



## Contrastive Analysis of Condoling and Consoling Strategies in Cameroon English and Cameroon French

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### Abstract

This study examines how speakers of Cameroon English and Cameroon French express compassion in two emotionally charged situations: bereavement and a spouse's involvement in an accident. Drawing on contrastive pragmatics and politeness theory, the analysis identifies the range of direct and indirect condoling and consoling strategies employed across both linguistic communities. The findings show that while both groups use a mix of explicit sympathy formulas, empathetic statements, exhortations, exclamations, and offers of support, their preferences differ in many ways. Cameroon English speakers rely more heavily on direct expressions with *sorry* and *condolences*, as well as exhortations and expressions of concern, whereas Cameroon French speakers favor formulas built on *condoléances*, *désolé*, *compatir*, and *partager*, alongside more frequent use of reassurance, wishes, prayers, and elaborate supportive acts. Address terms and external modifiers play a central role in intensifying empathy and reinforcing social bonds. By highlighting shared patterns and divergences, the study contributes to understanding relational work and compassion across linguistic borders in postcolonial Cameroon.

Keywords: Condolence Strategies, Contrastive Pragmatics, Cameroon English, Cameroon French, Compassion Expressions

### Introduction

Expressions of compassion play a central role in maintaining interpersonal relationships and fulfilling social expectations during moments of emotional vulnerability. In situations of bereavement or misfortune, speakers draw on sociocultural norms and linguistic resources to console others, reaffirm social bonds, and negotiate face concerns. As previous work has shown, condolence expressions constitute complex communicative acts that simultaneously acknowledge loss, provide moral support, and navigate the delicate balance between involvement and respect for the mourner's privacy (cf. Carr, 1996; Williams, 2006; Meiners, 2013). Within the field of pragmatics, such expressions offer fertile ground for examining how speakers select, combine, and modify strategies to satisfy multiple face

needs and relational goals.

In multilingual and postcolonial contexts such as Cameroon, compassion-related speech acts acquire additional significance. The country's colonial history, sociolinguistic diversity, and vibrant traditions of multilingual communication create a rich environment for exploring how linguistic choices index empathy, solidarity, and social alignment. Cameroon English and Cameroon French, each shaped by local norms and influenced by indigenous languages, provide distinct yet overlapping pragmatic repertoires through which speakers express sympathy and support. Investigating these repertoires yields insight into how communities construct relational meaning at the intersection of language, culture, and social expectations.

The present study offers a contrastive pragmatic analysis of condoling and consoling strategies used by speakers of Cameroon English and Cameroon French in two emotionally charged situations: the death of a close family member and the hospitalization of a spouse following an accident. By examining the forms, functions, and distribution of direct and indirect strategies across both linguistic groups, the study highlights how compassion is linguistically and culturally realized. Attention is also paid to the role of address terms, supportive moves, intensification devices, and references to religious or moral frameworks, which frequently serve to strengthen the illocutionary force of sympathy expressions. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of relational work in Cameroon's multilingual landscape and shed light on the pragmatic mechanisms through which speakers navigate sensitive interpersonal encounters across linguistic borders.

The remainder of this article is organized into the following sections. Section 1 provides the theoretical framework for the study by reviewing relevant literature on expressions of sympathy across languages and cultures. Section 2 presents the methodological framework, including the data sources, selection criteria, and analytical procedures. Section 3 offers a detailed analysis of condoling and consoling strategies in the selected linguistic contexts. It examines the pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic features of sympathy expressions, identifying recurrent patterns, preferred forms, and situational variations. Finally, Section 4 concludes the article by summarizing key insights, outlining the contribution of the study to postcolonial and cross-cultural pragmatics, and suggesting directions for future research on condolence practices and related expressive speech acts.

### **Theoretical Background**

#### **Defining Expressions of Sympathy**

The expression of sympathy is widely recognized as an expressive speech act whose primary function is to articulate the speaker's emotional response to another person's misfortune. In contexts of bereavement or loss, these expressions serve not only to acknowledge the gravity of the event but also to provide psychological comfort by

helping the bereaved “ease the sorrow and relieve the grief” and, in some cases, reframe their loss (Carr, 1996). Because condoling involves displaying emotional involvement, it constitutes a complex interpersonal act that may simultaneously affirm solidarity and threaten the mourner’s desire for privacy (Williams, 2006). As such, condolence expressions represent an ideal site for examining how speakers navigate face needs and balance involvement with respect.

Within the framework of linguistic politeness and relational work, condoling provides insight into how social bonds are enacted, reaffirmed, or negotiated through language. Speakers typically draw from a repertoire of discursive strategies such as direct sympathy formulas, empathetic statements, mitigated advice, supportive moves, etc. each of which indexes specific interpersonal intentions. These strategies help satisfy the bereaved person’s need for emotional support while also allowing the sympathizer to project an image of sincerity, empathy, and social alignment. The complexity of the condoling act thus reflects its dual orientation: it is both an obligation of civility and a form of relational work through which speakers manage interpersonal relationships.

Sympathy expressions occur rarely alone. They often appear as communicative acts, in the sense of Trosborg (1995), i.e. composed of several speech acts, such as offering comfort, acknowledging the sad event, expressing concern, and extending support. These structures perform multiple pragmatic and social functions simultaneously. They may reassure the bereaved of communal solidarity, reinforce kinship and friendship networks, and signal shared moral or spiritual values. In many cultural settings, condolence exchanges also function as moments of heightened relational display, where empathy is intensified through lexical choices, address terms, or references to collective identities.

In multilingual postcolonial contexts such as Cameroon, condoling and consoling practices acquire additional layers of meaning. Cameroon English and Cameroon French, shaped by distinct colonial histories and influenced by local linguistic ecologies, offer contrasting yet intersecting pragmatic repertoires. Examining sympathy expressions across these language varieties provides an opportunity to explore how speakers use language to index cultural norms of empathy, respect, and group cohesion. Differences in preferred formulas, degrees of directness, religious references, or reliance on address terms reflect broader cultural scripts of emotion, solidarity, and sociality. As the analysis below will show, expressions of sympathy in Cameroon are not merely formulaic responses to misfortune but culturally embedded acts that reveal how linguistic communities negotiate compassion and social harmony.

### **Literature Review**

Expressions of sympathy have been widely examined in pragmatics as affective and face-sensitive speech acts that occur in situations of misfortune, illness, or loss.

Because such contexts involve emotional vulnerability, speakers must carefully balance empathy, politeness, and social distance (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Sympathy thus constitutes a delicate act: it reinforces solidarity as a positive politeness strategy, yet simultaneously threatens face by drawing attention to another's negative state (Holmes, 1995; Coupland et al., 1992). Leech's sympathy maxim further explains the social obligation to minimize antipathy and enhance social harmony.

Studies of direct sympathy show that many languages rely on conventionalized formulas to mitigate intrusiveness. In English, *I'm sorry* is the dominant pragmatic resource for conveying sympathy as well as apology (Coulmas, 1981; Wierzbicka, 1991). Other languages, such as French, employ more lexically explicit emotional expressions (e.g., *désolé*, *attristé*) that foreground affect more directly (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005). These contrasts reflect culturally shaped preferences for emotional explicitness. Research also highlights the importance of indirect sympathy strategies, such as inquiries, reassurance, encouragement, or support (Nwoye, 1992; Sharifian, 2005). Such strategies help speakers to express empathy while avoiding direct reference to misfortune, especially in socially distant or hierarchical interactions. Interactional studies further show that sympathy often co-occurs with supportive moves such as greetings, self-introductions, expressions of solidarity, religious references, etc. that serve to ritualize or legitimize the exchange (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005; Placencia & Bravo, 2002). These moves tend to be more elaborate in cultures valuing ritual politeness or communal identity (Obeng, 1996).

