

Newspapers' Languages and Imagery Description of Issues Related to Public Accountability in Cameroon Between 2016 and 2020

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Abstract— Mass media in general and newspapers in particular have played a major role in Cameroon before and after the advent of democracy. They have advocated for civil rights, liberties, and for the freedom of the press. This study set out to investigate how Cameroon English newspapers have made the government of Cameroon accountable to the public from 2016 to 2020. How do The Post, The Guardian Post and The Sun Newspapers use language and imagery to describe issues related to public accountability in Cameroon from 2016 to 2020? The study was supported by the framing theory. The research design used in this study is a qualitative case study and a qualitative content analysis. Data triangulation was achieved by using different newspapers and three English-speaking newspapers were purposefully selected for the study. This decision was motivated by the availability of data. Altogether, 868 issues and 14576 articles were examined. Content analysis of newspapers follows the thematic approach was done with the support of Atlas ti 5.0. The findings revealed that inadequate journalistic practices outweigh the good practices with weight of 30.86% as against 9.7%. The type of inadequate reporting language used ranged from non-partisan, analytical reporting, people-oriented, multi-party orientation, ethical language, use of images support, objective critics of rumours, corrigendum and recapitulation. These language styles were attributed to good journalistic practices. In the other side, the opposite was attributed to inadequate journalistic practices and ranged from partisan, crude reporting, elite oriented, unilateral reporting, unethical language and forth-looking reporting. Newspapers highlighted negative practices or aspects of bad governance more that good governance with weight of 11.95% against 6.22% respectively for bad governance practices and good governance practices.

Keywords— Newspapers, public accountability, language; reporting, Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

The following is an excerpt by Thomas Jefferson, where he shared his point of view about the role of journalism in a democracy: "...Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." More than a century later, President John F. Kennedy was asked by NBC, during a December 1962 interview, whether he was as avid a news reader as he had been before entering The White House. Kennedy replied, "Even though we never like it, and even though we wish they didn't write it, and even though we disapprove, there isn't any doubt that we could not do the job at all in a free society without a very, very active press."

The term "Fourth Estate"—often attributed to 18th-century British statesman Edmund Burke who praised the mission of the press gallery during a parliamentary debate—refers to the press serving as the fourth branch of a democratic government, keeping citizens informed and observing the political process as an additional check on government. This role of the watchdog of power is enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which recommends that, Congress shall

make no law abridging freedom of the press. It implies that media have acquired the capacity over the years to question government authorities by exposing what they are doing to the public and raising alarm about just how their actions constitute a setback to the evolution of democracy. This is to say that the culture of media freedom and the existence of media in a democracy has an important implication on the development of democratic values in a society. This study therefore aims to investigate the role of private print media in a democracy, most especially in the effectiveness of the principle of public accountability. It is focuses on examining the various and changing roles of Cameroon's private print media as one of the social and political forces acting in the democratization process of the Cameroonian society. It focuses on the role of the private print media during the period of 2016 to 2020, that is, twenty years after the 1990 laws (Law No. 90/052 regulating the press), where we can still identify a conflicting relationship between the media and the government that has witnessed the sometimes-arbitrary arrest and incarceration of many journalists by the state.

Our focus will be on the English language media and more precisely on the private print media. Private print

media have been selected because they have been instrumental in the promotion of democracy in Cameroon especially during the turbulent period of the 1990's and 2016's where they played a determinant role in the advancement of democracy in Cameroon.

Media as Instrument of Public Accountability

The advent of an information society in Cameroon, has shown that there is a deep deficit of faith and credibility in the formal institutions of governance. Reform of our public institutions, democratic responsibility and to rational conduct by our State actors are depending on citizens holding institutions and incumbents accountable. This is achieved only by knowledge and continuous and detailed information. Maintaining peace and equanimity of the social order, developing an equitable development and progress in our large, complex and deeply plural society, making our public institutions effective and accountable, reforming our malfunctioning public services and disciplining delinquent public actors, requires an adequately informed citizenry. This is where the media comes in.

Because we are living in a dynamic society, that is a fast-changing society, citizen have been driven by the need for accurate and reliable information, that helps them sustain their existence in a challenging natural and societal environment. Today, professional media outlets, have the awesome, onerous and continuous responsibility of informing democratic society of its obligations and rights, of its essential sovereignty and of the unvarnished anatomy of their public institutions, is an important asset. Judge Learned Hand expressed the critical role of the media when he observed: The hand that rules the press, the radio, and the far-spread magazine, rules the country (extracted from Gary A. Hengstler - The Media's role in changing the face of U.S. Courts,)

The continuity of human social existence is functional of the type of news disseminated in the society. This is because news are an important component of the society as they permit us to live and associate ourselves together irrespective of the communities we live in. This is because information permit citizen to know their liberties and therefore to fight to have control over the systems and institutions of states governing their lives. Journalism is the medium and the system societies generate to supply news. Therefore, the character and integrity of the news and the institutions of journalism are of critical concern. Journalism influences the quality of our lives, moulds our thoughts and indexes our culture. It provides a unique component to our culture – independent, reliable, accurate and comprehensive information that we as citizens require, to be free.

