

Linguistic Taboos: A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Selected Menstrual Euphemisms Employed by Girls/Women in Public Conversations in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts a sociopragmatic analysis of selected menstrual euphemisms that girls/women in Cameroon employ when making reference to menstruation in public conversations. In the paper, we argue that, within national and international legal frameworks, the linguistic taboos imposed on public menstrual discourse by some cultures in the Cameroonian society constitute a serious threat to the freedom of expression as a fundamental human right. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to 127 female students at the University of Buea and Biaka University Institute of Buea. Data collected were analysed thematically, and the study was guided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. Findings from our analysis of data collected reveal that the euphemistic expressions employed by girls/women in public conversations on menstruation evoke different themes that carry both positive and negative connotations. However, a large majority of the euphemistic expressions identified in this study carry positive connotations. This implies that girls/women who employ such usages in menstrual discourse have a positive perception of and attitude toward menstruation, unlike others who see it as a nuisance, as seen in menstrual euphemisms that carry negative connotations. In the light of these findings, we recommend that children (both males and females) be properly educated on menstruation in their pre-puberty years in order to help eliminate erroneous beliefs and myths about menstruation. Such education can contribute to eradicating unfair linguistic taboos imposed on public menstrual discourse.

1. Introduction

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in the wake of the holocaust in 1948 states that: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.' Similarly, article 9 section 2 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights states that: 'Every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate his[her] opinions within the law.' Sadly, however, several decades after these laws were ratified, it is strange and disturbing to observe that girls/women in many parts of the world are still not allowed to freely express themselves in public on a natural and important topic like menstruation that affects their womanhood without resorting to a coded language. This seems to constitute another form of subjugation (based on linguistic injustice) that adds to the already-existing long list of discriminations that girls/women are experiencing in present-day society. As a matter of fact, menstruation is a natural biological process that a woman's body undergoes every month to prepare for possible pregnancy, but to speak about it directly and openly is considered taboo in many cultures. In some cultures, and societies around the world, people tend to have a negative perception of and attitude toward menstrual fluid. This negative perception and attitude have further led to unjust restrictions imposed on menstruating girls/women, including seclusion in some cases.

In Cameroon, the taboos and restrictions imposed on menstruating girls/women seemingly result from the widespread societal misconception that menstruation is a filthy and undesirable discharge from the female body. Sadly, this misconstrued societal belief has compelled most girls/women to avoid talking about menstruation in plain terms during public conversations with their male and female peers. The restriction on public menstrual discourse has further limited the openness of girls/women, particularly teenage girls, to disclose common but important issues related to their reproductive health for which they may be in dire need of assistance, be it from an elderly person or female or male sex who can be of help to them, or from a health expert. Consequently, a large majority of girls/women in Cameroon are forced to make recourse to euphemisms in lieu of a popular and widely understood word like *menses* when referring to menstruation in public conversations. In addition, what seems to be more intriguing is the semantic contents of the different types of euphemisms that these girls/women use when making reference to menstruation in their public discourses, as well as the various reasons for which they use such euphemisms. From the foregoing, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- a. To identify and do a thematic classification of the different euphemistic expressions that girls/women use when making reference to menstruation in public conversations;
- b. To ascertain the reasons for girls'/women's use of euphemisms to refer to menstruation in public conversations.

2. The taboos, misconceptions and stigmas surrounding menstruation in Cameroon

Bussmann (2006, p. 1173) defines a taboo as 'a term that is avoided for religious, political, or sexual reasons and is usually replaced by a euphemism.' Malmkjær (2002) contends that taboos are one of the social phenomena that trigger language change. As Bussmann (2006) notes, to avoid tabooed words and expressions in social interactions, speakers often employ euphemisms. According to Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 1), a taboo is a 'proscription of behavior that affects everyday life.' These scholars further argue that taboos are generally triggered by social constrictions on certain behaviours that may cause discomfort, harm, or hurt the speaker or listener. It is also worth pointing out that taboos vary from one culture to another. What is considered a taboo in one culture may not necessarily be the case in another. Therefore, what is considered taboo and how each taboo is treated greatly depends on each society's cultural norms and beliefs. The cultural norms determine what is acceptable and what must be avoided in a given society (Strazny, 2005, p. 1073). In addition, every culture has both linguistic and cultural taboos. Nevertheless, linguistic taboos on speaking about certain behaviours or natural processes such as menstruation are no taboos, scientifically speaking.

