

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

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Uninflectedness Workshop
45th DGfS Annual Conference
University of Cologne, 9 March 2023

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APPLIQUÉE

The morphological adaptation of loanwords from English (Saugera, 2012 a & b)

How English-origin nouns (do not) pluralize in French*

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Introduction

French nouns borrowed from other languages usually receive the standard silent suffix *-s* when used in the plural; that is, they are treated as native substantives. This general rule is sensible — it would be implausible for native speakers to integrate the morphologies of other languages into French. For this reason, the borrowed Italian and Arabic nouns *cappuccino* and *méhari*, for example, regularly follow French inflectional conventions with the adapted forms *cappuccinos* and *méharis* vs. their original plural *cappuccini* and *méhara*.¹ It is thus expected that the collection of English-origin nouns that belong to the French lexicon would receive the plural marker *-s*, especially since French and English share the same pluralization morpheme on nouns. However, although overt inflection is the norm, it is not systematic, as illustrated by the contrastive compounds *des black-jacks* vs. *des black-out*, and the nominalized onomatopoeia *des flops* vs. *des bang*. This paper addresses the absence of inflection on nominal anglicisms in French, especially compounds, which defies the morphological rules of both donor and recipient languages. More specifically, the paper identifies and comments on constraints that justify resistance to inflectional marking in a research corpus composed of the English-origin nouns recorded in the general language dictionary the *Petit Robert 2010* (PR).

* I am grateful to Patricia Lunn and Paula Chesley for their useful criticism of my article.

1. The plural form *méhara* is attested, but its usage, and that of most borrowed original plurals, is often perceived as a marker of pedantry (Grevisse 2008:694). The 'Conseil supérieur de la langue française' (*Journal Officiel*, 6 December 1990) prescribes a regular French plural for loanwords (*un jazzman, des jazzmans*) and permits the use of a plural form in the donor language as a singular (*un graffiti, des graffitis*). In the *Petit Robert 1993*, the recorded plural of *mafioso* is *mafiosi*, whereas the 2010 edition supplies both original and native forms (*des mafiosi, des mafiosos*). In press usage, *mafiosi* remains the most frequent.

French Language Studies 22 (2012), 225–250, © Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0959269511000032

The inflectional behavior of English-origin adjectives in French¹

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(Received June 2010; revised March 2011; first published online 14 June 2011)

ABSTRACT

When adjectives of English origin are pluralized in French, they follow one of three patterns: they receive inflection, reject inflection, or accept both forms. Curiously, these patterns of morphological variation have never been analyzed. This study identifies inflection-inhibiting constraints for a closed corpus of French dictionary-attested English adjectives and reveals that uninflected and variable adjectives do violate the standard native rule of adjective agreement, yet the constraints that block inflection are *French-derived*. A second feature of these adjectival anglicisms is that the nominal counterpart, if it exists, always receives native inflection (*des jeans baggy* vs. *des baggys*). The difference in word class, and specifically the feature of grammatical gender, may account for the contrastive behavior.

1 INTRODUCTION

The morphological behavior of anglicisms in French is poorly understood, as evidenced by the paucity of research on the topic (e.g., Humbley's bibliography of French anglicisms, 2002). The reason for this deficiency may be the assumption that these English words are completely integrated into French, since foreign words are typically classified as borrowed forms at the point when their adoption of the morphological features and/or phonological shape of the recipient language can be attested. Myers-Scotton (2006: 224) even refers to morphological integration as close to a 'universal' marker, arguing that '[...] borrowed words are *almost always* [italics in original] adapted to the recipient language in morphology (adapted in form).' The dictionary-attested English adjectives *bobo* and *cockney*, for example, receive the French affix *-s* in the plural (e.g., *des robes bobos, des accents cockneys*), which is a transparent indicator that the donor adjectives are pluralized like any other adjective by the morphology of the recipient language. Though native overt inflection is the most common pattern, it is not yet universal. There is a set of borrowed adjectives that remain morphologically unmarked (e.g., *des musiciens groggy, des yaourts light*) and a smaller set that exhibits variation (e.g. *des musiciens punk*

¹ I am grateful to Patricia Lunn for her rigorous editing, to Paula Chesley and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions, and to Françoise Gadet for her commentary on the initial draft.

