

A Critical Discourse Analysis of newspaper articles on the 2015 state budget of Cameroon in the national press

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Introduction

- Towards the end of every year (November-December) in Cameroon, the government draws and presents the state budget for the following year.
- This budget is always examined and adopted by the National Assembly before its implementation the next year.
- During this period of the year, news in the Cameroonian press is always dominated by various analyses of the new budget.
- This paper aims at a critical discourse analysis of selected newspaper articles from some Cameroonian newspapers on the 2015 state budget.
- The main focus is to determine the various ideologies that are developed and propagated in the different articles criticizing the budget.

Background

- The state budget is a very sensitive issue in the economy of a nation. Therefore, its drawing and presentation always attracts a lot of criticisms. This has always been the case in Cameroon.
- Whenever the budget of an up-coming year is presented by the government, various actors of the national life always criticize it; bringing out its merits and demerits; and in relation to their expectations.
- Pressmen are always engaged in this criticism so much such that nearly all newspaper publishers dedicate a portion of their papers to articles on the state budget.
- As such, these papers end-up developing and propagating various ideologies in relation to the state budget. These ideologies may be in favour or against the budget; depending on the orientation of the newspapers.
- It is on these bases that we have decided to unravel the various ideologies disseminated in the various newspapers upon the presentation of the 2015 state budget of the Republic of Cameroon.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

According to Van Dijk (1998:1):

- “Critical Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately to resist social inequality.”
- Critical discourse analysts therefore have a role of investigating peculiar social ideologies that manifest inequality and abuse of social power to the detriment of the minorities or the underprivileged in society. Their main focus is to present the various ways in which these inequalities are enacted by the privileged and resisted by the underprivileged.

CDA cont.

- Consequently, studies in CDA are not only limited to the description of text and talk but involve relating them to the societies in which they are produced because the main concern is to understand how the discourse is constructed and the reasons for incorporating certain linguistic structures, rather than others, in realizing particular texts or talks (Van Dijk 1995a).
- Studies in CDA can therefore take many dimensions, one of which is focusing on ideologies framed and propagated in various discourse in social contexts.
- “Ideology, for CDA, is seen as an important means of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations. CDA takes a particular interest in the ways in which language mediates ideology in a variety of social institutions.” (Wodak 2002: 9).

CDA Cont.

- Social institutions are noted for using particular patterns of language in their discourse to mediate various ideologies.
- CDA aims at deciphering these ideologies because "ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs and movies" (Van Dijk, 1995b: 17).
- Ideologies framed and sustained in various discourse equally establish and maintain power relations because the linguistic forms that mediate them also express and manipulate power.
- "Power is signalled not only by grammatical forms within a text, but also by a person's control of a social occasion by means of the genre of a text" (Wodak ibid: 11).

CDA and newspaper discourse

- Newspapers are noted for using particular patterns of language in their discourse to mediate various ideologies, especially when writing on topical social issues.
- This is contrary to their occupational norms which entail “reporting something called ‘news’ without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way” Schudson (2001: 150).
- Journalists who have total control of newspaper articles therefore have the power to use the genre in order to mediate various ideologies, thereby controlling the minds of their readers as they wish.
- This is reflected in the rhetorical organisation of newspaper articles: Headlines, lead and body.

CDA and newspaper discourse (cont.)

- Because headlines are designed to be short and catchy, and given that most readers often read and recall only headlines, journalists tend to exploit them to express their ideological view of the news stories they report (Van Dijk 1988).
- In the lead, which is the first sentence of the news story, they introduce the story by advancing some explanations to harness the view initiated in the headlines.
- The body consists of a series of details, examples, statistics, etc. that serve as concrete illustrations that sustain and justify intended ideologies.

CDA and newspaper discourse (cont.)

- Some critical discourse studies on newspaper articles have revealed how journalists exploit this genre to propagate particular ideologies.
- In a study of three elite U.S. newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*), Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) attempt to elucidate the ideological representations of U.S. policies towards Iran's nuclear programme.
- Mahfouz (2013) uses the same framework to study the Police news story framing in two Egyptian newspapers before the January 25 revolution.
- In a study on newspaper headlines about the 2011-2012 budget of Pakistan, Mahmood, M., Javed, and Mahmood, R. (2011) come up with findings showing that the headlines are representations of the editors' ideologies regarding their political inclinations.

