

# English borrowed words in French *gamer* discourse: how do they function?

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Leisure Activities (May 5th 2021)  
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# Understanding what the French *gamer* discourse means

- **Gaming discourse** can refer to the speech of **very different types of**:
  - **Participants**: developers, players, the media communicating about game-related events...
  - **Speech situations**: friends sharing a couch playing *Mario Kart*, a competitive team playing at an important tournament, a streamer commentating his actions in a game for an online audience... (Ensslin, 2011 : 66)
- A researcher that wants to study the way ‘people that play games’ talk must be real careful specifying what type of player their study targets: there are several types of players (SELL, 2020), and hence, possibly several types of speaking styles.
- There’s a well-known distinction between ‘hardcore’ gamer and ‘casual’ gamer, based on their investment in the practice of video games as well as its intensity among many other factors. (SELL, 2020).

# Understanding what the French *gamer* discourse means

- Though unsatisfactory (simplistic and reductive, not representative of how unique the experience of playing video games is (Ter Minassian *et al.* 2021), and elitist, because it can give rise to a feeling of insecurity, allowing for a distinction between ‘real’ gamer and ‘fake’ gamer), this distinction is helpful to differentiate two very different types of practices: **online, often competitive play** (‘hardcore’ gaming / gamers, or just *gamers*, as opposed to *players*) and **offline play** (‘casual’ gaming / gamers) having **huge implications on the way players talk**.
- Indeed, when they play online, players get to play with people from all over the world. **They use English to communicate.**

# Understanding what the French *gamer* discourse means

- Because they are so used to talking in English, **players end up using English words and syntax even when communicating in their mother tongue.** That's what happens for French players that play online, and often competitively: they speak a sort of '**Franglais**' / '**Frenglish**', as a hybrid speaking style including both French and English materials at all levels (lexical, syntactic and phonetic).
- In other words, the results of this study don't apply to **every person playing video games.** They apply to a specific type of practice: **people that play online, often competitive video games** ('hardcore' gamers, or simply 'gamers' as opposed to 'players').

# Understanding what the French *gamer* discourse means

- Even though we've highlighted how problematic the difference between 'hardcore' gamer and 'casual' gamer can get, we're going to call the discourse of players that play online, often competitively, '*gamer* discourse', for purposes of simplicity.

**Now that that's been said,  
let's investigate borrowing in  
French *gamer* discourse.**

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# Study questions:

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Are English borrowed words in French *gamer* discourse any different from those in other types of 'specific' discourses?

How integrated are those words into the French morphological system?

# Data

- In order to answer those two study questions, we're going to be using a set of data made of 245.000 words / 22 hours of French oral League of Legends talk collected from YouTube videos and streams as well as personal recordings.
- We're focusing on one video game: League of Legends.
- League of Legends is a *Multiplayer Online Battle Arena* game-esport opposing two teams of five players fighting for victory. Divided into three lanes, their purpose is to destroy the enemy turrets that protect the enemy base in order to reach the enemy main building, the 'Nexus', and destroy it. In order to do this, players communicate all game long, sharing information, coordinating in fights and discussing strategy.
- Video game 'League of Legends' was designed for competition: though you can play it for fun, it is highly competitive, hosting amateur competitive play through a ranking system in the game as well as professional play through offline competition such as regional and world championships. We call 'esport' the competitive practice of video games (short for 'electronic sport').



# Corpus

- Our corpus was transcribed and aligned to audio using software 'Praat' (Boersma & Weenink, 2020). Only transcripts will be used for this study.
- English borrowed words (Humbley, 1974) were extracted automatically using a Python code: each word in each transcript was searched in the French GLAFF lexical database (Sajous *et al.*, 2013). If absent from this database, the word would be written in a csv spreadsheet file as a possible borrowed word, only 'possible', because the French neologisms, also absent from the database, were also extracted. The second step was to tell apart French neologisms from borrowed words.

# Corpus

- At this point, we didn't tell apart real borrowed words from false borrowed words (Sablayrolles *et al.*, 2009): in the context of this presentation, we're calling 'borrowed word' any word made of at least one English constituent, whether it exists in English or not.
- Each loanword was annotated in terms of meaning, morphology and syntactic behavior in:
  - our French League of Legends corpus;
  - our reference corpus of English League of Legends discourse (to be able to tell apart real and false borrowed words);
  - in common English (to tell apart common words and technical terms).