The morphological adaptation of loanverbs from English

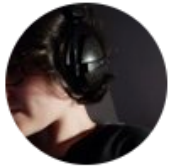
Anastassiadis-Syméonidis & Nikolaou (2011: 119)

les verbes s'adaptent de façon obligatoire au système flexionnel de la L1 (Anastassiadis-Syméonidis, 2005: 112), mais l'adaptation est facultative pour les substantifs et les adjectifs

Saulière (2014: 100)

On ne constate pas dans le français les symptômes d'une mort prochaine, notamment l'atteinte du noyau grammatical de la langue (on continue à conjuguer les verbes empruntés à l'anglais)

New data...



Laura/Ohlala #RazaCrew

@Ongaku_



Replying to [@UmbreoNoctiePV](#) and [@ZazieZanie](#)

La même j'ai crush sur une meuf avec qui je travaillais, je peux pas croire que les longs regards qu'on se lançaient étaient unilatéraux mdrrrr 2 ans après je lui ai dit que je crushais sur elle quand on bossait ensemble, je savais qu'elle était en couple avec un mec mais 1/2

[Translate Tweet](#)

2:21 PM · Jan 8, 2022 · Twitter for Android

*New
data...*



Historeissuuu ~ Klee HAVER

@_Yoimiyaaa_



Thread pourquoi j'aime Gaby Braun !
Je vais spoiler donc lisez pas le thread si vous êtes pas à
jour sur le manga !

[Translate Tweet](#)



11:59 PM · Dec 18, 2020 · Twitter for Android



Emmie
@emmjgr



je viens de play cette vidéo en salle de pause le son à fond 🧑

[Translate Tweet](#)



From **Joy Boy**

1:23 PM · Jan 14, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

*New
data...*

New data...



Your Bougie Auntie

@teenoushh

J'ai screenshot

J'ai report

J'ai bloqué

[Translate Tweet](#)

6:42 AM · Jun 27, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Also attested in the online press

Flower of Scotland

Esclavage : l'Écosse s'apprête-t-elle à "cancel" son patrimoine historique ?

Par Emilien Hertement

Publié le 22/12/2021 à 19:30

Entrepreneur et chef d'entreprise comme son frère, David McCourt a tout simplement « follow » le compte officiel d'un certain... Al-Walid ben Talal. Il n'en

Need for a quantitative approach

Choice of a syntactic pattern requiring verbal inflection that is both audible and graphemically visible:

- 1st-person pronoun + *aller*_{1p.-pres.} + X_{INFINITIVE}: *je vais stream(er), je vais tweet(er)*

Data collection

Twitter as corpus (Academic Research access)

- automated queries on the targeted pattern – *je vais X* – in a sample of French tweets from Nov. 2020 to Feb. 2022
= 100+ million tweets

Manual data filtering

- \approx 400,000 types
- \approx 4,000 types with $>$ 2,000 tokens
- selection of uninflected English verbal items
(forms like *mangé*, *downloadé* were filtered out)

Top 50 uninflected English-origin French verbs

bet	boycott	bug	cancel	carry
check	choke	cop	copyright	crush
dead	del	delete	die	dl
dm	fake	flop	follow	glow
google	grind	hashtag	kill	like
live	look	match	play	pop
post	pull	rp	rush	screen
skip	snap	spam	spoil	step
stop	story	stream	switch	troll
try	tryhard	tweet	unfollow	win

Distribution of the top 50 verbs

Twitter archives, 2006-2022

- change of scale (billions of French tweets) & diachronic depth
- relative distribution of inflected and uninflected forms:
 - *je vais stream vs je vais streamer*
the spelling variants of the inflected forms are included
(e.g. *canceller/canceler, hashtaguer/hashtager*)

Basic clustering into 3 groups

Group 1: virtually all forms are uninflected

- 34 verbs out 50, i.e. a sizable majority
 - 27 of them are neologisms: *grind, screen, skip, cancel, play, snap, carry, unfollow, crush, delete, fake, live, pop, cop, dead, del, die, dl, dm, glow, hashtag, pull, rp, try, tryhard, story, step*
 - 7 are established French verbs (listed in Weisman 2020):
bug, copyright, flop, switch, follow, google, match

