

# IN-GROUP UNITY IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON'S SEPARATIST DISCOURSE. STRATEGIES AND MEANS OF REALIZATION

Raymond Echitchi<sup>a</sup>

**Abstract:** The present paper is the result of a scientific venture into the discursive construction of separatism in Cameroon's English-speaking regions, which separatists refer to as Southern Cameroons or Ambazonia. My study aims specifically at identifying the linguistic and rhetorical strategies separatist leaders use in order to create a sense of unity amongst all English-speaking Cameroonians and make them join the fight for independence. To achieve this aim, I have analysed speeches authored between 2010 and 2015 by two Anglophone Cameroonian separatist leaders. The analysis of the speeches, which followed the Discourse Historical Approach (Wodak et al. 2009), reveals that Southern Cameroonian nationalists try to achieve unity by resorting to strategies such as nomination, predication, and argumentation through *topoi*. These strategies were realised by means of linguistic resources including lexicon, imperatives, deontic and epistemic modals.

**Keywords:** *discourse, separatism, unification, Cameroon, British Southern Cameroons*

## Introduction

Even though tensions surrounding the Anglophone/Francophone divide have been characteristic features of the country's political fabric since the early 1960s, very little was known about separatism in Cameroon until around 2016 when Anglophone teachers and lawyers started a series of protests which soon turned into a full-blown armed conflict between separatist factions and the Cameroon military.

Given its historical foundations, the Anglophone-Francophone divide in Cameroon is not just a national issue, but an international or transnational

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a University of Liège, Belgium, e-mail: sechitchi@uliege.be

crisis involving the United Nations, Britain, France as well as Nigeria (Ketzmerick 2023). Its causes can be traced back to 1961 when the former French Cameroun and British Southern Cameroons decided to reunite in an attempt to bring together all the territories that made up the German Protectorate of *Kamerun*.<sup>1</sup> In fact, following what became known as the scramble for Africa, Cameroon ended up under German domination, which lasted from 1884 to around 1916. The Germans are credited for drawing the first map of Cameroon and establishing colonial posts in the hinterlands. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, the League of Nations partitioned the German protectorate into two territories, which were then mandated to the French and British. French Cameroun was administered as a *de facto* constituent part of French Equatorial Africa and eventually achieved internal autonomy in 1956 and independence in 1960.

Things were a bit more complex for British Cameroons, as it was incorporated into colonial Nigeria and divided into two territorial entities, namely the British Southern Cameroons and British Northern Cameroons, which were administered as part of Eastern Nigeria, and Northern Nigeria respectively. Motivated by the desire to assert themselves as a separate community, Southern Cameroonian members of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly decided to break away and form their own parliament in 1954. When it came to independence, colonial authorities believed the British Cameroons was not viable enough to become a full-fledged country and only offered its citizens the possibility of becoming independent by joining the already independent states of Cameroon or Nigeria. A plebiscite was held to that effect, and while Northern Cameroons voted to remain in the Nigerian Federation, Southern Cameroons decided to reunite with the former French Cameroun, which had just been granted independence. This led to the formation of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, then made up of two entities, namely the former British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroun (Ngoh 1999; 2001).

As Konings and Nyamjoh (1997) point out, even before British Southern Cameroonians' decision to join the former French Cameroun, Francophone domination could already be felt during reunification talks. Furthermore, about ten years after reunification, the President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon decided to create a one-party political system and dismantle

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1 In the present article, "Cameroon" is used when talking about the internationally recognised country as a whole. Nevertheless, we also make use of "British Southern Cameroons", "French Cameroun" when talking about the two colonial entities that came together in 1961, and "Kamerun" when referring to the German protectorate that preceded the Anglo-French partition.

the country's federal form of government, which guaranteed autonomy for the former British Southern Cameroons. This gave the former French Cameroun the upper hand in all matters of public life, thus making some Anglophone Cameroonians resentful against their French-speaking countrymen. Another important reason behind Anglophone separatism – which is very much related to the historical reasons mentioned earlier – is the scanty representation of English-speaking Cameroonians in key decision-making organs. Furthermore, although the country is officially bilingual, many believe there has been more pressure on Anglophones to be proficient in the French language, which is the main language in most administrations (Fochingong 2005). Fochingong (*ibid.*) also highlights the belief amongst English-speaking Cameroonians that their region's state of development does not match the abundant natural resources it possesses. All in all, the Anglophone struggle for self-determination is seen as the direct consequence of bad faith and inaction from the Francophone-dominated administration, which contributed to further radicalising separatists (Musah 2022). It is nevertheless important to note that beyond the aforementioned factors, which may be described as circumstantial, Anglophone nationalists' main claim is that the British Southern Cameroons' decolonisation process was flawed, as the territory was never given the option of being a separate state (Anyangwe 2018; Ngang 2021; Lukong and Tella 2022).

