

The pragmatics of figures of speech in teacher - student conflicts: An analysis of selected EFL classroom exchanges in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The present article analyses the use of figures of speech in situations of conflict in the EFL classroom; it seeks to report how these linguistic devices are exploited by EFL teachers and students to perform a variety of acts during classroom exchanges. In a corpus of 70 EFL teacher student exchanges, we have appraised the use of figures of speech by EFL teachers and students in conflict situations in order to derive semantic and pragmatic meanings from the language choices. As a matter of fact, the present article focusses on figures of comparison as well as figures of exaggeration as used by classroom actors in the context of disagreement with a view to identifying the speech acts they perform in class. By means of direct class observation, 70 EFL classes were observed, recorded and transcribed; the analysis of the selected relevant data was done in accordance with the theory of speech acts and the politeness theory by Austin and Searle 1962 as well as Leech 1983. The findings revealed that in situations of conflict, figures of comparison and exaggeration served the purpose of performing face threatening acts which are undeniable conflict markers.

Keywords: EFL class, figures of speech, conflict situations, pragmatic appraisal.

A pragmática das figuras de linguagem nos conflitos professor-aluno: Uma análise de trocas selecionadas de aulas de EFL em Escolas Secundárias

Resumo

O presente artigo analisa o uso de figuras de linguagem em situações de conflito na sala de aula de inglês; procura relatar como esses dispositivos linguísticos são explorados por professores e alunos de EFL para realizar uma variedade de atos durante as trocas de sala de aula. Em um corpus de 70 intercâmbios de professores e alunos de EFL, avaliamos o uso de figuras de linguagem por professores e alunos de EFL em situações de conflito, a fim de derivar significados semânticos e pragmáticos das escolhas de linguagem. Com efeito, o presente artigo centra-se nas figuras de comparação, bem como nas figuras de exagero utilizadas por atores de sala de aula em contextos de desacordo, com o objetivo de identificar os atos de fala que realizam em sala de aula. Por meio da observação direta das aulas, foram observadas, gravadas e transcritas 70 aulas de Língua Inglesa; a análise dos dados relevantes selecionados foi feita de acordo com a teoria dos atos de fala e a teoria da polidez de Austin e Searle 1962, bem como Leech 1983. Os resultados revelaram que em situações de conflito, figuras de comparação e exagero serviram ao propósito de realizando atos ameaçadores faciais que são marcadores de conflito inegáveis.

Palavras-chave: aula de EFL, figuras de linguagem, situações de conflito, avaliação pragmática.

1. Introduction

Language has always played a pivotal role in the society because it is the key instrument of communication. In the classroom, language is even more important because it has an instructional and a psychological value. The outcome of teaching highly depends on the quality of the language used by classroom interactants. It is from this perspective that Pryse (1987) makes clear that words are our servants, and they simply say what we make them say. This clearly means that language choices are determined by the speakers' goals and intentions.

Though teachers are unconditionally expected to use pedagogic language in the classroom, we have observed for

years that conflict is so rampant in the classroom setting. In situations of conflict, classroom discourse is far from being beneficial for the learner since it is generally abusive and does not intend to attain any didactic goal. At times, language is just used by classroom interactants to do things that have nothing to do teaching/learning to use Austin (1962) expression.

The present article therefore analyses the use of figures of speech during teacher-student interactions in situations of conflict from a purely pragmatic standpoint. It examines the acts performed by both classroom interactants in that peculiar context. The categories of speech acts carried out by EFL teachers and their learners during classroom are determined by the functions of the figures of speech identified in the corpus. In the present article, we are analyzing the use of figures of exaggeration and comparison by teachers and learners in a corpus of 70 EFL classroom exchanges.

We intend to demonstrate that language choices made by EFL teachers and students during classroom talk often suit the context of conflict. The next section focuses on the problem posed in this study.

1.1 The problem

Over the past decades, language use has been studied by researchers from several perspectives. Jikong (1985), examined language use in adverse interpersonal interactions by stressing power. Nkemleke (2007), studied politeness strategies in social interactions. Fomukong (2009) examined language as a tool for social change. Brekelmans (2013) investigated the disagreement between the teacher and the students. Amabo (2013) investigated the role of language in conflict resolution. A glance at the above past studies shows that language use has been investigated from various perspectives but almost nothing was found on the use of figures of speech in the EFL class conflict situations in Cameroon. In addition, we have observed for years that language use is a source of conflict during classroom exchanges.

1.2 The purpose of the study

The aim of this article is to:

- identify the figures of speech used by EFL teachers in situations of conflict in the class.
- identify figures of speech used by EFL students in situations of conflict.
- Find out the functions of these figures of speech in the course of classroom interactions.
- find out the effects of these figures of speech on the class interactants.

Several questions were asked to attain the objectives defined above.

1.3 Research questions

- What speech acts do EFL teachers perform in situations of conflict?
- Which figures of speech do EFL teachers and students use in situations of conflict?
- What are the functions of the different figures of speech used?
- What are the effects of their use on the EFL classroom interactants?

