

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gjl.v10i1.3>

## SOCIO-ETHNIC STEREOTYPES AND THE REFUSAL OF OFFERS

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to establish the impact of stereotypes directed at social and ethnic groups in interpersonal interaction in collectivist postcolonial societies. Focus is on the refusal of offers whose acceptance is otherwise supposed to be default. I illustrate using interviews conducted in two Cameroonian towns, Bamenda and Yaounde in 2009, that knowledge of socio-ethnic stereotypes plays a significant role in speakers' decision to accept, or refuse offers from people of certain ethnic backgrounds or origins. From a postcolonial pragmatics theoretical standpoint, the analysis shows that the desire to enhance in-group cohesion, adhere to societal norms and defend in-group collectivist face while attacking out-group collectivist face is salient in interlocutors' verbal and physical behaviour.

**Keywords:** stereotypes, offer refusals, collectivist / group face, ethnic group, postcolonial pragmatics

### **1. Introduction**

This paper illustrates how the refusal of certain offers that would normally be accepted is sometimes motivated by stereotypes linked to the social background or ethnic origin of the offerer. Overall, the aim is to establish that in group-based cultures like the Cameroonian, individual face needs (as in Western cultures) are not prioritised over collectivist or group face needs, e.g., ethnic group or social entity (cf. religious community). In Cameroon, certain ethnic groups have specific stereotypes appended to them. For instance, the Bamileke ethnic group is generally linked with the practice of witchcraft or belonging to evil sects, referred to in their language as 'famla' or 'nyong'. It is claimed that members of the Bayangi ethnic group appear in another location shortly after they die and continue to live there or elsewhere – a form of reincarnation. The Hausa ethnic group, often treated as synonymous with being a Muslim, is stereotyped for being quick-tempered and violent. These stereotypes, I illustrate below, have impacts on social interaction, for instance, on how people accept, or refuse offers. The thinking often is that accepting an offer from a member of these ethnic groups

could expose the offeree to the stereotypes or *ills* identified with them. Focus in the analysis is on four socio-ethnic groups in Cameroon: the Bamileke, Banyangi and Hausa ethnic groups, and the Anglophones, the English-speaking part of Cameroon, formerly colonised by Britain.

Verbal behaviour is often modelled to suit social perceptions and expectations of interlocutors in a speech event or communicative act. The closer interlocutors may depend, to various degrees, on how close their ethnic or social groups are to one another. Interlocutors often have to deal with two types of stereotypes. The first is inter-group stereotypes, which target members of other ethnic or social groups, for instance, those between Anglophones and Francophones or between different ethnic groups in Cameroon. The second is intra-group stereotypes, which are societal stigmas placed on individuals within their respective communities. Being aware of these stereotypes, interlocutors adopt various discursive strategies that help them avoid conflict, save or maintain face and consolidate societal cohesion during social interactions. In the communicative event of offering discussed in this paper, offerees formulate their offer refusals in ways that enable them to refuse the offer but at the same time remain polite, respectful and socially acceptable, since blatant unmitigated refusals could lead to breakdown in societal cohesion within and across social and ethnic groups (see Anchimbe 2018).

The data used here are taken from two open-ended interviews conducted in two towns in Cameroon, Yaounde and Bamenda, in September 2009 with three females and one male respondents. Interviewees were asked about the reasons and circumstances under which they would refuse offers whose acceptance is the default expectation in their society. The respondents were interviewed in groups of two and were given the freedom to react to whatever the other said. The objective was to find out how they co-constructed certain variables or disagreed about them. The group interviews method reduces the imposing and often distracting presence of the researcher. In Bamenda, the two respondents were a journalist (female, 25-30 years old) and a teacher (male, 40-45 years old) while in Yaounde, they were both female postgraduate researchers (35-40 years old). In all, the data consist of over one hour and twenty minutes of recordings but only those parts that deal with social and ethnic group stereotypes are used in this paper. Since these stereotypes are common knowledge in the society, the respondents' responses are used here as testimonial and not quantitative proof of their impact on social interaction.

## **2. Postcolonial pragmatics: Theoretical insight into collectivist cultures**

In order to properly access speakers' intentions in the interviews, I rely on the tenets of the postcolonial pragmatics framework (cf. Anchimbe and Janney 2011a, b, 2017, Anchimbe 2018). This theoretical framework posits that any comprehensive investigation of social interaction in postcolonial societies must take into account the complex constitution of these societies marked by contact, hybridism and the emergence of linguistic and social behavioural patterns during and after colonialism. Postcolonial pragmatics aims, among other things, to accentuate the impact of collectivist societal norms on social interaction among the group's or the society's members and with members of other groups. Using postcolonial pragmatic components like age, history, ethnicity, collectivist social expectations, gender, societal norms, respect, religion and social status, grants insights to the choices speakers make during interaction. The bottom line is that in collectivist societies individual choices are determined by stakes of the collectivist group and its expectations.