Therefore, the present paper contributes to shedding light on the current situation by examining how Anglophone nationalism was constructed discursively over the five years preceding the outbreak of the conflict, i.e., between 2010 and 2015. It will attempt to describe ways in which Anglophone nationalists make use of language to enjoin members of their community to embrace separation from Cameroon. Independence activism in the former British Southern Cameroons stems from the belief amongst separatists that Anglophone Cameroonians have the right to self-determination since the British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroun are two separate territorial entities that should have never been united.

To prove their point and eventually convince fellow English-speaking Cameroonians to join the fight, Anglophone nationalists make use of various linguistic resources aimed at fostering unity amongst members of their community and enjoining them to back the independence struggle. Although a wider range of argumentation schemes are used in Anglophone nationalist discourse, emphasis will be laid on identifying and analysing the linguistic and rhetorical strategies nationalists use to rally their countrymen behind the independence struggle. Before proceeding to a discussion of

those strategies, I will outline the link between discourse, society, and the formation of identities.

### **Discourse Studies, Society, and the Formation of Identities**

The link between discourse and society has attracted the attention of many researchers (Billig 2003; Van Dijk 2001; De Beaugrande 1997). Discourse is, in fact, a key part of our interactions as humans, even though its role and impact are often kept under the radar. Far from just being abstract concepts, discourses on nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender for instance, which are also known as hegemonic discourses, often motivate or influence people's daily actions. Their pervasiveness in society could make some perceive hegemonic discourses as natural, even though they remain theoretical constructs that can be (and are indeed) modified, deconstructed, or discarded. This continuous integration of hegemonic discourses in various aspects of social life is referred to as sedimentation (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002). Therefore, discourse plays a very important role in the creation and/or consolidation of national identities not only in modern states but also amongst minorities, who are often faced with the need to destroy opposing narratives and assert their distinct nature. In such contexts, history plays a crucial role, since talking about a common past certainly has the potential to bring people together (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). This is exactly why, in his thoughts on national identity construction, Ernest Renan indicated that nationalism and emphasis on history are interwoven, as the latter is "a crucial factor in the creation of a nation" (Olick et al. 2011: 80). It is thus clear that discourse and identity tend to go hand in glove, with identity being tied to communities, i.e., social constructs, whose creation is planned, shaped and enforced by means of discourse (Anderson 2006; Howarth 2000; Philip and Jorgensen 2002). In fact, any group or community would come into existence only after someone talks about, communicates with, or speaks on behalf of it. Furthermore, given that people always fit within a certain group identity at any given point in time, the construction of a new identity cannot be achieved without the destruction of a previous identity or at least the use of various strategies aimed at establishing a clear difference between ingroups and outgroups in what has been referred to as social antagonism in political theory. The link between identity crises and social tension is clearly described by Laclau and Mouffe (1955: 25), who see social antagonism as a situation that arises when "the presence of the 'other' prevents me from being totally myself".

Most research on the discursive construction of national identity has focused on western societies, thus neglecting discourse from other parts of the world (Jiayu Wang 2016). This situation might be explained by the fact that critical discourse analysis was spearheaded by academics from “late Modern, and postindustrial, densely semiotised First-World societies” who would obviously focus on contexts they were familiar with (Blommaert 2005: 25). These scholars include Ruth Wodak and her colleagues who, in the mid/late 1990s, started studying the discursive strategies used in Austrian national identity construction, eventually providing scholars with a methodological approach for similar studies (Wodak et al. 2009). Their methodology, which is known as the Discourse Historical Approach, was found to be a suitable way to describe national identity construction in the Cameroonian context.

Wodak’s research certainly inspired Karner (2005), whose article discussed strategies Austrians used in order to construct a separate identity and reject formerly accepted pan-Germanic ideologies. Karner’s study is further evidence in support of the assumption that national identity discourses tend to be backdropped by a struggle between conflicting identities whose existence might complicate the study of trends or patterns in national identity construction, as people tend to move from one identity to another depending on their interests. This is exactly what Leith and Soule (2011) found in their study of political discourse in Scotland, where nationalist sentiment is determined not only by ethnic identity, but also by economic relations between the territory and Britain as a whole. Leith and Soule’s discussion of national identity in Scotland confirmed the complex nature of national identity construction in Britain, which Rosie et al. (2006) pointed out. In fact, after analysing media representations of the British nation, the authors found them to be very often self-contradictory and far away from pre-established models. They therefore went on to caution against the blind application of theories like Anderson’s *imagined communities* to complex national contexts such as the United Kingdom. Elsewhere in Europe, research on discourse and national identity include Costelloe’s (2014) analysis of the media coverage of the 2005 riots in France, which revealed that the media tended to resort to a *us vs. them* rhetoric in reports, often emphasising the origin of rioters to describe them as external threats to France’s internal stability.