2. Material and Methods

Data was collected through direct classroom observation of EFL lessons in 20 schools located in six regions of Cameroon. In each school, after administrative formalities, we were given the time tables of all the EFL teachers, and this granted us access to the lessons we wanted to attend.

As a result, two to three hours were observed on a daily basis. The exercise consisted in observing and recording the EFL exchanges that were conflictual. Later the recorded teacher-student exchanges were transcribed. The data collected is presented in form of tables and excerpts; they are analyzed in accordance with Austin (1960) & Searle (1962), theory of speech act coupled with (Leech, 1983), (Brown; Levinson, 1978) theories of politeness. We finally observed 73 hours in 35 classes as shown in the table below.

Table 1. Classroom observation in the selected schools.

Place	Schools	Class	Number of hours observed
Douala	Lycée de New-bell	1 ^{ère}	3h
		4 ^{ème}	2h
	Lycée Bilingue de Nyalla	Tle	3h
		3 ^{ème}	2h
	Collège Moderne des Lauréats	2 ^{nde}	2h
		6 ^{ème}	2h
Pouma	Collège Kamtchou Ndami	1 ^{ère}	2h
		6 ^{ème}	2h
	Lycée de Pouma	Tle C	3h
		3 ^{ème} Esp	3h
Dibang	Lycée de Dibang	3 ^{ème}	3h
		1 ^{ère}	2h
	Collège Deo Gracias	4 ^{ème}	2h
Bafoussam	Lycée Bilingue de Ndiengdam	2 ^{nde}	1h
		3 ^e	2h
		1 ^{ère} IF	3h
	Collège St Thomas	Tle	2h
		3 ^{ème}	2h
Foumbot	Lycée de Koudoumbaïng	Tle D	2h
	IBINO	6 ^{ème}	1h
	Lycée Leclerc	3 ^{ème} Esp	3h
Yaounde	Lycée Technique Nsam	Tle C	3h
		1 ^{ère} MB	3h
	Collège Ebanda	4 ^{ème} All	3h
		1 ^{ère}	3h
Bamenda	LTIC (Lycée Technique Industriel et Commercial)	2 ^{nde} IH	3h
		Tle ESF	3h
	Lycée Bilingue de Bayelle	3 ^{ème}	3h
		1 ^{ère}	2h
Sangmelima	Lycée Classique de Sangmelima	6 ^{ème}	2h
		1 ^{ère}	2h
	Lycée Bilingue	2 ^{nde} C	2h
Ngaoundéré	Lycée Bilingue de Sabongari	1 ^{ère}	3h
		3 ^{ème}	3h
	Collège de Mazonod	3 ^{ème}	3h
		Tle D	3h
Total: 09 towns 20 secondary schools		35 classes	73 hours /sessions

3. Data presentation and analysis

In the present section, we examined the use of figures of speech in the teacher-student exchanges we recorded

during class observation. The main objective is to report how these devices were exploited by teachers and students to perform a variety of tasks in situations of disharmony. From the analysis of the 70 EFL teacher-student exchanges, we found out that in situations of conflict, most of EFL teachers frequently resort to figures of comparison and exaggeration to degrade or upgrade students: these figures are analysed in the following section.

3.1 Figures of comparison

Classroom observation has revealed that situations of conflict or disharmony between teachers and learners frequently arise during EFL classes. The data analysis has equally shown that in situations of disagreement, teachers use simile and metaphor intensively to insult and humiliate arrogant learners who refuse to cooperate. An exchange is used to illustrate the use of each figure of speech and examples are given to back up the analysis.

3.1.1 The use of simile

Simo (1995:165) regards simile as: “a figure of comparison using like or as”. Two exchanges selected from the corpus are presented below to illustrate the use of simile in cases of conflict. This figure is regularly used by teachers to do many things in situations of conflict. Consider the exchange that follows:

Exchange 65: 2nde A, Lycée de Koudoumbaing, May 2016, Foubot

Situation: The teacher had just given back the scripts, a female learner stood without permission.

St: Sir you have given me 5 in Essay.

Teacher: Yes

St: Why?

Teacher: Tsuip, go and sit down Mme.

St: I think you do not teach well. You teach like a noyeur.

Class: (Ha ha ha).

Teacher: You don't know how to teach so you can't judge. Go and sit.

St : (She does not obey) hum le prof aime se montrer au lieu d'enseignant. Les Nkwa aiment alors ça !

Teacher: Hey Bolo, go and sit. Don't waste my time.

St: No, Sir I always have 7 in Essay.

Teacher: This time, you have 5.

St: My father is also a teacher hein. I will give him my paper.

Teacher: See hein Bolo, you are ugly like a Juju. Your dad is a teacher, and you behave like a dog like that?

Class: Ha ha ha.

St: But sir.

Teacher: Shut that big mouth like a pan.

Class: C'est vrai Mr., c'est Mr., c'est vrai.

Teacher: What is it Bolo? Do I look like your stupid boyfriend?

Class: may be hein Monsieur

Teacher: A girl who is rude like a street girl? No, not me.

Bolo: You are as old as my mother in 2nde. It's a pity. Vieille, laide et mal élevée. Bête comme ses pieds.

