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An ecolinguistic analysis of ecocentrism in Cameroon newspaper discourse

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Abstract

Environmental communication, also dubbed "green discourse", actively [re]produces and reinforces ideologies and efforts driven to valorise, protect and conserve nature. At issue is the investigation of deictic (pragma-linguistic) categories that rekindle consciousness about respect for the rights, protection and conservation of nature, thus ecocentrism, in the Cameroon newspaper. The ecocentric consciousness obtained in this work pertains to the newspaper issues and/or articles analysed, not a reflection of the entire Cameroon press. The data for this study comprised forty newspaper articles selected from ten newspaper publishers in Cameroon. Moreover, the descriptive statistical method (DSM) was used. The analytical procedure encompassed identification, interpretation and discussion of discursive entities vis-à-vis conservation. The theoretical framework adopted in this study was the ecolinguistic framework. The results showed that in ecocentric discourses, journalists strategically used language categories depicting conservation ideologies and concrete actions geared at idealising Cameroon's ecosystems. The ecologically venerating and conservation markers found included pronouns predominantly loaded with collective effort to protect nature; verbs marked with valorising and conserving actions; and imperative sentences compelling the audience towards nature protective actions, and so, criminalising nature-degrading activities. Additionally, personification was used to venerate nature with divine and/or human virtues, and finally, illocutionary speech acts framed concrete reasons and legal actions that justify and strengthen conservation. In essence, it was revealed that eco-conscious

journalists in the Cameroon press used language strategically to conscientise the public about the need to valorise and protect existing flora, fauna, reptiles and fish, and biosphere (water bodies, land and the atmosphere). Conscious that earthly life is sustained by nature, it is necessary for the media to cover environmental subjects more regularly, and in language patterns that espouse and concretise concerted efforts to valorise and conserve the ecosystem, and eventually, stabilise the current ecological crisis.

Keywords: ecolinguistics, ecology, ecocentrism, ecosophy, discourse, nature conservation

1. Introduction

In conformity with Fairclough's (1989; 2001) perception, discourse is a "social practice" that [re]produces and reinforces social meanings, notably in genres like politics, culture and the environment, inter alia. This social-political role and sensitivity, according to Jørgensen and Philips (2002), explains why discourse is seldom neutral to different identities, social relations, and environment, as it exerts significant pressure in the construction of social change. For discourse to galvanise desired social change(s), Griffiths (2006, p. 9) advances that discourse producers adopt unique and potent discursive styles that endow their events with utmost communicativeness and "persuasiveness" in different contexts.

The media, Van Dijk (2015) advances, exerts profound pressure on the transmission and negotiation of social meaning. Media significance emanates from the trust the public has for media information and equally, as Fairclough (ibid.) explains, because of the impact (awareness) it creates in their lives. Contrary to theoretical views that refute the objectivity of the media in the framing of reality, cf. Ardrèvol-Abreu (2015, p. 429), Stibbe (2015) postulates that the media, via stories (discourse choices covered), reinforces efforts towards nature protection and conservation.

The human factor is root and remedy to the contemporary ecological collapse, and so, communication is an indispensable contribution to environmental activism (Priest, 2016). It creates global awareness about practices and collective efforts that advance the valorisation, conservation, protection and sustainability of nature, and above all, the mitigation and adaptation to the warming climate. Media concern and preoccupation with the declining environment, and the changing and warming climate, according to Ebim (2016), justifies why after politics, sports and entertainment, the contemporary media space is replete with environmental news. This work seeks to contribute to these ideological changes by doing what Cameron (2012) postulates as "verbal hygiene": involving "[…] motley collection of discourses and practices through which people attempt to 'clean up' and make its structure or its use conform more closely to their ideals of beauty, truth, efficiency, logic, correctness and civility" (p. vii). Conscious of the worth of nature to

earthly existence, this work is driven by the zeal to bring out language uses in the Cameroon press that are nature-idealising and conserving, thus activating ecocentric consciousness. These eco-conserving patterns (ecocentric consciousness) are not a generalisation for the entire Cameroon press, but rather, a sample of distinguished newspaper discourses that advocate ecological valorisation and conservation.

1.1. Ecocentrism and the ecological turn

Stibbe (2015, p. 8) defines the term "ecology" as "the interaction of organisms with each other and their physical environment". Coined in 1866 by a German zoologist, Ernst Haeckel, ecology was founded, therefore, as a science that studies the habitation of species. The term "ecology" gained currency in linguistics following the publication of Einar Haugen's *The Ecology of Language* (1972). Haugen (1972) took keen notice of the interface between language and its environment in an imminent field he terms "human ecology". In the projection of the interaction between language and its speech community, Haugen (ibid., p. 325) opines that:

> Language ecology could be a natural extension of this kind of study [i.e., human ecology], and has long been pursued under such names as psycholinguistics, ethnolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics and sociology of language.

Haugen (ibid.) illustrates the interaction between language and its socio-cultural environment in the linguistic approaches unpacked above. The relationship between Haugen's metaphorical organism termed language and its environment (speech community), Garner (2005, p. 91) thinks, is "[...] more complex than, for example, that between a cat and the wild". He further explained that every language environment has "both man-made [like culture] and natural" factors that fine-tune the magnitude of interactions that are absent in the cat–wild interaction.

Ecocentrism is an ecological philosophy, an "ecosophy", that advocates consciousness about the protection and conservation of nature. The term "ecosophy" is Arne Naess's contraction of "ecological philosophy" (Drengson & Devall, 2010, p. 48). Ecocentrism, thus, considers all life as important and worth protecting. It is, for Stibbe (2015), an inclusive ideology that considers all species (including humans) as equal and important, and worthy of being protected and conserved. This radical thought opposes human traditions advocating the domination of nature, and in fact, reinforces parity between [human] culture and nature. To attain this, environmental communication exhorts humanity to consider the inalienable rights of non-human species that warrant protection.

Concurrent with the commitment in other academic fields, the contemporary environmental crisis has become a recurrent subject under investigation by linguistic researchers. The adoption of environmental theories and concepts in linguistic science is a marked manifestation of the "ecological turn" in the field of linguistics. Characteristic of

the "ecological turn" is the [paradigm] shift from structural linguistic theorising to the investigation and expression of profound concern for the diminishing biophysical environment and the protracted ecological crisis hitting the global world. This turn, in fact, hosts an eclectic research perspective on the interdependence between language and the biophysical environment, thus ecolinguistics. "Ecolinguistics" has galvanised what Stibbe (2012, p. 1) terms an "ecological turn" in linguistic science.

Media practices that realise environmental activism have innovatively been labelled as "positive discourse analysis" (PDA) (Martin, 2006). Within the purview of ecological discourse, positive discourse, Stibbe (2013, p. 115) explains, is a social practice that is not only resistant, but leads to the "promotion of counter-hegemonic discourses" that call for changes in social structures that dominate and oppress the natural environment, notably in media and political communications. Discourse practices are, therefore, positive if they exhibit and/or recommend alternative discourses that enhance environmental sustainability. Alternative discourse means novel patterns (language uses) of constructing nature positively and protectively.

1.2. State of biodiversity in Cameroon

Statistics from Gorenflo et al.(2012) identify the Guinean Forest of West Africa as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots and, thus, acknowledge tacitly that Cameroon, being one of the constituents of this region, is replete with biological species (diversity). As concerns the status quo, Mbah and Fosi Mbantenkhu (2004, as cited in Cameroon 2005) reveal that there exist about 10970 biodiversity species in Cameroon. This global biodiversity figure is further classified into different biospecies and vitality estimates, as presented below.

Table 1: Estimates of biodiversity species in Cameroon

Category of species	Degree of vitality	Total number of:	
		Species	Vitality
Plants	Endemic	9000	156
	Threatened		74
Mammals	Endemic	297	10
	Threatened		27
Birds	Endemic	849	11
	Threatened		17
Amphibians and reptiles	Endemic	373	19
	Threatened		03
Fish	Endemic	451	??
	Threatened		35

Source: Mbah & Fosi Mbantenkhu (2004, as cited in Cameroon 2005, p. 4)

Figures from Table 1 project that out of about 10970 biospecies estimated in Cameroon,

about 196 are endemic, and 156 are threatened. What is very frightening in the table is that the estimate of endemic fish species remains unknown, possibly because of hyper-exploitation (fishing). In essence, these figures (of endemic and threatened biospecies) are very significant to this work that aims to show how ecocentric newspaper discourses valorise biospecies, and so, promote their conservation.

