

Regional pragmatic variation in French: A contrastive study of complaint realizations in Cameroon and France

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Abstract: This study examined and compared complaints by speakers of French in Cameroon and France. Although complaints have been extensively analyzed, to date, little attention has been devoted to complaints across regional varieties of French. This study aimed to fill this knowledge and research gap by analyzing strategies used by speakers of Cameroon French and Hexagonal French to complain in three situations. The study is at the intersection of variational and postcolonial pragmatics and it is based on data provided by 20 Cameroonian and 19 French university students, who were asked to fill a DCT questionnaire. The results reveal some similarities in both French varieties regarding the use of complex complaint utterances. However, many differences were found concerning preferences for specific complaint strategies, external modifiers, internal modification devices and address terms.

Keywords: complaints, mitigation, regional variation, Cameroon French, French French

1. Introduction

The present paper offers a study of complaint realizations by speakers of French in Cameroon and France. Although complaints have been extensively examined, very little attention has been given to their realization patterns across regional varieties of pluricentric languages in general and French in particular. The present analysis is an attempt to fill this research gap by examining complaint realizations by speakers of French in Cameroon and France. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical background of the study, focusing on the definition of complaints, a brief literature review, and variational pragmatics, the framework adopted. In section 3 the methodology is presented, more precisely the participants, the instrument, and the data coding scheme. The results are presented and discussed in section 4, followed by the conclusion and suggestions for future research in section 5.

2. Literature review

2.1 The communicative act of complaining

The communicative act of complaining is generally defined in the literature as an act that is realized “in the form of exerting blame on those actors who are held accountable for the complainable” (Vladiminou et al., 2021:51). According to Chen et. al. (2011: 255), complaints are voiced to express “negative feelings towards the hearer, because the hearer is believed to be responsible for a socially

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unacceptable event". It is noteworthy that Boxer (1996) identifies two categories of complaints: (a) *direct complaints*, i.e. those which are realized to communicate the speaker's annoyance or displeasure about an offensive act or behavior of the addressee and they are directly addressed to the offender; (b) *indirect complaints*, i.e. those addressed to a third party or which represent expressions of discontentment with someone or something that is not present. The focus of the present study is on complaints that are directly addressed to the offenders. Overall, complaints have been classified as expressive acts (Searle, 1986) and, in terms of rapport management and face-work, they are considered face-threatening acts (cf. Trosborg, 1995), because they threaten the hearer's positive face wants of being admired or appreciated as well as the hearer's negative face wants of being free from imposition. Complaints are also described as conflictive acts (cf. Leech 1983).

2.2 Research on Complaints

There has been a considerable number of studies on complaints in different languages and across different languages and language varieties. Some of the intralingual studies include investigations on American English (Boxer, 1996, Hartley, 1998), Chinese (Du, 1995), Peruvian Spanish (Garcia, 1996, 2009), German (Gunthner, 2000). Studies adopting a *cross-cultural pragmatics perspective* include Chen et al., (2011), Essien Otung (2019), Van Meeren (2016). Also available are studies from an *interlanguage pragmatics perspective* such as Olstain, & Weinbach (1987; 1993; Murphy & Neu (1996), Trosborg (1995), Kraft and Geluykens, 2002, 2006). Some of the studies that adopt a *variational pragmatics approach* include Rinnert & Iwai (2003), Lochtmann (2022), Albert (2016), El-Dakhs, D. & Ahmed Mervat M. (2021). Complaints in French have received, as already indicated, relatively less attention. The very few existing studies examine complaints in the following varieties of French: Québec/Canadian French (cf. Laforest, 2002), French in France (cf. Laforest & Moise (2013), Acadian/Canadian French (cf. Chiasson-Albert, 2022), Belgian French (cf. Albert, 2016, Lochtmann, 2022), Cameroon French (cf. Mulo Farenkia, 2015, 2022). Since there is, to the best of the author's knowledge, no study on complaints across regional varieties of French, it would be interesting to know how speakers of different varieties of French complain in different situations. The framework adopted for such a study is variational pragmatics.