In Exchange 65, the student has initiated the conflict by being impolite and we identified a number of similes used by the teacher and the students for different purposes. Example 1 “you are as ugly as a juju”. Note should be taken that this utterance is produced almost at the end of the conversation. After several attempts to get cooperation from the student, the teacher uses the term (juju) to highlight the girl's ugliness.

This assertive, as (Austin, 1960; Searle, 1962) would put it, aims at humiliating and denigrating the arrogant

student who is indifferent towards the teacher's commands. The allusion to "juju" here by the teacher expresses his anger, his disdain. In the African context, the choice of the term is purposive since the addressee is an African. Juju, which is a typical African term generally associated with wickedness, ugliness and dirt, is chosen here to arouse feelings of shame, anger and frustration in the naughty learner. It is then understood that by using this word, the teacher intends to highlight the bad character of the learner to lament it. This comparison is a real insult, which violates the politeness maxims of generosity, tact, approbation and agreement; in fact, by comparing the student to a "juju" the teacher is overtly criticizing her physical appearance. By so doing, she is threatening the positive face of the student.

The explicit use of the comparative "like" with the adjective ugly intends to amplify or even showcase her bad attitude. This figure of comparison seeks to criticize the female student, to insult her with a view to eliciting positive behavioral change. Within the framework of the politeness theory, we can say that because of the poor behavior of the student, the teacher who has tried to persuade her in a very polite way to go and sit without success, resorts to a face-threatening act in order to hurt her and regain authority. By portraying her ugliness and pointing out her similarity with a "juju", the teacher is trying to reduce the girl's pride.

By so doing, she is teaching her a lesson of humility by insulting her. The pedagogic intention has no effect because of the teacher's impolite approach. It is obvious that the use of the insult by the teacher in this conversation is an indicator of disharmony. The perlocutionary effect of the simile used by the teacher is the student's answer that challenges the teacher: "yes I accept".

In a teacher-student relationship in the classroom, the student is supposed to submit. Disobedience is then considered as an impolite act that spiraled disagreement, anger and compelled the teacher to use arrogant language to establish order in the class. The second example of simile used by the teacher illustrates the point explained above. "Shut that big mouth like a pan". Reference to a pan here suggests that the mouth is abnormally big. This comparison expresses ugliness. It is associated with the idea of indiscipline and appeals to her emotions in order to make her obey.

In the third example, the teacher uses another direct comparison to laugh at the rude girl. "What is it, Bolo? Do I look like your stupid boyfriend?". This question is uttered by the teacher to remind the class of the stupidity of their classmate. Through this question, the teacher expresses doubt and clearly despises the student by depicting her unknown boyfriend who can only be a stupid boy.

By highlighting the opposition between him and the girl's boyfriend, the teacher clearly wants to hurt the positive face of the female student. Example four produced by the teacher is another insult and criticism meant to display the bad character of the girl. "A girl who is impolite like a street boy". Comparing that girl with a street boy is a technique to promote good manners by condemning severely street-like attitudes. It is then obvious that the face-threatening act here aims at managing the classroom successfully.

Example five "you look as old as my mother" is an assertive whereby the teacher wants to remind the girl she is old. By comparing her to her mother, the teacher flouts the norms of politeness; she is insulting the girl in order to arouse feelings of shame and guilt in her. The allusion to his mother suggests that the rude student is far older than the required age in the class. This comparison, which is hyperbolic, is used to humiliate the girl in order to restore harmony in the class. The sixth example of simile is still produced with the intention of impacting the conscience and emotions of the girl. "Bête comme ses pieds". The use of French here is to increase the intensity of the mockery for more embarrassment in public. In all the examples of simile used by the teacher in this exchange, there is a clear attempt to insult, criticize and humiliate the rude learner after other forms of negotiation have failed.

Unlike the teacher, the student makes use of a simile to challenge the teacher. "My father is also a teacher hein". The student uses this assertive to despise the teacher. By so doing, she denies the teacher's authority and refuses to obey. This negative act simply provokes an insult by the teacher. The second example of simile serves the same purpose. In this situation, impoliteness has bred impoliteness. "You teach like a noyeur" is a bad criticism, an insult. In the context of class, the comparison made by the student shows excessive boldness as well as disrespect; so, the teacher has flouted the maxims of tact and modesty by addressing the teacher like his or her classmate. The findings of this study indicate that in the context of conflict in the classroom, simile was regularly used by teachers and served many ends as indicated in the table below.

Table 2. Functions of simile in the teacher’s speech.

Number of conversations	Function	Occurrence	Percentage
70	Insulting	31	67.39%
	Criticising	10	21,73%
	Explaining	05	10.86%
70	03	46	100%

Source: EFL teachers from 20 Cameroonian schools

From the data presented in the table above, we can see that 67.39% of simile is used by teachers to insult despicable learners in situations of conflict. This figure of speech is abundantly used by teachers when there is conflict in the EFL class. As indicated in the table above, 21.73% of simile is used by teachers to criticize unacceptable classroom behavior of learners. They equally used 10.82% of simile in classroom talk to sensitize learners at times to bring change. Finally, simile is used to describe the negative attitude of students in the class with a view to sensitizing the whole class.

