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**RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Topic**

**ANALYSING THE LANGUAGE OF CORRUPTION IN SUB-SAHARAN  
AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF SOME SELECTED COUNTRIES IN WEST,  
EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA**

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# INTRODUCTON

The relationship between language and society has drawn worldwide the attention of sociolinguists. The researchers interested in this branch of linguistics have not been unanimous on the relationship between language and society. Despite the various stances held by sociolinguists concerning the relationship between language and society, which are not necessary in this work, the mainstream thinking holds that language is a reflection of the society in which we live. This stance is upheld in Sapir (1929), Fishman (1968), Trudgill (1974), Wardhaugh (1986), just to name these few. So, language is somehow a kind of mirror of the society. It is “a reflection of a society’s [ills], culture and its perception of the world; as it relays information, it demonstrates how a certain society takes in, processes, evaluates, and conveys that information”( <http://www.reallycoolblog.com/introspection-30-language-as-a-reflection-of-society>). On the basis of the above clues, it can be pointed out that all the phenomena which develop in the society are relayed through linguistic resources. One of these phenomena, which is of interest to this study is the phenomenon of corruption.

# Introduction(Cont.)

## ●Definition of key terms

### ●Corruption

It is important to state that in its etymology, the word corruption originates from the Latin word “corrumpere” which means deteriorate, destroy either physically or morally (<http://www.toupie.org/Dictionnaire/Corruption.htm>). Various definitions have been given to the word “corruption”. Some of them are the following:

- “Behavior which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private regarding influence. This includes such behavior as bribery [...] nepotism [...] and misappropriation [...]” (Nye, 1989, p. 966).
- “A two-way process, involving members of both the public and private sector, or a “giver” and a “taker” who are engaged in illegal, illegitimate and unethical action([http://www.unafei.or.jp/english/pdf/PDF\\_ThirdGGSeminar/Third\\_GGSeminar\\_P80-86.pdf](http://www.unafei.or.jp/english/pdf/PDF_ThirdGGSeminar/Third_GGSeminar_P80-86.pdf))” who misuse or abuse public office for private gain (Vathanak Sina Neang (nd) ).
- “The abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. (Transparency International) [https://www.transparency.org/whoweare/organisation/faqs\\_on\\_corruption/2/#defineCorruption](https://www.transparency.org/whoweare/organisation/faqs_on_corruption/2/#defineCorruption)
- **Corruption can therefore be defined as a the use of illegal, illegitimate or unethical means to achieve private gains.**



## ●Language

A human system of **communication** that uses arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, or written **symbols** (<http://grammar.about.com/od/il/g/language-term.htm>).

On the basis of this definition, it can be inferred that the language of corruption refers to the various linguistic resources used by language users in corruption practice.

## ●Subsaharan Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, West Africa

**Subsaharan Africa** refers to the part of Africa situated below the Sub-Saharan desert. **Central Africa** comprises countries such as Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.; **East Africa** comprises countries such as Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania, etc. whereas **West Africa** comprises countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Niger, Gambia, 'etc. as illustrated by the map below.

Map 1: Sub-Saharan Africa





# 1. Motivation

This research project is motivated by the following factors: first of all, corruption has become a global concern. More than 200 national and international bodies/organisations in charge of the fight against corruption have been created. Below are provided some of them. A more complete list can be found on <http://www.anticorruptionday.org/actagainstcorruption/en/resources/index.html>. Also, many world leaders have been accused of corruption.

Furthermore, the language of corruption in various countries is developing its lexicon and its linguistic features gradually and language users have developed myriads of “hygienic and camouflage ways” to refer to the practice of this social ill. For instance, in many countries, language users have coined various lexis and expressions to refer to bribe (e.g.: “cash for soup” (in Turkey), “token of gratitude” (in china), “money for tea” (in Afghanistan), “beans for the kids” (in Kinshasa), gombo/kola (Cameroon), goro, gbalamu, kua/kwa/kua, awufu, egunje (Nigeria), “glass of wine” (in Paris), “little cars” (in Prague), “cup of “kahwe” or coffe” ” (in North Africa), “tea for elders”/chai ya wazee” (Swahili expression, in Kenya), “something small/kitu kidogo” (in Swahili), “gratitude”/haalapenz (Hungarian/Mandarin), “oiling money”/Kenepenz”(in Hungary) (<http://www.pri.org/stories/2013-07-12/language-corruption-cash-soup-nokia-box>). and this language also varies from one public domain to another, although there are some lexis and expressions which cut across all the domains (Meutem Kamtchueng (2015); Safotso Tagne (2015)

## 2. Research statement and Question

This research endeavour is based on the main assumption that the overgrowing spread of corruption in the East, West and Central African countries has brought language users to manipulate their linguistic resources to refer to its practice.

