

The Art of Persuasion: Language Manipulation in Media Debates – A Case Study of Equinox and CRTV

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Abstract :

This study investigates the strategic manipulation of language in televised political debates in Cameroon, focusing on Equinox TV and CRTV through discourse analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Drawing on debate data from 2025, a pivotal year in the country's socio-political landscape, the research examines how language shapes public perception and political discourse. Equinox TV employs confrontational language and sharp metaphors to emotionally mobilize younger audiences, while CRTV adopts a formal, measured tone projecting institutional authority. Across both platforms, politeness and impoliteness strategies are deployed to establish credibility, challenge opponents, and reflect societal tensions. Power dynamics and political affiliations significantly shape narrative construction and rhetorical choices, while language manipulation redefines social identities and challenges stereotypes, underscoring the transformative capacity of discourse. The study highlights the importance of critical media literacy in democratic processes and maintains ethical integrity by relying solely on publicly available broadcasts.

Keywords : Discourse analysis, language manipulation, political debates, Cameroon, critical discourse analysis

Résumé :

Cette étude examine la manipulation stratégique du langage dans les débats politiques télévisés au Cameroun, en se concentrant sur Equinox TV et CRTV à travers l'analyse du discours et l'analyse critique du discours (ACD). S'appuyant sur des données de débats de 2025, une année charnière dans le paysage socio-politique du pays, la recherche examine comment le langage façonne la perception publique et le discours politique. Equinox TV utilise un langage combatif et des métaphores percutantes pour mobiliser émotionnellement les jeunes téléspectateurs, tandis que la CRTV adopte un ton formel et mesuré projetant une autorité institutionnelle. Sur les deux plateformes, les stratégies de politesse et d'impolitesse sont déployées pour établir la crédibilité, défier les adversaires et refléter les tensions sociétales. Les dynamiques de pouvoir et les affiliations politiques influencent considérablement la construction narrative et les choix rhétoriques, tandis que la manipulation du langage redéfinit les identités sociales et remet en question les stéréotypes, soulignant la capacité transformatrice du discours. L'étude souligne l'importance de la littératie médiatique critique pour les processus démocratiques et maintient l'intégrité éthique en s'appuyant uniquement sur des émissions accessibles au public.

Mots-clés : Analyse du discours, manipulation linguistique, débats politiques, Cameroun, analyse critique du discours.

Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool in shaping public discourse, particularly in the context of media debates,

where ideas are contested and public opinion is framed. These debates serve as critical platforms for influencing audience perception and understanding. The strategic use of language within

these discussions can significantly impact how audiences interpret events and form opinions. The media, encompassing television, radio, newspapers, and online platforms, plays a central role in communicating information and shaping beliefs, especially in areas where audiences lack direct experience. This underscores the importance of critically examining language use in media debates.

This study examines language manipulation in media debates, with a specific focus on the strategic deployment of politeness and impoliteness as rhetorical devices within televised discussions. Politeness and impoliteness are not merely matters of etiquette; they are powerful tools that speakers use to navigate social interactions, convey respect or disrespect, and ultimately, to persuade. The core of this research lies in understanding how debaters exploit language to sway audience perceptions, sometimes sacrificing politeness in favor of more assertive or aggressive persuasive tactics.

The Cameroonian media landscape provides a compelling context for this investigation. Cameroon boasts a diverse media environment, including both state-owned and private outlets, reflecting a range of political perspectives. However, this diversity exists alongside concerns about media freedom and government control. The study hones in on two prominent television programs: "Equinox Soir" broadcasted on Equinox TV, known for its independent stance, and "Press

Hour" aired on CRTV, the state broadcaster. These programs offer a rich source of data for analyzing language use within a specific cultural and political milieu.

The selection of "Equinox Soir" and "Press Hour" is deliberate, stemming from their widespread viewership and their consistent engagement with political and social issues relevant to Cameroon. Equinox TV, recognized for its independent reporting, serves as a platform for a multitude of voices and critical. CRTV, functioning as the state broadcaster, mirrors the government's viewpoint and frequently showcases debates centered on national. By conducting a comparative analysis of these two channels, this research seeks to deliver a well-rounded understanding of how language manipulation manifests across diverse media platforms, each characterized by its unique political leanings.