As discourse studies gained ground, research on nationalism went beyond Europe to reach contexts such as Australia where Mummery and Rodan (2007) discussed the impact of the global war on terror on discourses on

national identity in the country. The complex national identity situation in Australia is very similar to that of the United States, at least for the fact that the dominant culture in both countries was inherited from British colonialism. US national identity narratives have been studied by Gavrilos (2010), who uncovered a tendency amongst US nationalists to blame recent migrants for not making enough efforts to integrate into the dominant Anglo-American culture. In Asia, many studies relating to the discursive construction of national identity have focused on Hong Kong, where, since the 1997 handover, there has been a constant power tussle between the territory and mainland China (Zhang and Mihelj 2012; Cheng 2016; Wang 2019). As Chan (2014) indicates, though it is impossible to establish clear-cut patterns regarding Hongkongers' attitudes towards China, the inhabitants of the city-state have recently shown proof of a deep desire to present themselves as culturally distinct from China and gain more political and economic freedom.

In African contexts, an increasing number of researchers have developed an interest in discourse and identity over the last three decades. In addition to white nationalism in post-apartheid South Africa (Steyn 2004; Verwey and Quayle 2012), separatist movements have also attracted scholarly interest. For instance, Sorenson (1991) found that Eritrean secessionist discourse very much emphasised Italian colonialism while completely overlooking precolonial imperial unity with Abyssinia. Still in East Africa, the discursive construction of national identity in South Sudan has been studied by Frahm (2012), whose analysis of media discourse revealed that South Sudanese separatists tend to highlight ideas that unite them, such as Christianity, while looking down on tribal affiliations, which would certainly have a negative impact on the consolidation of a national identity. Similar findings were obtained in subsequent studies (Manfredi 2017; Idris 2019). Another African context which has been studied widely is Nigeria. Chilwa (2018) for instance deciphered online discourse with a view to finding out how the right to self-determination is constructed discursively amongst Biafra activists. Similar research has been carried out by Kamalu and Atowa (2020) and Igwebuikie and Akoh (2022), with the latter focussing on positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation in Internet radio speeches authored by a prominent Biafra separatist. The emphasis on ingroups' positive and outgroups' negative attributes is pervasive in separatist discourse in general and very often used by Anglophone separatist leaders in Cameroon (Echitchi 2018).

Finally, it is worth noting that apart from previous studies conducted by Echitchi (2018; 2021) there seem to be very few publications dealing with

the discursive construction of national identity construction amongst English-speaking Cameroonians. Therefore, in a bid to keep contributing to scholarship, I further analyse separatist discourse in Cameroon.

### **Data Collection and Methodology**

Eight political speeches authored by two separatist leaders between 2010 and 2015 (see Table 1) were collected with a view to getting a clear picture of the discursive construction of separatism amongst Anglophone Cameroonians. Since separatist leaders mostly use the Internet to communicate, all I had to do was to browse the social media pages and websites administered by secessionist activists to find our research data.

The speeches analysed in this paper were authored by Nfor Ngala Nfor, who is currently imprisoned in a maximum-security prison in Cameroon, and the late Chief Ayamba, Ngala Nfor's predecessor (see Table 1). Both headed the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), which was constituted in the mid 1990s as an umbrella movement for all English-speaking Cameroonians standing for either a return to the 1961 federal constitution or the outright independence of the former British Southern Cameroons. I decided to focus on the most prominent leaders between 2010 and 2015, as I believed their speeches would be an accurate reflection of Anglophone separatist ideology during that period. The eight speeches totalled over 15,000 words and were analysed manually.

The methodological approach that was followed is the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) as propounded by Wodak et al. (2009). Even though it was designed originally to study the discursive construction of national identity in Austria, DHA has the advantage of being applicable to other contexts. In accordance with the aforementioned approach, data analysis was divided into three steps. The first step consisted in reading the speeches that had been collected in order to identify the main ideas developed in the text – referred to as *contents* in DHA parlance. Once those contents were identified, the *discursive strategies* that Southern Cameroonian separatists would use so as to push their agenda were identified. The study ended with a search for *linguistic means of realization*, i.e., the linguistic resources used to implement discursive strategies.

**Table 1. Speeches**

Speech	Author	Year of release	Word count
New year message to the nation by the national chairman of the SCNC and chancellor of the provisional administration of the federal republic of Southern Cameroons	Chief Ayamba	2010	1330
SCNC national chairman's address to the nation on the occasion of the 49th anniversary of the independence of Southern Cameroons	Chief Ayamba	2010	1775
Speech on the 51st anniversary of Southern Cameroons independence	Nfor Ngala Nfor	2012	1859
Message of the SCNC to the people of British Southern Cameroons end-of-year 2013	Nfor Ngala Nfor	2013	2064
Address on the occasion of the 53rd anniversary of the confiscated independence of British Southern Cameroons	Nfor Ngala Nfor	2014	2289
Message to the people of British Southern Cameroons for the new year 2015	Nfor Ngala Nfor	2014	1616
Message to British Southern Cameroons students on the occasion of student cultural week	Nfor Ngala Nfor	2015	1931
SCNC message to the people of British Southern Cameroons end-of-year 2015	Nfor Ngala Nfor	2015	2334

## Results and Analysis

Unification, the semantic macrostructure we will be analysing in the present paper, involves attempts to rally members of an imagined community and foster a sense of belonging amongst them. In the speeches we studied, unification is structured around three main ideas or contents that, from a rhetorical perspective, would form a syllogism. In fact, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor base the need to unify on two premises, the first being the claim that English-speaking Cameroonians have the right to constitute a nation because they have the same culture, which they inherited from British colonisation. The second premise is the belief that cohabitation with the Francophone majority is a threat to Anglophone Cameroonians' much-cherished Anglo-Saxon culture and identity.

