Nativization of Dissertation Acknowledgements and Private Letters in Cameroon[1]

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ABSTRACT

One very important area of research on English in the "Outer Circle" has been on the extent to which text types have become nativized in the home culture. Yet, there seems to be a dearth of interest in this domain of study in Cameroon. With ample evidence from dissertation acknowledgements and private letters, this study assesses the cultural-specific indicators that make these text types distinctive. Because these texts are culturally and situationally highly bound, the investigation relies not only on the Sociolinguistic Approach generally used in such analyses, but also on the Cultural-based Approach and Grice's Co-operation Principle. Two hundred dissertation acknowledgements and 222 private letters have been used. And findings reveal that both text types show a greater degree of adaptation to the "culture of community" characteristic of traditional African lifestyle. For example, the general configuration of dissertation acknowledgements, and to a certain extent private letters, reflect the "good manners" of deference to elders and those who have played an important role in the writer's life and success. Other contextually determined features such as the transfer of native devices for personalizing speech interaction are frequent. The study concludes that while text-type research remains a rich area of study in view of the establishment of a profile of Cameroon-specific features of new Englishes, it is equally a good basis on which to investigate the ethnography of culture. Here linguistics and cultural studies will find a useful match.

Keywords: nativization, acknowledgements, letters, Cameroon English

1. INTRODUCTION

Although there has been considerable interest in the study and analysis of nativization of literary texts in the past few decades (see Kachru 1982a, 1982b, 1992 etc.), non-literary text types have not received the same attention. Yet in English non-native settings non-literary text types are considered to be a very productive area of research into nativization of English. In a previous study Nkemleke (2004: 610) drew attention to the fact that non-literary text types such as job applications and students' complaint letters are fast developing their own specificities within Cameroon. This present enquiry is an attempt to extend the scope of such investigation to dissertation acknowledgements (DAs) and private

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letters (PLs) in Cameroon. The analysis has largely been motivated by Kachru's (1982b: 313) claim that 'letters, either personal or not so personal [and DAs] are an excellent medium through which to study the transferred cultural norms in personal interaction'.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 ON THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE STUDY OF NEW ENGLISHES

The concept of new Englishes presupposes that those territories where English is used as a L2 variety (e.g. West Africa, India) have a different cultural background from that of the L1 speakers in the "Western world". Terms like *nativization, indigenization, contextualization* and *acculturation* (see Kachru 1990) used in the description of these varieties attest to this difference. Because these linguistic adaptations are mainly induced by the cultural background of the L2 speakers, the sociolinguistic approach (which emphasise the role of culture in the formation of new Englishes) has been widely used in the analysis of English in this context. This approach situates L2 varieties of English within the socio-cultural context of their use. Its emphasis is on the functional uses and the adaptation required to suit the variety to the demands made on it. It is not merely concerned with formal aspects of language, but goes into cultural-based norms of appropriateness. As far as non-native Englishes are concerned, this approach accepts them for what they are and not as 'interference varieties' (Quirk et al. 1985: 27–28) or imperfect approximations of native norms. This implies that 'nativization processes are recognized and innovations in language and style are considered as indexical markers' (Bamgbose 1997: 15).

One outcome of the sociolinguistic approach to the study of new Englishes is the successful correlation between the rhetorical thought patterns of L2 speakers and the written texts they produce in English. A number of studies on writing across cultures have emphasised the socio-cultural and ethnographic factors in such text structures (cf. Y. Kachru 1983a, 1987, 1992, 1996; Choi 1988; Clyne 1987; Hinds 1987). Most of these studies, especially Y. Kachru (1996) have used data from Indian English to "successfully"[2] proof the following hypotheses: (a) written texts produced by bilinguals in a L2 will show effects of the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of the L1 environment; (b) the writing

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[2] Although Y. Kachru's (1996) point is made that the two hypotheses are valid, she nevertheless expresses caution on account of the relatively small sample of essays examined in that study: 'it is not possible to claim that these results corroborate the hypotheses on the basis of the relatively small sample [essays] examined here. Further studies with a larger and more varied data base are needed before a more definitive statement can be made' (p. 135).

conventions followed by the bilingual student population will show effect of the L1 socialization.