In these societies, accepting offers, giving advice, helping out others in need, etc. are default behaviour expectations (see Nwoye 1992, Kasanga 2011). However, with inter-group stereotypes, some of these default behaviours could be flouted. While stereotypes and insults directed at the individual may be hurtful, those addressed at entire groups are more hurtful and hence tend to influence group members' interactional choices (see Ige 2010, Mulo Farenkia 2011, Anchimbe 2021).

The extensive multilingualism, multiethnicity and multiculturalism of Cameroon, further exacerbated by colonialism and its related outcomes, make it best approachable using an emic framework like postcolonial pragmatics. With approximately 200 ethnic groups, over 280 indigenous languages, two official languages (English and French) and a widespread Pidgin English (cf. Breton and Bikia 1991, Kouega 2007, Gordon 2008, Lewis 2009), it is certainly a complex linguistic and ethnic entity within which the construction of socio-ethnic in-groups is almost inevitable. An outcome of these socio-ethnic in-groups is the emergence of group-based stereotypes and stigmas. The need to generalise individual-based stereotypes to include the individual's ethnic or social group has resulted in the metonymical conceptualisation of larger units as equivalent to ethnic groups. As illustrated later, insults directed at one's ethnic group tend to hurt more than individualised ones. As a result, administrative units like Regions are equated with an ethnic group. For instance, the West Region is often treated as synonymous with the Bamileke ethnic group, which is the largest in the region. Additionally, the three northern regions (Adamawa, North and Extreme North Regions) are considered a homogenous religious group even though non-Muslims also live there. Again, the Anglophone zones, which constitute two

administrative regions (North West and South West Regions), are, based on their historical, colonially and (English) linguistic heritage, regarded as a homogenous entity almost analogous to an ethnic group (see Wolf 2001, Anchimbe 2005). These groups and the stereotypes placed on them influence patterns of both social and verbal interaction even at interpersonal levels.

The postcolonial pragmatic components relevant for the analysis of the data are history, ethnicity, social norms and linguistic identity. From a postcolonial pragmatics perspective, I illustrate how, for instance, the colonial history of Cameroon, which resulted in the emergence of the Anglophone and Francophone groups, is relevant in understanding interaction between members of these two groups. The component ‘ethnicity’ defines identity boundaries and often dictates terms of interaction with other ethnic groups. The next section explains how stereotypes operate at these levels.

### **3. Ethnic origins, group boundaries and stereotypes**

A number of salient publications have appeared since the 1990s that investigate the politics of identification, ethnicisation, regionalisation and language in Cameroon. While some of these studies deal with the relationship between the Anglophones and the Francophones, others focus on the construction of ethnic, individual and linguistic identities within different contexts and by different groups of people. The following studies discuss the history, evolution and contemporary facets of the relationship between the Anglophones and the Francophones: Eyoh (1998a, b), Jua (2003), Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003), Jua and Konings (2004), Anchimbe (2005, 2010). Others, including the following, have extended the discussion to include ethnic and social groups within the country: Monga (2000), Anchimbe (2006), and Mulo Farenkia (2011, 2015).

In all of these identity groups, the desire to build (social, ethnic, political) alliances and to confront ethnic and social group rivalry have been deciding factors, as Monga (2000), Anchimbe (2006) and Mulo Farenkia (2011) hold below. The outcome has been the construction of identities and the creation of boundaries around ethnic and social groups. These boundaries have also engendered cross-group stereotyping; which also is a strategy for confronting opposing social and ethnic groups, defending the group face and attacking the group face of the other groups. As Monga (2000: 723) explains, political manoeuvring has led to the fluidity of geographical and ethnic boundaries in Cameroon.

...the ethnicisation and ruralisation of politics in Cameroon have led political entrepreneurs not only to redefine the geo-cultural boundaries of their ethnic labels and “villages”, but also to display their cultural

differences as a way of marking their cultural space, distinguishing themselves from potential or actual “enemy” groups, and “recruiting” allies [...] The geographical boundaries of ethnic groups in Cameroon have been characterised by their fluidity and ability to respond to changes in the overall national sociopolitical and economic context. [...] The reconfiguration of ethnic frontiers is a selective, arbitrary, and hence a political process because it depends on particular political situations.