Journalism which provides something other than the above characteristics is a threat to democratic culture. History verifies this reality. From the Roman empire through Nazi Germany, the former Soviet Union, the Middle-eastern monarchies, dictatorships old and new, fundamentalist States and young democracies like African states, reinforce the fact that distorted journalistic values, whether the distortion be on account of external control or internal pathology, subvert cultures, enfeeble the population, promote inequality, and sooner than later, contribute to the downfall and decline of society.

In other places like western societies, news is controlled to encourage capitalism. Such societies according to Waisbord (2000) corporatized Media prioritizes ownership interests to individual liberties and to sustainable development or to the living index of the most disadvantaged, under-privileged and the relatively oppressed sections of our population. Corporatized Media and its associated pathology started in the United States in a more purely commercial form. This view is equally shared by Noam Chomsky (2013) when he says that news outlets owned by large corporations are employed to promote their conglomerate parent's products, to engage in subtle lobbying or corporate rivalry; or are intermingled with crass advertising to boost profits. This pathology becomes exponentially malignant when the corporatized media house or group owes loyalty to a broad political formulation. When this happens political discourse in the society which is the lifeblood of a democracy becomes garbled, incoherent, slanted and wholly distorted.

Media are called the fourth estate of democracy. This is because of the power it wields and the oversight function it exercises. The other three great estates are the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. These three Estates are accountable to the public and there are entrenched rules that define and execute this accountability. The Fourth Estate is equally vital and its effective functioning is of critical concern to the survival of democracy.

In this sense the Fourth Estate is to make the other three estates accountable to the public. What are the norms that define this accountability and how the accountability is to be enforced, should the need arise, are deeply problematic and contestable areas? But this much is indisputable. Media which exercises enormous influence to shape the contours of democracy, exercises its role in the name of the people. It should work for the people and is liable to be controlled by the people. At an empirical level what is at stake in defining the public accountability is the issue whether as citizens we have

access to independent, reliable information that makes it possible for us to effectively govern ourselves.

Media shapes public opinion but is in turn influenced and often manipulated by different interest groups in the society. Media can promote democracy by educating voters, protecting human rights, promoting tolerance and accommodation amongst social groups and ensuring that governments are transparent and accountable. When Transparency International (TI) crowned Cameroon with the demean title of the most corrupt country in the world in 1998 and 1999, the country's leadership was shocked upon receiving such scandalous news. The Prime Minister, Peter Mafany Musonge swore to fight this quandary in every sector of the socio-economic and political milieu. Tanjong (2009), on the role of the media in the fight against corruption, discovered that newspapers were considered as the most active medium in the fight while the private media were more dynamic than the public media in this endeavour. He concluded that private newspapers were the most institution in Cameroon in the fight against corruption. It tells us a lot about the role private media are expected to play in nurturing democracy and public accountability in Cameroon.

Media can play anti-democratic roles as well. They can inject or promote fear, division and violence and thus instead of promoting democracy, can contribute to democratic decay.

A fearless and effective watchdog is critical in fledgling democracies where institutions are weak, homo-centric and persuaded by political pressure. When legislators, judiciaries and other oversight bodies are powerless against the mighty or are themselves corruptible, media is often the only check against abuse of power. To efficiently deliver upon this role media must play a heroic role, exposing the deficiencies, the excesses or the delinquencies of legislators, bureaucrats or magistrates, despite the risks. A watchdog private press is the guardian of public interest, warning citizens against those who are doing them harm. Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureate, ascribed to the Press, cleansing powers and outlined the need for transparency guarantees such as a free Press and flow of information. Sen argued that information and critical public discussion are an inescapable and important requirement of good public policy and the private media have a clear instrumental role in preventing corruption, financial irresponsibility and under-hand dealings. There are many good practices whereby the media promotes democracy and good governance by pursuing neutral, professional and integrity based investigative reporting.

The media serves as a watchdog and investigative reporting on corruption, human rights violations and other forms of wrongdoing help build a culture of accountability in government and strengthen democracies. Serious investigative reporting must however not be confused with flippancy, disproportionate sensationalism or disguised blackmail. Nor is it a one-time affair. The investigation must be clear, penetrating, continuous; and be pursued to the logical conclusion of ferreting out the facts of the wrongdoing.

Media Content and Their Representations

In liberal democracies, the elites are involved in the ownership pattern of mass media mainly because they want to expand their control over the media and more precisely because they want the mass media to emphasize only the positive side of their actions. The main objective is for the media to legitimate their status in the society and to justify the status of the social institutions legitimizing their positions. Following this perspective exposes a focus on the relationship existing between media content and the social structure of the society. Media representations, particularly those depicting gender, ethnicity, and class, reflect the influence of power and influence the thoughts and actions of individuals (Hall, 1997).