Cross-cultural research consistently demonstrates wide variation in sympathy practices, shaped by cultural scripts and emotional norms (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Wierzbicka, 1991). Anglo-Western contexts favor brief, low-imposition formulas, whereas Romance and many African cultures prefer more affectively rich, relationally oriented, and often religiously grounded expressions (Sharifian, 2005). Comparative studies, from Japanese (Elwood, 2004) to Ghanaian (Kongo & Gyasi, 2015), Peruvian Spanish (García, 2010), Vietnamese (Nguyen, 2016), Persian (Sheikhan, 2017) and Chinese (House, Kádár & Cang, 2025), all reinforce the culturally sensitive nature of condolence routines. These studies show that sympathy and condolence expressions share universal communicative goals, i.e. expressing empathy and acknowledging loss, but differ markedly in form, explicitness, and preferred strategies. This body of work provides a foundation for analyzing how speakers of Cameroon English and Cameroon French express sympathy within emotionally charged scenarios.

Finally, contrastive pragmatics offers a systematic means of comparing linguistic strategies across languages, revealing both shared patterns and culturally grounded differences in the performance of compassion-related acts. Postcolonial pragmatics adds an important layer by situating these practices within Cameroon's multilingual and complex sociocultural environment. Because English and French in Cameroon have been indigenized, through contact with local languages and cultural norms, sympathy

expressions cannot be treated as replicas of British or French patterns. Instead, they reflect hybrid, indigenized pragmatic conventions shaped by postcolonial identity, relational expectations, and local communicative values (cf. Anchimbe and Janney 2011, Anchimbe 2018). Combining contrastive and postcolonial pragmatics thus provides a fruitful framework for analyzing how Cameroonians express compassion across the country's two official languages.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design and Instrument**

Data were collected using a written discourse completion task (DCT) designed to elicit spontaneous yet contextually appropriate expressions of sympathy. The instrument consisted of two scenarios requiring compassion-related speech acts: We are interested in how speakers of English and speakers of French in Cameroon express sympathy in the following two situations:

1. Situation 1: expressing condolences to a bereaved friend;
2. Situation 2: consoling the spouse of a superior (professor or boss), hospitalized after an accident.

These scenarios were selected because they represent recurrent, socially salient contexts in which speakers are expected to display empathy, solidarity, and polite relational behaviour. Their inclusion allows for the examination of both condolence and consolation practices, providing a comprehensive view of compassion expression across Cameroon English and Cameroon French. Participants were instructed to produce the utterance or sequence of utterances they would naturally use in each situation. The open-ended nature of the task enabled the emergence of both single-turn expressions and multi-layered sequences combining multiple supportive acts.

### **Participants**

The study is based on responses from 192 participants divided into two linguistic groups. The Cameroon French group consists of 142 speakers (97 females, 45 males) aged between 18 and 30. A large majority (74%,  $n = 105$ ) fall within the 20–25 age range. The Cameroon English group includes 50 speakers (38 females, 12 males) aged 21–36. Most participants in this group (78%,  $n = 39$ ) were between 21 and 25 years old, while 10 (20%) are aged 26–29, and one participant (2%) is 36. All participants were students at the University of Yaoundé I. The anglophone respondents reported acquiring English primarily through formal schooling and had spoken it for more than 15 years; similarly, francophone respondents had acquired and used French through school education for over 15 years. The two groups were thus comparable in terms of educational background, age

range, and length of exposure to their respective linguistic varieties, factors that support the validity of cross-linguistic comparison in a contrastive pragmatic study.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Participants completed the DCT individually to minimize peer influence and ensure the authenticity of their responses. They were asked to write as they would naturally speak in the situations presented, with no restrictions on length, structure, or number of expressions. The written format was particularly useful for capturing full linguistic realizations of condoling and consoling acts, including multi-component sequences, intensifiers, address terms, and other pragmatic features that are often difficult to document reliably in spontaneous oral interaction.

### **Data Analysis**

The expressions of sympathy were analyzed using frameworks established in previous research on condolence and sympathy expressions. The analysis first involved segmenting participants' responses and categorizing each token into one of three pragmatic types: direct strategies, indirect strategies, and external modifiers. Direct strategies comprised explicit formulas of sympathy (e.g., *my condolences*, *mes condoléances*), lexicalized expressions of empathy, and direct references to the loss. Indirect strategies included exhortations, encouragements, exclamations, expressions of concern, offers of assistance, religious or fatalistic statements, prayers, wishes, and reassurance formulas. External modifiers encompassed greetings, compliments, questions, and other supportive elements accompanying the main act. Each strategy was then examined for syntactic structure, lexical choices, and pragmatic functions. Particular attention was paid to address terms, politeness markers, intensifiers, and supportive moves, given their relevance for conveying emotional alignment and managing interpersonal relations. A qualitative analysis was conducted to uncover the pragmatic motivations behind the choice and combination of condoling and consoling strategies, focusing on how speakers oriented to the addressee's emotional needs, negotiated face concerns, and positioned themselves socially. Quantitative analysis complemented this by identifying the frequency and distribution of strategies across the two linguistic groups. The final step involved a contrastive analysis of the Cameroon English and Cameroon French datasets to identify convergences and divergences in the pragmatic realization of compassion. This comparison followed the principles of contrastive pragmatics and was further interpreted through the lens of postcolonial pragmatics to account for the sociolinguistic and cultural influences shaping compassion-related speech acts in Cameroon's multilingual context.

The next section presents the results of this analysis, beginning with the

distribution of direct and indirect strategies in each linguistic variety and then examining the specific forms and pragmatic functions used in the two scenarios.

## Results

### Expressing Condolences to a Bereaved Friend (Scenario 1) Condoling Strategies in Cameroon English

The Cameroon English data show a relatively balanced use of direct and indirect condoling strategies, with a slight preference for indirect realizations. As summarized in Table 1, direct strategies account for 46.8% of the condolence expressions, whereas indirect strategies represent 53.2% of the 96 tokens collected. This distribution indicates that while speakers frequently resort to explicit sympathy formulas, they more often rely on indirect means, such as encouragements, offers of support, and religious expression, to convey empathy and emotional alignment.

Table 1: Overall distribution of condoling strategies (English)

Strategy Type	N (%)
Direct strategies	46.8%
Indirect strategies	53.2%
Total	100%

#### Direct Condoling Strategies

A total of 45 direct strategies were identified in the dataset. As shown in Table 2, the most frequent type involved the use of lexical items containing *condolence(s)*, which accounted for 53.3% of all direct realizations. Expressions containing *sorry* constituted the second most common category (42.2%). Only a small proportion of direct strategies (4.5%) employed verbs explicitly expressing empathy, such as *share* or *imagine*, indicating that overt verbalizations of emotional alignment were relatively uncommon in the Cameroon English responses.

Table 2: Distribution of direct condoling strategies (English)

Strategy Type	1. N (%)
Condolence	2. 24 (53.3%)
Sorry	3. 19 (42.2%)
Share / can imagine	4. 2 (4.5%)
Total	5. 45 (100%)

Expressions involving *condolence* or *sympathy* were realized through a variety of

syntactic constructions. The most common pattern was a nominal construction, such as *My condolence(s)*, often expanded with address terms or evaluative adjectives (e.g., *My condolences, my dear*; *My sincere condolences*). A second productive form was the imperative construction, including *Accept my condolences* or *Please accept my condolence*, frequently intensified through adjectives like *sincere* or *heartfelt* (e.g., *Accept my heartfelt condolences*) or through politeness markers such as *please* and *kindly*. Variants containing *sympathy* (e.g., *Accept my sympathy/sympathies*) followed the same structural patterns.

Expressions containing *sorry* formed the second most common type of direct strategy. These appeared either as elliptical forms (*Sorry*), often combined with address terms (*Sorry, my dear!*), or as full clauses (*I'm sorry*). Speakers frequently strengthened these expressions through adverbs (*I'm really/very/so sorry*), address terms (*I'm very sorry, Bob!*), or propositional extensions referring explicitly to the loss (*I'm sorry for your loss*; *I'm so sorry about the news*). Some responses included clauses describing the misfortune (*I'm sorry it happened to you*; *I'm so sorry for what happened to you and your family*). Only one participant used an alternative structure (*All my regret*), making it the sole example of its kind in the dataset.