Data


- Data for this study comprise of five newspaper articles selected from four newspapers in Cameroon: *Cameroon Tribune*, *The Post*, *Cameroon Daily Journal* and *The Median Newspaper*.
- *Cameroon Tribune* has been chosen because it is a state-owned newspaper; therefore, articles published in this newspaper would obviously propagate pro-governmental ideologies.
- The other papers are private and would obviously preach independent or anti-governmental ideologies.
- Data analysis is done in two different stages. At the first stage, the analyses focus on how the papers propagate a positive perception of the budget.
- At the second stage, the analyses show how the papers negatively label the budget by pointing out its demerits.
- The analyses are based on the lexical features and the argumentative structures used by the writers in the various parts of their articles.


Findings and Discussion


The main preoccupation here is to present and discuss findings relating the various ideologies developed and sustained by various newspapers as concerns the 2015 state budget of the Republic of Cameroon. I will begin with those in favour of the budget, and then continue to those against the budget.

Ideologies in favour of the budget

- The words used in the framing of the headlines of three of the five articles analysed suggest a positive perception of the budget.
 1. 2015 Cameroon budget increases by 13.12% (*Cameroon Daily Journal*)
 2. 2015 budget: High Expectations (*Cameroon Tribune*)
 3. 2015 State Budget: Consolidating Investments in Priority Sectors (*Cameroon Tribune*)
- Stating that the budget has “increased” in the first example implies that the country and obviously the population are going to experience amelioration in some sectors of national life.
- Similarly, a budget that is coming amidst “high expectations” will surely take care of these expectations.
- The third example is very clear in stating that the budget is designed to “consolidate investments in priority sectors.”

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- After creating a positive perception of the budget in the headlines, the writers of these articles continue to sustain this ideology in the lead paragraphs.
 - In order to show the increment in the 2015 state budget, the writer of the first headline above proceeds to compare the budget to that of the previous year by stating that the budget has moved from 3312 BCFA in 2014 to 3746.6 BCFA in 2015, giving a difference of 434.6 BCFA.
 - It is understood here that this difference that has been added to the new budget is surely going to take care of what the previous budget could not; hence ameliorating national life.

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- In the lead of the headline announcing high expectations on the 2015 budget, the writer mentions the fact that lawmakers of the lower and upper houses of the National Assembly; that is, the Parliament and the Senate respectively, will for the next one month be examining the budget.
 - This is in order to determine whether the budget meets their expectations and consequently the high expectations of Cameroonians, since parliamentarians and senators are representatives of the entire population of the country in the National Assembly.
 - In the lead of the third headline above, the writer states that the government of Cameroon is putting in place performance strategies to use the 2015 budget to consolidate investments in priority sectors of the economy.
 - He equally emphasises the fact that the Prime Minister said nothing will be left to chance to attain this objective as the strategies set will ensure a smooth running of government's economic, financial, social and cultural programme for the 2015 fiscal year.

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- In the body of the articles, the writers continue to use words and argumentative structures that sustain a positive perception of their 2015 budget.
 - In the various paragraphs of the body of the articles, the writers name some priority areas, and list some concrete projects that are going to be executed using the increased budget.
 - Some of these priority areas identified in the articles include: improving the national road network with concrete projects like the Douala-Yaounde motorway, Kribi-Edea motorway, the ring road and the second bridge over the wouri; pursuing giant energy projects such as the Lom-Pangar, Mekin and Memvele; provision of potable water in towns such as Douala and Yaounde; improving the educational system through the recruitment of primary school teachers, building of classrooms and staff residential houses, and equipping of literacy centres; and improving agro-pastoral activities.
 - All these help in persuading the readers to view the budget as one that has been conceived to ameliorate their standards of living.

- From the preceding analyses, it is clear that the writers have the intention of using the power they have as producers of news, to control the minds of readers of their articles to have a positive perception of the 2015 state budget.
- This is because the papers concerned, especially *Cameroon Tribune*, are pro-governmental. They will obviously develop and propagate ideologies in favour of the government and her policies.
- That is why in their articles on the 2015 state budget, they focus more on the good things that the budget will help to realised in the course of the fiscal year.