The above stated research statement can be broken down into the following research questions:

- 1) What are the lexico-semantic, discursive and rhetorical features which characterize the language of corruption sub-Saharan Africa? What are the linguistic specificities of this language in various countries in Subsaharan Africa?
- 2) What are the proportions of the distribution of these features per language and per country?
- 3) How does this language enrich its lexicon and vary from one country to another?
- 4) What is the contribution of languages (superstrates, substrates), in each country, to the lexicon of the language of corruption?
- 5) What ethnosemantic interpretation can we make of the lexicon of the language of corruption in these parts of Africa?
- 6) Which correlation can be established between the size of the lexico-semantic constructions of the language of corruption in various countries and its spread?



# 3. Aims and scope of the study

## 3.1. Aims of the study

The aims of this research endeavor are the following:

- Studying the various linguistic hallmarks which characterize the language of corruption in some selected countries of sub-Saharan Africa;
- Identifying its linguistic peculiarities in these countries.
- Studying the politics of enrichment of this language in these countries and come up with the proportions of the distribution of the features per language and per country;
- Making an ethno-semantic interpretation of the lexicon of the language of corruption in these parts of Africa;
- Studying the possibility of establishing a correlation between the size of the lexico-semantic constructions of this language in various countries and its spread?;
- On a long run, coming up with a specialized lexicon of the language of corruption in sub-Saharan Africa;

# 3. Aims and Scope of the Study

- **3.2. Scope of the study**
- The study is limited to some selected countries of sub-Saharan Africa. These countries are chosen among those of East, West and Central Africa. For each of these parts of Africa, four countries will be selected on the basis of their corruption perception index. So, the first three corrupt countries of the East, West and Central Africa will be selected on the basis of the 2014 corruption perception index as provided by Transparency International 2014. <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/infographic#compare>.
- Central Africa: Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad
- East Africa: Somalia, Tanzania, Eritrea
- West Africa: Nigeria, Gambia, Ivory coast



# 4. Significance of the study

This research project is significant for several reasons:

- First of all, it shows how corruption has led to linguistic creativity in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa, thereby showing how the dynamism of some European languages (e.g. French, English) in the African sociocultural setting;
- Secondly, the study will enable researcher to come up with the politics which governs the enrichment of the lexicon of the language of corruption in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa;
- Moreover, the findings of this project will constitute a corpus data base on the language of corruption in sub-Saharan Africa and on a long run a specialized lexicon or dictionary on this language in this part of the world.
- Also, understanding the language of corruption can help fight against corruption.

# 5. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework proposed for this project is eclectic. It encompasses the following:

- Variationism/the theory of variation (Labov 1960), Sapir (1929), Fishman (1968), Trudgill (1974), Wardhaugh (1986)

→which stresses the fact that language is a reflection of societies and therefore varies from one area to another.

- Structuralism

→To study word-formation processes involved in the creation of the lexes. (Quirk and Greenbaum's (1973), Bauer (1983), etc.

- Functionalism.

→To study the types of meaning conveyed by the verbs used in this language (Material, verbal, experiential, cognitive, relational, desiderational, etc. ( Halliday (1985), Halliday and Matthiesen (2004), Thomson (2004)



# 6. Literature Review

## ■ Terje Skjerdal (2010)

→ Brown envelopes and need for ethical re-orientation perception of Nigerian journalists.

## ■ Ekpenyong and Bassey (2014)

→ Language of corruption and anticorruption in Nigeria.

## ■ Meutem Kamtchueng (2015)

→ A Linguistic study of the language of corruption in multilingual Cameroon.

## ■ Safotso Tagne (2015)

→ The Metalanguage of Corruption in Cameroon-Part I: The Registers of General Administration, Transport and Education

