Language as a Form of Weaponisation in Crisis: The Case of The Current Anglophone Cameroon Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how political discourse functions as a tool of power, marginalization, and radicalization within the context of the current Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. Focusing on a 2016 speech by the Minister of Territorial Administration, Paul Atanga Nji, delivered on CRTV during a national debate on unity, the study investigates how language can escalate social tension. Focusing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Stylistics as theoretical frameworks, the research was guided by the qualitative textual analysis model to uncover discursive strategies, such as declaratives, historical allusions, metaphor, mitigation, and exclusion, that the speaker employs to assert dominance and dismiss dissent. The speech was selected using purposive sampling because of its influential role and timing during the early phase of the crisis. Findings show that the denial of the Anglophone problem and symbolic delegitimization of marginalized voices provoked strong backlash, intensifying rebellion and prolonging the conflict. The article argues that in fragile political settings, language is not neutral but instrumental in shaping ideological boundaries and triggering resistance. It concludes that discourse sensitivity is essential in conflict communication to avoid deepening societal divisions.

Keywords: *Discourse, radicalization, political-discourse, Anglophone crisis, Critical Discourse Analysis*

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INTRODUCTION

This work seeks to investigate the effects of language use on the ongoing Anglophone Cameroon Crisis. This crisis, which erupted in 2016, began as a sit-down strike initiated by Anglophone teachers and lawyers protesting against the systemic marginalization and erosion of the Common Law and English Educational Sub-systems in favour of Francophone structures. What started as a peaceful civil action quickly spiralled into a protracted armed conflict marked by violence, mass displacement, and human rights violations. Central to the crisis is the use of ideologically and politically charged language by public figures. As Piller (2021, p. 1) rightly observes, 'language and communication are fundamental in both the problem and solutions of a crisis. ' Language, therefore, becomes more than a communicative tool. It functions as an instrument of power, manipulation, and identity reinforcement, contributing directly to the endurance of crises like the one in Cameroon.

This study explores how political discourse, particularly that of state officials, exposes and reinforces underlying power structures and ideological biases that shape the trajectory of conflict. Focusing on the Cameroonian Anglophone Crisis, it examines how specific linguistic and discursive choices heighten tensions and foster radicalized responses among marginalized populations. The analysis seeks to uncover how speech acts, rhetorical strategies, and ideological framing within political communication sustain or intensify the crisis, ultimately demonstrating how language use in these contexts plays a crucial role in prolonging conflict and obstructing peaceful resolution.

Focus here is on the speech of the Minister of Territorial Administration, Mr. Paul Atanga Nji, delivered during a televised panel discussion titled Rethinking National Unity, aired on the Cameroon Radio Television Network (CRTV) in June 2016 and later shared on CRTV's Facebook page. It provided an influential platform for the Minister to express controversial views denying the existence of the Anglophone Problem

(CRTV, 2016). This speech is selected not only because of its timing, at the early phase of the Anglophone protests, but also because of its content, tone, and reception by the Anglophone population. Moreover, the language employed in this discourse reveals deep-seated patterns of bias, injustice, inequality, and dominance that significantly contribute to the crisis's resilience (Nouchou, 2022, pp. 26-41). The study explores this speech through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1995) and Critical Stylistics (Jeffries, 2010) to uncover the linguistic choices that encode and decode ideology and shape public response.

There have been some studies on the Anglophone crisis from various perspectives. Fai (2018) investigated how Cameroonian media framed the crisis, noting an evolution in thematic focus that mirrored the country's political atmosphere. However, Fai's work did not explore how political speech influences public response or prolongs the crisis. Agwanda et al. (2020) contextualized the crisis historically and highlighted the role of social media in identity formation, but also failed to consider language as an agent of conflict. Chereji and Lohkoko (2012) proposed frameworks for conflict resolution, yet paid little attention to linguistic dynamics. Similarly, Roger (2018) assessed political and international responses to the crisis but did not examine the discursive practices sustaining it. These gaps underscore the relevance of this study, which uses critical discourse tools to expose the role of language in shaping ideological divisions and reinforcing radicalization. To ground this analysis, key terms such as language, discourse, political discourse, and radicalization must first be clarified

Defining key terms is necessary because it establishes a clear conceptual foundation for analysis, ensuring both precision and consistency in interpretation. In a study examining politically charged language and conflict, terms such as "language," "discourse," and "radicalization" carry nuanced academic and contextual meanings that may differ from everyday usage. By explicitly outlining how these concepts are

understood within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, the researcher aligns the reader with the theoretical lens being applied, avoids ambiguity, and strengthens the analytical rigor of the investigation. This clarity is especially vital when exploring how language functions as an instrument of power, ideology, and social division in a complex sociopolitical crisis.

