



## Exploring the Language of Bribery and Corruption in Cameroon: Manifestations, Impacts and Recommendations

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**Abstract:** Corruption in Cameroon has been widely studied from political and economic perspectives, yet its linguistic dimension remains underexplored. This study examines how bribery is pragmatically enacted and discursively normalised in everyday institutional interactions in Yaounde. Grounded in Speech Act Theory as proposed by J. L. Austin and further developed by John Searle, and informed by Critical Discourse Analysis in the tradition of Teun A. van Dijk, the research analyses data collected from 200 participants, including transport operators and public service users. The findings reveal that corruption is primarily performed through indirect speech acts, euphemistic substitutions, metaphorical framing, and code-switching. Expressions such as “On fait comment?” and “Il faut huiler” operate as implicit directives whose intended meaning relies on shared socio-cultural knowledge. The study argues that corruption in Cameroon functions not only as an economic transaction but also as a routinised communicative practice. Effective anti-corruption strategies must therefore incorporate linguistic and discursive interventions.

**Keywords:** Corruption Discourse, Speech Acts, Pragmatics, Code-Switching.

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## INTRODUCTION

Bribery and corruption pose a serious threat to a nation's development. It is the act of dishonesty, fraudulence by those in positions of authority. Transparency International defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. It therefore goes that it is not only for financial gain but for other non-financial gains. Corruption involves the breach of public trust, abuse of office, misuse of information and conduct that affects honesty and impartiality. In Cameroon, as in most African countries, corruption is a major problem. Begovic (2005) opines that “from the enforcement point of view, corruption is a contract. It is an informal contract because it is illegal – no court in the world

will uphold it if there is a problem with its enforcement”. According to U Myint (2000), “corruption is defined as the use of public office for private gain, or in other words, use of, official position, rank or status by an office bearer for his own personal benefit”. To U Myint, some aspects of corrupt practices include; bribery, extortion, fraud, embezzlement, nepotism, cronyism, appropriation of public assets and property for personal use, and influence peddling. To U Myint (2000), “activities such as fraud and embezzlement can be undertaken by an official alone and without involvement of a second party. While others such as bribery, extortion and influence peddling involve two parties the giver and taker in a corrupt deal”.

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For some time now, the government of the Republic of Cameroon is said to have made tremendous efforts to fight against corruption. The setting up of a legal and other institutional framework to fight this shows Government determination; unfortunately, corruption persists. According to *A Handbook to fight corruption in MINFOPRA*, the Government of Cameroon asserts that "This commitment is manifested by the setting up of a legal and institutional framework to fight against this scourge and to reduce the phenomenon to its barest minimum". Among other things, she states that the drawing up of a government plan to fight corruption in 1997 was a turning point in the fight. The government of Cameroon has also ratified international instruments, like that of the United Nations Convention against Corruption on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2004. This is according to her, proves that the government is doing enough to bring the ill practice to a bare minimum. Again, the government has set up an Anti-Corruption Unit in all the ministries and public administration by Order No.004878/CAB/MINFOPRA of 31 March 2005. (MINFOPRA 2015). According to MINFOPRA 2015, the putting in place of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (CONAC) by presidential Decree No.2006/088 of 11 March 2006 is a laudable effort toward eradicating the illness. There has also been the approval of the national plan on governance, and the drafting of the "National Anti-Corruption Strategy". According to MINFOPRA (2015): Those who allow themselves to be fooled by lies are more dangerous than liars; and those who allow themselves to be corrupted are more miserable than the corrupters. The corrupter and the corrupt are both liable to blackmail and thus lose their independence. A hard-earned penny is worth more than ten unscrupulously earned. Better with righteousness than much gain with injustice. And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blinds the wise, and perverts the words of the righteous.

### **Corruption as a Discursive Practice**

While corruption is often examined from economic, political, and legal perspectives, it is equally a communicative practice enacted through language. Corrupt transactions do not occur in silence; they are negotiated, implied, softened, resisted, and legitimised through discourse. Language, therefore, functions not merely as a medium of exchange but as a strategic instrument for performing and concealing corrupt intentions.