The amphibian and reptile estimate projected above is implicitly not different from those advanced by Gonwouo et al. (2007). The findings of this biodiversity project vindicate that there are eighty-six reptile species in the Mount Cameroon area. These figures, therefore, surmise the importance of the Mount Cameroon vicinity as hosting the highest number (about 30%) of the reptilian fauna in Cameroon. The abundance of biodiversity species in this area, in essence, demands prompt measures of conservation, one of which is in language use, as is the case in this work.

In recognition and preservation of its biodiversity wealth, the Republic of Cameroon's (1999) biodiversity report states that there are six major ecosystems in Cameroon: Marine and Coastal; Semi-arid; Tropical Humid Dense Forest; Montane; Tropical Wooded Savannah and Fresh Water. These ecosystems, according to the report, are endangered because they are the main source of subsistence for many indigenous communities and professions in Cameroon. These resources serve as raw materials and life-sustaining products in animal production, medicines, forestry, fishing, hunting and transformation. From this over-dependence, it can be observed that these ecosystems are under the pressure of human exploitative activities, wherein their products serve either as food, medicine, energy or aesthetic and pleasure values. Examining the factors precipitating biodiversity endangerment in Cameroon, Bussan (2013) justifies that the local population is over-dependent on and over-exploitative of natural resources because of poverty.

As concerns Cameroon's forestry stakes and potentials, MINFOF (2013) maintains that the dense tropical forest of Cameroon occupies 16 million hectares (ha), thus covering about 35% of the national territory. From the above projection, this work discerns dangers emanating from the Observatory for Central African Forest (OFAC) statistics cited in MINEF (2008), on Cameroon's net deforestation standing at 0.19%. This rate is estimated to correspond to the loss of about 37,000 ha imputed to logging and bushfire.

Moreover, the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP) cited in MINEF (ibid.) paints a disgusting image of Cameroon's land, air and water spaces. Statistics obtained from a GAHP project estimate that 9 million people died from land, water and air pollutions in 2012. Like the aggravating situation in most African countries, MINEF (ibid.) avers that the bad situation is becoming more precarious because the transport and manufacturing, and construction industries have the most alarming Co_2 emission rates of 61% and 11%, respectively. If no media sensitisation is carried out vis-à-vis the reduction of Co_2 emission, it is indicative that chances of survival will equally drop.

To contain ever-surging ecologically erasing activities in Cameroon, the government has strategised biodiversity conservation (BDC) at different levels (Eyebe et al., 2012). The first and most productive BDC approach adopted is [inter]governmental. Cameroon, as

indicated by Eyebe et al. (ibid., p. 7), is party to many sub-regional, continental and international accords and conventions on climate change and global warming, relating to forest, wildlife and fishery management. Among other accords, Cameroon is a signatory to the seminal Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (of flora and fauna). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) project that deals with biodiversity management and conservation in Cameroon is one of the windfalls of these international accords. To protect the flora and fauna in three priority zones in Cameroon, GEF has created the Boumba Beck Fauna Reserve, the Nki Fauna Reserve and the Lack Lobéke Fauna Reserve. All these are aimed at conserving endangered plant and animal species. Cameroon's (2005, p. 138) environmental report observes that there are thirty-one major animal parks and wildlife reserves in Cameroon. In addition to these national parks and wildlife reserves, Cameroon's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) and Ministry of Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA), as indicated by MINADER (2015), encourage the domestication of economic plants and animals as an effective BDC strategy.

The second BDC approach is a legal one. The government of Cameroon is receptive to environmental accords, which are eventually promulgated into the laws governing the exploitation of Cameroon's ecosystem. One of such recent enactments is Article 17 of the Environmental Management Law (N° 96/12), which spells out an environmental impact assessment (EIA) (an impact study) as a prerequisite for the execution of all projects that have potential of imminent dangers to the biophysical environment (UNDP/UNEP/ GEF, 2001). Another prominent one is Decree 2013/0171/PM of 14th February 2013, laying down rules for conducting environmental and social impact studies. These laws are promulgated to regulate and/or minimise the impact of construction, mining and industrialisation on the biophysical environment.

In a swift reaction to and conformity with the ratifications above, the government has been putting in place concrete measures to guarantee biodiversity protection in Cameroon. The first of these measures, which Eyebe et al. (2012) have applauded, is the creation of ministries with departments, units and programmes that are charged with the investigation, conservation and management of biodiversity species in particular, and the entire ecosystem in general. The key ministry cited in Semie Memuna Sama's PhD thesis, "Environmental law in Cameroon", and expatiated by Eyebe et al. (ibid.), is the pilot Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection (MINEP) which was created in 2004 and expanded to The Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED) in 2012. MINEPDED initiates environmental policies in Cameroon, monitors the environmental impact of economic activities, and implements the government's commitment and laws to conserve nature. In addition to the steering MINEPDED, the government has equally created specialised ministerial departments and related agencies to regulate human activities in and/or exploitation of specific ecosystems of the country. The main and partner environment-safeguarding ministries in Cameroon are The Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife Protection (MINFOP); The Ministry of

Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA); The Ministry of Water Resources and Energy (MINEE); and The Ministry of Mines, Industry and Technological Development (MINMIDT).

Community empowerment is another BCD approach. Indigenous communities' greater contact with and dependence on biodiversity betokens that efforts towards BDC must not be monolithically governmental. Tapondjou (2009, as cited in Eyebe et al., 2012) explains that the government has embraced an inclusive biodiversity framework that encourages community participation in biodiversity management. This community approach allots more exploitation rights to local populations inhabiting forest areas than external exploiters. Eyebe et al. (2012, p. 10) have identified some community-based BDC strategies adopted by the government, notably, the circumscription of Community Hunting Zones (CHZs) or forests that belong to communities, to pre-empt them from poaching in forest reserves. Cognizant of the fact that most Cameroonian women live in rural areas, and on natural resources, the government has also included women in the management of the biophysical environment. Teran (2016) confirms that the incorporation of women in BDC ventures is a salient prescription in "The Nagoya Protocol". MINADER (2015) counsels that women's involvement in BDC is feasible and effective if women are encouraged to form Common Initiative Groups (CIG) through which they would receive training on BDC and farming inputs from MINADER.

Communication and training is another government strategy to achieve effective biodiversity management and advocacy in Cameroon. In line with the dictates of "The Nagoya Protocol", summarised and analysed by Teran (2016, p. 2), the government and environmental NGOs have funded radio and television programmes that propagate BDC for "economic and socially sustainable development". This is the most significant strategy of this work, given that it gives premium to environmental advocacy in the media, which is the focus of this work. In terms of training, the government has opened professional schools of agriculture, forestry and wildlife in some regions of the country. Some of these training schools include the School of Forestry Mbalmayo; Wildlife School in Garoua; Veterinary School in Jakiri; and the Faculty of Agronomy Science (FASA) in the University of Dschang, inter alia. These schools are charged with training different BDC personnel and/or stakeholders. It is worth stating that despite the [inter]national mobilisation, coupled with the legal and policy instruments enacted to safeguard Cameroon's fabulous biodiversity wealth, environmental researchers, notably Bitondo (2000), have indicted the government of inertia and corruption. Cameroon's endorsement of the execution of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project without doing an EIA is a stunning example.

1.3. Environmental activism in media discourse

The main connection between language and environment is in the lexicon used. Words express environmental ideologies, and environmental ideologies, in turn, influence word choice(s) made in discourse. Yuniawan et al. (2018) ascertain the premise above as they

investigate the type of ecolexicon expressions in conservation news texts in mass media. Using the distributional method and identity method of ecolinguistics to analyse fragments of conservation texts, it is found that ecolexicon expressions (patterned as metaphor, personification, euphemism, dysphemism, synecdoche, hyperbole, metonymy, association, pleonasm and antithesis) are effective in realising and reinforcing conservation meanings in the media. To create conservation awareness and consciousness, the ecolexicon expressions above are proposed as salient content for language learners and news texts. The present work is innovative from the latter study in that, in addition to ecolexicon, it also investigates syntactic constructs that activate ecocentrism in the Cameroon newspaper.

