Jasmin Thames
Language and Society

Lasting Effects of Triglossia and Language Contact: Exploring the Impact of French on the English Language

Introduction

People come in contact with other languages almost daily. Sometimes this language contact is apparent while other times it is not. For example, it is common knowledge that *jalapeno* is Spanish, and *sushi* is Japanese. These words have entered the English language long ago and are not foreign words; they have fully integrated into the language. However, there are words, with heavy influence from language contact, fully integrated into English that the language contact influence goes unseen. The word pair *harbor* and *port* is an excellent example of this. *Port* is of French origin, whereas *harbor* is of Anglo-Saxon origin, which is the backbone of the English language. Many of these words of non-English origin entered the language as loanwords long ago and are no longer identifiable as loanwords.

This idea of word origins brings up several questions. In the situation where there are two words for one idea, both from different languages initially, are there different connotations attached to the words? If these connotations do exist, then they can tell us how society perceives specific languages and how this perception affects one's outlook on the community who speaks that language. Not only that, but it can give insight into how society may perceive those that choose a word of their native language origin over the foreign origin word and vice versa. In order to solve this puzzle, I focus my research on more specific questions. Does the origin of a word impact one's attitude towards the usage of that word? More specifically, how does one's attitude towards an English word of French origin compare to an English word of English origin? I believe that the word's origin will affect one's attitude even if a person is unaware of the origin of that word. The history of the word and people who initially used that word (e.g., stereotypes) still imposes specific convictions on that word. Through my analysis of dataset containing

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Anglo-Saxon and French synonyms, I show that there exists a difference in attitudes between Anglo-Saxon and French synonyms.

Background

In order to understand how French has influenced English, we first need to unpack several sociolinguistic theories. The first theory is language contact. Gillian Sankoff (2002), in her "Linguistic Outcomes of Language Contact" article, states that "language contacts have, historically, taken place in part under conditions of social inequality resulting from wars, conquests, colonialism, slavery, and migrations - forced and otherwise" (p. 641). Trade and urbanization are other reasons language contact may occur (Sankoff, 2002, p. 641).

From language contact, some speakers will inevitably become bilingual. Language contact impacts language in two ways. One way is substratum influence. Substratum influence is when one's native language affects other languages they speak. For instance, if there is a native speaker of English who also speaks Spanish, then there is a high possibility that English impacts their usage of Spanish. So, the person may speak Spanish with an English accent or structure sentences in Spanish similar to English sentences.

The second way that language contact impacts language is through borrowing. Borrowing is when words, or other linguistic features, from other languages, enters one's native language. The way borrowing occurs is first by a bilingual speaker spontaneously using a word or feature from the other language in their discourse. In the case of words, it begins as single word code-switching. Secondly, the usage of the word or feature becomes socially acceptable within the bilingual's community. Finally, the word or feature spreads to monolingual speakers in the

community. In this paper, we will focus more on the borrowing of words than substratum influence.

Now that theory of language contact is evident, it is vital to emphasize that "the linguistic outcomes of language contact are determined in large part by the history of social relations among populations, including economic, political, and demographic features" (Sankoff, 2002, p. 640).

With this in mind, let us turn to the second sociolinguistic theory needed to understand the relationship between English and French, which is diglossia. Ronald Wardhaugh, in his book *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, describes diglossia as the following:
"A *diglossic* situation exists in a society when it has two distinct codes which show clear functional separation; that is, employed in one set of circumstances and the other in an entirely different set" (2010, p.85). An example of functional separation is one code being used for daily conversation while another code used for high-status situations. The difference between the codes could be two different languages or two varieties of one language.

