

# Pragmatic Aspects of Signpost Messages in Cameroon: From the Ordinary to the Implied Meanings of the Messages

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**Abstract** - The paper examines the pragmatic aspects of signpost messages (SPMs) in Cameroon, focusing on the implied or intended meanings and the ordinary meanings of the messages. The investigation is carried out from the perspectives of Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Theory and Grice's (1975) Theory of Implicature. The findings point out that SPMs are not just communicative tools in Cameroon but also reflections of sociolinguistic realities and cultural values. For instance, the authors' intended meanings of SPMs reveal their ideological orientations and attitudinal tendencies.

**Keywords** - Pragmatic aspects, signpost messages, ideological orientations, attitudinal tendencies, and Cameroon

## 1. Introduction

Meaning remains the most important aspect of human communication, given that it is shared between a speaker and his/her audience. When the latter cannot infer the meaning from the speech of a speaker, communication cannot be effective. In this Line, Palmer (1981, p.1) stresses that meaning covers various aspects of languages, with no general agreement about the nature of meaning, what aspects of it may properly be included in semantics, or how it should be described. Considering the importance of meaning in Language and communication, it has been observed that previous pragmatic studies have not investigated both the intended or implied meanings and the ordinary meanings of signpost messages in Cameroon, as these two aspects of meaning can go a long way to reveal the ideological orientations and attitudinal tendencies of the authors of the messages, given that the ordinary meanings alone cannot provide the clear picture of what the authors of SPMs intend to convey in their messages.

According to Graddol (1994, p.19), the analysis of word meaning is important, but more is involved in communication than simply adding together the meaning of individual words. Linguistic context can be salient in determining which of many meanings a word is intended: compare, for instance, the phrases "Here is a mug of coffee" and "Here is an ugly mug of coffee!" However, the linguistic context alone is still not suitable.

The phrase "Here is a mug of coffee" can have several meanings, contingent on such factors as the procedure in which it is expressed, what has been uttered before, and the general situational context. It could be a straightforward piece of information a speaker voices as they pass across a steaming mug. Still, at the end of a party,

it could be a polite hint that it is time the guests were living, or it could be a very impolite way of telling someone they have had many drinks. They ought to sober up/ many other interpretations are possible in different contexts (Djadjeu Foteng & Ngefacc, 2022, p.24).

## 2. Literature Review

Previous studies have focused on various perspectives of meaning (semantic aspects), meaning in context, and the importance of intention and attitude in meaning. However, little attention has been paid to the meaning of signpost messages (SPMs), especially the relationship between the authors' implied and readers' meanings. A few former studies on SPMs have focused merely on the reader's perspective of meaning. Mbangwana (2002) indicates that the importance of intention and attitude should not underestimate the importance of plain sense in language use. The point to have in mind is not to undermine plain sense but equally to stress that intention and attitude are significant in meaning.

Mbangwana (2002) adds that though English has a common vocabulary stock with some languages, some shared words have different meanings. This explains why former studies on American and British English vocabulary (Simo Bobda, 2001; Kouega, 2001; Mbangwana, 2002) have disclosed that though they share the same vocabulary, some words in British English do not have the same meaning in American English. Unlike Simo Bobda (2001) and Kouega & Mbangwana (2002), Ngefacc (2022) argues that the meanings of utterances or speech acts in Cameroon rely nearly entirely on the intentions of the 'interactants' and their shared knowledge. He adds that semantics and pragmatics are significantly different, even though they work together.

Asongu (2023) investigates the linguistic landscape of Cameroon from a pragmatic point of view. However, his investigation focuses only on the qualitative dimension of signpost messages displayed in the country. Thus, This study addresses signpost messages in Cameroon by combining the qualitative and quantitative approaches. There is, therefore, a need to study the meanings that some authors imply by their SPMs, which can help understand their various backgrounds and visions of society. SPMs in this study refer to messages displayed on buildings, walls, posters, advertising billboards, door posts, etc., in a given place.

It has therefore been observed that there is a significant gap between the author's intended meaning of SPMs and the reader's meaning of the messages, and this gap tends to shape the attitudinal, ideological, or philosophical orientations, interests, and visions of the life of the authors of the messages. This is a problem because the interpretation of SPMs without considering the author's intended meaning can provide partial information about what the author may want to convey. This investigation then explores the gap between the pragmatic meanings of SPMs in Cameroon and the authors' implied meanings of the messages to reveal the attitudinal, ideological, or philosophical orientations, interests, and visions of life.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

This work is carried out from the perspectives of Mey's (2001) and Grice's (1975) pragmatic approaches. Literature related to pragmatics and its relevance to the investigation is presented from the historical overview of the theory to its related concepts. The notion of the user is essential in pragmatics. Indeed, most of the definitions of pragmatics came from Charles Morris's definition of pragmatics as "the study of the relation of signs to interpreter". However, in up-to-date communication-oriented terminology, notions such as 'messages' and 'language users' are preferred; in contrast to traditional linguistics, which focuses on the elements and structure (like sounds and sentences) made by the language users, pragmatics concentrates on the language-using humans. So, pragmatics involves producing Language and its 'producers', not merely the end-product Language. Hence, according to Mey (2001), If pragmatics [...] is a new paradigm (or program) of research, it is obliged to come up with a new definition of the object of that research.

What would such a new definition imply about the research object in question, Language, in its 'old' vs. its 'new' interpretation: Language as a human product vs. Language in its human use? One could, of course, divide the study of Language into two, pretty much independent, parts: one, a description of its structure (as dealt with by the traditional methods of grammar), the other, a description of its use (to be taken care of by pragmatics). In fact, for this author, given that the object of pragmatics has shifted from the old paradigm (Language as a human production) to its new interpretation (Language in its human use), it has to be reconsidered as a new paradigm of research where the study of Language has two parts: an independent part called 'a description of its structure' about grammar and 'a description of its use' about pragmatics itself. In other words, the appropriate domain of pragmatics would be what Chomsky named 'performance', that is, how the individual uses a language. Hence, empirical linguistic practice would be contrasted with 'competence', just the user's knowledge of the language and its rules (Mey 2001).

This standpoint is supported by Katz (1977, p.19), who opines that: "Grammars are theories about the structure of sentence types...Pragmatic theories, in contrast...explicate the reasoning of speakers and hearers". This means that pragmatic theories help point out the reasoning of speakers and hearers. This explains why the current investigation explores the relationship between the speaker's meaning of the SPMs (author's intended meaning) and the hearer's meaning (researcher's meaning, literal meaning, or conventional meaning). Nonetheless, the delimitation of Pragmatics vis-à-vis syntax, semantics, and other 'hyphenated areas' of research (psycho-, neuro-, socio-, ethno-, etc., linguistic), and so on is still problematic. However, the language user remains the point of focus of pragmatics. Consequently, one can discuss the 'user's point of view' as a common orienting feature for pragmatic research. Nevertheless, this does not provide a pleasing definition of pragmatics. Several pragmatics have various interpretations of the term 'language use', along with what is implied by the role of the language user. For example, 'language use' can be termed as whatever happens when users are 'doing things with words'; or, following a more limiting method, it could be said that pragmatics 'refers explicitly' to a user whenever Language is discussed (Katz 1977, p.19).

According to Levinson (quoted in Mey 2001, p. 21), "explicit reference [be] made to the speaker, or to put it in more general terms, to the user of the language". Given that, Levinson proposes to define pragmatics as being... "the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language". This definition considers merely uses of Language as pragmatically relevant that have a different grammatical expression, which functions with phonological, morphological and syntactic elements under the distinction of grammatical rules, and this is what Levinson calls 'grammaticalized'. However, he does not say how user and grammar are linked or how Language and context are connected, with or without grammar's assistance. Moreover, limiting pragmatics to only linguistic matters is debated by those who want to add the whole of human language use. This restriction may support the definition (Levinson 1983, p.11) quoted in Mey 2001, p. 21. Alleged 'extralinguistic' factors can merely be omitted from a pragmatic evaluation due to neglecting the user. So, a real pragmatic evaluation has to include the users in their 'social context' instead of limiting itself to grammatically encoded context features, as the 'grammaticalization requirement' appears to imply.

Hence, Mey 2001, p. 22 defines pragmatics as "the study of how humans use their language in communication, bases itself on a study of those premises and determines how they affect, and affectualize human language use." He says succinctly that "pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of the society." From the above definition, it is worth pointing out the frontiers of pragmatics vis-à-vis other adjoining research areas within and outside linguistics. In the literature, Geoffrey Leech (1983, p.6 cited in Mey 2001, p. 23) suggests 'complementarity' as his resolution to solve the delimitation problem between pragmatics and its nearest linguistic neighbour, semantics. Indeed, Geoffrey Leech talks of the promising way of materializing the relation between pragmatics and semantics: Pragmaticism (semantics inside pragmatics) and complementarism (semantics and pragmatics complement each other but are independent research fields).

His suggestion, however, remains weak, given that it has been considered more subjective and tough to justify objectively. Despite the debate on the weakness of 'complementarism', it remains the factor that can solve the delimitation problem between pragmatics and the neighbouring field, semantics. This is because the most traditionally based linguists prefer to assign pragmatics to a 'quiet corner' outside linguistics proper. Thus, pragmaticists can do their own thing in a complementary relationship with other fields but simultaneously remain different. The function uses and aims of pragmatics are also worth discussing. Concerning the term function, it is an old improvement in linguistic thinking. Since the mid-thirties, the German Psychologist Karl Buhler (1934, p. 29, quoted in Mey 2001) expounded his illustrious functional triangle of 'Ausdruck', 'Appell' and 'Darstellung', which respectively refer to 'expression' or 'manifestation' (speech) 'appeal' and 'representation' as representative of Language.

