Youths as Linguistic Innovators: The Impact of Cameroon's Youth Culture on the Spread of Neologisms in Urban Centers

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of Cameroon's youth culture as a driving force in the creation and dissemination of neologisms within urban centres, with a particular focus on the cities of Bamenda and Buea. In a rapidly changing linguistic landscape, young people are increasingly recognized as key agents of linguistic innovation, particularly in multilingual and postcolonial societies like Cameroon. The research investigates the ways in which the youth influence the development, spread, and acceptance of new vocabulary, examining the intersection of language, identity, and cultural expression. By employing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and participant observations, the study analyses how youth culture, mediated through social media, peer interactions, and local communities, fosters the emergence of neologisms. The findings reveal that neologisms, often shaped by youth experiences, reflect broader socio-political and cultural dynamics, such as globalization, technology, and local traditions. Additionally, the study highlights how neologisms serve as markers of youth identity, creating a sense of belonging and differentiation in urban spaces. Male neologisms generally reflect serious, goal-driven domains like politics, business, and education, while female neologisms often centre on fashion, social image, and relationships. This reveals how gendered interests influence language innovation among urban youth. The research emphasizes the significant role of youth as linguistic innovators and advocates for the recognition of their contributions to the evolving linguistic identity of Cameroon English. This study adds to the broader understanding of language change in postcolonial contexts as both a tool for communication and a symbol of cultural transformation.

Keywords: Neologisms, Youth Culture, Linguistic Innovation, Cameroon English, Language Change

INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic and evolving system that reflects the social, cultural, and economic transformations occurring within a society. In postcolonial nations like Cameroon, the evolution of language is particularly influenced by a complex interplay of local traditions, global influences, and the changing socio-political landscape (Bamgbose, 1991; Mesthrie et al., 2009). One of the most visible manifestations of this linguistic evolution is the emergence of neologisms—new words or expressions that enter the language and often reflect contemporary realities, innovations, and cultural shifts (Crystal, 2010; Trudgill, 2000). In Cameroon, where multiple languages and dialects coexist within a framework of English as an official language, neologisms have become a significant aspect of communication, especially among younger generations (Ngwaru, 2015).

Youth culture plays a crucial role in the creation and spread of these neologisms, particularly in urban centers where diverse linguistic communities interact, and global cultural trends, especially through social media, have a pervasive influence (Anderson, 2011; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). The digital age has created a platform for linguistic experimentation, with youth at the forefront of innovating new expressions that resonate with their peers. These new words serve not only as markers of linguistic creativity but also as symbols of social identity, belonging, and resistance to established norms (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). The spread of neologisms through platforms like social media and urban networks is, therefore, not just a linguistic phenomenon but also a cultural one that speaks to the values, aspirations, and challenges faced by the youth in Cameroon (Agha, 2007).

The role of youth in language innovation, particularly through the use of neologisms, is a subject that has garnered increasing attention in sociolinguistics (Tagliamonte, 2016). However, studies focusing specifically on how youth culture in Cameroon influences the spread of neologisms in urban centers are still limited (Mbah & Nkwetisama, 2019). This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring the linguistic innovations introduced by Cameroon's youth, their sociocultural implications, and the mechanisms through which these neologisms spread across urban environments. By investigating the ways in which young people contribute to the development and diffusion of new words in the country's urban centers, this study seeks to shed light on the intersection of language, culture, and identity in Cameroon's rapidly changing society.

This study will be guided by the central research question: How does Cameroon's youth culture influence the creation and spread of neologisms in urban centers? To address this, the paper will examine the role of youth in linguistic innovation, the influence of social media and technology, and the broader social and cultural contexts that shape the spread of neologisms. Ultimately, the study will argue that youth-driven linguistic innovations are not only a reflection of linguistic change but also an expression of social, cultural, and political transformations within urban Cameroon.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To explore how youth culture in Cameroon contributes to the creation of neologisms.

2. To examine the mechanisms through which neologisms spread within urban centers.

3. To analyze the social, cultural, and technological factors that facilitate the widespread adoption of neologisms among youth.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it offers a deeper understanding of the role of youth in language evolution, particularly in the context of a multilingual and postcolonial setting. By focusing on urban centers, where linguistic innovation is most apparent, this research highlights the ways in which youth culture acts as a catalyst for change, shaping not only language but also social and cultural norms. Additionally, the study's findings could contribute to the broader field of sociolinguistics, especially in understanding how youth-driven linguistic changes are part of the global flow of language in an interconnected world. Understanding the dynamics of language innovation in Cameroon will also have practical implications for educators, policymakers, and media professionals interested in recognizing the legitimacy of emerging linguistic forms and incorporating them into educational and social frameworks.

