

Health discourse in the multilingual landscape of Cameroon

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The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a worldwide state of medical emergency in general and communication challenges in Africa in particular. Language has played a vital role in communicating information related to the pandemic. Using a particular language within a social setting was not without a hitch. This study transcends the monolingual discourse and exploits the multilingual discourse to represent the case of Cameroon during the COVID-19 era. It examines discourses on the COVID-19 pandemic, which were expressed not only in the two exogenous foreign official languages of Cameroon (English and French) but also in the local national languages such as Ngiembom, Tuki and Bakoko. It equally assesses the extent to which these languages were used in the various communities and their impact on the population. Through a mixed method of data collection, the study employed a purposive random sampling technique. Data were collected from three local communities, Batcham, Mbangassina and Mouanko and analysed within the theory of linguistic relativism in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. The study reveals that most communities that went beyond the use of the two exogenous languages and employed the local languages to sensitise the population had more people who adhered to the health tips recommended by the government to abate the situation and, as a result, experienced better health conditions than those who only maintained the use of Cameroon's official languages. This study considers Cameroon's multilingual landscape and suggests an appropriate approach to communication in communities and nations with linguistic diversity.