In the sixties, Roman Jakobson (1960, p. 350 ff, quoted in Mey 2001, p. 26) expanded the Buhlerian model by adding three more functions: code, channel and poetic quality. These models of human Language constitute a shared sense of the significance of the user in the communicative practice. Hence, messages are not only 'signals' transmitted via neutral channels; human expression functions to appeal to other users and as a means of social togetherness. According to Ostman (1983b, P.19 quoted in Mey 2001), examining linguistic phenomena in this manner is beneficial in favouring the consolidation of different agendas of the 'componentialists' and the 'perspectivists'. However, the former is mainly focused on technical stuff such as presuppositions, implicatures, deixis etc. and a typical perspective interested in concepts, for example, "negotiability, adaptability and variability, motivations, effects, etc." the two lookouts can be fused by considering the communicative function of Language Vs the background of the available linguistic techniques, while equally putting these techniques in a 'functional-communicative perspective' (Mey 2001, p. 26).

Regarding the uses of pragmatics, it is first of all worth recalling that pragmatics can be characterized in distinct ways, following how linguistics is perceived and how pragmatics is positioned within it. On the one hand, an abstract characterization will consider pragmatics as a 'component' of linguistics (as phonology, syntax and semantics) or as 'perspective' pervading the components and giving them a pragmatic 'accent'. On the other hand, a practical characterization of the tasks and functions of pragmatics starts from the traditional problems (including problems of conversation and turn-control, problems of argumentation, problems of language use in educational settings, problems of interaction among humans and computers and all sorts of communicative problems) that linguistic research has dealt with for many years, and for which pragmatics delivers an up-to-date solution. So, pragmatics is helpful because it tackles all sorts of communicative problems.

In other words, pragmatics is helpful in that it helps to obtain a fuller, deeper and generally more reasonable account of human language behaviour. A pragmatic account is the only one that makes sense in communication. For instance, in the sentence 'keep the door opened', the meaning cannot totally be understood through semantic ambiguity, and thus only the user can tell what they insinuate. If not, speculations will be the only thing the hearers will have. This is because ambiguity exists outside the 'speaking situation' (context) (Mey 2001, p. 28). This is another reason why the investigator in this study ascertains the author's intended meaning of some SPMs instead of focusing only on speculations (personal interpretation of the messages). This is the only way through which the researcher can point out what the authors of the SPMs project through their messages (this could be their vision of life in Cameroonian society and their ideological or philosophical tendencies).

The aims of pragmatics can be traced from the 'immanence' of linguistic theory, by which linguists mean that linguistics is self-centred (as to its methods and objectives). Besides, linguistics is mainly descriptive, ignoring other aspects of language interpretation. However, pragmatics aims to explain how the same content is expressed differently in various cultural, religious, and professional contexts. Generally, such contexts differ linguistically because they vary from language community to language community. For example, considering the signpost

message in the US, "SLOWER TRAFFIC KEEP RIGHT", and another one in Canada 'KEEP RIGHT EXCEPT TO PASS', the semantic content of the two expressions is partially 'keep right', partially different (a reference to a 'slower traffic' as compared with 'to pass'); the sign seems to function in more or less way in the two settings. Considering the above indisputable function, the uses and aims of pragmatics and concepts that help complete interpretation are discussed in the following section.

### **3.1. Pragmatic Concepts and their Relevance to Meaning Interpretation**

As pragmatic concepts help interpret the meaning of some SPMs in this study, they are reviewed alongside their relevance in meaning interpretation. These concepts involve presupposition, context, implicatures, reference, indexicals, and deixis.

#### **3.1.1. Presupposition**

Some linguists think that meaning should be dealt with outside linguistics. According to them, 'extralinguistic' factors should be ignored as far as meaning interpretation is concerned. However, this thinking is considered in the literature as 'unscientific', as linguists looking at meaning in this way were accused of cheating on method (Mey 2001). Leonard Blomfield (1950, 143ff and Charles Hockett 1959 quoted in Mey 2001) postulate that meaning could only be studied through speakers' utterances in situations; that is, 'real' independent meaning should not be considered. They even ignore semantics in their tradition. However, pragmatics take the 'real' meaning of 'extralinguistic' very seriously. Considering this example from Mey (2001):

Suppose I utter the following:

John managed to sell his shares before the market crashed, to which a bystander remarks: No, he did not. The reply contradicts the first utterance and denies its truth. Then, both utterances are not valid and have different truth conditions. It is, therefore, understood that John seriously tried to sell his shares. This is true, though the utterances have different meanings: for the first speaker, John succeeded in selling his shares, whereas the second insisted that John did not succeed and had to take a financial beating. potential justification would be that both utterances have an underlying element (a 'proposition' of the form 'John tried to sell his shares', which remains stable, whether it is real or not that John sold his shares. This element is called a presupposition. In other words, a presupposition refers to what the speaker takes to be the common ground of the participants in a conversation. The speaker presupposes the hearer is aware of what they foremind to say. Aspects of presupposition in a given conversation pave the way to the assumption underlying discussion. There is that common ground between the speaker and the hearer. Hence, every communication is grounded on presuppositions. The presupposition parts of any speech act refer to the conditions that must be fulfilled to reveal the pragmatic meaning of utterances.

The receiver or the hearer focuses on inference when it comes to the interpretation of the meaning of an utterance. It is worth noting that readers and hearers establish inferences to interpret what they read and hear. Hence, the hearer relates the surface or literal meaning of the words to the foreminded interpretation. According to Yule, there are two types of inference: deductive inference, which is the inference derived from a particular premise and loose inference, which shows that an interpretation is from a set of statements that have been supplied. Unlike Yule (1996), Thorndike (1976, p.32) holds that the second kind of inference (loose inference) has to do with signals and ideas that lead the reader or the listener to infer some signification from utterances, like the place where the speech act holds, the participants involved, and the context of the discourse. Considering the significance of presupposition in the interpretation of meaning, as this work does on SPMs, one can say that limiting an interpretation solely to semantics will be unsatisfactory; thus, a pragmatic explanation must be considered to think like Mey (2001).



### 3.1.2. Context

Since pragmatism extends linguistics from the local grammar paradigm to 'extralinguistic', the term 'context' becomes unavoidable in every complete linguistic interpretation of utterances or sentences. Context is salient when outlining ambiguities in spoken or written Language. It is 'dynamic' and understood as the constantly changing surroundings, in the broad sense that helps the participants in the communication process to interact and to which linguistic expression of their interaction becomes intelligible. For instance, the presence of food in the mouth while speaking may be part of some context, yet it is not a linguistic element and may not even be a pragmatic one, but it contributes to meaning construction. Context is related to implicatures in that it is the 'universe' of every Language used, the total of what people do with each other in conversation. At this level, it is the conversational context and its conversational implicatures that decide whether the contradiction between, for instance, 'all' and 'some' (in the statements: Alex ate some of the raisins, and I add, as an afterthought-in fact she ate all of them) is a logical or a pragmatic one. The notion of context is relevant in SPMs in that it underlies the author's intended meanings, which the study aims to reveal in one of its dimensions.

### 3.1.3. Implicature

The term 'implicature' comes from the verb 'to imply', as its false cognate 'implication' defines a logical relationship between two propositions. For instance, you cut my hedge "I will take you out." Then, the logical implication will be that If you cut my hedge, I will take you out. It is worth recalling that defining the word 'implication' here clarifies its difference with implicature. The concept of focus here is implicature. According to Mey (2001, pp.44), 'to imply' means 'to fold something into something else'. Therefore, what is implied is 'folded in' and has to be 'unfolded' to be understood. According to Grice, "implicature" refers to what a speaker can imply, suggest or mean as different from what they literally say. Most often, speakers insinuate more than they literary say. A speaker may say "lock the door" to imply more than a simple statement about an action. For example, they could mean "I want to sleep"; it could mean "danger is coming". It could mean, "I do not want disturbance from strangers". It could mean all sorts of things depending on the context they share. The theory of implicature stands for the difference between the implied meaning and the literal meaning, which is, in several cases, different from the intended meaning. Generally, every speech act develops two types of implicatures: Conventional and non-conventional implicatures.

A conventional implicature means the ordinary meaning or conventional meaning of words, phrases or expressions. For Mey, a conventional implicature is how we comprehend an utterance in conversation in conformity with what we expect to hear. Non-conventional implicatures are non-truth-conditional inferences rooted in the cooperative principle and maxims. Besides identifying the phenomenon of implicature and classifying its types, Grice (2001) put in place a theory designed to explain and predict conventional implicatures and how they are comprehended. Grice (2001) developed a general comparative principle and four maxims that specifically explain how to be cooperative. He opines that people generally follow these rules for efficient communication. According to him, the Cooperative Principle constitutes what is demanded by the accepted purpose of conversation.