Media representation therefore can be defined as the ability of media to build a version of reality which is far from the real situation at hand. It reflects the assumed growing power of the media to transform the reality by giving to it another orientation. This transformed reality is generally at the opposite end of the actual reality as lived by the masses. It is visible when looking at the difference between media report and real events taking place in the society. Lang and Lang (1953) revealed that the media were constructing ideas of public sentiment that spectators at a rally did not recognise as part of their experience of the event. Media researchers then moved to gather evidence of the influences that set the media agenda (McCombs and Shaw 1972), framed events (Reese et al 2001), and shaped public understanding. While studies on the process of framing events and news reporting continued in journalism scholarship, sociologists are interested into looking at the latent (or concealed) meanings rather than the manifest (surface level, obvious) meaning in media content.

METHODS

Aim of the study

This study stems from the fact it has been observed that most of the studies carried out in the domain of media and democracy have evolved around themes such as

media and liberties, media and development, media and national unity, media and corruption. This situation can be explained by the fact that, third world countries which are relatively newer and younger states, after their independence, have gone through a series of turbulent political events. That is, after their independence, developing countries were under the yoke of the one-party system which was totalitarian. The relationship with media was marked by tension as media practitioners, mainly private print media practitioners, had to go through a series of control steps before they could publish their stories. In the case of Cameroon, print media practitioners before the 1990 laws had to submit a copy of their newspaper to government authorities who had the power of censorship, that is, they acted as gatekeepers while the same time setting their agenda in the media. It is important to mention that the print media owners and practitioners in Cameroon participated in the struggle for the advent of democracy. So, studies done have been geared towards the axis of media and freedom, media and national development etc. Limited attention has been given to the relationship that exists between the media and public accountability in a democracy. So, this study is an effort to examine the role of the private print media in making government authorities accountable to the public.

Research design and setting of the study

For this study, there are many methods that could be employed to understand how newspapers make use of language and imagery to describe issues of public accountability in Cameroon. Qualitative content analysis was used in this study. This design emerged after several scholars (e.g., Kracauer, 1952; Mayring, 2000) criticized quantitative content analysis for overlooking several aspects of texts, namely that overemphasis on quantifying results can affect the accuracy of results and that quantification can result in overlooking the latent contexts present within the texts. Bryman (2004) notes that QCA is “probably the most prevalent approach to the qualitative analysis of documents” (p. 392). Altheide and Schneider (2013) note that there are three steps that researchers must follow when they desire to use QCA.

First, they must identify what the problem is. Identifying a specific problem is a necessary step within QCA, as it “helps inform the appropriate unit of analysis, or which portions or segments of relevant documents will actually be investigated” (p. 39). Identifying this unit of analysis is important because it will inform the rest of the research. Moreover, identifying the problem will help the researcher determine what aspects of the text should be analyzed. The second step that researchers must

follow is that they must explore different sources of information to determine which sources would be best for analysis in the study. Some sources may be better suited for analysis than otherwise. Additionally, this investigation will allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of the context of the information. For the third step in preparing to conduct QCA, researchers must examine several examples of documents to determine what the unit of analysis should be. Schreier (2012) defines the unit of analysis as “each case on which qualitative content analysis is carried out” (p.130). The analysis of the said several examples of documents will enhance the researcher’s understanding of the context within which the situation took place, as well as the process that is used when analyzing those sources. This familiarity with the process, Altheide and Schneider (2013) note, allows the researcher to be able to describe how the text was produced initially.

Participants and data collection

The population of this study is made of all English-speaking newspapers in Cameroon. This population is estimated at 18 according to Cameroon Association of English-Speaking Journalists (CAMASEJ). The informants in this research are media outlets, especially in the case of this research are The Post, the Guardian Post and the Sun newspapers. The choice of these newspapers was motivated by the fact they have been consistent during the period the study and have data available to process and analyze. Experience is the main criteria of selection of the informant because those having such numbers of years are in the position to narrate the stages through, they went through in trying to depict issues related the observance of the principle of public accountability in Cameroon and what their main issues of contention have been.

The data collection process will start with a meeting with all the newspapers officials in the study. The meeting agenda will about discuss with the editor on the nature of the study, their participations in a study, how the information given will be processed. Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of context in analyzing data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this study, data which are newspapers clips will be collected from the Post, Guardian Post and the Sun newspapers archives departments. For each of them, soft copies and newspapers clips were made available corresponding to the years of the study intends to cover.

