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Neologisms in the English Oral Production of Francophone Students of the Department of Bilingual Studies at the University of Yaoundé I

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Abstract

This study focuses on the socio-linguistic use of neologisms in the English language amongst Francophone undergraduate students of the department of bilingual studies at the University of Yaoundé 1 in Cameroon. It assesses the ability of students to identify both cultural and linguistic neologisms in the language. The study explores instances of communication, for students use neologisms in their daily interactions. Such communication can either be verbal or written. The theory applied is the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as postulated by Giles, Taylor, and Bourhis in the 1970s and 80s. Data were collected from 181 informants with the use of a questionnaire. The results were analysed in terms of percentages, and presented on pie charts. The findings show that Francophone students of the bilingual studies department do have difficulties in identifying neologisms in the English language. The teaching of neologisms thus has to be reinforced at the level of their English vocabulary. The study also took into cognisance the relationship between language and communication, and language and culture.

Key words: Neologism, communication, culture, language, Communication Accommodation Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of science and technology, new words have appeared in the English language, bringing about fast changes in the language. The development of a language brings about advancements at several levels,

especially at the level of its vocabulary. One of such advancements is the phenomenon of neologisms. Today, English is widely spoken and used for international communication. The language is constantly developing its internal and external resources, adapting to various

changing circumstances due to its dynamic nature and the development of modern society. Vinogradov (1925) opines that "various changes and achievements in social, cultural, political, and scientific domains give rise to new forms and content, improving and expanding the expressive means of language and its structure through their structural complication or simplification." Language is the first to respond to changes in various areas of human life and activity. Social environments undergo social changes, while new words demonstrate people's intentions to build a more sustainable world. People strive to recognize the world to comprehend their past, as well as to explore the present and predict future trends in language development.

Vinogradov (ibid) holds that anthropocentrism, in this case, is realized in the naming and perception of speech acts, in the physical capabilities of man, and in the choice of linguistic means, and is broadly reflected in man's linguistic and creative activities.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Engelbert Mveng (1963) in *The History of Cameroon* writes that Cameroon was founded around 1472 by a Portuguese navigator by name, Fernando Po, who arrived at the Bight of Biafra, then sailed up the River Wouri, situated in the Coastal region. The navigator was surprised to see shrimps in the river, and so baptized the river "Rio dos Camarões" (river of shrimps). This name became "Kamerun" during the German colonial period and "Cameroon" or "Cameroun" during British and French colonial rule.

In 1884, Germany colonized Cameroon. The signing of the Germano-Douala Treaty in July 1884, after which Cameroon became a German protectorate, marked this event. However, with the defeat of Germany in 1916 during the First World War, Cameroon was divided between Britain and France, and administered first under the League of Nations mandate and later under the United Nations

trusteeship. Britain got two discontinuous strips of land of about 90,000km² along the Nigerian border: the strip to the north was called "Northern British Cameroons," and that to the south, "Southern British Cameroons". The French got the lion's share (2/3 of the entire territory) and administered it as an independent territory, whereas the British administered theirs from Lagos in Nigeria.

According to UN-based sources, the population of Cameroon in 2024 was estimated at 29,124,000. With a surface area of 475,442 square kilometres, it is bounded to the west by Nigeria, to the northeast by Chad, to the east by the Central African Republic, and to the south by Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Congo. The country is made up of ten administrative regions, two (2) of which are English-speaking and eight (8) French-speaking.

The Republic of Cameroon is a multilingual country with more than 280 indigenous languages (Ethnologue, 2025), one lingua franca (Cameroon Pidgin English - CPE), and two official languages-English and French. These official languages are the legacy of Franco-British rule in the country between the end of the First World War in 1918 and the country's independence in 1960.

This peculiar mixed language situation does not facilitate linguistic communication; on the contrary, it constitutes a major obstacle to communication due to the absence of a nationwide lingua franca that serves as a common linguistic medium. Moreover, the unequal use of English and French as official languages is yet another problem that negatively affects the policy of official language bilingualism. The language policy lacks clear-cut objectives and orientation. The policy, as being implemented, does not sufficiently promote indigenous languages and fails to guarantee the appropriate implementation of official language bilingualism. Hence, the policy of official language bilingualism, originally aimed at guaranteeing political integration and unity of

the state of Cameroon, now seems to constitute a source of conflict and political disintegration (Alobwede, 2023).