# 7. Methodology

- The data for this project can be collected via participant observation, online sources, written materials as well as social networks, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.
- **7.1. Participant observation**
- Through informal conversation with people who are used to following up the treatment of administrative documents in various offices of the public and private sectors (ministries, hospitals, schools, seaports, customs offices, law court, etc. in these countries, the researcher can get much data about the language of corruption.
- **7.2. Interviews**
- These data can also be collected via tape-recorded interviews. The information provided by the informants can be tape-recorded. For the data to be representative, it is found necessary to interview citizens of all walks of life (teachers, students, medical doctors, journalists, traders, drivers, etc.) of the various countries, male and female, young and old, and originating from the various regions or belonging to the various ethnic groups of these
- **7.3. Written and online materials**
- Data on the language of corruption can also be collected from newspapers, novels, papers, and books and from social networks.
- It is important to mention that the lexico-semantic data which will be finally retained will be selected on the basis of their gradients or frequencies. So, for a language item to be selected, it has to recur at least twice. The donor language of linguistic data should be sought for.
- **7.4. Data presentation and analysis**
- The data collected can be presented using lists, tables, diagrams, pie charts, histograms, etc. The linguistic data finally selected will be grouped together on the basis of the features that they share and each group will be labeled. The analysis will be **quantitative** and **qualitative**. The items will be selected on the basis of their frequencies and will be grouped under lablings. Also, the analysis of the data should take into account the donor languages of the linguistic data. This will enable to ascertain the influence of superstrate and substrate languages on the lexicon of the language of corruption in various countries as well as the contribution of these languages to the lexicon of the language of corruption. Besides, it will be helpful since it will enable the researcher to establish the proportion of the lexico-semantic features per donor language.



# 8. Some projected findings

Below are provided some projected findings:

- Language users utilize various linguistic constructions while (1) requesting, soliciting, receiving or accepting bribes; (2) sharing fruit of corruption, (3) searching, maintaining and consolidating corruption networks, (4) fighting against corruption, (5) showing relationships and acquaintances, and (6) justifying acts of corruption
- Among these linguistic constructions can be identified semantic shift, euphemistic and metaphoric constructions, borrowing, affixation, idiomatic formation, stereotyped sentences, etc.
- The language of corruption in various countries is gradually developing its lexicon, drawing from the various languages. The contribution of languages to its lexicon takes into account the sociolinguistic situation (i.e. statuses and the power relationship) in each country.
- Although corruption is a universal phenomenon, each country develop its linguistic constructions to refer to its practice.

## 9. Some data on the language of corruption in Cameroon (Drawn from Meutem Kamtchueng (2015:64-75))

- **Lexes and Semantic Shift**

Lexes Class	Donor	Standard Meaning(s)	New meaning
acce le rateur (du dossier)	N	Fr	pedal in the vehicle that makes it go faster bribe
bie re/beer	N	Fr/Eng	alcoholic drink made from grain bribe
carburant/ fuel	N	Fr/Eng	a substance which is used to provide heat and power bribe
che vre/goat	N	Fr/Eng	an animal related to sheep bribe
coq/ cock	N	Fr/Eng	an adult male chicken bribe
drink	N	Eng	liquid taken into the body through the mouth/alcoholic drink bribe
enveloppe/envelope	N	Fr/Eng	a flat, usually square or rectangular, paper container for a letter bribe
gombo	N	Fr	plant whose leaves and fruit are eaten as vegetables bribe
kola/ kola (nut)	N	Fr/Eng	fruit of the kola nut tree bribe
motivation/motivation	N	Fr/Eng	enthusiasm for doing something bribe
small thing	N	Eng	something which is small bribe
pepper	N	Eng	name of a vegetable used to give a spicy hot taste food bribe
whisky/whisky	N	Fr/Eng	a strong, pale brown alcoholic drink bribe

- **Borrowings**

- “choko” [tʃoko], “makala’ pati” [makala’ pati], “chop” [tʃɒp] from Cameroon Pidgin English (bribe)
- ndole [ndolɛ] from Mbooi, a Bantu language spoken in the Littoral Region of Cameroon (bribe)



## 9. Some data on the language of corruption in Cameroon (Drawn from Meutem Kamtchueng (2015:64-75))

- **Affixation**

Word/stem	class	donor	affixes	new lexes	new class	Meaning
gombo (N)	Fr		/-iser / (French suffix)	gombotiser	V	to give bribe
gombo (N)	Fr		/-iste/ (French suffix)	gombiste	N	a corrupt person
gombo (N)	Fr		/-ique/ (French suffix)	gombotique	Adj	which has do to with corruption

- **Coinages**

- Le droit de circuler (right to move), Le droit de l'œil (right of the eyes), corruption chantage (blackmail corruption), corruption du donner et du recevoir (give-and-take corruption), etc.

