RESPONDING TO REQUESTS IN CAMEROON FRENCH

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Abstract:

The focus of this paper is on request responses by Cameroon French speakers. Data were collected from 81 French-speaking Cameroonian university students. The analysis focused on the types of request responses (preferred, dis-preferred or open-ended) and the types and linguistic realizations of the speech acts (head acts and external modifiers) used to respond to requests. Request response strategies were also examined in terms of rapport management. The results showed that the participants mostly used compliance-responses. It was also found that positive responses to requests were mostly realised using combinations of agreements and/or promises to perform the requested act and external modifiers, while negative responses to requests were realized using combinations of refusals and/or reprimands and external modifiers. The few cases of open-ended responses to requests displayed combinations of aspects of compliance and elements non-compliance responses. The analysis also revealed social variation in the use of the three types of request responses. While the study expands the scope of research on the pragmatics of Cameroon French, it calls for further research on request responses.

Keywords: communicative act, request responses, (im)politeness, Cameroon French

1. Introduction

The present paper deals with request responses in Cameroon French. Making requests and responding to requests are generally used together in daily and institutional exchanges. However, these communicative acts are often studied separately. While several studies have extensively examined requests in and across languages and cultures, request responses have received very little attention. Also, there is need for further research on these speech acts in French, since most of the studies conducted on French discourse examine data from France, Belgium, and Canada. Other varieties of French have been largely neglected. The present study is an attempt to address this gap in the

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literature by focusing on request response strategies in three situations of social interactions in Cameroon. After this introduction, section 2 presents the background of the study and section 3 discusses the method used. Section 4 then presents the results of data analysis, followed by a conclusion and suggestions for future research in section 5.

2. Theoretical framework

Requests are directive acts, i.e. "*attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something*" (Searle, 1976:11). Since the act requested is performed in the speaker's interest (cf. Trosborg, 1995: 187), a request poses a threat on the interlocutor's own freedom of action and freedom from imposition (negative face): it is a face-threatening act (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987). Requests can be viewed from a conversation analytic perspective, according to Flöck and Geluykens (2018: 59), "*as first pair parts of an adjacency pair which create the expectation of a second pair part (response) to occur*". When a request is made, a response is generally expected and the type of such response, and its value in terms of relational work, depends on several factors. As the data used for the present study show, requests can be accepted or granted (positive response), declined (negative response), or generate ambiguous responses. In terms of rapport management, request responses can be considered as face-threatening, face-enhancing, as disruption or consolidation of social harmony. In other words:

> "*Not all alternative second pair parts are equal in status; some might be preferred while others are dispreferred. (…) Research on requests and their responses has shown unequivocally that indications of non-compliance are dispreferred second pair parts while indications of compliance are preferred.*" (Flöck and Geluykens, 2018: 59)

The majority of research has focused on requests and there is a very small number of studies on request responses (cf. Flöck and Geluykens (2018:61-63) for an overview of studies on request responses). Moreover, there are very few studies on requests and fewer studies on requests responses in French. Moreover, very little is done with regard to requesting and responding to a request in African varieties of French. In other to fill this research gap, the present work analyses request responses in Cameroon French, a regional variety of French which has received very little attention. The paper is a continuation of our study on requests in Cameroon French (Mulo Farenkia, 2024).

More specifically, the current study addresses the following questions:
1) What strategies do Cameroon French speakers use to respond to requests from friends and strangers?
2) What strategies do Cameroonian university professors use to respond to their students' requests?

3. Methodology

This section presents the participants of the study, the instrument and procedure (section 3.1), and the coding scheme used for the data analysis (section 3.2).

3.1 Participants, instrument, and procedure

Eighty-one respondents participated in the study. They were all French-speaking students at the University of Yaoundé (64 females and 17 males), aged between 18 and 30 at the time of data collection (2014). The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire consisting of different situations. In order to account for the impact of social distance and power difference and the weight of imposition of the request of the choice of utterances, the respondents were presented with twelve situations and were asked to construct possible dialogues between the participants in these situations. In the present study, we will focus on the three following situations:

a) *Friend - Kitchen* (Situation 1): The speaker asks his/her flatmate to clean the kitchen the latter left in a mess after cooking.

b) *Stranger - Electricity Bill* (Situation 2): The speaker asks the employee of the electricity company who is about to disconnect his/her power, because of unpaid electricity bill, not to do so.

c) *Professor - Deadline Extension* (Situation 3): The speaker (a student) is late with an assignment and asks his/her professor for an extension.