When we look at the functions of simile in the teacher’s speech, it is obvious that the rate of insult and criticism is very high. This is reminiscent of conflict and shows that the principles of politeness that aim at saving the face of people in a successful conversation are consciously or unconsciously flouted by teachers who are bound to create a conducive learning atmosphere. The majority of EFL teachers we observed, used comparison to perform acts such as humiliating, criticizing, blaming, shouting, and insulting in typical situations of conflict.

As far as students are concerned, the results of classroom observation indicate that students made use of very few figures of speech in the course of EFL classes because of their poor mastery of the English language. The following table presents the function of simile in the learners’ speech in situations of conflict.

Table 3. Functions of simile in the students’ speech.

Number of conversations	Function	Occurrence	Percentage
70	Disagreeing	02	50 %
	Insulting	02	50 %
Total 70	2	04	100%

Source: EFL students from 20 Cameroonian schools.

This table shows that students rarely made use of simile in situations of conflict to disagree or to insult. These acts are face-threatening in so far as the learner is not supposed to insult the teachers who are bound to teach against all odds. The things done with simile by learners portray a crisis and show that all the politeness rules are often flouted in the context of conflict. Another figure of comparison that was frequently identified in the corpus is the metaphor.

3.1.2 The use of metaphor

This research on language use in situations of conflict during classroom interaction has enabled us to find out that metaphor was particularly prized by EFL teachers. The following conversation exemplifies the use of metaphor by classroom interactants in a situation of conflict.

Exchange 68: 1ere A4, Lycée de Pouma, April 2017, Pouma.

Situation: A student slapped the French teacher the week before: The English teacher uses a writing lesson to punish him.

Teacher: Hi

Class: Hello.

Teacher: What did we learn last week? (Nobody puts up the finger)

Class: (Silent)

Teacher: Yes. Now you don't speak. You only know how to beat teachers.

A girl: It is not me. It is Bea.

Teacher: Hum. Mr. Béa, so you are a kick-boxer. Good. Let's us do this practical exercise. We learnt how to write a CV. We will complete these two CVs. If your CV is long, you are an intelligent person, a boss, a big person, a VIP.

Class: Yes Mme.

Teacher: OK. Two persons. Ngonono and Béa.

Ngonono: (She writes her CV fast) finished Mme.

Teacher: Wow, a real genius, you even have a certificate of German. Give her a big hand. Now come, the warrior.

Béa: (Scratching his head) Mme I no know.

Teacher: Yes. All you know is slapping teachers. You are laughing? You are a curse. Complete your CV.

Béa: Name: Béa. Surname: Jean.

Teacher: Sure? I thought you were Judas.

Béa: No. I am Jean.

Teacher: You are a Judas. So Judas is good for you.

Class: Yes, Mme! He is Judas.

Teacher: Shut. Continue Béa.

Béa: Born in 1996 in Yaoundé.

Teacher: Mama mi, you are a grand-father hein.

Teacher: Is that all? Go on with information about education.

Béa: It is fini.

Teacher: Finished? Hum? You are in 1ère. Where is BEPC? You have only CEPE? Mama! Write your school like your classmate did!

Class: (Laughter's)

Béa: I don't have.

Teacher: Yes, you only have bad manners. You don't have anything. Yet you are Rambo.

Teacher: Yes, he beats teachers. Béa, you slapped your teacher last week. Only a dog can behave like that.

Béa: Ekiéé Mme!

Teacher: Yes, you are a dog, so school is not good for you.

Class: Aie Mme is a Satan.

Teacher: Hey quiet! The truth is that school is not for Bandit.

The above teacher-student conversation is characterized by the regular use of metaphor. In this specific exchange, the student initiated the conflict by evocating a past recent event that shocked the teacher. In fact, she reminded of the day Bea, a despicable student bluntly slapped his math's teacher. As remarked previously, students rarely resort to metaphorical use of language, but teachers are instead very fond of metaphor. In Exchange 68, the teacher used six examples of metaphor.

The first example "so you are a kick boxer". The teacher calls Béa "a kick boxer" to criticize his previous violent act. The use of this term in an ironical way enables the teacher to disagree with his student by condemning that attitude in class. In the second example "you are a real genius", the teacher praises the smartness of the female learner. This metaphor intends to distinguish between a good learner Ngonono and a despicable one (Béa). In other words, it aims at delineating the bad character of the student Béa. This means that the teacher is insulting that learner because of his behavior. This assertive is also used to motivate the other learners to comport well. The compliment on the girl's CV aims at teaching a lesson of politeness to the class and to Béa in particular but it also aims at denigrating him.

Example 3 “Mr. Béa the warrior” is a technique of comparison. By means of this metaphor, the teacher brings out the violent behavior of Béa to criticize it. It could also be an expressive meant to tell Béa that she is disappointed and unhappy because of his past action. In Example 4, metaphor continues to be used to lecture the bad student. “You are a real curse”. Using curse here to refer to the guilty student is highly abusive. This strong language seeks to arouse fear, shame and regret in Béa. This assertive sounds definitely like a sanction. The teacher makes use of it to hurt the learner who beat the teacher a week ago. It is then crystal clear that metaphor is exploited in this situation to punish the learner and educate the class. In line with the politeness theory, we can say that the teacher flouted norms of politeness by harming the positive face of the male student in order to help him change his unacceptable behavior.

