, indirectly criticizing the player's performance and challenging his positive face.

These examples highlight the diverse nature of FTAs used across the pages. Bald FTAs often involve direct insults and threats, while off-record FTAs employ sarcasm, humor, or seemingly neutral statements to indirectly criticize or mock the hearer. The intensity of the FTAs varies depending on the platform, topic, and specific language used.

Platform Affordances and Influences:

Platform	Anonymity	Moderation	Positive Face Threats (Count)	Negative Face Threats (Count)	Total Face Threats (Count)
CNA	Yes	Moderate	14	2	16
Mimi Mefo	Yes	Loose	22	3	25
ADE Divine	Yes	Strict	15	0	15

Pages with stricter moderation, like ADE Divine, had fewer FTAs, suggesting moderation impacts online behavior. Conversely, anonymity may embolden users to express themselves more aggressively. These findings can inform future regulation and policy efforts to combat linguistic violence on social media. This implies that policymakers and platform developers could implement more effective systems to foster inclusive and respectful digital environments, if they recognize the role of moderation in mitigating FTAs.

3. Findings

3.1. Prevalence and Variability of Linguistic Violence

The analysis of the comments from the three Facebook pages (ADE Divine, CNA, and MMI) reveals a high prevalence of linguistic violence. The majority of the comments contained some form of negative or critical language, indicating a widespread use of linguistic violence in these online interactions.

The intensity and type of linguistic violence varied across the comments, influenced by factors such as the topic of discussion, the target of the comment, and the context of the interaction. For instance, comments related to politics or controversial issues tended to exhibit higher levels of linguistic violence, while comments directed at public figures or groups often contained more intense linguistic violence compared to those directed at individuals.

3.2. Impact of Linguistic Violence on Face, Identity, or Well-being

Table 2 : Impact of Linguistic Violence

Impact of Linguistic Violence		Example Comment
Impact on Face		CNA_25
Impact on Identity		MMI_32
Impact on Well-being		ADE_8

The linguistic violence observed in the comments can have detrimental effects on the face, identity, or well-being of the individuals involved.

3.2.1. Impact on Face

The Politeness Theory concept of positive face, which refers to an individual's desire to be respected and appreciated by others, is often threatened by linguistic violence. This can be seen in the comment CNA_25: "If we stay silent we are part of the conspiracy. I applaud this courageous lady. Doing what many can't do. Normally the public should stand by and defend this lady. She must be protected." This comment directly praises the target's actions, but in doing so, it also implies that the target's reputation and social standing are being publicly scrutinized and criticized, potentially threatening their positive face.

3.2.2. Impact on Identity

Linguistic violence can also target an individual's sense of identity and belonging, as illustrated by the comment MMI_32: "The highest witchcraft is the Cameroon Government." This comment associates the government with the negative and derogatory term "witchcraft," which can undermine the target's sense of belonging and legitimacy within the social and political context. Such linguistic violence can lead to feelings of marginalization and disempowerment, directly impacting the target's identity.

3.2.3. Impact on Well-being

The use of linguistic violence in the form of direct criticism or insults can also have a detrimental effect on an individual's emotional well-being. The comment ADE_8 exemplifies this: "Honestly that una coach is clueless. But I don't blame being given

a chance as indigenous, just as the Senegalese coach. Better luck next time though." This comment employs a dismissive and derogatory tone, which can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, shame, and decreased self-worth in the target. Such emotional distress can have significant implications for the individual's overall well-being.

4. Discussion

The findings from the analysis of the comments on the three Facebook pages (ADE Divine, CNA, and MMI) suggest that individuals strive to maintain their 'face' or public self-image during interactions. In this context, 'face' refers to the positive social value a person effectively claims for themselves in a given interaction, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). A stark reality revealed by the analysis is the pervasive presence of abusive language and direct threats. Insults, profanity, and dehumanizing rhetoric were commonplace, targeting both individuals and specific groups. Examining the frequency of these occurrences across topics and pages highlights significant variations. For instance, comments on political discussions displayed the highest concentration of overt aggression, while entertainment-focused pages exhibited lower rates. Beyond the blatant hostility, the data reveals a nuanced and often insidious use of indirect face-threatening acts (FTAs). Sarcasm, passive-aggressive remarks, and veiled threats emerged as frequent strategies employed to undermine the addressee's positive face (self-esteem, social identity) or negative face (freedom of action, non-imposition). This underscores the complex interplay between politeness theory and linguistic violence, where seemingly innocuous language can inflict significant social harm.

4.1. Causes and Consequences of Linguistic Violence in the Cameroonian Context

The persistent use of linguistic violence on these Cameroonian Facebook pages has significant social consequences. The findings clearly indicate that online communities can become fragmented and hostile, with users resorting to exclusion and ostracisation of those perceived as different or threatening. This digital polarization hinders constructive dialogue and erodes the sense of online common ground (Tamfuh, 2022). Furthermore, the study reveals a direct link between linguistic violence and mental health. Victims of repeated face threats and online aggression experience emotional distress, decreased self-esteem, and a sense of social isolation (Ngwainmbi, 2019). This psychological impact of online hostility is a crucial concern that must be addressed to promote responsible online communication and safeguard user well-being. Existing literature on the Cameroonian context corroborates these findings. Studies have consistently demonstrated the detrimental effects of linguistic violence, with victims reporting elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. The causal relationships between language use, community dynamics, and mental health outcomes are well-established in this body of research. In conclusion, the use of linguistic violence on Cameroonian social media has clear and significant consequences. It contributes to the fragmentation of online communities and imposes serious psychological harm on victims. Addressing this issue is essential for fostering healthy, inclusive, and constructive digital spaces in the Cameroonian context.