Tong (2014) advances that journalistic discourse is instrumental in exposing and creating public awareness of the life-threatening risks associated with environmental erosion. The Chinese media space is rife with ever-new stories projecting ecological devastation, and exposing sanctions meted on perpetrators. With recourse to the framing theory, the Chinese media conceptualises these environmental dangers as social problems that need prompt political solutions. China's political elite have reacted to these dander frames by accusing the press of subversion; for framing environmental risks in constructs that incriminate investors and business operators, therefore, jeopardising the country's envisioned economic growth. Contrary to Tong's (ibid.) critical study that investigates environmental awareness by analysing erosion discourses, this work, nonetheless, conducts an ecolinguistic study of [broad-based] conservation discourses to bring out discursive choices that activate ecocentric morality.

Media discourse has been found to be a strong force that shapes social behaviour about the environment. Suksiripakonchai's (2017) findings on media influence on the public perceptions about current environmental stakes in Thailand reveal that emotive language, blame lexes and force (imperative) language were powerful in swaying the public in favour of desired ecocentric ideologies. Suksiripakonchai's (ibid.) study parallels the current study in that it equally investigates the use of compelling language that directs public action and behaviour towards conservation and sustainability. Nonetheless, having as data not only newspaper headlines (as in the previous study), the present study also investigates other pragma-linguistic forms in Cameroon newspaper discourse, and the ecocentric ideologies calibrated in them.

Music is another media genre in which nature constructs are preponderant. According to Ghorbanpour (2016), nature songs, also coined as "eco-lyrics", evoke environmental salience with recourse to varied language resources. In the "eco-lyrical" analysis above, it is realised that nature songs are a great repository of varied stories that model the natural environment in unique, positive styles. Ghorbanpour's (ibid.) results indicate that nature songs adopt nature-conserving lexicon that realises equality and solidarity between humans and other biotic species in the ecosystem. It is found that ecocentrism in eco-lyrics is encoded in naming, metaphorical and personifying stylistic forms that venerate nature as a "living thing" [person], and as "a mother" who is inviolable to patriarchal ideologies. Acknowledging the importance of personification especially, Blackmore et al. (2013, p. 65)

reveal that it renews and concretises the connection between humans and other species, conceptualised as "animals like us". Unlike the stylistic analysis of nature songs above, this study conducts a pragma-linguistic analysis of environmentalism in the Cameroon press.

Olayiwola (2015) reveals that the media are very efficacious in transmitting and legitimising religious ideologies that reinforce the valorisation, protection and conservation of nature. Religious discourse in the public media conscientises the public about equity and respect for the entities that characterise the universe. Quoting Yussuf Ali's English Translation of the Quran (6: 36), Olayiwola (ibid., p. 5) states that "there is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, or a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you". Islamic communication preaches respect and equity among God's creatures, part of which is nature. This aligns with varied arguments proffered by Stibbe (2003; 2006; 2013; 2015) about ecological parity, with humanity placed in (not above) nature. Environmental categories that constitute Allah's (God) sacred beings include "weather, climate, vegetation, plants, animals, humans, rainfall and wind" and so on. Islamic communicators proscribe environmental depletion because, in tandem with the pillars of the Quran, it is a profane act of oppression on Allah's creatures, and therefore, challenging divine purpose and existence. In essence, Islamic communicators frame nature as Allah's gift to humankind, and so, humans have the divine duty to protect and conserve it.

Moreover, Yuniawan (2018) conducts an ecolinguitic analysis on conservation news texts, otherwise called "green texts", in Indonesian mass media. The method of comparison and contrast was adopted to analyse the environmental discourse (oral and written texts, and images), and results showed that environmental discourse adopted ecolexes related to different conservation variables. The Indonesian media, thus, used base words, derivative words, noun phrases, verb phrases and adjectival phrases that underpin pillars of value and character, art and culture, and natural sources and environment. These pillars are aspects that promote conservation, and the language patterns identified above, therefore, [re]produce and activate them. Besides using the ecolinguistic framework to analyse only written environmental news discourse, this work studies discursive patterns and the ecocentric thoughts they strengthen.

An indigenous study on the analysis of environmental advocacy in the media is carried out by Angwah (2019). It analyses the occurrence and mitigating patterns in climate change communication in the Cameroon press. The data for the study comprised thirty issues of three Cameroonian leading newspaper publishers, and key findings revealed a very insignificant coverage of climate change stories, notably the "stark realities" of climate change strikes in Cameroon. Inadequate reporting of climate change stories in the Cameroon press is caused by the ferocious appetite journalists have for what Angwah (ibid., p. 21) considers "current" news. Contrary to the latter work, the present study is committed to doing an ecocritical discourse analysis of the content of forty articles from ten Cameroon newspaper publishers, in an investigation of language use and resultant ecocentric ideologies.

Another related indigenous work to the current study is Ubanako and Ekembe's (2015)

eco-stylistic analysis of a Cameroonian novel, *The Lady with a Beard*, by Alobwed'Epie. At the end of the analysis, it is found that language use reflects the cultural and environmental experiences of the author and characters in the novel. The author, in fact, reconceptualises the natural environment with the use of lexico-semantic choices that reverberate with specific cultural ideologies. The language choices made are testament to the cohabitation between culture (language) and nature. Animal metaphors in the novel (for instance, lioness and tigress) are mapped with childbirth and feminine bravery. The void of gender entities for lion and tiger in the authors and characters' cultural lexicon, in essence, inspires the use of gender-rooted metaphors, notably "tigress" and "lioness", to attribute the heroine. This semantic gap bespeaks the [male] hegemonic order of the setting of the novel. Unlike the aforementioned study that carries a linguistic analysis of a literary text, this study nevertheless engages in an ecolinguistic analysis of language forms and the ecocentric ideologies they signal in the Cameroon newspaper.

2. Theoretical framework

The data were analysed using the ecolinguistic framework, specifically the model of deixis approach, postulated by Bang and Døør (1993). This framework empowers linguistic theory with the objectivity needed to investigate discourse(s) that project the virtues of nature, thus advocating protection and conservation. This reckons discourse as part of the ecological crisis, and so, the ecolinguistic framework seeks to galvanise consciousness about the salient role language plays in the valorisation and conservation of nature. The advocacy for nature protection and conservation is, according to Jørgensen and Philips (2002), part of the social change that discourse realises.

In the model of deixis approach, the syntactic and semantic fabric of each text is interpreted and/or understood within a particular context. By deixis, Levinson (1983, p. 54) refers to "the ways in which language encodes or grammaticalises features of the context of utterance or speech event, and thus also concerns ways in which interpretation of utterances depends on the analysis of the context of utterance".

Pronouns and expressions in discourse that mark ideologies are known as deictic elements/indicators. Bang and Døør (ibid., p. 9) aver that "deictical indicators are those features of the text which refer to the situation (and/or context), persons, objects, time, place and their logical connections". By so doing, lexes and syntactic structures (sentences) that are considered explicit deixis are those that transmit deictical reference(s). In effect, analysis in the current work is conducted on discursive elements, the ecological relationships they reinforce within a context, and the ecocentric ideologies (environmental themes) encoded in them.

3. Data and methodology

This research work was conducted in pursuance of Ebim's (2016, p. 5) prescription that "a

good, sound and logical research output should be governed by a well-defined research methodology based on scientific principles": choices of type, source and collection of data; techniques of statistical analyses; and presentation of results. In a nutshell, this section is the directory that prescribes the data needed, tool of data collection, choice of source and selection of data, patterns of data analysis and the conclusions drawn.

