

Narratives of Internally Displaced Persons of Anglophone Cameroon Crisis: A Circumstantial Appraisal

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Abstract

Narratives of trauma are generally aimed at expressing the depth of pain experienced by victims in an attempt to begin the journey towards healing and the choice of expressions show how close or distant to the victim is the narrative event. This article examines the use of circumstantial elements to prove both authenticity and negotiate how close to the heart the traumatic event is to the victims of trauma in the Anglophone Cameroon Crisis. The data were collected from sixty victims using a convenient sampling technique. Ethnographic approaches, which include semi-open interviews, diary reading, and focus-group discussions, were used. The qualitative research design was used focusing on the circumstantial elements found in the narratives of the victims sampled for this work. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics was used to analyze the data focusing largely on the use of duration, which involves time and space; manner and cause. This work concludes that by making use of adverbial and prepositional phrases, the victims show a very close relationship with their traumatic experiences as expressed in the exactitude with which they associate these experiences with the time, space, cause, and manner of occurrence. It further suggests that, while handling the socio-political causes of the crisis, attention should be paid to the depth of the wounds inflicted by the crisis in the hearts of the victims through the creation of trauma healing centers and the provision of psychosocial support for all victims.

Keywords: Trauma, IDPs, narratives, Anglophone, Crisis, SFL

1. Introduction

There is a continuous relationship between language and society and this relationship has to do with the ability to do things with words (Emike et al., 2017). Effectively, communicating what is felt for the other to either empathize or judge is largely based on the grammatical resources applied by the narrator. To foster understanding in any communicative event whether it be traumatic or otherwise, speakers employ different discourse strategies, some of which are essentially stylistic (Brown & Yule, 1983). The ideas people communicate to one another cover among other things their feelings and the beliefs, which bind them together as members of the same community.

The significant role that language plays in people's daily lives is partly social and partly psychological which involves the understanding of human behavior and human interactions (Osimen et al., 2015). Language is very crucial in the expression of ideas especially when the speaker is expecting the words to have particular effects on the listener. People, therefore, choose particular language structures in any communicative event for particular reasons because language is the vehicle for thought. It is through language and communication that the heart of a person can be seen (Adejimola, 2009). The implication is that language makes it possible for an individual to express feelings, emotions, views, ideas, opinions, perceptions as well as judgments about people, objects, places, things, information, and situations (Adejimola, 2009. p. 2). In narrating traumatic experiences, the victims pay particular attention to places, things, and emotions that keep the images engraved in their minds and create a bond between the victim and the traumatic event. The linguistic resources used to express these feelings vary from person to person depending on the context in which they find themselves.

The study of trauma narratives is important in clarifying the nature of trauma memory to ascertain the depth of the effect the experience has on the individual. Focusing on these narratives in very significant ways helps in the understanding of how trauma impacts both an individual and a community. Hwangbo (2004) describes trauma as the disenfranchised pain and grief that cannot be integrated into a person's general meaning structure and belief system. This is an experience of calamity that brings about a violent rupture on both the personal and the social levels. When a community that once had a normal and healthy functioning order suddenly experiences a negative or horrifying shift in their way of life caused by a crisis such as the ongoing Anglophone Cameroon Crisis, the devastating effects include what Zasiiekina (2020) explains as specific emotions caused by the trauma. These emotions are horror, fear, mistrust, sadness, shame, anger, stress and anxiety; these, break the very fabric that holds a community together.

The Anglophone Cameroon Crisis has become a fertile ground that produces horrendous narratives of trauma, which speak of human rights abuses that have caused untold pain and trauma, especially to the inhabitants of English-

speaking Cameroon (Human Rights Watch, 2018). According to Gould (2019), the United Nations Crisis Report determined the number of persons affected by this Crisis at the beginning of 2019 to be more than 4 million with 1.3 million in need of aid; 160.000 targeted and 437.500 persons displaced. This is in addition to those living in fear whose lives have been drastically transformed by the crisis. The expression of horror in the narratives and the detailed explanations covering especially time and space, manner, and cause, paint a picture of a deep sense of loss and a growing feeling of hopelessness with regard to how much longer the trauma will go on.