The fourfold maxims include the Maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner. First, the Maxim of quantity has to do with the information (the speaker's information must be informative as required). In other words, the speaker's contribution should be as informative as required for the current purposes of exchange and should not make their contribution more informative than required. Second, the Maxim of quality states that a speaker's contribution must be true (the speaker must say what is true). So, they should not convey what is believed to be false or unjustified. Third, the Maxim of relation corresponds to relevance (the speaker or the information has to be relevant enough). Furthermore, fourth, the Maxim of Manner deals with clarity (the speaker has to be perspicuous by avoiding obscurity and ambiguity and striving for brevity and order) and

methodology. In short, Grice (1975, pp. 26-30) considered the above not arbitrary conventions. He viewed them as general rules managing rational and cooperative behaviour. For instance, if Ruth is helping her friend build a house, she will need a hammer rather than books (relevance), more than one nail when many are needed (quantity), and straight nails rather than bent ones (quality).

She will do all these quickly and efficiently (in a manner). Implicatures are aspects of pragmatic meaning with specific palpable characteristics presented in a particular context shared by the speaker, the listener, the writer, and the reader. Levinson (1983, p. 97) refers to an implicature as a “pragmatic example of the nature and power of pragmatic explanation of linguistic phenomena. It provides some explicit accounts of how it can mean (in some general sense) more than what is said”. This means that non-conventional implicature does not come from the conventional meaning of words they account for in contrast to conventional implicature. It is important to note that the concept of implicature is dominant in the pragmatic aspect of the study in that the work dwells mainly on the authors’ implied meanings of some SPMs. This concept is related to the notions of reference discussed in the following sub-section.

### 3.1.4. Reference

Reference concerns the relationship between words and their meanings (Mey 2001, p.69). Lyons (1968, p. 404) proposes the subsequent triangle to understand the relationship between words and their meanings.

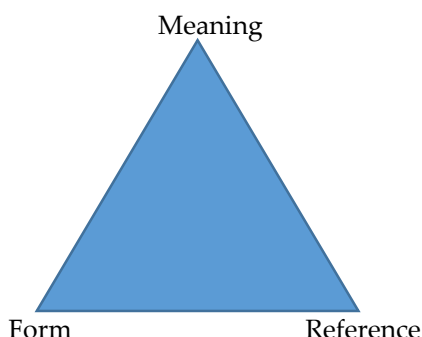


Fig. 1 Lyons's (1968, p. 404) triangle of words and meanings

The words that refer to the object or concept are termed the form; the object or the concept refers to the referent, and the meaning is the mental representation of the link between the form and referent. Reference is close to anaphora following the supposition: “I am in a foreign country, sitting in my hotel room at night. There is a knock on the door. I don’t open the door, but ask: “Who’s there?” the stranger answers: “It’s me.” Now, what do I do?”

Fundamentally, there are two possibilities: either the visitor is recognized, the person in the room decides not to open the room, or he does not recognize the voice and finds himself in a dilemma. What can be done with a voice that refers to a ‘me’ when that ‘me’ is unknown? Given that a ‘me’ always refers to an ‘I’ and every ‘I’ is a speaking ‘me’, the utterance ‘It’s me’ is always and necessarily true, and thus completely uncommunicative, when it comes to forming the identity of a speaker. Language has no known referent for ‘me’.

In this case, the reference of a word such as ‘me’ changes with the individual saying it, and so, considering that there is a difference between the direct referent (‘we know who John is’) and the indirect reference related to the above example of the person in the hotel room. Concerning the indirect reference, both linguistic and non-linguistic factors are needed to establish adequate meaning. For example, when someone says, ‘It’s me’, the latter can still be asked, ‘Me who?’ or ‘Who is talking?’ or reiterates, ‘Who is talking?’, perhaps in an irritated pitch or with increased volume. Relying on the answer obtained, the person in the room knows how to respond. Referents, indexicals and deixis are interconnected, as discussed below.

### 3.1.5. The Relationship between Reference, Indexicals and Deixis

From Latin 'nomen proprium', proper noun names belonging to people are the prototypes of linguistic expressions having 'proper' reference: names refer to persons, institutions and broadly, objects having clear reference. It is conceivable to refer to a certain person or object without using such a 'proper' expression; for example, one can refer to Aloysius Ngefack as a 'professor' or as the editor of "*Aspects of Cameroon Englishes*."

Unlike proper nouns, 'regular nouns' bear some indefiniteness in their naming: the word cow, for instance, refers to any female representative of the genus bovinum and does not reveal anything about what a particular cow is named, its nature, where it is found, the quantity of milk it provides per year etc. In effect, to refer to a specific cow, something representing what to find and where: an indexical expression, in a nutshell. An indexical expression can be defined as a particular kind of referential expression which, besides the semantics of their 'naming', their meaning, involves reference to the specific context in which that sense is put to work. For example, consider the statement: "I am six feet tall". (Levinson 1983, p.58 cited in Mey 2001, p.70).

The meaning of this statement is given by what the individual words insinuate, and every proficient speaker of English will understand them, in the situation of the utterance, as pointing out a certain height. The phrase 'I am' is problematic when it comes to understanding. To whom does it refer to? Hence, the contextual 'coordinates' of the utterance are necessary for the interpretation of its meaning. Indexicals are unavoidable in fixing those coordinates. They include pronouns (especially personal pronouns), local and temporal adverbs, verb tenses, etc. Deixis are used alongside indexicals and are words directly pointing out. Mey (2001) postulates that 'indexical expressions are pragmatically determined'. This insinuates that they depend on the persons who use them for their reference. The major ways of conveying an indexical relationship are known as 'deictic elements (also called 'pointers'). They tell us how to find the particular item they denote.

Nonetheless, if the person pointing is unknown through an indexical expression, the coordinate system will hang in mind-air. Considering that every 'indexing' or 'pointing' is made by human beings, and thus the whole pointing expressions have to be connected to the uttering person, pointing in a particular place and time includes the traditional philosophic and linguistic groups of person, place and time. Deixis and anaphora are also interrelated. As earlier said, a context helps not only in pointing out the real reference for deictic items like 'next' or 'last' but equally in the situation of other deictic expressions whose referents are not identifiable out of their real ('spoken' or 'written') context. For example, taking the pronoun 'this' as in: "I need a box this big",

From Mey (2001, p.73), the speaker refers to a particular box size in the spoken context. Moreover, uttering the statement: 'I met this girl the other day' really aims at indexing this particular person, or 'this' refers to a certain young lady who needs to introduce herself. At this level, there is what is called 'reminder deixis', given that the identity of the person mentioned in the above example might be of little interest. More to that, to correctly point out the pragmatic meaning of the utterance or message, one has to judge from the text of the message who is talking, where and what the message refers to in a particular context (it may be referring to jock in a certain context and to a piece of information in another).

In short, referent, indexicals and deixis are relevant in work in the sense that some language users (authors of SPMs) frame their messages in such a way that they have referents, which are pointed out by some indexicals and deixis (time and space) in particular contexts. Pragmatic theory functions by following well-defined principles and rules. The notion of principle here does not only mean 'elements of understanding' but also 'prerequisites to understanding'. In short, Mey (2001) defines principles as conditions for a comprehensive description of a language, which are different from the rules of description themselves, as in the case of the contemporary uses of the word. Pragmatic principles include:



1. The communicative principle: Here, people communicate to pass information on to somebody; this is the basis of every linguistic behaviour.
2. The cooperative principle: this principle is expatiated under the concept of 'implicature' above.

To conclude, considering that Mey's (2001) approach of pragmatics, like other pragmatic theories, places the user of a language at the centre of every date-to-date communication and phenomenon of context, it is therefore significant to outline some information intended by the authors of SPMs in Cameroon. This information further discloses the sociolinguistic realities, philosophical orientations (visions of life), and attitudinal tendencies) of Cameroonians, which can only be understood beyond ordinary or surface meanings of signpost messages. In other words, the pragmatic dimension of this investigation does not only outline the authors' intended meanings of the signpost messages, but it also shows how the gap between these meanings and the surface meaning provides some pieces of information related to the sociolinguistic realities, philosophical orientations (visions of life), and attitudinal tendencies) of Cameroonians.

In summary, it is important to recall that the Cooperative Principle constitutes what is demanded by the accepted purpose of the conversation. The maxims of this principle include the Maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner. First, the Maxim of quantity has to do with the information (the speaker's information must be informative as required). In other words, the speaker's contribution should be as informative as required for the current purposes of exchange. It should not also make his or her contribution more informative than is required. This was not the case for some SPMs. They were ambiguous in most cases. Second, the Maxim of quality states that a speaker's contribution has to be true (the speaker must say what is true). So, he/she should not convey what is believed to be false or unjustified. The author's contributions were promised to be true based on various reports obtained through the interview and survey, given that they were deeply entangled with their activities and beliefs.

Third, the Maxim of relation corresponds to relevance (the speaker or the information has to be relevant enough). As far as this Maxim is concerned, all the messages of the authors of SPMs were relevant. Indeed, their messages were not abstract. There were clear relationships between their messages and their interpretations. Furthermore, fourth, the Maxim of Manner deals with clarity (the speaker has to be perspicuous by avoiding obscurity and ambiguity and striving for brevity and order) and methodology. Like the Maxim of quality, this Maxim has not been respected by the authors of SPMs. This is because their messages have not been clear enough. This justifies why they could only be understood from their contextual perspectives, as discussed above. That is, the author's intended meaning of the messages was highly valued in an attempt to picture their visions of life's philosophical, ideological, and attitudinal tendencies. This is because the above analysis has shown that SPMs displayed in front of shops and schools in Cameroon are far from simple advertisement messages. They go beyond advertising to provide more insight into the lives of their authors.