The major social variables were the type of horizontal relationship between the speaker and the hearer and the type of vertical relationship (power asymmetry) between them. While the relationship between the interactants in situation 1 (Kitchen) is a close one (peer equality: - D, S=H); in situation 2 (Electricity bill) they don't know each other and they have unequal status, based on the institutionalised role of the employee of the electricity company (+ D and S<H): the power asymmetry is due to the fact that the employee, representing their employer (the company), has the authority to disconnect energy supply, because the customer, by not paying their bill, has failed to respect their own part of the contract. In situation 3 (Deadline extension), the recipient of the request has a higher power position (professor) and the student and professor know each other as acquaintances (- D and S<P). Table 1 summarizes the variables built in in the scenarios.

Table 1: Summary of the DCT request scenarios

Situation	Social /Power Distance	Topic	Setting	Interlocutors
Sit 1	- D and S=H	Kitchen	Home	Friend to Friend
Sit 2	+ D and S<H	Electricity bill	Home	Customer to Employee
Sit 3	- D and S < H	Extension	Campus	Student to Professor

3.2 Data analysis

Overall, 240 examples (each consisting of a request and a request-response) were collected from the 81 respondents, namely 71 answers in Sit. 1, 80 answers in Sit. 2, and 81 answers in Sit. 3. The model used to analyse the request responses are adapted from

Flöck's and Geluykens' (2018:67) classification, which breaks down request responses into two main categories: *Compliance* and *Non-compliance*. The "compliance category" is further sub-divided into (a) explicit compliance (which can be realised through an "agreement strategy" or an "indication of compliance strategy") and (b) implicit compliance (which can be realised through the following strategies: "request for specification", "positive evaluation", "follow-up request", "delegating request", "indication of postponing"). The "non-compliance category" is also sub-divided into (a) explicit non-compliance (which can be realised through strategies such as "disagreement" and "indication of non-compliance") and (b) implicit non-compliance (which can be realised through these strategies: "reason for non-compliance", "challenge", "alternative action").

In the present study, request responses are examined according to the following scheme. Two main categories of responses have been identified in the data: "Compliance - responses" and "non-compliance responses". Compliance-responses or positive responses are preferred responses (for the requester) while the non-compliance responses or negative responses are dis-preferred (for the requester). Both types of responses are examined as consisting of two functional units, respectively: the head act, i.e. the core of the request response, and pragmatic modifiers (internal and external[ii]). Most of the request responses in the data occur as a combination of a "head act" and an "external modifier" ("Head act + external modifier"). The head acts of the positive or compliance responses are realised using direct strategies such as "agreement" (e.g. *D'accord* 'All right'; *Je vous accorde cette faveur* "I grant you this favor'; *C'est compris* 'Understood'*)*, "expression of pleasure" (e.g. *Avec Plaisir* 'With pleasure') or indirect strategies such as "promise to perform the requested act" (e.g. *Je le ferai* 'I will do it.'). Head acts of the negative or non-compliance responses are realised through *"direct refusals"* (e.g. *Non* 'No', *Je ne peux pas* 'I cannot'), "indirect refusals" (justifications: e.g. *Je suis fatigué* 'I am tired'; apologies: e.g. *Je suis désolé*. 'I am sorry.') and 'reprimands' (e.g. *Mais pour qui vous prenez-vous ?* 'Who do you think you are?')

Generally, head act strategies of compliance-responses and non-compliance responses are modified on two levels: (a) with elements that are added within (internal modifiers) and outside (external modifiers) the head acts. External modifiers in positive responses serve to reinforce the head acts, namely the agreement with the request or the promise to perform the requested action. External modifiers are also used for relational work, i.e. to consolidate social harmony. The modifiers attested include apologies, justifications, comments, and thanks as can be seen in the examples (1-4).