This therefore means that in situation of disharmony in the classroom, many EFL teachers use face-threatening acts as classroom management strategies. Example 5 in this conversation shows the negative impression the teacher has of Béa, the learner who beat her colleague. “I thought you were Judas”. Comparing the learner to Judas portrays the bitterness of the teacher. Judas as the symbol of betrayal, wickedness and unfaithfulness in the Bible, seems to fit the learner.

The repetitive use of Judas here shows that the teacher intends to emphasize the student’s misbehavior, to lament rudeness in order to elicit change. In addition, the use of the term “Judas” is tantamount to violence as it violates the politeness maxims of generosity, tact, agreement and approbation. By comparing the same learner to “a grand-father” in Example 6, the teacher intentionally hurts him to humiliate him. Reference to “grand-father” here is considered as an insult which states explicitly that the student is very old (You are really a grandfather hein).

In Example 7, the figure of comparison is produced with a view to laughing at the rude learner. “You don’t have anything. Yet you are Rambo”. Rambo here is an epitome of force, violence. It is not then used here in a laudatory way. Instead, the speaker chooses it to lambast violence and discourage any prospective violent action in the class. The eighth example of metaphor “only a dog can behave like that” is an explicit criticism with an arrogant tone. The choice of the term “dog” points out the savage behavior of the boy, his indiscipline and his lack of education . The use of “dog” to address the boy provokes feelings of dismay in the class. It is a threat to the addressee’s face. Politeness rules are flouted on purpose, to repress negative behavior.

The next example lays more emphasis on the teacher’s attitude towards bad behaviour. Her attitude is transparent in her use of language. ‘Yes. You are a dog, so school is not good for you’. The use of dog expresses bitterness; by using it, the teacher shows some sort of rejection of that student who is not civilised. The word choice is so shocking that the class reacts using a metaphor: “Aie, Mme is a Satan”. This example by students is an expressive which demonstrates that they are not happy. It expresses disapproval and solidarity among learners. Allusion to Satan here is made to depict the excessive rigor of the teacher. The rigor, wickedness, coldness of the teacher is contextual. It occurs as a response to the learners ‘rudeness. The use of “bandit” implies that the student who beat the teacher the week before is a bandit who should not be in a classroom. In a nutshell, metaphor is preferably used by teachers to call into question abnormal behaviour by learners in the classroom.

Metaphor is also used by the teacher to praise a good action from a learner to motivate others to copy. This figure is used by EFL teachers as a wonderful strategy of conflict management in the classroom. Classroom research has shown that in situations of conflict, metaphor was generally used by EFL teachers to appeal to the learners ’conscience. The table below gives a global account of the functions of the metaphor in the corpus.

Table 4. Functions of metaphor in the teacher’s speech.

Number of exchanges	Metaphor	occurrence	Percentage
70	Insulting	30	53.57 %
	Humiliating	16	28.57%
	Criticising	10	17.85
	/	56	100%

Source: EFL teacher-student conversations from 20 schools in Cameroon.

Table 4 indicates that 17.85% of metaphor was frequently used by teachers to criticize unruly students who did not comply with the basic norms of the classroom. In most of the cases, metaphor was used as a technique of humiliation when the learners refused to cooperate. As displayed in the table above, 53.57% of this figure was

used to insult the impolite learners. From this table, it is crystal clear that language is hardly used in a haphazard way. It is purposive and varies from one situation to another. The functions of metaphor reveal that language use is essentially face-threatening in situations of conflict during EFL classes. In the next table, the use of this figure by students is reported.

Table 5. Functions of metaphor in the learners' speech.

Number of exchanges	Function	Occurrence	Percentage
70	Criticising	05	71.42
	Laughing at	02	28.57
	03	07	100%

Source: EFL learners of 20 Cameroonian schools

The two tables above exhibit glaring differences. It is noticed that in situations of disharmony, EFL teachers and their learners do not always use language to do the same things. In 71.42% of cases, students used metaphor to criticize the teacher. 28.57% of metaphor is used by students to laugh at their classmates and their teachers. The next section of this chapter focuses on figures of exaggeration. It will then examine how these devices are used by teachers and students to express disagreement, anger, disappointment or even rebellion. In addition, we will analyse how techniques of exaggeration are used to attack, to contradict, to humiliate, to praise, to insult, to run down, to give hope or arouse disgusting feelings in interactants.

3.2 Figures of exaggeration

In the course of field observation, we made a general remark that situations of conflict during class interaction are often punctuated with conscious or unconscious flouting of politeness norms. This results in anger that affects the language used by classroom interactants. As a matter of fact, the analysis of language use in the corpus of 70 conversations has revealed that teachers and learners' resort to dysphemism in various situations of disharmony.

3.2.1 The use of dysphemism

For Nordquist (opt cit), dysphemism refers to "the use of negative terms to describe an event, an individual or a thing". When classifying the data from the corpus, we found out that negative words are abundant in situations of classroom disharmony; the exchange below illustrates the use of this figure. The general remark is that whatever the conversation, teachers use more figures of speech than learners.