## 4. Methodology

This section considers, in turn, the setting of the study, the method of data collection, and the method of data analysis.

### 4.1. Setting

The investigation was conducted in four Cameroonian cities: Buea, Douala, Yaoundé, and Dschang. Specifically, the messages were gathered from the main streets, private and public areas involving schools, administrative places, markets, and hospitals in the cities. The towns under investigation were chosen for some reasons. They are all cosmopolitan cities made up of a significant number of people from the two main linguistic backgrounds of Cameroon (Anglophones and Francophones). Cities are also the main socio-economic areas of the country, and various SPMs characterize them. It is also important to note that Dschang is among the cities under investigation because it was where the observation and pilot phases of the research took place.

#### 4.2. Method of Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through observation, a digital camera, and semi-structured interviews. Seven hundred (700) messages were gathered from signboards, banners, billboards, posters, and walls in the towns under study. Then, seventy-three (73) face-to-face interviews were conducted with some authors of the messages in an attempt to ascertain the implied meanings of their messages. These authors were interviewed according to the frequencies of their messages. When a particular message appeared several times, it was considered during the interview, and the researcher contacted various authors following appointments. Interestingly, most authors whose messages were selected for interview were accessible. Among one hundred (100) authors sampled, seventy-three (73) were available for the interview (73%), leading to quite representative data. However, among the 700 SPMs collected, 37 were selected for analysis (see Table 3, pages 12-13 below). Some reasons justified the selection of 37 messages. First, the messages were chosen thanks to their salient nature, as each appeared on various signposts more than once. Second, they were selected because of their pragmatic potential. Third, some signposts displayed the same messages, and there was no need to analyze one message more than once. It is important to note that the same reasons for choosing messages worth analyzing were considered at the level of the interviews, given that none were considered during the analysis.

**Table 1. Frequency table for SPMs collected per city**

Various Cities	Number	Percentage
Douala	250	35.71%
Yaounde	250	35.71%
Buea	100	14.28%
Dschang	100	14.28%
Total: 04	700	100%

*Source: Personal compilation from data collected*

From the above table, it is obvious that the same sample size was not applied in all the cities under investigation. This is because Douala and Yaoundé are bigger cities than Buea and Dschang in terms of area and demography.

**Table 2. Frequency table for the informants N=73**

Informants per City	Number	Percentage
Douala	23	31.50%
Yaoundé	21	28.76%
Buea	16	21.91%
Dschang	13	17.80%
Total: 04	73	100%

*Source: Personal compilation from data collected*

#### 4.3. Method of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, depending on the study's dimension. For instance, the quantitative design was used to present the frequency of SPMs investigated, and the qualitative design was used to interpret the meanings of the messages.

### 5. Findings and Discussion

This part of the work presents the findings of the works and discussion. It presents the frequency of SPMs under analysis and points out the pragmatic interpretations of the messages in Cameroon. (According to authors' visions of life, their philosophical or ideological, and attitudinal orientations).

### 5.1. Frequency of SPMs under Analysis

Table 3. Frequency table for signpost messages under interpretation

Signpost Messages	Frequency
"Six Park"	3
"Galaxy Fashion"	4
"Marry and son services (M.A.S.S)-Service Traiteur"	2
"Bamenda Boys"	4
"Class Decor"	3
"Galaxy Computer Workstation"	2
"Novelty Fashion"	4
"Berry Hills Fashion"	3
"New Pressing"	4
"Perfect men"	3
"El-Shadhai-prestige supermarket"	2
"Grace Electronics"	4
"Destiny Home"	4
"Excel and Co stationary LTD"	5
"Canada Shop"	4
"Indian Hair by Line Kimora"	3
"Transforming Malabo Saloon"	3
"Japon Bureautique"	3
"GIGGAZ Trading LTD"	4
"Continental meal"	6
"Divine Comfort Furniture"	5
"Landmark Metropolitan University"	6
"FONKUSOH Travel Agency"	4
"Unik Fashion"	3
"Fullgospel Primary and Nursery School"	4
"Man Power"	3
"Buea Health and Safety"	3
"Gracias Dressing Depot"	4
"Theatre of Dreams"	5
"Fast food"	6
"Chimi Beauty."	4
"My Thom decor"	3
"5 étoiles Pressing"	4
"Pain Killer"	3
"Psaume 91"	3
"Boutique Spirituelle Mère Divine"	4

Source: Personal compilation from data collected

The above table exposes the SPMs under analysis. It considers messages that appear on signs more than once, that is, salient messages. The fact that the messages in this table feature more than once on signposts indicates that they contribute to effective communication. It is, therefore, important to interpret the messages pragmatically.

## 5.2. *Pragmatic Analysis of Signpost Messages in Cameroon, Authors' Visions of Life, their Ideological Orientations and Attitudinal Tendencies*

The focus here is on how the pragmatic characteristics of some SPMs give a picture of authors' visions of life philosophical, ideological, and attitudinal orientations in Cameroon. In this section, the investigator also presents some authors' personal reasons for giving specific names or information about their business places, schools, etc. The approach adopted here is the presentation of an SPM followed by its pragmatic interpretation, as observed subsequently.

### *"Six Park"*

Considering this SPM in front of a Snack Bar Restaurant in Yaoundé, the message's conventional implicature or ordinary meaning is based on its structure, "six park". Here, "six" is a numeral adjective, and "park" refers to a piece of ground in or near a city or town that is enclosed and kept for ornament and recreation. It is also an area zoned for a particular (industrial or commercial) purpose (Lyons 1968). The fusion of these two words denotes pieces of ground, which are six in number. However, according to the author of this message ("six parks"), the referent of the message is someone with a well-developed abdomen (having six parks at the abdomen). The author's idea or belief (ideology) about "Six Park" is that if someone consumes beer or food at his snack bar restaurant, the person will have a well-developed abdomen. That is, having six parks\* means being healthy. Therefore, the author implies by his message that anyone who eats or drinks in this snack bar will be healthy (author's implicature). So, the author perceives life as an entity where health should be valued.

### *"Galaxy Fashion"*

Following Lyon's (1968) Triangle of words and meaning, "Galaxy Fashion", which is perceived in front of a barber saloon in Yaoundé, refers (referent being the object or concept) to a barber saloon'. Conventionally, the word 'galaxy' refers to the Milky Way, the apparent band of centralised stars that appear in the night sky over the earth. Furthermore, 'fashion' refers to a trend favoured for frivolous rather than practical, logical, or intellectual reasons (popular trends). Recently, 'Galaxy' became the name of a telephone mark (Samsung Galaxy), a very shining and powerful smartphone. Literally, the researcher understood the compound noun ("Galaxy Fashion") differently from what the author implied. He understood this message as referring to a saloon where Samsung Galaxy smartphones are advertised alongside shaving. However, the message's author implied that when someone shaves or cuts their hair in his barber salon, the person shines like a Galaxy smartphone (a trendy smartphone on the market). So, the author believes in and promotes good work. Cutting people's hair so the latter looks as clean as a 'galaxy' (the stars). It can also be inferred from the author's implied meaning that he aspires to be clean: he cares about people being clean.

### *"Marry and Son Services (M.A.S.S)-Service Traiteur"*

From the surface, the investigator understood this SPM as a business area belonging to Marry and her son, where they do service traiteur (home delivery) services. Nonetheless, the author of the message, Marry, reported that her message implies more than what the researcher thought. In fact, she pointed out that, in addition to the fact that the business place belongs to her and her son, she wrote this message to refer to an actual reality about her personal life (her philosophy of life). She, therefore, said, "Marry and son services (M.A.S.S)-Service Traiteur" concerns two matters. First, "I trained my only son in service traiteur, and today, we do a joined business". That is, she had just one son in her life whom she values so much, then created her business place, trained her only son, and she does joined a business at this place with her only son. Second, she revealed that she would like her son to continue the business even after her death because the business pays well. From this analysis, one can note that

Marry's philosophy of life is to train her son and situates him before dying so that her only son will not suffer after her death. This can serve as an excellent example to many other parents in Yaoundé and Cameroon at large. That is, they need to learn how to be more responsible for their children from Marry, who perceives life as a place where parents should positively impact their children's lives.

#### *"Bamenda Boys"*

Given that pragmatics considers the notion of the referent (relationship between form and meaning) as important in meaning interpretation, the researcher attempted to refer to the word "Bamenda Boys" as a boy who was born in Bamenda and who lives in Yaoundé, given that the message was found in Yaoundé. However, the word "Bamenda Boys" implies a different thing in the context of its author. For him, "Bamenda Boys" means that if you come to his shop, you will meet an English-speaking barber, and this author believes that English-speaking Cameroonians are gentle people. So, the author's ideology about Cameroonians is clear. He perceives English-speaking Cameroonians as gentle people comparable to other Cameroonians.

#### *"Class Decor"*

On the one hand, the researcher thinks that the word "Class Decor" denotes a decoration shop (a shop specializing in decoration), given that it was written in front of a decoration shop. On the other hand, the message's author implies a different thing in her message. She wrote "Class Decor" on the door post of her shop to imply that her decoration has to do with much beauty, as she justified that the first noun, "class", means something beautiful in her context. So, understanding the word "class" outside the author's context is far from depicting her perception of a business. Then, sharing the author's context leads to the understanding that by "Class Decor", she insinuates a shop where decoration is done beautifully or beautiful items for decoration are found.