1) *« Désolé Tara[iii], je le ferai tout à l'heure. Je n'ai pas pu le faire avant parce que j'avais un dossier urgent à traiter là. »* (Friend)
   "Sorry, Tara, I will do that later. I could not do it earlier because I had a pressing issue to deal with."

[ii] In this study, focus is on external modifiers.
[iii] This term is a camaraderie address term which could be translated as "my friend", "buddy", "man."

2) *« **D'accord j'ai suivi je le ferai**. J'avoue que j'ai très mal agi en la laissant dans cette condition je m'en excuse. »* (Friend)

"Okay I have heard you I will do it. I accept that it was wrong leaving the kitchen in such condition I apologize."

3) *« Est-ce que j'ai même alors le temps, non! Je n'ai même pas encore fini mes devoirs. **Je vais voir ça after quand je vais back le soir**. »*

"Do I have time for that, no. I haven't finished my assignments. I will do that later when I returned in the evening."

4) *« Merci bien pour le rappel. **En fait, je le ferai dès que possible**. »* (Friend)

"Thanks for the reminder. In fact, I will do that as soon as possible."

In (1), the head act of the response is the promise to perform the requested act (in boldface). It is preceded by an apology (underlined), accompanied by the camaraderie term *tara* which is designed to calm down the requester. The promise is followed by a justification (underlined), which further reinforces the promise. In (2), the response consists of a triple head (in boldface), namely two agreements or acceptances (*d'accord j'ai suivi)* and a promise to perform the requested action (*je le ferai*). The multiple head act is followed by two apologies, namely a self-blame or an acknowledgement of wrong-doing and an offer of apology (underlined). In (3), the response begins with a rhetorical question which is used to mention lack of time as the reason for the mess in the kitchen, followed by another justification (unfinished assignments). These justifications (underlined) serve to reinforce the promise to take care of the kitchen later in the day (in boldface). It is interesting to note the use of two cases of code-switching in the clause indicating when the speaker intends to clean up the kitchen. The switch to English ("after" and "back") could be considered here as an index of in-group identity and closeness, which enhances the plead for patience with the interlocutor. In (4), the head act, the promise, is preceded by an expression of gratitude.

On the other hand, external modifiers in negative responses serve to strengthen the face-threats already expressed in the head acts. These include reprimanding, questioning, making negative comments, challenging the interlocutor, insulting, issuing threats or warnings, as shown in the examples (5-6) below.

5) L1 : *« Ma sœur, c'est comment ? Chaque fois que tu fais la cuisine, tu laisses trop de désordre. Pardon, essaye de ranger. »*
L2 *: « Akah! **Ne m'ennuie pas**. Je suis fatiguée et en plus j'ai cours tout à l'heure. Est-ce que toi-même tu ranges souvent? »* (Friend)
L1: "My sister, what is this? Each time you cook you leave a lot of mess behind. Please, try to tidy it up."
L2: "Akah! Don't bother me. I am tired and moreover I have class soon Do you tidy up often?"

6) L1 : « *Mon frère, s'il te plaît comprends-moi c'est la période de rentrées. C'est dur. Ne me coupe pas le courant. Je vais te chercher quelque chose.* »

L2: « ***Chaque mois c'est ce que tu fais***. *Tu penses qu'on nous paye avec quoi? Moi je ne vous comprends pas vous les clients.* » (Stranger)

L1: "My brother, please understand me, it is back to school time. Things are hard. Don't disconnect my power. I am going to give you something."

L2: "That's what you do every month. What do you think we get paid with? I don't understand you customers."