Language is viewed not merely as a system of communication, but as a tool for constructing social realities. Robins and Crystal (2025) define it as "a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves." Within political discourse, language serves as a vehicle for persuasion, ideology, resistance, and power. In conflict settings, it functions both as an instrument of negotiation and as a tool of domination or resistance, capable of influencing emotions, perceptions, and actions (Piller, 2021). Thus, understanding the role of language in discourse becomes central to unpacking how communication either escalates or de-escalates crises. Discourse in this article is understood through the lens of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). Wodak (2001) describes discourse as "a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts," which are shaped by, and in turn shape, their social and historical contexts. Fairclough (2001) adds that discourse is a social practice with a dialectical relationship to society. Thus, discourse is not neutral. It constructs identities, positions speakers and listeners, and influences perception.

Radicalisation, as used here, refers to the process by which individuals adopt extreme political or ideological positions, often in response to perceived marginalisation or injustice. This is frequently exacerbated by discursive practices that present skewed narratives or reinforce group antagonisms. Van Dijk (2006) notes that in situations of conflict, ideologies tend to polarize social groups into binary oppositions of 'us' versus 'them,' which drives conflict escalation.

Political discourse is a specific type of discourse employed by political actors such as government officials, opposition leaders, or activists to articulate ideologies, construct legitimacy, and mobilize or demobilize publics. It is inherently persuasive and strategic, often reflecting underlying power dynamics and institutional authority. According to Chilton and Schaffner (2011), political discourse involves the intentional use of language to influence political attitudes and behaviour, justify policy decisions, or manage public perception. In conflict scenarios, political discourse becomes a battleground for competing narratives, where rhetorical choices can either promote reconciliation or exacerbate divisions. As such, the analysis of political discourse provides a window into how language is used to navigate, and at times manipulate, crisis contexts.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Stylistics (CS) to examine how language used in Minister Paul Atanga Nji's speech contributes to ideological influence, power enactment, and potential radicalisation. The decision to focus on this speech is deliberate, as it exemplifies prototypical elite political discourse during the formative stages of the Anglophone Crisis. The Minister, himself an Anglophone, occupies a paradoxical position as both a government representative and a member of the marginalized group. His speech, therefore, serves as a rich site for exploring the discursive construction of loyalty, denial, and ideological alignment.

The study draws upon Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) within CDA, which emphasizes the significance of historical context in discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). DHA enables the investigation of how the speaker's discourse relates to past and current events, and how it constructs social actors, legitimizes power, or dismisses dissent. In contrast, Jeffries' (2010) model of Critical Stylistics

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is applied to analyse micro-level linguistic choices such as naming, deixis, modality, and rhetorical devices. Critical Stylistics (CS) offers tools for unpacking how specific grammatical and stylistic features construct particular ideological meanings within a text.

The researcher was resident in Bamenda, one of the regions affected by the crisis. This provided valuable insider insight into the conflict's socio-political and emotional dimensions. Living in a war-affected zone and experiencing the persistent fear and instability firsthand motivated the researcher to contribute to the search for a solution. This positionality informed the choice of purposive sampling and guided the data collection strategy.

Data were collected from digital media platforms including YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and Meta (formerly Facebook), which are widely used to share real-time content, commentary, and visual documentation of the crisis. Both spoken and written discourses were studied and analysed, including images that reflected crisis-related narratives and sentiments

The speech was transcribed and subjected to linguistic coding, followed by thematic categorization. The analysis paid close attention to discursive strategies such as historical allusion, mitigation, and contrast because they reveal how the speaker constructs authority, shapes public memory, and softens or deflects responsibility—key mechanisms in legitimizing state power during a political crisis

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The following discussion presents the analysis and findings from the critical analysis of Minister Paul Atanga Nji's speech delivered during the early stages of the Anglophone Crisis on CRTV's *Press Hour* in June 2016. Anchored in the frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Stylistics (CS), the discussion unpacks how language is strategically used to construct ideological positions, maintain dominance, and suppress dissent. The analysis focuses on how discursive patterns such as power abuse, marginalization, contrast,

dominance, rebellion, transformation, and mitigation emerge within the Minister's discourse and how they shape public perception and radical responses. The speech is examined not simply as a political statement, but as a text embedded within a broader socio-political crisis, revealing how linguistic choices reinforce or resist power asymmetries. Each theme discussed reflects a dimension of the broader ideological struggle, offering insight into how political discourse can escalate or entrench conflict.

