



Lexical Creativity in the Cameroonian Musical Landscape: The Case of Selected Songs of Lapiro De Mbanga

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Abstract:

Linguistic competence is not given to everyone. Words are meant to be used in and out of context, so using a word and making it fit perfectly into another context shows an individual's capability of being creative. This paper aims at showing the different lexical creative processes in selected songs by the Cameroonian born musician, Lapiro de Mbanga and his ability to give a completely different interpretation to the words, yet passing across a message using different word formation processes. Using a qualitative research method, this paper employs the theory of semantic to give meaning to the lexical items. Findings indicate that out of the eight lexical creative processes and semantic features, affixation is the most commonly used word formation process whereas onomatopoeia is the least. Still, a word formation process leads to another word formation process: compounding leading to the word formation process; neologism. Again, we have multiple word formation processes where one word is formed using two-word formation processes.

Keywords: Lexical creativity, Word formation processes, Semantic analysis, Affixation, Cameroonian music.

Review Article

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the most important bonds that unite humans, binding nations and cultures together. Without proper communication, the world will be in disarray. Verbal communication is one thing that distinguishes the human race from the animal race. Communication is our ability to speak, that is, the language we speak. Yunira *et al.*, (2019) posit that "language is the main tool of human communication". In our society, numerous means of communication have been invented, and music is one of the ways people use to communicate within it, leading to our study of language use in society, specifically in music, which falls under the realm of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics plays a crucial role in helping the public understand various aspects of language in society, as it studies language in its social context. Music is also a form of language. Music is an essential

element in man's life nowadays. Dorot (2019) thinks that music is the oldest art in the world. He further posits that the person seen as the forefather of music is found in the bible. This person is Jubal (Genesis 4:21), who is said to be the ancestor of all musicians who play the harp. As such, the word music has its origin in the Greek language from the word "mousike", which means "the arts of the muses" (ibid). A day does not go by without one listening to music, whether willingly or unwillingly, whether walking on the streets, sitting at home, at work, or listening to the news. There is always an opportunity to listen to music. Music is thus an art and has an impact on our behaviour and our thoughts; it shapes these two aspects of our lives. Music is used for information and entertainment. It is an indispensable element in culture that identifies people. It is also a bridging tool used to overcome different cultural barriers, especially

with our young musicians who frequently collaborate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Individuals often take music as a means to express inner thoughts that they are unable to articulate verbally. Music is a mood booster, strengthening the weak and awakening consciousness. It is a powerful, persuasive weapon that stirs up our emotions. As such, musicians employ a range of stylistic devices to enhance their music and convey their message. They have a way of playing and toying with the lexes to bring out meaning to fit their context. That is where we talk of lexical creativity. Lexical creativity, as defined by the researcher, is the ability to make words from different domains fit perfectly into a domain in which they have no apparent relation. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines creativity as "involving the use of skill and the imagination to produce something new or a work of art". The knowledge of creating and interpreting lexical elements is evident when applied to a variety of words, resulting in changes. People can remodel already existing words to communicate, which enables a fluent listener to understand the intended meaning of what is said, taking into consideration the context (Allan, 2016).

Word formation processes help in increasing the vocabulary of a given language. Using roots or parts of already existing words but employing different mechanisms to create another word may result in a word with the same or a different meaning. An online article by Tandon (n.d) defines word formation as the "ways in which new words are made based on other words or morphemes. Also called derivational morphology". Many studies have been done on word formation processes like Ubanako (2021), Ratih and Gusdian (2018), Luthfiyati *et al.*, (2017), and Lieber (2005) to name these, yet works have seldom been carried out in lexical creativity in the domain of music, thus this study seeks to investigate the lexical creativity in the Cameroonian musical landscape, bringing out the transformations and changes words undergo, in light of semantic features.