In exchange (5), the head act of the request refusal sequence is *Ne m'ennuie pas.* "Don't bother me.". The head act is preceded by the discourse marker *Akah* which is used in Cameroon French to downplay a situation, or to ridicule the value of interlocutor's speech move. In this situation, the discourse marker is used to downplay the validity of the request. The head act is followed by two reasons (tiredness and a forthcoming class). The sequence ends with the question *Est-ce que toi-même tu ranges souvent ?* The answer to this question is, from L2's point of view, a negative one and, as such, the question is an indirect reminder or reprimand designed to challenge L1's right to make the request and to reinforce the request refusal act. In other words, L2 is indirectly telling L1 that the request is not a legitimate one because L1 does not always respect the rules. In (6), L2, the employee of the electricity company refuses the customer's request not to disconnect their power. With the indirect refusal, *Chaque mois c'est ce que tu fais* L2 reprimands L1 for regularly using justifications to request for favour. It is reinforced by two external modifiers, namely a reprimand, in the form of a question, and an expression of surprise about the customer's attitude. It is important to highlight the use of the address term *vous les clients* 'You customers'. This address strategy serves in this request refusal to create a distance between the company employee and the customer (who is treated here as representing all customers) and it serves to further reinforce the employee's negative evaluation of the customer's attitude. It is clear that L2 is tired of the schemes used by L1 to escape paying their bills.

The data also show that some respondents produced "mixed, ambiguous or open-ended responses", which occurred as combinations of strategies that would normally appear in compliance-responses or non-compliance responses is as in (7-8).

7) L1 : « *Regardes! Tu as laissé la cuisine en désordre. Est-ce que tu peux la ranger? On a l'impression que c'est un dépotoir.* »

L2 : « <u>*Ce n'est pas une manière de s'adresser au gens*</u>. ***Je vais le faire quand j'aurais un peu de temps***. » (Friend)

L1: "Look. You left the kitchen in disorder. Can you tidy it up? You have the impression it is a dump."

L2: "That is not a (nice) way to talk to people. I will do it when I have some time."

8) L1: « *Monsieur, s'il vous plaît avec tous les problèmes que j'ai en ce moment, je n'ai pas vraiment eu le temps de finir mes travaux. Donnez-moi encore quelques jours et vous l'aurez.*

L2 : « *Je n'aime pas les étudiants paresseux!* **Je vous accorde encore trois jours** *mais cela jouera sur votre note finale.* » (Professor)

L1: "Please sir, with all the problems I am dealing with right I did not really have the time to finish my assignment. Give me a few more days and you will have it."

L2: "I don't like lazy students. I will give you three more days but this will affect your final grade."

In (7), the promise to perform the requested act by L2 (in boldface) is preceded by an act of reprimanding (underlined) by which L2 indicates that s/he accepts to clean up the kitchen but s/he is not happy with the tone in which the request was made. In (8), the professor's (L2's) response to the students consists of three speech moves. The professor begins by chastising the student, by indirectly describing him/her as a lazy student. Then L2 agrees to give the student three more days to submit the assignment (in boldface) and adds the warning that the extension will affect L1's final grade (hinting at the deduction of points that remains to be specified). Although the request is granted, the student is described as lazy and s/he is informed of a potential mark deduction.

4. Request-response strategies

As already indicated, three types of request responses were identified in the data. These are compliance responses (preferred responses), non-compliance responses (dis-preferred responses), and mixed or open-ended responses. Their distribution across the three situations is presented in Table 2. Compliance request-responses are the most of frequently used: they account for 106 instances (44.2%), followed by non-compliance responses with 78 examples (32.5%) and open-ended responses with 56 tokens (23.3%). In terms of situational distribution, compliance-responses are most frequent in the friend situation (63 instances of the 106 responses attested), non-compliance responses are mostly used in the stranger situation (44 tokens of the 78 responses found), while open-ended responses mostly occur in the professor situation (27 instances of the 56 tokens identified).

Table 2: Distribution of request-response types

Request response type		Friend (S1)	Stranger (S2)	Professor (S3)	Total
Preferred	Compliance	63 (79.7%)	14 (17.5%)	29 (35.8%)	106 (44.2%)
Dis-preferred	Non-compliance	9 (11.4%)	44 (55%)	25 (30.9%)	78 (32.5%)
Open-ended	Mixed	7 (8.9%)	22 (27.5%)	27 (33.3%)	56 (23.3%)
Total		79 (100%)	80 (100%)	81 (100%)	240 (100%)

4.1 Compliance-response strategies
In the data, responses to requests are realised using combinations of head acts and external modifiers.