2.3 Variational pragmatics

Variational pragmatics is an emerging field in pragmatics that was conceptualized by Schneider and Barron (2008) as a discipline at the interface of pragmatics and sociolinguistics that examines intralingual pragmatic variation according to macro-social factors, such as region, gender, social class, age, and ethnic identity. Variational pragmatics differs from cross-cultural or contrastive speech act studies (variation across different languages and cultures) (Wierzbicka 2003) in that while cross-cultural studies seem to perceive languages "as homogenous wholes from a pragmatic point of view" (Barron 2005: 520) variational pragmatics is based on the assumption that "speakers who share the same native language do not necessarily share the same culture" (Barron and Schneider 2009: 425), that region is a macro-social factor that impacts intralingual pragmatic variation and that "pragmatic differences may occur across varieties of the same language" (Barron and Schneider 2009: 425). These differences may be observed on the formal, actional, interactive, topic, and organizational levels of analysis (for details, cf. Barron 2015, Schneider and Barron 2008; Schneider 2010).

Focusing on the region as a macro-social factor of pragmatic variation, the analysis carried out in the present paper adds to studies of language use across regional varieties of pluricentric languages (cf. Clyne 1992). These studies have highlighted the relevance of analyzing regional varieties of a language in relation to their individual cultural contexts. Also noteworthy is that macro-social variation is examined on several levels of pragmatic analysis. These are (1) the formal level, with a focus on forms such as discourse markers; (2) the actional level, with a focus on speech acts and their realizations; (3) the interactional level, with a focus on longer stretches of discourse (e.g. conversational openings); (4) the topic level, with a focus on content units and their management; (5) the organizational level, concerned with turn-taking phenomena; (6) the stylistic level, focused on issues of (in)formality; (7) the prosodic level, focused on paralinguistic parameters; (8) the non-

verbal level, focused e.g. on gaze, gestures, and posture, and (9) the metapragmatic level, focused on talking about communication (for details, cf. Schneider, 2021). The present study on complaints in Cameroon French and Hexagonal French is an analysis on the actional level. It should be underlined that one of the language varieties under study is a postcolonial variety of French. More precisely it is an ex-colonial language in use in a postcolonial setting, which is characterized, like other postcolonial societies, by cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. This hybridity also affects the complaint realization patterns of Cameroon French speakers. According to Janney (2006: 3), “just as colonisation led to new hybrid varieties of the colonial languages of power, it also led to new, culturally and linguistically mixed, patterns of communication – and to new pragmatic strategies – in these varieties.” These observations also indicate that a postcolonial pragmatic approach would be helpful to explain how aspects of the postcolonial community influence the choice of some complaint moves, external modifiers (e.g. attention getters, forms of address, interjections), address terms etc., which are not found in the Hexagonal French examples.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Two groups of participants took part in the study. The first group consisted of 20 Cameroonian (seven male and thirteen female) students of the University of Yaoundé 1. They ranged in age between 18 and 26 years and had been speakers of French since elementary school in a multilingual context. The second group consisted of 19 French (three male and sixteen female) students at the University of Toulouse Le Mirail. They were aged between 18 and 23, and all native speakers of French. The Cameroonian data were collected in Yaoundé in 2013 while the French data were collected in Toulouse in 2014.

3.2 Instrument

The data were elicited from a written Discourse Completion Task questionnaire consisting of tasks related to the production of speech acts such as refusals, complaints, thanks, advice-giving, etc. the tasks designed to elicit complaints in three situations were described as follows.

- a) Situation 1 [Friend]: Your friend borrowed your jacket and when s/he returns it, you discover a hole in it. You say to him/her¹:
- b) Situation 2 [Stranger]: The man or woman sitting next to you at the cinema is making so much noise that you cannot concentrate on the movie anymore. You say to him or to her.
- c) Situation 3 [Professor]: Your professor returns your exam paper. You are not happy with the final grade. You go to his office and say to him or her.