Exchange 70: 3eme All, March 2016, Lycée de Dibang, Dibang.

Situation: The teacher slapped a girl who had been chatting for 5 min while the others were working.

Teacher: (Slaps a girl): Miss, if you are not interested in the lesson, go.

The girl: It is not normal to beat people hein.

Teacher: Close that dirty thing you call your mouth.

The girl: C'est même quoi? On tape les gens? Je vais me plaindre.

Teacher: Hey Mme. If you are a prostitute, don't come to school.

The girl: No Sir. I am not your child.

Teacher: Shut up. Rubbish, animal where did you grow up? In prison?

The girl: Oui mais on n'est pas en prison. Je vais me plaindre.

Teacher: Before taking me to prison, get out. Fast. Look at her fat head which is even empty.

The girl: Teacher should also respect students. Le respect est réciproque hein.

Teacher: (Moves towards the girl) laide chose, tu ressembles à un enfant de la rue. Get out bastard. Ta maman. Tu me tentes?

The girl: Vous même vous ressemblez à un pauvre type qui a faim.

Teacher: Really. It is a pity! On doit garder les ordures comme toi qui ne servent à rien dans une classe ? Future prostitute. Don't you dare come to my class again ok?

The girl: (While going out) Yes et puis quoi? Quel cours même ? Le cours de somnifère ? Tsuipp.

Teacher: That's what happens when villagers like you arrive in town. Villageoise comme ça. Grand-mère who cannot behave well. Ooh yes, you are real mouton like they say in French.

Class: (silent)

In conversation 70, the conflict was initiated by the teacher who violently slapped the student because he was not doing the task given. Conflict is then reflected in this classroom discourse. There are many examples of dysphemism used by the teacher and the girl involved in this interaction. The first example "close that dirty thing you call your mouth" contains an abusive word. Instead of saying mouth, the teacher prefers to use "dirty thing", which is negative and considered to be an insult. This directive shows that the teacher is annoyed with the girl's attitude.

Her headiness has motivated the teacher, who called her attention several times in vain, to become impolite. In the second example, the teacher seems scandalized by the arrogance of the girl. He therefore makes use of two negative words to describe her student: "shut up. Rubbish, animal. Where did you grow up? In prison?" The choice of "rubbish" reminds us of something without value, something dirty. Similarly, the use of "animal" portrays lack of discipline, lack of education. Dysphemism here is used to criticize the immoral behaviour of the girl who talked back to the teacher in class. The perlocutionary effect of those utterances is anger. Out of anger, the teacher uses the third example of dysphemism: "look at her fat head which is even empty". This assertive is an insult; so, it is a threat to the girl's positive face because it violates the conversational maxims of tact.

Example 4 also contains many negative words: the teacher says "laide chose" translated as "ugly thing". This noun phrase is used to depict the ugliness of that arrogant learner. He also uses French to abuse that girl. "Tu ressemble à un enfant de la rue", "you look like a street child." This term here describes the despicable conduct of that girl who seems to enjoy a lot of liberty. Other words such as "bastard" or "ta maman" indicate that the teacher is so surprised that she has lost her self-control. As the expected effect fails to be achieved, the teacher laments the presence of a bad student like her in Example 5: "on doit garder les ordures comme toi qui ne servent à rien dans une classe". By calling her "ordure", the teacher harmed the student's positive face and violated the politeness rules of sympathy, tact, modesty and agreement. Consequently, it is a threat to her personality that can damage her self-esteem.

Example 6 depicts the rude student as a future prostitute. This term is extremely abusive; it is produced to undermine the student's dignity, security and happiness. This utterance can also be seen as an expression of the teacher's hatred for the student and discomfort in class. As a reaction to that abusive language, the student retorts by using a negative term "quel cours même? Le cours de somnifère?" Tsuipp.

The use of French to answer an EFL teacher is an overt sign of conflict, disrespect. The sigh at the end "Tsuipp" shows despise on the part of the learner. This spirals another reaction from the teacher. "That's what happens when a villager like you arrives in town". The term "villageoise", grand-mère" in a single utterance probably indicates the teacher's bitterness facing the disobedience and laziness of that student. In this exchange like in others, dysphemism was regularly used to insult, to call into question negative attitude and to threaten when there was no harmony between the teacher and learners.

To sum up, we have noticed that dysphemism is prized by many teachers when a conflict arises in class. In this respect, the majority of teachers used it to criticise learners and insult them to bring back order in the classroom. To conclude this section, we can say that dysphemism is frequent in the speech of teachers in situations of conflict as indicated in the table below.

Table 6. Frequency of dysphemism in the teachers' speech.

Number of conversations	Functions	Occurrence	Percentage
70	Insulting	30	50.84%
	mocking	20	33.89 %
	Criticise	09	15.25%
Total	03	59	100%

The table shows that in situations of conflict, teachers cherish dysphemism. They make use of it to mock learners who are disrespectful or lazy. In many conversations characterized by conflict, teachers exploited that figure of speech to manage the class. 50.84% of dysphemism is used to insult students who are stubborn and unwilling to work. Another function of this figure is criticism. Most often, it is used to describe poor classroom behaviour or highlight the negative attributes of a learner. Interestingly, we found out that learners used fewer negative words as can be seen in (Table 7).