POWER ABUSE

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) "primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted through text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). In the speech under analysis, power abuse is realized through various linguistic strategies, including declaratives, direct quotations, reported speech, referencing, presuppositions, and dismissive discourse. The speech begins with a strong declarative structure designed to assert dominance and authority: *'I said it yesterday, I'm saying it today, and I will say it tomorrow: there is no Anglophone Problem in Cameroon and I've given facts to justify what I say, which is important'* (CRTV, 2016). This sentence functions as a performative assertion of epistemic certainty. The repeated use of the first-person pronoun 'I' emphasizes the speaker's identity as a powerful government official. a representative of the dominant group. van Dijk (2015) identifies group identity as a key ideological category in discourse, where elite speakers often invoke their institutional role to legitimize their worldview.

The declarative structure *'I said... I'm saying... I will say...'* utilizes temporal adverbials *'yesterday,' 'today,' 'tomorrow'* to project an unchanging, timeless truth. This reinforces the idea that the speaker's position is not open to debate. Furthermore, the modal auxiliary 'will' conveys epistemic commitment, suggesting unwavering loyalty to the stance taken, regardless of shifting political realities.

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From a Critical Stylistics perspective, the use of the declarative mood serves to position the speaker's beliefs as facts, leaving no room for alternative interpretations. The phrase *'I've given facts to justify what I say'* further presupposes that any existing counter-narratives are baseless or irrelevant. This construction enacts discursive dominance by silencing dissenting voices, rhetorically denying the very issue at the heart of the conflict. Thus, the sentence not only signals the speaker's stance but also represents a broader ideological move to maintain the status quo. It exemplifies how those in power use declarative language to frame contested realities as settled truths, thereby reinforcing institutional narratives and marginalizing opposition discourse.

This denial carries profound implications within the broader context of the Anglophone crisis. Anglophone communities, long affected by historical injustices such as unequal representation, cultural erasure, and systemic exclusion, have increasingly viewed language like this as emblematic of power abuse (Nouchou, 2022). The dismissive tone of this declaration, delivered by a speaker who shares a regional background with the oppressed group, amplifies the sense of betrayal. It communicates governmental intransigence and delegitimizes the lived realities of the marginalized, a move that intensifies resentment and feeds into radicalizing narratives (Oxford Political Review, 2024)

This denial of the existence of an anglophone problem is especially provocative in a context where peaceful protest has historically been met with violence, arbitrary arrests, and repression (Cameroon Intelligence Report, 2022). As a result, many now view violence as the only language that their oppressors understand. The declaration '*there is no Anglophone problem'* didn't just provoke anger; it catalysed a wave of resistance and reactionary discourses that targeted the Minister and his collaborators for their perceived complicity.

The National Chairman of the United Democratic Party (UDP), El Hadj Lawal Boko, publicly criticized the Minister, stating: "MINAT boss, Paul Atanga Nji, is one of the biggest problems Anglophones are facing in the current socio-political impasse." In a press statement, El Hadj Lawal Boko argued that the Minister's early involvement in the crisis, including a firm and dishonest public stance, intensified the conflict. According to him, "if he, Paul Atanga Nji, was not too firm, rigorous and telling lies on issues, it would have been something of the past" (Musa, 2018). In this way, government denial is seen not only as a dismissal of lived experience but as a discursive act of power abuse that directly fuels radicalization (Botes, n.d.).

The Minister Paul Atanga Nji proceeded to state '*…am not more interested even to know his second name because he said that so long as we don't go back to the federal system of government, we cannot solve the problem of the lawyers.*' In this sentence, there is the use of dismissive discourse strategies that exemplify the power asymmetry in political speech. The speaker (a government official) uses personal disinterest '*I am not even more interested to know his second name*' as a rhetorical tool to discredit a dissenting voice. The deliberate withholding of the person's name symbolizes an effort to erase the individual's legitimacy and delegitimize their opinion (van Dijk, 2006). In Critical Discourse Analysis, such discursive strategies fall under exclusion and marginalization, where the dominant group omits or downplays the relevance of opposing figures to maintain ideological superiority. This denial of lived experience silences the voices of a group that already feels excluded. When institutional actors deny the very existence of their problem, the affected group may feel that peaceful dialogue is futile, and that violent or extremist measures are the only path to recognition (Goodwin et al., 2001; Moghaddam, 2005).