The primary objective of this study is to dissect the rhetorical strategies employed through language in televised debates and to evaluate their impact on audience. This entails identifying specific linguistic features, such as markers of politeness, instances of aggressive language, and the utilization of rhetorical questions, while also examining how these elements are employed to construct arguments and influence viewers. Furthermore, the study aims to discern how the application of politeness and impoliteness influences the credibility and effectiveness of debaters. Ultimately, this re-

search endeavors to provide valuable insights into the function of language in shaping public discourse and exerting influence on democratic processes within Cameroon. By exploring these dynamics, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how language shapes public opinion and influences political outcomes in a complex media environment. The findings will be relevant to media practitioners, policymakers, and citizens alike, fostering a more critical and informed engagement with media debates.

1. Significance of Language in Media Debates

Media outlets significantly shape social meanings by becoming primary sources of information. The language used to depict social and political groups and describe newsworthy events often sets the standard for public discussion. In media debates, language constructs narratives, evokes emotions, and sways public opinion. The deliberate choice of words, tone, and presentation of facts greatly impacts audience interpretation, highlighting the importance of critically analyzing language in media debates.

1.1. Politeness and Impoliteness in Communication

Politeness and impoliteness are essential in social interaction, influencing relationships and conveying respect or disrespect. Politeness involves mitigating potential threats to another

person's public self-image through respect and indirect language. Conversely, impoliteness causes offense or violates social norms, leading to social conflict (Ifechelobi & Okpokiri, 2020). Balancing persuasion with civility is crucial in media debates, where the interplay between politeness and impoliteness is particularly salient.

1.2 Research Problem

This study addresses language manipulation in televised debates, emphasizing the strategic use of politeness and impoliteness. The core issue is understanding how debaters use language to influence audience perceptions, sometimes compromising politeness for persuasive effect. The research focuses on "Equinox Soir" on Equinox TV and "Press Hour" on CRTV, providing a rich source of data for analyzing language use in a specific cultural and political context.

1.3 Relevance of Chosen TV Programs

"Equinox Soir" and "Press Hour" are significant choices due to their wide viewership and focus on political and social issues in Cameroon. Equinox TV, known for its independent reporting, offers a platform for diverse voices. CRTV, as the state broadcaster, reflects the government's perspective and features debates on national policies. Comparing these channels provides a balanced view of language manipulation across different media platforms with varying po-

litical affiliations.

1.4. Objective of the Study

The primary objective is to analyze rhetorical strategies in televised debates. This involves identifying linguistic features such as politeness markers, aggressive language, and rhetorical questions, examining how they shape arguments and persuade viewers. The study also seeks to understand how politeness and impoliteness affect debaters' credibility and effectiveness, providing insights into language's role in shaping public discourse and influencing democratic processes in Cameroon.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Research on Language Manipulation

The study of language manipulation in media has a rich history, drawing from various disciplines including linguistics, communication studies, and political science. Researchers have long been interested in how language can be used to influence attitudes, shape perceptions, and control behavior (Lakoff & Duran, 2018). Early work in this area focused on propaganda and persuasive rhetoric, examining how political leaders and advertisers use language to sway public opinion (Benoit, 2007). More recent studies have explored the subtle ways in which language can be manipulated through framing, spin, and other rhetorical devices.

One prominent area of research concerns the use of framing in media discourse. Framing involves selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others, thereby influencing how audiences interpret events. For example, a news report about immigration might focus on the economic costs associated with immigration, thus framing it as a burden on society. Alternatively, it could highlight the cultural contributions of immigrants, framing it as a positive force. Studies have shown that framing can have a significant impact on public attitudes toward a variety of issues, including climate change, health-care, and crime.

Another important line of inquiry has focused on the role of language in constructing social identities. The language used to describe social groups can reinforce stereotypes, perpetuate biases, and justify discrimination. For instance, media representations of minority groups often rely on negative stereotypes, which can contribute to prejudice and social exclusion. Conversely, language can also be used to challenge stereotypes and promote more inclusive representations of social groups.