As concerns the education system, there are two subsystems, an Anglophone subsystem based on the English model, and the Francophone subsystem based on the French model. Although the two are used side by side, a bilingual system of education is also operational at both the secondary and tertiary levels, where studies are carried out in both English and French. According to UNESCO 2020 estimates, Cameroon's overall literacy rate is estimated at 78.23%: youth male (15-24) 88.63%; adult male (15+) 83.40%; adult female (73.5%) (UNESCO, 2020).

3. DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The two main concepts in this study are neologism and culture, which are very important concepts that guide our research and which should be properly defined before we proceed with the research and analysis.

Neologism is an important linguistic phenomenon in that their emergence demonstrates the ability of a language to undergo and sustain change, and their capability of deflecting negative intrusion from other languages and cultures. In everyday interactions, humans create new words. Such creativity and productivity in inventing new words are unlimited. In all aspects of life, people create new expressions, combine new words, derive new terms, and create new phrases.

Neologism is an important part of the English language whose analysis and study are of great significance to English learners. It covers a wide range of topics varying from politics, economy, culture, conflicts, science, and technology, with diverse genres ranging from news, editorials, features, and reviews.

There are many definitions of the term neologism depending on the school of thought. Newmark (1988) distinguishes twelve types of neologisms that are classified by their

formation: old words with new sense, collocations with new meanings, abbreviations, eponyms, transferred words, acronyms, new coinages, derived words, collocations, phrasal words, pseudo-neologisms, and internationalisms.

The term culture has no generally accepted definition because it varies from one region to another, from one author to another, and from one field of study to another. Culture is used to refer to all the activities of life, whether social, physical, external, or internal. Its material components include buildings, furniture, clothing, musical instruments, and other tangible stuff. It is the total of all the tangible and intangible things, including art and craft, customs and traditions, ideas, values, social and political norms, and habits, etc. Technology and development are also components of culture (Bennett 1982:31). These two concepts are simultaneously cause and effect for each other and play a vital role in the transformation of a culture from a tradition-oriented society to a modern one. Such transformation occurs due to the cultural industries, i.e., the mass media.

4. THEORETICAL FRAME

Any research work needs a foundation that guides research by outlining the key concepts, theories, and assumptions relevant to a specific topic. The theoretical framework acts as a roadmap, helping researchers to understand and explain phenomena within their studies. The theory used in the present study is the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) developed in the 1970s by Giles (1973), Giles, Taylor, and Bourhis (1973), to predict and explain the changes individuals make to create and to maintain social distance in interaction and changes that are enacted for reasons that go beyond the mere exchange of referential information and emotions. According to Gallois and Giles (1998), Giles, Willemyns, Gallois, and Anderson (2007), CAT has been refined and elaborated many times to

account for the dynamics of interpersonal and intergroup communication.

Coupland and Jaworski (1997: 241-242) originally developed a socio-psychological model exploring accent and bilingual shifts in interactions; CAT has today expanded into an *"interdisciplinary model of relational and identity processes in communicative interaction"*. According to Coupland, Giles, and Henwood (1988), Giles and Wadleigh (2008), the theory explores the different ways in which communicators accommodate, the motivations for doing so, and the consequences arising from these adjustments. Although language remains a central focus of the theory, discursive structures and nonverbal communication behaviours, as well as other communicative aspects of identity (such as dress and hair-style), can also be understood from a CAT perspective.

5. METHODOLOGY

181 male and female undergraduate students (respondents) were retained for this study. All respondents use English and French in their daily interactions. The undergraduates were students of levels 1, 2, and 3 of the department of bilingual studies of the Faculty of Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences of the University of Yaoundé 1 in the Republic of Cameroon.

For each level, the researcher first met with the student representatives (delegates) to explain to them the reason for the study. Next, the students of each level were invited to a meeting with the researcher in the presence of their class delegates. After a detailed discussion on the nature of the questionnaire, the participants gave the researcher assurance that they would respond to the questionnaire.

The data for analysis comprised samples of neologisms that were collected from the respondents. The questions were designed under four headings, namely: definition of neologisms and word formation process,

identification of neologisms, types of neologisms, and sources/origin of neologisms.

The questionnaire administered was made up of 10 multiple-choice (MCQ) closed questions. The questions focused on two types of neologisms: cultural neologisms and linguistic neologisms. Some questions were related or similar, so as to find out if respondents were coherent in their answers. Each question had four options among which respondents were expected to choose the correct answers. The questions were short and simple to understand, given the nature of the respondents.