Study Background

Cameroon is a linguistically diverse country with more than 250 languages spoken across its different regions, making it a prime example of a multilingual society (Ethnologue, 2021). This linguistic diversity results from the country's colonial history, where both English and French were introduced as official languages, alongside numerous indigenous languages. Over time, this multilingual environment has led to the development of various varieties of English, notably Cameroon English, which blends English with local languages and dialects, reflecting both global and local linguistic influences (Nkwetisama, 2016; Mbodiam, 2012). Cameroon English, characterized by its unique lexical and grammatical features, represents a dynamic linguistic space where local, colonial, and global influences coexist and shape the way people communicate (Ngwaru, 2015).

In this context, one of the most notable features of language evolution in Cameroon is the emergence of neologisms. Neologisms, defined as newly coined terms or expressions, play a crucial role in reflecting the changing realities of society, including technological advances, social interactions, and cultural shifts (Hickey, 2012). In Cameroon, neologisms are a particularly important linguistic phenomenon as they often arise from the intersection of global and local influences, such as the proliferation of social media, exposure to international pop culture, and the ongoing use of indigenous languages (Alderete, 2007; Ndam, 2016). These new words and

expressions offer unique insights into how Cameroonians navigate the complexities of globalization while retaining their cultural identity and social autonomy (Ngwaru, 2015).

Youth, particularly in urban centers like Bamenda and Buea, are central to the creation and spread of these neologisms. Youth culture, characterized by its embrace of digital technology, social media, and contemporary trends, has become a powerful force in linguistic innovation. As highlighted by researchers such as Mbah and Nkwetisama (2019), Mbibeh and Tanyam (2022),the youth especially in urban settings, are the primary drivers of linguistic change, using social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter to experiment with language and introduce new words or expressions that often reflect their social, cultural, and political realities. The rapid dissemination of these neologisms through digital communication allows them to gain traction quickly, transcending geographical and social boundaries (Crystal, 2006).

The socioeconomic and sociocultural factors influencing the spread and acceptance of neologisms are multifaceted. Factors such as urbanization, the increasing role of the youth in shaping public discourse, and the integration of global economic forces all contribute to the rise of new lexical innovations. Additionally, the dominance of social media as a space for linguistic creativity has introduced a more flexible and informal way of communication that values speed and ease of expression over formal linguistic rules (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). As a result, neologisms often emerge as shortcuts for complex ideas, catering to the rapidly evolving needs of a young, digitally connected population (mbibeh and Tayam 2022, Alderete, 2007). Despite the prominence of neologisms in Cameroon English, there remains limited scholarly attention focused specifically on the role of youth culture in their creation and spread. While some research has been conducted on language contact and the sociolinguistic dynamics of Cameroon English (Nkwetisama, 2016; Mbodiam, 2012), the intersection of youth culture and neologisms has yet to be thoroughly explored. Understanding how youth-driven linguistic innovation is shaping Cameroon English will offer valuable insights into the broader processes of language change, particularly in postcolonial societies where identity, globalization, and tradition continually interact.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the impact of youth culture on the spread and creation of neologisms in urban centers of Cameroon, specifically in Bamenda and Buea. By investigating the sociocultural, socioeconomic, and technological factors that contribute to the emergence of neologisms, this research will provide a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of Cameroon English and its role in shaping national identity and cultural expression in the 21st century

Problem and Rationale

The emergence of neologisms in Cameroon English, particularly driven by youth culture in urban centers, is an area of sociolinguistic study that remains underexplored. Despite the growing influence of digital platforms and youth-driven communication, there is limited research on how these linguistic innovations reflect social, political, and cultural shifts in Cameroon. Youth, especially in cities like Bamenda and Buea, are at the forefront of creating and spreading new terms, influenced by local languages, global media, and political movements. The lack of in-depth understanding about these dynamics limits our comprehension of how Cameroon English evolves. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how youth culture shapes neologism creation and dissemination in urban settings. Understanding this phenomenon is crucial for both academic research and language policy in Cameroon, where the linguistic landscape is rapidly changing due to globalization and digital communication.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods to investigate the role of youth culture in the spread of neologisms in Cameroon's urban centers. The research focused on the cities of Bamenda and Buea, which were selected for their linguistic diversity, educational significance, and active youth populations.