The identification of potential or actual enemies and the recruitment of allies, as explained by Monga (2000) above, lead to the creation of certain types of groups whose relevance is temporary, selective, opportunistic and fluid. Anchimbe (2006) identifies many such identity-based opportunistic groups Cameroonians construct in order to benefit from the socio-political advantages provided by such groups. These groups, consciously constructed by members, are endowed with (positive) qualities that make them look different from others. The major markers used are geographical and linguistic similarities. Anchimbe (2006: 250) sums up the non-linguistic factors thus:

The main non-linguistic parameters of group identity in Cameroon are generally geophysically shared features that signal similarity and common identity. The notorious diversity of Cameroonian ethnicity is overcome by impressively devised similarities. Geophysical similarities are used to bridge the more glaring differences of languages, ethnicity, religions and cultural practices. Common among these are references to regionally shared characteristics and natural boundaries. Regionally, we have *the coastal people, the Grand North, the forest people, the Grassland cultures*; and for natural boundaries we have the historically significant expressions, *on the other side of the (River) Mounjo, Ambazonian Republic (Ambas Bay)*.

Interaction within and across these groups require coping strategies that can be explained using postcolonial pragmatic components like history, ethnicity, religion and others. A significant question to answer in such an investigation is: What happens when these groupings are rather used to stigmatise members and subject them to certain verbal insults or linguistic victimisation from other groups? Opportunistic identity groupings are modelled on the in-group structure and identity alignment provided by ethnic groups. Ethnic group identity tends to be the strongest and the innermost coat of the onion-like multiple identities people construct in postcolonial collectivist societies.

Mulo Farenkia (2011) explains from a postcolonial pragmatic perspective how ethnic group stereotypes are used to insult and denigrate members. Certain ethnic and social group names have been steeped into stereotypes such that they are no longer used only for members of the group but are also used metaphorically as insults on others. In some of these names, Mulo Farenkia (2011: 1485) says,

on observe qu'il s'articule surtout autour des termes comme *bami*, *anglo*, *nkwa*, *wadjio*, *bassa*, etc., des dénominatifs qui n'indiquent pas seulement l'appartenance (ethnique ?) d'un individu, mais ces mots-textes participent aussi et surtout à l'affirmation agressive de l'*ethos* ethnique du locuteur qui entend par là dénier ou dévaloriser l'identité ethnique de l'autre.

...one observes that it revolves around the terms *bami*, *anglo*, *nkwa*, *wadjio*, *basaa*, etc., which are indicative not only of the ethnic appearance of the individual but also, and above all, are an aggressive affirmation of the ethnic style or ethos of the speaker. The aim is to devalue or denigrate the ethnic identity of the other. *My translation*

In the quote above, Mulo Farenkia (2011) identifies stereotyped appellations used to refer not only to the entire ethnic or social group but also to its members. These terms are, therefore, used to devalue and attack the group's face in a bid to insult or ridicule the individual. Two of the terms are created through clipping, i.e., *Bami* from Bamileke and *anglo* from Anglophone; one is a derogatory name, i.e., *wadjio*, for Muslims; and the other, *Bassa*, is the name of the ethnic group.

Mulo Farenkia (2011) uses Example 1 to illustrate the extension of socio-ethnic insults from the group to the individual. The exchange takes place in an open market in Yaounde. The two female market retailers (commonly referred to in Cameroon as 'buyam-sellams' – buy-to-sell), belong to two different ethnic groups: the Bamileke and the Beti ethnic groups. In the exchange, they quarrel over a potential buyer, but the insults they direct at each other rather target their ethnic groups. The context of the interaction – the competitive open market setting – creates a tense atmosphere between the two as they struggle to sell their goods.

#### Example 1

Eton woman:           Aaaa glafis! Vous et vos maris, vous êtes des sources de famla. (*Aaaa grassfield! You and your husbands are the source of witchcraft.*) *My translation*

Bamileke woman: Les nkwa! Vous êtes très égoïstes. Pour un seul client, tu m'agresses comme ça? (*The Nkwas! You are very egoistic. Because of one client, you are attacking me this way?*) My translation (Mulo Farenkia 2011: 1488)

The Eton woman does not call the Bamileke woman by her name or by the name of her ethnic group, i.e., Bamileke, but rather chooses a stereotyped reference, 'glafis' (grassfields). In this reference, she includes ethnic groups and regions generally referred to as the grassfield people or cultures. The Bamileke vendor in return uses a highly stigmatised reference to the Beti, i.e., 'les nkwa', which means worthless, lazy, unprogressive, unscrupulous and pleasure-seeking people. This reference ignores the ethnic diversity within the Beti group which is made up of the Bulus, Ewondos and Etons, who in turn have internal stereotypes on them. Notice the use of the plural pronouns, 'vous, vos', even though they are addressing each other. This confirms the hypothesis advanced above that ethnic insults hurt the individual more than personal insults. Selecting group-based insults or stereotypes is, therefore, conscious, and investigating such intentions requires solid foundation in the composition of the society. Postcolonial pragmatics offers the tools for doing so (see Anchimbe 2018).