Google Forms, an online survey tool, was used to collect data. It is a cloud-based data management tool used for creating and developing web-based questions that are freely accessible on the internet for a researcher to use and develop web-based questionnaires. It is 100% free access at all time, limitless surveys, unlimited respondents, unlimited survey responses, and automatic data collection on a Google spreadsheet, which today is a popular product for online survey research.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This research paper was designed in four categories, namely: definition of neologisms and word formation process, identification of neologisms, types of neologisms, and sources/origin of neologisms.

The first question was to find out if students knew what neologisms were. The following options were given: (a) *neologisms are newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense*; (b) *neologism is a newly coined lexical unit or existing lexical unit for an existing word, or a word borrowed from another language*; (c) *neologisms are "nonce" words*; (d) *a, b, and c*. The distribution of responses and the percentages per answer are presented in tables and pie charts

Table 1a. Definition of neologism

Letter representation	Frequency	Percentage
A	52	28.7
B	108	59.7
C	02	01.1
D	19	10.5
TOTAL	181	100

Of the 181 respondents, 52 (28.7%) hold that *neologisms are newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense*, 108 (59.7%) hold that *neologism is a newly coined lexical unit or existing lexical unit for an existing*

word, 01 (01.1%) think that *neologisms are "nonce" words*, while 19 (10.5%) think that answers a, b, and c define the term neologism. The correct definition is (a), that is, *neologisms are newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense*.

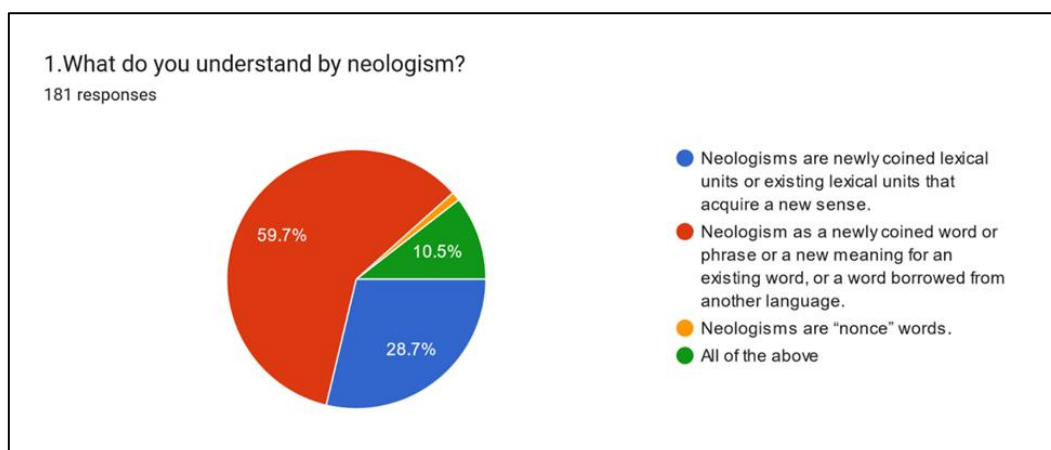


Figure 1. Definition of neologism

While 162 (89.5%) of respondents provided a wrong answer, only 19 (10.5%) had the right answer

Table 1b: Total answers in percentage

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	19	10.5%
Wrong answers	162	89.5%
Total	181	100%

"neologisms can be defined as "newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense". Arnold I.V. (1986:217) defines a neologism as a newly coined word or phrase or a new meaning for an existing word, or a word borrowed from another language.

The second question was to find out from the students if they could pick out, among a given number of concepts, which one was not a neologism. The options were: (a) *collocation*, (b) *new coinages*, (c) *abbreviation*, and (c) *creativity*.

Crystal (1997) describes neologisms as "nonce" words in that, of the many neologisms created, adapted, or mutilated, very few survive. According to Newmark (1988:140)

Table 2a. Choosing an exception

Letter representation	Frequency	Percentage
A	42	23.2
B	39	21.5
C	40	22.1
D	60	33.1
Total	181	100

Of the 181 respondents, 42 (23.2%) held that the exception in the list was (a) *collocation*, 39 (21.5%) held that the exception was (b) *new*

coinages, 40 (22.1%) held that the exception was (c) *abbreviation*, while 60 (33.1%) pointed out that the exception was (d) *creativity*.