The data comprised newspaper articles (in English expression) that evoke environmental protection, conservation and sustainability. It is worth emphasising that population chosen for this research piece is not an entire newspaper, but suitable eco-reports and advertorials that advocate nature idealisation, protection and conservation. These articles were published in and extracted from ten newspaper publishers between March 2019 and July 2020. The data do not represent a synchronic or diachronic survey, but rather, simply an arbitrary selection that suits the objectives of this study. The sample simply shows positive discourses in the Cameroon press (not the entire press) that idealise the biophysical environment. The findings should, therefore, not be misconstrued for the ecocentric orientation of the entire Cameroon press, but a mere reflection of available ecocentric discourses in Cameroon's media landscape. The corpus constitutes the following newspaper publications:

Table 2: Ecocentric newspapers analysed

Newspaper publisher	No. of publications used	No. of articles used
Cameroon Tribune	05	06
Cameroon Business Today	02	03
Municipal Updates	02	02
The Sun	02	04
The Post Weekender	04	07
The Eden	02	04
The Star	03	05
The Median	02	03
Eco-Outlook	02	03
The Green Reporter	02	03
Total	26	40

Each edition of the newspapers was included in the population of study based on the availability of a nature story that is relevant to this study. So, the collection of relevant discourses and classification of the corpus was based on the judgement of the researchers.

Considering that this work focuses on an ecolinguistic analysis of discourse properties that activate ecological conservation (harmony) in Cameroon newspaper discourses, the descriptive statistical method (DSM) (Cantos, 2013; Woodrow, 2014) was adopted. Using the DSM, suitable environmental newspaper articles were selected, the texts were classified, a mini-corpus was built and followed by the identification, quantification and interpretation of deictic structures that are laden with ecocentric ideologies.

4. Data analysis

The conduct of analysis in this work followed a procedure of identification, interpretation and discussion of pragma-linguistic categories used, and the ideologies encoded in them. In tandem with the above, analysis focused on the forty ecocentric discourses collected. By ecocentric [media] discourse, consideration is given to salience-evoking stories, that frame and reinforce the care and conservation of the ecosystem. Ecocentric discourse idealises and valorises, and above all, advocates the protection and conservation of existing flora, fauna, reptiles and biosphere (water, land and the atmosphere). It also includes activism for proper waste management and sustainable development, inter alia. The discursive forms under consideration were subjected to a linguistic and pragmatic analysis. This analysis, in fact, showed how ecocentric meanings (valorisation and conservation) are encoded in or tagged to discursive patterns in ecocentric newspaper discourses in Cameroon, as presented below.

4.1. Pronouns

Seven main pronouns were identified in this part of the corpus. They subsume "we", "our", "us", "itself", "they", "there" and "every [one/thing/man/woman]", and are used in eighty-one instances. The proportions of these pronominal categories in the texts are presented below.

Table 3: Pronouns used in ecocentric discourses

Pronoun	Frequency	Percentage (%)
We	42	51.85
Our	24	29.63
Us	05	06.17
Every[one/thing/man/woman]	04	04.94
There	03	03.71
They	02	02.47
Itself	01	01.23
Total	81	100

As seen in Table 3 above, the personal pronoun "we" is the most preponderant with a frequency of 42, having a rate of 51.85%. "We" is a plural pronoun that is used to construct a more collective, inclusive and collaborative mindset in the audience and works towards the protection and conservation of Cameroon's ecosystems. This inclusion and collaboration can be seen in the following examples:

(1) *The less **we** pollute the environment, the more **we** prevent Global Warming* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11810/8009 of 25/05/2019, pp. 11-12)

(2) **We** *want to preserve these animals because … **we** cannot afford to lose any of them* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11870/8069 of 24/06/2019, p. 16)

(3) **We** *must fight against pollution … and the negative effects of Climate Change.* (*Cameroon Business Today*, No. 110 of 19-25/06/2019, p. 25)

This personal pronoun, thus, evokes a more inclusive and collaborative effort between the text producer (journalist) and their Cameroonian public in the struggle to protect and/or restore nature.

Another recurrent pronoun in Table 3 is the use of the possessive "our", which has a frequency of 24 (29.63%). Its use is displayed in the examples below.

(4) **Our** *farms need less pesticides and more organic methods* (*Cameroon Tribune,* No. 11871/8070 of 25/06/2019, p. 6)

(5) *Let us teach **our** children to respect nature and take care of the environment* (*Municipal Updates*, Vol. 3, No. 083 of 20/07/2020, p. 4)

(6) *World leaders must take urgent action to transform **our** relationship with the natural world* (*The Median*, No. 390 of 08/06/2020, p. 3)

"Our" is another plural pronoun that weaves much meaning in environmental news discourse. The deployment of "our" as a pre-modifier in the texts, as in the previous case above, is used to galvanise inclusive, general and collaborative initiatives in nature protection and conservation. As seen in (4) above, "Our", being a possessive adjective, in effect, betokens the frame that nature is a collective asset that warrants a more collective (concerted) effort to cater for, protect and conserve.

"Us" is the third prominent pronoun in the selected texts. This is equally a plural pronoun that occurs five times in the text, making 6.17% of pronominal occurrences. "Us" is also a functional category in the texts, as seen in the following:

(7) *… it is for **us** to reconsider the use and deposition of plastics* (*Municipal Updates,* Vol. 3, No. 076 of 08/06/2020, p. 6)

(8) *COVID-19 is warning **us** to mend our broken relationship with nature* (*The Post Weekender*, No. 02107 of 10/07/2020, p. 6)

"Us" is also a grammatical tool that is used to advocate general (community) involvement in the preservation and conservation of Cameroon's ecosystems. This means nature (and the environment) is a collective endowment whose protection requires collective action as well.

Other pronouns identified in texts in this section include "every [one/thing/man/woman]" with a frequency of four (4.94%). This is another involving and/or including resources that call for inclusion in effort and consideration of every aspect of nature. They advocate individual involvement in nature protection and conservation.

The pronouns that are scantily (least) used in the texts include "there" with a frequency of three (3.71%); "they" with an occurrence of two (2.47%) and lastly, "itself" with one (1.23%) occurrence. It is worth explaining that the lesser and negligent use of "itself" exhibits the absence of individuality in environmental conservation moves, and in which case, nature is least and/or seldom attributed a thing entity.

The above deictic resources enhance ecological salience as their use intimates that the protection, conservation and/or restoration of nature require collective drives, not individual. It starts with an individual, and then becomes a community practice.

4.2. Verbs marking valorisation, and protection and conservation of nature

One of the unique grammatical resources used by Cameroon newspapers to express diverse environmental actions is the verb. The use of verbs, in fact, denotes different actions taken either to vitalise or protect and preserve Cameroon's ecosystems. In the sixty-seven verbs identified, some were used to valorise (express the vitality of) nature, while others were expressive of actions that protect the ecosystem. The actions encoded in the verbs found, thus, valorised and protected the forest, biosphere [(high)lands, water and atmosphere], biodiversity and aquatic lives, as discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

The first category of verbs found is that which expresses the vitality of different ecosystems. These verbs are used to express the virtues of a natural entity by stating the actions they perform. In tandem with the above, thirty-nine such verbs denoted actions that valorise different entities of nature. In this verb stock, a majority of them, with a frequency of twenty-seven (69.24%), denote actions that idealise and valorise the forest and plant species, as in the instances below.

(9) *The antioxidant lycopene [tomatoes] is thought* **to help restore** *chemical balance in diabetics* (*Cameroon Business Today*, No. 127 of 16-22/10/2019, p. 27)

(10) *The long-term availability of plant ingredients* **to support** *human health … is dependent on prioritising the conservation and sustainable use of the source species* (*Eco-Outlook*, Vol. 1, No. 020 of October 2019, p. 6)

(11) *Each year, the marine plants* **produce** *more than half of the atmosphere's oxygen and a mature tree* **cleans** *our air,* **absorbing** *about 22Kgs of CO_2,* **releasing** *oxygen in exchange* (*Eco-Outlook*, Vol. 1, No. 022 of January 2020, p. 2)

(12) *There are reports of herbal products* **containing** *wild plant ingredients being used* **to prevent** *and* **treat** *COVID-19* (*The Green Reporter*, No. 029 of 22/06/2017, p. 4)

As seen in the excerpts above, the tactful use of verbs like *to help restore, produce, cleans, absorbing, releasing, containing, to prevent, treat* and *to support*, among others, is simply evocative of the different processes and/or actions performed by the forest and other plant species to sustain and support earthly life. Environmental articles that used such verbs had as intent (frame) the protection, conservation and valorisation of the forest and other plant species.