Now that the two core sociolinguistic theories of this research are apparent, it is time to turn to the relationship between English and French. To begin, we first have to look at when the two languages first came in contact: the 11th century. As a result of the Norman Conquest of 1066, England got a new ruling class, and this new class brought with them the French language (Roth, 2010, p. 1). England went from a diglossic society, with English and Latin being prevalent, to a triglossic society with the introduction of French. Philip Durkin, in his book *Borrowed Words: A History of Loanwords in English*, perfectly explains the language

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situation of English after the Norman Conquest. In his chapter "Exploring the Contact Situation and Identifying Loans," Durkin (2014) states:

> Latin was the language of the Church, but appears to have been learnt primarily through the medium of French until well into the fourteenth century. Government and legal business was typically recorded in either Latin or Anglo-French, as was almost any commercial business. A good deal of business appears also to have been conducted in Anglo-French, as for instance in legal pleading or in parliament. This situation gradually changed in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as English began to be used in an ever-increasing range of professional functions. (p. 3)

So, early on, all three languages served different purposes: Latin used as an international language, and primary usage was in the Church, French used for government, court pleadings, and dealings with the royals, and English used for everyday speech.

When English started to pick up more professional usages in the 14th century, English initially did not have the vocabulary to do so. At this time, borrowing from Latin and French occurred to fill in the vocabulary (Durkin, 2014, p. 8). For example, "French words relating to law" (Roth, 2010, p. 2) made their way into English. This is not to say that words from either language had not already entered the English language early on due to French and Latin being in England for a few hundred years.

Soon the borrowing went beyond words for professional usage. High-frequency English words, like *foreign, rule, close,* and *change*, all originated from French. More of these words can be found in Durkin's chapter "Exploring the Contact Situation and Identifying Loans." There are also cases where a French word was once a synonym with an English counterpart before its

meaning changed. For example, English *king* and French *prince* once referred to the same entity. However, after time passed, there was a need for a title for the son of a king. The meaning of *prince* changed from referring to a monarch to the son of a monarch (Roth, 2010, p. 5).

The analysis of *king vs. prince* is the closest thing to this research. From the previous works mentioned above, it is evident that French influenced English. However, these works only mention how some English words formed from the construction of French words. Previous scholarly works mostly talk about how English borrowed French words to fill in the English lexicon for professional or high-status words. Some works touch on how English borrowed some French morphological structure (e.g., suffix *-ment*) and applied them to English words (Roth, 2010, p. 4). There appears to be very little research on the coexistence of English and French words that refer to the same concept. Because there seems to be little knowledge on this issue, this research attempts to fill in this missing puzzle piece.

Methods

In order to determine society's attitude on English words of French origin, a survey of 30 questions was administered. Of the 30 questions, 18 questions were sentences that contained a word from an English-French word pair (e.g., *lawyer* vs. *attorney*). Two questions were dummy sentences. The sentences were organized such that words from the same pair were not close together in the question order. For every sentence, respondents were asked to rate the friendliness of the writer of the sentence. Friendliness was measured on a scale of one to five, with five being the friendliest. A comment section was provided for respondents to provide words to describe the writer. Because of the difficulty of doing in-person interviews and surveys, this survey was

posted on social media platforms. Data was collected in this way because it best captures the respondents' opinion by limiting them to two ways of responding: rating the writer and providing words to describe the writer. This way, the dataset is more cohesive and easier to analyze. A solely open-ended survey would have made it difficult to record the sample's opinion accurately. The table below shows the list of words used for this study.

Table 1

List of Words used in Study

Anglo Origin	French Origin
Lawyer	Attorney
Want	Desire
Leave	Depart
Forbid	Prohibit
Smell	Odor
Buy	Purchase
Answer	Response
Fall	Autumn

For demographic information, age, occupation, race/ethnicity, sex, respondents' highest level of education, place respondents spent most of their lives before age 18, and the English variety they speak was collected. Only this information was collected because it seemed most relevant in terms of demographic information. Socioeconomic status did not seem like it would be of use in this study; therefore, it was not collected. Also, many people are not comfortable disclosing that information.