Both separatist leaders then stand on the aforementioned premises to conclude that the independence of the former British Southern Cameroons is the only way to preserve its Anglo-Saxon identity, and that this is why all Anglophone Cameroonians should unite in order to achieve that goal.

In terms of strategies, unification is conveyed through the use of nomination and predication, which mostly aim at separating outgroup from ingroup members, through argumentation by means of a set of commonplace argumentation schemes (also known as *topoi* in DHA jargon) and intensification. These strategies are realised linguistically through specific lexical items, epistemic and deontic modals or constructions, as well as figurative language such as metaphor and metonymy (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Unification: Semantic Macrostructures and Strategies**

Contents	Strategies	Devices (Linguistic means)	Examples
All Southern Cameroonians have an Anglo-Saxon culture	Nomination: ingroup/ outgroup separation, foregrounding/ backgrounding  Predication  Argumentation	Toponyms, demonyms, lexemes related to relics of British colonialism, tribal regions  Rejecting ethnic divide	Common Law, Anglo-saxon educational system, Francophones, French, North West-South West divide, colonial, occupier
The Anglo-Saxon culture that makes them distinct is at threat	Nomination  Predication: negative presentation of actions taken by outgroup members  Argumentation	Lexemes related to destruction  Negative description of Cameroon, lexemes related to destruction, <i>topoi</i> (threat/danger), hyperboles  Metaphor, metonymy	Put to torch, send a sharp knife through, assimilation, annexation, colonial, evil, hyperbole
All Southern Cameroonians should unite to preserve their culture	Intensification  Argumentation	Deontic modals, deontic verbs, imperatives, intertextuality, allegory, lexemes expressing threat, <i>topoi</i> (usefulness, divine justice, threat)	Must, have to, should, call on, appeal, challenge, implore, focus, God of justice, evil spirit, warn

### ***All Southern Cameroonians have an Anglo-Saxon Culture***

The emphasis on their territory's Anglo-Saxon culture of is one of the main ideas used by separatist leaders to unify Anglophone Cameroonians, while totally setting them apart from their French-speaking countrymen. The linguistic strategies and devices used for this purpose include nomination, which is realised by means of toponyms, demonyms as well as other lexemes that clearly point to the former British Southern Cameroons' colonial past and heritage and create a clear separation between English- and French-speaking Cameroonians. In addition, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor resort to predication in an attempt to describe the internationally recognised state of Cameroon as the occupier. Then, argumentation enables the separatist leaders to reject tribal affiliation, which they consider to be a tool the Francophone administrators have always used to further oppress them.

Throughout the speeches, there is a clear distinction between Southern Cameroons and *La république du Cameroun*, where Anglophone Cameroonians are said to have a British or Anglo-Saxon heritage which can be seen in their distinct legal and education systems. Although the British administration of Southern Cameroons lasted only 40 years, Anglophone separatists use the British colonial heritage to justify their right to be a nation. According to them, Anglophone Cameroonians' current culture, linguistic choices and other traditions reflect that colonial period. Therefore, great emphasis is laid on the main aspects of the British colonial legacy, namely the English language, English education and the English Common Law. This is exactly what transpires from Excerpt 1 below.

[1] The **Common Law**<sup>2</sup> and the **Anglo-Saxon educational system** and heritage constitute the soul of the **British Southern Cameroons** nation which **la Republique du Cameroun** for its prestige and grandeur cannot put to the torch (Ngala Nfor 2015, end-of-year message).

For Ngala Nfor, the fact that they speak the English language rather than French, the official language spoken in the rest of Cameroon, coupled with their distinct education and legal systems, is evidence that they are a separate nation. This need to emphasise the British colonial period in discourse aimed at unifying the people of Southern Cameroons can be explained by the existence of various ethnic groups in the former British Southern

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2 Author's highlights in bold.

Cameroons, with some of them having very close ties with ethnic groups in the French-speaking part of Cameroon. Broadly speaking, the territory of the former British Southern Cameroons is divided into two sets of ethnic groups, namely indigenes of the coastal areas and contiguous forests in the present-day South-West Region on the one hand, and the indigenous populations of the Grassfields or the North-West Region, as it is known in today's administrative nomenclature. While the people of the South-West Region are culturally and linguistically related to ethnic groups in the French-speaking Littoral Region, the North-West Region is closer to the French-speaking West Region. Therefore, pan-Cameroonian narratives often emphasise ancestral ties between ethnic groups across the linguistic divide and may take advantage of (or even arouse) tensions between the ethnically distinct North-West and the South-West to weaken separatist ideologies amongst English-speaking Cameroonians (Konings and Nyamjoh 1997). As a reaction to those opposing narratives, Anglophone separatists seem to shun traditional languages or ethnicities (which are likely to divide them) and solely focus on what brings them together. Their Anglo-Saxon nature is consistently put to the fore while strongly Cameroon's administrative nomenclature (North-West and South-West), which is built on tribal lines, is strongly denounced.