Basic clustering into 3 groups

Group 2: a sizable majority of forms are uninflected

- 11 verbs out of 50
 - 6 neologisms: *choke, kill, look, stream, win, bet*
 - 5 established verbs: *troll, like, stop, rush, tweet*

Basic clustering into 3 groups

Group 3 : a more or less balanced ratio of inflected and uninflected forms

- 5 established verbs: *post, spoil, boycott, check, spam*

je_vais_boycott

Occurrences

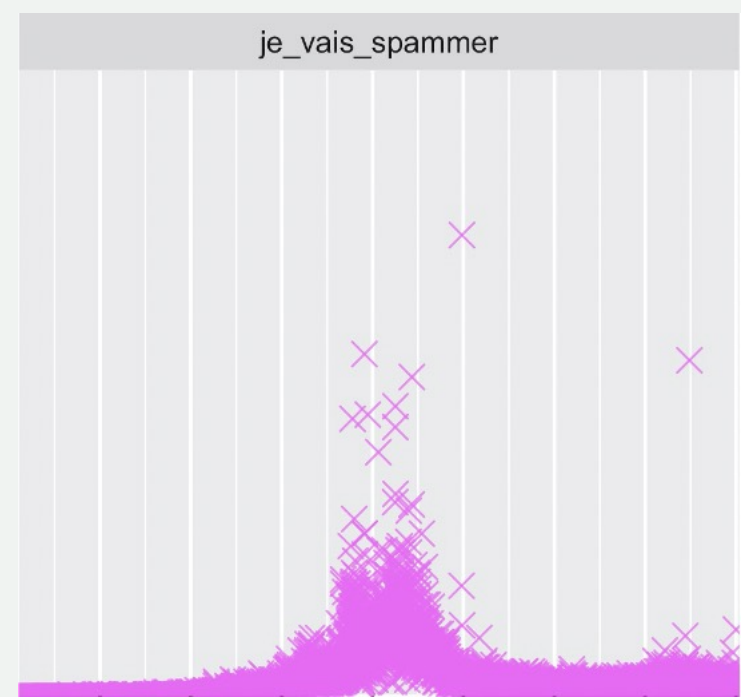
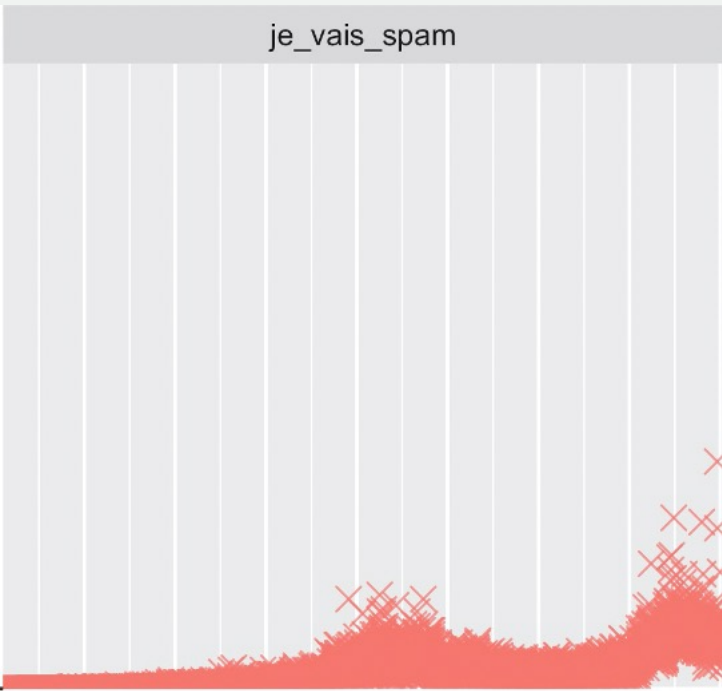
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2008 2010 2012 2014 2016 2018 2020 2022