2.2 CULTURAL AND DISCOURSAL THOUGHT PATTERN

Kaplan (1966) discusses these adaptations within the context of "cultural thought pattern" in intercultural interaction. His claim is that each language has a cultural thought pattern and that patterns of rhetoric are, however, culturally relative. For example, according to Kaplan the English language and its related thought pattern has evolved out of the Anglo-European cultural pattern, and it is predominantly linear in sequence which contrasts with many thinking in other cultures. Subsequently, he (Kaplan 1987) argues that all of the various rhetorical modes are possible in any language, but maintained that each language has clear preferences, and that the full range of forms does not occur with equal frequency in any used language.

The relationship between underlying thought patterns and language design in African and Indian Englishes have been investigated and documented (see Taiwo 1976; Pandharipande 1983; Y. Kachru 1983b, Parthasarathy 1983). Kachru (1990: 162) quotes two passages from Achebe (1966: 20) to illustrate what may be considered the African rhetorical pattern: 1a is the Africanized version and 1b is a 'Western' rendition of it.

> 1a. I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something then you will bring back my share. The world is like a mask, dancing. If you want to see it well, you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying, "had we known", tomorrow.

> 1b. I am sending you as my representative among these people - just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight.

Commenting on the two versions, Achebe concludes that 'the material is the same. But the form of the one is in character and the other is not. It is largely a matter of instinct but judgement comes into it too'. What makes a text culture-specific within a context of situation, therefore, is 'a combination of creative instincts and formal judgement' (Kachru 1990: 162).

To better understand this process of creative instinct and formal judgement of the L2 speaker, one has to begin with a distinct set of hypotheses for what has

been referred to as the bilingual's or multilingual's grammar[3] (Kachru 1990). This bilingual's grammar can be seen in the light of what sociolinguists have termed "verbal repertoire" or "code repertoire", with specific reference to a speech community or speech fellowship (see Chishimba 1983; Kachru 1982b). Such speech communities have a formally and functionally determined range of language and/or dialect as part of their competence for linguistic interaction. Kachru (1990: 164) characterizes the nature of such bilingual's competence as follows:

> a characteristic of such competence is the faculty and ease of mixing and switching, and the adaptation of stylistic and discoursal strategies from the total verbal repertoire available to a bilingual. One has to consider not only the blend of the formal features, but also the assumptions derived from various cultural norms, and the blending of these norms into new linguistic configuration with a culture-specific meaning system.

According to Kachru, these characteristics result in a limiting effect on the texts because the conventional "meaning system" of the code under use is altered. And this is the result of various linguistic processes, including nativization of context (here cultural presuppositions overload a text and demand a serious cultural interpretation), of cohesion and cohesiveness (here the native speaker's concept of cohesion and cohesiveness is altered and these concepts are to be redefined in each institutionalised variety within the appropriate universe of discourse (cf. Y. Kachru 1983a, 1983b), and of rhetorical strategies (these include consciously or unconsciously devised strategies according to the patterns of interaction in the native culture, which are transferred to English).

From a purely syntactic consideration, the L2 English user's thought patterns have equally been investigated. For example, Y. Kachru (1983b) concludes that Hindi[4] discourse is a "spiral-like structure", and there is a greater degree of tolerance for digression in an orthographic paragraph in Hindi as compared with English, provided the digressions link various episodes in discourse paragraphs in a spiral-like structure. Pandharipande (1983: 128) has also labelled the paragraph in another South Asian language (Marathi) "circular". Contrasting what Kaplan (1966) calls the "linear" paragraph structure of English with the "circular" structure of Marathi, Pandharipande further points out that: (a) '… a paragraph in English begins with a general statement of its content, and then carefully develops that statement by specific illustrations; (b) while it is discursive, a paragraph is never digressive; (c) the flow of ideas occurs in English in a straight line from the opening sentence to the last sentence. On the other hand, the paragraph in Marathi is full of digressions. It begins and ends at

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[3] Kachru (1990) uses the term grammar here to refer to the productive linguistic processes at different linguistic levels (including that of discourse and style) which a bilingual uses for various linguistic functions.