Furthermore, verbs valorising Cameroon's BD ranked second, with a frequency of six (15.38%). The verbs deployed in the environmental news discourses in this segment of the corpus, in essence, bring to consciousness actions and/or natural processes (phenomena) that instantiate the important role nature plays in the survival of human beings. The [action] verbs that exhibit this salient role are presented in the following examples:

(13) *Ecotourism … **generates** a lot of income that communities will also benefit from* (*The Sun*, No. 0568 of 30/10/2019, p. 11)

(14) *One of them is the fungi mushroom which **helps to restore** pollution-damaged habitats* (*The Star*, Vol. 2, No. 592 of 13/07/2020, p. 9)

(15) *… when Biodiversity is destroyed, the system that **supports** human life is destroyed* (*The Median,* No. 390 of 08/06/2020, p. 3)

In utterances (13), (14) and (15) above, with recourse to the verbs *generates*, *helps to restore* and *supports*, inter alia, nature is constructed in the Cameroon newspaper with the virtues of a generator (provider) of income to indigenous communities, a restorer of natural (Edenic) habitats and a supporter of human existence, respectively. These verbs show the functions of BD in the survival of human beings. The semantic load of these verbs is indicative of positive discourses that reinforce (frame) biodiversity conservation.

Moreover, verbs that denote actions that valorise biosphere rank third, with a frequency of five, making 12.82%. This category of verbs reverberate with the ideals (positive value) of [high]lands, water and atmosphere in the human environment. The use of some of these verbs is exemplified as follows.

(16) *The lake **appeals to** virtually all passers-by* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11845/8044 of 15/05/2019, p. 3)

(17) *… people believed that sea water **contained** medicinal properties* (*The Eden*, No. 1164 of 15/06/2020, p. 4)

(18) *The exercise took place … at a water source that **serves** … part of the community* (*The Eden*, No. 1164 of 15/06/2020, p. 4)

In examples (16), (17) and (18) above, verbs in the likes of *appeals*, *contained*, *serves*, and many others, are telling of the worth of [high]lands, water and the atmosphere in the sustenance of earthly life. They are marked with the ideal processes of nature and its phenomena. While [the beauty of] Lake Awing *appeals to* (charms) every passers-by, the sea water is virtuous in *containing* medicinal components, and water *serves* part of the community. The lone use of the verb *accumulate*, for instance, brings to the limelight the role aquatic animals (fishes) play in detoxifying water bodies by absorbing and accumulating toxic substances and gases in their bodies.

In the second category, twenty-eight verbs were found framing actions that related to the protection and conservation of the ecosystem. The most recurrent of these twenty-

eight verbs were those that reinforced the protection and conservation of two ecosystems. Verbal groups echoing actions related to tree planting and protection of the biosphere were the most prominent, having an occurrence of ten (35.71%) each. As seen in the examples below, these verbs realised actions that protect and conserve biosphere [(high)lands, water and atmosphere], and equally the protection and conservation of forest and plant species.

(19) … *the bill …* **will also help protect** *the health of people, especially youths who are most exposed to tobacco consumption* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11871/8070 of 25/06/2019, p. 6)

(20) *The 3D printer which is a machine that* **melts** *processed plastic into solid useable gadgets* (*Municipal Updates*, Vol. 3, No. 076 of 08/06/2020, p. 6)

(21) *It [stove] is environmentally friendly and* **helps to stop** *deforestation* (*Cameroon Business Today*, No. 110 of 19-25/06/2019, p. 25)

In (19) and (20) above, the verb phrasals *will also help protect* and *melts,* respectively denote actions that realise the protection and conservation of Cameroon's physical space: [high]lands, water bodies and the atmosphere. Nonetheless, *helps to stop* in (21) is literally communicative of actions that halt (check) ruthless, unsustainable exploitation of the country's forest resources. The parity in the occurrences of verbs advocating protection and conservation of Cameroon's forests and biosphere, in fact, reflects reporters' consciousness about the salience of the biosphere and the forest to humanity. Worthy of notice is the fact that some of these actions were those prescribed or performed by environmental laws, and others carried out by environmental NGOs and related stakeholders.

To continue, verbs that evoke BD protection and conservation have a frequency of eight, which is 28.58% of the aggregate. Actions that reminisced BD protection and conservation are encoded in the highlighted verbs in the examples below.

(22) *The rapid expansion of palm oil plantations* **threatens** *the world's most sensitive habitats* (*The Post Weekender*, No. 02107 of 10/07/2020, p. 6)

(23) *Cameroon* **intends to conserve** *or …* **improve** *its biodiversity* (*The Median*, No. 394 of 06/07/2020, p. 4)

(24) *Cross River State ... is host to a community-based-REDD+ programme that* **promotes** *… biodiversity, conservation and Climate Change mitigation (Eco-Outlook*, Vol. 1, No. 022 of January 2020, p. 2)

In the excerpts above, the verbs realise ecological protection and conservation variedly. In (22), the verb *threaten* conscientises the Cameroonian audience about the dangers plantation expansions pose to natural habitat, thus calling for an end to such habitat endangering activities. On the other hand, the respective use of '*intends to conserve or … improve* and *promotes*' in (23) and (24) denote concrete actions taken by government departments and

environmental NGOs to safeguard (conserve) and restore Cameroon's BD. Other verb groups like *have warned*, *causes* and *has contributed* refer to actions that caution against threats to BD.

4.3. Functional sentences

By functional sentences, interest is on sentences bearing intentions that influence the audience. The two main functional sentences identified in the corpus were declaratives that simply inform the audience about a nature-oriented status quo, and imperatives that compel them to carry out an environment-saving action. Seventy-four functional sentences were identified in this segment of the corpus, as in the subsequent discussions.

4.3.1. Declarative sentences

As represented in Table 4 below, twenty-four declarative sentences were identified and analysed in this portion of the corpus. These declaratives were used to give some useful, nature-related pieces of information to the Cameroonian public.

Table 4: Declarative sentences and ecological frames realised

Ecological frame	Frequency	(%)
[Re]afforestation, conservation and valorisation of forest/plants	10	41.67
Conservation of biosphere (land, water and atmosphere)	08	33.33
Biodiversity protection, conservation and valorisation	06	25
Total	24	100

Out of the twenty-four declarative sentences used, a majority (ten) gave information about actions and/or measures the government of Cameroon with partner [Environmental] NGOs have taken to recoup, valorise and conserve the depleting forest. The declaratives equally vitalise natural entities by giving details pertaining to their functions in the human environment, as in the following utterances.

(25) *The forestry and wildlife boss equally noted that successful surveillance of forest depends greatly on actors at local levels* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11871/8070 of 25/06/2019, p. 21)

(26) *Recent actions carried out in the flora and fauna sector in Cameroon is the operation "Green Campus" project, which consists of planting trees in all public and private schools* (*The Sun*, No. 0568 of 30/10/2019, p. 11)

(27) *The Minister of Water and Energy Resources has announced the replacement of wooden poles with concrete ones* (*The Eden*, No. 1169 of 13/07/2020, p. 3)

As stated hitherto, declaratives were used to transmit varied efforts made by the government of Cameroon and its stakeholders to protect and conserve forest resources.

In effect, declarative (25) is a concrete move to safeguard against unsustainable exploitation of the country's forest wealth. Moreover, (26) constructs actions taken to renew the forest via [re]afforestation in the school milieu; and (27) indicates the government's expedient initiative to combat rampant tree cutting through the replacement of wooden electric poles with those of cement. Declaratives, so to speak, function as environmental actions and pieces of advice that advance the protection, conservation and valorisation of the country's forest resources.

Also prevalent in the corpus were declaratives that revealed information about the protection and conservation of the country's biosphere (land, water and atmosphere), with a frequency of eight, thus 33.33%. They shared useful information about the activities and measures the government has put in place to safeguard the physical space (land, water and atmosphere) from pollution. These action-driven details and measures follow suit.