#### *"Galaxy Computer Workstation"*

Like in (3) above, the word 'galaxy' refers to the Milky Way, the apparent ban of centralised stars that appear in the night sky over the earth. Recently, 'Galaxy' became the name of a telephone mark (Samsung Galaxy), a very shining and powerful smartphone. When this word collocates with "computer workstation", the researcher interprets the phrase as referring to a place where computer services are offered. The researcher's meaning of this message is not far from the author's intended meaning. The author talks about an open workplace where he offers many services concerning computers (repairing and training). From the author's meaning, it can be inferred that he believes in openness and dynamism. This explains why he is the owner of a multipurpose shop. This is an attitudinal tendency about the author of this SPM in particular and Cameroonians in general. In Cameroon, people offer many services at their workplaces, businesses, and shops. For example, "Snack bar restaurant" (see 22 below under 4.4. Cognitive Sociolinguistic Aspects of Signposts in Cameroon: Signpost Messages as Family of Linguistic Constructions). The owner of this construction reported that his business place offers two services: he sells drinks, accommodates gala, and sells food. This attitudinal tendency is typical of Cameroonians, given that the investigator realized that many business people offer more than one service at their locations in Cameroon. From this analysis, Cameroon can be termed as a country where the citizens are dynamic and open-minded.

#### *"Novelty Fashion"*

"Novelty Fashion" is another SPM in front of a dressing shop in Yaoundé. From its surface interpretation, considering it is situated in front of a dressing shop, it simply means a new or novel fashion. This is exactly the meaning the author intended by his message (... "it means new. We deal with any new style or model.") There is, therefore, a correlation between the literal meaning and the author's contextual meaning of the message. From this message, one can understand that Cameroonians are more interested in new styles and models of dresses. This may be why the author of the message above reported during the interview that he makes many profits out of new styles and models of dresses. So, Cameroonians, especially those living in Yaoundé, have positive attitudes towards new



styles and models of dresses. Then, any investor with this philosophy would make a profit if they decide to do business in this country.

#### *"Berry Hills Fashion"*

As the previous examples show, the researcher's meaning of the SPM "Berry Hills Fashion" differs from that of the author. This is because the researcher's interpretation is literal, and that of the author is contextual. In effect, the researcher understood this message as referring to a shop where they sell fashionable items, that is, items that have to do with the current trends, favoured for frivolous rather than practical, logical, or intellectual reasons (popular trends). However, this message was only understood contextually, thanks to the interview administered to the writer of the message. She, therefore, reported that from her message, her name "Berry" and "hills" refer to 'hill shoes'. She stressed that she specializes in "hill shoes" in her business, as she presented those shoes to the investigator. So, "Berry Hills Fashion" is a form that has as referent-a shop belonging to a lady called Berry who sells only hill shoes, which are in fashion (current trend, favoured for frivolous rather than practical, logical, or intellectual reasons; popular trends). She believes fashion items sell more, as it is a general tendency in Cameroon and beyond today. People believe that fashion items sell more than old fashion items. This philosophy characterizes many business people in the cities under investigation and Cameroon in general, as the latter attract the population, especially the youths, to their various shops with fashionable items. In addition, from the author's intended meaning of the above message, it can be inferred that some business people in Cameroon have attitudinal tendencies to name their business places after them (see, for instance, "Marry and son services (M.A.S.S)-Service Traiteur"). This could be to claim ownership. This attitude may encourage some people to create and own a business, place, school, etc., given that being a proprietor is always a privilege.

#### *"New Pressing"*

Unlike "Novelty Fashion" above, "New Pressing" is an SPM written before a pressing in Yaoundé. It has almost the same meaning as "Novelty Fashion" (a newly created place). As far as "New Pressing" is concerned, it refers to a place where dresses and shoes are being washed) opened for such services as dresses and shoe wash. From the author's context, the message instead has a different meaning. Indeed, the writer revealed that the place had existed since 2005, and by calling it "New Pressing", he implies that the shop had grown bigger. It offers new services involving online payment, payment after service, training and consultancy. From the author's contextual meaning, it can be inferred that the benefits of this business have been ameliorated. The place has been innovated into a more dynamic and open business place, as in the case of "Galaxy Computer Workstation" above. So, this author shares the philosophy of other business people in Cameroon, a country where business is the dominant activity, as demonstrated in the first part of the analysis. This author believes in a dynamic and open business. From this analysis, any investor (either in or out of Cameroon) can do effective business in Cameroon today, given that Cameroonians are already aware of some modern approaches related to business.

#### *"Perfect Men"*

Given the noun "Perfect men", the researcher can literally interpret it from its structure. As a message written on the barber saloon's sign in Yaoundé, it contains the adjective "perfect", which means fitting its definition, without fault or mistake; thoroughly skilled or talented; excellent and delightful in all aspects. Then, the plural noun "men" refers to adult male humans. When the two words are fused, they denote adult male humans who do not have a fault, who are talented or skilled, excellent and delightful in all aspects. Conversely, the author of the message "Perfect Men" implies a different thing in his message. Indeed, the author reported that "perfect men" means to say, "We respect people's time and do what they expect from us to be satisfied and do a quality job." According to the author of the above SPM, the noun refers to time consciousness, satisfaction, and quality when doing his job. It is important to note that from the interview administered to the author of this message, it was noticed that the referent of the message is both the author and his customers. The author said he and his workers are considered perfect men because of the "good" way they do their job, and customers are equally termed as

“perfect men”, given that the message's author and his workers aim to make their customers look perfect. So, this message reveals not only the author's positive attitudinal tendency (time consciousness, satisfaction of customers, and competence) but also his positive representation of his clients, even though this positive representation of the clients aims to persuade them to adhere to his services. This shows the extent to which some business people in Cameroon, especially in Yaoundé, have positive attitudinal tendencies vis-à-vis their various jobs and customers. The former aspires to create an excellent image for their customers (as “perfect men”). This can, therefore, contribute to people's blossoming in Cameroon.

#### *“El-Shadhai-Prestige Supermarket”*

Regarding this message, there is a gap between the researcher's and the writer's intended meaning. The researcher understood this message as referring to a supermarket. However, the writer of this message pointed out during an interview that his message signifies “God is with us- God is great.” He further said he believed his business has been prospering thanks to God; this may be why he acknowledges God through the noun phrase “El-Shadhai”, which refers to God. From this analysis, it can be inferred that some business people in Cameroon, especially in Buea, believe God guides their business. That is, they prosper in their business because God is with them. So, the philosophy of such business people is that if a business person relies on God, the implication will be prosperity. This seems to be a call to other business people to count on God when doing their business, so much so that they will succeed in this activity.

#### *“Grace Electronics”*

This is another SPM where the investigator's meaning differs from that of the writer of the message. Looking at this SPM from the surface, the word “Grace” can lead to the thinking that the message refers to an electronic shop where “grace” (God's power) supports the owner in her business. However, the author implies quite a different thing in this message. When she was interviewed on the message, she said, “My shop is named Grace Electronics because it is named after my daughter, whose name is Grace, so she will be motivated to work hard in life.” This author's interpretation shows she has the same ideology as “Marry And Son Services (M.A.S.S)-Service Traiteur” above. That is, the writer's philosophy is to motivate and encourage her daughter to work hard in life by writing the child's name on the sign of her electronic shop. The common philosophy of “Marry and Son Services (M.A.S.S)-Service Traiteur” and “Grace Electronics” is the involvement of their children in the daily business they do in an attempt to motivate the latter. Given that some parents are concerned about their children's future while exhibiting their daily activities, other parents still neglecting this ideology could copy it in Cameroon and far beyond. Like Marry in the example above, this author perceives life as a place where parents should positively impact their children's lives by including them in their actions. This tendency could alleviate the rate of joblessness that characterizes a country like Cameroon.

#### *“Destiny Home”*

“Destiny Home” has almost the same interpretation as the previous example. However, there is more to the present message regarding meaning comparable to the previous example. From the surface aspect of this SPM placed in front of a cosmetic shop in Buea, one can understand “Destiny Home” as a shop (“home”) where any person is destined; the fate of any person who needs a cosmetic product (s). However, in addition to naming this shop after her daughter, the author stressed that she spent many years in her marriage without conceiving a child, then when “God” “gave” her this daughter (Destiny), who is everything to her as she said, there is nothing she and her husband can do in life without including their only child (“I named this shop after my daughter whom I had through difficulties and when we had this child, we started having breakthroughs”). From this response obtained by interviewing the writer of “Destiny Home”, it was also noticed that the family of the author started witnessing progress or overcoming some obstacles (having “breakthroughs”) only from the birth of this child. From this interpretation, it can be deduced that the author's “Destiny Home” philosophy is that a child's birth can change a family's situation. So, she believes that a child is a blessing.

*“Excel and Co Stationary LTD”*

The pragmatic concept, known as referent (see Lyons 1985), is relevant at this level, where the referent of the writer of the SPM above differs from that of the investigator. The latter referred to “Excel and Co stationary LTD” as a place where either the Excel software is being studied, or services are made using this software. However, the manager of the place where the message was written indicated during the interview that he was not the one who wrote the message but confirmed that he had found out the meaning of this message from his employer (“excel here derives from the word excellent and it is another name of my boss- here we sell office and stationary things of good quality, and we are excellent in any service”. “Excel” in the context of the writer means ‘excellent’. Also, it refers to the name of the owner of this place where office and stationery items are being sold instead of a place where either the Excel software is being studied, or services are made using this software, as the researcher thought literally. From the word “excellent” in the writer's context, two things can be understood. First, he sells stationary items of good quality. Second, he believes in excellent services. So, the socio-philosophical orientation of the writer of the above SPM is the promotion of excellence in terms of the quality of what one should sell and how the selling should be done. Therefore, this could stand as an example to be followed by other business people in Cameroon and beyond to satisfy their clients and make good profit.