In many institutional encounters in Cameroon, requests for bribes are rarely expressed directly. Instead, they are performed through indirect speech acts, implicatures, euphemisms, and metaphorical expressions. Drawing on the Speech Act framework of J. L. Austin and later developed by John

Searle, it can be argued that such utterances function as directives whose illocutionary force differs from their literal meaning.

Cameroon's multilingual environment provides fertile ground for coded linguistic practices. Corruption-related expressions frequently involve code-switching between English, French, and Camfranglais, creating shared in-group meanings that may exclude outsiders. These hybrid forms contribute to the normalisation and routinisation of corrupt exchanges within specific speech communities.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, particularly in the tradition of Teun A. van Dijk, corruption discourse can be viewed as a site where institutional power and ideological control are reproduced. Public officials may deploy indirect language to maintain authority while avoiding explicit accountability. Through repeated interaction, such discourse becomes normalised and socially legitimised.

The language of corruption in Cameroon demonstrates lexical innovation and semantic shift. Everyday words such as "beer," "kola nut," "oil," and "juice" acquire specialised pragmatic meanings within corrupt exchanges. These euphemistic substitutions reduce the moral gravity of the act and reframe bribery as hospitality or appreciation.

### **RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES**

Although bribery and corruption in Cameroon have been widely studied from political, economic and legal perspectives, little scholarly attention has been paid to the linguistic mechanisms through which corruption is negotiated, normalised and reproduced in every day interaction. Corruption exchanges are rarely explicit. Instead, they are mediated through:

- Indirect speech acts
- Euphemistic expressions
- Metaphoric framing
- Code-switching
- And conversational implicature.

So, despite extensive research on corruption in Cameroon, existing studies largely overlook the linguistic dimension of corruption practices. Corruption is also enacted through communicative acts that rely on shared socio-cultural knowledge and pragmatic inference. The absence of a discourse-oriented analysis leaves a gap in understanding how corruption is reproduced at the micro-interactional level. This study addresses that gap by examining the speech acts, lexical innovations, and discursive strategies that enable corruption to function as an everyday communicative practice.

The general objective, therefore, is to identify and categorise the linguistic expressions used in corruption exchanges in selected public institutions in Yaounde, Cameroon.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Some credible works have been done in the domain of corruption globally. Damijan (2023) worked on corruption: a review of issues where she focused on the historical overview of the concept of corruption and the damaging effects that it has on the economy and society. She states that “corruption was first understood as a disturbance of the balance of state power, and later as the immorality of political patronage and favouritism of certain groups”. To her, corruption has moved from the public space to the “intertwining” of both public and private spaces. Begovic (2005) looks at corruption from definitory perspective, defining it, giving its types, causes and consequences of corruption. To him, corruption is different from theft, embezzlement and other financial crimes. Not all abuses of public office are considered to be corruption; some are direct theft, fraud, or embezzlement. Therefore, Begovic (2005) says that “if a senior government official simply illegally appropriates money from the budget without providing any service or favour to anyone, that is not corruption- it is a crime but of another kind” (Begovic 2005).

U Myint (2000) looks at the causes, consequences and cures for corruption. His study highlights the need to maintain that corruption directly bars the way to a nation’s development. He examines the causes and consequences of corruption, specifically in the context of less developed nations, especially those nations with what he terms “considerable regulation and central direction”. According to U Myint (2000), “the lack of transparency, accountability, as well as institutional weaknesses such as in the legislative and judicial systems, provide fertile ground for the growth of rent seeking activities in such a country”. He also notes that some of the causes of corruption is the upsurge of a convert economy and the increase in social costs which is related with corruption, and this leads to “adverse consequences on income distribution, consumption patterns, investment, the government budget and on economic reforms”. U Myint (2000)’s study also analyses the supply part of bribery and its global scope and presents some recommendations on how to address the issue of corruption, which will bring it to its lowest rate of practice.