# Let's dive into the first study question.

**Are English borrowed words in French  
*gamer* discourse any different from those  
in other types of ‘specific’ discourses?**

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# The specificity of English loanwords in French *gamer* discourse

- Borrowing is a common phenomenon that can occur in common language as well as in ‘specialised languages’.
- Papers on English loanwords can be found in the French language of management (Bondrea, 2007), IT (Saint, 2013), social media (Martin, 2019), plastic surgery (Hansson, 2014), and others.
- Though there are many different reasons why borrowing, specialised languages borrow **technical terms** to refer to **specific, technical concepts**.

# The specificity of English loanwords in French *gamer* discourse

- Although French gamers also borrow technical terms to refer to technical concepts, they also borrow **common words** referring to **everyday concepts** that have nothing to do with the game.
- This has a direct implication on the amount of borrowed words that can be found in the French *gamer* discourse: an extremely **high number** of English loanwords can be found in this specific type of discourse. Some sentences are even half-English / half-French.

# Here's an example.

# The specificity of English loanwords in French *gamer* discourse

E1: 'Il aurait dû courir **instant top**, être là sur le **dive** et **TP back** au **mid**. On va aller chercher sûrement une **ward** très **deep back** pour Vander.'

E1': 'He should've ran **top instantly**, been there for the **dive** and used his **TP back** in **mid**. Vander is probably going to go and put a **ward** **deeply** in the **back**.'

E2: 'Il faut vraiment **leave** cette position de merde.'

E2': 'You really need to **leave** this shit position.'

**In blue**: in-game phenomena / specific, technical concepts

**In yellow**: common concepts



# The specificity of English loanwords in French *gamer* discourse

- You can see the amount of loanwords that can be found in only two sentences (E1) as well as the different ‘common’ borrowed words (as opposed to ‘technical’ borrowed words) that can be found.
- The list of unspecialized items is long and one of our objectives was to compare the amount of specialized items and the amount of unspecialized items, but we were quick to realize how tricky such a task is, given how hard it is to determine the degree of specialization/technicity of a word. ■

**‘the status of ‘technical’ concepts denoted by those terms is far from clear. For some, a piece of discourse can seem almost incomprehensible because of the high degree of technicity of the discipline though the same text might not raise any issue for others, seeing the same concepts as part of common knowledge’ (Charnock, 1999: 3, our translation)**

# The specificity of English loanwords in French *gamer* discourse

- Though we haven't figured a way to proceed to a quantitative comparison between technical loanwords vs. common loanwords in French *gamer* discourse, what we can say is that what we can observe in French *gamer* discourse is **not a matter of episodic lexical borrowings referring to more or less technical concepts forming a closed class**. Technicity is not a criterion for borrowing. Instead, borrowing is **unpredictable**, targetting lexical words as well as some function words, such as prepositions.
- Alternation between French words and English words in French *gamer* discourse reminds us of **code-switching**, whereby bilinguals switch from one language to another for purposes of linguistic economy (Martinet, 1955), or just because it's the first word that comes to mind.

# The specificity of English loanwords in French *gamer* discourse

- The number of borrowing **hapaxes** in our corpus suggests that many of the loanwords we extracted are not part of the French League of Legends lexicon, but are rather symptomatic of **the process of borrowing being itself a marker of French *gamer* discourse.**
- The fact that we haven't read any paper reporting a similar situation in any other specialized language suggests that French *gamer* discourse might be one of its kind in this regard.



# Let's dive into the second study question.

# **How integrated are those words into the French morphological system?**

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# Methodology

- For this study, we decided to focus on **verbs**.
- We studied the 286 **verbal** anglicisms of our corpus.
- Our precise study question was : in our corpus of French League of Legends speech, **how are verbal anglicisms inflected? Do they bear...**
  - **The French inflections:** infinitive, 1st & 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural in present tense, past participle, present participle, imperfect, conditional;
  - **The English inflections:** -ed preterit marker, -s 3rd person singular in present tense;
  - **No inflection at all.**

# Results

## Uninflected or inflected?

- 48/286 verbs were found with at least one inflected occurrence (17%)...
- ... meaning **83% of all verbs were never found inflected (= invariable) in our corpus.**



# Results

## When inflected, French or English inflection?

- **Only two verbs were found with an English inflection:**
  - **'boosted'**: 'des joueurs **boosted**' ('boosted players');
  - **'spotted'**: 'j'vais pas me faire **spotted**' ('I'm not going to get spotted').
- **The rest of the verbs (46/48) beared a French inflection, marking integration into the French morphological system, as well as resulting in a morphological 'Franglais' ('Frenglish'), with a combination of an English morpheme (the borrowed word) and a French morpheme (the inflection).**

