
On the emergence of uninflectedness: The case of incipient verbal inflection dropping in present-day French

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The adaptation of English-origin verbs to French inflectional paradigms seems to have been undiscussed until the present day due to its systematic nature. This systematicity is, however, to be questioned in view of the recent emergence of uninflected variants for a large number of these verbs (e.g., *je viens de play cette vidéo en salle de pause le son à fond* 'I have just play this video in the break room with the volume full on'). Our data from a corpus of 50 million French tweets show that the lack of inflection on English-origin verbs is a quantitatively remarkable fact, with thousands of daily attestations in 2021, and the distribution between inflected and uninflected infinitive forms in a sample of 50 verbs is quite striking as — except for two of them, *spam(mer)* and *check(er)* — all verbs are predominantly uninflected, and overwhelmingly so (over 90%) for a vast majority of neologisms and a large minority of established verbs.

Remarkably, verbal uninflectedness in present-day French is not limited to borrowings from English. It appears repeatedly at the margins of the lexicon, in colloquial language of slang origin such as *verlan* and borrowings from Romani, as well as in the newly emerged French-based contact languages of western Africa Nouchi (Ahua 2008, Atsé N'Cho 2014) and Camfranglais (Bogni 2018). Regarding the latter, Bogni claims that the verbs (mostly borrowed from English, Cameroonian Pidgin English, and Duala) which do not display inflection, especially in the infinitive and the past participle, belong to a new, "fourth-group" class of conjugation. Uninflectedness thus appears to be a marker of limited assimilation, flagging foreignness and peripherality. In the context of social media communication, it might also be that it is used as a marker of textual genre and in-group membership.

References: • Ahua, B. M. (2008). Mots, phrases et syntaxe du nouchi, *Le français en Afrique* 23, 135-150. • Atsé N'Cho, J.-B. (2014). Les verbes du nouchi (parler argotique ivoirien) : pour une analyse morphosyntaxique, *Revue du LTM*, 10. • Bogni, T. (2018). Verbes et conjugaison en camfranglais, *Argotica*, 7, 171-196.