4.2. Triggers and Escalators of Conflicts Arising from Linguistic Violence

The analysis reveals several potential triggers and escalators of conflicts arising from linguistic violence. These include the use of

direct criticism, hate speech, and abusive language, which can provoke or escalate conflicts among users. The intensity of the linguistic violence, as well as the topic, target, and context of the interaction, can also influence the likelihood and severity of conflicts. These findings have broader implications for online communities. They highlight the need for effective moderation policies and interventions to mitigate the impact of linguistic violence and promote positive and respectful interactions. They also underscore the importance of understanding the triggers and escalators of conflicts in order to prevent or manage them effectively. This is particularly crucial given the potential societal harms of linguistic violence, including the exacerbation of social divisions and conflicts.

5. Conclusion

This study examines linguistic violence as manifested in the comments on three Facebook pages (ADE Divine, CNA, and MMI). The findings reveal a high prevalence of linguistic violence, with variations in intensity based on factors such as the topic of discussion, the target of the comment, and the context of the interaction. The study concludes that linguistic violence, through its various forms such as abusive language, hate speech, and cyber bullying, poses a serious social problem, impacting the face, identity, or well-being of the individuals involved. To mitigate the impact of linguistic violence on social media, several measures are recommended. First, social media pages should implement more effective moderation policies to identify and remove instances of linguistic violence. Second, authorities should consider legislation to address online harassment and hate speech. Media organizations can play a role by promoting positive and respectful online interactions. Lastly, public education initiatives could help raise

awareness about the harmful effects of linguistic violence and encourage more respectful online communication.

The findings of this study make significant contributions to the growing body of Cameroonian research on linguistic violence and online communication. Within the local research landscape, this work builds upon and expands previous studies that have examined the psycho-social impacts of hostile language use on social media platforms in the Cameroonian context (Ngwainmbi, 2019; Tamfuh 2022). These findings are essentially contextual as Cameroonian scholars have cautioned against simplistic generalizations from Western-centric models that may overlook important local variables (Binyam, 2020). The implications of this study extend beyond the field of linguistics, showcasing its interdisciplinary relevance. Sociologists may find the findings on online community fragmentation and digital polarisation particularly relevant, as they echo concerns raised in Bail's (2023), which challenges myths about echo chambers and reveals solutions to political tribalism by exploring innovative online experiments and in-depth interviews with social media users. Psychologists, in turn, will likely be interested in the well-documented links between linguistic violence and individual mental health outcomes, which can inform their understanding of the psychological impacts of online hostility. For educators in Cameroon, this study underscores the pressing need to integrate digital citizenship and media literacy components into school curricula, empowering students with the skills to navigate online spaces respectfully and constructively. Communication professionals, too, can leverage these insights to promote positive online discourse and foster more inclusive, cohesive digital communities within the Cameroonian context. In summary, this study's contributions are multifaceted, addressing pressing concerns

within the Cameroonian research landscape while also resonating with global scholarly conversations.

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Appendices

Data Collected from Facebook Pages

ADE Divine Comments

- Comment ADE_7: "The decision to substitute Onana for Ondo was the most amusing spectacle I have witnessed twice."
- Comment ADE_3: "Are you aware of South Korea's recent nuclear fusion experiment? I understand it achieved temperatures surpassing that of the sun."
- Comment ADE_8: "Honestly that una coach is clueless. But I don't blame being given a chance as indigenous, just as the Senegalese coach. Better luck next time though."

- Comment ADE_10: "It's obvious his contribution rate to Super eagle's success is even 9... I know players like him may not hit the net but will put opposition under pressure throughout a game. Kudos to the African king."
- Comment ADE_12: "No one forced Njie to sign for Cameroon."

CNA Comments

- Comment CNA_22: "After punishment, what next... they will soon be out of time. Will their sanctions reduce Cameroon's problem?"
- Comment CNA_25: "Imposing taxes on people while the BETI, BULU & EKANG embezzle money with full confidence knowing that nothing will happen to them because their brother is in power. Nemesis will catch them this particular year."
- Comment CNA_35: "Song, I suggest you consider reducing your consumption of marijuana; it might improve your reasoning. You're embarrassing people with your poor command of Pidgin."
- Comment CNA_36: "This life no balance. Lawlessness in LRC has become a Law, At the eve of the collapse of most dictatorial regime. Everything start to fall apart including body part."
- Comment CNA_41: "This Malachi guy is one of, if not the best minister in Cameroon. Have been following up this dude for some time now. Very bilingual and fluent in both English and French, always available with the press to give an update of any public incident regarding health and hospitals like the case of the pregnant woman in Douala. More grace to you Sir and God bless you for the job you are doing."

MMI Comments

- Comment MMI_5: "They seem to desire more bloodshed in the name of warfare... God is watching."
- Comment MMI_12: "This is humility!! This is realness!! This is the man of the season!! There is plenty to learn from him. With all the Wealth he chose to be real!! No faking. Some people with a couple pounds in their accounts will be renting hotels, trying to

live lavishly to please a people who are only interested in what they see on the media and nothing beyond that."

- Comment MMI_13: "Really funny, the kids are happy seeing their uncle, and playing with him.(regarding a politician visiting children)"
- Comment MMI_15: "You know how many times Ni John be morn big pa e own for Ntarinkon? We waka all round town with coffin and die rat inside. Last last Ni die, pa still deh di brush two mop."
- Comment MMI_32: "The highest witchcraft is the Cameroon Government."
- Comment MMI_36: "God shouldn't allowed Eto to roll this beautiful Continent Cameroon, Eto politics might be worst than that of president Paul Biya, let Paul Biya roll for the next 1000 years, Eto might be dangerous, he is full of tribalism."