je_vais_boycotter

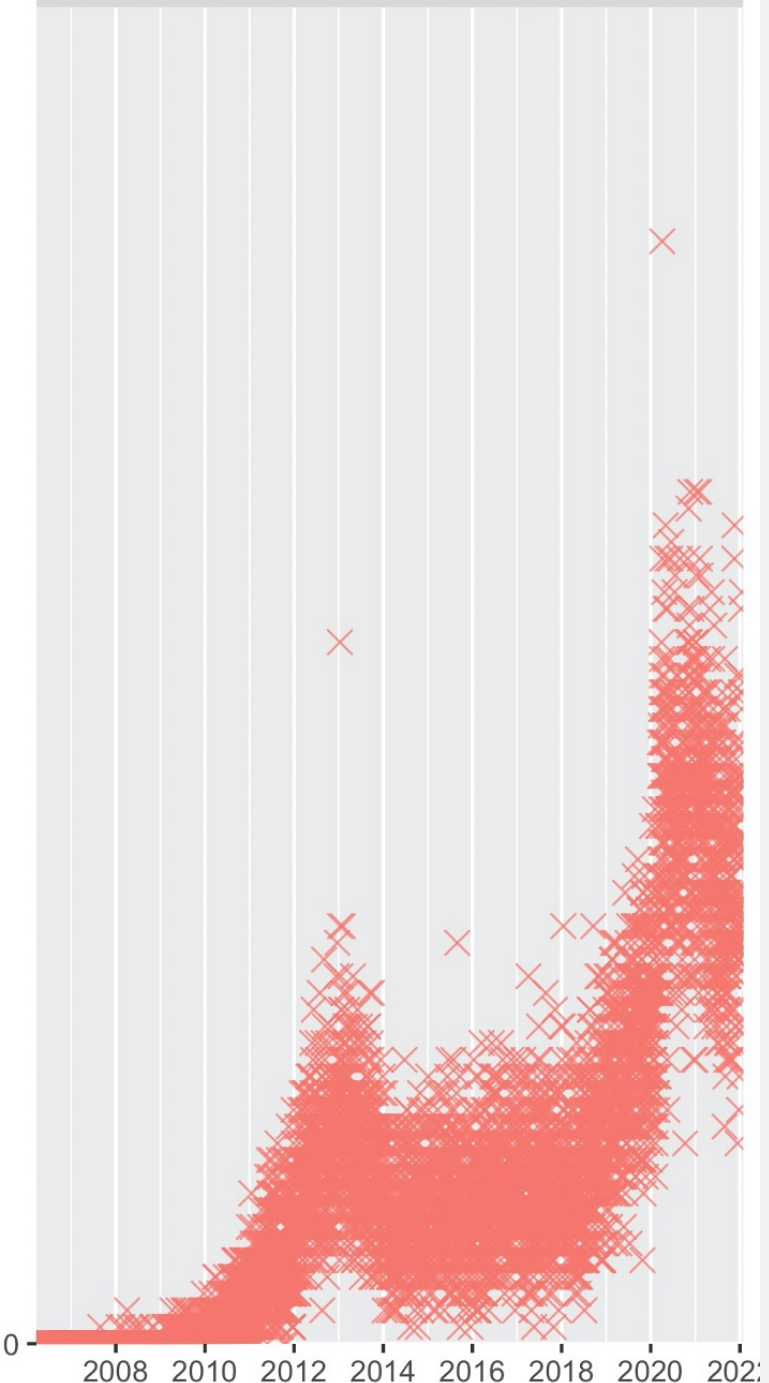
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