2. Background to the study

Gould (2019) explains that the socio-historical origin of the Anglophone Cameroon Crisis is critical for understanding how it escalated and how it is manifesting itself currently. She focuses on the role of colonization in the political trajectory that transformed it into a system of glaring disparity. To her, the fact that Cameroon was developed and treated as separate territories since its occupation by Britain and France beginning in 1916 with different agendas, institutions, cultures, and languages continued long beyond the colonial era. The hope that was born at independence and reunification disintegrated with Francophone domination. As she puts it ‘simultaneously, Anglophones have been systematically eliminated from public discourse and subjugated as second-class citizens’ (Gould, 2019. p. 5). This marginalization led to peaceful protests by Anglophones against the government, which erupted into overt violence and calls for secession.

Willis et al. (2019) agree with Gould (2019) that the present crisis in Anglophone Cameroon cannot be comprehended outside its historical context. They consider the problem to be rooted in the land boundary and colonial policy implemented by the British and French a century before the conflict started. As they put it ‘decades of French and British colonial policy transformed the physical border into something deeply rooted, which has created complex cultural differences that are manifested in the practices of communities and embedded in the socio-political structure’ (p. 7). They explain that the reunification of the Anglophone regions into Cameroon has never been fully accepted and despite the frustrations of Anglophone stakeholders since that time, their grievances have

yet to be addressed by both Cameroon and the international community. Several Anglophone movements have developed over decades calling for the Anglophone Problem to be addressed. They include Southern Cameroons National Council, Southern Cameroons Youth League, and Free West Cameroon Movement amongst others. These long-standing grievances are at the root of the angry outbursts in the Anglophone regions that matured into an armed conflict leaving many displaced, abused, and traumatized.

3. Review of Related Literature

Mackinnon (2000) explores aspects of discourse, memory and narrative, which put together paint a clear picture of the difficulty involved in the narration of war trauma. He thinks this can be solved using a literary approach to narrating trauma, which provides a vent through which problematic aspects of war trauma can be represented. He also considers that there is a possibility of the survivor never being able to fully tell the story of their war trauma. It should be noted that as difficult as representing the trauma of war in words can be, to Mackinnon (2000), a means has to be provided for the victim and the platform is the literary world though the task of the author can be a very trying one.

Dalenberg (2000) agrees with Mackinnon (2000) on the difficulty involved in speaking trauma. As she puts it 'trauma is hard to speak, and hard to hear'. This is because they are sudden, uncontrollable, and negative events. Though she focuses on the inadequacy of language in describing trauma, she agrees that the ability to find a vent helps the traumatized person to start making meaning of the traumatic event.

Matei (2013) shifts slightly from the above authors by looking at the linguistic mechanisms that show the manner in which a person evaluates their traumatic experiences rather than looking at how inadequate language is in describing their pain. She explains that the use of language exposes the distance that the speaker puts between them and their experience. This aspect of her research ties with what this present article focuses on; the ability of the victim in their use of language, to show how close or distant the traumatic event affects them. Her focus on the discourse markers frequently used in the trauma narratives

she sampled, shows that language can also furnish proof of healing when an individual is narrating their experience.

Knutsen & Jensen (2017) on their part posit that the construction of a trauma narrative may serve several functions but whatever the functions are, it should be noted that the ability to coherently narrate trauma is important for being able to communicate one's experiences to others to make meaning of the sad events. Furthermore, trauma narrative work contributes to the processing of the traumatic experience and integrating it as part of the memories of the individual, which forms part of their autobiographical memories.