#### **4. Offer refusals: Stereotypes and verbal behaviour**

Searle (1976) classifies offers (of services, goods, assistance, etc.) under the category of commissive speech acts since these commit the offerer to a future action deemed to be relevant to the offeree. But for Wunderlich (1977: 30), offers are similar to conditional speech acts like warnings, threats, advice, and extortions, which as he explains "interfere with the addressee's planning of action". Whichever classification we accept, the bottom line remains the same – the realisation of any offer depends on the offeree's disposition to accept it. Therefore, acceptance is generally dependent on the amount of trust the offeree has in the offerer, the social distance between the two, and the offeree's decision to incur such a debt. The onus here is on the individual and their personal wants and face needs.

However, in the Cameroonian postcolonial context, the onus lies more with respect for the group's norms and expectations than with individual wants and face needs. Offer refusals could, therefore, also be motivated by the offeree's knowledge of the social stereotypes attached to the ethnic group of the offerer and the social norms of their own society that govern behaviour in such situations. As such, it is not only the individual social relationship between the two but also the collective public face of their ethnic groups that determines how individuals react in such social interaction situations.

The discussion of the role of social and ethnic stereotypes in the refusal of offers below is at two levels: ethnic groups (4.1) and historical linguistic groups (4.2). Ethnicity and history are two central postcolonial pragmatic components through which the collectivist base of postcolonial societies can be easily described. These components are crucial in the discussion in sections 4.1 and 4.2.

The data discussed indicate how ethnic and historical linguistic groups have been associated with certain negative qualities that repel other people from interacting with, accepting offers from, and engaging in personal relationships with them. It indicates that social conflicts are easily and strategically represented in speech, and that the physical and non-verbal patterns through which negatively-construed groups are avoided, denigrated also have linguistic counterparts, i.e. physical avoidance and denigration of group members can also be done through speech. The defence of ethnic group identity and face, therefore, takes priority over individual identity and face, which also explains why insults on the ethnic group directed at individual members of the group tend to have a stronger effect than those directed at the individual's persona.

#### 4.1 Ethnic group stereotypes in offer refusals

The multiplicity of ethnic groups in Cameroon, just as in many other postcolonial African countries, has often been used for political gains by politicians, who emphasise ethnic differences in a bid to keep the people divided making it easy for them to consolidate power. This has had a top-down effect on inter-ethnic and inter-regional interaction. Members of these groups now place stereotypes and stigmas on certain cultural and social aspects of other groups they consider opposed to them and use these to denigrate, avoid and close group borders to their members. The bigger picture is that this socio-political behaviour has extended into social interaction and verbal behaviour. Ethnic groups are now often recognised, not according to their specific positive social features, but rather according to the stigmas placed on them. Facets targeted in the creation of stereotypes include cultural activities, religious beliefs, sectarian belonging, history, political leaning, ethnic group myths, norms and expectations. These facets could be used as pragmatic components in the investigation of speaker intentions in interactions, as shown in the analysis below.

In Example 2 below, both respondents agree they would turn down offers from people if they knew they were members of certain ethnic groups. They initially hesitate to name the ethnic groups but eventually do so when reassured that the interview is for research only. The male respondent mitigates the refusal by implying that he would accept it but “will not consume the offer” (2). Accepting but not consuming the offer helps him maintain the bond between him and the offerer so that none of them loses face. It also ensures solidarity and cohesion within their society hence consolidating the

group's public image or face. He (and by extension his ethnic group) has respected the default norm of accepting offers but by not consuming it, he gives credence to the stereotype placed on the ethnic group of the offerer.