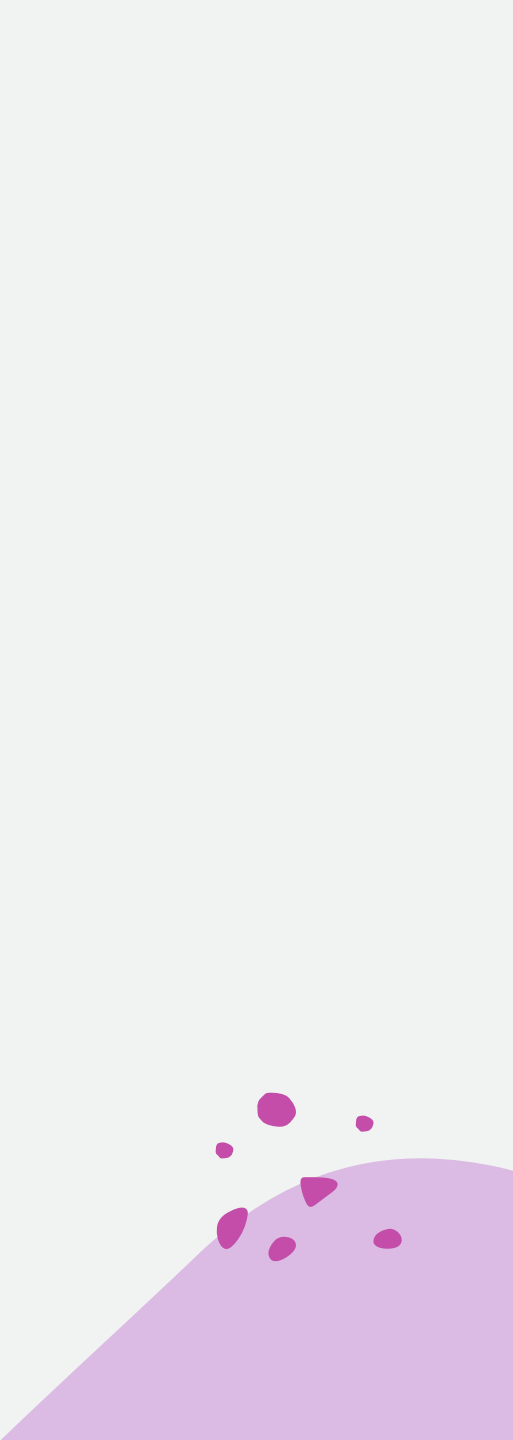
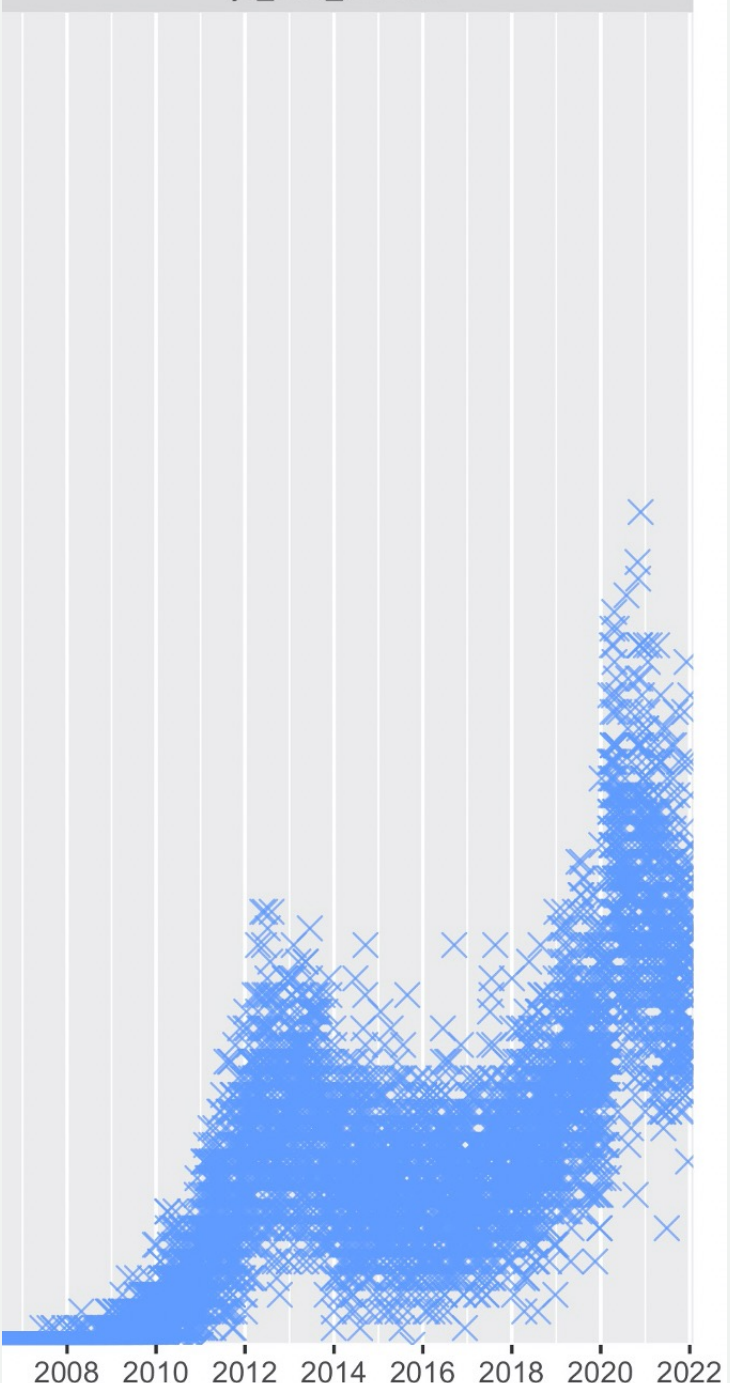