2.2. Politeness Theories and Their Application in Media Contexts

Politeness theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), provides a valuable framework for understanding how language is used to manage

social relationships and avoid conflict. The theory posits that all individuals have two types of “face”: positive face (the desire to be liked and approved of) and negative face (the desire to be autonomous and free from imposition). Speakers often employ politeness strategies to mitigate potential threats to another person’s face. These strategies can include using indirect language, showing deference, and expressing solidarity.

In media debates, politeness strategies can be used to build rapport with audiences, establish credibility, and avoid alienating potential supporters. However, speakers may also choose to violate politeness norms in order to assert dominance, challenge opponents, or express strong emotions. The strategic use of impoliteness can be a powerful rhetorical tool, but it also carries the risk of damaging a speaker’s reputation and alienating audiences.

Several studies have applied politeness theory to the analysis of political discourse, examining how politicians use language to manage their public image and build relationships with voters. These studies have shown that politeness strategies can be highly context-dependent, varying according to the speaker’s goals, the audience’s expectations, and the broader political climate.

2.3. Gaps in Existing Literature

While there is a substantial body of research on language manipulation

and politeness in media, there are still significant gaps in our understanding of these phenomena, particularly in the context of Cameroonian TV debates. Much of the existing research has focused on Western media systems, and it is not clear whether the same patterns and dynamics apply in different cultural and political contexts. Cameroon’s unique linguistic landscape, with its mix of English and French speakers, presents a particularly interesting case study for examining how language is used to negotiate identity, power, and social relations.

Moreover, there is a need for more research on the specific rhetorical strategies used in Cameroonian media debates and their impact on audience perception. While some studies have examined media bias and political communication in Cameroon, few have focused specifically on the role of language manipulation in shaping public discourse. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of language use in “Equinox Soir” and “Press Hour,” two of the country’s most prominent television programs.

3.Theoretical Framework

This study will draw on a combination of theoretical frameworks to analyze language manipulation in Cameroonian media debates. Discourse analysis will be used to examine the structure and organization of language in the selected TV programs. Discourse analysis is a broad approach to studying language in context, focusing

on how language is used to construct meaning, negotiate social relations, and exercise power (Manning, 2008). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be employed to uncover the hidden assumptions, power dynamics, and ideological biases embedded in media texts. CDA is a more explicitly political approach to discourse analysis, aiming to expose how language is used to maintain social inequalities and promote dominant ideologies.

In addition, politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) will be used to analyze how speakers employ politeness strategies to manage face and build relationships with audiences. The study will also draw on rhetorical theory to examine the persuasive techniques used in media debates, such as appeals to emotion, logic, and credibility. By combining these theoretical frameworks, the study will provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how language manipulation affects politeness in media debates and its implications for public discourse.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing discourse analysis to explore language manipulation in televised debates aired on Cameroon's Equinox TV and CRTV. By focusing on the strategic use of politeness and impoliteness, the study aims to shed light on how language shapes public perception and influences discourse during these discussions.

4.1. Data Collection

The primary data for this research was collected from the official YouTube channels of both Equinox TV and CRTV. Specifically, the analysis focuses on episodes from 2025, allowing for a contemporary examination of political discourse relevant to current events in Cameroon. This timeframe is particularly significant as it captures the evolving dynamics of political debates within a rapidly changing socio-political landscape.

Equinox TV broadcasts primarily in French, necessitating a process of translation before analysis. Each selected episode was transcribed from its original French dialogue into English to ensure accessibility and accuracy for analysis. The translated content was scrutinized for instances of language manipulation, with a keen focus on identifying features associated with politeness and impoliteness. Selecting debates from both television channels provides a balanced perspective, highlighting the contrasting editorial slants and approaches taken by state-controlled versus independent media.

Given the intense nature of political discourse in Cameroon, the debates chosen encompass a range of critical issues, including governance, public policy, societal challenges, and electoral matters. This selection enriches the analysis by providing diverse contexts in which language manipulation operates. By analyzing debates on highly salient topics, the study aims to uncover the rhetorical strategies employed

by speakers to persuade audiences and navigate political landscapes.

4.2 Data Analysis

The analysis will utilize discourse analysis as the primary analytical framework, focusing on language use within the selected episodes. Key linguistic features such as politeness markers, aggressive language, rhetorical questions, and framing techniques will be identified and analyzed. This analysis will reveal how speakers employ specific language choices to construct their arguments, negotiate social relationships, and influence audience perceptions.