As observed earlier, menstruation in Cameroonian society is surrounded by taboos and stigmas, and shrouded in several myths. In fact, menstruation is considered in some cultures in Cameroon as an impurity, with menstrual blood viewed as toxic and polluted. As a result, girls and women who live in such communities are often unfairly subjected to various restrictions whenever they are menstruating. Furthermore, in some Cameroonian cultures, menstruating girls/women are prohibited from performing certain domestic chores as well as obligations, and they are not allowed to participate in some every-day, community, cultural and religious activities. During the pilot study for this research, for instance, one of our interviewees who has experienced such restrictions in both the Christian and Islamic worlds, and whose name we have withheld for ethical reasons, narrated her story as follows:

Personally, I grew up in a Christian family and I was taught that when menstruating, I should not go to church because at that time, the woman is [considered] "impure." But once I started shaping my own world and beliefs, I stopped observing this because I told myself that God cannot create me and put in me an impurity that prevents me from worshipping Him anytime and anywhere as written in the Scriptures. Again, embracing the Islamic faith, I came across the same restriction. Menstruating women do not pray until their period passes.

As seen in the above excerpt, the taboos and stigmas surrounding menstruation in Cameroon are practised among Christians and Muslims. However, what should in Cameroon be noted is that the restrictions and stigmas meted on menstruating girls and women do not take place in all Christian homes. There are homes where menstruating girls and women are not restricted from performing certain activities or stigmatised. One other female interviewee, a Muslim, confirmed that in Islam, menstruating girls and women are prohibited from entering the Mosque, praying, fasting and even touching the Holy Quran because it is believed that at this time, they are impure and unholy. Also, one of the co-founders of *KmerPad*, a Cameroonian company that manufactures sanitary pads, revealed that: 'In Cameroon, still today, a young girl may be told not to cook when she [is in] her period because the dishes would be ruined.' This implies that some young girls in Cameroon are deprived of critical domestic activities such as cooking simply because they are going through a natural process, they have no control over.

In other cases, some parents oblige their menstruating teenage girls not to go anywhere closer to, interact with or allow themselves to be touched by boys or men under the pretext that, if they do so, they will instantly get pregnant. What happens is that parents use such unscientific and erroneous arguments as a weapon to instill fear in their menstruating teenage girls,

thereby causing them to stay away from boys or men, even if these girls are in dire need of assistance from the boys and men. In some of the cultures in the North West Region of Cameroon, a menstruating girl/woman is not allowed to visit, see, or cook for the *Fon*², or carryout any palace activity because it is believed that a woman's menstrual blood could either weaken or destroy the mystical powers of the *Fon*. In these communities, when a menstruating girl/woman mistakenly comes across a *Fon*, she either obligatorily turns her face to a different direction or bow and cover her face with her hands. These restrictions and myths further lead to the silencing and isolation of girls and women at a time when menstrual education and hygiene are emerging as central issues for upholding gender equality, human rights and development. According to Kamowa (2018), the taboos, humiliation, and myths around menstruation contribute to its stigma. She further argues that: 'Stigma around menstruation is a violation of human rights including rights to non-discrimination, equality, health and privacy.'

It is worth noting that these misconstrued beliefs about menstruation, coupled with the restrictions on menstruating girls and women, constitute a serious obstacle to the fight against gender inequality and human rights violation in the Cameroonian society. Many parents are either incompetent or unwilling to properly educate their female children on menstruation. Nevertheless, in Cameroon, to violate any of the taboos does not potentially make the girl/woman concerned to suffer corporal punishment, incarceration, ostracism, illness or death. The major negative effect on girls and women is twofold; first, they violate their rights to express themselves freely in public and, second, the restrictions imposed on them lead to isolation and silence, which could further result in psychological trauma.