*“Canada Shop”*

Ordinarily, one can understand that this message refers to a shop where products or items from Canada are being sold (e.g. there are items such as dresses, bags, and shoes in the shop). However, the author said she wrote the message because she is also based in Canada. The author evoked the following reasons for writing her message: “I wrote the message because I am also based in Canada, and Canada is a prestigious country, and many Cameroonians are interested in foreign products today, and I wanted people to know that my shop is not only based in Buea...Cameroon...many people visit my shop, which is trendy too.”

From this discourse of the writer of “Canada Shop” during the interview, it was inferred (see inference as a pragmatic concept) that her use of the noun “Canada” is for advertisement purposes, given that the author believes that Canada is a prestigious country and some Cameroonians usually have the attitudes of showing more interest in foreign products than the ones produced in Cameroon. So, the ideology of this businesswoman about Cameroonians is that the latter are more interested in foreign products.

This explains why the writer of the message further reported that many people visit her shop daily. It has been noticed that this ideology of Cameroonians’ attachment to foreign products is profound today. Another example justifies this, “U.S Conner-we are specialized in cosmetics”, where the owner of the shop revealed that she is specialized in the US products (“I sell only U.S products”). She said she sells only US products because she realized that her compatriots are more interested in Western products than those made in Cameroon. This may imply that Western products are of good quality and comparable to the ones made in Cameroon. In the second example, the author’s use of the adjectival deixis “only” emphasizes her specialization in US products, which, according to her ideology, is what customers appreciate in most cases. This proves that any investor who may like to sell Western products in Cameroon would make a significant profit, given the interest of some Cameroon citizens in the products.

The examples above also show the dynamism of some signpost messages’ authors. That is, some business people in Cameroon have the attitudinal tendency to take their business to the international level. They do not limit their business only to Cameroon.

Like “Canada Shop” and “U.S Conner-we are specialized in cosmetics”, the following SPMs (16, 17, and 18) are related to foreign countries. The ideologies, attitudes, or reasons for writing these messages vary from author to author, and their messages’ implications differ from the investigator’s significations, as discussed below.

*“Indian Hair by Line Kimora”*

Looking at this message, the investigator thought it simply referred to a shop where Line Kimora is selling Indian wigs, as the surface structure suggested. The author confirmed that she sells (“only”) Indian hair or wigs in her shop but added some significant pieces of information that could only be known through her. According to her, “Line Kimora” from her SPM is the combination of her name (“Line”) and that of her daughter (“Kimora”) (je vends les mèches indiennes et Line est mon nom et Kimora est le nom de ma fille »/I sell Indian wigs and line is my name and Kimora is the name of my daughter).

In addition to selling foreign products (from India), the line reveals her philosophy or vision of life through her SPM. Like “Marry and Son Services (M.A.S.S)-Service Traiteur” and “Grace Electronics” above, line happens to be one of those business people in Cameroon who have the attitude of including their children or thinking about their children when it comes to business. Line reported during the interview that her reason for including her child in the business is because the business pays well, and she wants her child to engage in this business when she grows up so that she will not face the problem of unemployment that characterizes Cameroon. The interviewee's report presupposed that Cameroon is a country characterized by a lack of employment, and she believes that it is important to resolve this problem in her daughter's life through a lucrative business. So, line, as a shop owner in Douala, believes that children should also be oriented toward business to solve the unemployment problem that they may face in future, given that there are limited job opportunities in Cameroon today. This example could be followed by many other Cameroonians, especially business people, to alleviate the problem of unemployment in the country by including various children in business.

*“Transforming Malabo Saloon”*

From this message, the researcher understood that “Transforming Malabo Saloon” referred to a saloon where women are transformed into beautiful people. This researcher's meaning was contradicted by the author's intended meaning of the message. In effect, the writer of the message informed that the message from her sign resulted from a ‘revelation from God’. “The message from my signpost was a revelation from God. Malabo is in my signpost because I worked in Malabo before coming to Buea, Cameroon, and I am rendering the same service that I was rendering there to help the people of my country. Malabo make\* me different from other hairdressers because it shows that I have experience from a foreign country, and I also have many customers every day, more than my colleagues here in Buea”)

From the meaning of the message “El-Shadh-hai-prestige supermarket” above and this report of the writer of “Transforming Malabo Saloon” provided about “Transforming Malabo Saloon” (“the message from my signpost was a revelation from God”), it is understood that some business people in Buea in particular and Cameroon in general believe in spirituality when it comes to exhibiting their various businesses. They believe that God inspires and guides business people like them.

According to their philosophy of life, spirituality/God should not be neglected in business. That is, God can provide success in business. On top of that, the author of the message “Transforming Malabo Saloon” believes in patriotism as she pointed out that she started her hairdressing saloon business in Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea, before coming to Buea, Cameroon, to help her compatriots with her expertise. Hence, it is clear that this author has international business skills.

She believes that her expertise from Malabo makes her different from other hairdressers who have only been working in Buea. She is one of those Cameroonians who believe that good products and expertise can only come from abroad. She sees herself as different from her colleagues simply because she once had a saloon in Malabo. Her belief is shared by some Cameroonians, considering that she testified that she has many customers on a daily basis who are comparable to her colleagues. That is, she is highly solicited in Buea.

*“Japon Bureautique”*

From a literal perspective, this message suggests that the shop is selling products related to Japan. However, the message's author provided a completely different meaning as far as his message is concerned. He said:

« Le Japon ma toujours intéressé-je suis passionné de l'art Japonais, de la qualité des produits Japonais, de la langue Japonaise. J'ai eu le rêve d'aller au Japon, donc j'aime tout ce qui a trait au Japon » / I have always been interested in Japan- I am passionate about Japanese arts, about the quality of Japanese products and language. I had a dream to go to Japan, so I like anything that has to do with Japan.

This author's implied meaning of his SPM reveals his interest or likes, attitude, and goal. The writer of the above message likes Japan and anything that has to do with this country, especially its art, products, and Language; that is, he has been very interested in this country. He has always dreamed of visiting this country. He added that he likes everything that has to do with Japan because Japanese products are of good quality. So, besides the fact that Japan is a perfect country, according to the author of the above message, he believes that foreign products are of good quality compared to those made in Cameroon, like other previous authors. This explains why his goal and dream have always been to visit Japan.

The positive language attitude of the author of « Japon Bureautique » simply confirms the multilingual nature of the Cameroonian LL, an LL where people like languages beyond their official and indigenous languages (e.g. Japanese).

*“GIGGAZ Trading LTD”*

From the surface, the researcher did not understand what the author intended by “GIGGAZ Trading LTD”, apart from thinking that the SPM referred to a business place (“Trading LTD”). Interestingly, the proprietor of this small enterprise (for decoration) was available for an interview. Mr GIGGAZ, as he called himself, said: “GIGGAZ is an American Entrepreneur who inspired me, and I have been following him right from America, where I was based for some time. I did not use his exact name. I did “TIZZA” to suit my context and make a difference”. From this discourse of the author of the SPM above, it is understood that its meaning could never be known without passing through the writer. Indeed, “GIGGAZ”, as the man called himself, did not only write the message to name his business place but to disclose his reasons and motivation for writing the message. For the author, the referent of “GIGGAZ” is an American entrepreneur who inspired him, and he has been following this entrepreneur right from America, where he lived for some time. However, he modified this name to suit his context and make a difference. It is understood that some business people in Cameroon do not just write messages on their signposts to advertise their products or to name their various business places. Still, they also write to reveal why they do a particular business and how they got motivated about it. This attitude could push many Cameroonians to become entrepreneurs by copying good examples from existing business agents in Cameroon or abroad.

*“Continental Meal”*

This SPM suggests consuming a meal on the whole continent. Given that the message is found in Buea, it refers from its surface structure to a meal eaten on the whole African continent. However, the message's author implies that African dishes are being sold in her restaurant and not only Cameroonian dishes (“it means African foods are sold here and not only Cameroonian foods”). From this interpretation, it is clear that the investigator's message's meaning differs from what the author implies. Hence, the implied meaning of the message reveals that the author's ideology is to promote African cultural diversity through gastronomy, given that she thinks about the entire African continent in her restaurant and not only Cameroon. Other restaurant owners could copy this ideology in Buea, Cameroon, and beyond to develop Africa from a cultural perspective.



*"Divine Comfort Furniture"*

Looking at the surface structure of the message above, the researcher understood that it referred to a furniture shop. On the other hand, the writer of the message during the interview suggested a quite different meaning. Indeed, he said: "First of all, my name is Divine, which is a Christian name meaning power, and I am producing comfortable furniture. At the beginning, my signboard did not have the word "comfortable", but people testified that my furniture is comfortable before I added the word "comfortable".