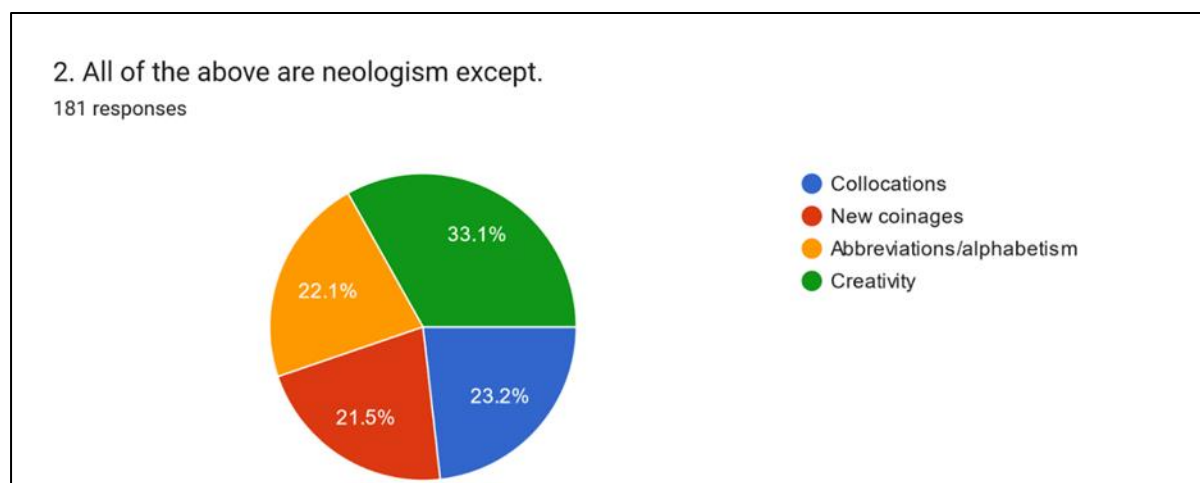


Figure 2 choosing an exception

The correct answer to the question was (d) *creativity*, which is not a neologism. While 212 (66.9%) students gave a wrong answer, only 60 (33.1%) were able to choose the correct answer.

Table 2b: Total answers in percentage

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	60	33.1%
Wrong answers	121	66.9%
Total	181	100%

The next question on the questionnaire was to find out if the respondents could identify some modern sources of neologisms. The following options were provided: (a) *technology/*

science, (b) *political development/advertisement*, (c) *the COVID-19 pandemic*, and (d) *a, b, and c*.

Table 3a. Sources of neologisms

Letter representation	Frequency	Percentage
A	83	45.9
B	34	18.8
C	08	04.4
D	56	30.9
TOTAL	181	100

Of the 181 respondents, 83 (45.9%) chose (a) *technology/science*, as a source of neologism, 34 (18.8%) chose (b) *political development/advertisement*, 08 (04.4%) chose (c) *the COVID-19 pandemic*, while 56 (30.9%) chose (d) *a, b, and c*.

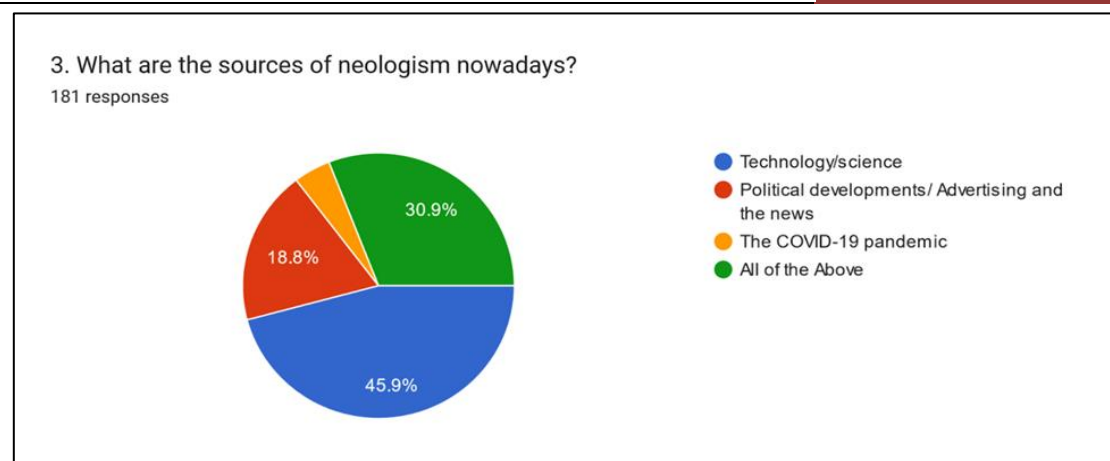


Figure 3 sources of neologisms

Given that options (a), (b), and (c) are all modern sources of neologism, the correct answer to the question was (d). Only 56 (30.9%) of respondents knew that a, b, and c are all sources of neologisms.