4. Theoretical Framework

This article makes use of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyze the narratives of the victims. In SFL, language is considered primarily functional. In analyzing a text, the field, which is the topic, talked about, the tenor, which is the relationship of participants and the mode that is the channel of communication must be considered (Endarto, 2017). Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) emphasize dimensions known as metafunctions, which are ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction refers to the ability that language has to construe human experiences into categories (experiential) and then configure them into complex patterns (logical). This aspect mostly deals with the use of transitivity that includes three main components: processes, participants, and circumstances. The interpersonal metafunction focuses on the ability of language to negotiate social roles and attitudes. This can be analyzed using mood and modality. The textual metafunction looks at the ability of language to create discourse which entails theme and rheme (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004., Endarto, 2017).

The aspect of SFL used in this article is the circumstantial elements that lie at the end of the transitivity continuum. They occur freely in all types of processes and with essentially the same significance. Circumstantial elements instead of standing on their own serve as an expansion of something else. These elements form the adverbial and prepositional groups. They include extent (distance, duration, and frequency), location (place, time), manner (means, quality, comparison, and degree), cause (reason, purpose, and behalf), contingency

(condition, default, and concession), accompaniment (comitative, additive), role (guise, product), matter, angle (source, viewpoint) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This work focuses on three circumstantial elements in the analysis of the data. These are location, manner and cause. According to langster.org, these circumstantial elements make writing more interesting, describe how things appear and happen, and help the reader visualize an action with an appropriate level of intensity.

5. Methodology

This work set out to describe the use of circumstantial elements in the narratives of the victims of trauma in the Anglophone Cameroon Crisis. To describe these circumstantial elements, the qualitative research method was used because of the holistic manner in which it looks at data as well as its interpretative nature. Sixty participants were sampled using convenient sampling. This is because, with narratives of trauma, the victim has to be willing to open up and share their experiences. Many victims regard trauma as an almost sacred part of their experiences. Sharing it, therefore, has to be something they really want to do. Most of the participants choose to remain anonymous, which is why only their first names were used. Some have simply been described using their villages. Ethnographic approaches were used which included audio and video recordings as well as focused group discussions which took place at the Mission 21 Trauma Healing Center, Bamenda. The participants gave their consent for their recordings to be used in this research work as part of their contribution to trauma healing and the creation of awareness of the psychological damage this ongoing crisis has on individuals and communities. The analysis has been done using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics focusing on the circumstantial elements mostly with some emphasis on the processes and the participants since these elements cannot be analyzed on their own.

6. Results and Discussion

Circumstantial elements are somewhat parasitic largely because they depend on the processes to have full meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The use of adverbial and prepositional phrases to show accuracy and credibility in the

narratives translates the vivid manner in which the victims capture their traumatic experiences. The time or place of the action summed up in location, the manner in which the event occurred, and the cause as expressed in the narratives draws the listener into the experience, which at some point can become the cause of vicarious trauma. The intent is to transmit as much as possible the degree of pain, horror and hopelessness that is felt by the victim.

6.1 Location

Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) look at this element representing location from both the angle of place and time of the event. These are represented by adverbs of place answering the question of *where*, adverbs of time answering the question of *when* and duration answering the question of *how long*.

Table 1: Representation of elements of location in clauses

| Clause | Verb | Process | Circumstance | Type |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------|-------|
| Bali-Nyonga is located along the Mamfe-Ekok corridor | is | relational | along | Place |
| I went to the bank...at commercial avenue | went | material | at | Place |
| They were shooting and going toward City Chemist...and toward the main market | were shooting/ going | material | toward | Place |
| It was on a certain September | was | relational | certain | Time |
| It fell on a Monday in Bamenda | fell | material | in | Place |
| They told me to come down to Akaka junction | told | verbal/ material | to | Place |
| It happened around 9pm when everyone was asleep... | happened | material | around | Time |
| They took me to the regional hospital | took | material | to | Place |
| I entered the hospital around 2:30am | entered | material | around | Time |
| Our driver entered inside the bush | entered | material | Inside | Place |
| From Oku to Noni we met seven checkpoints | met | material | from/to | Place |
| We had to move from Bamenda to Yaounde | had to move | material | to/from | Place |
| A truck pulled up just a few yards from her house | pulled up | material | from | Place |
| She left her house till today | left | material | till | Time |
| After eight months, the organization had to pull out with its workers | pull out | material | after | Time |
| ...the common man has to trek from Bali to town everyday | to trek | material | from/to | Place |
| At about 3 pm the gunshots still continued | continued | material | at/about | Time |
| So, we stayed there till 5pm | stayed | material | there/till | Time |
| The boys attacked us from the bush | attacked | material | from | Place |
| We just lay on the floor | lay | material | on | Place |
| we started hearing gunshots around the place, behind Camairco | started hearing | verbal | around/behind | Place |
| That night, we didn't sleep until the next | didn't sleep | material | until | Time |