A small number of respondents employed empathy-based constructions, such as *I share your pains* and *I can imagine how painful and difficult this experience may be to you*. These explicitly acknowledge the bereaved person's emotional experience and signal an attempt to convey shared affect. Across all direct strategies, speakers relied on a set of common intensification devices, including: (a) adverbs (e.g., *really, very, so*), (b) prepositional clauses (e.g., *about + NP, for + NP, for + VP*), (c) verb clauses referencing the tragic event, and (d) address terms, which personalize the message and soften the expression of sympathy.

### **Indirect Condoling Strategies**

Indirect condoling strategies were slightly more frequent, accounting for 51 of the expressions produced. Their distribution is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of indirect condoling strategies (English)

Indirect Strategy Type	N (%)
Exhortations / Encouragements / Advice	26 (51%)
Exclamations	11 (21.6%)
Expression of concern	1 (1.9%)
Offering support	4 (7.8%)
Statements about inevitable death (Truism)	5 (9.9%)
Lacking words / Acknowledging the sad news	2 (3.9%)
Statements that God is in control	2 (3.9%)
Total	51 (100%)

Exhortations, encouragements, and advice constituted the most frequently used indirect condoling strategy, accounting for 51% of the tokens. These were predominantly expressed through imperative constructions urging emotional fortitude (e.g., *Be courageous; Have courage; Be strong*). Variants built around *take* (e.g., *Take it easy; Take heart*) were also common, alongside constructions such as *Cheer up, my friend*. Some of these forms were softened with politeness markers (*please*) or downtoners (*just*), as in *Please be strong for me* and *Just take it easy*. Another productive pattern involved the structure *you have to*, framing resilience as an obligatory or necessary response (e.g., *You just have to be strong; My dear, you just have to take heart*).

Several participants also encouraged the bereaved to avoid negative emotional reactions, producing expressions such as *Please don't cry a lot* and *Please dear, do not be depressed*. These utterances functioned as supportive guidance aimed at helping the bereaved manage their emotional response.

Exclamations represented 21.6% of the indirect strategies. These were realized through evaluative or affective markers such as *What a shame! It's a shame! Oh, what a pity!* and *Oh my God!* all of which foreground emotional alignment with the bereaved.

Only one respondent expressed concern by requesting additional information (*When did she die?*), indicating an interest in the circumstances of the loss.

Offers or promises of support (7.8%) addressed both emotional and practical needs, with expressions such as *You can lean on me for anything, I will come over in the afternoon*, and *Do you need some help?* These utterances highlight solidarity and availability.

Statements invoking God's will or divine sovereignty (3.9%) included expressions such as *God takes him/her away for a better intention* and *The Lord is in control*, reflecting culturally grounded religious interpretations of loss.

Statements presenting death as inevitable (9.9%) relied on widely shared truisms, such as *That is life, It is the way for everyone on earth*, and *It is a road we will all take*, thereby normalizing loss as part of the human experience.

Finally, two participants expressed difficulty finding appropriate words or simply acknowledged the news (e.g., *I know I don't have the words that can console you; I heard you are bereaved*), signaling empathy through verbal restraint and recognition of the gravity of the situation.

### **Condoling Strategies in Cameroon French Overall Distribution of Strategies**

In the Cameroon French dataset, indirect strategies appeared considerably more frequently than direct ones. As shown in Table 4, 36.4% of the condoling expressions were direct, whereas 63.6% were indirect, indicating a clear preference for mediated, supportive, and elaborated forms of expressing sympathy. This distribution suggests that speakers of Cameroon French tend to privilege indirectness and affective reinforcement when addressing bereavement, relying on strategies that soften the message, attend to the addressee's emotional state, and embed condolences within broader supportive discourse.

Table 4: Overall distribution of condoling strategies (French)

Strategy Type	Cameroon French
Direct strategies	36.4%
Indirect strategies	63.6%

### **Direct Condoling Strategies**

French-speaking respondents produced 140 direct condoling expressions. As shown in Table 5, the majority (70%) involved the lexical item *condolérance(s)*, making it the most prominent direct strategy. The second most frequent group (20%) consisted of expressions containing adjectives such as *désolé*, *touché*, *navré*, or *triste*. A smaller subset (7.2%) relied on verbs of shared feeling, including *compatir à* and *partager*, which explicitly convey emotional alignment. Only a few instances (2.8%) featured culturally specific items such as *asia* and *patience*, reflecting locally grounded ways of expressing compassion.

Table 5: Distribution of direct condoling strategies (French)

Strategy Type	N (%)
Condoléances	98 (70%)
Désolé / touché / navré / triste	28 (20%)
Compatir à / partager	10 (7.2%)
Asia / patience	4 (2.8%)
Total	140 (100%)

Expressions with *condoléances* appeared in a wide range of syntactic patterns. Many respondents produced elliptical nominal constructions, such as *Mes condoléances*, often intensified through modifiers like *toutes*, *vraiment*, *très*, *sincères*, or *attristées* (e.g., *Toutes mes condoléances* ; *Vraiment mes sincères condoléances* ; *Mes condoléances les plus attristées/sincères* ; *Toutes mes sincères condoléances, mon ami* ; *Très sincères condoléances, mon ami*). Other realizations took the form of explicit performatives, including *Je t'adresse mes (sincères) condoléances* and *Je te présente mes condoléances*. Some participants used imperative constructions, particularly *accepte* and *reçois* (e.g., *Accepte mes condoléances les plus attristées*; *Reçois mes condoléances*). Noteworthy as well were expressions introduced by *je te prie de*, which frame the condolence as a polite appeal (e.g., *Je te prie de recevoir mes condoléances*).

The second most frequent category of direct condolence relied on adjectives denoting sadness or emotional impact: Expressions involving *désolé*, *touché*, *navré*, *triste*. Respondents used both simple clauses (e.g., *Je suis désolé(e)* ; *Je suis touché(e)*; *Je suis vraiment désolé/triste pour toi*) and more elaborated constructions specifying the cause or deepening the emotional stance (e.g., *Je suis sincèrement touchée par la mort de cette personne de ta famille qui t'est chère*). These formulations highlight the speaker's affective involvement and explicitly align them with the bereaved.

Ten responses were expressions with *compatir à* and *partager*. They used verbs that directly encode shared suffering. Examples include *Je compatiss vraiment* ; *Je compatiss à ta douleur, chère amie* ; and *Je partage ta peine*. Other realizations signaled solidarity more indirectly, as in *Je suis de tout cœur avec toi*. Several expressions were introduced with *sache que*, which serves as an intensifier (e.g., *Sache que je compatiss à ta douleur*).

A small number of participants employed *asia* and *patience*, items drawn from Cameroon's multilingual repertoires. In Cameroon French, *assia/asia*, borrowed from Camfranglais and Cameroon Pidgin English, functions as an expression of sympathy or consolation, while *patience* typically also occurs in informal settings. Examples include *Patience hein* and *Assia hein*. These forms were sometimes combined with other condolence strategies, as in *Ouiais ma puce, asia, mes condoléances et beaucoup de courage*. As noted in sociolinguistic descriptions, *assia* may express apology or sympathy depending on whether the speaker bears responsibility for the negative event. In condoling

contexts, it indexes shared emotional pain and cultural proximity.