From the author's interpretation, it is understood that he values his name by including it in his SPM. Relating his name to Christianity by indicating that it is a Christian name and means "power" indicates that his name impacts his work/profession (this may be why he has a good result). In addition, the author's interpretation of the message shows an amicable collaboration between him and his customers, as the latter testified that his furniture is comfortable. This also indicates that he works well and believes in the satisfaction of his clients. The fact that the author considers the clients' comments and reshapes his SPM above shows that he believes in good collaboration between the business person and their clients, which can only be possible through quality service. So. Other business agents could copy this example in Buea, Cameroon and beyond.

*"Landmark Metropolitan University"*

Morphologically, this SPM refers to a higher education institution (University). Although the author of the message shares an aspect of meaning with the researcher, there is more to the fact that the message refers to a higher education institution (University). The Registrar of this University reported that:

"It is a Christian-based University, though not habilitated to any church. It is grounded on the belief that God is the vision bearer. God directs, and then the proprietor implements. Landmark has a unique set-up in terms of the courses it offers. It is called a Metropolitan University because it covers an international scope. It is based in Cameroon and Canada and will embrace other countries as time passes."

According to the report above from the interviewee, "Landmark Metropolitan University" is not just a higher education institution or private University like the others in Cameroon but is a Christian-based University. Hence, the author's vision of life is in line with the fact that God is the vision bearer; God directs. He follows this belief in his school, just like other previous writers of SPMs, who are business people who believe that God/spirituality should not be neglected when it comes to business because the latter can guide every business agent towards success.

The registrar also indicated that Landmark has a unique set-up; that is, it is a special institution in terms of courses offered. It is a metropolitan University because it covers an international scope (it is based in Cameroon, Canada, and will also exist in other countries as time evolves). This information could only come from the author or an internal person in the school, like the registrar. Nobody could have imagined the meaning of the SPM above without the registrar. The information, according to which this university has a special set-up and covers an international scope, indicates that the author is dynamic and thinks openly.

The proprietor's philosophy is glaring, as he believes in the internationalization of education (especially professional education), which may be why his institution is top-rated and promising. So, school proprietors who internationalize their educational philosophy tend to succeed more as far as education business is concerned (other examples include and are not limited to: RAINBOW College, Dschang; GUMIS Fantastic International, Dschang; and Fombah Glorious, Dschang, which have international partners as the proprietors indicated). It is worth pointing out that RAINBOW College, GUMIS Fantastic International, and Fombah Glorious are the most prestigious and popular schools in Dschang.

### *"FONKUSOH Travel Agency"*

The surface structure of the SPM above suggests a travel agency. The author's implied meaning confirms that it is a travel agency, but other pieces of information accompany this referent, as the manager said:

"FONKUSOH is an abbreviation\* where FON means Foncham KU, the proprietor means Kupond (the wife to the proprietor), and SOH means the name of a stakeholder. First, Forest, Home means going back to our roots, trying to depict African culture and the environment through a variety of foodstuff." Looking at the author's interpretation above delivered by the agency's manager during the interview, the message constitutes a string of the people concerned by the business. They include Foncham, the proprietor of the agency; Kupond, his wife; and Soh, the name of the business stakeholder. The proprietor's attitude of including these people in the business could be an indication of humility and acknowledgement. That is, he acknowledges his wife and the stakeholders in his business. This is to insinuate that he does not do the business alone and that some collaborators surround him. So, according to the author's philosophy, it is important to acknowledge the people who support you in your business. This could motivate them to reinforce their collaboration with you and thus pave the way to growth.

### *"Unik Fashion"*

Looking at this message in front of a shop that sells dresses in Buea, the researcher did not understand the specificity apart from simply considering the message as referring to a place where dresses are being sold. After interviewing the shop owner, her message's intended meaning was known. The form "unik" refers to the adjective "unique", as the author indicated. By this adjective, the shop's owner meant her shop is "outstanding". For her, the form "unik" corresponds to the adjective "outstanding" because she sells models of dresses that cannot easily be found in other shops. So, the author's reason for writing "unik" is to indicate that she sells models of rare dresses. She also pointed out that her spelling of "unique" was intentional, and this spelling of unique ("unik") that cannot easily be found elsewhere justifies the uniqueness of her shop. From this analysis, it can be inferred that the author of the SPM above believes that a message is written in front of a shop to inform the public about a business and can also characterize a business place.

### *"Fullgospel Primary and Nursery School"*

Morphologically, the SPM "Fullgospel Primary and Nursery School" refers to a Christian basic education school ("full gospel") training kids. The author said she had an idea of creating a school but did not think about linking it to Christianity. However, given that she is a member of the whole gospel church, she decided to collaborate with her pastor to put this "Full gospel Primary and Nursery School" so that other church members could send their children there. She said she wanted a school where children would be educated alongside evangelism. She added that in Government schools in Cameroon, children are not introduced to Christian life, which has been contributing severely to moral decadence. According to her, educating children alongside evangelism prepares them for good morals in their future jobs (e.g. avoidance of 'corruption', 'sexual harassment', 'violence', etc.). From the author's intended meaning of the message above, it is clear that she believes in an educational system where evangelism (morality) should not be neglected, given that it can help the children in the performance of their duties in future, void of bad practices such as 'corruption', 'sexual harassment', 'violence' etc. as earlier mentioned. The author of the SPM above believes that moral education is emphasized in Christian schools more than in government schools in Cameroon. However, moral education exists in the general curriculum of primary education. So, the author wrote the message above for advertisement purposes and to promote Christian teaching; that is, she is interested in Christian education.

### *"Man Power"*

Looking at the SPM above in front of a garage in Buea, the context of the garage helped the researcher understand that it was the name of that garage. However, after interviewing the garage proprietor, the investigator got an important meaning of the message. Besides being the referent of a garage, "Man Power" is the Nickname of

the proprietor of the garage, and it denotes the hardworking nature of this man ("Man Power is my name which means hardworking man and only hard work pays"). So, from this discourse of the interviewee, it is crystal clear that his philosophy is the promotion of hard work, which, according to him, pays. This may invite other compatriots to work hard in their lives.

#### *"Buea Health and Safety"*

"Buea Health and Safety" literally refers to a health centre. However, the manager of this health centre revealed that in addition to the fact that the SPM of her hospital denotes a health centre, this centre also trains health personnel, given that "health is life". So, the above investigator's interpretation is limited as far as the meaning of "Buea Health and Safety" is concerned because it is the author's interpretation that points out the philosophy of this health centre. The philosophy of this health centre is dynamism in health-related matters (treating patients and training health personnel- "we treat people and also teach people how to cure"); that is, the health centre believes that "health is life".

#### *"Gracias Dressing Depot"*

According to the investigator, "Gracia's Dressing Depot" refers to a dressing shop. However, the author of this message implied more than this researcher's meaning as he indicated that by the message above, he implied appreciation and acknowledgement. That is, the message means that he is thankful to his customers ("...it means we are thankful to any customer who buys\*.") The fact that this businessman thanks his clients through the Spanish word "gracias" discloses an attitude of appreciation and acknowledgement towards his customers. He pointed out during the interview that he thinks of his clients whenever they buy from him because, without them, he is nothing. Declaring that without his customers, he is nothing is a humble attitude that the author of SPM above manifests towards his clients and beyond. This may be a successful business approach, as this businessman believes that thanking his customers would encourage them to come next time. He even reported that his customers have been regular in his shop thanks to the good relationship he has been maintaining with them. This could be a model to be copied by other business people who neglect the attitude of appreciation and acknowledgement vis-à-vis their customers, which could be a catalyst to progress in business.

#### *"Theatre of Dreams"*

Considering the literal meaning, the investigator understood the SPM as referring to a place of theatre performance. However, he visited the place and interviewed the owner, and she said: "Before opening my shop, I never knew how to name it because I was interested in selling many things and never wanted to reduce the place to one thing like phone-it means that you can find items of your dream in my shop." From this interviewee's report, "Theatre of Dreams" instead refers to a shop where telephones are being sold, other electronic items, and household accessories, instead of a place of theatre performance, as the surface structure of the message suggested. The author wrote vague information about her shop because, at the initial level of her business, she never knew how to name her shop, given that she was interested in selling many items and not only telephones with which she started the company. According to her, the place is called "Theatre of Dreams" because every client can find their dream items there. Hence, the author believes that the names of her shops capture her business orientation, which is a business where she sells more than one kind of product. So, she believes in an open business, a business that is not limited to one product. This philosophy is typical of Cameroonians today (e.g. Snark Bar Restaurant, General Commerce, Excel and Co stationary LTD, etc.). This may denote that Cameroonians have realized that dynamic business areas provide more profit, which may be why they are becoming more interested in such businesses.

#### *"Fast Food"*

According to the researcher, the SPM "Fast food" concerns a restaurant where the service is fast. However, the writer of this message provided a different meaning to her message during the interview. She said: "Fast food veut dire nourriture à chaud. Si tu veux un repas à chaud, on peut te faire un repas à chaud- et j'ai choisi l'anglais parce

que c'est une langue internationale."/ Fast food means I sell hot food. If you want a hot food, it can be prepared for you. I chose English because it is an international language, said a French-speaking restaurant owner in Dschang.

Considering the author's interpretation above, it is clear that she considers the public's or clients' interest by allowing the latter to choose services in her restaurant. That is, she believes in people's interests regarding her restaurant business. Besides, as a French-speaking Cameroonian, she chose to write her message in English because she is aware that English is an international language and thus can be understood by a good number of people who come to her restaurant daily. So, this author's philosophy is to consider the interest of her customers and to use a language (English) that is more popular than her first official Language (French) to reach a mass population. Given that this ideology may be promising, other business people who do not believe in it could do so to facilitate their services in Cameroon and far beyond.