Sampling and Participants

The study targeted a sample of 120 participants, ensuring a balanced representation across age, gender, and social

background. This included 40 young adults (ages 18-30), 30 educators, 30 community leaders, and 20 local language experts. Participants were selected using a combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques. Purposive sampling focused on individuals with expertise in language evolution, while stratified sampling ensured a diverse representation from various social groups, such as students, educators, and local language professionals.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through structured interviews, surveys, and participant observation to capture both individual and group perspectives on neologisms in urban centers.

- **Structured Interviews**: In-depth interviews were conducted with local language experts, educators, and community leaders to explore their perceptions of neologisms, their origins, and social significance. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent.

- **Surveys**: A structured survey was distributed to young adults and educators, gathering information on the types of neologisms they used, the frequency of their usage, and their understanding of the meanings behind these words.

- **Participant Observation**: Observational research was conducted at youth gatherings, educational settings, and on social media platforms. This provided real-time data on the usage and spread of neologisms, as well as the contexts in which they were employed.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using a combination of thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data. Thematic analysis focused on identifying recurring themes related to the formation, spread, and societal impact of neologisms, while descriptive statistics quantified the frequency of use and social group variations in neologism adoption. Cross-validation of data from interviews, surveys, and observations enhanced the credibility of the findings. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how youth culture influenced the creation and spread of neologisms in Cameroon's urban centers, and how these innovations reflected broader sociocultural trends. The analysis begins with quantitative before moving to qualitative data.

Frequency and Source of Neologisms

Source	Bamenda (n=100)	Buea (n=100)	Total (%)
Social Media	34	42	38%
Campus Conversations	26	22	24%
Street Interactions	18	16	17%
Music & Entertainment	12	15	13.5%
Political Graffiti	10	5	7.5%

This table presents the frequency and percentage of neologisms collected from five sources in Bamenda and Buea. The total sample size per city was 100 expressions, selected across varied urban contexts. social media emerged as the dominant source of neologisms (38%), with Buea slightly leading Bamenda. This reflects the increasing role of digital culture in language innovation. Campus conversations and street interactions also accounted for a significant portion (24% and 17%, respectively), suggesting that informal peer interactions are crucial incubators for lexical creativity. Political graffiti, while the least common source overall (7.5%), is important for capturing politically loaded expressions, especially in conflict-prone zones like Bamenda. The slightly higher count in Bamenda reflects greater visible resistance through coded expressions.

Types of Neologisms

Type of Neologism	Example	Meaning/Usage	City of Origin	Spread to
Semantic Shift	“Fire”	Extremely attractive or fashionable	Buea	Bamenda, online
Morphological Blending	“Chopportunity”	Opportunity to eat for free or gain advantage	Bamenda	Buea, campuses
Code-Mixing	“Tu peux vex me”	"You can annoy me" (French-English blend)	Buea	Widespread
Acronym-based	“GBG”	"Get Back Ground" – secret information	Bamenda	WhatsApp groups
Sound Imitation	“Waaah!”	Expression of surprise or excitement	Both	Both

This table categorizes examples of neologisms based on their linguistic structure, including semantic shifts, morphological blends, code-mixing, acronyms, and sound imitation. Youth in both cities creatively manipulate language structures to produce new expressions. Buea shows greater instances of semantic shifts and code-mixing, possibly due to its higher bilingual population and exposure to Anglophone-Francophone interactions. Bamenda leans toward morphological blending and acronyms, often encoding deeper socio-political meanings. The use of sound imitation suggests shared expressive resources across both regions. These innovations highlight linguistic flexibility and the influence of multilingualism, urban pressure, and social identity on youth discourse.