To account for the impact of social distance and power asymmetry on complaint performance, I included these three situations in the questionnaire, and the respondents in both countries were asked to imagine that they find themselves in the situations described and to write down what they actually would say to complain. The social variables that were built into the questionnaires were the type of horizontal relationship between the speaker (complainer” and the hearer (offender) and type of vertical relationship (equality or power asymmetry) between them. While the relationship between the interactants in situation 1 (friend) is a close one (peer equality: - D, = P); in situation 2 (stranger) they don’t know each other, but they have equal status as cinema customers (+ D and =P). In situation 3 (professor), the recipient of the complaint has a higher power position (professor) and the student and professor know each other as acquaintances (- D and S<P). Table 1 summarizes these scenarios.

¹ These tasks were presented in French.

Table 1. Summary of the DCT Complaint Scenarios

Situation	Social Distance / Power	Topic	Setting	Interlocutors
1	- D and = P	Damaged jacket	Home	Friend to Friend
2	+ D and = P	Noise	Cinema	Customer to Customer
3	- D and - P (S < P)	Poor grade	Office	Student to Professor

3.3 Data analysis procedure

The participants produced 116 answers for the three questionnaire tasks: 60 complaint utterances by the Cameroonians and 56 responses by the French. These responses were analyzed according to the types (pragmatic status) and number of discursive moves used by the respondents to realize their complaints. Each response was considered as a complaint turn or a communicative act (cf. Trosborg, 1995) consisting of either one move (head act only) as in (1) or multiple moves as in (2-3). In (2), the turn consists of a request for repair/behavior change (in italics and underlined an indirect complaint) and a grounder/justification (an external modification). In (3), the complaint turn begins with a rhetorical conflictual question (in italics and underlined, which is the head act) and it is followed by two rejection acts (external modifications).

- 1) *C'est même quoi ton problème ?* (S2-CamF)
'What on earth is your problem?'
- 2) *Pourriez-vous faire moins de bruit ? Je ne peux pas suivre le film.* (S2-HexF)
'Could you make less noise? I can't watch the movie.'
- 3) *Comment tu peux être négligent comme ça ? Je n'ai plus besoin de cette veste garde la.* (S1-CamF)
'How can you be this negligent? I don't need this jacket anymore keep it.'

The discursive moves in the complaint utterances were segmented and, following the schemes used in previous studies (cf. Trosborg; 1995), a distinction was made between head acts, i.e. units that can be used alone to realize a complaint, and external modifications, i.e. additional moves. The next step consisted in classifying the head acts or complaint strategies, based on their pragmatic functions/definitions. Table 2 presents the seven main strategies which were identified in the data.

Table 2. Types of complaint strategies.

Complaint strategy	Definition and example
Request for repair	Speaker requests for repair, behavior change or solution (e.g. <i>S'il vous plaît faites moins de bruit, j'essaye de suivre.</i> (S2-CamF) 'Please keep the noise down, I am trying to follow.' <i>Tu me la rends réparée.</i> (S1-HexF) 'You will return it to me repaired.'
Interrogation and Exclamation	Speaker asks how/why the hearer committed the offense (e.g. <i>Comment tu peux être négligent comme ça ?</i> 'How can you be this careless?'; <i>Tu te fous de moi ?</i> 'Are you kidding me?') or expresses surprise about the offense (e.g. <i>Putain mais c'est hallucinant ça!</i> (S1-HexF) 'Damn, this is incredible.'
Accusation	Speaker blames the interlocutor for committing the offense or criticizes the hearer (e.g. <i>Tu l'as abimée. C'est fichu, ce n'est plus nécessaire de me la remettre.</i> (S1-CamF) ' You damaged it. It's ruined. It's no longer necessary to return it to me.')
Disappointment	Speaker is disappointed with the hearer's attitude or the results of the latter's