Table 7. Frequency of dysphemism in the learners' speech.

Number of conversations	Functions	Occurrence	Percentage
70	Dispraising	10	76.92%
	Mocking	03	23.07%
Total	02	13	13%

Source: EFL teacher- student conversations in 20 Cameroonian schools.

When comparing Tables 6 and 7, we realize that teachers used more negative words than students. For instance, while teachers uttered 59 words, students uttered 13 to carry out negative acts that signal disharmony: mocking, insulting. This difference in the use of negative words is surprising. Teachers are supposed to incarnate values and to use civil language to teach politeness to learners.

This high rate of dysphemism to insult, mock and criticize learners can be explained by the loss of temper by teachers following repeated provocation. The point raised above is substantiated in some teacher-student interactions chosen from the corpus. In the light of the table above, we have seen that more than 90% of the examples of dysphemism found in the corpus were uttered by teachers; students only produced 20.96 % of negative terms in the course of classroom talk.

This imbalance in the use of dysphemism can be accounted for by the asymmetric relation between the teacher who is a superior and the learner, an inferior class interactant. The presence of negative words in the speech of teachers or students evidence disharmony between them. Dysphemism is generally used to insult, to criticize, to mock learners during conflict. Unlike teachers, students occasionally use this rhetorical device to criticize and despise the teacher in the course of conflictual EFL class interactions. In the subsequent point, we will analyse sarcasm that is frequently used by classroom participants in situations of conflict.

3.2.2 The use of sarcasm

The look taken at the teacher-student interactions recorded and transcribed in the course of this research has shown that sarcasm is so prized by EFL teachers when there is no harmony. It is frequently used by teachers as a weapon to provoke a variety of feelings and emotions. Sarcasm is regarded by (Nordquist ,1995) as one kind of irony in which a praise is really an insult. The following excerpt illustrate the use of sarcasm when there is no harmony between EFL teacher and students.

Exchange 33 : 3ème, Lycée de Pouma, November 2016, Pouma

Situation: The teacher was giving back the students' scripts; performances were poor, and he was unhappy.

Teacher: In this class, people are so intelligent. The highest mark is 21/40.

Class: Aie Sir.

Teacher: Let me give back the scripts then we correct the 2nd sequence exam together. Owona is the first, yellow Jersey, Maillot jaune as you say in French. 08/40

Class: Ha ha ha ho ho On s'ennuie.

Teacher: Give a big hand to the king of the class. Aboudi 10/40. What a progress, last time he had 16/40.

Class: Héé Sir, you are not good!

Teacher: Why? I have to encourage good students like Aboudi who is first everywhere. Mbassa 12/40 wonderful mark. Continue to take care of your body instead of learning.

Mbassa: Yes.

Teacher: And she even says yes. You are very wise hein. Mme Tapa, 14/40. Wow, you have tried. From 4 to 7. Next time, you should have at least 10 hein.

Tapa: Yes Sir.

Teacher: Kilo Cathy, a beautiful girl with a big brain. Give her a hand. Clap for her.

A st: Why Sir?

Teacher: She scored very high 12/40.

Class: Haha haha. And we clap Sir

Kilo Cathy: Monsieur, vous savez encourager hein. Vraiment pour un prof.

Teacher: Speak English. Say that in English. You only know how to read comic strips when I am teaching. Now you are crying.

Kilo Cathy: crying? Que c'est quoi? C'est seulement l'anglais.

Teacher: Même en français, t'es Molière. Tu as toujours 03.

In this teacher-student conversation, the teacher was the initiator of the conflict. Sarcasm was used to laugh at students who had performed very poorly. It was used by the teacher to express anger and disappointment. Examples of sarcasm flourish in the present interaction. Consider the following: example 1: "In this class, people are so intelligent. The highest mark is 21/40". It is obvious that the compliment given by the teacher appears to be a reproach.

Sarcastically, he highlights and laments the poor performances of the learners. The words "intelligent" and the highest mark 21/40 are paradoxical in this context. This utterance has an illocutionary force: it indirectly criticises the laziness of the class. Consequently, the perlocution indicates that the students have perceived the mockery of the teacher. The class's reaction is "Aie Sir". The use of "Aie" by learners in this context implies that the learners are shocked. Example 2 "Owona is the first, yellow Jersey, Maillot Jaune as you say in French 08/40" Here, the teacher emphasized the extremely poor performance, but he used the term

"Yellow Jersey, first, maillot jaune". This laudatory speech is instead an insult. Mockery here is understood by the class that bursts into laughter (perlocutionary effect). It is obvious that through the use of sarcasm, the teacher expresses anger and flouts the politeness maxims of generosity, tact, agreement; he shows no sympathy for the learners who performed poorly; this is probably done with the objective of criticizing the students and motivate them to work more.