Data Analysis Procedures

Mouton and Marais (1991) describe data analysis as the process whereby a phenomenon is broken down into its constituent parts for it to be understood better. In the social constructionist/interpretivist paradigm, the

content analysis method has become common practice (Burns, 2006). This data analysis has been used by Fatima (2016) in her study on the on journalists' democratic roles during transition in Egypt. Content analysis is described by both Schreier (2012) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) as well as organizational strategies. This organizational strategy will help to understand how The Post, Guardian Post and the Sun newspapers make use of language and imagery to make government accountable to the public. More specifically, articles from newspapers were copied and pasted in a word document. The files were now converted into a Rich Text Format (.rtf) extension recommended for Atlas.ti 5.2 software (Atlas.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, Berlin, Germany) that assisted in the analysis of this bulk of data as explained by Nana (2018). This program easily automates the coding process and examines huge amounts of data and a wider range of texts quickly and efficiently, once the coding is done. These data were analyzed using the process of thematic analysis whereby the researcher was not guided by a pre-defined code list, and the codes were gradually derived from umbrella terms that summarize the content of newspapers. The first stage consists in deciding on the level of analysis. At this level, single words, clauses, sets of words or phrases or entire articles were coded. Word Crunch integrated in the software help in sorting out desired word and at times the Cruncher integrated machine language was used to extract and ground desired words in a given article or section of the primary document. The primary documents of textual data were coded for every independent idea as it emerged from the data and for the frequency of concept occurrence following the positivism principle, but the interpretation of findings was dominantly qualitative. However, the frequency or grounding also reflects how many times a concept emerged and was a major indicator of emphasis. Precautions were taken to clearly determine the meaning of themes or umbrella term and what they stand for. In the context of this study, to satisfy this requirement, findings are organized in code-grounding-quotation tables as it is the case with the interviews. The code-quotation table ensures the objectivity and reliability of qualitative analysis in the sense that if code/concepts/umbrella terms and their descriptions can be subjective to relative error, the quotations are grounded and real and thus help compensate for potential bias (Nana, 2018).

Ethical considerations

The first step towards enhancing ethical standards is that this research will be approved by a scientific committee of the department of Sociology and Anthropology from the University of Buea. During the research process, the

following measures will be taken to ensure that ethical standards are respected. First, all participants will be provided a written consent form inviting them to participate in the study. During this process, according to Leedy (2000) the research purpose and process must be explained to participants. For this study, a written consent form was prepared and signed by the participants.

Findings

The study presents the findings from the analysis of retrospective data gathered from newspapers and analysed with the support of Atlas.ti. These are composed of qualitative tables in code-grounding-quotation tables. In this line, the selection of themes was done by identifying the most recurring themes. In other words, this was done by identifying the grounding of each them and those with the most recurrent ones and equally most pertinent were shortlisted for this analysis.

Themes

The objective examines the types of language and imagery description employed by English speaking newspapers in reporting public accountability in Cameroon between 2016 and 2020.

The findings are organized in a dialectic manner, adequate journalistic practices (Non-partisan, objective, respect of journalistic ethics, supporting images and more) in one side and inadequate journalistic practices in the other.

The code, main concepts or umbrella terms are described as to make the sense behind them well understood in the context, they are then grounded (counted for number of occurrences). The codes are supported by well-illustrative quotations.

The trend of English newspapers languages and imagery description of issues related to public accountability in Cameroon between 2016 and 2020 is presented under objective three. The variation of trend from 2016 to 2021 is presented for each of the code and for the overall composite concepts grouped as 'adequate journalistic practices' and inadequate journalistic practices'. This trend is graphically presented under objective three using line charts.

- Partisanship

In the field of journalism, it is expected from journalists to report in a neutral way. That is their report is expected to be objective and balanced. This prevents them from distorting news' items. In the case of this study, a partisan style of reporting was highly emphasized. Partisan reporting falls under inadequate journalism

practices. It is a reporting style and language that indicate a penchant for a given party. Such stance violates fundamental journalistic practices by giving a partial view of what is happening in the society. This bias form of reporting is reflected in report like the following quotation

“The ongoing Anglophone crisis has not only tainted the image of the military for its gross disrespect of human rights, but it has as well sullied anything positive about the police and the other paramilitary forces”.

Such statements clearly indicated that newspapers here adopted a partisanship reporting style. This is because though security forces committed many flaws while defending the integrity of the territory and the population, this cannot be used to conclude that the country security forces do not observe human rights laws when conducting their operations or are completely useless. Another instance of partisan reporting style can be observed in the following

“Appointing Atanga Nji, Nalova lyonga Ministers is provocation of Anglophones”

As an attempt to develop possible solutions to respond to the crisis, the government reshuffled the government by appointing the said personalities, to ministry of sovereignty like the ministry of secondary education and the ministry of territorial administration which simply means the ministry of interior. These are strategic positions. By affirming it was a provocation, these newspapers clearly indicated that they were not anymore objective in their reporting approach. This is because these appointments were made by the government as the adoption of a more inclusive society policy in which all the various strata are participating and involved in the management of state affairs.

On the other hand, non-partisanship, in journalism is a core principle which has to be observed by all members of the profession. In our case, print journalist's reports should not be skewed towards a particular interest. It can be defined as the use of language or report in a neutral way. We are expecting journalists to report on issues affecting the society without taking position and allowing the masses to make the necessary conclusions without been orientated towards a particular school of taught.