[4] This is an Indo-Aryang language of South Asia (also Marathi) and it shares similar characteristics with African languages.

the same point. Similarly, Lannoy (1971: 277) concludes that a characteristic trait of Indian mind is indifferent to the logical sequencing defined in Aristotle's law of the extended middle[5].

2.3 CULTURAL MODEL IN A CULTURAL VIEW OF NON-NATIVE ENGLISH

Although sociolinguists recognized the role culture plays in the study of new Englishes, it has been argued that the category culture in this context is very often only presupposed in works that focus on cross-cultural communication in English (Doyé 1999). It is within this perspective that Auer (2000) suggests that sociolinguistic research on African English, by and large, seems to miss out on the "cultural turn" in linguistics (cf. Wolf 2004). A brief discussion of the cultural model approach in the context of cognitive anthropology is essential in the understanding of some of the texts types that I will examine in this study.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture. In other words, 'the most fundamental values in a culture are coherent with the conceptual structure in the culture' (Wolf 2004: 139). Taking culture to mean 'shared knowledge' (Quinn and Holland 1987: 4), 'which is systematic of nature and has dominant themes' (Wolf and Simo Bobda 2001: 228), we can easily see how cultural models conform to the concept of "metaphor" as illustrated by Lakoff and Johnson. They (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) distinguish between "conceptual metaphors" and 'metaphoric linguistic expressions'. Seemingly unrelated expressions on the linguistic "surface" are generated by conceptual metaphors; searching out and analysing a body of expressions thus enables us to arrive at the "underlying" conceptual metaphors, or the cultural models utilized by a group in question.

The value of such cognitive analysis lies in the fact that we are able to study texts (written and spoken) produced in a given variety, and 'make estimations about the systematicity and the status of the concept in that variety' (Wolf 2004: 139). This linguistic investigation enables us to arrive at the underlying concepts, the knowledge which in turn enables us to understand the meaning of certain expressions.

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[5] This does not mean that the Indian mind is illogical. It means that he (the Indian) employs a system of logic different from that of English, since paradigms of logic are not universal (see Kaplan 1996, 1997 for an extended discussion of this).

2.4 THE CO-OPERATION PRINCIPLE

The Co-operation principle (Grice 1975) implies that any contribution will be as informative as is necessary (bearing in mind the implicit awareness of the contents of the common presupposition pool), that it will be as accurate as possible (that there will at least be no intention to mislead or deceive), that what is said will be relevant to the subject of the conversation (so that if what is said appears to be irrelevant the listener will be right in further processing the speech in search of an alternative and relevant meaning) and that what is said will be kept clear and appropriately brief. Of course, these maxims will be observed with varying degrees of success, depending on the linguistic abilities of the participants and on the sociological components relating to the conversation. The foundation work of H.P. Grice in this aspect of discourse is summarized by Levinson (1983) in terms of four maxims which exemplify the principle of Co-operation in conversation.

The Co-operation Principle is: make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. And this is stated in four basic maxims as follow:

1. **The maxim of Quality**: try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:
    (i)   do not say what you believe to be false;
    (ii)   do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
2. **The maxim of Quantity**:
    (i)   make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange;
    (ii)   do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
3. **The maxim of Relevance**: make your contribution relevant.
4. **The maxim of Manner**: be perspicuous, and specifically:
    (i)   avoid obscurity;
    (ii)   avoid ambiguity;
    (iii) be brief;
    (iv)   be orderly.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data for this study is composed of 200 DAs and 222 PLs written over a period of ten years (1990–1999). The DAs were collected solely from the department of English of the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) Yaounde. In this institution the writing of a dissertation is an essential and compulsory requirement for students to obtain their end-of-course Diploma, which qualifies them as teachers of English and literatures in secondary and high schools. Because these