Wathne (2021) made a study into understanding corruption and how to curb it. She looks at the various definitions of corruption and its different forms. Wathne (2021:3) holds that “The cost of corruption greatly exceeds the sum of bribes paid,

funds misappropriated, and taxes avoided”. She points out that corruption hinders the development of a nation, increases inequity and therefore undermines legitimate government, which goes a long way to weakens public’s trust in true democracy. Wathne (2021) holds that we cannot satisfactorily state which country is most corrupt because the question cannot receive any direct answer since corruption takes many forms, occurs at all levels of power, and everybody is seemingly involved in one way or the other. Wathne (2021:3) puts “Corruption can take many forms, occur at all levels of power, and be conducted by all types of agents, including individuals, businesses, public officials, politicians, state agents, and non-state actors”. She posits that the causes and indicators of corruption and ways to curb it depend on the nation’s economic growth and whether the nation is a democracy or an autocracy. Wathne (2021) opines that corruption exists in both developed and developing countries, “It is an integral and integrated part of the economic, social, and political system. Most people have no alternative but to engage. Corruption includes both legal and illegal acts”.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper anchors on two key theories beginning with that of Austin (1962), Speech Act, and later developed by Searle (1969). Speech Act theory is said to be at the centre of discourse analysis and pragmatics, and it does not study only words and sentence meaning, it also study meaning of utterances in definite contexts. Austin (1962) held that sentences should be categorised into two fundamental parts, namely, the constative and the performative. According to Van Dijk (1980:176), Speech Act is also called an illocutionary act; it is consequently a social act that is accomplished by the utterance of a meaningful expression in a specified context. Searle (1978:16) defines speech act as:

Speaking a language is performing speech acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises and so on, and more abstractly, acts such as referring and predicating and secondly that these acts are in general made possible by and are performed in accordance with rules for the use of linguistic elements.

Using Austin’s tripartite distinction:

Locutionary act – the literal utterance (e.g. “On fait comment?”)

Illocutionary act – the intended meaning (e.g. request for a bribe)

Perlocutionary act – the effect (payment of money)

Most corruption-related utterances function as indirect directives, where the speaker avoids explicit requests but relies on shared socio-cultural knowledge.

Beyond J. L. Austin (1962) and John Searle (1969), this study also draws insight from Teun A. van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Van Dijk posits that discourse is a site where power, dominance, and ideology are enacted and reproduced. In corruption-related exchanges, language becomes an instrument of covert domination where institutional authority is exercised indirectly through pragmatic manipulation.

Corrupt discourse in Cameroon operates largely through:

- Indirect speech acts
- Conversational implicatures
- Euphemism
- Metaphor
- Code-switching
- Politeness strategies
- Strategic ambiguity

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic design aimed at examining the linguistic realisation of corruption in everyday institutional encounters. Although some descriptive statistics are presented to contextualise respondents' perceptions, the primary focus of the analysis is pragmatic and discursive.

### Research Setting

The study was conducted in Yaounde, the political capital of Cameroon, selected due to its concentration of public institutions and frequent citizen-state interactions. The multilingual character of the city also provides a fertile context for examining code-switching and hybrid sociolects in corruption-related discourse.

### Participants and Sampling

A total of 200 participants were purposively selected based on their frequent interaction with public service institutions. These included bike riders, taxi drivers, public service users, and individuals who had cases at police stations and gendarmerie brigades. These groups were chosen because they regularly engage in high-contact administrative encounters where opportunities for corrupt negotiation are likely to occur.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through Semi-structured interviews, Participant observation, Field note documentation, and Checklist-guided elicitation.

Participants were asked to recount actual encounters involving implicit or explicit requests for informal payments. Particular attention was paid to recurrent expressions used during such exchanges. In some cases, expressions were recorded verbatim in

field notes immediately after interaction to preserve linguistic authenticity.