It is also worthy to point out that, with the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs), there is increased access to information, and some educated and influential Cameroonian women, especially those who have had the opportunity to live and study in Western countries are educating and empowering young girls and women in Cameroon to defeat the taboos and stigmas around menstruation. Within the last decade, too, there has been an exponential increase in the number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) created by women to educate young girls on menstrual hygiene and provide them assistance in that direction.

3. Current debate and empirical studies on euphemism

The term 'euphemism,' following Holder (2008, p. 65), is derived from the Greek word 'euphemo,' which means 'speaking well.' It is further divided into two morphemes; 'eu' meaning 'good' or 'well' and 'phemo,' meaning 'speech' or 'speaking.' Fromkin and Rodman (1993) define euphemism as a 'word or phrase that replaces a taboo word or serves to avoid frightening or unpleasant subjects.' Cruse (2006, p. 57) considers euphemism as 'an expression that refers to something that people hesitate to mention lest it cause[s] offence, but which lessens the offensiveness by referring indirectly in some way.' Similarly, Bussmann (2006, p. 388) defines euphemism as 'a pleasant replacement for an objectionable word that has pejorative connotations.' Samoskaite (2011) and Nyakoe, Matu and Ongarora (2012) argue that euphemisms are used to veil objects, situations and people by presenting them more acceptably or politely. This suggests that euphemism is a linguistic mask that is used to conceal real information about objects, situations and people. According to Leech (1974), euphemism is 'the linguistic equivalent of disinfectant.' This implies that euphemism plays a purification role in language use. Allan and Burridge (1991, p. 11) contend that: 'Euphemisms are alternatives to dispreferred expressions, and are used in order to avoid possible loss of face. The 'dispreferred' expression may be taboo, fearsome, distasteful, or for some other reasons have too many negative connotations to execute speaker's communicative intention on a given occasion felicitously.'

On their part, Al-hamad and Asma (2013) posit that euphemism is one of the different strategies that speakers employ to achieve politeness in social interactions. Chi and Hao (2013) corroborate this view by affirming that without euphemisms, 'any language would seem to be vulgar and rude and void of politeness to some degree.' Also, Rawson (1981) and Linfoot-Ham (2005) maintain that euphemisms are powerful linguistic tools that are so deeply-rooted in our language to the extent that some people, including plain speakers, hardly ever get through a day without employing them in their speech. Therefore, the importance of euphemisms in social interactions cannot be overemphasised. This perhaps explains why researchers have increasingly developed an interest in the subject. Fernández (2008), for instance, examined the euphemistic and dysphemistic figurative language used to designate sex-related taboos from the Conceptual Metaphor Theory framework. The study aimed to analyse the function of conceptual metaphors in euphemistic and dysphemistic use, focusing on how a given experimental domain is more likely to trigger verbal mitigation or offence. Findings reveal that metaphorical terms and phrases that refer to sex-related taboos can be comprehensively described using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) cognitive view of metaphor.

Furthermore, proceeding from a sociolinguistic standpoint, Chi and Hao (2013) studied the basic functions of and the reasons for the use of euphemisms. They argue that, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, euphemisms can better be explained by ascertaining the cultural and contextual factors that influence them. These researchers conclude that, like language, euphemism is influenced by culture, and it is also a vehicle of culture. Also, Epoge (2013) investigated euphemism in Cameroon English. He argues that the

² A *Fon*, according to Ngwa (2017), is '...a paramount chief under whom are sub-chiefs that administer different ethnic groups of diverse people within the Fandom.'

use of euphemism in Cameroon English is both sweet-talking and deceptive. As sweet-talking, he posits that euphemistic terms, in Cameroon English, are palliative because they soften unpleasant elements of reality and are used to maintain one's face by not being rude and offensive to others. As deception, he contends that euphemism, in Cameroon English, is a conscious dishonest roundabout way of using words, phrases, or expressions to present bad things nicely or acceptably. He concludes that the flattery effect of euphemism is temporal because the reality of the thing remains in the addressor's and the addressee's mind.