Table 3b: Total answers in percentage

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	56	30.9%
Wrong answers	125	69.1%
Total	181	100%

In question four, the students were asked to identify what type of neologism was the underlined word in the sentence: *CAMARCO has bought a new plane*. The following

four options were presented to the students as answers: (a) *creation*, (b) a *neologism*, (c) *interference* and (d) *neither a, b, nor c*.

Table 4a. Identifying the underlined word

Letter representation	Frequency	Percentage
A	26	14.4
B	94	51.9
C	11	6.1
D	50	27.6
Total	181	100

Of the 181 respondents, 26(14.4%) chose (a) *creation*, 94(51.9%) chose (b) *neologisms*, 11(6.1%) chose (c) *interference*, while 50(27.6%) chose (d) *neither a, b, nor c*.

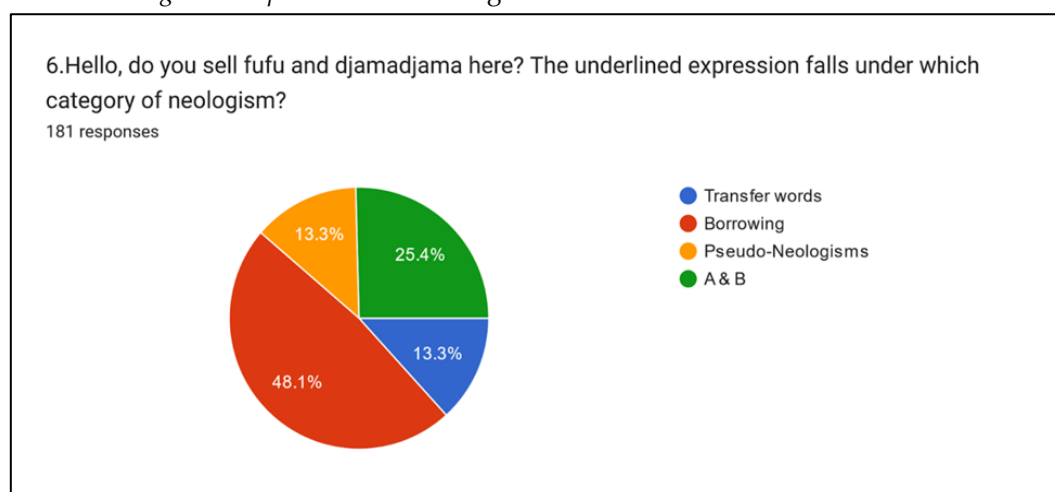


Figure 4 identifying the underlined word

The correct answer was (b) *a neologism*, which was given by 94 (51.9%) respondents, while 87 (48.1%) chose a wrong answer.

Table 4b: Total answers in percentage

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	94	51.9%
Wrong answers	87	48.1%
Total	181	100%

The word CAMAIRCO, which is an acronym of the Cameroon Airline Company, is a blend of three coined words: Cameroon, airlines, and company. Jackson (1991) argues that acronyms are frequently formed based on proper nouns, especially in the case of organisations. These nouns can either be proper nouns or common nouns. In the case of CAMAIRCO, we have a proper noun

(Cameroon) and two common nouns (airline and company). We can thus conclude that acronyms are formed from nouns, no matter their category.

It will be interesting to also mention the sociolinguistic dimensions of acronyms, i.e., by pointing out that acronyms can be markers of social identity (Plag:2005). Members within a given group, but not outsiders, understand an acronymic word within a given context. When Cameroonians talk of CAMAIRCO, everyone understands that they are talking about the flag bearer (Flight Company) of the country.

In the next question, respondents were asked what a word formation process was. They had four options: (a) *the derivative structure of existing words and the patterns on which a language builds new words*, (b) *a way a word is formed*, (c) *classification of words according to their formation*, and (d) *neither a, b, or c*.

Table 5a. Definition of word formation process

Letter representation	Frequency	Percentage
A	105	58
B	48	26.5
C	24	13.3
D	4	2.2
Total	181	100

Of the 181 respondents, 105 chose (a) *the derivative structure of existing words and the patterns on which a language builds new words*, 48 (26.5%) chose (b) *a way a word is formed*, 24 (13.3%) gave the answer (c) *classification of words*

according to their formation, while 4 (2.2%) gave the answer (d) *neither a, b, or c*.