Example 3: "Give a big hand to the King of the class Aboudi 10/40" is profoundly face-threatening since this sentence clearly portrays mockery. The king of the class is supposed to have the highest mark. It could be a strategy to boost learners and invite them to work hard. However, the words used can hurt the ego of the learners who are from French background and yield the reverse outcome, which is discouraging them.

Example 5: "What a progress, last time he had 16/40. The use of progress is paradoxical because the student performance has dropped. The apparent compliment is meant to laugh at the student with the intention of impacting him. Example 6: "I have to encourage good students like Aboudi who are first everywhere." This statement means exactly the reverse. By mocking the student, the teacher hopes to motivate the learner to work harder. Example 7: And she even says yes. You are very wise hein Mme. The locution says the learner is intelligent to mean she is stupid. By bringing out her stupidity the teacher appeals to her conscience. This is an insult which undermines the student's dignity by arousing shame. Example 8: Kilo Cathy, a beautiful girl with a big brain. The teacher here refers to him as "a big brain" to call into question her dullness. By so doing, the teacher subtly insulted the

beautiful girl with a very poor mark. The reaction of the class (laughter's) shows that the message was correctly decoded by the students.

The last example: *Même en français, t'es Molière, t'as toujours* 03. The choice of language here is typically sarcastic. Moliere is considered as the father of the French language. Yet the learner's performance is below expectations. Because of her arrogant answer, the teacher used sarcasm to insult her and arouse shame in her. In this exchange, the teacher used 9 examples of sarcasm while the student used a single example. Sarcasm is then seen as a technique used by the teacher during conflict to criticize the learner's behaviour, to mock students who performed poorly with the view to upgrading their motivation to work. Students rarely made use of sarcasm because of their low level in English. For the teacher, it is a means of sensitization and correction, but it threatens the face of the learner by violating the maxim of tact, sympathy and generosity. Table 8 and Table 9 present the frequency of that figure in the teacher-student conversations.

Table 8. Functions of sarcasm in the teachers' speech.

Number of exchanges	Function	Occurrence	Percentage
70	Insulting	20	54.05 %
	Mocking	10	27.02 %
	Criticising	7	18.91%
	03	37	100%

Source: teacher-student conversations from 20 Cameroonian schools.

Table 9. Frequency of sarcasm in the learners' speech.

Number of exchanges	Function	Occurrence	Percentage
70	Criticising	06	60 %
	Mocking	04	40%
Total	02	10	100%

Source: EFL teacher-student conversations in 20 Cameroonian schools.

The tables above show that teachers were fond of using sarcasm when there was conflict in the class. They use this figure to insult most of the time, to mock ill-bred learners and to criticize those who exhibited arrogant behaviour. Unlike teachers, learners rarely used sarcasm to amuse the classroom as well as to insult teachers and classmates. Table 10 gives a global account of the figures used in the corpus.

Table 10. Distribution of figures of speech by class interactants.

N° of exchanges	Teachers' utterances			Learners' utterances	
	Figures of speech	Occurrence	%	Occurrence	%
70	Metaphor	56	28.28	07	21.87
	Simile	46	23.23	02	01.10
	Dysphemism	59	29.79	13	06.56
	Sarcasm	37	37.44	10	05.05
Total 70	04	198	100	32	100

Source: Teacher-student exchanges from 35 EFL classes in 20 schools in Cameroon.

At the end of this section on figures of speech, we realize that 86.08 % of figures of speech were produced by teachers as they have a good command of English. The analysis of the teacher-student exchanges that are part of our corpus revealed that figures of comparison such as simile and metaphor are most often used to insult and humiliate arrogant learners who do not respect classroom norms.

They are equally used for criticism. Many students used them to complain about the teacher while many EFL teachers used them to denounce ill behaviour and bring about positive change. The use of language by classroom interactants then depends on the speaker's intention, the context and relationship between interactants. In accordance with Austin's & Searle's theory of speech act as well as Leech's theory of politeness, it is crystal clear that language is not used at random. In situations of harmony like in situations of conflict, language choices are real actions performed in the classroom for a variety of reasons. The next point summarizes the findings.

4. Conclusions

The main objective was to identify and analyse the figures of speech used by EFL teachers and learners in situations of conflict in the EFL class from a strictly pragmatic standpoint. It equally aimed at finding out the effects these linguistic devices have on both classroom actors in such situations. The research came up with the following findings: in situations of conflict, figures of comparison (simile and metaphor) and figures of exaggeration (sarcasm and dysphemism) are often used to perform face threatening acts such as insulting, humiliating, criticizing, mocking, hurting.

All these speech acts contradict politeness maxims of generosity, modesty, sympathy, approbation and agreement and have the potential to destroy the teacher-student relationship which is sacred. The following suggestions were made:

- In situations of conflict, the compliance with leech politeness maxim is fundamental since language is a weapon but it is also a remedy.
- Instead of using language to perform face threatening acts, teachers must use it to perform face saving acts such as motivating, praising, congratulating, sensitizing, encouraging, raising hope, uplifting students' self-esteem, advising, correcting.

5. Authors' Contributions

Edwige Damaris Hagbe: study design, writing, scientific reading, corrections, submission and publication.

6. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest.

7. Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

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