[2] To play games of seeking personal favours, of betraying your kinsmen for cheap popularity, of singing and dancing to the **coloniser's** music of divide and rule, of tribalism and **North West – South West** divide is to perpetuate our subhuman status and statelessness (Ngala Nfor 2014, end-of-year message).

[3] Recalling that the existence of the **South West** as opposed to the **North West** is **la Republique du Cameroun colonial** product of divide and rule... (Ngala Nfor 2015, end-of-year message).

As we can see in Excerpts 2 and 3, Ngala Nfor vehemently rejects the separation of Southern Cameroonians based on ethnicity. Even though he decides to clearly mention the North-West and South-West divide, he proceeds to relate it to the Francophone-dominated administration (referred to as *la Republique du Cameroun*) which he identifies through nomination and predication as a colonial entity. Furthermore, one can see the extent to which nomination and predication strategies often entail the

use of arbitrary judgement, so long as the latter suits the purposes one has in mind. Therefore, Ngala Nfor encourages his countrymen to favour one colonial experience (the British one), while at the same time criticising another experience for its alleged colonial nature.

From the above, it seems that the first thing both separatist leaders want their countrymen (and the international community) to understand is that they are a distinct people, a separate nation from the rest of Cameroon. To achieve this purpose, they insist on the former Southern Cameroons' distinct colonial past and the educational and legal systems the territory inherited from Britain. At the same time, they vehemently reject narratives that may build on tribal affiliations in order to separate Anglophone Cameroonians, who, according to independence activists, have a common language and legal system as well as a shared culture which is the result of British colonialism. After having presented what unites all English-speaking Cameroonians, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor proceed to the second premise in their syllogism, which is discussed in the next section.

### ***Southern Cameroon's Anglo-Saxon Culture is At Threat***

The secessionist leaders insist that the core aspects of their identity are at threat because of attempts to assimilate them into the Francophone sociopolitical system. This second premise is very important in unification, since, as mentioned earlier in this paper, the formation of nations goes hand in glove with social antagonism (Laclau and Mouffe 1955). It is enforced by means of nomination, through lexemes related to persecution, destruction, colonialism etc., predication, which involves negative-other presentation and overall argumentation by means of *topoi*.

[4] Over 233,000 Southern Cameroonians on 11th February 1961, voted for “independence” by joining la Republique du Cameroun NOT for “**enslavement**” by **exchanging colonial masters** (Ayamba, 49th anniversary speech 2010).

[5] The **destruction** of our Anglo Saxon (*sic.*) educational system is sending a sharp knife through the core of our inherent identity. Education deals with the cultural heritage, core values, vision and principles of life of a people. **Assimilation** is the instrument by which all these are destroyed to facilitate and concretise **annexation** (Ngala Nfor 2015, end-of-year message).

[6] The deliberate action taken by **Yaoundé** to **destroy** the Common Law and our Anglo Saxon (*sic.*) educational system is aimed at erasing British Southern Cameroons from the map of Africa (Ngala Nfor 2015, message to students).

Nomination and predication enable Ayamba and Ngala Nfor to describe Cameroon as a predator state, an evil country ruled by self-centred politicians whose presence in the former British Southern Cameroons can be likened to colonial occupation. Anglophone Cameroonians are said to be facing “enslavement”, “assimilation” and “annexation” masterminded by “Yaoundé”, Cameroon’s capital, which Ngala Nfor uses metonymically to represent the country’s administration. To make English-speaking Cameroonians clearly picture what the destruction of their identity entails, Ngala Nfor resorts to a conceptual metaphor involving stabbing. He also uses figurative language when stating that the Francophone-dominated administration would like to wipe the former British Southern Cameroons off the map of Africa. Overall, the *topos* of threat is a very important argumentative strategy in discourse aimed at pushing for unity of purpose amongst Cameroonian citizens from the former British Southern Cameroons. By trying to convince their countrymen that their identity is at threat, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor hope Anglophone Cameroonians will readily join the struggle for self-determination and independence.

### ***All Southern Cameroonians Should Unite to Preserve Their Culture***

The conclusion of the separatist syllogism is the need for unity in purpose, which is indeed the point Ayamba and Ngala Nfor are trying to make. This finding is in line with what was obtained by Wodak et al. (2009) and more recently by Özuflu (2022). The latter’s research suggests that the masterminds of imagined communities not only try to present their groups as united wholes, but also make sure they never stop encouraging their people (or those they want to be part of their community–ingroups) to unite. The need for unification can be communicated through direct or indirect coercion and the use of commonplace arguments such as usefulness, divine justice and threat. These *topoi* were enforced in the speeches under study through linguistic resources including modality (epistemic and deontic modals, imperatives and other deontic constructions), intertextuality, allegory and lexemes expressing threat.