### Indirect Condoling Strategies

Indirect strategies were highly frequent in the Cameroon French dataset, with a total of 245 tokens. These strategies encompassed a wide range of supportive, affective, and mitigated expressions that framed condolences in terms of encouragement, emotional reinforcement, and culturally grounded interpretations of loss. Their distribution is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Indirect condoling strategies (French)

Type of indirect strategy	N (%)
Exhortations / Encouragements / Advice	76 (31%)
Assurances that everything will be fine	25 (10.2%)
Exclamations	23 (9.4%)
Statements about God's will	21 (8.6%)
Statements about death (truisms / adages)	20 (8.2%)
Offering support	36 (14.7%)
Expressions of concern	10 (4%)
Wish / Hope	30 (12.3%)
Other	4 (1.6%)
Total	245 (100%)

As in the English dataset, *exhortations*, *advice* and *encouragements* formed the largest category of indirect strategies. These expressions encouraged emotional strength, resilience, or acceptance of the situation. Imperative constructions were especially common, including *Sois/reste fort* ; *Tiens bon* ; *Garde le moral* ; *Serre seulement le cœur* ; *Aie le gros cœur*. In addition, many speakers produced guidance aimed at helping the bereaved regulate their emotions such as *Ne te laisse pas abattre par la douleur* ; *Ne garde pas trop ça à cœur* ; *S'il te plaît, ne t'angoisse pas trop* ; *Ne sois pas triste*. These expressions functioned both as emotional support and as culturally situated directives favoring composure and endurance. In addition, respondents used deontic declaratives with *il (ne) faut (pas)* (e.g., *Il faut seulement serrer le cœur*; *Il ne faut pas te laisser abattre par la douleur*) to frame emotional resilience as a necessary response, similar to English *you have to* forms.

Several participants used the “*assurance that everything will be fine*” strategy to reassure the bereaved that the situation would eventually improve. Examples: *Ce n'est pas la fin du monde* ; *Ça va passer* ; *Tout ira bien* ; *Malgré ce décès, tout n'est pas fini pour toi*. These expressions aim to instill hope and emotional resilience.

*Exclamations* were another prominent indirect strategy, expressing shock, sadness, or empathetic concern. Common realizations included *Oh là là ! Mon Dieu ! Que c'est triste ! Oh non ! Mama ! Je ne sais quoi dire ; C'est pas possible ça ; Ce n'est pas vrai ; Quelle malchance !* Such forms foreground the speaker's emotional involvement and serve to align affectively with the bereaved before offering further supportive content. These exclamations often co-occurred with additional strategies, forming multi-component condolence sequences as in *Weh, weh, weh, ce n'est pas possible! Mes condoléances. Que Dieu t'assiste moralement.*

Respondents frequently expressed *wishes* for courage (e.g., *Je te souhaite beaucoup de courage*) and invoked *divine help*: *Que Dieu vous vienne en aide ; Que Dieu t'assiste moralement ; Que son âme repose en paix ; Que la terre de nos ancêtres lui soit légère.* With such constructions sympathy is expressed within spiritual and cultural frameworks.

A substantial portion of the indirect strategies invoked religious beliefs or divine will or sovereignty, reflecting the centrality of spirituality in Cameroonian communicative practices. Statements attested include *Dieu est au contrôle, C'est la volonté de Dieu ; Dieu seul sait pourquoi ; C'est Dieu qui donne et c'est lui qui reprend.* These expressions not only provide comfort but also frame the loss within a shared moral or spiritual understanding. These religious or spiritual expressions were frequently combined with advice and encouragement as in *Oh! Ce doit être un tel choc pour toi et ta famille. Sois forte ! Tu sais, c'est le seigneur qui donne la vie, c'est aussi lui qui le reprend... Prie beaucoup !*

Several participants produced statements on the inevitability of death. The truisms and adages produced served to normalize death as part of the human condition. Examples include *C'est le chemin de tous ; C'est le destin commun ; Nul n'est éternel ; C'était son jour; Il ne reviendra pas ; C'est la vie, La mort fait partie de notre destinée,* and *Nous passerons tous par là.* These philosophical or fatalistic statements serve to mitigate the emotional weight of the loss by situating it within universal experience. Proverbs were sometimes added for emphasis: *Ce qui ne vous pas tue vous rend fort.*

*Offers of assistance* constituted another important set of indirect strategies. Respondents expressed availability for emotional or practical help, using formulations such as *Je suis là pour toi, Tu peux compter sur moi, Je viendrai te voir,* or *Si tu as besoin de quelque chose, fais-moi signe.* These expressions emphasize solidarity, companionship, and willingness to provide support during the period of mourning. Other strategies range from offering psychological comfort to offering practical assistance. For instance: *Je viens dès que possible, J'arrive tout de suite, Je viendrai te voir dès que je peux, N'oublie pas que tu as un ami sur qui compter, N'hésite pas si tu as besoin de moi.* These expressions also appear with other strategies (e.g., *Oh! Mes condoléances ma chérie... J'arrive tout de suite ; Gars, c'est la vie. Nous sommes avec toi.*

Although less frequent (4%), *expressions of concern* appeared in interrogative form and showed interest in the circumstances of the death (e.g. *Était-il malade? De quoi souffrait-il ? Comment cela est-il arrivé ? C'est arrivé quand ?*) They were often paired with direct condolence forms (e.g., *Mes condoléances mon frère. Était-il malade? De quoi souffrait-il?*) These expressions function as displays of involvement and signal attentiveness to the bereaved person's emotional state and the context of the loss.

Overall, indirect condoling strategies in Cameroon French revealed a strong preference for encouragement, emotional reinforcement, and culturally grounded expressions of support. These strategies not only communicated sympathy but also enacted interpersonal solidarity, spiritual alignment, and shared cultural understandings of suffering and resilience.

### **The Use of Address Terms Address Terms in Cameroon English**

The Cameroon English dataset contains only seven instances of address terms in condolence utterances. Although quantitatively limited, they play a crucial pragmatic role in condolence exchanges: (a) they personalize the expression, ensuring that sympathy is directed explicitly at the bereaved; (b) they function as solidarity markers, signalling emotional closeness, empathy, and interpersonal support; (c) they may serve as softeners, mitigating the face-threatening nature of engaging with someone's grief, (d) they help frame the condoling act in a way that strengthens the illocutionary force of the condolence. In contexts of bereavement, where social and emotional expectations are heightened, such address terms help speakers manage the delicacy of the interaction. The endearment and solidarity terms *My dear* (n = 3) and *Dear* (n = 2) are employed to create a sense of warmth and closeness that reassures the bereaved of the speaker's emotional presence. In a moment of loss, such terms: (a) reinforce in-group membership, (b) signal sincere concern, and (c) soften the emotional weight of the condolence. The recurrence of *my dear*, the most frequent form, suggests a culturally salient strategy of affectively loaded address to strengthen social cohesion in times of grief. The friendship term *My friend* (n = 1) is employed to encode familiarity and solidarity, while the personal name *Bob* (n = 1) is used to index high personalization and directness, to intensify the sincerity of the condolence, and to signal a pre-existing relationship. Although only seven tokens were recorded, address terms carry significant interpersonal meaning. The preference for *my dear* and *dear* reflects broader tendencies in Cameroonian English usage, where these forms help to establish a compassionate tone and align with culturally grounded expectations of sensitivity, care, and solidarity in situations of mourning.