dissertations are defended publicly, students consider this event as an exercise in academic achievement and at the same time public relation. Family members, friends and loved ones are usually invited. These people are considered to be part of the students' success and they are often referred to in the acknowledgement section of the dissertation. Private letters on the other hand are taken from the corpus of Cameroon English which was compiled between 1992 and 1994, and consists of letters written between 1990 and 1994. These letters were written by Cameroonians living in the country and abroad and they covered a broad range of personal and intimate matters relating to family, social and economic situations, love, sadness, joy, anxiety etc.

Data is analysed on the basis of the different theoretical discussions above. That is, excerpts from DAs and PLs are used to exemplify each theoretical premise, where applicable. An extended discussion is then provided on the reason for the occurrence of these features, illustrating how they have been contextualized in the Cameroonian context

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 EXPRESSION OF DEFERENCE

Almost all the DAs and PLs in my corpus use a deferential strategy of some kind. This discourse strategy is very much part of the etiquette of the Cameroonian communities in which writers of these texts are members, a long tradition in most African societies where respect for elders and for authority has been paramount. However, of the two text types being examined here, this practice is more frequent in DAs than in PLs. Table 1 below illustrates how varied and frequent expressions of reverence are in DAs.

Table 1. Variety and frequency of expressions of deference in DAs (1990–1999).

Expressions	Total frequency
My special/ sincere thanks, gratitude to …	102
I am particularly indebted to …	88
My hearty gratitude/ thanks go to …	78
Special thanks go to ….	65
My hearty and special thanks go to …	63
My perpetual gratitude goes to …	44
I am exceedingly grateful to …	43
My profuse gratitude goes to …	40
I owe much thanks and sincere gratitude to …	39

I am also greatly grateful to …	35
My heartfelt thanks go to …	34
My sincere and immense gratitude go to …	28
I am particularly/ highly indebted to …	27
My profound gratitude goes to …	26
I am gratefully indebted to …	23
I am indeed very grateful to …	22
My profound gratitude, …	17
I owe a perpetual debt of gratitude to …	16
My invaluable gratitude goes to …	12
I am immensely thankful to …	8
My profuse thanks go to…	3
Total	**813**

These forms of "veneration" are very much associated with the African way of life. Here people live in a community where the burden of each member is that of the entire group and people are expected to behave as such. Beyond the more perceptible expressions of the nature indicated above, we also find in DAs, full sentences (e.g.1–3) and even texts (e.g. 4) that give praises to those who have helped the students with supervision of their work.

1. When I first became interested in carrying out this study, I had the inestimable good fortune to come under the personal supervision of an inspiring lecturer: Dr (Mrs) X, I am very much indebted to you for prodding and provoking me into new areas of thoughts and feelings (1995).
2. This study has gone through thanks to the inestimable academic tutelage and studied guidance of my supervisor Dr X (1998).
3. Finally, it is to the distinguished and enviable professional style of the B & K Institute[6], that this work owes its aesthetic strength (1998).
4. My wife X did not only play the role of an informant, but she made suggestions, stayed by me into the deep of the night as I toiled with this research, prepared my meals promptly while coping with her own studies, bore all my irritable behaviour when the pressure of work wore me out, proof-read the work and encouraged and persuaded me when she found out that I was sometimes trying to give up. I do not know what I would have done without her. In fact, she is everything a husband needs. She stoically bore the weight of my impatience and did it so lovingly. This work is hers. I sincerely thank God for sending

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[6] This is a name of a local library where students go to do research.

her to me. Finally God manifested His presence throughout my life in diverse ways that I would be doing great injustice to any conscience if I fail to say He is the salient force behind all my success in life. Thank you lord! (2001)