“Dion Ngute's 365 days in office: Remarkable achievements, challenges ahead”

“Chairman, National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, decrying killing, burning and kidnapping”

“Cameroon needs urgent dialogue, human rights to solve Anglophone crisis”

“Cameroon is losing huge resources to corruption”

The following quotations reflect the reality of what we are living in Cameroon. In relation to the prime minister his Excellency Dion Ngute his first year as Prime was characterised by a leadership style which opened to all the actors in the society. He made himself available to support any initiative which was to promote peace and economic development in Cameroon. For instance, it was the first time that we see his office presiding over business inauguration ceremony in the economic capital. Added to that, he met with states retired employees in order to look for a solution for issues affecting their pensions. He was involved in all the activities which could enhance Cameroon prosperity.

As for corruption, it has been an issue affecting government activities for a very long time and reporting on it is important because it is fundamentally affecting government activities. In fact, the state keeps losing a lot of financial resources because as citizens are delayed when requesting for state services because civil servants are requesting for money, in the case of economic operators, it slows and sometimes kills activities which were supposed to create wealth for the state.

In a nutshell, though these newspapers made an extensive use of non-partisan reporting style (6124 occurrences), as we can see, they made more use more of partisan reporting (7960 occurrences). This is explained by the fact they made more of inadequate journalistic practices.

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The following quotations reflect the reality of what we are living in Cameroon. As concerns the Prime Minister His Excellency Chief Dr. Joseph Dion Ngute, his first year as Prime was characterized by a leadership style which was open to all the actors in the society. He made himself available to support any initiative which aimed to promote peace and economic development in Cameroon. For instance, it was the first time that we saw the office of the Prime Minister preside over a business inauguration ceremony in the economic capital. Added to that, he met with retired state employees to seek a solution to issues affecting their pensions. He was involved in all activities which could enhance Cameroon's prosperity.

As concerns corruption, it is an issue that has negatively impacted government's activities for a very long time. Reporting on it is important because it truncates government's achievements and growth and needs to be constantly addressed. In fact, the state keeps losing huge financial resources because as citizens are delayed when requesting for state services like civil servants requesting for money, in the case of economic operators, it slows and sometimes kills activities which were supposed to create wealth for the state. So it is objective to assert that:

“Cameroon is losing huge resources to corruption”

In a nutshell, though these newspapers made an extensive use of non-partisan reporting style (6124 occurrences), as we can see, their use of a partisan reporting style far outweighed the other (7960 occurrences). This is explained by their outstanding use of inadequate journalistic practices.

- Elite oriented

This is a reporting technique whereby newspapers only give a voice to elites in their newspapers. It can be defined as elite voice been giving a dominant place, with little attention paid to people opinions, voice attributed essentially to an individual. Examples of such reporting techniques include:

“Fru Ndi vows to disrupt upcoming elections if Anglophone crisis is not resolved”

“Tassang fires back, insists Kamto is a liar”

“Marafa endorses teachers' strike from prison”

Such instances attest of the fact that newspapers were highly opened to opinions leaders in the society. This can be explained by the fact that most of those opinions formers in the society like Mr Fru Ndi and Mr Tassang played a fundamental role in the development of the crisis. And by giving them a voice in their respective

media, newspapers are sure to get stories sold to the public who look after them to make meanings out the phenomenon they are experiencing. Moreover, the choice of the elites to whom they give a voice in their newspapers can equally be explained by the fact they share similar views and beliefs with the newspapers under investigation. Both the newspapers and the opinion leaders have as main duty to heavily and constantly call government to tasks. Therefore, it explained the appearance of those opinions leaders as frequent as possible in their reports.

The reporting technique is described as inadequate journalistic practices because it is silencing other segment of the society leading to unilateral reporting.

On the other hand, people-oriented reporting, can be described as good journalistic practices. It is the reporting technique which consists in giving a voice to the people to evaluate the political activities, elite voice not dominant, or voice identified as representing that of a group. It simply means it is the capacity of print journalists to give a voice to all the strata existing in the society, all the groups should be given an equal chance to express their views concerning the management of government affairs. Examine the following quotations:

“PM Dion Ngute weeps! Joins thousands to pay homage to victims”

“Parents, Students Express Views On School Resumption”

“Disabled persons living in Kumba, Meme Division, South West Region, have appealed to the government of President Paul Biya to enter into meaningful and all inclusive dialogue to solve the Anglophone crisis”

“The South West and North West Women' Task Force (SNWOT) for the fight against violence last week greeted Prime Minister, Head of Government, Chief Dr. Dion Ngute Joseph with placards in Bamenda as he embarked on a four-day peace mission to the Region.”