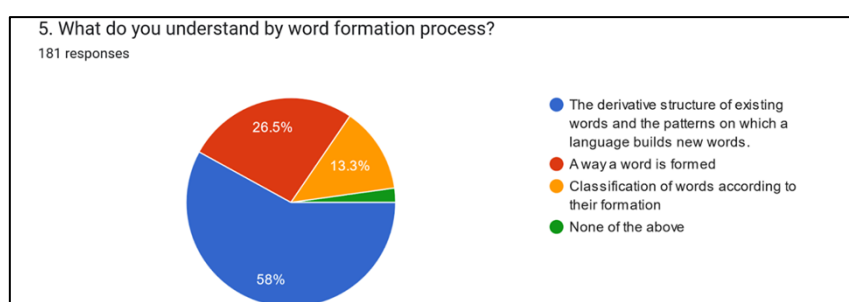


Figure 5 definition of word formation process

The correct answer to the question was (a), which was chosen by 105 (58%) respondents, while 76(42%) of them gave a wrong answer.

Table 5b: Total of answers per percentage

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	105	58%
Wrong answers	76	42%
Total	181	100%

The second question in this category was for students to identify a non-word formation process among a given number of lexemes: (a) *affixation*, (b) *compounding*, (c) *convention*, and (d) *creation*.

Table 6a: Identifying a non-word formation process

Letter representation	Frequency	Percentage
A	20	11
B	20	11
C	44	46.4
D	97	53.6
Total	181	100

Of the 181 respondents, 20 (11%) chose (a) *affixation* as the answer, 20 others chose (b) *compounding*, 44(46.4%) chose (c) *convention*, while 97 (53.6%) chose (d) *creation*.

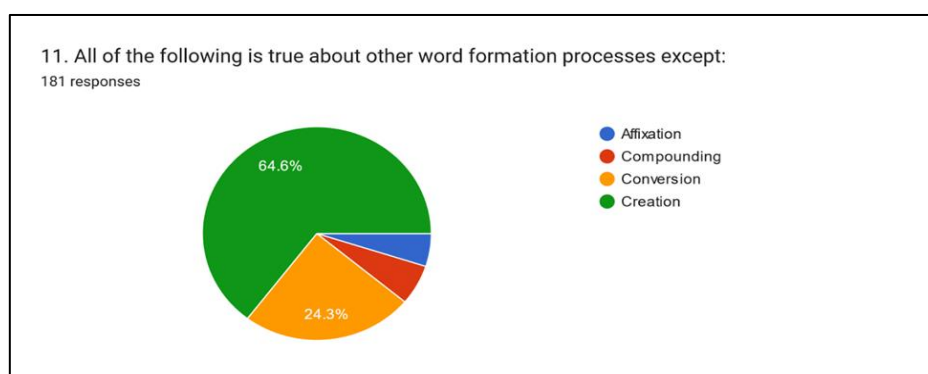


Figure 6 identification of a non-word formation process

The correct answer to the question was (d) *creation* which is not a word-formation process. 97 (53.6%) respondents held that word-formation is a linguistic phenomenon that leads to new words, while 84(42%) were unable to provide the correct answer.

Table 6b: Total of answers per percentage

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	97	53.6%
Wrong answers	84	42%
Total	181	100%

In the seventh question, the students were asked under what type of neologism the word *iPhone*

fell: Yesterday, my mother bought a new *iPhone*. The options were: (a) *internationalism*, (b) *collocation*, (c) *transfer word*, and (d) *phrasal word*.

Table 7a: Neologism type

Letter representation	Frequency	Percentage
A	91	50.3
B	44	24.3
C	33	18.2
D	13	7.2
Total	181	100

Of the 181 respondents, 91 (50.3%) chose (a) *internationalism*, 44 (24.3%) chose (b) *collocation*, 33 (18.2) chose (c) *transfer word*, while 13 (7.2) chose (d) *phrasal word*.

8. Yesterday, my mother bought a new iPhone. The underlined word is a:

181 responses

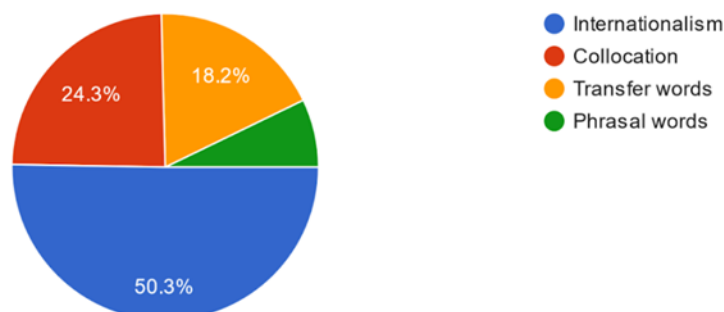


Figure 7 neologism type

The correct answer to the question was (a) *internationalism* which was chosen by 91 respondents, while 90 respondents gave a wrong answer.