In these examples Grice's maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relevance and Manner are flouted in many respects. The requirement to show excessive appreciation far overrides the need for brevity and precision. These examples also show the extent to which students hold their lecturers in high esteem, not just because they have supervised their research, but most importantly because they are senior people to them. The piling up of words and expressions showing respect amounts to a subjugation of self to the authority of the lecturer whom the candidates see as invincible, "all-knowing" and "all-wise". This equally illustrates the choices in native Cameroonian (or African) cultures where there is a penchant for the florid in communal discourse, here transfer into writing. This is very much characteristic of Indian English where a similar style in Sanskrit has largely influenced Indian writing (cf. Kachru 1990). In fact, as Mazrui (1975: 153) points out 'capacity to adorn one's speech [and writing], and to give it weight… was an important factor in the process by which leadership emerged [in Africa]'. This feature of writing, which must be classified by native speakers as 'register misuse' (Görlach 1994), is often combined with avid use of proverbs reflecting the tradition expressed in most African societies according to which 'a wise man who knows proverbs reconciles difficulties' (Mazrui 1975: 152), or- according to Achebe (1966) - 'proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten'.

4.2 TRANSFER OF RHETORICAL STYLE FROM NATIVE CULTURE

In every context where English is used as a L2, it is natural that various linguistic devices are usually exploited to develop functional or communicative styles. Question and answer technique has been identified as a common pattern of interaction in L2 native communities, especially in story telling occasions. The technique usually involves putting questions to the audience for participation. According to Kachru (1990: 168), 'this technique is very effective indeed for passing on the cultural tradition to new generations and for entertaining other age groups'. This style is a common occurrence in my corpus of PLs used in this study. The following extracts exemplify this pattern of discourse.

5.   It is long time I haven't heard from you people, and as you know I can't bear it for too long. It is not possible again on phone, now that you are no longer in Yaounde. How are you uncle? I hope every one is fine (PL005).

6. In any case by God's grace I will be able to visit you all some times. What about your new station? Do you like it? Surely yes. You are almost together in Male2's house in Douala. I am the only one missing. Well, the Lord knows why and has the solution (PL 068).

7. It is with much love and dignity that I am putting these words in front of you. How is health down there? How about school? Hope all is fine (PL0 75).

8. It is great pleasure for me to write you this letter to wish you a happy Christmas and a new year. How are you and the whole family? I'm sure everything is fine. Ni how is work? I hope all is fine (PL010).

9. Without mincing words let's go straight to your health and studies because that's what concerns me much. How are you? I hope you are doing fine in health. How are your studies also? Hope also fine. Have you people started classes already? As concerns my health I am doing fine (PL030).

10. I say hello once more to you, how are you pulling on with studies? Well? I wish to inform you that before your leaving here I was ill and nothing has changed as you left me, and those eyes are increasing the more (PL032).

In each of the excerpts above, the writer engages his/her reader (though not in a face to face conversation) in a kind of pseudo-dialogue by asking questions (how are you? how are things? how is work?) and providing 'tentative' answers to them (hope all is fine, surely yes etc.). The relationship between the writer and the reader in these extracts is therefore very intimate and this reflects the spirit of community that characterizes social life in traditional Cameroonian/African cultures and societies. The dominant cultural metaphor (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980)[7] being expressed here is that of communal life. It is this conception of life derived from the modes of thoughts and actions from the native culture that have given rise to the pattern of writing seen in examples (5) – (10) above, and to the following expressions of phatic communion, gleaned from PLs:

Uncle, will you still come for x-mas…?/ Mama, really times are hard at home./ we are living because Batibo is our town./ Mama I have a problem with Female1./ My dear you have been so silent./ How are you dear./ It is with much love and dignity that I am putting these words in front of you./ Please I am really begging on you to gather these things for me./ Well uncle, us [sic] here we are well but only male1 who spring

[7] Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of metaphor, and those of numerous other cognitive linguists, psychologists and anthropologists coming from the same school of thought, rest on the assumption that language is part of thought and that by analyzing language, one can arrive at the underlying conceptual structure of its speakers. However, as Wolf (2004:139) clarifies " this does not imply that language is isomorphic with the conceptual system of one culture… Different languages can have a similar, and in turn, different varieties of one language may have an altogether different conceptual base, as is the case for various varieties of English".