# Results

- Some persons / tenses were **always found inflected** in our corpus...
  - **2<sup>nd</sup> person plural in present tense**: ‘mais fightez !’ (‘fight!’)
  - **present participle**: ‘il a forcé le Flash de Finn **en flashant** lui-même’ (‘he forced Finn’s Flash by flashing himself)
  - **imperfect**: ‘j’pushais’ (‘I was pushing’), **[!!]** ‘si il flash inait pas j’le tuais tranquillement’ (‘if he hadn’t **flash inned**, I would’ve killed him easily’)
  - **conditional**: ‘là, idéalement, je warderais’ (‘here, ideally, I would ward’)
- We liked the ‘flash inait’ example: if you pay close attention, **it is the preposition and not the verb that bears the imperfect marker**. This might suggest that **instead of two items combined, ‘flash in’ is conceptualized as one item by the French speaker**.

# Results

- Is it contradictory with the 83% uninflected verbs we found in our corpus? No: it just means that those verbs weren't found with such persons / tenses, which are not very frequent in gamer discourse.
- We hypothesize that if we were to find those verbs in those persons / tenses, they would also be inflected.

# Results

- ... some other persons / tenses were found only **possibly inflected.**
  - **Infinitive:** 'j'vais aller farmer' / 'I'm going to go farm' vs. 'Orianna va juste farm∅ sous tour' / 'Orianna's just going to farm under tower'
  - **Past participle:** 'il a dashé' / 'he dashed' vs. 'CoreJJ qui a dash∅' / 'CorerJJ dashed'
- This difference in person / tense behavior, with some persons / tenses being obligatorily inflected while some others are not might suggest that **some French morphological rules are stronger than others.** At least, it is our hypothesis.

# Results

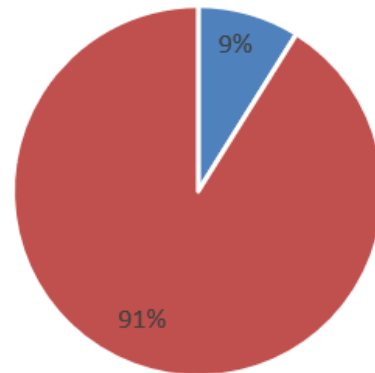
- **As far as the verbs that were found variably inflected in infinitive / past participle forms, is a tendency between inflected / uninflected identifiable?**
- We divided those verbs into **5 different groups** based on the uninflected / inflected ratio: 80 – 100% uninflected, 60 – 80% uninflected, 40 – 60% uninflected, 20 – 40% uninflected, 0 – 20% uninflected.
- Here's what we found.

# Results: inflected / uninflected variation, 5 different groups

## Group 1 : between 100% and 80% of uninflected forms

7 words : flashé vs. flash (PP), banni/ban (PP) flasher/flash (INF)  
ganker/gank (INF) poker/poke (INF) pusher/push (INF) stunné/stun (PP)

Example with 'flashé' vs. 'flash' (PP) :

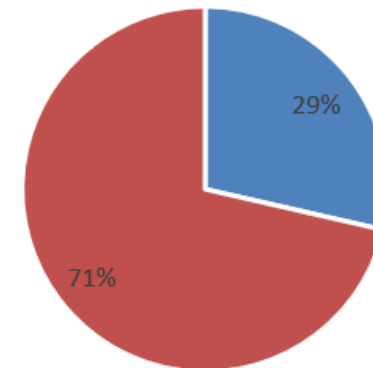


■ flashé ■ flash

## Group 2 : between 80% and 60% of uninflected forms

6 words : engager vs. engage (INF), dashé/dash (PP) roamer/roam  
(INF) trollé/troll (PP) wardé/ward (PP) warder/ward (INF)

Example with 'engager' vs. 'engage' (INF) :