By referencing the individual's advocacy for a federal system of government, the speaker signals a controversial political demand that has long been at the heart of Anglophone discontent. The rejection of this position suggests an unwillingness to engage with structural reforms, portraying any call for federalism as unworthy of serious consideration (Oxford Political Review, 2024). According to Van Dijk's (1998) ideological square, this functions to emphasize 'our' (the government's) rational stance and de-emphasize 'their' (the dissenters') relevance or credibility. Here, power is abused by dismissing the dissenters' ideological stance. From a Critical Stylistics standpoint (Jeffries, 2010), the naming and referring function is used here negatively: the speaker deliberately withholds naming to signal contempt or rejection. This rhetorical move reveals bias in the representation of social actors and reflects how linguistic strategies can enact social exclusion.

As van Dijk (2014) notes, "quoting others is never innocent; it is a strategic act of power." Similarly, Norman Fairclough emphasizes that reported speech allows speakers to manage accountability and subtly propagate their own ideologies while appearing to merely report facts. The Minister cites others to advance his narrative. The clause *'so long as we don't go back to the federal system... we cannot solve the problem...'* is presented as reported speech, but the framing introduces presuppositions that:

- The individual referenced has a solution (federalism),
- That the federal system is linked to resolving lawyers' issues,
- And that these views are not worthy of consideration.

Such rhetorical devices underscore how power holders suppress alternative narratives, reinforcing dominance and maintaining the status quo (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). --shaping reality by controlling whose voice is heard and how it is interpreted.

MARGINALIZATION

Marginalization is a major theme that runs through the speech and is a tool in CDA where language is used to subtly dismiss the concerns of the oppressed. In this speech, there are many references to past political statements and an emphasis on national unity, with the speaker downplaying ongoing exclusion. This rhetorical strategy reflects a broader pattern of discursive power abuse in which dominant voices invalidate minority grievances. Such marginalization is not neutral; it reinforces inequality and suppresses dissent. As van Dijk (1993) notes, discourse often serves to legitimize dominance and silence the oppressed.

Several sentences in the speech perform discursive work to minimize systemic marginalization by rhetorically asserting national freedom of expression, while implicitly reinforcing institutional exclusion of minority voices, particularly Anglophones. When Minister Paul Atanga Nji said, *'…An Anglophone has never been a Minister of Defence in Cameroon…'* it is an acknowledgement of political marginalization, but rather than being interrogated as a problem, it is merely stated in passing. No critique or follow-up discussion is provided. According to Van Dijk (1993, 1998), such strategies reflect symbolic inclusion, in which minority concerns are referenced but not addressed, thus reinforcing dominance through the appearance of fairness.

The Minister equally uses Metaphors when he said, *'The Anglophone will no more talk in the bush, they will talk in the Parlor'* This metaphor constructs a hierarchy of discourse spaces: the *'bush'* implies illegitimacy, rebellion, or primitiveness, while the *'parlor'* represents civility, acceptance, and elite inclusion. It implies that marginalized voices are only valid once they conform to dominant expectations. This reflects discursive domestication, a form of control through linguistic framing (Jeffries, 2010). To justify his assertions, the minister alludes the President of the Republic. *'…As far back as 1983, President Paul Biya said…'* Here, a past statement is invoked to invalidate current dissent,

reinforcing the illusion of historical and ongoing freedom. van Dijk (2006) identifies this tactic as a manipulative discursive move in which the dominant group uses its access to historical narratives and political platforms to construct legitimacy and to dismiss resistance as unnecessary or illegitimate. Horgan (2008) and Dalgaard-Nielsen (2010) show that perceived political injustice and lack of voice are among the most consistent precursors to political radicalization.

The speaker makes lots of allusions to enhance his manipulation and gain favour. He alludes to the 1961 federal system of government, the unification in 1972, and the name change to la Republique in 1984, showing how the country moved from a federal to a unitary state. The speaker uses these historical allusions to show that he has a good mastery of Cameroon's history and is well-informed to educate citizens and advise them on the best steps to take. However, he fails to reveal the shortcomings of this historical evolution of governance. This is a strategic discursive move often used by those in power to legitimize the status quo and downplay current dissent (van Dijk, 1998). Wodak argues that deliberate exclusion of facts, 'silencing by omission,' is a key strategy in oppressive discourse. By omitting historical or socio-political causes of conflict, dominant groups reframe dissent as 'unjustified rebellion' (Wodak, 2021, p. 47) In recounting the history of Cameroon, the Minister omits the facts that Anglophones have been marginalized for a long time and have been protesting for many years, which underscores the historical cause of the crisis. The people learn of the limitations of this history through the media, showing how the speaker manipulates the truth by revealing only part of it to justify his ideology and maintain dominance. This rather makes him lose his credibility in the eyes of the oppressed, pushing them into radical rebellion against all attempts to hide the truth of the crisis.