### *Modality and Unity*

Secessionist leaders make use of modality with a view to enjoining Southern Cameroonians to specific behaviours and actions. The close reading of Ayamba's and Ngala Nfor's speeches revealed their consistent use of the deontic modal "must", which expresses a strong obligation (Excerpts 7 and 8). Furthermore, deontic constructions are usually preceded by the first-person plural "we", which denotes a strong desire to present the struggle for self-determination as a collective rather than an individual initiative.

[7] Learning from our age of hope and promise and the dark-age under la Republique du Cameroun subjugation, **we must** vehemently reject and cast away everything seen in the evil system. From the good of the age of hope and promise **we must** be determined to build a system of government that is people- centred... (Ngala Nfor 2015, 53rd anniversary speech).

[8] Southern Cameroonians should not rest on their laureates but redouble their efforts to emulate the examples of others who have conquered the forces of oppression, suppression and subjugation. Freedom is indeed within our reach so we **must** make the last effort to achieve it and join our rightful place in the community of free, sovereign nations of the world (Ayamba 2010, New Year speech).

Apart from deontic modals, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor also resort to other deontic constructions with the purpose of rallying Anglophone Cameroonians behind the struggle for independence. More specifically, they make use of (phrasal) verbs such as "call upon/on", "enjoin", "implore", "appeal", "challenge", and "let" as evidenced in Excerpts 9 to 12. Here again, both separatist leaders want to emphasise the fact that they are addressing all English-speaking citizens. Therefore, every deontic construction includes either the word "all" or the phrase "each and every one of us". This confirms that the unification message is not meant for only a few Anglophone Cameroonians but aims to engage the entire population of the former British Southern Cameroons.

[9] **I call upon all** of you fellow compatriots, to be more hopeful now than ever before and **implore you** to be extremely vigilant to watch out against any surprise that our enemy is likely to spring up to delay and frustrate our hope (Ayamba 2011, New Year speech).

[10] In conclusion, I wish to **enjoin** all Southern Cameroonian patriots at home and in the Diaspora to stay focused on our liberation struggle to free us from the shackles of la Republique du Cameroun which have bound us as slaves for these past forty-nine years (Ayamba 2011, 49th anniversary speech).

[11] **We call on all** patriotic British Southern Cameroonians both at home and abroad to fasten their belts, reaffirm their commitments to the struggle for the coming year promises greater challenges and more sacrifices (Ngala Nfor 2015, end-of-year message).

[12] In this regard **let each and every one of us**, for our individual and collective interest and above all for the dignity of our children and national integrity of our fatherland **let us all** jettison Yaoundé's imposed NW-SW dichotomy (Ngala Nfor 2015, New Year speech).

Finally epistemic modality also intervenes in attempts at unifying English-speaking Cameroonians. This is often reflected in the use of the modal “should”, through which both separatist leaders present the independence struggle as a necessity. This is evidenced in Excerpts 13 and 14 below.

[13] Southern Cameroonians **should** not rest on their laureates but redouble their efforts to emulate the examples of others who have conquered the forces of oppression, suppression and subjugation (Ayamba, 2010 New Year speech).

[14] The future is great, bright and promising for each Southern Cameroonian. This **should** challenge and inspire us to unite and build a great nation for our children. This is our challenge, our patriotic duty which we cannot afford to delay any further (Nfor Ngala Nfor 2014, New Year speech).

Overall, modality is closely related to common-place arguments that help the separatist leaders emphasise how useful the struggle for self-determination is. In addition to the *topos* of usefulness, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor make use of other argumentative strategies, such as divine justice and threat, which are all aimed at appealing to emotions.

### *Pathos and Unity*

The two separatist leaders whose speeches were analysed often resort to *pathos* (i.e., a rhetorical strategy aimed at awakening strong emotions in the audience) in order to consolidate their message of unification. This is manifested in their appeal to religion (*topos* of religion), which is often interconnected with ideas pertaining to divine justice and retribution. Most Cameroonians believe in a divine being, and regardless of its shape and form, religion still plays a very important part in the English-speaking part of the country. The separatist leaders under study are well-aware of the importance of religion amongst their fellow countrymen, and that is exactly why they decide to present the independence struggle as a divine mission. By so doing, they (indirectly) present themselves as servants of God or spiritual leaders that every Southern Cameroonian should support, obey, or even revere. This also implies that those who do not contribute to the self-determination struggle are going against the will of God. By describing the independence struggle as a divine mission, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor are definitely telling Anglophone Cameroonians that those who fail to embrace the independence struggle will very likely face divine justice. This idea of divine retribution is based on the belief (which all religions share) that there will be a reward for people who obey divinity and punishment for those who do not. In a religious context like the former British Southern Cameroons, describing the independence struggle as a divine mission can be a very efficient argumentative strategy, as the fear of God could convince many to join the independence struggle.