je_vais_check

Occurrences



je_vais_checker

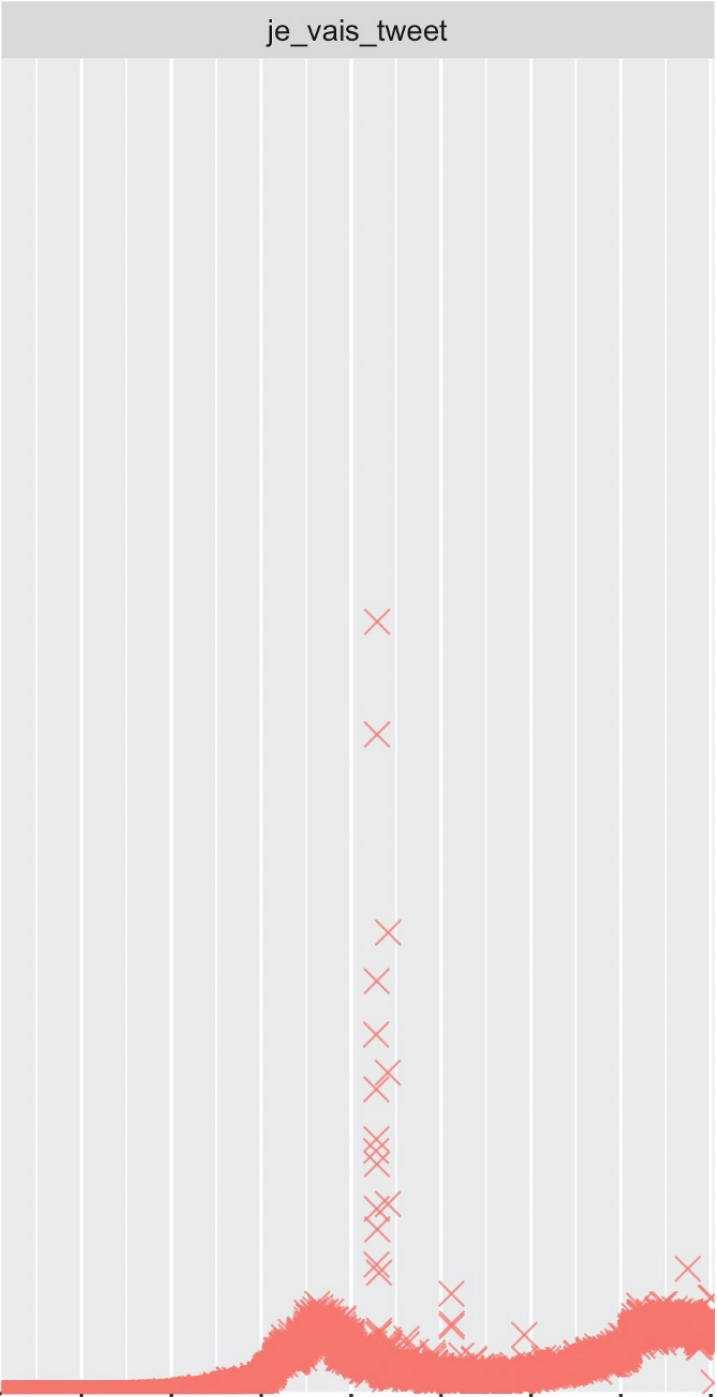


je_vais_tweet

Occurrences

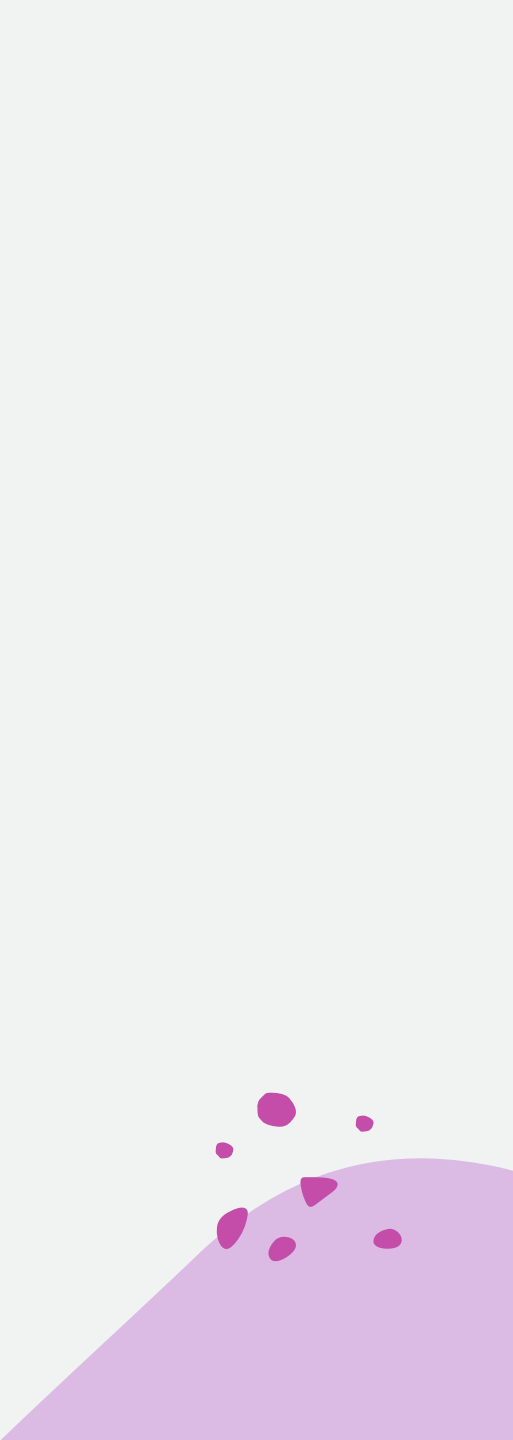