CONTRAST

Contrast is another tool used in CDA to highlight disparities, inequalities, and power abuse in a text. Contrast is evident in the use of historical reference: *'As far back as 1983, President Paul Biya said... In the new deal, Cameroonians are free to air their views.'* This statement creates a sharp contrast between past proclamations of freedom and the present-day reality of repression. van Dijk (2006) identifies such moves as manipulative discursive strategies where distant historical narratives are invoked to invalidate contemporary grievances. By emphasizing freedom of expression in Cameroon, the speaker seeks to delegitimize current protests and dissent.

However, this rhetorical emphasis starkly contrasts with ongoing events where people have been arrested and subjected to violence for peacefully expressing their views. Students at the University of Buea and lawyers have faced beatings and arrests during peaceful protests, incidents that have significantly fuelled the Anglophone crisis (Musa, 2018; Fai, 2018). This juxtaposition reveals the ideological disconnect between official narratives and lived experiences, exposing the speaker as a member of the ruling elite who abuses power by refusing to acknowledge the grievances of marginalized groups (Van Dijk, 1993).

Such a vehement denial of the people's plight deepens their frustration and sense of injustice, implicitly conveying that peaceful resolution is unattainable. Consequently, this ideological stance reinforces the perception that the only remaining option is to engage in resistance, often radicalized, thereby prolonging the crisis (Horgan, 2008; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). The contrast between proclaimed freedoms and lived oppression thus not only silences dissent but inadvertently legitimizes the escalation of conflict

DOMINANCE.

Dominance is another key theme that runs through the discourse. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is concerned with how language contributes to the construction, reproduction, and resistance of dominance and power structures (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2008). It explores how discourse reflects and reinforces social hierarchies and power imbalances, particularly by promoting dominant-group ideologies and marginalizing alternative perspectives.

As van Dijk (2006) notes, ideologies become especially salient in contexts of domination and resistance, where social groups compete for control over meaning and representation. A prominent discursive strategy in such contexts is the polarization of group identities, often framed through an 'us' versus 'them' binary. This distinction supports identity construction and legitimizes the ideological positions of dominant groups while undermining or silencing dissenting voices (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

In the discourse analysed, the speaker makes repeated references to figures such as *'Paul Biya,' 'the Prime Minister, head of government,'* and other high-ranking officials, including the *'Minister of Finance,' 'Minister of Defence,' and "General Ivo, Director of Presidential Security*.' These references employ metonymy, substituting individual names for the broader institution of government, thereby signalling who holds decision-making power. This rhetorical choice emphasizes the structure of dominance and the centralization of authority. The speaker further reinforces his alignment with this dominant group by identifying as *'the permanent secretary to the National Security Council.'* His use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' '… we see what can be done' constructs a collective identity that includes himself and other power holders, thus reinforcing his insider status and authority to control discourse and decision-making (van Dijk, 1993).

The speaker employs polarizing discourse structures that emphasize positive attributes of the in-group while de-emphasizing their shortcomings, and conversely highlight the negative aspects of the out-group while downplaying their legitimacy (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). For example, he states: *'The Prime Minister was in Bamenda two or three days ago discussing with people... the government is open to dialogue.'* This is an attempt to portray the government as responsive and benevolent. However, this is immediately contradicted by another statement: *'I don't talk on that, but it's official that we have a red line that we can discuss.'* The concept of a *'red line'* functions as both imagery and a discursive boundary, suggesting that while dialogue is permitted, it is strictly limited and controlled by those in power. This contradiction reveals the performative nature of the government's engagement, one that appears inclusive but is fundamentally closed to transformative negotiation (Chilton, 2004). The imagery of the 'red line' is perceived not just as a restriction, but as a threat, a challenge to which some marginalized actors may feel morally obliged to respond.

The speaker further asserts dominance using imperatives, such as: *'I want to talk about common law.'* Such directives are framed not as suggestions but as authoritative instructions, reflecting control over the agenda and framing of the discourse (Fairclough, 2013). The speaker's reliance on the pronoun 'I' reinforces his personal authority and status. He also uses rhetorical questions like: *'Do they use the common law system again?'* These are not genuine inquiries but rather devices to dismiss the legitimacy of opposing viewpoints. As van Dijk (2008) argues, such rhetorical strategies serve to deny the validity of dissent and reinforce dominant ideologies by trivializing alternative narratives. When discourse is dominated by top-down narratives, and dissenting voices are excluded, silenced, or patronized (e.g., the use of imperatives or rhetorical questions to shut down opposition), it creates perceived injustice.