In addition, Aboh (2015) examined the use of euphemism as one of the politeness strategies that speakers deploy to lessen the effect of an offensive expression in four Nigerian movies. Findings show that euphemism is a strong discourse strategy that is not only deployed to tone down the effect of an expression on the hearer, but is also a linguistic modality that discourse participants activate for politeness reasons. In terms of syntax, euphemisms found in sampled texts occurred at the sentential level. He concludes that preserving the hearer's self-image is equally preserving his/her identity, and disregarding the self-worth of the hearer is disregarding his/her identity. On his part, Sa'd (2017) conducted an ethnographic study on the discourse strategies that Arab interlocutors employ to euphemise tabooed subjects raised in conversations. Findings indicate that issues such as sex, death, health, politics, religion, talents, possessions, abilities and family relations are considered taboos in Arab communities. Findings further reveal that interlocutors make recourse to strategies like euphemistic terms and expressions, silence, change of tone, prosody and eye contact, and criticism to deal with taboos. The researcher concludes that taboo, euphemism and (im)politeness are highly intertwined and significantly influenced by factors like age, gender, social distance, etc.

More recently, Kusumah (2019) studied the use of sexual euphemisms in pop and hip-hop lyric songs to avoid taboo words that are restricted in public discourse. Sourcing data from 40 songs – 20 pop songs and 20 hip-hop songs – shows that sexual euphemisms in sexual activity appear more frequently in pop songs, while sexual euphemisms in sexual body parts appear more frequently hip-hop songs. Findings further reveal that both pop and hip-hop songs use representative speech more frequently than directive speech acts. Kusumah (2019) concludes that euphemisms were used in the songs to avoid words that are considered taboo in some communities. As we pointed out earlier, the study of euphemism has attracted many scholars' attention for several years now and counting. The empirical studies reviewed above are just a few samples that we have randomly selected from a myriad of existing studies in order to illustrate the ongoing scholarly debate on the topic. In the next section, we discuss how this study was conducted.

4. Methodology

Data for this study were collected following a systematic approach and in two different phases. To begin with, a pilot study was conducted with a total of 20 women randomly selected from different tertiary academic institutions in Cameroon and asked to list the different euphemistic expressions they often use when making reference to menstruation in public conversations and provide reasons for their linguistic choices. After collating data from the pilot study, we used them to design a two-item questionnaire that we later administered to 127 randomly selected female students at the University of Buea (UB) and Biaka University Institute Buea (BUIB), for the second phase of data collection. The first item on the questionnaire had a table with a list of euphemistic expressions from which we asked our respondents to select (by ticking) that which/those that they often use when making reference to menstruation in public conversations. We also gave our respondents the liberty to add more euphemistic expressions to those on the list provided in the questionnaire. This initiative paved the way for more and richer data. On its part, the second item on the questionnaire required respondents to choose from a list of four reasons in order to justify their usage of euphemisms in public menstrual discourses. Again, we provided space for respondents to give additional reasons (if any) that were not listed in the second item of the questionnaire. The data collected were analysed thematically and descriptively.

Additionally, Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory was employed as a theoretical framework to guide this study. According to this theory, interlocutors use particular strategies to create a comfortable environment for communication and achieve the goal of such communication. The Politeness Theory is essentially based on the notion of 'face,' the public self-image that speakers strive to protect in a communicative situation. The notion of face further involves two contrasting needs of a human: the desire to be approved of and appreciated by the other (positive face), and the desire to have independent views and freedom of thought (negative face). In sum, the Politeness Theory centres on the notion of politeness in conversation and how speakers strive to protect their public self-image and social reputation. Therefore, the major goal of the Politeness Theory is to find out why people do not often use simple and direct language in a conversation, but rather complex and sometimes indirect phrases, as is the case in the context of this study. In the section that follows, we present and analyse the findings of this study as per the objectives stated in the introduction above.

5. Findings

As indicated earlier, the first objective of this study was to identify and thematically classify the different euphemistic expressions that girls/women use when making reference to menstruation in public conversations. The second objective of this study was to ascertain respondents' reasons for using euphemistic expressions when making reference to menstruation in public conversations. In the sub-sections that ensue, we present and analyse our findings as per the aforementioned objectives.