(28) *It (Lake Awing) will become a tourist attraction when gov't completes investment projects* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11845/8044 of 15/05/2019, p. 3)

(29) *… project will consist of industrial scale collection and recycling of electronic waste in the cities of Yaounde and Douala* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11810/8009 of 25/05/2019, pp. 11-12)

(30) *The Port Authority of Douala plans to construct a fire protection network* (*The Post Weekender*, No. 02101 of 19/06/2020, p. 4)

(31) *Youth Development Organisation … has embarked on the protection of water sources* (*The Eden*, No. 1164 of 15/06/2020, p. 4)

In line with the respective utterances above, (28) is constructive of the valorisation of water bodies; meanwhile, (29), (30) and (31) are announcements of concrete actions initiated by the government to realise the protection of the country's physical space: [high]land, water and atmosphere.

Declaratives relating to biodiversity protection, conservation and valorisation ranked last with a frequency of six (25%). Pragmatically, the sparse occurrence of declaratives on this ecosystem is rather signalling government protective action(s) in all areas of the ecosystem, as in the examples below.

(32) *… the Agreement … will enable it [Cameroon] to safeguard a significant part of its rich wildlife heritage* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11870/8069 of 24/06/2019, p. 9)

(33) *"…We are reaffirming … our firm will to fight against destruction of biodiversity"* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11871/8070 of 25/06/2019, p. 21)

Utterances (32) and (33) above are evocative of concerted and/or legal actions taken by the government and partner NGOs to reinforce the protection and conservation of Cameroon's biodiversity (plants and animal species). Utterance (32), in fact, states moves taken by the government compelling citizens to refrain from plundering biodiversity, in which case biodiversity defaulters are liable to face judgement.

4.3.2. Imperative sentences

Fifty imperative sentences were analysed in the corpus. They were identified from the five different markers inherent in their formation and/or structure. The markers of imperatives observed included "should", "must", "let's + verb phrase", "imperative form (zero-subject clause)" and "directive verbs/phrases", as considered in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Summary of imperative markers used

Imperative marker	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Directive verbs/phrases	16	32
Should	15	30
Let's + verb phrase	09	18
Must	06	12
Imperative form (zero subject)	04	08
Total	50	100

The statistics above reveal that the use of directive verbs or phrasal imperatives is the most pervasive in the corpus, with an occurrence of 16 (32%). This implies that directive and/or compelling verbs or phrases are the most effective tool used by Cameroonian reporters to galvanise different environment-driven actions, and state the stakes (urgency) involved. The usage of some of these directive verbs is instantiated in the utterances that follow.

(34) *We* **want to preserve** *these animals because they belong to … Cameroon* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11870/8069 of 24/06/2019, p. 9)

(35) *The bill, therefore,* **defines standards** *relating to the protection of people … environment against hazards from radiological and nuclear materials* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11871/8070 of 25/06/2019, p. 6)

(36) *Individuals, organisations and gov'ts* **need to come together** *to protect … the planet* (*Municipal Updates*, Vol. 3/ No. 083 of 20/07/2020, p. 4)

(37) *Minister* **demands** *behavioural change to combat desertification and drought* (*The Eden*, No. 1164 of 15/06/2020, p. 4)

In tandem with (34), (35) and (37), respectively, efforts and actions in language forms (verbal imperatives) like *wanting to preserve* animals, *defining* standards for environmental protection and *demanding* desertification-combatting changes in behaviour are compelling of the Cameroonian audience to engage in the protection and conservation of the biophysical environment. These particular imperatives, notably "defines standards" and "demands behavioural change", in fact, criminalise actions that contravene the orders (legality) laid down by or in these compellers. In utterance (36), "need to come together to protect", on its part, is cautionarily compelling of concerted action (synergy) to reactivate, realise and reinforce environmental protection.

The outright "should" imperatives rank second in this category with fifteen (30%) occurrences. The use of "should" is expressive of a direct and/or blunt imperative that reverberates with disregard for the social classes of the public audience. Its use intimates a desperate appeal for urgent and global actions to save the waning ecosystem from extinction. The ecologically conscious actions sparked by "should" imperatives are given in the instances below.

(38) *It (forest)* **should therefore be preserved** (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11809/8007 of 22/03/2019, p. 14)

(39) *Migratory birds constitute an important part of Cameroon's biodiversity, and* **should be conserved for the benefit of the present and future generations** (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11870/8069 of 24/06/2019, p. 9)

(40) *… proper handling of waste materials …* **should constitute an important part of our efforts to … protect the environment** (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11871/8070 of 25/06/2019, p. 6)

The use of "should" constituted a power propellant of ecological actions [re]produced and reinforced by the Cameroon press. It was observed that while "should" is used to spur conservation action, as in (38) and (39) above, it is deployed in other instances (like in legal instruments) as in (40) to restrict and direct actions towards protection and conservation of the biophysical environment.

Imperatives involving the use of "let's + verb phrase" were equally present in the data, with a frequency of nine (18%). The use of "let's" prescribes unity, and the verb phrase denotes actions to save or do justice to the ecosystem, as in the following examples:

(41) **Let us walk more and drive less** *to conserve fuel and prevent auto-emission* (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11871/8070 of 25/06/2019, p. 6)

(42) **Let's reduce food wastage** *by buying only what is necessary and planning our meals* (*Cameroon Business Today*, No. 110 of 19-25/06/2019, p. 13)

The journalistic construct involving the use of "let's", thus, is revealing of the fact environmental protection and conservation should be a collective effort; preoccupying and involving everybody, and in varied ways. In effect, the "let's" imperative is both inclusive and compelling.

It was observed that "zero-subject imperatives" were the least used in the corpus, with a four (08%) occurrence rate. Their sparse use could be because the absence of a subject makes them ambiguous and non-referent. It might not have been considered a useful tool to communicate the urgency of global involvement in environmental and climate actions. "Zero-subject imperatives" address nobody specifically as they are rather ambiguous.

With reference to the statistics above, it can be observed that imperative sentences were used to direct and/or oblige the public on the obligatory actions to be taken, and

behaviours to be adopted to protect and conserve the ecosystem.

4.4. Personification

Personification, according to Charteris-Black (2004, p. 21), denotes language use that refers "to something that is inanimate using a word or phrase that in other contexts refers to something that is animate". Personification was identified in the corpus apropos of verb phrases and adjectival phrases that personify (give human attributes to) different aspects relating to Cameroon's ecosystem.

4.4.1. Verb phrases personifying Cameroon's ecosystem

Forty-one nature-personifying verbs and phrases were identified in the corpus. Within these personifying verbs and verb phrases, interest is on verbal forms that denote environmental actions and/or reactions. In such constructs, inanimate (nature and related) entities perform different actions that exert positive impact on the human environment. They also imply metaphorical actions performed on nature. The most prominent markers in this group are verbs that activate the conservation of the biosphere. With the most outstanding frequency of eighteen (43.9%), these verbs enact actions that seek to protect and conserve Cameroon's [high]lands, water and the atmosphere, as in the examples below.

> (43) *Let's teach our children* **to respect nature** *and* **take care of the environment** (*Municipal Updates*, Vol. 3/ No. 083 of 20/07/2020, p. 4)
> (44) *Minister demands behavioural change* **to combat desertification and drought** (*The Sun*, No. 0609 of 13/07/2020, pp. 3-4)
> (45) *We* **must fight against pollution** (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11871/8070 of 25/06/2019, p. 6)
> (46) … *a major global prize to reward those working* **to save the environment** (*The Star*, Vol. 2, No. 567 of 15/01/2020, p. 3)

The personifying verb phrases *to respect nature* and *take care of the environment* in (43) above, thus, are suggestive of actions that respectively show recognition for the existential rights of nature and those that show gratitude to nature via love, friendship and care. Nonetheless, the phrases '*to combat desertification and drought*', '*must fight against pollution*', and '*to save the environment*' in utterances (44), (45) and (46) frame the tender beauty and inviolability of nature that should be safeguarded by brave (war-like) human efforts. The implication of these personifying verbs (and phrases) is that environmental protection involves commitment and steadfastness.