Example 2. (2009, Bamenda, Male (40-45 years, teacher) and female (25-30 years, journalist))

- (1) Question: So you will turn it [the offer] down if you knew that person is from a given ethnic group?
- (2) Male: Good, from a particular ethnic group that is, let's say, is suspicious, I will not consume the offer.
- (3) Question: Just tell me, any ethnic group?
- (4) Male: No, I don't have any.
- (5) Female: (smiles) You know, it is not good calling names here, but ehh, you know, it is a matter of research, research purpose?
- (6) Question: Hmm, yes.
- (7) Female: I will say; we get to the South West, the Bayangis. I fear that tribe wholeheartedly from what I have been hearing and they confirm it themselves. Like, you know, when they die, they go, they come back. I don't know how far is that true. But coming from their mouth, I would say, they usually say, get the news from the horse's own mouth. When I get to areas like that I am very very scared. My acquaintance to people, my approach, my manner of approaching to people changes automatically.
- (8) Question: So you would think of turning down an offer if you knew this is a Bayangi person?
- (9) Female: From that zone, from that area. Even you are from the North West Region or you are [from] my tribe and you've been living there for over 15, 20 years, I am just going to be scared. I will be scared all through until I get out of that place.

On the contrary, the female respondent is blunt in her response. She singles out the Bayangi ethnic group because as she says, "when they die, they go, they come back" (7). The aspect of the Bayangi ethnic group that is stigmatised here is the common belief that members of the ethnic group continue their lives in other parts of the world after they die, especially if they die prematurely. It might not altogether simply be a belief or a myth because as the respondent says in turn (7), it is "coming from their mouth" and is thus believable. The strength of the stereotype is seen in her choice of

words, e.g. “I fear that tribe wholeheartedly”, (7) “I am very very scared” (7), and “I will be scared all through until I get out of that place” (9).

Her reaction to people from this ethnic group is not only physical, i.e., fear and scare, but also verbal or linguistic. As she says, her way of approaching people will change automatically (7). What this means is that social acts of exclusion and stigmatisation exert impacts on linguistic choices; and it is only when interactants observe these hurdles correctly without creating breaches in interpersonal relationship that they are considered competent members of the community. This competence is almost indispensable in a postcolonial society like Cameroon given its sociocultural, linguistic and ethnic plurality. Being aware of, and socialised into, social norms, inter-ethnic rivalry or cooperation facilitates choices in communication.

Interestingly, the female respondent does not limit this stereotype to Bayangi people alone but extends it to include anyone, even people from her “tribe” and region who have lived in Bayangi land for 15 to 20 years (9). This indicates that the stereotype could be extended to non-ethnic group members. When that happens regularly, the stereotype could become a metaphorical or idiomatic reference for anyone who portrays aspects of the ethnic group, i.e., the practice of coming back to life in another location after death.

In Cameroon, ethnic origin often takes priority over linguistic similarity or personal closeness in the decision to refuse offers. This applies most evidently to those ethnic groups that have widespread stereotypes on them. Given that Anglophones and Francophones identify each other exceedingly through the use of English and French respectively, the use of English does not usually automatically open Anglophone in-group boundaries to others, especially Francophones.

In Example 3, Female 1 says she will not be flattered by the use of English by someone from Mbouda (14), a Bamileke town (Francophone), into accepting an offer from him or her. The Bamilekes are identified with witchcraft, especially what is referred to as ‘famla’ or “nyongo” (41). It is believed that some members of this ethnic group belong to witchcraft cults (famla) that kill people mysteriously and that these victims go on to work for them in another world as zombies. Being a wealthy and business-inclined ethnic group, this famla argument is often used to account for the amount of wealth these people have. Again, like above, an ethnic-group stereotype determines how an offer is accepted or refused at the interpersonal level.

Example 3. (2009, Yaounde: Two females, postgraduate researchers, 35-40 years)

- (10) Question: If the person speaks English and then offers to give you something and you realise the person is from the West. Would you accept?  
(11) Female1: That’s why I told you that sharing begins with dialogue.

- (12) Question: The person is from the West and you have started talking in English.  
(13) Female1: And I ask you, 'where are you from?'  
(14) Question: And you ask deeper and the person says, ohh! I am from Mbouda.  
(15) Female 2: You just vomit all what you have eaten.  
(16) Female1: I have not yet eaten.  
(17) Question: If you have eaten?  
(18) Female1: You just, hahahah.  
(19) Question: And if you had eaten?  
(20) Female1: No. I can't eat like that. I know it, I am not a child.