To analyze the data, Excel was used to calculate the average friendliness score of each sentence. The overall friendliness score for Anglo-origin words and French-origin words was

calculated and plotted for each subcategory in demographic information for the highest level of education, race/ethnicity, and sex.

Results and Discussion

Of the 53 people surveyed, only 33 people completed the survey entirely. The data presented is based on these 33 participants. Also, all but one of the thirty-three respondents were in the college-age bracket; the outlier was in the 35 - 44 age bracket. Also, only one out of thirty-three respondents spoke a variety of English other than the American variety. This participant also did not spend most of their life before the age of 18 in the US. Thus, this data set only represents a small part of society. Due to this constraint, only the correlations between average friendliness scores and sex, race/ethnicity, and highest level of education were analyzed.

The overall average score for Anglo-origin (AO) words was 3.37. For French-origin (FO) words, the average was 3.02. This does not seem to be a significant difference between the scores. When examining the mean score and its relationship to the social variables, this trend continues for some variables. For all the words' score breakdown, see the appendix.

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Figure 1

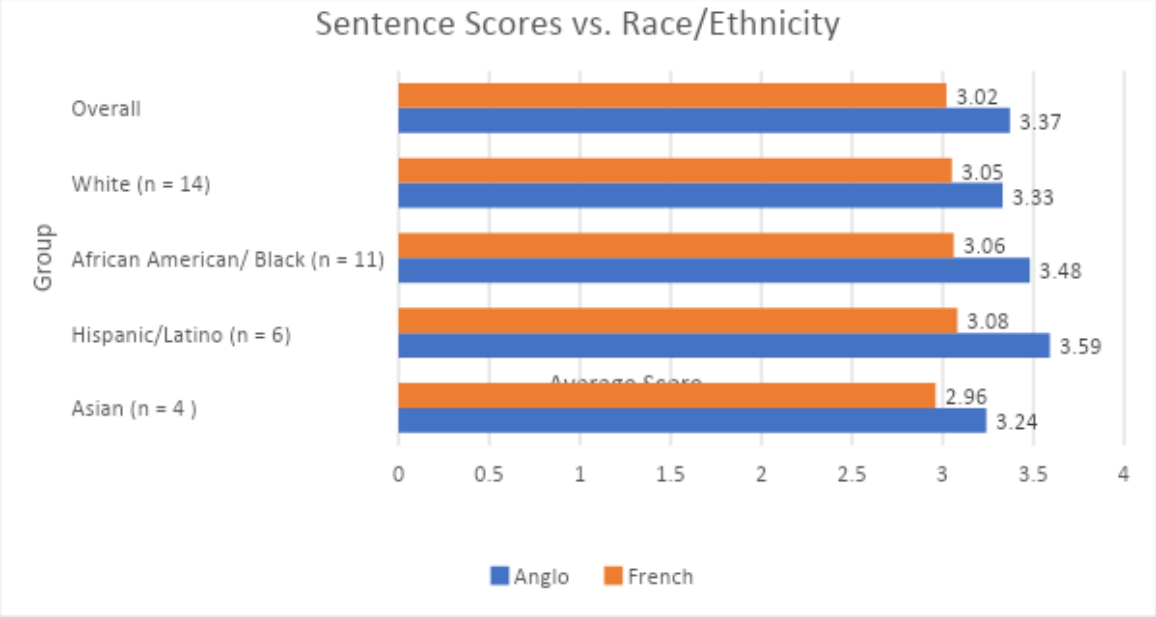
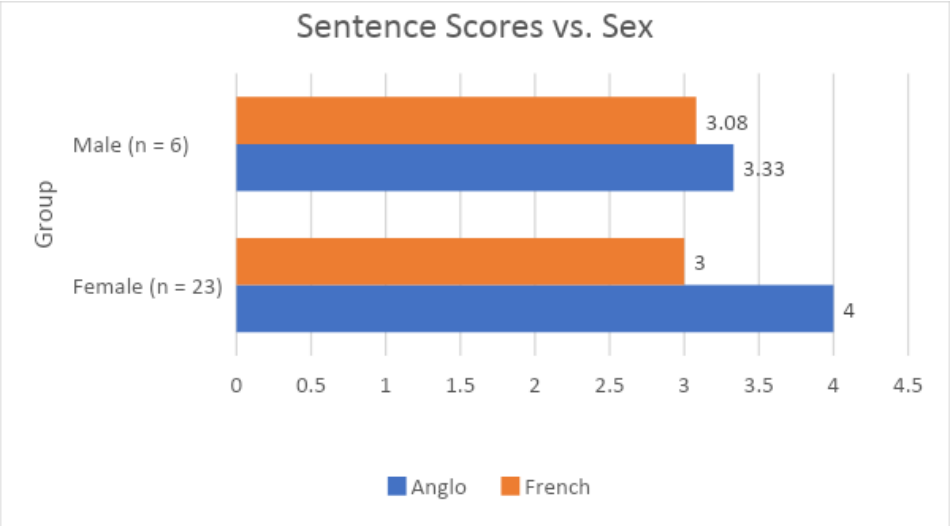