### Analytical Framework

The analysis is grounded in Speech Act Theory as proposed by J. L. Austin and further developed by John Searle. Each identified expression was examined at three levels:

- Locutionary content (literal meaning)
- Illocutionary force (intended function)
- Perlocutionary effect (outcome of the utterance)

In addition, insights from Critical Discourse Analysis in the tradition of Teun A. van Dijk informed the interpretation of how power relations and institutional asymmetries shape these interactions.

### Code-Switching Patterns

The goal was not merely to quantify corruption perceptions but to uncover the linguistic strategies through which corrupt intentions are encoded and normalised.

### Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, anonymity was guaranteed. Institutional names were withheld, and no identifiable participant information was recorded. Drawing inspiration from Austin's (1962) speech Act theory, and using the descriptive method of analysis, the data for this paper were collected using checklists, observation and interviews. We talked to 200 Cameroonians. That is, 35 bike riders who ran into trouble with the police or municipal police, 35 taxi drivers who ran into trouble with the police and gendarme officers, 35 public service users in Ministry A, (name of Ministry withheld) and 35 in Ministry B, (name of Ministry withheld), 30 persons who had cases at the police station, and lastly 30 persons who had cases at the Gendarmerie brigade. Four key questions were asked to determine their understanding of the topic under discussion. It should be noted that our case study was based in the city of Yaounde, Cameroon.

- 1) What do you understand by bribery and corruption?
- 2) Do you know any words, phrases or sentences that can be considered as expressions of the desire to combat corruption practices?
- 3) Have you been faced with an issue that required you to pay before a service was rendered to you?
- 4) What do you think are the negative impacts of bribery and corruption on the Cameroonian society?
- 5) What can you propose as solutions to curbing the phenomenon of bribery and corruption among Cameroonians?

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section of this research paper focuses on the findings and discussions of the data collected in the field.

### Data from Bike Riders

We have 35 bike riders who gave responses under this section. These are persons who ran into trouble with police officers, municipal police and sometimes, Gendarme officers.

Questions	Yes response		No response		Total Percentage
Do you understand what corruption is?	35	100	00	00	100
Have you been involved in any corrupt practices before	20	57.5	15	42.5	100
Do you think corruption is a good practice?	5	14.5	30	85.5	100

Observably, the table above demonstrates responses from bike riders in the streets of Yaounde. We noticed that all the 35 informants do understand what corruption is, making a total of 100 percentage. On whether they have been involved in an act of corruption, 20 informants said yes, making a total percentage of 57.5. Meanwhile 15 of them said they have not been involved in any corrupt practice before, making a percentage of 42.5. We also sort to find out if corruption is a good practice and 30 of them said no (85.5) saying that it is a bad practice while 5 (14.5) said it is a good thing because it helps

them to come out of some difficult situations. Some noticeable expressions were said to be common place here. Expressions such as, ‘we do how?’ voici votre jus, parler vite etc. These are expressions that do invite the parties to engage in acts of corruption.

### Data from Taxi Drivers

We have 35 taxi drivers who gave responses under this section. These are persons who ran into trouble with police officers, municipal police and sometimes, Gendarme officers.

Questions	Yes response		No response		Percentage
Do you understand what is corruption?	30	85.5	5	14.5	100
Have you been involved in any corrupt practices before	25	71.5	10	28.5	100
Do you think corruption is a good practice?	2	5.5	33	94.5	100

From the table above, we observed that out of the 35 informants, 30 accepted knowing what corruption is, while 5 shied away or did not know what corruption was. On whether they have been involved in one way or the other in acts of corruption, 25 taxi drivers said they been involved (71.5) and 10 said no (28.5). On whether corruption is a good practice, 33 of them said corruption is bad (94.5) while only 2 of them (5.5) said it is good in some

cases. Those who claimed it is a good practice said it allows them to get what they want at a faster speed. Here, we gathered some expressions such as, you will have to give my beer, meaning you must pay.