Method

Qualitative research, according to Schie (2023), "allows researchers to explore complex phenomena in depth and emphasises the perspectives and voices of the participant. It provides an opportunity for individuals to share their experience, beliefs and opinions in their own words, giving them agency and contributing to a more democratic and inclusive research process". At the same time, Creswell (2009) posits that "qualitative research is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". These two definitions align perfectly with our study, given that the research is based on the musician's experience and opinions, and in his lexical creative ability, he assigns meaning in a way that suits him, thereby fitting perfectly into the context. Thus, the data for our research is based on a database corpus collected through the Vidmate application by downloading the sounds. After careful listening, we transcribe them to obtain a complete copy of the sounds, ensuring that our analysis is accurate and concrete. In total, three sounds from Lapiro de Mbanga's music list have been selected and analysed. The titles of these sounds are: "Demissioner", "Lefam So", and "Mimba We". Conducting qualitative descriptive research, we began by selecting phrases in which these lexical elements were found. We then identified the linguistic elements and, finally, analysed the word formation processes, providing the meanings of words and the changes they have undergone according to the theory of semantics. Kroeger (2022) says semantics is the study of meaning, and Yunira *et al.*, (2019), quoting Crystal (1991:310), confirm this by stating that "semantics is one of the branches of linguistics that studies meaning...". When words are formed, their meaning is essential for communication to occur. Therefore, lexical creativity does not end with the creation process; it must also convey meaning. Leech (1981), quoting Ogden and Richards, notes that meaning becomes confusing when there is a lack of agreement on the meaning of basic terms. In contrast, the theory of meaning in

use posits that meaning is derived from the way an expression is used, as Ludwig Wittgenstein suggests (Horn and Karlgren, 1995). Meaning in this paper has been obtained according to Ludwig's viewpoint, given that the musician's use of words helps in getting his intended meaning.

Literature Review

This section attempts to examine works that are similar to this paper, whether in the domain of music or lexical creativity. We begin with Alfiyani (2021), who looks at the use of figurative language in Niki's sound. Having as an aim to analyse and look at the dominant figurative language used by Niki, and after careful selection of about three songs, he proceeds to listen to them carefully. Using the figurative language framework, which he says gives an unusual emphasis on the denotation of regular words, he then moves on to analysing some sentences. Results show that the most commonly used figurative device is the metaphor, followed by hyperbole and repetition. In all, 41 instances of figurative expressions were found, while Pangaribuan and Marpaung (2024) examine the language style used by Niki to convey her message. Three language styles are identified: consultative, informal, and intimate. The informal style is characterised by the use of slang, contractions, and other features, while the intimate style is marked by a dependence on the listener and the use of vulnerable, emotional expressions. Still, Zuliakah *et al.*, (2024) analyse the lexicosemantic meaning and contextual meaning of words in Taylor Swift's album 'Lover', where some selected sounds were chosen. The findings demonstrate that the interpretation of words varies, and there is a difference between lexical and contextual meaning. Thus, the dictionary meaning of a word differs from the meaning used in the song. Furthermore, L'Homme (2004) examines a lexico-semantic approach to terminology, using the example of the word "programs." The findings show that not only do words have multiple meanings, but they also have relationships with other terms that bring out the sense of a word. This

relationship can be observed in the hierarchical relationships of words, specifically hypernymy and meronymy. He says, "terminology structures are discovered gradually through semantic relations".

Ubanako (2021), on his part, works on word formation processes and semantic features. A list and definitions of some of these features are provided. Among the lexical features, we have; compounding, borrowing, affixation, onomatopoeia, blending etc and among the semantic features we have; semantic reduction, semantic degradation, semantic elevation and semantic extension to name these. Another research, Ratih and Gusdian (2018) look at word formation processes in the Oxford online Dictionary from 2012 to 2016 and affixation is the most used word formation process, followed by compounding and later blending. Still, Plag (2003) in his introductory chapter goes as far as examining how words are formed, targeting free, bound, and unbound morphemes that are added either to the root of a word or follow the root word. He also examines the different word formation processes mentioned above, but goes further to introduce another process: conversion, which is also a zero-suffixation word. The only thing that changes is that the same word can be used as a noun and as a verb, for example, water; to water flowers (verb) and to drink water (noun). Still, Luthfiyati *et al.*, (2017) do not end with word formation processes, but go to the extent of examining different derivations, and the results show that words can be formed using various derivations: adjective derivation, noun derivation, and verb derivation. That is, words changing their word classes by the addition of affixes and the noun derivation is the most used, while the verb derivation is the least used. Additionally, Yule (2010) identifies different types of word formation processes in one of his chapters, and also introduces another process that involves multiple processes. This is a process whereby a word has a two-word formation process. Lieber (2005) further examines what compounding entails and the various forms it takes. Here, he