In addition, verb groups implicating actions aimed at protecting, valorising and conserving biodiversity follow suit with an occurrence rate of 14 (34.15%). By valorisation, these are encoded with different actions carried out by the government on the one hand,

and nature on the other, to sustain humanity, as in the examples below.

> (47) … *many solutions which* **will help fight Climate Change and biodiversity loss** (*The Post Weekender*, No. 02107 of 10/07/2020, p. 6)
> (48) … *mushrooms have the ability* **to support Mother Earth**; *they* **are also capable of promoting your own health** (*The Star*, Vol. 2, No. 592 of 13/07/2020, pp. 11-120)
> (49) *They [whales] also* **capture tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere** (*Eco-Outlook*, Vol. 1, No. 020 of October 2019, pp. 11-125)

While the highlighted verb phrase in (47) signals concrete actions taken by the government to conserve biodiversity, '*to support Mother Earth*', '*are also capable of promoting your own health*' and '*capture tons of carbon from the atmosphere*' are representative of valorising actions performed by biodiversity to stabilise and sustain earthly life. In essence, verbs in this category, in fact, are used to create awareness of the virtue of biodiversity, that it deserves protection and conservation. They equally implicate the concrete actions that have to [and are supposed] to be carried out by the Cameroonian public to guarantee biodiversity conservation.

The least personifying of these verb phrases are those related to forest actions, with two (04.88%) scanty occurrences. These verbs define actions that have been taken by the government and partner NGOs to protect and restore Cameroon's forest (and other endangered plant species). In the construct *to heal our relation with nature*, for instance, the press therefore makes a clarion call to the Cameroonian audience to inculcate a more positive mindset that realises the protection and conservation of forest resources (endemic plant species).

4.4.2. Adjectival phrases personifying Cameroon's ecosystems

These are syntactic structures marked with the transfer of human attributes to nature and its phenomena. The thirty-eight adjectival phrases identified in the data are representative of compliments that endow nature and the environment with human virtues. They are powerful tools of environmental activism, as discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

Table 6: Adjectival phrases personifying Cameroon's ecosystem

Ecological frame	Frequency	(%)
Conservation of biosphere (land, water and atmosphere)	16	42.10
[Re]afforestation, wildlife conservation and valorisation of plants	11	28.95
Biodiversity protection, conservation and valorisation	11	28.95
Total	38	100

From the thirty-eight adjectival phrases identified, the majority of sixteen (42.10%) are

those that conceptualise biosphere as a person. In this regard, these adjectival phrases profoundly vitalise [high]lands, water and atmosphere with human virtues. Some of these personifying attributes are presented in the instances below.

(50) … *located beside the* **mighty Atlantic Ocean** (*The Sun*, No. 0609 of 13/07/2020, p. 5)

(51) *[Mount Fako]* **is blessed** (*The Sun*, No. 0609 of 13/07/2020, p. 5)

(52) … *soil is* **home to large populations of natural agents** *that … promote the environment* (*The Median*, No. 390 of 08/06/2020, p. 3)

(53) … *the climate that makes* **the planet hospitable** *all comes from nature* (*The Green Reporter*, No. 029 of 22/06/2017, p. 4)

As presented above, adjectival phrases constructing the physical environment with human ideals were very effective in advocating ecocentrism. The highlighted constructs, *mighty Atlantic Ocean* and *is blessed* in (50) and (51), respectively, consecrate the physical environment as an angel and a deity that is inviolable and indispensable for human survival. In several instances, like in (52) and (53) above, biosphere is projected as a lovely (caring) host to human life. These attributes dignify and celebrate nature and, therefore, activate calls for environmentally protective actions.

Adjectival phrases personifying forest and wildlife attributes are at par with those framing biodiversity protection with a frequency of eleven (28.95%) each. Personifying adjectives [and phrases], in fact, realise conservation of the two ecosystems above in peculiar patterns, as presented below.

(54) *The* **humble onion** *is found in every kitchen … its* **curative powers** *make it an important medicinal plan* (*The Sun*, No. 0609 of 13/07/2020, p. 6)

(55) *When the need for* **a special care enclosure** *arose for our three* **disabled chimpanzees**, *we built and adjusted the enclosures to make* **their lives comfortable** (*The Star*, Vol. 2, No. 591 of 06/07/2020, p. 6)

(56) … *mushrooms have the ability to support* **Mother Earth** (*The Star*, Vol. 2, No. 592 of 13/07/2020, p. 9)

(57) **Nature is the friendliest thing** *humans can ever have* (*The Post Weekender*, No. 02108 of 13/07/2020, p. 4)

(58) *We want the forest … not because* **the forest is beautiful**, *but because all these* **beings that inhabit the forest are part of us** (*The Green Reporter*, No. 029 of 22/06/2017, p. 4)

The prevalence of personifying adjectival phrases, thus, realised dual ecological meanings in the newspapers analysed. As seen in the utterances above, the respective uses of phrasal forms in the likes of '*humble* onion', '*curative* powers', '*Mother* Earth', 'Nature *is the friendliest thing*', 'the forest *is beautiful*' and 'beings that inhabit the forest *are part of us*' are compliments

that idealise and, thus, valorise the country's forest and wildlife resources. This valorisation entails protection and conservation. To add, personifying constructs such as *a special care enclosure* in (55) above, on the one hand, idealise activities that are directed towards the protection of and/or care for wildlife, and phrases such as *disabled chimpanzees*, on the other hand, tilt attention to the sympathetic state of nature in need of care. From the parity above, it can be said that the government of Cameroon and its stakeholders have been putting significant efforts into the protection and conservation of forest and wildlife resources especially, and biodiversity in general. These pragmatic aspects advocate ecological harmony by projecting these entities as human equivalences that have the right to live and, thus, deserve to be protected and conserved.

From the discussions above, it could be seen that while the personifying verb phrases refer to actions and activities that are and/or have been initiated to restore, protect and conserve Cameroon's ecosystems, the personifying adjectival phrases are representative of ideal (life-saving) qualities exhibited by nature to sustain humanity, therefore, warranting conservation.

4.5. Illocutionary speech acts

Illocutionary speech acts (SAs) are utterances that are meant to state the intention of or justify a course of action in the environment. Searle (1971), thus, reiterates that the illocutionary speech act is the hub of pragmatics, as intention is a very indispensable, better still, a primordial factor in the meaning continuum. This involves the use of varied phrase and sentence patterns that adduce an ecologically restoring, protecting and conserving action in Cameroon's ecosystems (forest, wildlife and livestock, biodiversity, biosphere and aquatic lives). These illocutionary SAs have illocutionary themes (phrasal patterns) that signal intentions, aims (goals/objectives) or reasons (justifications) for an action. The distribution of the eighteen illocutionary SAs identified and their themes are represented in the following table:

Table 7: Distribution of illocutionary speech acts

Illocutionary theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Intentions	09	50
Aims (Goals/Objectives)	05	27.78
Reasons/Justifications	04	22.22
Total	18	100

The statistics above reveal that utterance themes in the pattern of overt intention are the most pervasive illocutionary act in the corpus, with a frequency of nine (50%). In this part of the corpus, utterances are calibrated with intentions using three unique markers: verb + to + verb phrase; noun + in order + verb phrase; and passive voice. These structures are expatiated with the examples below.

(59) *The day is celebrated each year* **to raise awareness on the importance of trees** (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11809/8007 of 22/03/2019, p. 14)

(60) *Let's … adopt … intelligent agricultural practices* **in order to ensure soil conservation** (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11871/8070 of 25/06/2019, p. 6)

(61) *… experts … say the move* **is intended to protect users and the environment** (*Cameroon Business Today*, No. 110 of 19-25/06/2019, p. 13)

(62) *The ashes from the El-Sa stove …* **are used as manure, making the cooking utensil environmentally friendly** (*Cameroon Business Today*, No. 110 of 19-25/06/2019, p. 13)

As seen in utterances (60) and (61) above, the respective uses of '*in order to ensure soil conservation*' and '*is intended to protect users and the environment*', among others, are overt declarations expressive of the intentions behind varied environmental actions or responses realised by government departments and environmental stakeholders to safeguard the natural space. In the absence of the intention lexis *in order to* and *intended to*, as above, the use of "to + an action (verb phrase)", for instance, '*to raise awareness on the importance of trees*' in utterance (59), is equally declarative of the intention(s) driving the decisions, actions and activities of the government and other stakeholders in the environment vis-à-vis nature protection and conservation.