### Data from Public Service Users A

We gathered information from 35 public service users from Ministry A (name of Ministry withheld).

Questions	Yes response		No response		Percentage
Do you understand what is corruption?	35	100	00	100	100
Have you been involved in any corrupt practices before	15	42.5	20	57.5	100
Do you think corruption is a good practice?	00	00	35	100	100

From the data collected from public service users of Ministry A, we noted that 35 of them agreed to knowing what corruption is all about, making a percentage of 100. Out of the 35 persons, 20 said they have been involved in some acts of corruption because they needed to fast-track their documents in a particular office. This makes a percentage of 57.5, while 15 of them said they have never been involved in any act of corruption, making a total of 42.2. On whether corruption is a good practice, all the 35

informants said it is bad and must be discouraged. Gere moi, il faut huiler, fais un geste were some of the expressions used in this kind of situation. These expressions directly or indirectly invite partners to engage in corrupt practices.

### Data from Public Service Users B

We gathered information from 35 public service users from Ministry B (name of Ministry withheld).

Questions	Yes response		No response		Percentage
Do you understand what is corruption?	33	94.5	2	5.5	100
Have you been involved in any corrupt practices before	20	57.5	15	42.5	100
Do you think corruption is a good practice?	6	17.5	29	82.5	100

Looking at the table above, we observed that, out of the 35 informants, 33 agreed to knowing what corruption is about, making a percentage of 94.5. Out of the 35, 2 informants did not say they understood what corruption is all about, giving a percentage of 5.5. On whether they have ever been involved in corrupt practices, 20 said they have, giving a percentage of 57.5 and 15 declined, giving a percentage of 42.5. On whether they consider corruption as a good practice, 29 informants said that it is a very bad practice, giving a percentage of 82.5 and 6 said corruption has enabled them to come out

of some difficulty challenges, with a percentage of 17.5. Tchoko, on fait comment, gombo are some of the expressions common place here which literarily translate into asking parties to give or take something in exchange for a service.

**Data from Persons Who Had Cases at the Police Station**

We equally talked to 30 persons who were involved in such issues at the police stations in the city of Yaounde.

Questions	Yes response		No response		Percentage
Do you understand what is corruption?	30	100	00	100	100
Have you been involved in any corrupt practices before	25	83.5	5	16.5	100
Do you think corruption is a good practice?	5	16.5	25	83.5	100

From the information gathered from informants who had cases at the police station, we noticed that 30 of them all claimed to know what corruption is all about, making a percentage of 100. On whether they have been involved in corrupt practices, 25 said they have, giving a percentage of 83.5. 5 said they have never been involved, making the percentage of 16.5. We also sort to know whether they consider corruption a good practice, 25 (83.5)

said it is a bad practice and 5 (16.5) said it is good because it helps fast-track some administrative procedures.

**Data from Persons Who Had Cases at the Gendarmerie Brigade**

We equally talked to 30 persons who were involved in such issues at the Gendarmerie Brigade in the city of Yaounde.

Questions	Yes response		No response		Percentage
Do you understand what is corruption?	30	100	00	100	100
Have you been involved in any corrupt practices before	20	66.5	10	33.5	100
Do you think corruption is a good practice?	3	10	27	90	100

From the table above, we observed that 30 of the informants accepted knowing what corruption is, making a percentage of 100. On whether they have been involved in corrupt practices, 20 said 'yes', making a percentage of 66.5, and 10 said 'no', giving a percentage of 33.5. We also sought to know whether they consider corruption as a good practice. 27 of them said 'no', it is not a good practice, with a

percentage of 60 and 3 said yes, it is a good practice, giving a percentage of 10.

**Words and Expressions on Corruption**

These are just some of the terms and expressions that are frequently used by those who engage in corrupt practices.