	action (e.g. <i>Franchement hein je suis déçue. Je ne ferai plus cette erreur-là!</i> (S1-CamF) ‘Honestly, I am disappointed. I won’t make this mistake again.’)
Threat or warning	Speaker threatens to retaliate or mention negative consequences of the offense (e.g. <i>La prochaine fois tu ne l’auras pas.</i> (S1-CamF) ‘Next time you will not get it.’ <i>C’est la dernière fois que je te prête mes affaires.</i> (S1-HexF) ‘This is the last time I will lend you my things.’)
Disbelief or confusion	Speaker expresses disbelief or confusion with respect to the offense (e.g. <i>Bonjour, je ne comprends pas ma note à l’examen dans votre matière.</i> (S3-HexF) ‘Good morning, I don’t understand my exam grade in your subject.’)
Reprimanding or moralizing	Speakers mentions a moral or social norm that the hearer has ignored (e.g. <i>Monsieur, ici c’est un cinéma, pas un restaurant.</i> (S2-HexF) ‘Sir, this is a cinema, not a restaurant.’)

The third step consisted in classifying types of external modification performed by the respondents of both groups. Two categories of additional moves were found: preparatory acts or pre-modifiers and supportive acts or post-modifiers. Table 3. presents the external modifiers attested in both data sets.

Table 3. Types of external modifiers

Type of external modifier	Definition and Example
Preparatory acts	
Attention getters	Serve to catch the hearer’s attention. The elements used include interjections, address terms, other expressions, alone or combined <i>Gars, c’est how ? (...) T’as vu ce que tu as fait de ma veste ?</i> (S1-CamF) ‘Guy, what is this? (...) Have you seen what you did to my jacket?’ <i>Ma sœur et ma très chère amie, tu n’es pas gentille. Regarde ce grand trou.</i> (S1-CamF) ‘My sister and my very dear friend, you are not nice. Look at this hole.’ <i>Oh putain! Non mais (...) T’as vu ce que tu as fait?</i> (S1-HexF) ‘Oh damn! No but (...) Have you seen what you did?’ <i>Merde, il y a un trou maintenant! Tu abuses là.</i> (S1-HexF) ‘Shit, there is a hole now! You are going too far.’ <i>Monsieur le professeur, je suis très déçu par rapport à ma note finale.</i>
Apologies	<i>Excusez-moi, je viens vous voir parce que je ne comprends pas la note que vous m’avez donnée.</i> ‘Excuse-me I have come to see you because I don’t understand the grade you gave me.’ <i>Monsieur je suis désolé de vous importuner mais j’ai un souci par rapport aux résultats de l’évaluation.</i> ‘Sir I am sorry to disturb you but I have a problem with results of the test.’
Greetings	<i>Monsieur bonjour.</i> ‘Good morning sir.’
Explanation of purpose	<i>J’ai des soucis avec ma note finale.</i> ‘I have some concerns about my final grade.’
Supportive acts	
Grounders and comments	<i>Regarde ce grand trou. Pourquoi tu m’as fait ça ? Tu sais bien que c’est ma ‘dernière valise’ et que je n’ai plus d’argent.</i> (S1-CamF) ‘Look at this big hole. Why did you do this to me? Yu know that it is my best outfit and that I don’t have money anymore.’ <i>Pourriez-vous faire moins de bruit? Je ne peux pas suivre le film.</i> (S3-HexF) ‘Could you make less noise? I can’t watch the movie.’

Rejection	<i>Comment tu peux être négligent comme ça ? Je n'ai plus besoin de cette veste garde la.</i> (S1-CamF) 'How can you be this negligent? I don't need this jacket anymore keep it.'
Thanks	S'il vous plaît j'essaie de suivre donc de grâce moins de bruit. Merci. (S2-CamF) 'Please I am trying to watch the movie so please reduce the noise. Thanks'

The analysis also compared the types of internal modifiers used by the respondents of both groups. These elements were divided into mitigators and intensifiers, as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Types of internal modifiers