4.1.1 Head act strategies

When responding favourably to requests, the participants use the following strategies as head acts:

a) "Acceptance" (e.g. *D'accord sans problème.* 'Okay no problem.', *(C'est) compris.* '(It's) understood.', *Oui bien sûr.* 'Yes of course.')

b) "Expression of pleasure" (e.g. *Avec plaisir ma sœur*. 'With pleasure my sister.' *Oui volontiers. '*Yes gladly.')

c) "Promise to perform the requested action" (e.g. *Je vais le faire.* 'I am going to do it.' *Je n'oublierai pas. '*I won't forget it.').

The results show that 115 instances of acceptances or agreements occur: 50 tokens in the friend situation (43.4%), 22 instances in the stranger situation (19.2%), and 43 examples in the professor situation (37.4%). The act of accepting or agreeing to perform the requested action is realised using different types of constructions. The act of promising, the other head act strategy occurs only in the friend situation where it is used 47 times. The promise head act is realized directly or indirectly. While the participants mostly use the verbs *faire, arranger, ranger* other verbs and verb clauses are also attested. These verbs are conjugated either in the future tense or in the immediate future *"aller + infinitive"*. Also interesting is the fact that most of these promise realizations are internally modified by means of time adverbials.

4.1.2 External modifiers

The head acts are generally combined with each other and/or associated with additional face-enhancing speech moves/acts such as grounder (justification), apologies, thanks, greetings, etc., as can be seen in (9-10).

9) L1 : « *Bonjour Monsieur. Jusqu'ici je n'ai pas encore réglé ma facture de courant. Vu que les délais sont passés, j'implore votre indulgence. Donnez-moi un peu de temps afin que je puisse résoudre ce problème.* »
L2 : « **Pas de problème madame**. *Vu que vous payez régulièrement vos factures à temps. Nous vous donnons une marge de quinze jours pour vous acquitter de vos dettes.* » (Stranger)
L1: "Good morning, sir. So far, I have not yet paid my electricity bill. Since the deadline has passed, I beg your indulgence. Give me some time so that I can resolve this issue."
L2: "**No problem, madam**. Since you regularly pay your bills on time. We are giving you a margin of fifteen days to pay off your debts."

10) L1 : « *S'il vous plaît monsieur, permettez-moi de remettre mon devoir un peu plus tard. En effet, Monsieur, je n'ai pas eu le temps de le terminer. Je vous prie, Monsieur, de m'accorder cette grâce.* »

L2 : « *Demoiselle, vous avez eu suffisamment de temps pour le faire. Exceptionnellement, et parce que je suis touché par votre franchise, **je vous accorde jusqu'à demain à 12h**.* » (Professor)

L1: "Please sir, allow me to submit my assignment a little later. As a matter of fact, sir, I did not have time to finish it. I beg you, sir, to grant me this favour."

L2: "Lady, you had enough time to do this. Exceptionally and because of your honesty, I am giving you extra time until tomorrow at 12 pm."

In (9), L2 begins the response turn with the head act *Pas de problème* to agree to give the customer some extra time. The head act is followed by a reason why the request has been granted (the customer has regularly paid her bills on time) and an indication of the duration of the extension period granted. In (10), the last utterance of the response (*Je vous accorde jusqu'à demain à 12h)* is the head act. It is preceded by a reminder that the students actually had enough time to finish and submit this assignment, followed by the reason why the professor accepts to grant the student's request (the student's honesty).

4.2 Non-compliance response strategies

4.2.1 Head act strategies

When responding negatively to requests, the respondents use two types of head acts, namely:

a) Refusals or disagreements (e.g. *Non* 'No.', *Non monsieur.* 'No sir.', *Ne m'ennuie pas.* 'Don't bother me.', *C'est impossible.* 'It's impossible.' *Je n'y peux rien.* 'I can do nothing.', *Je n'ai pas le choix.* 'I don't have a choice.')

b) Reprimands : e.g. *Tu n'as pas à me parler de cette façon.* 'You don't have to talk to me taht way.'*Chaque jour c'est la même chanson.* 'Everyday it's the same song.')