In addition to general discourse analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be employed to uncover the underlying power dynamics and ideological positions embedded in the language used during these debates. CDA is instrumental in examining how language reflects and perpetuates social inequalities, allowing researchers to identify the ideological resources that speakers draw upon to justify their positions (Gee, 2014).

Furthermore, the analysis will pay particular attention to the strategic use of politeness and impoliteness. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness strategies are crucial for managing social relationships, particularly in contentious settings like political debates. The research will explore how speakers balance these strategies, using politeness to build rapport with audiences while employing elements

of impoliteness as a rhetorical device to challenge opponents and assert dominance during discussions.

The selected episodes will be analyzed qualitatively, allowing for an in-depth examination of the linguistic features that demonstrate language manipulation. This involves a close reading of the transcripts to identify patterns and inconsistencies, as well as shifts in tone and register that indicate the speakers' strategic choices.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in this research. Data collected from publicly available broadcasts ensures compliance with privacy, copyright, and ethical research standards. The study aims to present its findings responsibly, respecting the integrity of the participants involved in the debates. By focusing solely on publicly accessible content, the research avoids any potential ethical dilemmas linked to private communications or unapproved recordings.

The findings will be disseminated in an academic context, contributing to ongoing scholarly discussions about language manipulation in media discourse. The study will remain focused on the linguistic aspects of the debates, avoiding any personal judgments about the speakers or the content of their arguments.

In summary, this methodology outlines a rigorous and ethically anchored framework for examining language manipulation in Cameroonian

media debates. Through a qualitative analysis of televised discussions from both Equinox TV and CRTV, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how language shapes public discourse and influences political outcomes in a complex media environment.

5. Results

The content analysis of extracts from the debate programs “Equinoxe Soir” on Equinox TV and “Press Hour” on CRTV revealed distinct patterns in language manipulation strategies employed by debaters. These strategies were evident in both the use of rhetoric and the framing of arguments, reflecting underlying political affiliations and differing journalistic approaches.

In “Equinoxe Soir”, the language employed during the debates indicated a direct engagement with

ongoing political tensions in Cameroon. The opening statement, “I don’t think we should take the baton and flock,” signifies a rejection of violent state responses to protests demanding political change. This phrase demonstrates an awareness of the societal volatility surrounding the calls for reform, and presents a moral stance against the use of force by the government. However, the subsequent statement, “I think the president should use both carrot and baton,” reveals a conflicting perspective on governance tactics. The metaphor of “carrot and baton” embodies the dual approach of incentivizing compliance through positive measures (carrot) while simultaneously employing coercive tactics (baton). This juxtaposition emphasizes the complexity of political discourse in Cameroon, where calls for reform coexist with justifications for repression.

Image 1 : Equinoxe Soir



Source: Equinoxe Soir, November 14,2025

The term “droguers,” used by one speaker to describe the opposition, illustrates another dimension of language manipulation. This derogatory label not only conveys a dismissive attitude towards the opposition’s credibility but also serves to delegitimize the youth protesting for change by equating them with drug dealers. However, the counterstatement, “Cameroonian youths are not drogue dealers,” reveals an attempt to reclaim agency for the younger generation, challenging the stigmatization of protesters. The use of this counter-narrative signifies an essential aspect of language manipulation: the need to redefine social identities against prevailing negative stereotypes.

Additionally, phrases such as “This is not the time for a black he-goat” highlight the urgency implied in the debate. The imagery of “black he-goat” suggests a departure from traditional, violent measures of governance, calling for more constructive dialogue instead. This metaphor emphasizes the preference for peaceful resolutions over forceful crackdowns on dissent.

The assertion “We know he won,” referencing opposition leader Issa Tchiroma, indicates a subtext of resignation or acceptance of political realities. The statement reflects a broader sentiment of skepticism about the legitimacy of electoral processes and the perception of inevitable political outcomes. The follow-up, “I am not okay when the president says others

will reign,” signals a fear of potential repression and emphasizes the tension surrounding political discourse. Such expressions indicate an awareness of the potential for state violence against opposition voices.