[15] ... Under the **mighty hand of the God of Justice** who dedicated this land our inheritance we will triumph (Ngala Nfor 2012, 51st anniversary speech).

[16] Learning from our mistakes and failures we must in confidence and with **God of justice on our side** move forward in renewed spirits. As we move into the New Year, let the **evil spirit** of individualism, self-seeking, greed and treachery be buried. Traitors never win against their people! (Ngala Nfor 2015, New Year speech).

Apart from religion, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor use other argumentative schemes to foster unity by creating fear in their audience. Many a time, direct threats with lexemes such as “warn” or metaphorical and allegorical

constructions that predict doom for all those who do not support the self-determination struggle are expressed.

[17] All Southern Cameroonians who are collaborating with the forces of oppression are hereby **warned** to desist from fraternizing with the enemy because of the sinecure positions they hold. [...] We call upon these stooges and bootlickers to **join the freedom train** early enough and contribute their quarter towards the liberation struggle or to be **forever condemned** by the court of history **when the hour of reckoning comes** (Ayamba 2010, 49th anniversary speech).

[18] ...we call on the Teachers Union to understand the language and tactics of Yaoundé. **Any lamb that goes to dance with baby lions must know that it will soon be pepper soup for their breakfast** (Ngala Nfor 2015, New Year speech).

Excerpt 18 includes an allegory in which Ngala Nfor likens Anglophone Cameroonians who want to remain united with the French-speaking part of Cameroon to lambs playing with baby lions. In other words, French-speaking Cameroonians (especially government officials) are depicted as cubs that may look friendly and innocent but would gradually reveal themselves as fierce predators. Furthermore, Ayamba suggests that Anglophone Cameroonians who are fraternising with their French-speaking countrymen are doing so at their own risk (Excerpt 17). He therefore warns them to desist from carrying out such practices or face the consequence that may befall them. “The hour of reckoning” here may refer to divine judgement in the afterlife or a time when the former British Southern Cameroons will achieve full independence. Whatever the case, threat is definitely part of the strategies Ayamba and Ngala Nfor resort to in order to encourage English-speaking Cameroonians to join the fight for independence.

### *Unity and the Topos of Comparison*

The discursive construction of unification in Anglophone Cameroonian separatist discourse is, as indicated throughout this paper, structured as a syllogism whose conclusion is the idea that English-speaking Cameroonians should unite to preserve their colonially inherited identity. Therefore, the two separatist leaders whose speeches were studied attempt to emphasise

what makes their territory distinct from the rest of Cameroon while rejecting arguments aimed at merging them into a pan-Cameroonian nation. This translates into their putting the British colonial period and its legacy in the spotlight while vehemently denouncing ethnic affiliations and differences, which would make it difficult to consolidate the nation they have in mind. As a matter of fact, given the territory's ethnic diversity, the creation of a distinct nation in the former British Southern Cameroons can only be achieved by rejecting (or disregarding) ethnicity, which is incompatible with a nationalist project based on legacies of British colonialism such as the English language, educational system and common law.

Similar strategies have been identified in other African contexts, including South Sudan and Eritrea. In South Sudan, nationalist narratives laid emphasis on Christianity, which contributed to differentiating the territory from the Muslim north and uniting the country's main ethnic groups, namely the Dinka and Nuer. Therefore, as Frahm (2012) indicates, South Sudanese nationalists tended to shun the differences and tensions between the country's main ethnic groups while emphasising the only thing that really brought them together and set them apart, i.e., religion. Eritreans also saw themselves as distinct from their Abyssinian kindred and considered their common colonial experience to be stronger than ethnic and religious ties with the rest of Ethiopia (Uoldelul 2007). In the various pieces of discourse they produced, Eritrean separatists would often present the need to preserve the legacy of Italian colonialism as the reason behind their desire to form a separate nation (Sorenson 1991). Eritrean nationalism was therefore based on the country's "identity as a former Italian colony whose decolonization was thwarted by Ethiopian intervention" (Iyob 1997: 53). As a result, differences between Muslims and Christians within Eritrea on the one hand, and similarities between Eritreans and other ethnic groups in Ethiopia's Tigray region for instance were completely overlooked or rejected. The Italian period was therefore the bedrock of the Eritrean nationalist discourse, as it enabled independence activists not only to construct a separate identity, but also to counter pan-Ethiopian arguments.

South Sudan and Eritrea, along with Namibia, East Timor and Estonia are mentioned by Ayamba and Ngala Nfor in an argumentative strategy referred to as the *topos* of comparison. By referring to these territories that successfully achieved their independence they certainly hope this will encourage Anglophone Cameroonians to unite and fight for their right.

[19] As I speak to you today, a new nation will soon be born in Africa when the people of Southern Sudan vote on January 9th 2011 (*sic*) to take their destiny into their own hands. All indications point to the fact that the people of Southern Sudan are resolved to vote for separation and freedom (Ayamba 2010, New Year speech)

[20] This reality which faced the peoples of South West Africa (Namibia), Eritrea, East Timor, among others, boldly confronts our generation. Each generation standing at the crossroad of its history must out of absolute necessity answer the question “Who are we?” and “Who is not us?” (Ngala Nfor 2014, 53rd anniversary speech).