In the data, there are 65 instances of refusals or disagreements, of which 22 (33.8%) are found in the professor situation, 36 (53.4%) occur in the stranger situation, and only seven (10.8%) in the friend situation. Some participants used direct refusals while others preferred indirect refusals. Reprimands appear 65 times in the data, with 31 instances in the professor situation (47.7%), 22 occurrences in the stranger situation (33.8%), and 12 tokens in the friend situation (18.5%).

4.2.2 External modifiers

The external modifiers used to aggravate head acts in negative responses include complaints, insults, grounder, etc. Below are two illustrative examples from the data. In (11), L2 rejects the request indirectly by reminding the customer that the employee is not the one who makes a decision (*Le problème n'est pas le mien).* The head act is preceded by a complaint about the customer's aggressive attitude. Then, L2 reminds the customer that s/he is just obeying instructions from the company branch and L2 goes on to exhort L1 to go talk to the branch manager. All these modifiers serve to upgrade the request refusal. In (12), the professor (L2) uses two reprimands to preface the request refusal head act *En tout cas, pas de discussions*, which is followed by a justification (*le délai est passé*) and the negative consequences of not submitting the assignment (*donc ça fait zéro*).

11) L1 : « *Hé! C'est quoi? C'est comment? À peine une facture impayée et vous venez déjà me couper le courant? S'il vous plait ne coupez pas. Je viendrai la régler demain.* »

L2 : « *D'abord, vous m'agressez ensuite vous me suppliez. Le problème n'est pas le mien. Il est au niveau de l'agence. Allez y retrouver le chef.* » (Stranger)

L1: "He! What is it? What is it? Just one unpaid bill and you want to cut my power off? Please don't cut, I will come and sort it out tomorrow."

L2: "First you attack me then you beg me. The problem is not mine. It is at the branch level. Go there and meet the boos."

12) L1 : « *S'il vous plaît professeur, est-ce que je pourrais remettre mon devoir plus tard? Je n'ai pas eu le temps de le terminer.* »

L2 : « *Mais pour qui vous prenez-vous? Donc, maintenant je devrais marcher à votre rythme? En tous cas, pas de discussions, le délai est passé donc ça fait zéro.* » (Professor)

L1: "Please sir, could I submit my assignment later? I did not have time to finish it."

L2: "But who do you think you are? So, now I should walk at your pace, Anyways, no (further) discussions, the deadline has passed, so that's zero."

The results reveal that a wide range of speech acts were selected by the participants to either soften or intensify head acts in their request responses.

Table 3 presents the speech act types attested and their distribution in the three situations. Overall, 384 external modifiers were found. These modifiers mostly occur in the stranger situation (164 instances, i.e. 42.7%), followed by the professor situation (124 examples, 32.3%) and the friend situation (96 tokens, 25%). In terms of the type of external modifier used, the results show that grounders are, with 112 instances (29.6%) the most frequently employed, followed by warnings (57 instances), advice / suggestions / admonitions (38 tokens), reminders (37 examples), apologies / regrets (32 instances), greetings (21 instances), comments (19 tokens). The other external modifiers have much lower frequencies. As can be seen in Table 3, these modifiers are distributed differently across the three situations. Moreover, they are combined in various ways with head acts in the compliance responses and in the non-compliance responses. For instance, some justifications are used to reinforce refusals and reprimands in negative request responses, while other types of justifications serve to support acceptances and promises to comply in positive request responses.