Research shows that perceived political exclusion is one of the most common precursors to radicalization (Doosje et al., 2013).

Another strategy used to reinforce dominance is the generalization of specific grievances, thereby erasing the distinctiveness of the Anglophone problem. For instance, the speaker states: *'Go to Maroua, go to Ngaoundéré... you have bad roads... we have those problems everywhere.'* This reframing shifts the discourse from a discussion of structural marginalization to a generalized developmental narrative. While Dominguez and Foster (2011) do highlight national infrastructural issues in Cameroon, conflating them with the historical and sociopolitical grievances of the Anglophone population amounts to a strategic denial of the Anglophone identity and experience. This aligns with what van Dijk (1993) describes as the discursive exclusion of marginalized groups by denying them the right to define their problems

The speaker's statement: *'We don't talk about things which we have... those facts have been treated; it's over. We talk about the reunification,'* is a clear attempt to restrict the discursive space and prescribe what should be discussed. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power, in which authority is exercised not only through policy but also through control over what is sayable and what is not. To the marginalized, such rhetorical prescriptions and dismissals only reinforce perceptions of state hegemony and duplicity. As Wodak (2011) observes, when the powerful dismiss grievances as illegitimate, they risk reinforcing the determination of the oppressed to resist through counter-discourses or even direct action

BETRAYAL
Betrayal, as Giurlando (2020) explains, involves the violation of trust, loyalty, or the breaking of communal obligations and shared expectations. It occurs when individuals believe that those expected to act in their collective interest instead align with opposing powers, thereby

rupturing communal bonds. In the speaker's discourse, this notion of betrayal becomes central. The speaker identifies as an *Anglophone, 'I am an Anglophone,'* implicitly aligning himself with a historically marginalized group in Cameroon. However, his discursive choices and ideological alignment reveal a significant rift between shared communal identity and political allegiance. Despite asserting this identity, the speaker undermines the grievances of the Anglophone community by siding with the dominant Francophone-led government. He references other prominent Anglophone figures in government, such as '*General Ivo, Prime Ministers from 1992: Achidi Achu, Mafany, Musonge'* to justify that he is not alone, that other Anglophones occupy powerful positions. He then states, '*When you talk about marginalization in terms of responsibility and post, I don't agree,'* implying that the presence of elite Anglophones in high office invalidates claims of systemic exclusion.

However, this logic reflects what van Dijk (2006) describes as an ideological strategy of denial, where dominant groups use token representation to deflect accusations of inequality. In this case, the speaker leverages symbolic inclusion to dismiss structural marginalization. This rhetorical move, using selective examples of elite inclusion, obscures the broader systemic grievances of the Anglophone population, which include linguistic discrimination, underdevelopment, and political exclusion (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003).

By presenting the president's appointments of Anglophones as evidence of trust *'If you don't have confidence in somebody, you cannot give him that responsibility.'* the speaker subtly demands reciprocal loyalty from the community. He frames political appointments as proof of state goodwill and implies that Anglophones should, in turn, remain loyal to the regime. Yet, this claim backfires. Rather than fostering unity, it deepens distrust and evokes a sense of communal betrayal. As Bourdieu (1991) notes, symbolic power is most effective when it masks domination

as consensus. Here, political loyalty is framed as national unity, even as it suppresses dissenting voices.

This perceived betrayal is especially painful given the speaker's shared identity with the oppressed. The use of emphatic modal constructions such as '*I don't agree*' reinforces the speaker's certainty and dismissiveness, positioning him ideologically with the dominant group rather than with his community. According to Wodak (2015), such rhetorical moves are common in elite discourse, where authority figures use deontic modalities to assert power and marginalize alternative perspectives.

Furthermore, the speaker's alignment with the regime illustrates a key concept in Critical Discourse Analysis: ideological dislocation (Fairclough, 1995). Although he shares a cultural and geographical identity with the marginalized, his ideological stance contradicts their lived experiences. While the Anglophone population articulates a discourse of exclusion and resistance, he articulates a discourse of unity and denial. This discursive contradiction reinforces the community's disillusionment with its leaders and drives a deeper wedge between political elites and grassroots movements.

Thus, radicalization emerges as a reaction to symbolic annihilation, in which not only are grievances denied but identities and histories are erased or co-opted. The government's use of elite Anglophones as tokens of inclusion is interpreted not as genuine representation, but as a strategic manipulation, further fuelling alienation and resistance (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). In this way, betrayal becomes both a discursive and structural trigger for radicalization. It delegitimizes peaceful discourse, delegitimizes leadership from within, and frames the struggle as one that must be fought outside the state's institutional bounds.