### Address Terms in Cameroon French

The Cameroon French dataset contains 126 instances of address terms, making it considerably richer and more varied than the Cameroon English corpus. This dense use of nominal address forms highlights key cultural and pragmatic patterns in how French-speaking Cameroonians express empathy, solidarity, and relational closeness in condolence interactions. The dataset includes both single ( $n = 40$ ) and compound ( $n = 86$ ) nominal forms. Single terms encompass kinship terms (e.g., *frère*), friendship terms (e.g., *camarade*, *gars*, *man*), general social terms (e.g., *miss*), and especially personal names. First names and surnames, representing 65.5% of all single terms, serve as highly personal cues that index familiarity, directness, and emotional involvement. Compound forms are overwhelmingly *Possessive + Noun structures* (97.7%), such as *mon ami*, *ma copine*, *mon pote*, *ma sœur*, *mon frère*, *ma chérie*, *ma puce*, *ma belle*, and the figurative Cameroon French *ma mère*. These combinations use possessives (*mon*, *ma*) with kinship or endearment nouns to convey intimacy, affection, and a shared emotional space. Their productivity shows that French-speaking Cameroonians routinely express compassion through relational alignment, positioning themselves as emotionally co-present with the bereaved. Terms such as *ma chérie*, *mon ami*, or *ma sœur* explicitly signal warmth and solidarity, helping reduce emotional distance and communicating sincere concern. Kinship and friendship terms act as social-binding devices, reinforcing communal identity and framing the mourner as part of a supportive network. Consequently, expressions like *Toutes mes sincères condoléances*, *ma chérie* carry significantly greater emotional force than more formulaic, unmarked expressions. The prominence of kinship-based and affectionate address terms reflects broader sociocultural norms in Cameroon, where kinship is frequently extended to express solidarity and emotional reciprocity.

### Contrastive Analysis and Discussion of Findings (Scenario 1)

Overall, both datasets favour indirect condoling, but Cameroon French does so more strongly (63.6%) than Cameroon English (53.2%). Conversely, Cameroon English shows a higher proportion of direct expressions (46.8%) than Cameroon French (36.4%). Regarding the use of direct strategies, the results show that, in Cameroon English, direct condoling is predominantly realized through formulae containing *condolence(s)* (53.3%) and *sorry* (42.2%), with very limited use of explicit empathy claims (e.g., *share/can imagine*) (4.5%). In Cameroon French, direct expressions are more heavily routinized around *condoléance(s)* (70%), complemented by affective adjectives (*désolé/touché/navré/triste*, 20%), and a smaller set of empathy verbs (*compatir/partager*, 7.2%). Culture-specific items (*asia/patience*) occur marginally (2.8%). As for indirect strategies, it was found that both groups rely most on exhortations, encouragement, advice,

but this strategy is substantially more prominent in Cameroon English (51%) than in Cameroon French (31%). Beyond this shared preference, the datasets diverge in their secondary choices: Cameroon English shows a comparatively higher use of exclamations (21.6%) and death truisms (9.9%), whereas Cameroon French more frequently employs offers/promises of support (14.7%), wish/hope/prayer (12.3%), and assurances that everything will be fine (10.2%), three categories absent from the English corpus. Religious framing is present in both groups but is more salient in Cameroon French (statements about God: 8.6% vs. 3.9%). Cameroon French also shows a slightly higher rate of expressions of concern (4% vs. 1.9%), while “lacking words/acknowledging the news” occurs only in Cameroon English (3.9%). In sum, the contrast suggests that Cameroon English condoling in this scenario is relatively more formula-plus-directive (frequent *condolence/sorry* and strong exhortations), whereas Cameroon French displays a more elaborated supportive orientation, with greater use of reassurance, prayer/wishes, support offers, and religious anchoring alongside highly routinized *condoléances* formulae.

After discussing the realization strategies of expressions of sympathy in situation 1 let us now turn to situation 2.

**Consoling the Other for Spouse Being Involved in an Accident (Scenario 2)**  
**Consoling Strategies in Cameroon English**  
**Direct Consoling Strategies**

Table 7 shows the distribution of direct consoling strategies in English.

Table 7: Distribution of direct consoling strategies (English)

Type of direct expression	Frequency
Expressions with “sorry”	18 (82%)
Expressions with “sympathy”	4 (18%)
Total	22 (100%)

The results show a clear pattern: in an accident scenario involving strangers, English speakers overwhelmingly favor “sorry”-based direct sympathy expressions (18/22 = 82%) over explicit “sympathy”-based wording (4/22 = 18%). This distribution strongly suggests that “sorry” functions as the default, socially efficient sympathy formula in brief, low-relationship encounters.

Eighty-two percent of the English-speaking participants produced sympathy expressions containing the lexical item *sorry*. These were realized in concise forms such as *so sorry*, *sorry, lady!* and *I’m sorry*. Other realizations were more elaborated, combining *sorry* or *I am sorry* with address terms and/or explicit references to the cause of the sympathy. Examples include: *Sorry for what happened to you, Mme; I am sorry for what*

*happened; I'm very sorry, Madam; I am sorry about your husband's condition; and Madam, I'm sorry about the accident.* These forms illustrate the versatility of *sorry* in constructing direct and contextually grounded expressions of sympathy.

Eighteen percent of the Cameroon-English respondents used expressions that incorporated the word *sympathy*. These expressions tended to be more formulaic and formal in tone, as seen in realizations such as *Accept my sympathy* and *Ma'am, my sympathy*. Although less frequent, these forms demonstrate an alternative strategy for expressing direct sympathy, one that relies on explicitly naming the sentiment rather than using a more conventionalized marker like *sorry*.

### Indirect Consoling Strategies

Table 8 presents the breakdown of indirect consoling strategies in the Cameroon English data set.

Table 8: Distribution of indirect consoling strategies (English)

Strategy type	N (%)
Exhortations, encouragements, advice	27 (26.7%)
Expressions of concern	33 (32.7%)
Statements about God	7 (6.9%)
Reassurance	12 (12%)
Expressions of wish or hope	9 (9%)
Exclamations	8 (7.9%)
Others (Acknowledgements of the sad news, truism)	4 (4.8%)
Total	101 (100%)

Table 8 shows that Cameroon English speakers relied most on expressions of concern (33; 32.7%) and exhortations/encouragement/advice (27; 26.7%), which together account for nearly 60% of all indirect strategies. This indicates a strong tendency to frame sympathy practically and interpersonally, checking on the victim and offering guidance/support, rather than only stating emotion. Reassurance (12; 12%) and wishes/hope (9; 9%) form a secondary cluster, further emphasizing emotional support and optimism. Smaller but notable strategies include exclamations (8; 7.9%) and God-related statements (7; 6.9%), suggesting that affective intensity and religious framing play a role, though less centrally. Overall, the pattern highlights an action-oriented, supportive indirect sympathy style in this context.

As shown in Table 8, *expressions of concern* constituted the most frequently used indirect strategy, representing 32.7% of all indirect sympathy expressions in Cameroon

English. As the label suggests, this strategy is used to display care for the well-being of the addressee or the person involved in the accident. In many cases, respondents asked questions about the circumstances surrounding the accident, using forms such as *What happened?* and *What really happened?* Others made inquiries about the condition of the injured person, with examples including *How is his condition now?* *How is the situation like?* *How is he doing now?* *By the way, how is he doing?* and *Is he in a serious condition?* Some questions were phrased indirectly, as in *Hope he's better now* and *Hope now everything is fine*. The respondents also showed concern for the hearer's own well-being through questions such as *And what about you?* *Are you ok?* and *Are you feeling fine now?* These realizations indicate that expressions of concern serve not only to gather information but also to establish empathy and interpersonal involvement.

The second most frequently used indirect strategy was *exhortations, encouragements, and advice*, employed by 26.7% of the participants. This strategy was realized through a wide range of syntactic constructions. Imperatives were commonly used to urge the interlocutors to remain strong, courageous, calm, or composed. Examples include *Be strong;* *Be courageous;* *Be courageous, Madam;* *Have courage, Madam;* *Just be courageous;* *Please take heart;* *Take heart, Madam;* and *take it easy, Madam*. Some imperative forms were used specifically to exhort the addressee to pray (*Continue praying;* *Pray*), while others advised reliance on prayer (*All you need now is prayers*). Encouragements and pieces of advice were also formulated using declarative constructions containing the expression *you just have to*, as in *Madam, you just have to put yourself together* and *You just have to be calm, Madame, in order to take good care of him*. Other instances focused on discouraging worry through negative imperatives such as *Don't bother a lot;* *Don't worry;* and *Madam, don't worry*. One participant produced the utterance *He needs you more than ever*, which served as an encouragement for the addressee to remain strong to support the hospitalized person.