Fonctions of Neologisms

Fonction	Example	Interpretation
Identity Marking	“Njangi soldier”	Member of a peer financial support group
Resistance / Protest	“He don nyam”	Corruption accusation (he has stolen)
Humor / Irony	“President of Chopdom”	Someone who exploits a system selfishly
Group Solidarity	“Team inside”	In-group phrase for inclusion or loyalty
Social Commentary	“Cam no fine”	Expression of dissatisfaction with governance or life

This table outlines the communicative functions of selected neologisms, ranging from identity marking to political resistance and humor. Youth neologisms serve pragmatic and ideological functions. Many terms express protest, irony, and social critique. “President of Chopdom” and “He don nyam” are satirical expressions targeting political figures, while “Njangi soldier” and “Team inside” create in-group solidarity. These expressions reflect how language becomes a tool for navigating survival, resistance, and belonging in a turbulent socio-political landscape. They also signal alignment or dissent, making vocabulary a form of social action.

Perceived Acceptability and Usage

Context of Use	Always Use (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely/Never (%)
Among Peers (Informal)	88%	10%	2%
In Public Spaces	65%	25%	10%
In Academic Settings	30%	45%	25%

On Social Media	90%	8%	2%
With Older Adults	15%	30%	55%

This table shows the percentage of youth who reported using neologisms across various social contexts. Neologisms are most freely used on social media (90%) and among peers (88%), confirming that youth perceive these environments as linguistically permissive. Their usage drops significantly in formal or intergenerational settings. For example, only 15% always use them with older adults, indicating awareness of sociolinguistic boundaries and respect hierarchies. This points to a form of linguistic compartmentalization, where neologisms are deployed strategically based on context and audience.

Influence of Political Crisis on Lexical Innovation

Term	Literal Meaning	Contextual Usage	Implied Meaning
"Disappear"	To vanish	"They disappear am for up station"	Arbitrary arrest, abduction
"Black-legged"	A traitor	"Na black leg that!"	Informant or government sympathizer
"ZAM"	Gunfire	"We hear zam for mile 6"	Violence, insecurity
"Tear rubber"	New or untouched	"That bike na tear rubber"	Acquired through looting or violence
"Small girl, big god"	Sugar baby	"That one na small girl big god"	Sex-for-favor or survival relationship

This table displays politically and socially loaded neologisms developed during the Anglophone Crisis, reflecting the influence of conflict on youth vocabulary. The political crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions has inspired a wave of context-specific lexical creativity. These terms encode risk, violence, and socio-economic survival strategies. "Disappear" and "black-legged" carry heavy emotional and political weight, enabling covert discussions in dangerous contexts. Others like "tear rubber" and "small girl, big god" comment on moral compromise and survival. Such vocabulary is functional, serving as linguistic resistance, coping mechanism, and socio-political critique.

Gender-related Neologisms and Intersectionality in Language Innovation

The data reveals interesting patterns in gender-related variation in the neologisms created and spread by urban youth in Bamenda and Buea. There is a noticeable distinction in the kinds of neologisms adopted by male and female speakers. For instance, male neologisms often gravitate towards terms associated with politics, business, or education, reflecting broader societal interests and the youth's engagement with issues of power and professionalism. Examples of such male-dominated neologisms include terms like "Buda" (a slang for a powerful political figure) and "Hustle" (representing the drive for success in business and financial ventures).

On the other hand, female neologisms tend to revolve around more personal, social, and trivial aspects of life, often involving relationships, food, and celebrity culture. Female speakers in the study predominantly use terms like "Gwam" (used to refer to a trendy or well-dressed individual) and "Snacky" (a term often used for light, fashionable snacks or items of luxury). These neologisms mirror the preoccupations of young urban women with appearance, social life, and lighter cultural themes.

Furthermore, the intersectional influences of gender, age, and social class are crucial in shaping language innovation. While female youth, particularly in urban settings, often engage with neologisms related to leisure and entertainment, their male counterparts show a stronger tendency towards adopting and creating terms that represent more serious, societal concerns. This distinction is deeply reflective of the ways in which gender roles, cultural values, and societal expectations influence language development, adding a layer of complexity to the

neologism landscape in Cameroonian urban centers.

Gender related Neologisms

Male Neologisms	Female Neologisms
Buda - A term referring to a powerful political figure or leader.	**Gwam** - A term for a well-dressed individual, often used in admiration.
Hustle - Refers to a strong work ethic or drive, particularly in business.	**Snacky** - Used to describe a luxury snack or item, often symbolizing indulgence.
Banga - A term for an ambitious person, typically in business or politics.	**Bae** - Refers to a romantic partner, especially in popular culture and social media.
Bro - Informal term for a male friend, commonly used in casual and social contexts.	**Queen** - A term of empowerment used among females, often to describe a woman with high social status or influence.