[sic] her hand./ Please accept my esteem regard./ Brother thank you a million times for the small thing that you sent to us.

4.3 THE METAPHOR OF "COMMUNITY" AS A REFLECTION OF STYLE

In an attempt to figure out how the image of "community" is reflected in the overall configuration of DAs and PLs, it is important to distinguish the Cameroonian/African concept of the term from a typical western understanding of it. According to Wolf (2004: 140), 'while in the Western world, "family" and "community" form two distinct conceptual domains, in traditional and localized African settings, "family" and "community" constitute only one domain'. How this knowledge of culture translates to language choices and/or style is reminiscent of how genre is realised—indexically.

From the point of view of "community", the structure of most of the DAs and PLs used in this study portrays not only a social hierarchy that would be found in a traditional setting, but also tacitly acknowledges the fact that one's success is also that of the whole "community":[8] Firstly, the writer of the DAs would first acknowledge the contribution of his/her supervisor (usually in very elevated language), then pays homage to his/her parents and/or guardian(s) who have sponsored him/her all along or have given some significant help (materially or morally) to him/her in the course of undertaking the research. If the candidate is married, he/she would praise the spouse for the material and moral assistance given him/her in the course of their research. Lastly the candidate would indicate that if the work comes out to be of any value, he/she would willingly share the spoils with the above-mentioned persons, if there are any shortcomings, he/she would accept responsibility for them. In PLs the typical pattern is as follows: Firstly, the writer opens the letter with greetings, generally a rhetorical question of some kind: how are you over there? And then an answer, hope you are fine. Secondly, a problem is usually posed, or an issue explained, or a request made. All of this is done in a language that shows a lot of respect for the person to whom the letter is addressed. Lastly, greetings are equally extended to the family members of the person the letter is being addressed to, most often wishing him/her well again (i.e. re-echoing the idea in opening paragraph). These two relatively stable patterns of DAs and PLs are the most frequent, accounting for over 80 % of the cases. However, there are other patterns that deviate from these.

Tables 2 and 3 below indicate the structural configuration of the dominant patterns and other less dominant patterns found in DAs and PLs.

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[8] The term is used here in a restricted sense to refer to the members of one's family, friends and other relations.

Table 2. Structural patterns in DAs

Patterns	Total
Dominant pattern: MOVE 1: Praises of supervisor(s) for academic guidance in all forms without which the work would not have seen the light of day. MOVE 2: Recount help given by parents, guardian(s), spouse and other family members and friends. MOVE 3: Thank all those who help in one way or the other, but whose names the candidate have failed to mention for want of space or has simply forgotten. MOVE 4: Offer to share the good results of the project with the above-mentioned persons and to accept responsibility for any shortcomings.	173 (86.5%)
Others In this category we have three basic patterns: 1. Those that open with a general statement stating how it would not have been possible to undertake such a study without the help of so many persons. And then goes on to list those persons, of course, with the supervisor coming first and the rest in the following order: parents, guardian(s), spouse and friends. 2. Those that start with a proverb (e.g. "one hand cannot tie a bundle") and repeat the pattern in 1 above. 3. Those that just acknowledge the supervisor's contribution and a few family members, all in a single paragraph.	27 (13.5%)
Total	200 (100%)

Table 3. Structural patterns in PLs.

Patterns	Total
Dominant pattern: MOVE 1: The writer opens with some kind of general statement: (expressing joy for writing or a worry for staying too long before writing, or make reference to a previous letter received from the person he is now writing to), then greetings, generally a rhetorical question of some kind: how are you over there? And then an answer, hope you are fine. MOVE 2: Another problem is usually posed, or an issue explained, or a request made. All of this is done in a language that shows a lot of respect for the person to whom the letter is addressed. MOVE 3: Another problem/issue is raised sometimes a repetition of the same thing mentioned in 1 and 2 above. MOVE 4: Another problem is raised, still a kind of restatement of the same issues in 1, 2 and 3 above. MOVE 5: Lastly, greetings are equally extended to the family members of the person the letter is being addressed to, most often wishing him well again (i.e. re-echoing the idea in opening paragraph).	182 (81.98%)