5.1 Thematic classification of identified euphemisms

As explained in the methodology above, the first item on the questionnaire aimed at exploring the different euphemistic expressions that girls/women use when making reference to menstruation in public conversations. The table below captures the euphemistic expressions identified, as well as the themes depicted in them.

Table 1: Thematic classification of identified euphemisms

	Themes	Euphemisms
1.	Visitation	visitor, monthly visitor, August visitor, special visitor.
2.	Periodicity	monthly, my monthly, monthly flow, monthly encounter, period, mourning period, my time, my monthly friend.
3.	Royalty	her majesty, her royal majesty, the queen, the red queen, the red princess, the rosy princess.
4.	Fertility/Productivity	flower, my flower.
5.	Friendship	my faithful friend, my Indian friend, my monthly friend, my girlfriend.
6.	Indisposition	broken tap, broken calabash, broken dish, broken oil bottle.
7.	Discomfort	woman sickness/illness, woman crisis, woman headache, woman palaver, woman wahala ³ , disturbance.
8.	Compensation/Reward	salary, monthly salary.
9.	Obligation/Duty	monthly tax, monthly due.
10.	Colour	the lady in red, red oil, palm oil, red princess, the red rose, red car, red wedding, code red, tomatoes, grenadine.

As seen on the table above, themes like periodicity, royalty, friendship, discomfort, indisposition, colour and visitation are more prominent among the different euphemistic expressions used by girls/women when making reference to menstruation in public conversations. The euphemistic expressions are used as alternatives in order to avoid being blunt when referring to menstruation in a public conversation. Furthermore, the use of such euphemistic expressions is linked to the concept of linguistic politeness. According to Olmen (2017), 'linguistic politeness can be defined as the ways in which language is employed in conversation to show consideration for the feelings and desires of one's interlocutors, to create and uphold interpersonal relationships..., and to comply with the rules for what society or one's culture considers appropriate behavior.' In fact, girls/women who use euphemisms when making reference to menstruation in public conversations do so to save their face and save the face of their interlocutor(s) during social interactions.

Therefore, girls/women who use euphemistic expressions when talking about menstruation in public are generally considered as being polite. Following Bahktiar (2012), polite attitudes toward others are triggered by the need to be liked, the need to be accepted, the need to avoid embarrassment and the need to uphold one's self-esteem. Denham and Lobeck (2010, p. 337) contend that: 'Politeness expresses concern for others but also carries the intention of having this concern reciprocated; we are polite because we want to make others feel at ease and this in turn makes us more comfortable too.' Politeness, then, is a communication strategy employed to maintain, enhance face and mitigate threats (Adepoju, 2016).

5.2 Why girls/women use euphemisms in public menstrual conversations

The second objective of this study, as mentioned earlier, was to ascertain respondents' reasons for using euphemisms when making reference to menstruation in public discussions. Four options were provided on the questionnaire for respondents to choose which of them best explain(s) their use of euphemisms in such contexts. In the data analysis process, we observed that whereas some respondents chose only one reason to account for their use of euphemisms when discussing menstruation in public, others chose more than one reason. The table that follows captures our findings on the number of reasons provided by respondents.

³ *Wahala* is a Pidgin-English word that is mostly used in West Africa, precisely in Nigeria, to mean trouble. For example, 'why you dey find wahala?' means 'why are you looking for trouble?' However, its meaning can change depending on the context of usage. For instance, when a speaker says 'no wahala,' when responding to a question such as 'will you accompany me to the supermarket?' he/she could either mean 'yes' or 'no problem.'

Table 2: Statistical summary of the reasons given by respondents

N° of reasons	N° of respondents	Percentage
01 reason	82	64.5%
02 reasons	29	22.8%
03 reasons	10	7.8%
04 reasons	06	4.7%

The findings presented on table 2 above reveal that 82 (64.5%) respondents gave just one reason for using euphemisms when talking about menstruation in public, while 29 (22.8%) gave two reasons; 10 (7.8%) gave three reasons; and 06 (4.7%) gave four reasons. It can further be observed from the statistics displayed that respondents who gave just one reason were more than those who gave two, three and four reasons. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that our goal was to ascertain the major reason for respondents' use of euphemisms when talking about menstruation in public, not the number of reasons that they gave. As a result, we narrowed down our analysis to focus more on respondents who chose just one reason from the four options that were provided on the questionnaire. The succeeding table presents our findings in that direction.