## 9. Some data on the language of corruption in Cameroon (Drawn from Meutem Kamtchueng (2015:64-75))

### ■ Requesting, soliciting, receiving or accepting bribes

faire quelque chose/to do something

- faire un geste (to make a gesture)
- faire asseoir le chef (to make the chief sit down)
- dire quelque chose/to say something
- verser le vin rouge (to pour red wine)
- mouiller la barbe de quelqu'un (to wet somebody's beard)
- lancer le chef (to throw something to the chief)
- attacher la chèvre (to tie the goat)
- motiver quelqu'un/to motivate somebody
- to clean someone's eyes
- to oil someone's hands/lips
- to rub someone's mouth
- to scratch someone's back
- to wet someone's pocket
- to pepper somebody's mouth
- faire boire à quelqu'un (to give drink to somebody)



## 9. Some data on the language of corruption in Cameroon (Drawn from Meutem Kamtchueng (2015:64-75))

- donner quelque chose pour les pauvres (to give something for the poor),
- voir quelqu'un derrière derrière (to meet somebody behind behind)
- mettre sa main dans la poche (to put one's hand in the pocket)
- to provide legs for the file.
- parler bien/speak/talk well
- parler comme un grand ou un homme (speak/talk as a great man)
- faire comme un connaisseur (do as a connoisseur)
- finir avec moi (finish with me)
- passe à la chefferie (come to the (traditional) palace)
- to come prepared for this file
- come with my small thing
- se battre comme on peut (pour un dossier) (to struggle as one can (for a file))
- s'apprêter bien pour un dossier/to get well ready for a file/get prepared for this file.
- Can you, please quench my thirst?
- Can you show sign of appreciation?
- Can you give me a cup/bottle of wine?
- Can you give me a cup of garri?
- Even chewing-gums are good for chewing.
- C'est ça qu'on mange? (Is that what we eat?)
- Je ne mange pas les papiers/dossiers (I do not eat papers/documents)

## 9. Some data on the language of corruption in Cameroon (Drawn from Meutem Kamtchueng (2015:64-75))

- ■Sharing fruits of corruption (bribes)
  - payer le droit de l'oeil de quelqu'un (to pay someone's eyes rights)
  - payer la vision de quelqu'un (to pay someone's sight).
  - J'attends ma part (I am waiting for my own share)
  - L'oeil qui a vu doit être rincé (the eye which has seen should be cleaned)
- ■Searching, maintaining and consolidating corruption networks
  - huiler le réseau (to oil the network)
  - avoir le réseau (to have the network)
    - chercher le réseau (to search the network)
    - entretenir le réseau (to maintain the network)
  - être dans le réseau (to be in the network)



## 9. Some data on the language of corruption in Cameroon (Drawn from Meutem Kamtchueng (2015:64-75))

- ■ Relationships and acquaintances

- être le fils de quelqu'un (to be the child of somebody)
- avoir les cotes (to have support)
- avoir la godasse (to have shoe)
- avoir les parapluies (to have umbrellas)
- avoir quelqu'un derri re soi (to have somebody behind oneself)
- avoir sa personne quelque part (dans un service) (to have one's person somewhere (in an office))
- avoir quelqu'un de puissant quelque part (to have an influential person somewhere)
- avoir ses gens quelque part (to have one's people somewhere).  
être cote (to have support)
- Quelqu'un est quelqu'un quand il a son quelqu'un quelque part qui est quelqu'un (somebody is someone when he has somebody somewhere who is someone)

- ■ Justifying acts of corruption

- Le salaire là c'est combien (How much do I earn)
- On va faire comment? (How are we going to do?)
- Tu crois que je vis comment? (What do you think I do to earn a living)
- une chèvre broute là ou elle est attache e (a goat grazes where it is tied).

## 9. Some data on the language of corruption in Cameroon (Drawn from Meutem Kamtchueng (2015:64-75))

- PROPORTIONS OF LANGUAGE ITEMS IN THE CORPUS LEXES (in Cameroon)

	Lexes	%	<i>Stereotyped constructions %</i>	
• French	17	53.12	75	77.31
• English	11	34.37	22	22.68
• Cameroon Pidgin				
• English	3	9.37	00	00
• Home languages	1	3.12	00	00
• Total	32	100	97	100



# Conclusion

The findings reveal that language users utilize various linguistic resources in order to request, receive or accept bribes; sharing the fruits of corruption; fighting against corruption; searching, maintaining and consolidating corruption networks; showing relationship and acquaintances; justifying acts of corruptions, etc.

Some of the linguistic constructions which are at work in the language of corruption are the following: semantic shift, euphemistic and metaphoric constructions, borrowing, affixation, idiomatic formation, stereotyped sentences, etc.

Besides, it is very probable that the contribution of languages to the lexicon of the language of corruption takes into account the sociolinguistic situation (i.e. the statuses and the power relationship) of the languages spoken in each country.

The linguistic resources used to refer to the practice of corruption shows the dynamism of the language of European importation into the non-native contexts.

Although corruption is a universal phenomenon, each country develops its lexico-semantic constructions to refer to its practice.

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Thank you for your kind  
attention!!!