Others: In this category we have three basic patterns: 1. Those that have a single paragraph and the writer encapsulate all the MOVES in the dominant pattern above, though not extensively. 2. Those that have a single paragraph and the writer just make a point, and then mention only one of the MOVES in the dominant pattern above. 3. Those that contain a single paragraph and the write express only a point.	42 (18.01%)
Total	222 (100%)

The following DAs (11) and PLs (12) illustrate the dominant patterns above:

11. Acknowledgements

I am very highly indebted to my supervisor Dr. X whose in depth knowledge and criticism serve as a treasurable [sic] reminders that it takes more than an average effort to satisfy one's academic ideals. Dr, accept my esteem gratitude and recognition of your invaluable assistance.

My utmost gratitude also goes to Dr. X, for his encouragement throughout the course. I am also indebted to my former supervisor Dr. X who could not continue the supervision due to other commitments out of the country. I also owe X a lot for the assistance in the realization of this work.

May I seize this opportunity to thank Dad and Mum and the family of X and X for their consistent support throughout my academic career. May I seize this opportunity too to thank my friends, X, X1, X2, X3, X4, X5, X6, X7, X8, X9 and Mrs X for their words of encouragement and other forms of assistance.

Despite my huge debt, however, I am solely responsible for my errors and short comings of this work and the fruit of this work will be shared with all the above-mentioned persons.

12. Letter

Dear Mama,

It's great pleasure for me to write this letter to you this to wish you a happy Christmas and happy New Year. How are you and family? Hope very fine. Great Female1 and Female2 for me. Mama I need their card. I am begging you to send them to me anytime you see somebody coming home. How are things over there in Buea? Are there hard as for us at home? Mama really times are hard in Cameroon.

As for us things are not moving. We are living because Batibo is our home town. Everything of ours is taking from the farm. We eat us well and we are in good health. Mama we are not going to school because of the teacher's strike that is all around the country. For us here only the private schools go to school.

Ma (grandmother) is well and strong. The problem with Ma is that she did not know any of us. When we ask her anything in the past she would not know. Mami is also well. The problem is this period at home is a working period. So everyday we go us to the farm.

Mama I have a problem with Male1. That is since he came down there he has never written a letter to me. For this reason I always think that it may be I have done something wrong to him. So you should ask him.

Thank to Male2 and you for what you have given my brother Male3 to be managing his life over there. I hope everything will be nice for all of us. Accept our greetings from this end. Have a nice stay and greet everybody for me.

Sign

The structure of the texts above is a recreation of the situations from the native culture and they typically exemplify the communal spirit that appears to be a dominant way of life in traditional African setting. The DAs (11) begins with the student paying due recognition and respect to his/her supervisors and this is followed by similar words of gratitude and thanks to so many other family members and friends. This means that success or achievement here is considered a collective effort of the "community" and accordingly due recognition of the assistance (even if infinitesimal) of each member of that extended family is a moral duty. In the case of the letter (in 13) the spirit of community is seen in the manner in which relationships are established in the text—through phatic communion. A related outcome of this is the unequal power relations in the texts (*tenor*), which is very much an 'underlying ideology that characterizes most of traditional society in Africa—respect for elders' (Nkemleke 2004: 610).

4.4 REPETITION AS A REFLECTION OF THOUGHT PATTERN

A lot of what is written in my corpus of DAs and PLs is predominantly repetitive, exhibiting features of the Indo-Aryan languages of South Asia which Y. Kachru (1983b: 58) characterized as 'spiral-like in structure' and/or "circular" (cf. Pandharipande 1983: 28). This repetition both at the level of the orthographic paragraph and sometimes full text is likely due to the influence of the writers' L1, which does not necessarily adhere to the predominantly linear pattern of the Anglo-European languages (cf. Kaplan 1996). Examples (13) and (14) below exemplify this 'spiral-like' pattern in DAs and PLs (MI = main idea, R1 = repeated for the first time, R2 = repeated for the second time etc.). Example (15) illustrates a rather different but related phenomenon – that of imprecision, which may still be linked to the concept of "non-linearity" of thought patterns in non-European languages, espoused by Kaplan (1966, 1997) and vindicated by empirical studies in South Asian languages.