“Tibor Nagy says US stands for a united Cameroon”

“Anglophone MPs must propose solutions now”

“SDF vows to quit parliament if Hon. Wirba is arrested”

“UB Vice-Chancellor speaks on school resumption”

“Anglophone Parents, the Revolution Is Eating Our Children (I)”

As we can see, the quotations do not give room to influential people or personalities to express their views. It rather takes into consideration all the groups involved in the society and present their opinions on issues affecting their lives, especially concerning the Anglophone insurgency. We can see parents, politicians, political parties, members of the education family, association of women, disabled persons who each express themselves on important issues. Having said this, it is important to note that this reporting technique is almost invisible in their reports. That is, the voice of the masses almost inexistent in these three newspapers. In fact, we have 102 occurrences, indicating the number of times the newspapers adopted this reporting technique. The fact that elite-oriented reporting technique registered (1962 occurrences) attest to the fact that the newspapers made use of the elite-oriented reporting 20 times more than their use of people-oriented reporting. Once more, this can have explained by the fact, they choose to give a voice only to civil society actors who share the same ideological orientation with them. Even when they tend to give a voice to all the segments of the society, they target only those who still share the same ideological orientation with them. Some of the following quotations attest of this:

‘Anglophone Parents, the Revolution Is Eating Our Children (I)’

‘Disabled persons living in Kumba, Meme Division, South West Region, have appealed to the government of President Paul Biya to enter into meaningful and all inclusive dialogue to solve the Anglophone crisis’

We should remember that, because newspapers stopped being journalists and became advocates, they expected that with The Major National Dialogue, they will push the agenda such that it meets up with their expectations. That is why in this quotation for example, they only use voices which support such ideas. Therefore, be it the elite-oriented or people-oriented reporting technique, the objective remains the same- pushing their ideological orientation by giving voices only to those who support such views.

- **Unilateral-reporting**

It comes as a consequence of elite oriented reporting. This is because by giving a voice in their newspapers only to elites in the society who are considered as opinion leaders, they are indirectly silencing others members of the society like the masses. Unilateral-reporting can be defined as considering just one party opinion or not balancing voices during reporting, elite

oriented reporting dominant. This can be seen in the following:

‘Fru Ndi condemns military, amba excesses as crisis persists’

‘Agbor Balla denies being sponsored by Atanga Nji to frustrate Anglophone struggle’

By giving the voice just to one party, the newspapers are occulting the voices which is a violation of the journalism ethics which requires journalists to balance their stories by giving both parties an opportunity to express themselves. In the second quotation for example, newspapers do not allow Mr Atanga Nji, the opportunity to express himself about the issue at hand. By giving a voice only Mr Agbor Balla, newspapers intentionally do it because he shares the same ideological stance with them. As member of the civil society, newspapers and opinions leaders have as main objective to bring government to task by scrutinizing actions. Therefore, when stating that: ‘Agbor Balla denies being sponsored by Atanga Nji to frustrate Anglophone struggle’, the newspapers intend to maintain and enhance the reputation of the activist and of the opinion leader which constitute a reliable source of information for them. Multi-party reporting was equally used by newspapers when reporting on a particular topic. It can be defined as the reporting technique which consists in giving a voice to all parties involved when reporting on a particular situation.

‘Fall, Nagy call for school resumption in NW, SW’

‘UN, EU, US back Swiss offer to facilitate dialogue’

‘Gov’t, CRTV, Ambazonia Call For School Resumption’

‘Bishops make fresh appeal for effective school resumption in NW, SW’

As we can see, newspapers in the case of school resumption, they gave a voice to all the parties involved in the Back to School campaign initiated by the government. Looking at it from that angle, it may seem that during the 4 years covering the study, they have been doing so in a consistent manner.

However, this is not the case because unilateral reporting (783 occurrences) was used more as reporting technique ten times more than multi-party reporting (82 occurrences). It matches with the findings of the study because inadequate journalism practices far outweighed adequate journalism practices

- **Unethical language**

In this study it is defined as the use of inappropriate wording by journalists when reporting on events. It is the use of unethical wording in news stories. The choice of words used in a news story can inform us about the ideological stand of a newspaper. This is because it is intentionally used to dramatize a situation and provoke a violent reaction from the readers. It is an inadequate journalistic practices which aims at giving a more negative tone to a situation already alerting. In the case of this study, newspapers used such language to show that English speaking Cameroonians were considered by the government as things and not human beings, which is an exaggeration and a hyperbolism of the context. The following quotes are perfect examples of such practices:

“When will Biya stop using Anglophones as fire extinguishers?”

“Governor blasts Anglophone parents for committing Academic Genocide”

“Organise Common Entrance Examinations or Be Sacked!”

“Solve the Anglophone problem or kill us all”

“Francophones will shed blood to fight secessionists-”

“Special Status content: A Poisoned Gift with Attractive Features”

As depicted by this analysis, newspapers are insinuating that English speaking Cameroonians are considered as things and not as human beings by the President of the Republic. It is not a mere statement made by newspapers but an attempt to push the latter to reject government efforts towards the end of the crisis. The use of such unethical language by newspapers give us more information about the political affiliation of the said newspapers. This therefore compels us to understand that their report is not objective and flawed with a lot of hyperbolism. The use of this approach is to frame the story in such a way they obtain from their readers the expected reaction. Reaction which will be translated by a total rejection of all the efforts made by government to address the issue. This is verified by the following quotation:

“Special Status content: A Poisoned Gift with Attractive Features”

The emphasis on such salient wordings indicates that newspapers have positioned themselves not as a social institution participating in the national development of

their country but as agents of hatred speech by the creation of various factions within the society.