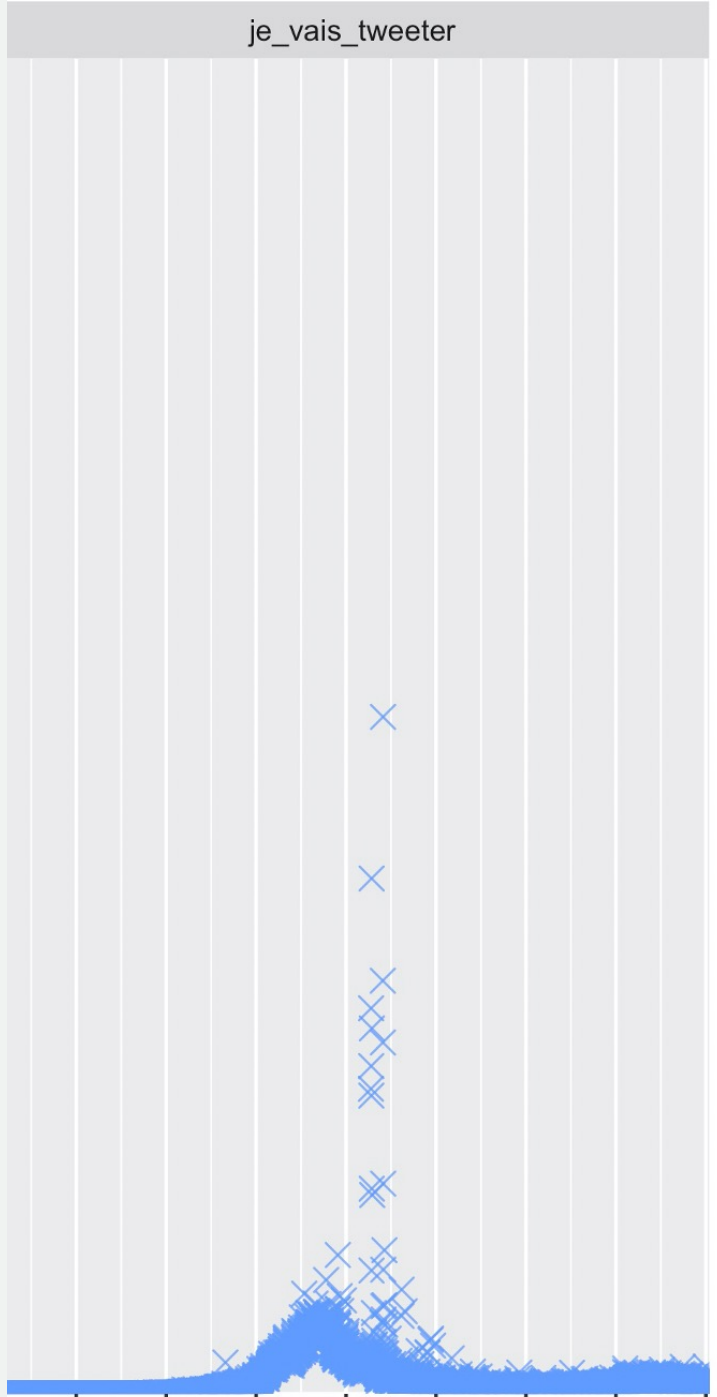
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2008 2010 2012 2014 2016 2018 2020 2022