#### *"Chimi Beauty."*

The investigator referred to this message as a beauty salon, given that it is written in front of a beauty salon in Dschang. That is a place where women/girls do their hair. Nonetheless, in a sequel to the interview conducted with the proprietor of this place, the message has more meaning comparable to the investigator's interpretation, and the intended meaning of the message is far beyond just a beauty salon. Indeed, the author of this message recounted that:

«Chimi est le nom de mon épouse, qui est très belle. Donc le service dans mon salon se fait à l'image de ma femme et ça signifie aussi l'amour »/ Chimi is my wife's name, who is very beautiful. So, the service in my saloon is done in relation to the image of my wife and this means love. From the information provided by the author of the SPM above, it is evident that the message reveals his attitude of love and appreciation towards his wife. He confirms his wife's beauty through the name of his business place, as he does the business in the image of his wife, "Chimi". It can, therefore, be inferred from this attitude of the writer of the message that he believes in the valorization of his wife, as he expresses the attributes of his wife and the love he has for the latter through the name of his business place. This attitude and philosophy of the proprietor of "Chimi Beauty" could appeal to other men to valorize their wives more by showing them some love beyond the marital home. This could also contribute to the implications of a spouse's involvement in business.

#### *"My Thom decor"*

Considering that "My Thom decor" was written before a decoration shop in Douala, the researcher's referent was a decoration shop. This referent was noticed through "décor" (clipping of the word decoration). According to the author of the message, in addition to referring to a decoration shop, as the researcher rightly noticed, "My Thom decor" was written to claim ownership over the shop, that is, a decoration shop belonging to Thom, as the interview showed ("my message means that I do the decoration).

My message also intends to claim ownership- the decoration store is for me Thom-I prefer to work for myself because I do not like the command"). The author's interpretation of the message equally revealed his preference for life. He prefers to work as his patron instead of working under somebody else. Besides, the interpretation above points out the author's dislike; that is, he dislikes being commanded. The meaning of the message above could only be partially known if the author's interpretation was not considered.

From the author's interpretation, it is obvious that some business people in Douala, in particular, and Cameroon, prefer to work for themselves because they may want to be free from commands. This is justified by the fact that most business people in Cameroon are their proper patrons (e.g. Mary and Son Service Traiteur", "Grace Electronics, "Destiny Home", "Divine Comfortable Furniture" etc.). So, this philosophy of independence in business is predominant in the country.

### *"5 étoiles Pressing"*

"5 étoiles pressing" literally denotes where dresses and other items are washed. Nevertheless, the writer's implied meaning is that it does not only refer to a simple pressing but to a luxurious pressing, as the noun phrase "5 étoiles" suggests ("ca veut dire pressing du luxe-quand vous faites laver vos vêtements ici, vous ressemblez aux personnes de luxe"). So, this is another case where the name of a shop characterizes it instead of merely naming it. Hence, it is evident that some shop owners in Cameroon have the attitudinal tendency to advertise their business through names that characterize it, that is, the way they do it. This could be a strong advertisement strategy. In addition, using this name for the pressing has to do with a quality service, given that the author claimed that when people wash their dresses in the pressing, they look luxurious.

### *"Pain Killer"*

Looking at the message "Pain Killer" on the signpost of a popcorn seller in Douala, it was difficult to know the referent, given that there is no relationship between the word "Pain Killer" and popcorn. This is because "painkiller" is generally known as a drug that numbs the body's pain. As a morphological neologism, written separately (pain + killer) by the popcorn businessman in his context, it implies a different meaning. Indeed, this man wrote this message to insinuate that his popcorn satiates any person who purchases and consumes it. He added that "Pain Killer" is his Nickname ("pour dire que mon popcorn rassasie. Pain killer c'est mon surnom"/to mean that my popcorn satiates. Pain Killer is my Nickname). From this author's interpretation of the SPM, it can be inferred that he believes in his customers' satisfaction. His ideology is to satisfy his customers by providing them with food that satiates them. This indicates that this author is conscious of his client's expectations (satisfaction). So, this attitude of consciousness could be copied by other business people in Cameroon and far beyond, that is, having the buyer in mind while producing.

### *"Psaume 91"*

As previous SPMs related to Christianity, « Psaume 91 »/ Psalm 91 was seen before a garage in Douala, Cameroon. Though the investigator perceived this message as a biblical allusion, it was impossible to know why the garage owner wrote it on his signpost. Therefore, in an attempt to know the intended meaning of the message and the reason for reporting it, interviewing the writer of the message was necessary, as he said:

«Ça veut dire que celui qui demeure sous l'abri du très haut repose a l'ombre du tout puissant. Moi qui crois en Dieu suis protégé. J'ai écrit ce Psaume parce que j'ai trop souffert, car les hommes d'impôts m'ont trop menacé dans ma boutique et j'ai tout donné à Dieu. » / This means that he covers anyone who lives under the Almighty. I who believe in God is protected. I wrote this Psalm in my shop because I have suffered a lot, for the men of taxes disturbed me a lot in my store and I channelled everything to God.

From this author's interpretation, it is clearly understood that he wrote the message "Psaume 91" in front of his garage because he had suffered a lot since the men of taxes had been disturbing him in his shop. In this case, he decided to live in God and channelled everything to the latter. This is because he believed he would be protected and consoled by God. So, this Mechanic believes that protection and consolation are embedded in God, and anyone who may feel like him in business-related difficulties or any other difficulties will be protected and consoled. It is worth nothing that this ideology of believing in God's assistance when it comes to business is not only incarnated by the author of "Psaume 91" but by many other business people in Cameroon, as discussed above.

### *"Boutique Spirituelle Mère Divine"*

From the message above, the words "spirituelle"/spiritual and "divine"/divine served as the context to know that the message is related to God. In effect, the writer of this message revealed that she wrote the message because she sells only spiritual products ("I wrote this message because I sell spiritual products like the bible, rosaries, olive oil and many others"). Hence, it is evident that some business people in Douala, in particular, and Cameroon, in



general, are specialized in selling spiritual products such as the bible, rosaries, olive oil, etc., as the deixis “only” (pragmatic concept) denotes. As an English-speaking Cameroonian from Ndop, Bamenda, the author said she wrote her message in French because Douala is a French-speaking town. So, this author believes in cultural integration, as she accepts the culture (Language) of her host community or town (Douala) by exhibiting a positive language attitude in a multilingual country like Cameroon. This is in line with the saying, “When you go to Rome, behave like the Romans”. This is undoubtedly the right approach to enhancing living together and sustaining a living. So, this businesswoman's attitudinal tendency and ideology are necessary for Cameroon, a country characterized by a unique cultural diversity (e.g. approximate 283 indigenous languages, different dishes and beliefs, etc. see Ngefacs 2016, p. 1) where living together has become a serious challenge to people. In addition, from this message, it is understood that Cameroon is a country where Christianity is seriously valued. Some can easily earn a decent living through the selling of church accessories. This could be justified because some Cameroonians believe God is real and can protect them.

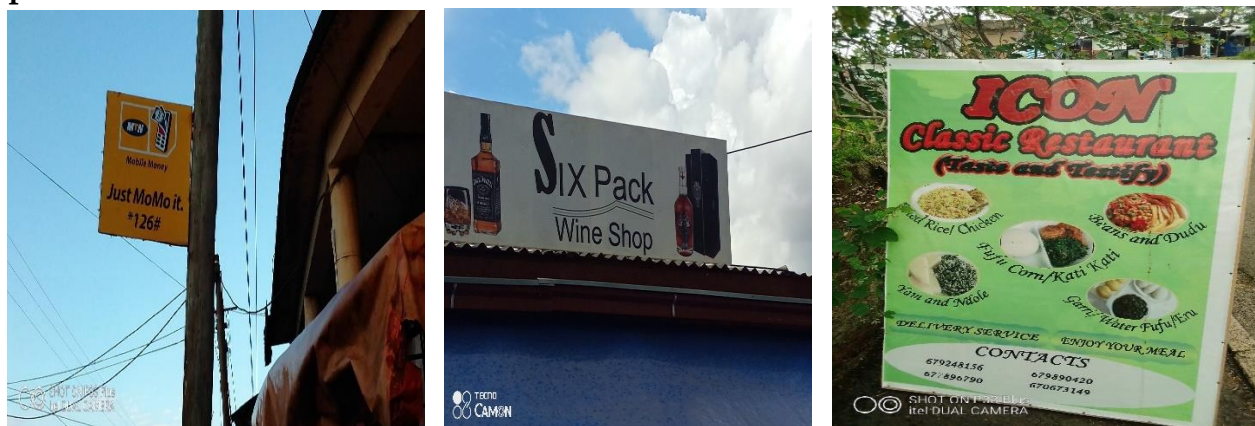
## 6. Conclusion

From the pragmatic analysis above, the investigator, therefore, argued that most SPMs displayed in the LL of Cameroon have dynamic meanings, as the ordinary meaning (which represents just the tip of the iceberg of a message) is different from the author's implied meaning (which is complex and contextual in most cases). The gap between these two aspects of meaning reveals significant sociolinguistic information about the authors, Cameroonians, Cameroon, and beyond. Through the authors' meanings, their visions of life's philosophical, ideological, and attitudinal orientations are revealed.

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## Appendix



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