Figure 1 shows the relationship between average friendliness scores and race/ethnicity. For each group, the average score for AO words was between 3.24 and 3.59. The mean for FO words ranged from 2.96 and 3.08. There is not much variation in scores between the races/ethnicities either. This lack of variation may be due to not having an equal number of participants in each group. It could also suggest that there is not a correlation between attitudes towards varying-origin words and race/ethnicity.

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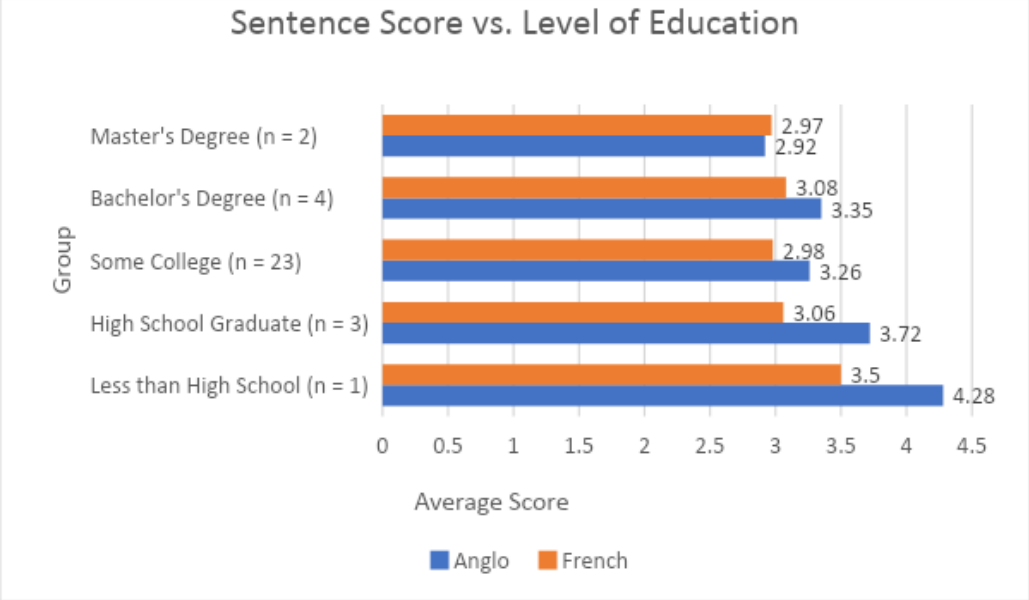
Figure 2