This table provides a visual representation of the differences in the types of neologisms used by males and females in the urban youth culture of Cameroon. As seen, male neologisms tend to be associated with political, business, and educational contexts, reflecting the more serious, goal-oriented aspects of youth culture. In contrast, female neologisms are often linked to fashion, social status, and romantic or cultural expressions, highlighting the gendered interests and social roles that shape language innovation. These distinctions reinforce the sociolinguistic influence of gender in the creation and spread of new terms in urban spaces.

Study Findings

The findings of this study revealed several key insights regarding the role of youth culture in the spread of neologisms in Cameroon's urban centers, specifically in Bamenda and Buea. The data collected from interviews, surveys, and participant observations highlighted the dynamic interplay between youth culture, language innovation, and societal changes.

From the quantitative data. The findings from the data analysis reveal that youth in Bamenda and Buea actively engage in the creation and spread of neologisms as part of their everyday communication. These new expressions are largely generated and disseminated through informal platforms such as social media, street corners, and campus discussions. The young people's reliance on digital spaces like WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok facilitates rapid innovation and transmission of terms that resonate with their lived experiences. This suggests that the creation of neologisms is not just a linguistic trend but also a social phenomenon rooted in youth culture and digital engagement.

A wide array of linguistic strategies is used in the formation of these neologisms. Techniques such as semantic shifts, morphological blending, code-mixing, and onomatopoeia reflect the dynamic and hybrid linguistic environment in urban Cameroon. Many of these new words and phrases carry deep cultural and political undertones, serving functions such as expressing youth identity, critiquing authority, asserting group solidarity, and injecting humor into difficult situations. Notably, some expressions emerging from the Anglophone Crisis highlight the precarious nature of life in conflict zones, demonstrating how language is adapted to represent fear, resistance, and resilience.

Importantly, the analysis also shows that the use of these neologisms is governed by contextual awareness. While widely accepted among peers and in online spaces, these expressions are carefully avoided in formal or intergenerational settings. This selective usage underscores the strategic linguistic choices youth make depending on their audience. Overall, the creation and use of neologisms in Bamenda and Buea reflect a powerful means through which young people construct identity, navigate socio-political tensions, and respond to the complexities of urban life in contemporary Cameroon.

Below is a presentation of findings from qualitative analysis.

Lexical and Semantic Characteristics of Neologisms

The study found that neologisms in Cameroon English predominantly emerged through processes such as borrowing, abbreviation, and coinage. Borrowing was particularly common, with many new words incorporating elements from local languages such as Pidgin English and indigenous Cameroonian languages. For example, the term *"sawa"*, derived from the Duala language, is widely used among young people to refer to not just someone from the coastal region of Cameroon as before, but to a lively person who is ready to spend some cash. This term has evolved from its original meaning to represent a cultural and regional identity in urban spaces. Similarly, words like *"ashia"* (from Pidgin English) refer to a state of having been blessed with good fortune, while its traditional meaning has evolved to include connotations of success in personal or professional life.

Abbreviations and acronyms also played a significant role in the creation of neologisms, particularly in online and digital communication. For instance, the acronym *"AFK"* (away from keyboard) was widely adopted among young adults who frequently engaged in online gaming and social media platforms. Additionally, the term *"LIT"* (a slang expression for something exciting or enjoyable) has gained popularity in Cameroon, largely due to the global influence of American youth culture and the music industry.

Semantic shifts in familiar English words were also notable. Words like *"ghost"* and *"vibe"*, traditionally used with their original meanings, were appropriated to represent different concepts. For example, *"ghosting"* now refers to the act of abruptly ceasing all communication in a relationship, while *"vibe"* signifies an emotional or social atmosphere, especially in informal contexts such as parties or online interactions.

Youth as Primary Drivers of Lexical Innovation

Young adults were identified as the primary innovators of new words, especially in informal settings. Youth culture, characterized by the influence of music, fashion, social media, and popular culture, was found to significantly shape the linguistic landscape of the urban centers. In interviews, participants frequently noted how music, particularly genres like hip hop and Afrobeat, contributed to the spread of neologisms. For example, the word *"banger"*, meaning a hit song, was popularized by youth who frequently referenced it in relation to music tracks they found particularly impactful or catchy. In online spaces, the word *"lit"* was equally used to describe exciting or thrilling moments, often in the context of youth-driven social events. For example, "hustle" has evolved from a general term for struggle or effort to refer specifically to informal, entrepreneurial activities often tied to survival strategies in a complex economic environment. This shift highlights the role of language in shaping and reflecting economic practices, offering an insight into how Cameroonians navigate the challenges of daily life.