Type of internal modifier	Definition and Example
Mitigators	
Modal or semi-modal verbs, modal constructions	Serve to express speaker's hesitation or politeness in making indirect complaints such as requests for solution, e.g. <i>vouloir, pouvoir, aimer, souhaiter</i> <i>J'aimerais que vous m'éclairiez sur certains points.</i> <i>Pourriez-vous s'il vous plaît m'aider à comprendre pourquoi ?</i>
Subjectivizers	Characterize the proposition as the speaker's opinion, e.g. <i>Je pense que ; Il me semble que ; Je crois que</i> <i>J'estimais que mon travail était satisfaisant</i> ». (S3-CamF) 'I felt that my work was satisfactory.' (S3-HexF) <i>Je pense que ma copie de composition est à revoir.</i> (S1-CamF) 'I think that my exam copy needs to be reviewed.' <i>Je pense que ma copie de composition est à revoir.</i>
Understaters	Under-represent the state of affairs denoted in the complaints, e.g. <i>juste, un peu plus de, quelques, certains, petit, etc.</i> <i>Je voulais juste comprendre ce que j'ai raté aux examens.</i> (S1-HexF) 'I just wanted to understand what I missed in the exams.'
Politeness markers	Express politeness and soften the imposition in requests for solution, e.g. <i>S'il te/vous plaît</i> <i>Est-ce que vous pouvez arrêter ce bruit s'il vous plaît?</i> (S2-HexF) 'Can you stop that noise please?'
Supplication markers / cost minimizers	Plea for co-operation in order to reduce imposition in requests for solution, e.g. <i>Je vous prie de, je vous en prie, si possible, si vous (me) le permettez, si cela ne vous dérange pas</i> <i>Je voudrais, si ça ne vous dérange pas, avoir un petit éclaircissement au sujet de ma note finale à l'examen.</i>
Consultative devices	Express reluctance to realize the complaint, e.g. <i>Serait-il possible de, je ne sais pas si, je ne sais pas si, je me demandais si.</i> Inquire about addressee's readiness for co-operation <i>Je me demandais si vous pouviez revoir ma copie.</i> (S3-CamF) 'I was wondering if you could review my copy.' <i>Je ne sais pas s'il y a lieu de vérifier mes feuilles de composition.</i> <i>Je me demandais si vous pouviez revoir ma copie.</i>
Collaboration or inclusiveness markers	Reduce face-threat by evoking collaboration between the speaker and the interlocutor in the search for a solution, e.g. <i>Nous, on, ensemble</i> <i>J'aimerais qu'ensemble nous revoyions mon travail.</i> <i>On peut retrouver ma copie pour la vérifier ensemble ?</i>
Avoidance strategies	Use of agent avoiders, impersonal expressions, nominalisations to depersonalize the

	<p>problem at hand <i>Je ne comprends pourquoi les efforts que j'ai fournis ne sont pas proportionnels au rendement.</i> <i>On n'entend plus rien.</i></p>
Intensifiers	
Lexical intensifiers	<p><i>Negatively loaded adjectives, verbs, verb constructions, adverbs/adverbials, and nouns used to describe the action as bad. They express speaker's dissatisfaction, disappointment, doubt or highlight the negative results of interlocutor's action or behaviour.</i> <i>Ma note n'est pas du tout convaincante. (S3-CamF) 'My grade is not convincing at all.'</i> <i>Je suis très déçu par rapport à ma note finale. (S3-CamF) 'I am very disappointed with my final grade.'</i> <i>Pouvez-vous arrêter ce vacarme? (S2-HexF) 'Can you stop that din?'</i></p>
Markers of contrast or consequence	<p>They highlight the discrepancy between complainer's expectations and final results; or introduce the reasons for speaker's disappointment, dissatisfaction, surprise, e.g. <i>Pourtant puisque, étant donné que, bien que, alors que, malgré,</i> <i>Je ne comprends pas pourquoi j'ai obtenu une note si basse malgré tous mes efforts.</i> <i>Ma note est décevante, pourtant j'y ai mis le paquet pour une bonne note.</i></p>

Finally, the use of address terms was examined. The participants used pronominal terms (e.g. *tu, vous, on, nous*) as well as nominal terms (e.g. *kinship, endearment terms and terms of respect and deference*) (cf. Table 5).