Another indirect strategy observed was *reassurance*, accounting for 12% of the indirect sympathy expressions in the Cameroon English dataset. This strategy aimed to comfort the addressee by providing positive projections about the outcome of the situation. It was realized through constructions such as *Your husband will be fine;* *Everything is going to be alright;* *He'll be fine;* *She will be alright;* *Everything will be ok;* *He is going to be ok;* *It will be ok;* *Everything would be alright;* *All is well;* and *It shall be well*. Some examples included temporal adverbials, which served to intensify the reassurance, as in *It will soon be over;* *Everything will soon be alright;* and *Your husband will get well as soon as possible*. Additional intensifiers such as *I'm sure* and *By God's grace* further reinforced the reassuring tone of the utterances: *I'm sure everything is going to be fine soon;* *By God's grace, everything is going to be alright*.

*Exclamations* also occurred in the data as indirect markers of sympathy. These expressions served primarily to convey shock, concern, or emotional alignment with the

addressee's situation. Examples include *Oh madam! Oh! It's a pity, Ma'am; Oh! Oh, it's a pity; It's such a sad situation!* and *Oh my God, Madam*. These forms function as immediate affective reactions that display empathy without explicitly referencing sympathy.

*References to God or statements about God* were another strategy used to comfort the addressee and encourage emotional resilience. Such statements invoke divine intervention or control as a source of reassurance. The constructions employed include *God is in control* and *God will take control*. By framing the situation within a religious context, these expressions provide spiritual support and reflect the sociocultural salience of religious belief in dealing with misfortune.

Participants also expressed sympathy indirectly by *expressing hopes or wishes* for the injured person's recovery. These expressions focused on the anticipated improvement of the victim's condition and included constructions such as *We all hope that he will recover as early as possible; Hope he will get well very soon!* and *I hope everything will be alright*. One respondent formulated a prayer-like utterance, *Ma, it shall be well with you*, which simultaneously expresses hope and offers a blessing.

Another strategy consisted of *acknowledging the sad news or unfortunate event*, thereby validating the addressee's emotional state. Examples include *I heard the unfortunate news* and *I heard what happened to your husband*. These utterances serve to demonstrate awareness of the situation and implicitly communicate sympathy.

A small number of responses fell into a miscellaneous category. These included truisms such as *While we are still alive, such things are bound to happen*, which frame the incident within a broader existential perspective. Other responses highlighted the respondent's personal connection to the injured individual, as in *Your husband is my boss*, which may function as a subtle expression of empathy by implying shared emotional impact or personal concern.

### **Consoling Strategies in Cameroon French Direct Consoling Strategies**

Table 9 summarizes the distribution of direct consoling strategies in the Cameroon French data set.

Table 9: Distribution of direct consoling strategies (French)

Type of direct expression	Frequency
Expressions with <i>désolé, touché, attristé</i> , etc.	28 (43%)
Expressions with <i>compatir / partager, peine</i> , etc.	25 (38.6%)
Expressions with <i>compassion, sympathie</i>	3 (4.6%)
Expressions with <i>condoléances</i>	3 (4.6%)
Others	6 (9.2%)
Total	65 (100%)

Table 9 shows that Cameroon French speakers rely primarily on two types of direct sympathy expressions. The most frequent category consists of formulas using *désolé, touché, attristé*, and related items (43%), indicating a strong preference for conventionalized expressions of personal sadness or emotional alignment with the addressee. The French-speaking respondents expressed sympathy using formulas containing adjectives such as *désolé, touché, triste, attristé*, and *sincère*. These expressions framed the speaker's emotional reaction to the situation and were realized in forms such as *Je suis vraiment désolé pour ce qui vous arrive* ; *Ce qui lui arrive me touche profondément* ; *Cette nouvelle m'a beaucoup attristé* ; and *Mes sincères regrets, Madame*.

Approximately thirty-nine percent of the francophone participants conveyed sympathy by using expressions built around *compatir, partager*, or *peine* (38.6%), which explicitly highlight shared suffering and solidarity. Many of these expressions contained the verbs *compatir à* (e.g., *Je compatissais à votre peine / douleur*) and *partager* (e.g., *Je partage votre peine* ; *Nous partageons avec vous ce moment de douleur* ; *Madame, nous partageons votre tristesse*). Other attested patterns include constructions with *être de tout cœur* (*Nous sommes de tout cœur avec vous*), expressions built around *avoir/faire de la peine* (*Madame, ça me fait beaucoup de peine*), the verb phrase *prendre part à* (*Madame, je prends part à votre forte douleur*), as well as empathetic formulations such as *Je sais ce que vous pouvez ressentir en ce moment*.

A less frequent pattern consisted of expressions containing the nouns *compassion* and *sympathie*. Only three instances of this type appeared in the dataset, realized as *Toute ma sympathie, Madame*; *Ma compassion la plus profonde, Madame*; and *Toute ma compassion*. These forms tend to be more formal and ceremonial compared to the more commonly used patterns discussed above.

The results also show that three respondents produced expressions containing the

term *condoléances*. In the context of an accident in which the injured person is hospitalized and not deceased, these expressions are inappropriate. The condolence formulas included *Madame, je vous adresse mes sincères condoléances* and *Mes condoléances, Monsieur*. In one instance, the condolence formula was combined with other sympathy strategies, suggesting that the respondent likely confused set expressions rather than assuming that the individual had died (e.g., *Mes condoléances Monsieur, j'ai appris que votre épouse a eu un accident. Mais ne vous en faites pas, par la grâce de Dieu tout ira mieux.*)

The remaining 9.2% fall into miscellaneous direct expressions that do not fit the main categories. Overall, the distribution reveals a marked preference for emotionally grounded, personalized formulas over more formal or institutionalized sympathy expressions. Finally, a few participants used expressions containing the word *patience*. In Cameroon French, *patience* can be used informally to express apology or sympathy. When used as a sympathy expression, it may appear alone or in combination with other strategies, as in *Patience* and *Nous vous disons patience*. Additionally, the expression *Nos prières et nos pensées iront vers vous* was attested, further illustrating the diversity of direct sympathy formulas in Cameroon French.

### Indirect Consoling Strategies

Table 10 shows the different strategies used by the French-speaking respondents to indirectly console their interlocutors.

Table 10: Distribution of indirect consoling strategies (French)

Strategy type	N (%)
Expressions of concern	62 (29%)
Exhortations, encouragements, advice	55 (25.7%)
Reassurance that everything will be fine	40 (18.7%)
Expressions of wish and/or hope	33 (15.4%)
Offers and promises of support	17 (7.9%)
Others (truisms)	7 (3.3%)
Total	214 (100%)

Table 10 shows that Cameroon French speakers predominantly rely on expressions of concern (29%) and exhortations, encouragements, and advice (25.7%) when expressing sympathy indirectly. Together, these strategies account for more than half of all responses, indicating a strong preference for supportive, involvement-oriented forms that highlight interpersonal care and practical guidance. A second category of strategies includes reassurance (18.7%) and expressions of wish or hope (15.4%), both of which focus on projecting a positive outcome and offering emotional comfort. Less frequent are offers and

promises of support (7.9%), which nonetheless reflect a willingness to demonstrate solidarity through potential action. The remaining category, truisms (3.3%), represents a small set of general statements that frame the situation within broader life perspectives.

With 29% of the examples, *expressions of concern* constituted the most preferred indirect strategy. As in the Cameroon English corpus, French-speaking respondents used this strategy to inquire about the circumstances of the accident (e.g., *Qu'est-ce qui s'est réellement passé?*), the current condition of the injured person (e.g., *S'il vous plaît, quel est l'état de santé de mon patron ?*), and the medical report (e.g., *Que disent les médecins ?*). In many cases, these constructions were combined with other strategies, thereby serving both an informational and an empathetic function.