In the exchange in Example 3, Female 1 hesitates to say exactly what she would do if she had accepted the offer before knowing the offerer is from Mbouda, a Bamileke town in the West Region (12-14). Given her knowledge of inter-ethnic rivalry, she says she would rather be cautious: "I can't eat like that. I know it, I am not a child" (20). However, Female 2's reaction is more dramatic and unmitigated as she says she will "vomit" all she had eaten (15). This response signals the pervasiveness of ethnic stereotypes within the community and their influence on interpersonal interaction. The desire to protect the social public face of the group is not as strong in this example as in Example 2 where the male respondent says he would accept the offer but would not consume it. The two respondents in Example 3 do not feel obliged to maintain in-group cohesion with a Bamileke person because first, they do not belong to the same ethnic group and second, they are Anglophones and the Bamilekes are Francophones. The Anglophones have often accused the majority Francophones of marginalisation since the two former British and French colonies reunited at independence in the 1960s (see section 4.2) This double layer of identity attachment is crucial for individuals when they interact both socially and linguistically in inter-ethnic or inter-group contexts.

Again, the importance of verbal interaction during the offer act is highlighted in this exchange. Female 1 insists on talking with the offerer first before accepting any offer. For her, the face-threatening question "Where are you from?" is indispensable in such situations, even if the discussion is in a language that is the group's major code, such as English for Anglophones. In this regard, the relationship between language and ethnicity becomes a tricky one since the use of the same language is not enough to signal belonging to the 'same' social or ethnic entity.

#### 4.2 Colonial linguistic group stereotypes in offer refusals

The two colonially-introduced linguistic groups in Cameroon are the Anglophones and the Francophones. They are strong because they have historical roots and are identified with specific geographical locations: the former French and former British colonies.

Moreover, the country is divided into ten administrative regions, two of which are Anglophone. This historically-based classification makes Cameroon to stand out as an odd member in the common dichotomies studied in postcolonial communities. The struggle for public space is not between discourses produced in the ex-colonial languages and the indigenous languages, as it is the case in Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique, etc., but rather between two ex-colonial languages, French and English. Cameroonians now build solid ethnic-like groups and identities (see Example 6) around these languages such that certain characteristics, which Anchimbe (2005) refers to as anglophonism and francophonism, can be identified as specific to each of them. Members of the two groups behave differently when together and when with a member of the other group. For instance, they quickly open group boundaries to fellow members but close them to non-members. They also easily accept offers from fellow members but not from non-members. These groups now have unwritten in-group norms that members are expected to abide by in order to project and consolidate an acceptable group face (see Eyoh 1998a, Tatah Mentan 1998, Wolf 2001, Jua and Konings 2004).

In Example 4, the male respondent says he would accept the offer if he knew the offerer were an Anglophone like himself. He is convinced that such situations cannot be mistaken because he can distinguish, even through dressing, an Anglophone from a Francophone (24-28).

Example 4. (2009, Bamenda, Male (40-45 years, teacher) and female (25-30 years, journalist)

- (21) Question: Well, in all, speaking English in that context, will it affect your reaction?
- (22) Female: It's no assurance.
- (23) Question: But for you, yes.
- (24) Male: Ya, at least ehh you may be thinking that this person might have known you somewhere and giving you an offer and being a stranger in that town this person might have known a bit about you. But unfortunately, you know, dressing used to sometimes indicate where you come from... Where you come from because when I find an *anglophone* in Yaounde
- (25) Question: You know?
- (26) Male: I know that this is an *anglophone*. When I find a *francophone* I will know.
- (27) Question: Just from the way they dress?
- (28) Male: Just from the way they dress.

(29) Female: That is just to say, eh, if I meet that person; let's get more acquainted, you know, and eh maybe.

(30) Question: Maybe later on?

(31) Female: May be later on, in the course of the discussion.

If we compare the position adopted by the respondents in Example 4 to earlier examples, we realise that they are softer towards fellow Anglophones even more than to members of certain Anglophone ethnic groups. The female respondent initially says it is no assurance that she would accept an offer if she knew the offerer were an Anglophone (22) but ends up agreeing with the male respondent that she may accept later after getting acquainted to the offerer (29-31). This is not the case in her reaction to Bayangis in Example 2, where she stresses "I fear that tribe wholeheartedly... I am very very scared" (7).

It is contradictory that Female 2 who lives in Yaounde (an Anglophone from the South West region) considers all Anglophones as 'brothers' and 'sisters' (41), and that at the same time a fellow Anglophone (the female respondent in Bamenda) is scared of an Anglophone ethnic group. This is, however, normal in postcolonial communities where identity construction depends on contexts of interaction, interactional goals and the desire to be close to or distant from interlocutors, topics and third-party referents. As a result, individuals in these multilingual spaces have various onion-like coats of identity built around languages, ethnicities, professions, social groups, etc., which they constantly put on or switch to as situation and goal demand. Within the entity Anglophone are several ethnic groups. The need to identify with or defend the group or collectivist face of either the Anglophone group or the ethnic group is determined by context and the exigencies it imposes.