mentions two types of compounding: the first is root compounding, typically consisting of a noun plus a noun, a noun plus an adjective, an adjective plus an adjective, and so on. He argues that root compounding, made up of a verb plus a noun, is not very productive. The second form of compounding is synthetic compounding, which is the adding of a suffix to compounded words like cat lover. The next word process he discusses is derivation, where he outlines the different types of prefixation and suffixation. The last word formation process is conversion.

As we continue with our research, we discover that Zapata (2007) adds more word formation processes to the already standard processes. These added processes, in the first place, involve symbolism, which is the alternation of phonemic structure within a morpheme to indicate grammatical functions, as seen in the plural form of the word "goose" (to "geese") and the irregular past tense of words like "swim" (to "swam"). In the second place, we have suppletion, which is a complete change in the form of the root word, like in the case of good to better. He continues with the functional shift process, which involves using an already existing word in a new function. This process is also called the zero derivation or conversion process. The change in this process occurs at the stress level of the word, at the voicing of the final consonant, and at the change of class category, etc. Added to these processes is eponymy, where words are derived from the names of places, inventions, activities, or, more specifically, from people.

Corpus and research

The corpus for our research was selected from some of Lapiro de Mbanga's selected music. Lapiro de Mbanga's answers to the name Lambo Pierre Roger, born at Mbanga, (on the 7th April 1957-16th March 2014), thus the name Lapiro de Mbanga. His creative nature is seen from his artistic name, which is a blend of the initials of his name. He is a musician who sings using Pidgin English and Camfranglais. Music is often used as a medium for lexical creation nowadays.

Everyone uses a word the way they want and when they want, as long as it conveys the intended meaning. Lapiro de Mbanga is not exempt from this aspect. Lapiro employs various lexical and semantic features. He is a musician who sings more about politics and the events happening in his country. As an ex-convict, he sings about his ordeals, his struggles, and the government is his target. He tries to satirise them and, as such, uses a variety of words to present most of the ills committed by the government, which are clearly understood in context. Lapiro de Mbanga, in his lexical creativity, uses word formation processes like affixation, compounding, and clipping, to name these, bringing about some modifications and changes in the words.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper is limited to analysing the word formation processes according to Ubanako (2021), giving the semantic processes they have undergone and the meaning obtained. This section provides examples of Lapiro de Mbanga's use of lexical features, and the different excerpts highlight the linguistic features (in bold), which include affixation, compounding, blending, borrowing, and clipping. The first excerpt is:

Excerpt 1: Affixation

- You **chercham** you **trouvam**, you **troucam** you **supportam**
- Step down, **demissionner** because you don over massacre constitution
- You don over echouer, subordination for pouvoir judiciaire weh politic di manoeuvre within **ingerrance** for inside gestion for justice
- **insecurite** **generaliser**, gregre don hala for bank for bonaberi,
- Dem don massacre you **représentant** chef de terre Monsieur le sous-préfet and na camagourou for Bakasi
- Enseignant vacataire en attente de **situalisation** depuis matusale
- pour le **liberalisme** communautaire don turn na pour le **liberalisme** de corruption

- we di evoluer na for regime du tchoko ana **institutionalisation** du faux
- crédit **remboursable** dans cent ans, plus les années **d'échelonnement**
- pourtant dat road di meng people all day for sika manqué d'entretien ana **materialization**
- Dem go cook wati you **fonctionnairam** for fonction publique
- You don **electrocuter** code electoral
- **Terminator** des **terminator**
- You don make kind kind **classement** dem, kind kind **remplacement**, kind kind taxi kanatitac
- No be you boulot na **securisation** des personnes et des biens
- A vrai dire dat one na **echouation** total
- gangstar witi anti-gangs na **cohabitation** pacifique
- A go **masham** alanganta pepe na yi a go trowe am for eye so pia pia pia
- or we own boulot for **sauvetage**, dem no di ask man diplôme and na 5 annee d'experience
- Mimito and na **sous-officier** dem don turn na watch night for **microfinance**