[21] The youths of Namibia, Eritrea, East Timor, Estonia, among others, suffered same [*sic*] when their nation was under annexation and alien rule. Change came when in unity with their teachers, parents, they in nationalistic zeal and patriotic determination resisted and triumphed over foreign domination and alien rule (Ngala Nfor 2015, message to students).

The success of the self-determination struggles in South Sudan, Eritrea and Namibia seems to have inspired Southern Cameroonian separatist leaders. As opposed to Ayamba, Ngala Nfor does not mention South Sudan, because the country's independence was followed by a violent power struggle between Dinka and Nuer factions, making it an example to avoid. Overall, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor were well aware of opposing discourses that would present the former British Southern Cameroons as a mere colonial construct. Therefore, South Sudan, Eritrea and Namibia are mentioned to consolidate the claim that European colonialism can indeed create cultural and/or religious differences that would lead to the creation of new nations. Furthermore, comparison is a way for both leaders to convince their supporters to keep believing in the struggle for independence and be resilient. In other words, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor were surely trying to tell English-speaking Cameroonians who were still sitting on the fence that the independence of the former British Southern Cameroons was a valid case and that they should embrace their distinct identity, and come together as one in order to fight for their right to self-determination.

## Conclusion

This article presented the discursive strategies two Anglophone separatist leaders, namely Chief Ayamba and Nfor Ngala Nfor, used in speeches during 2010-2015 in order to convince English-speaking Cameroonians to come together and break away from Cameroon. After analysing the speeches following Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (2009), we realised that in order to unite their fellow countrymen and create a separate community, the two secessionist leaders made use of nomination, predication and argumentative strategies to emphasise the features that make their community distinct from the rest of Cameroon. Given the fact that neither precolonial history nor ancestral heritage could help differentiate between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians, nationalist leaders built their argument on the one thing that sets their territory apart, i.e., British colonialism. Aspects of British colonialism such as language, education, law (or the so-called Anglo-Saxon culture as a whole) were therefore used to consolidate the former British Southern Cameroons as a distinct nation. Though paradoxical in a fight against an alleged new form of colonialism, the use of colonially inherited attributes in membership categorization makes sense if we relate it to theory on nationalism. In fact, as Anderson (2006) indicated, a nation is first a social construct, a carefully thought-out ideology. Therefore, its masterminds would readily build on whatever means available to them in order to create separation between ingroup and outgroup members. In discourse, this can take the form of great emphasis on all aspects that will push the nationalist agenda while deliberately overlooking and rejecting any social construct that might slow down the identity building process (Howarth 2000; Phillips and Jorgensen 2002, Wodak et al. 2009). The emphasis on the British colonial past also confirms that national identity construction is often achieved by means of the writing of a common history for ingroup members, which in the case of the former British Southern Cameroons, can only be that of the British colonial period. The creation of sub-state nations as a result of Western colonialism has caused issues not only in Cameroon and Eritrea (which was also mentioned in this paper), but also in other countries such as Morocco (Western Sahara) or Ghana (Western Togoland).

After having established that by dint of their distinct British colonial experience, they are a separate nation, Anglophone Cameroonian separatist leaders then go further to indicate that their distinct identity is facing possible annihilation. Here, nomination and predication are once again

used to present Cameroon's Francophone-dominated administration as a colonial administration whose sole desire is to completely assimilate English-speaking Cameroonians into the dominant French-speaking culture.

This is the second proposition of the unification syllogism, which therefore leads to the final conclusion, i.e., the need to unite. This idea is conveyed through strategies of intensification and argumentation. To begin with, a sense of duty is created in all Southern Cameroonians and then intensified by means of epistemic and deontic modality. This is achieved linguistically through (modal) verbs and other imperative constructions. When using these constructions, Ayamba and Ngala Nfor make sure that they stress the fact that their message is aimed at all Anglophone Cameroonians rather than a selected few. The use of deontic constructions in the speeches analysed confirms McKenna and Wadell's (2007: 394) claim that deontic modality "seeks human action, but also seeks commitment to bring that action about". In addition to intensification through modality, both separatist leaders resort to commonplace arguments that mostly appeal to emotions. These include the *topoi* of religion, divine justice and threat, which are all manifested in lexemes expressing warning, as well as direct or indirect references to God and religious texts. Although it is not used to set ingroups apart, the *topos* of religion is further evidence that national identity construction very often taps into religious beliefs, especially in traditional societies where faith plays an important part. Finally, the *topos* of comparison, which is manifested in references to successful independence movements, is also used to convince Anglophone Cameroonians to unite and join the fight for independence.

The present research provides further evidence of the discursive nature of national identity struggles, the arbitrariness of national identity strategies, and the fact that nationalist leaders in very distinct contexts make use of similar strategies to create imagined communities.

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