Ideologies against the budget

- The words used in framing the headlines of two of the three articles analysed suggest this negative perception as illustrated below:

1. SDF MPs Dump 2015 Budget

Storm Out of Parliament (*The Post*)

2. 2015 state budget

Skyrocketing running expenditures! (*The Median Newspaper*)

- Reporting that SDF MPs dumped the budget is an expression of the valueless nature of the budget. If the budget can be dumped, that means it is as useless as rubbish considered for the dustbin.
- Similarly, by focusing only on running expenditures, which are described as skyrocketing, the headline from *The Median Newspaper* suggests that the new budget has nothing to offer to the population.
- This is because money reserved for running expenditures is used entirely for consumption, and not on any development projects.

- After using the catchy phrases of their headlines to create a negative perception of the 2015 budget in the minds of their readers, the writers of the articles continue to sustain this ideology in the lead paragraphs by offering some explanations.
- The lead of the article from *The Post* explains why SDF MPs rejected the budget. The article reports that these MPs “described the adoption of the 2015 budget as an official approval of illegality, generalised and organised national embezzlement of State fund” (p. 1, *The Post* No. 01587, December 8, 2014).
- A budget that is designed to favour such malpractices should obviously be “dumped” because it will not help the country to develop in any way.
- Similarly, the lead of the article from *The Median Newspaper* explains that despite the President and the Prime Minister’s calls on the ministers to cut down on the running costs of their ministries, a look at the budgets of their respective ministries shows that this has not been respected. This implies that the budget of these ministries is orientated towards consumption instead of development.

- In the bodies of their articles, the writers proceed to give concrete illustration to justify their negative perception of the 2015 budget.
- In the article from *The Post*, the reporter relates the SDF MPs' reasons of dumping the budget. These include:
 - that the budget of the Senate, like that of any other ministry, should be presented for scrutiny after which it must be defended, because adopting a budget that has not be examined and duly defended entails “giving a blank cheque for the embezzlement of public funds;
 - that the government intentionally violated the provisions of the law but submitting the finance bill late, entailing that the Finance Committee of the Parliament did not have enough time to examine it properly;
 - and that the bill be sent back to the Finance Committee for a profound scrutiny.

- In the body of his article, *The Median Newspaper* reporter analyses different headings of the budget in order to show how state funds will be wasted.
- According to the details presented, 65bn is reserved for celebration and mission allowances with the Presidency alone taking what the reporter refers to as “whooping 9.5 billion CFA”, money which according to him is dedicated essentially to “eating”.
- Other details show that 35bn will be spent for fuel alone, 47.5 for bonuses, 25.2 for water and electricity bills, 6.9bn to run ELECAM, 12.2bn to run the Senate, and 19bn to run the Parliament.
- In the course of presenting these details, the reporter uses words, expressions and devices that express his negative perception on the way state funds are spent on running expenditures in Cameroon.

- Some examples in the data include the use of exclamations, rhetorical questions, comparisons, and loaded words. For example:
 1. The bulk of money
 2. A great leap forward
 3. Two times bigger
 4. More than 35bn for fuel alone!
 5. But to whom does the bulk of money rather go?
 6. No one can explain why the Presidency's increase is bigger than that of the defence ministry which is at war.
- The lexical choices and the devices used by the reporter translate his intention of influencing the readers to equally develop a negative perception of the 2015 state budget.
- The analyses in this section show that *The Post* and *The Median Newspaper*, which are private newspapers in Cameroon, develop and sustain anti-government ideologies. The words, expressions and devices that their reporters use in framing and developing their articles show that they have the intention to influence their readers to develop a negative perception of the 2015 state budget.

Conclusion

- This study concludes that newspaper discourse on topical and sensitive issues such as the state budget, tends to switch from objective news reporting to ideology driven discourse.
- Journalists who have the power and control over this genre use this to control the minds of their readers, depending on their political orientation.
- This is realised through their choice of words and argumentative structures.
- Newspaper articles, therefore end up drifting from objective news reporting to developing, sustaining and propagating certain ideologies.

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Thanks for your kind attention