Table 5. Types of address terms

Type of address term	Definition and Example
Pronominal address terms	
Tu	To show familiarity, directness e.g. Tu te fous de moi?
Vous	To index social distance, deference, respect, e.g. Pouvez-vous recorriger ma copie ? 'Can you regrade my paper ?'
On	To defocalize reference to the speaker or hearer, e.g. On veut suivre le film. 'We want to watch the movie.'
Nous	To defocalize reference to the speaker, e.g. <i>Vous n'êtes pas chez vous, permettez-nous de suivre.</i> 'You are not at your place. Allow us to watch the movie.'
Nominal address terms	
Kinship, solidarity, and endearment terms	Serve to express closeness and to soften the complaint, e.g. Ma sœur et ma très chère amie , <i>tu n'es pas gentille.</i> (S1-CamF) 'My sister and my very dear friend, you are not nice.'
Terms of respect and deference	Serve to express respect to strangers and/or deference to superiors, e.g. Monsieur , <i>ici c'est un cinéma, pas un restaurant.</i> (S2-HexF) 'Sir, this is a cinema, not a restaurant.' Monsieur bonjour <i>j'ai des soucis avec ma note finale.</i> (S3-CamF) 'Good morning sir I have some concerns about my final grade.'

4. Results and discussion

The focus, in this section, is on the following aspects: overall distribution of discursive moves (4.1), complaint strategies (4.2), external modification (4.3), internal modification (4.4.), and use of address terms (4.5).

4.1 Overall distribution of discursive moves

Table 6 presents the distribution of discursive moves, i.e. head acts/complaint strategies and external modification in both French varieties. The results indicate that both groups mostly head acts to construct their complaints, albeit with a difference. The Cameroonian participants used much more head acts than the Hexagonal French speakers did (Cameroon: 58.2% vs. France: 55.7%).

Table 6. The overall distribution of discursive moves in Cameroon and Hexagonal French

Type of discursive move	Cameroon	France
	No. (%)	No. (%)
Head acts	111 (58.2%)	78 (55.7%)
External modification	80 (41.8%)	62 (44.3%)
Total	191 (100%)	140 (100%)

4.2 Complaint strategies

Table 7 presents a breakdown of the seven main complaint strategies attested in both data sets. The most popular strategy among the respondents from both countries is the ‘request for repair strategy’. However, we can see that the French informants used requests much more than their Cameroonian counterparts (France: 39.7% vs. Cameroon: 33.3%). The second most common strategy is the ‘accusation strategy’. It represents 20.6% of the French examples, while it accounts for 19% of the Cameroonian data set. Concerning the third most frequent strategy, the “interrogation and exclamation strategy”, Table 2 shows that the Cameroonian participants employed much more tokens than their French counterparts (Cameroon: 18% vs. France: 14%). Differences also emerged regarding the use of the other complaint strategies. For instance, we notice with the ‘disappointment strategy’ a huge difference between both groups: while this strategy accounts for 14.4% of the Cameroonian examples, it represents only 2.6% of the Hexagonal French data set. Conversely, concerning the use of the “disbelief strategy”, we can see that this complaint strategy represents 11.5% of the Hexagonal French examples while it accounts for only 5.4% of the Cameroonian productions. Overall, the analysis reveals that the complaint strategies were employed with different degrees of preferences within each group.