Table 7b: Total of answers per percentage

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	91	50.3%
Wrong answers	90	49.7%
Total	181	100%

According to Antrushina (1999), internationalism borrows many words from other languages that convey concepts which play an important role in our communication. International words can be found in many fields, such as science names (e.g. philosophy, biology, mathematics, medicine, and lexicology); art (e.g. theatre, music, drama, artist); politics (e.g. politics, revolution, communism, progress); and technology (e.g. atomic, antibiotic, radio, computer).

This type of neologism falls under stable words that are recognised, known, and accepted by people within a long period of time (Andreescu 2012). According to surveys, the percentage of modern English words derived from each language is 29% from French, 29% from Latin, 26% from German, 6% from Greek,

and the rest accounts for 6%. News English often reports world news, and the use of loan words cannot only attract the readers' attention but also provide them with direct foreign information.

The next question was for students to identify neologisms in a given context and say what type of neologisms they were: *Hello, do you sell fufu and djamadjama here?* The following options were given: (a) *transferred words*, (b) *borrowing*, (c) *pseudo-neologism*, and (d) *neither a, b, nor c*.

Table 8a: Neologism type

Letter representation	Frequency	Percentage
A	24	13.3
B	87	48.1
C	24	13.3
D	46	25.4
Total	181	100

Of the 181 respondents, 24 (13.3%) chose (a) *transferred word*, 87 (48.1%) chose (b) *borrowing*, 24 (13.3%) chose (c) *pseudo-neologism*, while 46 (25.4%) chose (d) *neither a, b, nor c*. The compound word *fufu and ndjamandjama* in the sentence is a Cameroonian dish which has no equivalent in the English language. Thus, in the sentence, it is a transferred expression into the English language.

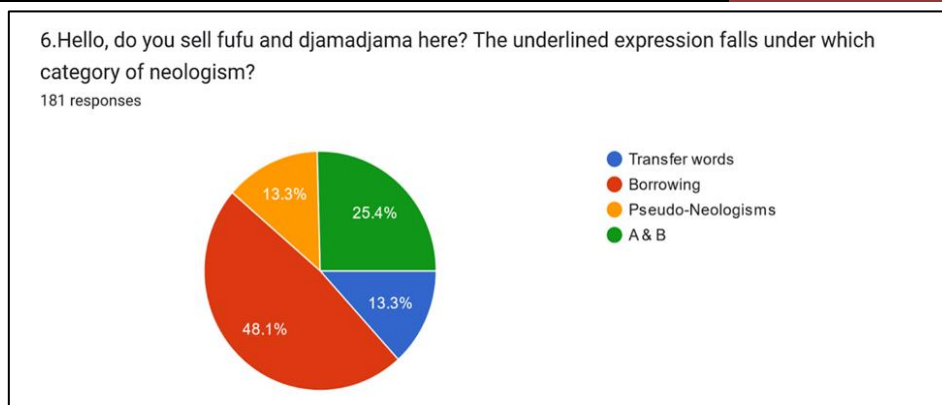


Figure 8 type of neologism

While 157 (86.7) gave a wrong answer to the question, only 24 (13.3%) of respondents provided the correct answer.

Table 8b: Total of answers per percentage

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	24	13.3
Wrong answers	157	86.7
Total	181	100%

linguistic neologism, (c) simple neologism, and (d) creative neologism.

Table 9a: Categorisation of neologisms

Letter representation	Frequency	Percentage
A	167	92.3
B	10	5.5
C	2	1.1
D	2	1.1
Total	181	100

The ninth question was to find out from the students under what category of neologism the underlined words in the sentence could be classified: *Words like eru, kati-kati, djamadjama, and ndole can be classified under?* Four options were provided: (a) cultural neologism, (b)

Of the 181 respondents, 167 (92.3%) chose (a) cultural neologism, 10 (5.5%) chose (b) linguistic neologism, while 1(1.1%) each chose (c) simple neologism, and (d) creative neologism respectively.