je_vais_tweeter

2008 2010 2012 2014 2016 2018 2020 2022



Uninflectedness in other remote corners of the lexicon

in
verlan
slang

Carna

Définition

Commentaires

carna *verbe transitif.*

Arnaquer, gruger.

Quand j'pense que tu faisais le canard pour qu'on te fasse quécro | Maintenant tu veux nous carna, kâhba sous merde, t'es qu'une serpillière (MAFIA K'1 FRY, « Balance », *La Cerise sur le ghetto*, 2003) 📖.

Bébé, mauvaise nouvelle : les keufs me veulent | En plus de ça, mon soce m'a carna mes thunes (TANDEM, « Frères ennemis », *La Trilogie*, 2005) 📖.

VAR. karna.

ÉTYM. Verlan d'*arnaquer*.

Uninflectedness in other remote corners of the lexicon

in verlan slang

Rem. Comme la plupart des verbes verlanisés, le verbe pécho reste invariable et ne se conjugue (au présent) qu'aux trois premières personnes du singulier voire à la troisième personne du pluriel. Il devient participe passé autrement. Je, tu, il (elle), ils (elles) pécho; nous avons, vous avez, ils (elles) ont pécho.

Le Dictionnaire de la Zone. Tout l'argot des banlieues. © 2000 - 2022 Cobra le Cynique.

Uninflectedness in other remote corners of the lexicon

in slang loanwords from Romani (verbs in *ave(r)*)

Choucrave

Définition

Commentaires

choucrave *verbe transitif invariable.*

Voler. Syn. **chouraver**.

— *Elle est cool ta casquette, tu l'as achetée où ?* — *Je l'ai choucrave à Clignancourt !*

ÉTYM. Déformation de **chourave**.

Le Dictionnaire de la Zone. Tout l'argot des banlieues. © 2000 - 2022 Cobra le Cynique.

In French-based contact languages of western Africa

Nouchi (Ahua 2008, Atsé N'Cho 2014)

for verbs which are not of French origin:

- uninflectedness in the present-tense paradigm
(but variation in the 1st and 2nd person of the plural)
 - *je/yé badou 'I eat'*
- unadapted past participle
 - *nous avons badou 'we have eaten'*

In French-based contact languages of western Africa

Camfranglais (Bogni 2018)

for some verbs which are not of French origin:

- *J'ai begin à play les cartes frons.*
- *Il va win le bacho cette année.*
- *Nous allons back autour de 17 heures.*

=> a new "fourth-group" class of conjugation

Conclusion

- verbal inflection not systematic in present-day French
- exploratory study of a quantitatively important phenomenon in online discourse
- verbal uninflectedness especially salient in loanwords
- marked choice flagging foreignness, peripherality, limited assimilation, but also textual genre and in-group membership
- seems mostly limited to informal discourse and younger speakers