*Exhortations, encouragements, and advice* represented 25.7% of the examples and were the second most common indirect strategy. Respondents employed positive imperative constructions such as *soyez fort, soyez sans crainte, madame, ayez du cœur, and restez positive*, as well as negative imperatives like *Ne désespérez pas s'il vous plaît ; Madame, n'ayez pas peur ; and Ne vous en faites pas*. These forms were used to motivate the interlocutor to remain strong, calm, and hopeful in the face of the stressful situation.

This “reassurance that everything will be fine” strategy functioned to encourage optimism by reassuring the addressee of a positive outcome. It was realized through expressions such as *ça va aller, tout ira mieux, and ce n'est pas la fin du monde*. Some respondents strengthened the impact of their reassurance by adding religious references (*Tout ira bien par la grâce de Dieu ; Par la grâce de Dieu il se rétablira*), epistemic markers (*je suis sûr que votre épouse s'en sortira*), or assertive constructions (*je vous assure qu'il se rétablira par la grâce de Dieu*). These intensification devices served to enhance the comforting effect of the reassurance.

More than fifteen percent of the Cameroon French informants used *expressions of wish or hope*. These were formulated as hopes for a speedy recovery (e.g., *Nous espérons et souhaitons qu'il se remettra vite et qu'il nous revienne*), appeals for divine assistance (e.g., *Que Dieu tout puissant vous aide à surmonter cette épreuve douloureuse*), and prayers for divine protection (e.g., *Que Dieu le protège*). Another variant involved explicit prayers for the injured person's recuperation, as in *Nous prions beaucoup le grand Dieu pour qu'il retrouve rapidement sa santé*. Expressions of wish, hope, and prayer often appeared in combination with other strategies, as illustrated in *Comment se porte le professeur ? Est-ce que c'est grave? Que Dieu le protège*.

Another indirect strategy consisted of *offering or promising moral or psychological support*. Examples include *Nous sommes là pour vous reconforter ; Surtout, vous pouvez compter sur moi ; Nous allons prier beaucoup pour lui ; Madame, nous vous soutenons dans cette épreuve ; and Je vais beaucoup prier pour qu'il se remette rapidement*. The recurrent use of the pronoun *nous* suggests an emphasis on collective solidarity, providing the addressee with a sense of communal support during a difficult

moment.

The final category comprises expressions of sympathy formulated as truisms, such as *Dans la vie il y a des hauts et des bas* and *La vie ne réserve que des surprises*. References to God also appeared in this category, reflecting the cultural embeddedness of religious discourse in expressions of empathy and emotional support.

### External Modification

#### External modifiers in Cameroon English

In the Cameroon English dataset, there were three instances where respondents used greetings as a way of establishing initial contact with the addressee before expressing sympathy. These included *Good afternoon, Madam*; *Good day, Mrs.*; and *good morning, Madam*. In one case, the respondent also closed the sympathy turn by sending regards to the person involved in the accident, as in *Extend my kind regards*. These forms function as supportive peripheral acts that frame the main sympathy expression and help create or maintain interpersonal rapport.

#### External Modifiers in Cameroon French

Contrary to the English corpus, which contained only four instances of supportive acts, the Cameroon French dataset exhibited a much richer repertoire, both in terms of the number and the variety of supportive acts used, as shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Distribution of external modifiers (French)

Type of external modifier	Frequency
Greetings	44 (43.5%)
Self-introductions	25 (24.8%)
Justifications	20 (19.8%)
Compliments and good wishes	9 (9%)
Apologies	3 (2.9%)
Total	101 (100%)

Table 11 indicates that the French-speaking respondents employed five to six different types of supportive acts to accompany their expressions of sympathy. These included greetings, self-introductions, justifications, compliments, well-wishes, and apologies.

*Greetings* were by far the most frequently used supportive act: almost 44% of the respondents greeted the addressee before expressing sympathy. Given the nature of the situation, an interaction between strangers in a hospital, greetings played an important role

in establishing rapport and creating an atmosphere of trust between the speaker and the spouse of the accident victim. Participants appeared to consider a sympathy expression without an introductory greeting inappropriate or abrupt. The greetings were typically realized as *bonjour*, *bonsoir*, and *salut*, usually accompanied by terms of address such as *madame* or *monsieur*.

The second most preferred supportive act was *self-introduction*, which accounted for almost 25% of the data. This high frequency can also be attributed to the interactional context: in such a situation, it is expected that the speaker reveals their identity and, crucially, their relationship to the injured person. The questionnaire scenario asked respondents to imagine themselves in a professional relationship with the victim—either as students (student–professor) or employees (employee–boss). Accordingly, self-introductions were realized as *votre mari, c'est mon professeur ; je suis l'employé de monsieur ; je suis l'étudiante de votre épouse ;* and *nous sommes les étudiantes du monsieur couché là*. Self-introductions often co-occurred with greetings, as shown below:

- 1) *Bonjour madame. En fait je suis une étudiante de votre mari. Je suis sincèrement désolé, un camarade m'en a informé ce matin.*

'Good morning, ma'am. In fact, I am a student of your husband. I am sincerely sorry; a classmate informed me of the accident this morning.'

The third most frequent supportive acts were *justifications*, used by almost 20% of the respondents. As the term suggests, justifications explained the speaker's presence at the hospital. Some took the form of acknowledgements of the news, e.g., *j'ai appris l'accident c'est pourquoi je suis là ; j'ai appris que mon patron a eu un accident ; je viens d'apprendre pour l'accident*. Others highlighted the speaker's intention to provide moral support, as in *Je suis venu lui apporter un soutien moral*. Justifications also appeared alongside other supportive moves as in (2).

- 2) *Bonjour madame, je suis une étudiante de votre mari, raison pour laquelle je suis ici. Je compatis à votre douleur et vous assure qu'il se rétablira par la grâce de Dieu. Du courage à vous madame.*

"Good morning, ma'am, I am a student of your husband, which is why I am here. I sympathize with you and assure you that he will recover by the grace of God. Be courageous ma'am."

Approximately 9% of Cameroon French respondents used *compliments* and *well-wishes* to support their expressions of sympathy. Compliments often served to highlight the social or professional value of the injured professor or boss, as in examples where the victim is described as *one of the best teachers*. The compliment was typically followed by a wish for rapid recovery. In one example, the speaker also reassured the addressee that she was not alone, emphasizing the collective support of all the students; the turn concluded with an invocation of divine help. The recurrent use of *nous* reinforces the idea that the victim's situation is of collective concern. Other compliments included

*madame, c'est un grand professeur, on a besoin de lui* and *Il ne méritait pas cet accident*. Compliments were also expressed by sending warm regards: *adressez mes amitiés à votre époux*. Below are some examples:

- 3) *Madame, votre époux est l'un de nos meilleurs enseignants et nous espérons qu'il se rétablira très vite.*

“Madam, your husband is one of our best teachers, and we hope he recovers very quickly.”

- 4) *Madame, votre époux est l'un de nos meilleurs enseignants et nous espérons qu'il se rétablira très vite. Mais en attendant vous n'êtes pas seule, nous sommes tous avec vous, que Dieu nous aide.*

“Madam, your husband is one of our best teachers, and we hope he recovers very quickly. But in the meantime, you are not alone — we are all with you, may God help us.”

- 5) *Votre époux compte beaucoup pour nous ! Nous partageons votre angoisse. Mais nous savons que tout va aller pour le mieux.*

“Your husband means a great deal to us! We share your anxiety, but we know that everything will turn out for the best.”

Finally, a small number of respondents used apologies as supportive acts. These functioned primarily as disarmers or attention-getters and appeared in combination with other strategies as shows below:

- 6) *S'il vous plaît madame, nous venons assister notre patron qui a eu un accident.*

“Please, Madam, we have come to assist our boss who has had an accident.”

- 7) *Excusez-moi monsieur, comment va madame ? J'espère que ce n'est pas trop grave ? Que Dieu la garde.*

“Excuse me, sir, how is Madam doing? I hope it's not too serious. May God protect her.”