Table 7. Distribution of complaint strategies in Cameroon French and Hexagonal French

Type of complaint strategy	Cameroon	France
	No (%)	No (%)
Request for repair	37 (33.3%)	31 (39.7%)
Interrogation and Exclamation	20 (18%)	11 (14%)
Accusation, Criticism or Doubt	21 (19%)	16 (20.6%)
Disagreement or Disappointment	16 (14.4%)	2 (2.6%)
Threat or Warning	9 (8%)	3 (3.8%)
Disbelief, Confusion or Discouragement	6 (5.4%)	9 (11.5%)
Reprimanding or Moralizing	2 (1.8%)	6 (7.8%)
Total	111 (100%)	78 (100%)

4.3 External modification

Two categories of external modifiers were identified: preparatory acts or pre-modifiers and supportive acts or post-modifiers. Their distribution in both French varieties is presented in Table 8. We see that the participants of both groups used more preparatory than supportive acts

Overall, four different types of preparatory acts were used. These are *attention-getters*, *apologies/disarmers*, *greetings*, and *explanation of purpose*. They occurred differently across both French varieties. While attention-getters were the most preferred preparatory acts by the Cameroonian respondents (21 tokens of 51; 26.3%), apologies and disarmers were the most frequently used preparators by the French participants (12 occurrences of 39; 19.4%). The second most popular pre-modifier among the Cameroonians was apologies, while attention-getters were the second most common preparatory acts in the Hexagonal French examples. Greetings were much more employed by the French informants. Explanations of purpose accounted for 8.7% of the Cameroonian data set while they represented 11.4% of the French external modifiers.

Table 8. Distribution of external modifications in Cameroon French and Hexagonal French

Type of external modification	Cameroon	France
	N (%)	N (%)
Preparatory acts	[51; 63.7%]	[39; 62.8%]
Attention getters, interjections and/or address terms	21 (26.3%)	10 (16%)
Apologies and disarmers	14 (17.4%)	12 (19.4%)
Greetings	9 (11.3%)	10 (16%)
Explanation of purpose	7 (8.7%)	7 (11.4%)
Supportive acts	[29; 36.3%]	[23; 37.2%]
Grounders and Comments	23 (28.8%)	21 (34%)
Rejection	5 (6.3%)	0
Thanks	1 (1.2%)	2 (3.2%)
Total	80 (100%)	62 (100%)

Table 8 also indicates that three types of supportive acts occurred. These are *grounders/comments*, *rejections*, and *thanks*. The complaints realized by the participants of both groups were overwhelmingly supported by grounders and comments, with the French informants having a higher number of these moves (France: 34% vs. Cameroon: 28.8%). Rejections were used only by the Cameroonians. The least frequent of all post-modifiers, thanks, were employed much more by the Hexagonal French speakers.

4.4 Internal modification

This section focuses on morphological, lexical, and syntactical elements or units found in the complaint head acts or the external modifiers that serve to modify aspects of the complaint utterances. These elements were divided into mitigators/softeners and intensifiers/upgraders. In total, 171 internal modifiers were used, namely 95 mitigators and 76 intensifiers. The Cameroonians used 47 mitigators (54%) and 40 intensifiers (46%), while the Hexagonal French informants used 48 mitigators (57%) and 36 intensifiers (43%). Overall, the respondents of both groups used more mitigators than intensifiers, with the French having a much higher percentage of softeners. Tables 9 and 10 present the distribution of the mitigators and intensifiers respectively in both French varieties. As can be seen in Table 9, there were eight different types of mitigators in the data. These are *modal constructions*, *politeness markers*, *subjectivizers*, *understaters*, *avoidance strategies*, *consultative devices*, *supplication markers*, and *inclusion markers*. Their distribution is different across both French varieties. Politeness markers were, with 13 occurrences, i.e. (27.7%), the most popular mitigators among the Cameroonians while modal constructions were, with 12 tokens (25%), the preferred softeners by the French participants. The third most frequent mitigators were *avoidance strategies* and they were much more employed by the French informants. While the other mitigators

also show different degrees of preferences by both groups, we can see that *consultative devices* occurred only in the Cameroon examples.