The type of reporting language used ranged from non-partisan, analytical reporting, people oriented, multi-party orientation, ethical language, images, and objective critics of rumours, corrigendum and recapitulation. These language style were attributed to good journalistic practices.

In the other side, the opposite was attributed to inadequate journalistic practices and ranged from partisan, crude reporting, elite oriented, unilateral reporting, unethical language, no images, non-objective critic of rumors, corrigendum and forth-looking only.

Ethical language was defined in the study is defined as not using unethical language like victimizing, insulting or using demoting language when reporting on a given topic. The following quotations are examples of reporting using ethical languages. In this quotations we can observe the both the tone and the choice of words are respectful of journalism ethical standards.

“The Minister of Territorial Administration, Atanga Nji Paul says more than 75.000 families have benefited from the Government Emergency Humanitarian Assistance in the North West and South West Regions of the country.”

“Take us back like prodigal sons, ex-combatants beg population”

“Human Rights Commission to wrestle irregularities during twin elections”

“We don’t want food, end the war! Internally displaced persons”

“The President of the Republic, Paul Biya, has urged recently graduated military officials from the Combined Services Military Academy, EMIA, to respect human rights and be defenders of the wellbeing of compatriots.”

Though it recorded (11168 occurrences) in their reports, we should not forget that when making use of ethical language, newspapers only respect ethical standards when the issues they are talking about was in line with their political affiliation. Examples can be seen in:

“Human Rights Commission to wrestle irregularities during twin elections”

“We don’t want food, end the war! Internally displaced persons”

“The President of the Republic, Paul Biya, has urged recently graduated military officials from the Combined Services Military Academy, EMIA, to respect human rights and be defenders of the wellbeing of compatriots.”

In actual fact, they observed these standards when the issue at hand was in support of what they have been decrying, thereby serving as additional credit to their stories. The same newspapers in relation to the same topic described the President of the Republic, President Paul Biya, as a monster giving inhuman treatment to English-speaking Cameroonians. Their framing approach was different depending on the response the government was giving to a situation. When the government view was in support of their standpoint, they were more inclined to use ethical language and when it was contradicting their perspective, they were crude and unethical in their language.

- Crude reporting

One of the main aspects of inadequate journalism practice is the use of crude reporting when reporting on a particular topic. It is defined as just presenting facts without further analysis to enhance understanding by the common man (for instance, just presenting the budget without analysis and monitoring). Such reports prevents their readers from understanding for instance why a particular decision was taken. It is intentionally done this way because it aims at making readers to remain in the dark in front of some governmental decisions and actions and therefore only relying on the analysis they will make. Instead of explaining the background fact leading to the adoption of a given measure, they voluntarily chose to ignore it in order to depict a negative picture of the government’s measure. These quotations can attest to that:

“The director general of taxation hereby informs all tax payers, that the revised official version of the 2017 tax code is henceforth available on the website www.impots.cm”

“Brief profile of newly appointed Ministers”

“Circular No. 001 /C/MINFI of 28th December 2016 Instructions relating to the Execution of Finance Laws, the Monitoring and Control of the Execution of the Budget of the State, Administrative Public Establishments, Regional and Local Authorities and other Subsidized Bodies, for the 2017 financial year”

“Press release: Within the framework of the material organization of the election of the President of the Republic to hold on 7 October 2018, the Director

General of Elections hereby wishes to draw the attention of the general public and, in particular, stakeholders of the electoral process, as well as election observers to the following details and clarifications”

Like in the case of the 2017 tax code, newspapers were supposed to explain to their readers why the code was revised, explain the government’s motivation when reviewing the code and later on present an overview of what changes readers should expect to experience as a result of this action. In the case of the Minister of Economy who recently took a major decision waving up to 80 percent of the customs charges on imported goods till February 2022, readers who read such articles, won’t understand that this measure was taken after a series of consultative meeting with members of the Cameroon Business Club who were decrying the increasing maritime charges they have been facing since the advent of Covid 19 when importing goods.

Analytical reporting on the other side can be defined as the extent to which journalists digest the information and make it available to the people, by presenting, analyzing and monitoring. In this study, it recorded only (3 occurrences) as compared to (123 occurrences) for crude reporting. Here under are the quotations:

“execution of the Budget at The end of December 2017: During the 2017 financial year, the State budget was implemented within a context marked at the international level by: (i) a global economy that was consolidated throughout the year, with a growth estimated at 3.7% compared to 3.2% in 2016, thanks in particular to the good performance of world industrial production and the recovery of international trade. According to the IMF, this dynamic should continue in 2018, in view of the first indices of the year, with growth expected to be higher than in 2017, between 3.8% and 3.9%, driven by United States and emerging countries. (ii) The low level of world oil prices, despite an increase of more than 20% in 2017 compared to 2016.”