| | | | | |
|---|------------------|-------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| morning we had to escape | | | | |
| ...the separatist came and pined flags on all road junctions | came/ pinned | material | on | Place |
| It all happened in 2018 while I was still in Babessi | happened /was | material/ relational | still in | Place |
| My neighbor was captured in mile three... | was captured | material | In | Place |
| That Wednesday I was coming back from work... | was coming | material | that | Time |
| We heard gunshots around. | heard | mental | around | Place |
| ...the man was shot dead in front of his wife | was shot | material | in front | Place |
| ...what took place on the 5th of June 2021 | took place | material | On | Time |
| This particular Saturday... | / | / | particular | Time |
| ...I did not sleep for 15 minutes when I heard... | sleep | material | For | Time |
| As early as 5am I went to his compound... | went | material | as early as | Time |
| ...on the 8th of August 2018, I was returning from church... | was returning | material | on/of/from | time/ place |
| ...six months after we had a road block... | had | relational | after | Time |
| ...from that day when I see a military man... | see | mental | from/when | Time |
| Recently, I visited Fundong... | visited | material | recently | Time |
| I saw a young man behind my house | saw | mental | behind | Place |
| ...later on, my son was kidnapped... | was kidnapped | material | later on | Time |
| ...for two whole weeks my mother slept like a new born baby | slept | material | for | Dura tion |
| It's getting to four to five weeks now that we are not stable | are | relational | to | Dura tion |
| They were shooting and giving an interval of five minutes | were | relational | of | Dura tion |

The use of circumstantial elements expressing time is meant to show when each event occurred and how it affects the victim. Some experiences happened momentarily and it was over; others took longer periods making the trauma complex. In expressions of time such as: *in 2016, that Monday morning, on the third of September 2017, that night at 1 am, at about 3 pm, it was at night...* the victim is announcing an event that is about to occur or declaring the close of an event that has already traumatized them. When the narrator says: *that night at 1 pm*, though it seems like the event is coming from a locked-up historical archive, it is evident that the traumatic event is in the long-term memory of the victim. The listener is invited to feel the way the victim felt considering the fact that *1 pm* is a time when the world is supposed to be asleep. The precision with the time tells the listener how close to the event the individual was and leaves a picture of how traumatized the narrator is, owing to the fact that the crisis is still ongoing. Thus, there is also the fear of reoccurrence. The references made to events that took place *in 2016, on the third of September 2017, that Monday morning* could be interpreted as events that are somewhat distant in the memory

of the narrator brought up to justify the feeling of generalized grief experienced by those trapped within it or are affected by the consequences of the war.

The expressions of time that involve *till, until as in from 3 pm till 5 pm, from Friday night till the next morning, until my neighbor came, till about eight weeks...* presuppose a duration within the traumatic event. The event is not just signaled like a hit-and-run affair but the victim endured a degree of torture within a given period with no ability to object or escape.

The use of circumstantial elements to express location is meant to give credibility to the narratives and to show the listener that the event took place in the presence of the narrator or someone close. These expressions of place are made mention so that the narratives can be verified were possible. The narrators make use of expressions of place such as: *in Bali, along the Mamfe-Ekok corridor, at Commercial Avenue, at the bank, to Atuakum, from Oku to Noni, from Bamenda to Yaounde, in the house, on the floor, behind Camairco, on all road junctions...* The processes that precede these circumstantial elements are indicative of the actions, doings, and feelings of either the perpetrators of violence or the state of the victims.