REBELLION

Rebellion is a theme that accompanies dominance, bias, and marginalization. It explores the defiance against authority, social norms or oppressive systems. It taps into the human desire to challenge power structures and fight for personal group freedom. This speech by the minister caused a lot of hurt feelings in the marginalized, especially because they identified the speaker as one of them; as such, it was received with a lot of negative feelings by the anglophone community. The Minister's public denial of the existence of an Anglophone problem, coupled with his attempt to legitimize the state's authority by listing other Anglophone elites in high government positions, was interpreted by many as a profound betrayal. This type of behaviour is what Bareta (2016) terms the 'Mistaken Anglophone', a person who, though part of the marginalized community by birth, becomes an agent of oppression.

Bareta (2016) critiques Minister Paul Atanga Nji's speech, likening it to the rhetoric of the regime in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and suggesting that the Minister's loyalty to the state comes at the expense of truth and communal solidarity. His quote of Nelson Mandela's warning that harm done by a brother can be more devastating than harm done by an enemy captures the intensity of betrayal felt by the Anglophone community. Bareta frames the Minister's statements as provocations that fuelled the flames of rebellion rather than as efforts to promote peace or reconciliation.

Public intellectuals and commentators played a crucial role in shaping the reception of the Minister's speech. Muma (2018), for instance, highlights the deep emotional injury inflicted by the Minister's denial and calls for a public apology, framing it as a necessary step toward redemption. He metaphorically states that 'waters of a thousand rivers cannot wash Paul Atanga Nji clean from the self-inflicted curse,' emphasizing the perceived severity of the Minister's betrayal. Muma (2018) links the Minister's words directly to the escalation of state

violence, claiming that his denial of the Anglophone crisis justified a military approach rather than dialogue: 'It was this fallacious claim that caused the army to descend with medieval barbarism.'

This interpretation aligns with Fairclough's (1995) understanding of discourse as social action: language not only reflects reality but actively shapes it. The Minister's rhetoric, though perhaps intended as a message of unity, was decoded by the marginalized community as a justification for repression, which in turn triggered a discursive and material rebellion. His language became part of the structure of what van Dijk (2006) calls the "reproduction of dominance," and the community's reaction was an attempt to disrupt this control.

Rather than quelling the crisis, the Minister's speech deepened resentment and prolonged resistance. The community's perception of betrayal by a symbolic representative, an Anglophone in government, created fertile ground for radicalism. This rebellion manifested not only in verbal attacks and public condemnations but also in the escalation of separatist rhetoric and armed resistance. The anger and resistance triggered by such discourse are consistent with theories of identity politics, which suggest that when marginalized groups perceive symbolic violence and denial from within their own ranks, their response is often intensified (Wodak, 2015). The emotional betrayal acts as a moral catalyst, pushing the community toward resistance as a form of reclaiming dignity and justice.

TRANSFORMATION
In critical discourse, transformation refers to the strategic use of language to reshape perceptions of social realities, power dynamics, and ideological positions. It can be used to either challenge dominant systems or to reinforce them subtly under the guise of reform (Fairclough, 1995). In the analysed ministerial speech, the speaker attempts to transform public sentiment by presenting the government as committed to national

development: '*…That's why the government has a program of development, and each year, ministers who are directly concerned bring out those plans. We see what can be done; it's a government policy.*' This rhetorical appeal is designed to shift the focus away from grievances of marginalization and redirect attention to perceived state-led progress. By doing so, the speaker attempts to reframe the dominant ideology, one widely contested by the Anglophone population, as both legitimate and effective. According to van Dijk (2006), such discursive moves are characteristic of ideological manipulation, where the speaker seeks to mitigate dissent by appealing to the collective good while ignoring structural inequalities.

By highlighting these development plans, the minister implicitly suggests that the state's actions are sufficient and that continued agitation is unnecessary. This kind of discourse transformation aims to delegitimize the rebellion by portraying it as misinformed or ungrateful. However, in a context marked by historical marginalization and deep mistrust, such framing may appear disingenuous. Rather than pacifying dissent, it can reinforce the perception that the speaker is complicit in masking systemic injustice (Wodak, 2015).

The use of the inclusive pronoun *'we'* serves a dual ideological function. On the one hand, it tries to construct a shared national identity and sense of partnership between the state and the marginalized; on the other hand, it conceals the asymmetric power relations that led to the current crisis (Fairclough, 2001). This rhetorical attempt at transformation may therefore be seen as a form of symbolic violence, repackaging dominance as development and marginalization as misperception.