“Why Atangana Kouna, Baptiste Bokam, Philip Ngwese were sacked: Many Cameroonians have been trying to read the mind of President Paul Biya ever since he reshuffled his government on Friday March 2. While he moved some of his ministers to supposedly juicier ministries, others moved to positions which many Cameroonians see not as promotions but demotions; while some of his former key collaborators were dropped entirely”

“Africa Communications Intelligence platform: The Africa Communication and Information Platform, ACIP, for Health and Economic Action will be formally

launched today, a statement has announced. The platform will be launched via an online event organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, ECA. In a statement, ECA said Africa is about to roll out a groundbreaking mobile based public communications platform to provide more than 600 million users across the continent with the latest public health advice. The Africa Communications Intelligence Platform, the statement explained will also furnish national and regional COVID task forces with user generated survey data and actionable health and economic insights. By improving national data and statistics, ACIP they said

will enable authorities to better analyze pandemic related problems and implement appropriate responses...''

The choice of opting for mostly a crude reporting style can be explained by the fact that, newspapers report's main objective is to portray government activities as detached from reality and to give more reasons to their readers to perceive the government as unable to deliver the expected promise. By so doing, they indirectly make them to join them in their ideological battle.

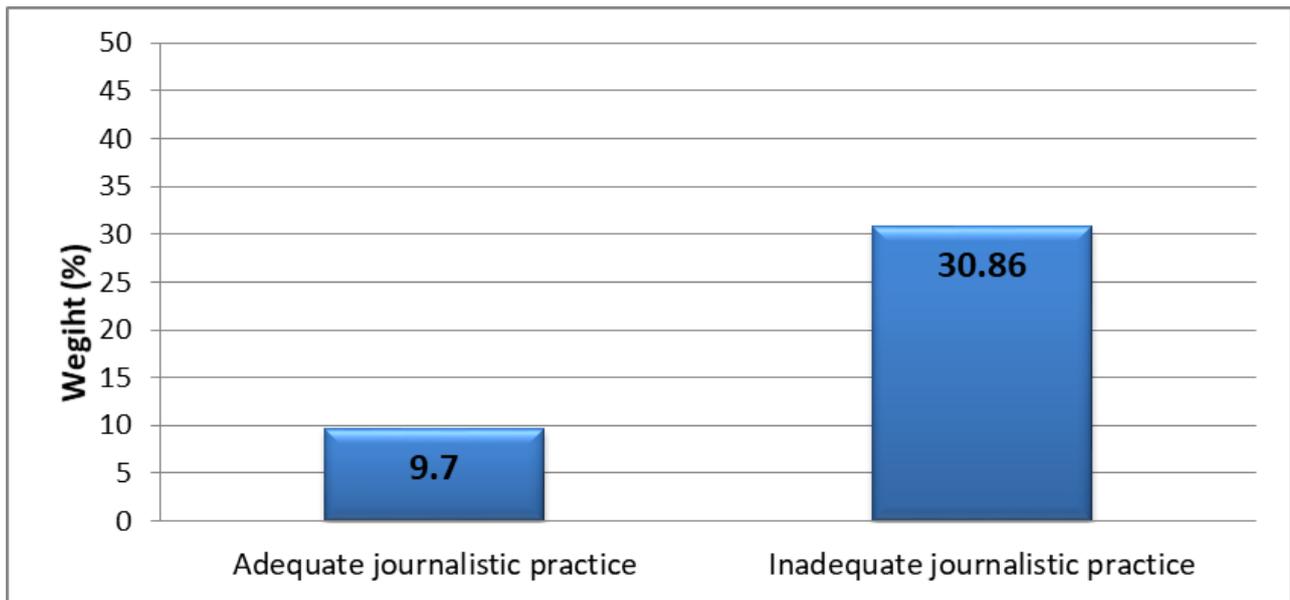


Figure 1: Comparing cumulative weight of English newspapers languages and imagery description of issues related to public accountability in Cameroon between 2016 and 2020

Inadequate journalistic practices outweigh the good practices with weight of 30.86% as against 9.7%.

CONCLUSION

The fact that inadequate journalistic practices with respect to language used outweighed good journalistic practices implies that newspapers under investigation are more likely not to be pro-government. By emphasizing on the type of languages used, this study as recommended by Dunlevy (1998) could then say something on the neutrality and objectivity of how newspapers report on public accountability issues in Cameroon over the study period. Though the findings indicated that newspapers contents were tilted more toward inadequate governance, we could deduce that the political affiliation of newspapers. This vacuum was somehow filled by the fact that this study equally deeply studies the types of languages used to report the subject matter. The findings revealed that the languages weighed more towards inadequate journalistic practices, characterized by partisan, elite-reporting, unilateral reporting, unethical language like victimizing, insulting or demoting languages, forth-looking only analysis or

crude reporting whereby newspapers just post communiqués without analysis to enhance the understanding or digestion by the public. In fact critics could be objective, but the language of critic can stain the objectivity and indirectly display the political affiliation of the newspapers.

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