The above pattern pervades all the narratives showing the impact of the events on the narrators. The narrators go into the details of location largely because they assume that given the context of communication, the listener is aware of some of the incidents quoted and the tension that exists in some of the places named. The narrators are also aware of the fact that the listener knows that particular spots were and are still dangerous especially traveling to the villages. The narrators' using context to their advantage is able to make the listener both believe the stories as well as live the trauma with them.

6.2 Manner

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), this circumstantial element answers the question *how, by what mean, like what, or how much?* It is represented in the table below as used by the victims of trauma in their narratives.

Table 2: Representation of elements of manner in the clauses

| Clause | Verb | Process | Circumstance | Type |
|---|-----------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| ...the organization had to pull out its workers | pull out | material | with | Manner |
| I was so scared | was | relational | so | Manner |
| Suddenly, we started hearing gunshots... | started hearing | material | suddenly | Manner |
| It was really scary | was | relational | really | Manner |
| I quickly banged the door... | quickly | material | quickly | manner |
| it was actually very difficult for us to live our lives | was | relational | actually very | manner |
| It's really disheartening... | is | relational | really | manner |
| So eventually my mom lost it... | lost | material | so, eventually | manner |
| The Anglophone crisis has affected me in many ways... | has affected | material | in | manner |
| This crisis has affected me and my family very greatly | has affected | material | very, greatly | manner |
| We are now living separately dotted all over the country... | Living | material | separately | manner |
| I was so confused | was | relational | so | manner |
| It was not easy but gradually it's getting better... | was not | relational | gradually | manner |
| My parents are really affected | are | relational | really | manner |
| I was always very scared | was | relational | always, very | manner |
| ...but sadly, it is actually happening... | is | relational | sadly, actually | manner |
| ...after that I constantly had nightmares | had | relational | constantly | manner |
| It has really been a great loss | has | relational | really | manner |

The elements of manner expressed in the following examples *precisely, so, really, quickly, actually, very* are used to show the intensity of the actions and happenings. These circumstantial elements are used by the narrators to portray those circumstances that are crucial to the understanding of the meanings of their declarative statements. In statements like: *it was actually very difficult for us to live our lives...* the intention of the narrator is not just to give the information but to let the listener see the degree of difficulty the traumatic experiences has brought to their lives.

6.3 Cause

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), this element answers the question of *why, what for, and who for?* The reasons are largely explanations of the situation as witnessed by the victim of trauma or the justification of the perpetrator with the intention of imposing their structure while inflicting trauma on the victim.

Table 3: Representation of element of cause in the clauses

| Clause | Verb | Process | circumstance | type |
|--|-------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| ...people are afraid to travel because of the trouble... | are | relational | because | cause |

| | | | | |
|---|---------------|----------|---------|-------|
| My friend also had to leave because they burned down their house | had to leave | material | because | cause |
| That time they said I was taken because I was a teacher | was taken | material | because | cause |
| We left Bamenda because one night someone showed me a gun | left | material | because | cause |
| It started because a gendarme officer was killed | started | material | because | cause |
| She had to travel twice because her family was scattered | had to travel | material | because | Cause |
| My organization left because the organization could no longer pay its workers | left | material | because | cause |

The element of ‘cause’, largely represented in the narratives through the use of *because* links the action to the reasons behind the response. The traumatic experience produces a response from the victim necessitating an explanation to help the listener see the degree of helplessness and the concept of generalized grief experienced at all levels of communal life. This is exemplified in statements like *my organization left because the organization could no longer pay its workers...the leaving of the organization, means loss of jobs and livelihood for many families and loss of services provided as well, making the grieving process not just individual but collective.*

Circumstantial elements make writing and speaking to be interesting, describing how things happen and how they appear. These elements are used for emphasis and help the listener or reader to visualize an action from the perspective of the writer or speaker. They also build vivid descriptions that project the mental situation of the victims.