Affixation is the art of adding morphemes either at the beginning (prefix), at the end (suffix) or in the middle (infix) of a word. In the first excerpt, he employs different forms of affixation, utilising both suffixes and prefixes. The different suffixes used are: “*am*”, “*er*”, “*tion*”, “*sme*”, “*ment*”, “*ter*”, “*tor*”, “*age*” and “*able*”. The different prefixes used are “*in*”, “*de*”, “*anti*”, “*sous*” and “*micro*”. The use of these affixes in some cases have led to semantic shift like in the word “*fonctionnariram*”, which comes from the word “fonction” translated as function. The change in meaning moves from; a function to a job description and the use of the suffix “*tion*” has led to the word formation process; neologisme as seen in the word “*echoution*” from the word “echouer”, which means failure. The addition of the suffix has not changed the meaning of the word, it has maintained its original meaning. Again, the use of the suffix “*am*” shows a form of

satirical tone, both in “*you chercham, you trowam* and “*fonctionnairam*”. It has also led to a change in meaning; “*masham*” has evolved from “grinding to pieces” to mean “to be outspoken”. Additionally, the use of prefixes has led to semantic change, as seen in words like “*sous-officier*”, where there is a shift from a normal office worker to a rank in the military. Similarly, with microfinance, the addition of the prefix “*micro*” changes the meaning of the word, now referring to an institution dealing with finances. In most cases, the addition of these affixes ought to change the class category of the words, but surprisingly, most words here have maintained their word class, except for “*démissionner*” and “*représentant*”, which have changed. The addition of the prefix “*de*” and suffix “*er*” to the word “*mission*” has led to a class change. “*Mission*” is a noun, and adding these affixes has changed the word class to a verb. Similarly, the addition of the prefix “*re*” and suffix “*ant*” to the word “*présenter*” has changed the word class from a verb to a noun. Using affixation, the musician tries to name all the ills the government has committed.

Excerpt 2: Compounding

- **Gangstar** wit anti-gangs na cohabitation pacifique
- **Taximan, moto-taxi**, transportateur dem dey for **corps a corps** witi mbere
- Dem di **mache head** for all petit débrouillard
- For no support team, you must **tie heart**, you chop maîtrise
- Donc na you be **maillot jaune** for dat equipe national for shiba
- Yes ancient **showgar** that be say you go shit over big shit and e go smell
- Njinga man **chock fire** allez
- Na you be **preparateur physique**, soigneur and na you be alanmigou for that your siamanchester.
- **condrey man** comme vous pouvez le constater, famille don chapsai
- Jacque Chirack for ngola dom **comot corriger** for ultimatum

- **Chopchair** for sonel and sinec dem di soso sock quittance, dem di take do, lumiere witi dimba no deh

The second excerpt is made up of compound words, which is the combination of the bases of two words to form one meaningful lexical item. These words are either separated, written as a whole, hyphenated or linked by an article. Whatever the case may be, when they are combined, they automatically change the meaning of the words. While some words have undergone semantic degradation, that is obtaining a more pejorative meaning, like “gangstar”, “mache head” and “corps a corps”, others have lost meaning; this can be seen with a word like “maillot jaune”, actually referred to a winner in a bicycle race, yet in this present case, it is used to refer to the president of a country. The meaning has reduced from a leader of a country to a winner in a race. A winner in a race does not control anyone; he takes orders from his sponsors or coach, but a President is the one who gives orders; he assigns responsibility to people to do so. So, using maillot jaune to refer to the present has reduced the meaning of the word. The use of compounding has equally led to synonyms; the words “preparateur physique, soigneur, alanmigou and siamanchester” are synonyms, having the meaning “leader”, which, in this case, still refers to the President. He uses all forms of names to refer to the President, who is the leading authority, so that only someone who understands his personal experience and background will comprehend the meaning of his words.