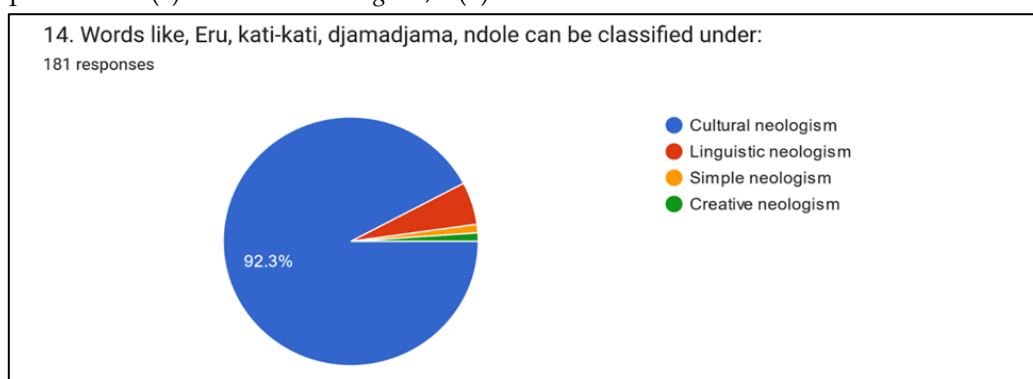


Figure 9 categorisation of neologisms

While 167 (92.3%) were able to identify the words as cultural neologisms, 14 (7.7%) failed in choosing the correct answer.

Table 9b: Total of answers per percentage

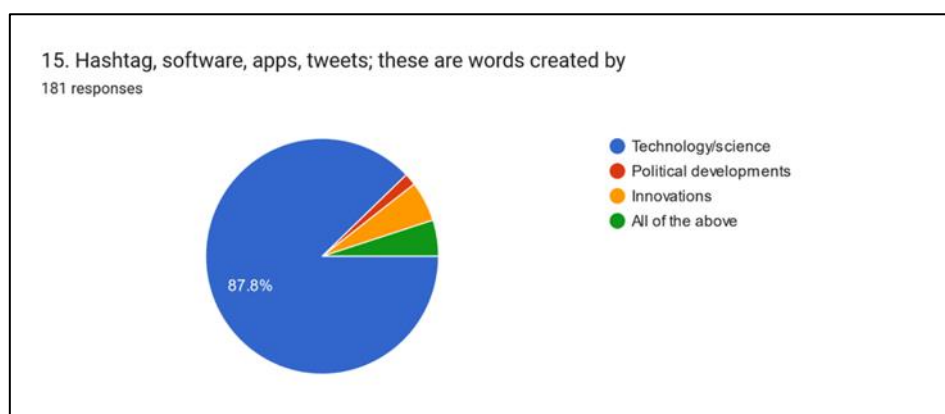
Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	167	92.3
Wrong answers	14	7.7
Total	181	100

The last question required students to identify the sources of the following neologisms: Hashtag, software, apps, tweet. Four options were provided: (a) *technology/science*, (b) *political development*, (c) *innovation*, and (d) *a, b, c*.

Table 10a: Categorisation of neologisms

Letter representation	Frequency	Percentage
A	159	87.8
B	10	5.5
C	7	3.9
D	5	2.8
Total	181	100

Of the 181 respondents, 159 (87.8%) chose (a) *technology/science*, 10 (5.5%) chose (b) *political development*, 7 (3.9%) chose (c) *innovation*, while 5 (2.8%) chose (d) *a, b, c*.



While 159 (87.8%) gave (a) *technology/science* which was the correct answer, 22 (12.2%) gave a wrong answer.

Table 910b: Total answers per percentage

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	167	92.3
Wrong answers	14	7.7
Total	181	100

7. Conclusion

Neologisms are constantly created in the English language, frequently through traditional word formation processes of English morphology. In some cases, they are formed from an existing word in the language, but with a new meaning. Sometimes, they are the result of changing some aspects of the word form; in

other cases, a new form of a word is directly incorporated into a language because of the need for a new word with a particular meaning, or because, at times, speakers find some words easier to use than others.

The present study shows that lexical innovation is a dynamic feature of interlanguage development. Faced with gaps in their second language lexicon and under the constraint influence of French and Cameroon linguistic repertoire, Francophone students systematically create new forms through processes such as semantic extension, blending, and phonological adaptation. Rather than hindering intelligibility, many of the innovations point to an emerging variety of English shaped by its special sociolinguistic environment. Consequently, pedagogical approaches in bilingual contexts should move beyond a strict error-correction model. A more

productive stance would involve raising metalinguistic awareness: distinguishing between creative context-appropriate neologisms and forms that impede communication, while also validating students' agency as language users. Future research could expand this work by comparing oral and written production, and by tracking how institutional exposure to English over the course bilingual studies program influences the rate and type of lexical innovation.

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