It was also observed that the passive form in utterance (62) above bears an intention. In the construct '*are used as manure, making the cooking utensil environmentally friendly*', the use of the verb phrase introduced by *making*, thus, intimates the intention of pointing out the use of ashes from the El-Sa stove as manure.

Moreover, it was observed that objective-oriented illocutionary SAs were significant in the corpus, with an occurrence rate of five (27.78%). In this category, utterances pertaining to intentions are marked with noun phrases composed of unique lexes that are literally suggestive of objectives, goals and aims, exemplified below.

(63) *The* **aim is to involve companies, communities and sectors in actions to protect the environment** (*The Sun*, No. 0568 of 30/10/2019, p. 11)

(64) *SURUDEV has as* **objective … to reduce ecological degradation, through conservation of biodiversity** (*The Median*, No. 390 of 08/06/2020, p. 3)

(65) *The* **goals of the community-based REDD+ programme are to sustainably manage forest, encourage forest communities to … improve the well-being of the people and the environment** (*The Median*, No. 394 of 06/07/2020, p. 4)

In utterances (63), (64) and (65), the respective uses of '*aim is to involve companies, communities and sectors in actions to protect the environment*', '*objective … to reduce ecological degradation, through conservation of biodiversity*', and '*goals of the community-based REDD+ programme are to sustainably manage forest*' are prominent markers of the intentions of different legal instruments enacted, and actions carried out in the environment to ensure protection and conservation. It is

worth stating that "objectives" were used to state the immediate outcomes, "aims" stated the short-term outcomes, and meanwhile, "goals" were constructive of the long-term outcomes (expectations) of efforts taken to realise environmental justice plus conservation. Goal-oriented utterances are more distributed in this category than "objectives" and "aims", given that they were referent to the conservation of nature to sustain future generations. In essence, intention and/or outcome-oriented statements marked the ecological stance (attitudes) and consciousness of Cameroon press[wo]men.

Nonetheless, illocutionary SAs that are reason or justification-patterned are the least used, with a frequency of four (22.22%). The use of unpopular styles involving peculiar registers like *reason, in line with* and other implicit patterns are the unique means used by Cameroon press reporters to make justifications about decisions and actions carried out to safeguard the environment, as follows.

(66) … *encourage the planting and protection of trees,* **which are a legacy for them** (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11809/8007 of 22/03/2019, p. 14)

(67) … *this action goes* **in line with Cameroon's objective to restore over 12m ha of deforested and degraded land by 2030** (*Cameroon Tribune*, No. 11871/8070 of 25/06/2019, p. 6)

(68) … *our source also evoked* **environmental reasons for the institution of type approval for telecommunication equipment** (*Cameroon Business Today*, No. 110 of 19-25/06/2019, p. 13)

In an analysis of the utterances above, the uses of '*which are a legacy for them*', '*environmental reasons for the institution of type approval for telecommunication equipment*', and '*which are becoming scarce and endangered*' from (66), (67) and (68), respectively, are justifications of different courses of action taken to protect and conserve the biophysical environment. These justification or reason-guided statements are tacitly expressive of the ecocentric consciousness of the Cameroon press, and related to the legal instruments put in place to check uncontrolled and unsustainable exploitation of nature.

5. Discussion of key findings

In all, it was found that ecocentric discourses in Cameroon press are replete with varied pragma-linguistic patterns that activate a plethora of ecological constructs: valorisation, protection and conservation of the ecosystem. The use of environmentally friendly textual and contextual patterns was meant to conscientise the public about the importance of nature protection and conservation. It was found that varied forms of linguistic (pronouns, verbs and functional sentences) and pragmatic (personification and illocutionary speech acts) entities were effective in persuading the public about the virtues of nature to humanity and, thus, the importance of nature conservation and/or sustainability for the future generation.

The forty constructive discourses analysed culminated in the identification of three formal and two pragmatic resources that weave varied shades of ecological meanings. As concerns the formal fabric of the constructive discourses, the discursive tools deployed to realise ecocentric consciousness include pronouns, verbs and functional sentences. The seven types of pronouns analysed included "we", "our", "us", "itself", "they", "there" and "every [one/thing/man/woman]". It was found that the preponderance of pronouns, in essence, betoken the need for collective (and inclusive) efforts to protect, restore and conserve nature. The use of singular and plural pronouns (*everyone* and *we/our*) is suggestive of the fact that ecocentric consciousness starts as an individual action, and then progresses to a collective one. Pronominal constructs involving "we", "us" and "our" advocate general (community) involvement in the valorisation and conservation of Cameroon's ecosystems. These plural forms are used to include and exhort the masses who may or are not involved in any serious (industrial) form of environmental devastation to accompany the government and its stakeholders in drives to consolidate nature conservation and sustainability. These plural categories (*we*, *us* and *our*), therefore, mark the environment as a collective endowment whose protection requires a collective action. Moreover, action verbs are expressive of actions (say '*to help restore*', '*produce*', '*cleans*', '*to prevent*' and '*to support*', in utterances (9)-(12), respectively) performed by natural entities to sustain terrestrial life. Some of these verbs are also encoded with concrete intentions, actions taken and/or efforts made by the government of Cameroon (and its stakeholders) to protect and conserve the biophysical environment for posterity; for example, '*will also help protect*', '*helps to stop*', and '*intends to conserve*', in (19), (21) and (23), respectively. As concerns the use of functional sentences, it was found that imperative sentences were effective in compelling the Cameroonian audience toward a desired environmental action(s). The use of the imperative forms *Directive Verbs/Phrases* and *should*, thus, realised nature protection and conservation as an obligation.

With regard to the pragmatic categories, Cameroon press reporters also activated ecocentric consciousness and morality with recourse to personification and illocutionary SAs. In this category, the profundity of personification, in fact, venerated nature: divine and human virtues were attributed to nature using verbs and nouns. Constructs in the likes of '*humble* onion', '*curative* powers', '*Mother* Earth', 'Nature *is the friendliest thing*', 'the forest *is beautiful*', inter alia, are representative of the idealisation of nature using personification. In other instances, it was with the use of personification that environmentally eroding activities/phenomena are framed as environmental enemies against whom efforts are put; '*to combat desertification and drought*' and '*must fight against pollution*' respectively from utterances (59) and (60) above. Lastly, the use of illocutionary SAs was another efficacious tool of environmental advocacy. It was found that statements calibrated with intentions, aims (objectives/goals) and reasons/justifications were used to corroborate different environmental actions and decisions taken by the government and environmental sympathisers. Syntactic form like '*in order to*', '*intended to*', 'to' + an action verb (for instance, '*to raise awareness on the importance of trees*' in utterance (59)), '*aim is*', '*goals of*', '*reasons for*', and

'*objective* [is] *to*' are markers that realise this purpose.

6. Conclusion

Finally, among the discursive categories analysed and discussed, the preponderance of pronouns and personification, thus, respectively attested to the commitment of ecocentric Cameroonian journalists to (i) inform and involve every Cameroonian in environmental action; and (ii) consider nature as a sentient entity with rights to live, be catered for, and be protected. Bearing in mind that anthropocentric discourses are also visible in Cameroon's media space, worst competing with ecocentric discourses, the production of more ecocentric news discourses, realised by more innovative patterns, will go a long way to radicalise ecological consciousness and conservation in Cameroon. The ecocentric discourses that are sampled for this study, in essence, use language strategically and productively to project the virtues of nature, and so, galvanise more conservation efforts in Cameroon. In a nutshell, journalists crafted ecocentric discourses to conscientise other media practitioners and the entire Cameroonian populace about the virtues of the biophysical environment in need of conservation. The valorisation, sustainability and conservation ideologies reinforced in these ecocentric newspaper discourses are considered environmental advocacies that align with government efforts to preserve Cameroon's ecosystems.

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