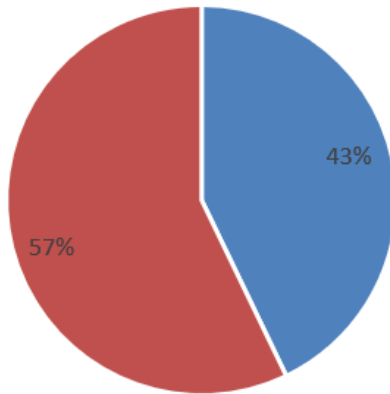


■ engager ■ engage

# Results: inflected / uninflected variation, 5 different groups

**Group 3 : between 60% and 40% of uninflected forms**  
2 words : farmer vs. farm (INF), se regrouper/group (up) (INF)

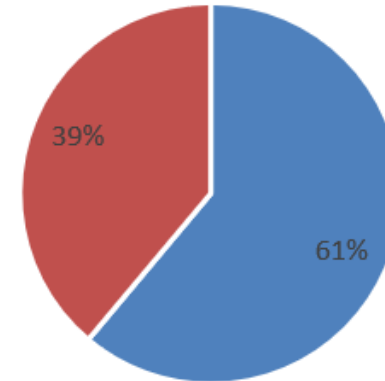
Example with 'farmer' vs. 'farm' (INF)



■ farmer ■ farm

**Group 4 : between 40% and 20% of uninflected forms**

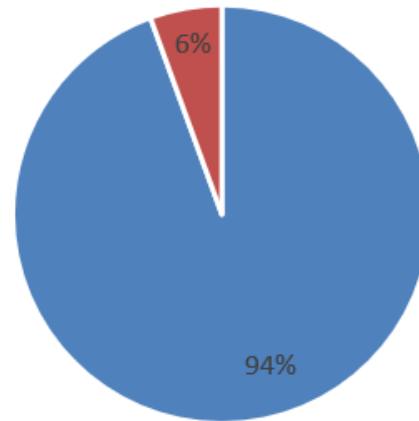
1 word : contesteur vs. contest (INF)



■ contesteur ■ contest

# Results: inflected / uninflected variation, 5 different groups

Group 5 : between 20% and 0% of uninflected forms  
1 word : tanker vs. tank (INF)




■ tanker ■ tank



# Results

The fact that 7 and 6 words are in group 1 and 2 whereas only 1 word can be found in group 4 and 5 suggests that **the great majority of verbs that vary in inflection in infinitive & past participle forms are uninflected.**



**How to account for the behavior of tank/tanker and contest/contester, differing from the others because of the majority of inflected occurrences?**

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# Results

- **Hypothesis 1**: Because ‘contester’ exists in French, ‘contester’ would be more used than ‘contest’? (61% ‘contester’, 42% ‘contest’).
- **Counter-example**: ‘banni’ exists in French, yet ‘ban’ occurs 83% of times.
- **Hypothesis 2**: For disambiguation? ‘Tanker’ would be preferred to refer to the action and ‘tank’ to refer to the agent, French speakers applying a semantic distribution for purposes of binary linguistic signs?
- **Counter-example**: Many polysemous words such as ‘jungle’ can be found in our corpus. ‘Jungle’ can be used to refer to a location, different types of agents (despite existing *jungler* form), and can also be found in adjectival position.
- Conclusion: we haven’t yet found an explanation to account for this particular behavior.

# Conclusion

- Lexical borrowing in French *gamer* discourse goes way beyond technicity.
- Borrowing is unpredictable, and loanwords do not form a closed class.
- Could it be a special case of code-switching, with a **specific, restrained bilingualism** for French League-of-Legends players that would be **League-of-Legends bilinguals**? Indeed, French League of Legends players are by no means fluent in English, but as far as League of Legends games are concerned, competitive players are perfectly able to communicate in English with fellow foreign teammates.
- As far as morphological integration is concerned, we found a majority of uninflected verbs, abiding **neither by the French nor the English morphological rules**.
- When inflected, verbs beared the French inflection.
- Some persons / tenses were always found inflected. This suggests that some French morphological rules would be stronger than others.
- **Lexical and morphological ‘Franglais’ / ‘Frenglish’ could be a marker for *gamer* discourse.**

# Further research

- For our doctoral thesis, we plan on researching the syntactic integration of borrowed words, such as the position of modifiers. Are attributive adjectives preposed (English system) or postposed (French system)?
- We also plan on studying the actantial model and the transitivity of verbs: are they similar in French and in English? Example: 'il va me go' (literally: 'he is going to go me').
- We plan on studying 'false' borrowed words **created** by French people using English formants. How far goes the linguistic creativity of French *gamers*?
- We also plan on studying the lexicon, categorizing each word in terms of part of speech, finding a way to count them and studying borrowings filtering.
- We're also working on a dictionary of League of Legends terms.

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