Table 3: Overall distribution of external modifiers

Type of external modifier	Friend (S1)	Stranger (S2)	Professor (S3)	Total
Justification / grounder	46	40	26	112 (29.2%)
Apology / regret	20	7	5	32 (8.3%)
Promise	6	5	3	14 (3.6%)
Comment	4	5	10	19 (5%)
Request	6	0	2	8 (2.1%)
Thanks	4	1	0	5 (1.3%)
Complaint / insult	4	0	0	4 (1%)
Question	3	4	9	16 (4%)
Greeting	2	10	9	21 (5.5%)
Calming down	1	0	0	1 (0.3%)
Willingness	0	4	0	4 (1%)
Reminder	0	37	0	37 (9.7%)
Advice / suggestion / admonition	0	24	14	38 (10%)
Warning / announcing negative consequences	0	27	30	57 (15%)
Stressing a condition for action / Asking for justification	0	0	12	12 (3%)
Empathy	0	0	4	4 (1%)
Total	**96**	**164**	**124**	**384 (100%)**

4.3 Open-ended or ambiguous response strategies

There are also cases of open-ended request-responses in which the speaker's intent to accept or refuse to grant the request is not expressed in a straightforward manner. Example (13) illustrates this type of open-ended response.

13) L1 : « *Bonjour cohabitant. Comment a été la journée d'hier? Ton repas était très délicieux; seulement tu as oublié de ranger la cuisine après le repas. S'il te plait, peux-tu le faire maintenant?* »

L2 : « *Oh! Désolé pour ce désordre, mon camarade. Je m'en excuse vraiment. Après le repas, j'ai eu un coup de fil qui m'obligeait à me déplacer illico, raison pour laquelle j'ai laissé la cuisine dans cet état.* » (Friend)

L1: "Good morning flatmate. How was your day yesterday? Your meal was very delicious. However, you forgot to tidy up the kitchen after the meal. Please, can you do it now?"

L2: "Oh! Sorry for that mess, my friend. I really apologize. After the meal, I received a phone call and I had to leave immediately, that is the reason why I left the kitchen in this condition."

In L2's response, we have two apologies, namely an expression of regret which is modified by *Oh* (an interjection of surprise) and a camaraderie term (*mon camarade*), and an offer of apology which is reinforced by the adverb *vraiment*. These remedial acts are followed by a justification. However, there is no explicit indication whether L2 intends to perform the requested action (i.e. to tidy up the kitchen). The response could be interpreted as one leaning towards compliance.

Another example is given in (14), where the type of request response is negotiated.

14) L1 : « *Boss! Je promets de payer. Laisse-moi encore un peu de temps, c'est entre nous non?* »

L2 : « *Est-ce que c'est alors moi qui fais? C'est en haut qu'on nous dit de faire ça, mais si tu parles bien, je vais peut-être te laisser encore un peu de temps.* » (Stranger).

L1: "Boss, I promise to pay. Give some more time, it is between us."

L2: "Am I the one responsible for this? We are told by the hierarchy to do this but if you speak well (i.e. give me something in return) maybe I will give you a little more time."

Responding to L1's request to give him/her some extra time to pay the bill, L2 indicates, first of all, that s/he is not the one in charge of decision-making. L2 further indicates, using *mais si tu parles bien,* his/her willingness to grant L1's request if L1 does give L2 a bribe. As we can see here, the initial request by L1 has triggered another request by L2.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the ways in which Cameroon French speakers respond to requests. The results revealed that most of the responses found in the data were realised in the form of compliance with the requests. These strategies accounted for 106 instances (44.2%), followed by non-compliance responses (78 examples) and open-ended responses (56 tokens). The analysis also showed that positive responses to requests were mostly realised by combining an agreement and/or an expression of pleasure, and/or a promise to perform the requested act and other types of face-enhancing and harmony-consolidating speech acts, whereas negative responses to requests were realised by

combining direct refusals and/or indirect refusals and/or reprimands and other types of face-threatening speech acts. Open-ended responses to requests generally resulted from combinations of aspects of compliance and elements of non-compliance responses. In terms of situational distribution, it was found that the compliance responses were most frequent in the friend situation (63 instances of the 106 responses attested), while non-compliance responses were mostly used in the stranger situation (44 tokens of the 78 responses found). The analysis of external modifiers also revealed differences across the three situations with respect to the types and frequencies of the speech acts used. While these findings contribute to a better understanding of trends regarding responses to requests in Cameroon French, it would be interesting to investigate the linguistic realisations and modifications of request responses more thoroughly and to examine how request responses function in naturally occurring situations.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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