### Address Terms

The distribution of address terms in Situation 2 reveals clear cross-linguistic differences in how Cameroon English and Cameroon French speakers manage politeness and social distance.

#### Address Terms in Cameroon English

In the Cameroon English data (n = 32), address term use was highly concentrated on *Madam/Madame* (26 tokens). Only minimal variation appeared (*Ma'am, Ma, Mrs., Lady*), and no respondent used *sir*, indicating a uniform orientation to a female addressee and a relatively narrow, conventionalized address-term repertoire.

### Address Terms in Cameroon French

By contrast, the Cameroon French dataset (n = 124) contained a far higher number and frequency of address terms, divided between *Madame* (80%) and *Monsieur* (20%). This larger distribution reflects the more elaborate interactional framing characteristic of the French responses, where greetings, self-introductions, and justifications frequently co-occur with address terms. The presence of *Monsieur* suggests greater interpretive flexibility among Cam-French respondents, who did not uniformly assume a female addressee.

Overall, Cameroon French speakers employ address terms more frequently and more flexibly, embedding them within a broader set of ritualized supportive acts, whereas Cameroon English speakers use them sparingly and primarily as straightforward politeness markers. This contrast underscores differing interactional styles: a more formalized and relational approach in Cameroon French versus a more economical and streamlined one in Cameroon English.

### Contrastive Analysis and Discussion of Findings (Scenario 2)

In both Cameroon English and Cameroon French, indirect strategies clearly outweighed direct expressions, indicating a shared preference for mitigating sympathy when addressing strangers in an emotionally sensitive accident scenario. Cameroon English produced 22 direct vs. 101 indirect expressions, whereas Cameroon French showed an even stronger imbalance (65 vs. 214), reinforcing the tendency toward indirectness across both groups.

The two corpora diverged sharply in the use of direct strategies. Cameroon English relied predominantly on highly formulaic “sorry”-based forms, which are concise, conventional, and interactionally safe. In contrast, Cameroon French speakers employed a broader and more affectively explicit repertoire, with frequent use of *désolé*, *touché*, *attristé*, as well as verbs like *compatir* and *partager la peine*. While both groups used similar categories of indirect strategies (e.g., concern, encouragement, reassurance, hope/wish), their realizations differed. Expressions of concern were the most frequent in each corpus, but Cameroon French responses tended to be more formal and elaborated, especially in inquiries about medical details. Encouragements and advice appeared in both datasets, though French responses more often included expanded imperatives and address terms. Reassurance and wishes for recovery were also common in both languages, with Cameroon French displaying a higher density of intensifiers and religious references. Additional patterns such as truisms and life reflections appeared only in the French corpus. Overall, Cameroon English speakers used concise, formulaic, and pragmatically economical strategies, whereas Cameroon French speakers produced more elaborate,

affectively explicit, and ritualized sympathy expressions. Despite these stylistic differences, both groups showed a strong shared preference for indirectness as the primary mode of expressing empathy in Situation 2.

A comparison of external modifiers and address terms in the Cameroon English and Cameroon French datasets reveals clear cross-linguistic contrasts in how speakers frame and reinforce sympathy in Situation 2. Although both groups rely primarily on indirect sympathy strategies, they differ substantially in the complexity, variety, and interactional framing of the supportive resources they mobilize. Supportive acts were almost absent in the Cameroon English data (n=4), limited to brief greetings and occasional closing wishes. These served only as minimal framing devices and did not substantially expand the interactional structure surrounding the sympathy expression. In contrast, Cam-French speakers employed a rich and diversified repertoire of supportive acts. These included greetings (44%), self-introductions (25%), justifications (20%), compliments, collective expressions of solidarity, and occasional apologies. French-speaking respondents systematically prefaced their sympathy with such relational and ritualized moves, creating a more elaborate interactional sequence and strengthening interpersonal alignment with the addressee. This pattern reflects a preference for interactional scaffolding, where supportive acts contextualize, legitimize, and enhance the force of the sympathy expression.

The use of address terms further illustrates the cross-linguistic contrast. Cameroon English speakers employed a small, stable set of forms (primarily *Madam/Madame*), indicating a concise and formulaic approach to polite address. Notably, no instances of *sir* appeared, suggesting a shared interpretation of the addressee as female and a limited sense of variation in address-term choice. By contrast, Cameroon French speakers used address terms far more frequently (n = 124), with *Madame* accounting for 80% and *Monsieur* for 20% of the examples. Their high frequency results from the consistent embedding of address terms within greetings, self-introductions, and other supportive acts. The presence of *Monsieur* suggests greater interpretive flexibility and a stronger orientation toward ritualized, socially marked openings. These patterns point to fundamental differences in interactional style. Cameroon English speakers appear to prefer concise and formulaic expressions; minimal pre-sequences and sympathy expressed directly through established routines. Cameroon French appear to prefer elaborate, relational, and ritualized expressions with extensive use of greetings, address terms, introductions, and religious or communal references. Their expression of sympathy in this situation is embedded within a multi-layered interactional format.

### Conclusion

This study examined how speakers of Cameroon English and Cameroon French

express sympathy in an accident scenario involving strangers, focusing on their use of direct strategies, indirect strategies, supportive acts, and address terms. The analysis revealed both shared tendencies and striking contrasts between the two linguistic communities, reflecting broader sociolinguistic and cultural orientations.

Across both groups, indirect strategies emerged as the dominant means of expressing sympathy, suggesting a shared preference for mitigating the imposition of a face-threatening act in a context marked by emotional vulnerability and social distance. Expressions of concern and exhortations/encouragements were the most frequently used indirect strategies in both language varieties, indicating that speakers prioritize empathy, emotional support, and reassurance over explicit statement of sympathy. Despite these parallels, the nature and distribution of direct strategies differed markedly. Cameroon English speakers relied heavily on the highly conventionalized “sorry”-based expressions, reflecting a concise and formulaic anglophone approach to sympathy. In contrast, Cameroon French speakers employed a richer and more varied emotional lexicon—*désolé*, *touché*, *attristé*, *compatir*, *partager la peine*, and related forms—resulting in more explicit and affectively oriented expressions. The appearance of condolence formulas in the French corpus, even in a non-fatal context, further underscores the strong role of ritualized language patterns in francophone expressions of sympathy.

The most significant cross-linguistic differences emerged in the use of supportive acts, which were rare and minimal in Cameroon English but frequent, diverse, and interactionally complex in Cameroon French. French-speaking respondents commonly prefaced or accompanied their sympathy with greetings, self-introductions, justifications, compliments, well-wishes, and apologies. These moves served to establish rapport, justify the speaker’s presence, display communal support, and soften the emotional weight of the situation. In contrast, Cameroon English respondents used very few supportive acts, and those that occurred were largely limited to greetings and closing wishes. This contrast highlights a broader communicative pattern: Cameroon French displays a more ritualized, relational, and socially framed sympathy style, whereas Cameroon English favors brevity, pragmatic efficiency, and reduced interactional scaffolding. Address terms further illustrated these differences. Cameroon French speakers used them far more frequently and integrated them into a wide range of supportive moves. Cameroon English speakers also favored formal address terms but employed them much less extensively, indicating a more streamlined interactional structure. The findings reveal that while both linguistic groups show comparable pragmatic intentions in expressing care, concern, and solidarity, their linguistic realizations diverge significantly. Cameroon French speakers draw on a culturally grounded repertoire characterized by elaboration, formality, and collective orientation, whereas Cameroon English speakers rely on concise, formulaic, and individual-oriented expressions. These differences underscore the importance of considering both linguistic norms and cultural interactional styles when examining

sympathy expression in multilingual contexts.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of politeness, empathy, and interpersonal communication in Cameroon's bilingual sociolinguistic landscape. The findings highlight the intricate ways in which language, culture, and context interact in shaping emotional expression, and they offer a basis for future research on cross-cultural pragmatics in other communicative situations and linguistic varieties.

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