7. Conclusion

The circumstantial element mostly used in the narratives falls under location which is split into place of occurrence and time of action, followed by duration which indicates the length of time the victim endured the torture (which is added under place and time), manner which shows how the action was carried out and lastly the cause. These are the frames used in this work. Circumstantial elements express the speaker’s point of view, add relevant information to what the speaker is saying, show the feelings of the speaker and vividness to the understanding of the audience. The victims express the concept of generalized grief first as individuals in their narratives, secondly though not collectively, grief cuts across all the narratives either from the perspective of a person going

through loss and hardship or from the perspective of an entire community experiencing lockdowns, roadblocks, abductions, flight or torture. The placement of the circumstantial elements in the tables above is to show how the narrators perceive their experiences with regard to time, place and duration, manner, and cause. The general pattern in the narratives is to give precision when it comes to specific traumatic experiences to show the listener how close to the experience they were and how the experience has destabilized them psychologically.

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Appendices

Comfort

This incident happened to my father and precisely in Bali Nyonga. So my father works at the Prescraft or handicraft center in Bali Nyonga. He said from the beginning he heard the sound of a gunshot. Prescraft is an organization that deals with woodwork, carving and planing machine so the machine was actually making a lot of noise. So when he heard the sound of the first gunshot, to be sure that what he heard was real he had to put off the planing machine so that he could get what was happening. So he left the workshop and went outside to actually listen from which direction the sound of the gun was coming from; whether it was coming from Bamenda through Bali to get to Batibo, because Bali-Nyonga is located along the Mamfe-Ekok corridor. So from the time he came out from the workshop he listened to the sound of the gun and realized that it was getting intense so he could not actually tell from which direction the gun was coming from. So he was confused whether it was coming from Bamenda going towards Ekok or it was coming from Ekok going towards Bamenda neither was it even coming from the quarter, he could not get it because it was really intense. Now, to his greatest dismay, he wanted to actually go closer to the sound so that he could get the actual direction it was coming from. Just for him to move about ten meters and realize the loudest of the sound of the gun that has ever been shot in Bamenda; bouuuuum!... as though it was a bomb that was shot towards his direction. In response to that incident, he fell, the first that came into his mind was that may be his two legs had been shot he felt that weakness...that...those...weakness around his limbs that he could not walk. He fell on the ground and the only thing he could do... he could not stand up gain to run because had like tried to stand up and his feet could not carry him. He now used his buttocks, crept and entered the bush. So he actually entered the bush with his two...with his buttocks. Crawling like a baby.

Edwina

I have a friend who told me that this crisis a truck pulled up just a few yards from her house and there was a serious fight, serious shooting and she couldn't find a suitable place to hide so she just lay down on her floor...She emptied everything she had in her bank account to start a business which could not hold.

Fanda

...after eight months the organization had to pull out with its workers... that's how I lost my job because the organization could not continue working and had to end contracts with everybody. It's so sad that it's the common man suffering in this crisis...the state armed groups don't want bikes, the non-state armed group say ok if no bikes no cars...at the end of the day it's the common man that suffers.. the government has their armored cars, if they want to move, they'll move...the

common man has to trek from Bali to town everyday... my organization was willing to help people get to the hospital for free but because of political reasons... at the end of the day there is no proof that our vehicles had guns inside

Nadege

...It was at a restaurant at Commercial Avenue where we went to eat. So we went there in the afternoon. For a while we were fine, suddenly we started hearing gunshots just around the place, behind Camairco. So everybody was asked to go on the floor, some people went under the table. There was one grandma who was there too she was so scared until she almost started crying... in fact she started crying. It was really scary...some of them started praying against the shooting. It started because a gendarme officer was killed around small Mankon so they started shooting from small mankon to Commercial Avenue. They shot for over an hour...

Esther

...We left Bamenda because one night I heard a knock and as I went down to open the door of the basement, someone showed me a gun and told me that if we do not give them a certain amount of money they were going to take all of us captives. I quickly banged the door, bolted it and ran upstairs. That night, we didn't sleep until next morning we had to escape. While in my hideout in Douala my house help called me saying that they called her threatening her that they were going to burn down the house...