Furthermore, social media played a pivotal role in the spread of neologisms. One interviewee, a 22-year-old university student in Buea, noted how they and their peers were quick to adopt terms such as *"savage"* (used to describe someone who is bold or ruthless) after seeing it repeatedly in viral memes and posts on Instagram and Twitter. This highlights the rapid dissemination of neologisms through platforms that encourage user-generated content and peer-to-peer communication.

Sociocultural and Socioeconomic Factors

Several sociocultural factors influenced the spread of neologisms. Technology, particularly social media, was identified as a major driver, with platforms facilitating rapid language change and the wide diffusion of new terms. A notable example is the term *"flex"*, which was used in the context of displaying one's wealth or achievements in an ostentatious manner. The term spread quickly across social media platforms and became widely used among youth as they increasingly showcased aspects of their lives, such as possessions or status, in posts and selfies. This was further evidenced during the interviews, where young adults discussed how the need to appear trendy and successful in digital spaces spurred the creation and popularization of certain words.

The influence of global culture, particularly Western media, was also evident in the neologisms adopted by youth, particularly terms related to technology, entertainment, and politics. The term *"cancel"* (popularized through social media as part of the "cancel culture" movement) was adopted in Cameroon to refer to publicly rejecting

or boycotting a person, product, or idea. Young adults expressed that they had used this term in relation to celebrities or political figures who they perceived as unethical or unworthy of support.

Socioeconomic factors also played a role, as the adoption of new terms often reflected a desire for social mobility and inclusion within specific peer groups. For example, one participant, a 19-year-old student, shared that using neologisms like *swag, hot ohh!* (meaning stylish or fashionable) allowed them to bond with their peers, signalling their participation in the global trend of fashion-forward youth. This desire for social status and belonging was reinforced by the fact that youth frequently used these terms to distinguish themselves from older generations or individuals who did not follow the same linguistic trends.

Neologisms as Markers of Identity and Belonging

Neologisms were frequently used as markers of social identity and belonging. In interviews, young adults, particularly those in urban areas, expressed a sense of pride in using new words that distinguished them from older generations or from individuals in rural areas. Terms like *"jungle"* (meaning an area of social disarray or chaos) and *"ghetto"* (representing a particular urban space where a subculture is formed) were used not only to describe physical places but also to reflect the youth's identification with certain lifestyles or attitudes that were seen as authentic or rebellious.

The study also highlighted how these new words represented a form of resistance to traditional norms and values. For example, the use of the term *"hustle"* in the context of personal entrepreneurship or struggle against societal odds has become increasingly popular among youth, signifying a shift towards a more proactive and self-reliant approach to life. This reflected a broader sociocultural context of economic hardships and the desire for financial independence in the face of limited opportunities.

Challenges and Resistance to Neologisms

While the spread of neologisms was widespread among youth, the study also identified resistance from older generations and more conservative sectors of society. Educators and community leaders, especially in Bamenda, expressed concerns about the impact of neologisms on the preservation of "proper" English. For instance, a 45-year-old language educator remarked, "Neologisms are reshaping our language, but they are not always accurate representations of the linguistic structures we strive to teach." This concern was echoed by other participants, who argued that the widespread use of terms like *"chill"* (to relax) and *"fam"* (family or close friends) undermined the formality and clarity expected in educational settings. However, despite this resistance, younger generations continued to embrace and popularize these new terms, signalling a shift toward a more flexible and dynamic approach to language use.

Impact on Formal and Informal Communication

The study found that neologisms were predominantly used in informal settings, such as peer conversations, social media, and music, but there was a growing incorporation of these terms into formal communication, particularly among youth-led media and academic discussions. Terms like *"hustle"* and *"vibe"* were increasingly being incorporated into written discourse, including articles and opinion pieces shared on social media platforms. This suggested a gradual acceptance of neologisms in broader societal communication, reflecting the evolving nature of language in contemporary Cameroon.