From a conflict-resolution perspective, transformation can play a constructive role. Botes (n.d.) describes conflict transformation as the process of *'inducing change in the parties' relationship through improving mutual understanding.'* Genuine transformation requires engaging with

the root causes of the conflict and acknowledging the perspectives of all parties. If the parties in this conflict, especially the dominant party, were to use this method to improve understanding between both parties, it could lead to a solution to the crisis. In this context, however, the transformation presented in the minister's speech appears more ideological than relational, aimed at reinforcing the status quo rather than facilitating reconciliation.

MITIGATION

In Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), mitigation is employed as a rhetorical strategy to soften the impact of potentially confrontational or harmful language. It aims to preserve social harmony, reduce interpersonal tension, and signal sensitivity to opposing viewpoints (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 1984). In political discourse, especially in conflict settings, mitigation becomes a critical tool for de-escalation and trust-building. In the speech under analysis, Minister Paul Atanga Nji attempts to use mitigation when he states: *'The Prime Minister is in Bamenda for dialogue... that's why the government has a program of development, and each year, ministers who are directly concerned bring out those plans. We see what can be done; it's a government policy.'* This utterance is structured to communicate attentiveness to the region's grievances and to present the government as proactive and development-oriented. The use of temporal markers like *'each year'* and collective pronouns like *'we'* suggests continuity and inclusivity, both hallmarks of mitigated discourse (Fairclough, 1995). However, the mitigating effect is undermined by his frequent, emphatic denials of the existence of an Anglophone problem. Statements such as *'I don't agree'* with claims of marginalization effectively nullify the softening intent, creating a contradictory stance that alienates rather than reassures. As van Dijk (2006) explains, for mitigation to function effectively, especially in settings of asymmetrical power relations, dominant actors must acknowledge the legitimacy of the marginalized

group's perspective. By categorically denying their concerns, the speaker reinforces ideological dominance while failing to build the mutual trust necessary for meaningful dialogue.

Furthermore, the minister's use of absolute modal verbs such as *'will,'* *'do not,'* *and* *'have'* reflects a rigid, dogmatic tone. CDA scholars emphasize the importance of hedging devices, modal expressions like *'may,'* *'could,'* *'might,'* *'seen,'* in allowing discursive space for alternative viewpoints and reducing the authoritarian impact of speech (Hyland, 1998). For instance, saying *'There may be perceptions of marginalization'* rather than *'There is no Anglophone problem'* would invite engagement rather than provoke hostility. In crisis communication, especially one marked by identity politics and historical marginalization, mitigation strategies must be authentic and consistent. While the minister superficially adopts the language of reconciliation, his contradictions through absolute denials and the lack of acknowledgment of suffering render the mitigation ineffective and even aggravating. According to Wodak (2015), conflict discourse requires openness to polyphonic voices; suppressing one voice delegitimizes the entire communicative process.

The failure to apply mitigation authentically in this discourse may have escalated tensions, deepened perceptions of betrayal, and contributed to the radicalization of the marginalized population. A more cautious use of language, grounded in probability, empathy, and acknowledgment, could have helped tone down tensions and foster conditions for peacebuilding.

CONCLUSION
This study reveals how Minister Paul Atanga Nji's speech, through denial, absolutist language, and alignment with dominant powers, reinforced marginalization and betrayed communal trust. His rhetoric evoked strong feelings of betrayal, prompting rebellious responses from the Anglophone community. Attempts at transformation and mitigation failed due to contradictory and exclusionary discourse. The speech ultimately

deepened ideological divides and prolonged the crisis. This analysis affirms that in conflict settings, language must acknowledge diverse perspectives to foster understanding. Discourse, when misused, becomes a tool of division rather than resolution. As such the use of language in crisis should be given central attention due to its ability to change behavioral patterns of listeners and readers. Based on these findings, several actionable recommendations emerge for policymakers and communicators in conflict-affected contexts. First, inclusive political rhetoric should be promoted, wherein the grievances of marginalized communities are acknowledged rather than denied. Also discourse sensitivity training ought to be integrated into official communication strategies to prevent language that dehumanizes or dismisses opposing groups. Participatory dialogue platforms should be developed to allow affected communities to co-create narratives of unity. Finally, media and educational institutions should foster public awareness of how language shapes conflict, thereby building societal resilience against divisive rhetoric. By adopting these measures, political discourse can transform from a catalyst of division into a meaningful instrument for reconciliation and sustainable peace.

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