Excerpt 3: Repetition

- Malgre decision for court supreme and na **soso** withi that grand rang you be make me
- insecurite generaliser, **gregre** don hala for bank for bonaberi, **Gregre** don hala for conso et wouri
- No **big big** organization for coupe d’afrique, no correct stade
- djess now, **na tchop a tchop**
- agent de payage routier dem di cut **two two cent** dans le easy
- ba sauveteur oh, ana bayam sellam oh, an aba **Kankan** taxe, ba impot liberatoire
- You don make **kind kind** classement dem, **kind kind** remplacement, **kind kind** taxi kanatitac
- You don rafla **kind kind** joueur sep so,
- **So, so** di fade, you di fade, donc no be fault for joueur

In this excerpt, in his use of repetition, the musician seeks to emphasise on the issues he is advancing. His constant repetition of the same word indicates that he is highly frustrated with the situation and is irritated. His emphasis is on the audience being aware that these issues are severe, but the authorities are neglecting them. Using repetition, he is satirizing the government, for all the years of governing, there is no progress; “*no big big organization for coupe Afrique, no correct Stade*”, despite all the ministers who have been appointed, this can be seen when he says “*you don rafla kind kind joueur sep so*”. The word “joueur” has undergone a semantic change; it means “a player” here, but is used to refer to “ministers”. The repetition of “kind” stands for different people.

Excerpt 4: Acronyms

- Weh be say you don maintenir minister weh di concasser droit d’auteur for **CMC**
- Gratuite for ecole primaire and ardo for **APE** publigatoire
- Poutant banque mondial, **FMI**, Clube de Paris ana all institut financier dem don trust we do avec majoration

Acronyms are words formed from the initial letters of other words. Moehkardi (2016) defines an acronym as “a word coined by taking the initial letters of the words in a title or phrase and using them as a new word”. The different acronyms may have different meanings, but the most common one is FMI, which stands for International Monetary Fund and the APE, which stands for “Association Parent Eleve” (Parents Teachers Association, commonly known as PTA). The type of acronym used here is initialism, since they are simply abbreviations. Another type of

acronym we have, which is not found here, is the word acronym, formed when the abbreviated letters can be read as a word. Acronyms can be written in either capital or small letters.

Excerpt 5: Clipping

- Gratuite for école primaire and **ardo** for APE publigatoire
- Yes don createur de la richness au ministère des **dembres**
- You must leave **braca**, you step down, that means say you demissioner
- You want dame you **mimba** we, you want soule you **mimba** we
- Na for **termier** me and the rest and na me I dey prete for meng
- **Cami** don capsai

The use of clipping brings about semantic restriction, as seen in the word “braca,” which is a clipped form of the word “bracelet.” A bracelet is a piece of jewelry worn around the wrist, typically used in a football match, meant for the captain, who is synonymous with a leader. As such, the use of bracelets is said to have undergone both a restriction and a shift simultaneously. A shift, because the leadership has shifted from the leader of a football team, to the leader of a whole country, and a restriction because, the meaning has been reduced from a leader of an entire nation to the leader of a football team of about 24 people played in a field of some hectares (105metres /68metres). We equally have a semantic change with the word “*termier*”. “*Termier*” is a clip from the French word “terminer”, meaning “to finish”. Yet, it has changed and taken up the meaning of “to kill”, while “cami” is usually seen as the trademark of a vehicle and is now referred to as the name of a country. It has undergone semantic reduction. From the name of a whole country to a trade mark, that is denigrating the inhabitants of the country. The other words have been shortened as seen below: “*ardo*” comes from adolescent, “*dembres*” from “*debrouilleur*” (a struggling person), “*mimba*” from remember. They have not changed.

Excerpt 6: Blending

- Gratuite for ecole primaire and ardo for APE **publigatoire**
- We di evoluer na for regime du tchoko **ana institutionalisation** du faux
- For sauvetage, il n'est pas de concours, **troway** francis e don bad Dem don massacre you représentant chef de terre Monsieur le sous-préfet and na **camagourou** for Bakasi
- Na you be **preparateur physique**, soigneur and na you be **alanmigou** for that your **siamanchester**.