No.	Words/expressions	Meaning/Implication
1	Garder mon jus'	Keep me juice, which implies that the person should pay for the service
2	Parler vite'	Talk fast, and decide whether you want the person to help you or not
3	You will have to give my beer	Give me my beer, which in this case, is money
4	Voici votre jus'	This is your juice. Here is your pay for helping me
5	nothing for me'	Did you not bring anything?
6	on fait comment	What should we do?
7	On peut gérer ça, mais parle seulement bien	We can solve your problem, but you have to give us something

No.	Words/expressions	Meaning/Implication
8	Parler bien, comment chef?	What should I do, Sir?
9	C'est bon, mais on fait comment alors	It is okay, but what should we do now?
10	Chef, je dois t'offrir quoi encore ?	Sir, what should I give again?
11	Gère-moi	Handle/fix me
12	Il faut huiler	You need to oil the process
13	Fais un geste	Make a gest/give something
14	Give him something	For you document to go faster, you need to give him money
15	We do how?	make an offer
16	Tchoko	Give money
17	Gombo	Money to fast-track
18	Where is my kolanut	Where is my gift/money
19	What have you brought for me	Subtle way to ask for a bribe
20	You came to the palace empty-handed	You should not come to my office without something for me
21	You have to see me	Give me money before I can work on your file
22	Is that what I will eat?	Offer something before I can be of help
23	Moi, quoi dedans?	What will I gain from handling your file?
24	Moi, je suis déjà fatigué	I am tired of this. The user should understand and be ready to make an offer
25	Je prends ma pause déjà	I'm going out for a break. So, retaining me should only be possible if you offer to give me something or take me out
26	We do how?	What should be done? which means that the users should understand that money is involved in the process
27	Help me, I will find your beer	Please, help treat my file. I will give your money
28	Il faut donner à boire	Give to drink, meaning make an offer/give money
29	C'est ça que je vais manger ?	Is that what I will have? Do something
30	Boss, fais seulement le travail, je vais garder ton whisky	Please, just do the job, I have your gift/money

**DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN THE LANGUAGE OF CORRUPTION**

The findings reveal that corruption in Yaounde is linguistically mediated through coded discourse practices. These expressions are rarely direct; instead, they operate through pragmatic inferencing.

**1. Indirectness and Implicature**

Expressions such as: “On fait comment?” “Nothing for me?” “You came empty-handed?”

Function as conversational implicatures in the Gricean sense. The literal meaning differs from the intended illocutionary force. The speaker intentionally violates the maxim of quantity or manner to trigger inference.

Thus, corruption discourse depends on shared contextual knowledge.

**2. Euphemism and Semantic Shift**

Many expressions demonstrate semantic bleaching and euphemistic transformation:

Expression	Literal Meaning	Corrupt Meaning
beer	Alcoholic drink	money
kolanut	Fruit with traditional significance	Gift /bribe
Oil” (Il faut huiler)	lubricant	Facilitate with money
juice	drink	Payment or bribe

These lexical substitutions reduce the moral weight of the act. Corruption is reframed as hospitality, appreciation, or tradition.

This supports Van Dijk’s notion that ideology is reproduced through lexical choices.

**3. Code-Switching and Camfranglais**

Many expressions combine English, French, and Camfranglais:

- “Gère-moi”
- “On peut gérer ça”
- “Tchoko”
- “Gombo”

This multilingual blending serves important discursive functions:

1. Creates in-group solidarity
2. Excludes outsiders
3. Masks illegal intent

#### 4. Reflects urban youth sociolect

The corruption lexicon, therefore, forms a speech community repertoire shared among state agents and users.

#### 4. Politeness and Face-Saving Strategies

Drawing from Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, most bribery-related utterances preserve negative face (freedom from imposition).

Instead of saying:

"Give me money."

Speakers say:

"Parler bien." "Fais un geste."

This reduces direct accountability and diffuses responsibility.

Corruption becomes negotiated rather than commanded.