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrated that youth culture in Cameroon plays a crucial role in the creation, spread, and acceptance of neologisms. These linguistic innovations reflect the socio-cultural, technological, and political shifts within the country, serving as a medium for youth to express their identity, challenge traditional norms, and engage with global trends. The study also highlighted the tension between linguistic innovation and traditional language norms, suggesting that the evolution of Cameroon English is shaped by both the creative forces of youth and the regulatory forces of more conservative groups. Neologisms in Cameroon English are not merely linguistic trends but also serve as markers of social change and identity among the country's youth, reflecting the adaptive nature of language in the face of globalization and sociocultural transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the role of youth culture in the creation, spread, and acceptance of neologisms within Cameroon's urban centers, specifically in Bamenda and Buea. Through a combination of interviews, surveys, and participant observations, it has been established that youth are the primary innovators and disseminators of new words and expressions, which are heavily influenced by global trends, social media, and local cultural dynamics. The findings revealed that neologisms in Cameroon English predominantly emerge through processes such as borrowing from local languages, abbreviation, and semantic shifts of existing terms. These neologisms reflect the socio-political and economic realities of postcolonial Cameroon and act as markers of identity and social belonging for the youth. A key insight from the study is that youth culture, particularly through music, fashion, and digital platforms, significantly impacts the spread of these linguistic innovations. The study also highlighted the role of technology, especially social media, in facilitating the rapid dissemination and adoption of neologisms among young people. Furthermore, it was evident that these new words serve as expressions of resistance to traditional norms and as tools for social mobility, particularly in urban settings. The study also saw that male neologisms generally reflect serious, goal-driven domains like politics, business, and education, while female neologisms often center on fashion, social image, and relationships. This contrast reveals how gendered interests and roles influence language innovation among urban youth. Ultimately, it highlights the sociolinguistic role of gender in shaping how new terms emerge and spread.

Despite the pervasive spread of neologisms, the study identified resistance from more conservative segments of society, particularly among older generations and educational institutions, who view these terms as a threat to linguistic propriety. This tension between linguistic innovation and traditional norms reflects broader societal debates about the role of language in preserving cultural heritage while accommodating the demands of a rapidly changing world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to further explore and manage the evolving linguistic landscape of Cameroon English:

1. **Promote Linguistic Inclusivity in Education**: Educational institutions should acknowledge the dynamic nature of Cameroon English and incorporate the study of neologisms into curricula. This will help bridge the gap between formal education and informal youth language, promoting linguistic inclusivity. Teachers and language instructors could develop materials that reflect both traditional and contemporary uses of English, helping students navigate the evolving linguistic landscape.

2. **Further Research into Sociolinguistic Impacts**: More research should be conducted to investigate the sociolinguistic impact of neologisms on different demographic groups within Cameroon. Future studies could explore the intergenerational tensions in language usage and examine how language change reflects broader societal transformations in Cameroon, particularly in relation to politics, identity, and globalization.

3. **Support the Documentation of Neologisms**: Given that neologisms in Cameroon English are rapidly evolving, it is essential to document and preserve these linguistic innovations to ensure they are not lost in the future. Linguists and sociolinguists should collaborate with local communities to create comprehensive lexicons or dictionaries that reflect these new words, providing valuable resources for language preservation and research.

4. **Encourage the Integration of Neologisms into Media**: The media plays a critical role in the spread of neologisms, and as such, it is important for media outlets, including print, broadcast, and digital platforms, to support the use of these new words in a way that respects their social and cultural origins. Including neologisms in mainstream media, especially those targeting youth audiences, can further solidify their place in everyday communication while also fostering inclusivity.

5. **Address Concerns About Linguistic Purity**: While neologisms serve as important markers of cultural identity and social change, it is equally important to address concerns about linguistic purity and the

preservation of standard English. Academic institutions and policymakers should consider developing frameworks that allow for the integration of neologisms into formal language settings without undermining the integrity of traditional language structures.

6. **Facilitate Dialogue Between Generations**: To resolve the tensions between linguistic innovation and traditional language practices, it is important to encourage dialogue between younger and older generations. This could be achieved through community engagement initiatives or intergenerational language workshops where participants can share their perspectives on language change, fostering mutual respect and understanding.

By adopting these recommendations, Cameroon can harness the positive aspects of linguistic innovation while addressing concerns regarding language preservation. This approach will allow for a balanced evolution of Cameroon English, one that reflects both the local cultural context and global influences. The ongoing study and documentation of neologisms will also contribute to the broader understanding of language change in postcolonial societies.

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