Neologism can be seen in the use of blending, as in the word “publigatoire,” a blend of “public” and “*obligatoire*”. The use of this word is a form of satire because it is said pupils from government primary schools are not required to pay fees (in Cameroon), but the Parents Teachers Association imposes a levy on parents. The second blend: “*institutionalisation*” comes from “*institution*” and “*nationalisation*” The word “*institutionalisation*” means implementation. And the last word: “*troway*” comes from “throw” and “away”. For these two last words, we realised that there is no change in the meaning of the words; they have both maintained the meanings obtained from the initial words. We also have words that have undergone a shift in meaning, like “camagourou”. This word is the combination of the words “came”, which is a verb, and “gourou”, which is a noun. The word “gourou” is a ‘spiritual guide’ (in rituals), a respected person in society’. And “camagourou” stands for a President, who is also a leading figure, so it has shifted from a negative connotation to a positive one, from a god to a leader. We can equally say that there is semantic degradation, shifting from a god to a leader, which degrades the position. Blending has not only led to the creation of new words and changes, but also to the emergence of neologisms. The words “alanmigou” and “siamanchester” are synonyms of “camagourou”, yet they are new words. “Siamanchester” can be said to originate from the blend of “sisia”, a pidgin

word that signifies “to overpower someone”, and the name of a leading team in the Champions League, “Manchester”. Merging these two words gives birth to the word “siamanchester”, a synonym of a god.

Excerpt 7: Borrowing

- Na **tsunamie** I di declancher for this heur
- Chopchair for sonel and sinec dem di soso sock quittance, dem di take do, lumiere witi **dimba** no deh
- Sappeur pompier dem don turn sinec soteh na dem di serve **dimba**
- That means say, sep **njaka** for we **njaka** for you **njaka**

With the use of borrowing, there is a semantic shift which is also a restriction, as seen in the word “*tsunamie*”, which is a wild sea wave, but has shifted to troubles. We say a shift because a tsunami is synonymous with problems, difficulties, and restrictions, as it has evolved from a mighty destructive wave to a situation that can be easily resolved. As for the words “*dimba*” and “*njaka*”, they have been borrowed from nearby Cameroonian languages, with the meanings “water” and “child”, respectively; no changes have occurred.

Excerpt 8: Onomatopoeia

- Because of over **boom boom** contry man
- Damba no be **boom boom**, damba na sense

The onomatopoeia here resonates like a bomb blast, highlighting the difficulties the country is facing. The use of the “boom” sound is an exaggeration; that is, the country's situation is so alarming. The sound has not been used once, but has been repeated, emphasising the country's rough state.

CONCLUSION

Lexical creativity can also function in conjunction with various stylistic devices that enhance the understanding of the word and its function or word class. Indeed, we might not have targeted all the lexical creations, but our analysis has surely provided sufficient

evidence to draw some conclusions. The paper has shown that lexical creativity is not limited to the level of a lexeme but extends far beyond the word; the context provides a deeper understanding of the word.

We have observed that lexical creativity, achieved through the affixation method, has resulted in semantic change, semantic shift, and the creation of neologisms. In the analysis of compound words, it is evident that compounding also led to neologisms and semantic degradation. Clipping, on its part, has led to semantic changes and shifts, which is also the case with the other processes. Research by Luthfiyati *et al.*, (2017) shows that words change their word class when affixes are added; however, this is not entirely accurate. In the case of affixation, most words in this research have maintained their word class. From the above analysis of the processes, it is evident that new words can be formed, new meanings can be derived from existing words, and existing words can acquire new meanings. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is the user's ability to use the words correctly.

We have also observed that specific word formation processes have led to the emergence of other word formation processes. For example, Blending led to neologism, which is equally a word formation process. Furthermore, we have multiple processes, where words have two-word formation processes, as seen in the phrase “siamanchester”. Again, the most used semantic feature is semantic change, followed by semantic shift. Most words transforming, in whatever form —be it affixation, compounding, blending, or clipping — have changed and taken on different meanings. Whether shifting, changing, or reducing the meaning, there is a modification.

In all, eight-word formation processes have been used, with affixation being the most prevalent, followed by compounding and then repetition. The least complex word formation process is onomatopoeia. From the analysis, it

is clear that affixation and compounding, which are the primary and most productive word formation processes, are the most frequently used processes by Lapiro de Mbanga, aligning with Ratih and Gusdian's research. So, lexical creativity refers to the user's ability to use words in a language, rather than inventing new words.

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