Table 9. Distribution of mitigators in Cameroon French and Hexagonal French

Type of mitigator	Cameroon	France
Modals or modal constructions / tense	7 (15%)	12 (25%)
Politeness markers	13 (27.7%)	11(23%)
Subjectivizers	5 (10.6%)	6 (12.5%)
Understaters	4 (8.5%)	5 (10.4%)
Avoidance strategies	8 (17%)	9 (18.7%)
Consultative devices	2 (4.2%)	0
Supplication markers and cost minimizers	5 (10.6%)	3 (6.2%)
Collaboration and inclusiveness markers	3 (6.4%)	2 (4.2%)
Total	47 (100%)	48 (100%)

As can be seen in Table 10, three sub-categories of intensifiers were used by the participants of both groups. These are *lexical intensifiers*, i.e. negatively loaded adjectives, verbs, adverbials or nouns, *contrast or consequence markers*, and *insistence markers*. Lexical intensifiers were, by far the most frequent upgraders in Cameroon French (70%) and Hexagonal French (75%). The second commonly used intensification devices accounted for 19.4% of the French examples and 17.5% of the Cameroonian responses. The frequency of the least employed intensifiers, i.e. insistence markers, is distinctively higher in the Cameroonian data set.

Table 10. Distribution of intensifiers in Cameroon French and Hexagonal French

Type of intensifier	Cameroon	France
Lexical intensifiers	[28; 70%]	[27; 75%]
1. Negatively loaded adjectives	5 (12.5%)	5 (13.9%)
2. Negatively loaded verbs/verb constructions	6 (15%)	5 (13.9%)
3. Adverbial and time intensifiers	16 (40%)	15 (41.7%)
4. Negatively loaded nouns	1 (2.5%)	2 (5.5%)
Contrast and consequence markers	7 (17.5%)	7 (19.4%)
Insistence markers	5 (12.5%)	2 (5.5%)
Total	40 (100%)	36 (100%)

4.5 Use of address terms

Given their role in signaling existing as well as intended relationships between the interlocutors, in expressing closeness, solidarity, reverence, respect, deference, etc. address terms also play an important role in determining the complaint perspective as well as the interpretation of complaints in terms of rapport management. Table 11 summarizes the distribution of all the address terms in the data. Firstly, the participants of both groups used more pronominal than nominal address terms. However, the percentages of the address terms diverge across both French varieties. In the Hexagonal French examples, the pronominal forms represent 95.6% while the nominal terms account only for 4.4%. In the Cameroonian data set, the pronominal forms represent 78.4% and the nominal terms account for 21.6%. Table 11 also indicates that of the different pronominal address terms used, *vous* was, with a preference rate of 58.6% in Hexagonal French and 39.8% in Cameroon French, the most frequently used, followed by *tu*. The use of nominal address terms shows diverging frequencies across the French varieties. We see that while nominal terms represent 21.6% of the Cameroonian examples, only 4.4% of them appeared in the French data set.

Table 11. Distribution of address terms in Cameroon French and Hexagonal French

Type of address term	Cameroon	France
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Pronominal address terms	[116; 78.4%]	[109; 95.6%]
<i>Tu</i>	48 (32.4%)	36 (31.6%)
<i>Vous</i>	59 (39.8%)	67 (58.6%)
<i>On</i>	5 (3.4%)	4 (3.6%)
<i>Nous</i>	4 (2.8%)	2 (1.8%)
Nominal address terms	[32; 21.6%]	[5; 4.4%]
<i>Kinship/solidarity/endearment terms</i>	9 (6.2%)	0
<i>Terms of respect or deference</i>	23 (15.4%)	5 (4.4%)
Total	00% 148	114 (00%)

5. Conclusion

This study examined aspects of regional pragmatic variation in French, focusing on the speech act of complaining in Cameroon and France. It was found that the complaints realized by the participants from both countries in the three situations were mostly complex, generally consisting of head acts and external modifications. The quantitative analysis has revealed differences in the degrees of preference regarding the choice of complaint strategies, external modifiers, internal modification devices and address terms. Since the focus of the study has been on quantitative analyses, the next step should be to provide a detailed qualitative examination of the realization forms and situational variation of the complaint moves and additional discursive moves attested in the data. Such an analysis will shed more light on similarities and differences concerning the complaint behavior of Cameroon and Hexagonal French speakers.

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