Table 3: Statistical summary of respondents who gave just one reason

Reasons	N° of Respondents	Percentage
Because I feel comfortable when using them/it, even in public.	18	14.1%
To exclude others who do not understand the meaning.	21	16.5%
Because they/it sound(s) pleasant to the ears than the word 'menses.'	16	12.5%
To avoid drawing attention or raising eyebrows from people around me.	27	21.2%

As observed in table 3 above, 18 (14.1%) respondents revealed that they use euphemisms when discussing menstruation in public because they feel comfortable doing so, whereas 21 (16.5%) made known that they use euphemisms in order to exclude people who do not understand their meanings; 16 (12.5%) said they use euphemisms because they find them pleasant to the ears than the word 'menses;' and 27 (21.2%) revealed that they use euphemisms in order not to draw the attention of or raise eyebrows from people surrounding them during public conversations. Also, it can be seen in the data displayed in Table 3 above that respondents who chose the last option were numerically superior to those who chose the other options, and they were followed by those who chose the second, first and third options, respectively.

6. Discussion

A critical examination of the findings discussed above reveals some interesting insights relating to the different euphemistic expressions that girls/women in Cameroon use when making reference to menstruation in public conversations. To begin with, the theme of visitation portrayed in euphemisms like 'visitor', 'monthly visitor', 'August visitor', and 'special visitor', seem to stem from the temporary nature of menstruation. From these euphemisms, one could further make a connection between the discomfort a visitor may cause his/her host and the nuisance that menstruation brings to a girl/woman. On its part, the theme of periodicity evoked in euphemisms such as 'monthly', 'my monthly', 'monthly flow', 'monthly encounter', 'period', 'mourning period', 'my time', and 'my monthly friend', also indicates that menstruation only lasts for a short period of time.

According to Allan and Burrige (1991, p. 82), the word 'menses' (plural) used in medical terminology is derived from the Latin word 'mensis' (singular), which means 'month.' Interestingly, too, menstruation occurs once every month. Little wonder, therefore, that there is a link between the word 'month' and menstruation, which has engendered many variants as seen in the euphemisms listed earlier. Those euphemisms indicate that menstruation is a monthly or periodic event, and many people easily understand them. Such euphemisms are direct ways of conveying the message that a girl/woman is menstruating without invoking uncomfortable visuals or associations. As a matter of fact, they are more direct and so clear that they very rarely need further explanation.

Furthermore, the theme of royalty conveyed through euphemisms such as 'her majesty', 'her royal majesty', 'the queen', 'the red queen', 'the red princess', and 'the rosy princess', attribute royal qualities to menstruation and puts it in a positive light. This further implies that girls/women who employ these sexy and appealing phrases when making reference to menstruation in public conversations rather have a positive perception of and attitude toward it. In addition, the theme of fertility highlighted in

euphemisms like 'flower' and 'my flower' is suggestive of maturity and eligibility to produce fruits. In fact, menstruation is a sign that a woman's body has attained fertility – a sign of fruitfulness. Thus, menstruation symbolises the flower, while the fruit stands for childbirth. Put differently, menstrual blood is the flower that must blossom before the baby (the fruit) can emerge. Also, there are variants of the euphemistic word 'flower' such as 'my rose' and 'the red rose' that specify the type and equally make use of the colour metaphor to reference menstruation. In such euphemistic expressions, the combination of the colour and flower metaphors paves the way for easy interpretation and understanding.

Additionally, the theme of friendship expressed in euphemisms such as my 'faithful friend', 'my Indian friend', 'my monthly friend', and 'my girlfriend', carry positive connotations and also portray menstruation in a positive light. Girls and women who make use of these euphemisms probably have a positive perception of menstruation, and this seemingly explains why they personify it by attributing human qualities to it. On the contrary, euphemisms like 'woman sickness/illness', 'woman crisis', 'woman headache', 'woman palaver', 'woman wahala', and 'disturbance', that evoke the theme of discomfort criminalise menstruation and suggest that girls and women who make use of them seemingly have negative views about and attitudes toward it. In fact, for at least five days, a menstruating girl/woman is compelled to endure cramps and observe exclusive hygienic practices throughout this period. This portrays menstruation as a nuisance to some girls/women; something that brings discomfort and thus, the aforementioned euphemisms used to portray menstruation as a nuisance. These euphemisms further suggest the discomfort and moodiness that girls/women often experience during menstruation.