#### 5. Metaphorical Framing of Corruption

Corruption is metaphorically framed as:

Eating ("Is that what I will eat?")

Drinking ("Il faut donner à boire")

Oiling machinery ("Il faut huiler")

These metaphors conceptualise bureaucracy as a machine that requires lubrication.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Discursive Awareness and Pragmatic Sensitisation Campaigns

Government anti-corruption campaigns should include linguistic awareness programs that expose common euphemisms and indirect expressions used in corrupt exchanges. Many corrupt acts survive because they are disguised through. By making the illocutionary force visible, such campaigns reduce the protective ambiguity of corrupt discourse.

#### Institutional Language Policy Reform

Public institutions should adopt explicit communication guidelines that prohibit indirect monetary insinuations and promote transparent, standardised verbal procedures. All service procedures must be verbally and visibly displayed. Officers must use scripted institutional language during service delivery. It replaces personalised negotiation discourse with institutionalised procedural discourse.

#### Promote Transparent Linguistic Practices

When processes are automated and standardised linguistically (forms, receipts, digital instructions), the space for negotiation discourse shrinks.

Less verbal negotiation → less opportunity for corrupt implicature.

Encourage Whistleblowing Through Discursive Documentation. Encourage citizens to:

Record and report specific phrases used in corrupt exchanges.

Document indirect expressions that imply bribery.

Creating a lexicon of corruption discourse can help institutions detect patterns.

### CONCLUSION

This study has examined bribery and corruption in Cameroon not merely as economic or political misconduct, but as a discursively mediated social practice enacted through language. While corruption has traditionally been analysed through legal, institutional, and developmental lenses, this paper has demonstrated that corrupt transactions are fundamentally communicative events structured by identifiable linguistic patterns.

Drawing on the Speech Act framework of J. L. Austin and John Searle, the findings reveal that corruption in everyday institutional encounters is largely performed through indirect directives, euphemistic substitutions, metaphorical framing, and conversational implicatures. Utterances such as "On fait comment?", "Il faut huiler," "Give my beer," and "Where is my kolanut?" function not at the level of literal meaning, but at the level of illocutionary force, where shared socio-cultural knowledge enables participants to infer the intended demand for illicit payment.

The analysis further shows that Cameroon's multilingual ecology facilitates corruption discourse through code-switching and hybrid sociolects, particularly Camfranglais. These linguistic resources create in-group solidarity while simultaneously masking explicit intent. Through repeated use, such expressions become conventionalised, contributing to what may be described as the discursive normalisation of corruption.

From a Critical Discourse perspective in the tradition of Teun A. van Dijk, corruption discourse reflects and reproduces institutional power asymmetries. Public officials deploy strategic ambiguity and politeness mechanisms to maintain authority while minimising accountability. In this way, language becomes a subtle instrument of dominance, allowing corruption to persist without overt confrontation.

The data also reveal a striking paradox: although a large majority of respondents morally condemn corruption, many admit to participating in it. This contradiction suggests that corruption in Cameroon operates at two levels — ideologically rejected yet pragmatically sustained. Language plays a crucial mediating role in reconciling this tension by reframing bribery as hospitality, appreciation, facilitation, or necessity.

Ultimately, this study underscores that corruption is not sustained solely by weak institutions or economic pressures, but also by entrenched communicative habits. If corruption is linguistically performed, it must also be linguistically disrupted. Anti-corruption efforts should therefore extend beyond punitive frameworks to include discursive awareness, pragmatic sensitisation, institutional communication reform, and the de-normalisation of euphemistic corruption lexicon.

In contributing a linguistic and discourse-analytic perspective to corruption studies in Cameroon, this paper opens new avenues for interdisciplinary engagement between Applied Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, and Governance Studies. Future research may further explore regional variations in corruption discourse, digital communication environments, and the evolution of corruption-related sociolects.

Corruption, as this study has shown, is not only a financial transaction; it is a speech event. Understanding its language is therefore an essential step toward dismantling its practice.

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