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I nevertheless accept and take full responsibility for all the shortcomings that may be found in the work.

14.   Private letter [emphasis and bold signs are mine]

Hello Male 1,

How is life at the moment? Hope everything is on the good footing. As you know I will not come down to Yaounde. I may come down if there should be new presidential elections in March. What I wanted to inform you is that you should really help me and gather my things for me [**MI**]. Take my radio cassette from Male2 and my dictionary [**R1**]. Ask male3 to give you my notes on constitutional law History and Civil law [**R2**]. Also go down with Male4 to our former landlord and collect some of the things there [**R3**]. I seriously need those things especially the distributor **[R4].** Please I am really begging on you to gather these things for me **[R5]**. Some of the things are in Male6's house I hope you know the place [**R6**]. I have along my travelling bag in which to put some of the things. You can even take them and keep in Male6's house and when you see someone coming you can then give them to the person [**R7**]. The most essential thing is that the things should be gathered in one place so that I can direct anybody at any moment to collect them [**R8**].

Signed.

15.   Fist paragraph of a DAs

This work has been the thorniest undertaking that I have plunged myself into purely on academic goals. It has been a sacrifice for knowledge. Not that knowledge is not worthy of my sacrifice; but that a negative response as to the purpose of the work may ruin all intended goals. It is this dark side of the issue that caused me so much pain and discouraged me to the point of abandoning the work.

Dissertation acknowledgements and PLs of this nature abound in my corpus. In text (13) above, the main idea in the opening paragraph is re-echoed at the end.

In text (14) the main idea is repeated (in one way or the other) seven times. In fact, the whole letter is about one main idea: 'to help gather my things for me' (see line 4 of the letter above), but which is repeated in several other ways. In a typical "Western" thinking this violates Grice maxims of Manner ('be perspicuous and specifically: be brief and orderly') and Quantity ('do not make your contribution more informative than is required'). However, since patterns of rhetoric are culturally relative and paradigms of logic are not universal (cf. Kaplan 1966), it may be argued that the Cameroonian way of laying emphasis is through such repetitions, a sort of reinterpretation of Grice sub maxim: 'do not make your contribution more informative than is required'. After all "informative" in this case is seen from the perception of the writer and reader of the letter because there is 'shared knowledge' (Nystrand 1986: 36) between the two. In this perspective text (15) above, which seems to run counter to Grice's sub maxim of Manner ('avoid obscurity and ambiguity') may well be properly understood even by an educated audience in Cameroon (though not necessarily approved by the academic community). And the contextual clues for understanding the text in this society may include an appreciation of the difficult conditions under which students study and the value that both family and well-wishers attached to a diploma that these students obtained upon graduation from this institution.

5. CONCLUSION

The preceding analyses have sought to show that DAs and PLs in Cameroon are significantly (at least on the basis of my data) culturally contextualized. The main conclusion that one can therefore draw is that some background knowledge of "culture" (of Cameroonians and/or Africans) is essential in order to properly understand texts produced in this setting.

This view naturally leads to the crucial role "culture" plays in an understanding of non-native English texts. As presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world widely shared by other members of the community (Quinn and Holland 1987), a "culture" models our thoughts and shapes our behaviours. Understanding texts produced in a specific non-English cultural setting may therefore involved a proper appreciation of the expectations of the people there. This calls for academic cross-fertilization and an interdisciplinary approach to linguistic research in English L2 communities, where findings from anthropology, sociology and psychology may be very relevant. While such an enterprise remains to be pursued, it may still be premature to make definite statements on context-specific characteristics of DAs and PLs in Cameroon.

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