In contrast, the language patterns observed in “Press Hour” on CRTV demonstrated a more cautious and formal approach. The statement, “Hate speech is propagated by those who are supposed to combat it,” reveals a critique of systemic failures within institutions responsible for maintaining peace and order. This expression not only highlights hypocrisy but also frames the current political climate in Cameroon as one where official narratives fail to address underlying societal tensions.

The phrase “Your energy was too young” critiques the opposition’s lack of experience, implying that youthful exuberance alone is insufficient to secure electoral victory. This dismissive comment serves to undermine the opposition’s legitimacy, framing them as inadequately prepared to tackle the complex political landscape ahead. By positioning experience as a key factor for success, the speaker seeks to reinforce the credibility of the ruling party while framing the opposition’s energy as naive and misdirected.

Image 2: Press Hour



Source: Press Hour CRTV 21
and November 16,2025

The repeated assertion that “their achievements are on papers” underscores a perception of failure among organizations that combat hate speech and political violence. This statement implies that there is a disconnect between policy intentions and actual impact. By suggesting that these achievements exist in theory rather than practice, the speaker attempts to delegitimize the actions of various institutions claiming to address societal issues, reflecting a broader mistrust in governance.

Comparative Findings

The comparative analysis of the language used in “Equinoxe Soir” and “Press Hour” emphasizes stark differences in rhetorical strategies and their implications for audience engagement. Equinox TV’s approach was characterized by confrontational and provocative language, utilizing sharp metaphors and personal attacks to engage the audience emotionally and to encourage a critical examination of the government’s actions. In contrast,

CRTV’s tone was more measured and strategic. Its use of formal language and institutional critique resonated with viewers seeking a sense of stability and rational debate in a politically charged environment.

The emotional engagement elicited by Equinox TV’s language manipulation strategies is significant. The aggressive framing and immediate challenges presented by speakers seem designed to mobilize younger audiences who are frustrated with the status quo. This aligns with the tendency of media to attract viewership by tapping into societal discontent and rallying support for opposition voices. Debaters on this platform appear to recognize the power of persuasive language to galvanize action, potentially altering the perceptions of those disaffected by the political landscape.

On the other hand, the CRTV approach reflects an intention to maintain civility and respect within the political discourse. Such framing may appeal to more conservative audiences, fostering a sense of credibility and authority. By employing a form of language that emphasizes experience and established institutions, CRTV positions itself as a stabilizing force within a tumultuous political climate, appealing to viewers who might feel alienated by more aggressive styles of discourse.

The divergent strategies employed by Equinox TV and CRTV reveal the ongoing tensions within Cameroonian society regarding political expression, governance, and social

identity. The findings highlight the significant role that language plays in shaping political landscapes, negotiating power, and constructing public opinion. These insights underscore the importance of understanding media language as a tool for both manipulation and empowerment in contemporary discourse.

6. Conclusion

This study provides critical insights into the language manipulation strategies employed in televised debates on Cameroon's Equinox TV and CRTV, revealing significant differences in how these platforms engage with political discourse. Key findings indicate that Equinox TV utilizes confrontational and provocative language, effectively mobilizing discontent among younger audiences, while CRTV adopts a more formal and conciliatory tone to foster credibility and authority. The contrasting approaches highlight the role of media in shaping public perception and discourse, illustrating how language can empower or marginalize voices within the political landscape.

The implications for public discourse are profound. Language manipulation shapes not only the immediate context of political debates but also contributes to broader societal narratives, influencing the public's understanding of governance, political identity, and societal change. This dynamic underscores the necessity for critical media literacy among au-

diences to discern manipulation and engage thoughtfully with the content presented.

However, the study is not without limitations. The focus on a specific timeframe and the selection of particular debate episodes may not fully represent the breadth of discourse within Cameroonian media. Additionally, the reliance on specific platforms restricts the findings to their unique contexts and may not generalize across other media outlets or regions.

Future research should explore the linguistic strategies employed across a wider variety of media outlets, including social media platforms and community-based channels. Investigating these dynamics in the context of different cultural and political environments could provide richer, more nuanced understandings of language manipulation and its impact on public discourse globally. By broadening the scope of research, scholars can better assess the implications of language in shaping democratic processes and societal change.

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