## **5. 'Ethnic' as collectivist container**

The category 'ethnic' is construed in the examples as an entity a lot bigger than an ethnic group. The bond between members of certain groups like administrative regions and linguistic groups could be so strong that they think of themselves as belonging to an ethnic group (see Wolf 2001, Anchimbe 2006). Alternatively, they could be thus conceptualised by members of other groups. So, based on certain similarities members of certain other groups may treat groups of people as belonging to an ethnic-like group even though this might not be the case. References to the West, Northerners, Southerners, Anglophones and Francophones in the examples construct them into an ethnic-like group similar to the Bayangi or Bamileke ethnic groups. While the West is an administrative unit, Northerners constitute three administrative regions but are combined into an ethnic-like group based on religion. Islam is the predominant religion

in these three regions. With the help of more examples (5, 6) from the interviews, I explain below how these diverse groups are treated as ethnicities both by members and non-members.

### 5.1 Regions as ‘ethnic’: West, Northerners, Southerners

The question in turn (32) lists three ethnic entities but the responses from Female 1 and Female 2 extend the concept of ethnicity to cover a whole administrative region (35), a group of provinces; “North” and ‘Southerners’ (39). The name of an ethnic group, “Hausas” (39), is mentioned only once in Example 5. The term ‘Bamilekes’ mentioned in the question turn (32) is reframed by Female 1 as “people from Western Province” (35), suggesting that both are interchangeable. They are not synonymous because there are many other ethnic groups in the West Province. Similarly, for Female 2, the Hausas and the Northerners are the same people. This explains why she uses both references as synonyms, “we call them Hausas” (39). Again, this is an extended category because the North is made up of non-Hausa ethnic groups as well. It is also an extended religious container (39) because non-Muslims also live in these three administrative regions. The use of the plural (inclusive) pronouns “we” and “us” (39) introduces another extended category or container, the “Southerners” (39), which includes everyone else apart from the Northerners.

Example 5. (2009, Yaounde: Two females, postgraduate researchers, 35-40 years)

- (32) Question: You know people from different ethnic groups in Cameroon like the Bamilekes, the Ewondos, Wum and so forth. Would you normally not accept an offer from someone because of his/her ethnic group?
- (33) Female1: Of course.
- (34) Question: For instance?
- (35) Female1: For instance, the people from *Western Province*. They are involved in sects, what they call in quotes “nyongo”, yes.
- (36) Question: So, if they offered you a drink you will normally not accept because the person is from the West?
- (37) Female1: I don’t even make friendship with them. For you can make a friend with that type of a person and you find yourself far.
- (38) Question: The same opinion? (*to Female 2*)
- (39) Female 2: Very very much the same, you know. I would not say the *West* but people from the *North*, we call them *Hausas*. Looking at their religion and also their indecency, at times they offer me certain things I will not like to take because it’s like they have a stigma from

us *Southerners*; so such people will scare me from receiving anything from them.

In identifying and stigmatising the Northerners, Female 2 finds it necessary to create an in-group to which she belongs; one to which the Northerners may be opposed. This can be seen in the use of the inclusive plural ‘we’ and the exclusive plural pronoun ‘them’ in turn (39): “we call them” and “us Southerners”. The boundaries between these groups are sometimes inflexible as Female 1’s response to the question in turn (36) illustrates: “I don’t even make friendship with them” (37). The pronoun “them” covers more people than just the Bamilekes who make up most of the West region but who are not the only ethnic group therein. Creating these extended collectivist groups, makes it easier to delimit the group faces that have to be protected or attacked; the extent to which social norms apply; and the expectations to comply with vis-à-vis the group.

## 5.2 Anglophones and Francophones as ‘ethnic’

If one takes into account the creation of collectivist containers in which to fit different groups of people, then Wolf (2001) is right to suggest that the feeling of being an Anglophone in Cameroon has become as strong as belonging to an ethnic group. Anglophones can no longer simply be defined in terms of the use of English and origin in the two English-speaking regions because over the decades they have constructed themselves into an extended socio-ethnic group with more characteristics and ethics that stretch beyond language and origin. These characteristics, especially in moral behaviour and education, have often been credited for the influx of Francophone children in English-medium schools not only in Yaounde and Douala but also in the Anglophone zone (see Anchimbe 2005, Mforteh 2007, Fonyuy 2010).