Moreover, the theme of indisposition communicated through euphemisms such as 'broken tap', 'broken calabash', 'broken dish', and 'broken oil bottle', imply that a girl/woman cannot perform any sexual activity throughout her menstrual period. The idea of a broken tap invokes the visual of a broken faucet with water oozing out of it in great quantities and an uncontrollable manner. When a faucet is broken, the main supply point is either identified and locked, or any other cosmetic method is used to seal it in order to prevent water from oozing out while waiting for repairs to be done. During such time, water cannot be fetched from the faucet since it is temporarily out of use. Similarly, when a girl/woman is menstruating, she uses sanitary products like tampons and pads to absorb menstrual flow throughout her period. She cannot engage in any sexual activity during this period. Furthermore, the words 'tap', 'calabash', 'dish', and 'bottle' as seen in the euphemisms above could be interpreted as metaphors for a menstruating girl's/woman's vagina.

Also, the theme of compensation/reward highlighted in euphemisms like 'salary' and 'monthly salary' is indicative of the fact that girls/women who use such expressions consider menstruation as a form of payment that they receive every month, not in financial value as an employee does for regular work done or service rendered to an employer, for example, but rather a natural form of reward that girls/women periodically receive when they attain maturity and their bodies become fertile, thus prepared for childbearing. Again, these euphemisms help to portray menstruation in a positive light, and they imply that users of such euphemisms have a positive perception of and attitude toward it. On its part, the theme of obligation/duty expressed in euphemisms such as 'monthly tax' and 'monthly due' shows that girls/women who employ them view menstruation as a compulsory levy imposed on them by nature once their bodies transition to maturity and they attain fertility. Thus, users of the aforementioned euphemisms consider menstruation as a moral and biological duty that girls/women are bound to perform once they mature and their bodies become fertile for childbearing.

Last, but by no means the least, an intriguing observation from the findings presented above is the analogy that respondents make between menstruation and anything that is coloured red. In fact, the colour of a woman's menstrual flow is so salient that many euphemisms for menstruation have been created based on colour metaphors. Euphemisms like the 'lady in red', 'red oil', 'palm oil', 'red princess', 'the red rose', 'red car', 'red wedding', 'code red', 'tomatoes', and 'grenadine', are created based on colour metaphors that associate menstruation with the colours of common things. Furthermore, the colour reference in these examples is so direct that it leaves little room for multiple interpretations. From the foregoing, it can be argued that menstruation, like other phenomena, has equally triggered linguistic creativity among girls/women in Cameroon who, as a result of societal pressures, are compelled to adopt a coded language when making reference to it in public conversations. Therefore, one must be familiar with menstrual euphemisms in order to fully participate in and access meaning in public conversations on the topic of menstruation.

7. Conclusion

In this study, we have observed that girls/women make use of euphemisms when discussing menstruation in public as a form of politeness strategy to avoid face-threatening acts (FTAs). They employ euphemistic expressions as a politeness strategy to negotiate social interactions in order to achieve the most favourable outcomes for all participants. Furthermore, the lack of adequate knowledge and proper information about menstruation is seemingly the cause of the taboos, misconceptions and stigmas surrounding menstruation in Cameroon. As part of the contribution toward dispelling these misconceptions and stigmas, we recommend that children (both males and females) be properly educated on menstruation in their pre-puberty years. Acquainting children of both sexes with proper information relating to menstruation can eliminate the erroneous beliefs

and myths and probably eradicate the various forms of discrimination that menstruating girls/women face in the Cameroonian society. Contributing to the fight against restrictions and discriminations imposed on menstruating girls/women is even more important at the present moment when menstrual education and hygiene are emerging as central issues for upholding gender equality, human rights and development.

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