As can be seen in Example 6, Anglophones refer to each other using the kinship relations ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ and behave more cooperatively when together. Here the conceptual metaphor, COMMUNITY IS FAMILY is used to define the limits and expectations of the group (see Anchimbe 2018, 2021). Of course, an offer from a kin is expected to be accepted without any distrust or suspicion. The respondent in Example 6 agrees that she would go against her normal habit of refusing offers to accept an offer if she knew the offerer were an Anglophone, whom she refers to as “my brother, my sister from the same zone” (41). Even though the word ‘Anglophone’ is not mentioned in the question (40), the respondent immediately links the act of speaking English to being Anglophone.

Example 6. (2009, Yaounde: Two females, postgraduate researchers, 35-40 years)

- (40) Question: Alright, any addition to that as far as language and contact is concerned; that is to say, if you met someone on the bus and the person speaks to you in English, would you move closer to the person or you will still stay far away until you know where exactly that person is from?
- (41) Female 2: Considering the context in which we are in Cameroon, you know there is that division, francophone and anglophone. So, when we are travelling and you identify your *brother anglophone* or *your sister anglophone*, you will find yourself relating more to that person because you really identify with the person. So, it is very difficult to refuse an offer from such a person because you already know this is *my brother, my sister* from the same zone. So, you will, I think, for me I will not refuse any offer but then considering the fact that I am a Christian, so, anything that I receive I pray and I know nothing evil can happen to me. So, I don't have that much fear.

Interestingly, the amount of fear that goes with receiving offers from 'strangers' disappears when the offerer is an Anglophone. An Anglophone is family. Besides, whatever unknown, evil outcome may be triggered by the offer is, for the respondent, to be taken care of by God, since, as she says, "I am a Christian, so, anything that I receive I pray and I know nothing evil can happen to me" (41). By reverting to God in this case, the respondent makes use of a strong postcolonial pragmatic component, religion. Being a resilient facet of postcolonial societies, religion serves as an all-powerful solution to every problem. In Example 6, protection from anything evil in the offer lies in prayer. The reliance on this colonial heritage indicates the level of hybridism and coalescence that colonialism set in motion in these societies. In line with the tenets of postcolonial pragmatics, all of these components are indispensable in appropriately accounting for communicative decisions in postcolonial societies.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has illustrated, with the help of examples from Cameroon, that socio-ethnic stereotypes, biases, and insults directed at an individual's group hurt the individual even more than those directed at the individual as an individual. This is because of the collectivist nature of these postcolonial societies in which an individual's worth is often valued in terms of their socio-ethnic group's value. Using postcolonial pragmatics as frame of analysis, the paper showed how group members' verbal and physical

behaviour could be influenced by belonging to and alignment with an ethnic or social entity. For instance, accepting offers from strangers is possible if offerees know the offerers belong to the same socio-ethnic group as themselves and not to a group that has certain stereotypes linked to it. So, in these collectivist societies success in interpersonal and intergroup communication sometimes depends on knowledge of group stereotypes and biases. In individualistic societies, success rather depends more on the mitigation, through for example, politeness, indirectness, hedging, etc., of the speech act than interlocutors' group alignment.

Any pragmatic analysis of interactional (verbal and non-verbal) behaviour in collectivist societies like the Cameroonian studied in this paper will have to take into account the place of social and ethnic stereotypes in the way people address others, agree with others, accept things from others, position themselves vis-à-vis others, make friends with others, and open up individual and group boundaries to others. It is not a temporary stage in the lives of people because some of these adaptation strategies are taught to children in their early years of interaction with the outer, extended family and inter-ethnic contacts. They are socialised into them from childhood. Studies also have to take into account the possibilities and constraints of each collectivist culture, and how members live up to societal expectations by playing the roles that match their social status, age, gender and position in the community.

From another perspective, one of the aims of this paper has been to encourage more pragmatic research into patterns of social and linguistic interaction among Cameroonian (and other African) indigenous cultures in their hybrid and hybridising states. Such perspectives will provide more reliable explications of speakers' choices of language, words and identity 'coat' in given contexts and with given interlocutors. The use of names or naming strategies (Anchimbe 2008, 2011), address forms (Echu 2008), insulting references (Mulo Farenkia 2011), and certain discourse markers (Talla Sando 2006) to refer to people suggest far more than identification or naming. These strategies also indicate patterns of closeness and distance, politeness and impoliteness, in-group vs. out-group construction, and deference and social hierarchy within the society and between interlocutors. While sociolinguistic approaches expose them as they are, emic pragmatic approaches like the postcolonial pragmatics framework are necessary in explaining their illocutionary motivations, the importance of collectivist social norms on them and their actual or intended perlocutionary impacts on interlocutors.

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