Mean friendliness score vs. sex has the same trend as the previous social variable. The average score for FO words for males and females was 3.08 and 3, respectively. For AO words, the scores were 3.33 and 4, respectively. Here, there was also a disproportionate representation of the groups: males = 6 and females = 23. As it stands, it seems like there is no correlation between sex and the linguistic variable. However, sex may be worth examining more. Some early sociolinguistic studies show that language variation does exist between the sexes for some linguistic variables. For example, Fischer's 1958 study showed that there is a difference in preference for the [n] ending versus the [ŋ] between girls and boys (Wardhaugh, 2010, pp. 166-167). Even though the difference in the French scores is slight, the gap for the AO scores is more considerable. If this pattern continues in a continuation study, when both groups have the same number of participants, and the difference between scores is significant, then there may be a correlation between sex and attitudes towards varying-origin words.

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Figure 3



Looking at the relationship between sentence scores and level of education, the trend of AO words having the highest mean score for each group diminishes. We see that as the level of education increases, the mean score for AO words decreases while the mean score for FO words stays about the same or increases. These results suggest that there may be a correlation between level of education and the linguistic variable. However, more analysis is needed to confirm the correlation as for each level of education, there was not an equal number of respondents.

Conclusion and Significance of the Study

From the data collected in this study, we cannot conclude with complete certainty that there is a lingering effect of French contact with the English language. Like any other research, you cannot confirm anything with one hundred percent certainty. However, the analysis of

average friendliness scores as it relates to respondents' levels of education holds promising information about society.

This analysis shows us that what society may be reacting to is formality and not loanwords per se. Words of French origin have integrated into the English language in such a way that the average person would not recognize it as being a loanword or having French roots. The visible component of these words is formality. In everyday conversation, the words of Anglo origin are more likely to be used than their French-origin counterparts. When talking to a colleague, one would probably choose to say, "I bought a new pair of shoes yesterday," over "I purchased a new pair of shoes yesterday." Since its introduction to English society, French had more formal usages, like affairs with royalty.

In modern times, this distinction in the formality of the two languages still exists. This distinction is possibly taught in our education systems. Students often hear from teachers that one does not write how they talk or how one talks at home is different from how one talks in more formal settings. These concepts are instilled in students early. As students further their education, their vocabulary expands to include more technical and formal terms. In these higher education settings, teachers and professors expect students to be familiar with these new terms and use them comfortably daily. More formal language becomes the norm of talking and impacts the way one evaluates the use of language around them. That is why it makes sense the friendliness score of French-origin words increases as the level of education increases.

Overall, all the data collected makes sense. One's environment has the most influence on their language. One's race/ethnicity does not relate to one's environment that much. Some races or ethnicities may populate specific parts of a city more than others, but that is about it.

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Socioeconomic status and education level determine the type of environment one is in more, thus affecting language use more. The role of sex is tricky and dependent on cultural and gender norms. Nevertheless, these norms can impact the environment one lives in and the language directed to them. That is why the variation in scores for education level and sex and the lack of score variation for race/ethnicity makes sense.

The conclusions made about society come from data collected from thirty-three participants. Because the amount of data is small, it can hardly represent society as a whole. In continuing this study, ensuring that there are more than thirty-three respondents is a top priority. If there are about 30 respondents for each subcategory of the social variables (e.g., thirty people with a Master's degree, thirty people with a high school diploma), then the conclusions drawn will be more sound.

Also, changing the format of the survey may be useful. The method of collecting results, the rating scale and the open-ended response section would remain the same because it worked well in collecting respondents' attitudes. However, the actual sentences given to respondents to score would change. The themes were not the same for both words in the pair. For example, for the word pair smell vs. odor, smell was paired with the theme of baking and odor with the theme of trash. The differences in themes could have influenced the scores given. To ensure that there is no influence from the sentences, making the themes the same for both words in the pair will help.

With these changes to the format of the study, maybe then we can confirm if society does perceive words of native-origin versus words of foreign-origin in their language differently.

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Moreover, we may be able to verify and whether this difference in perception affects one's outlook communities that speak a variety that uses these foreign-origin words either more or less.

Sources

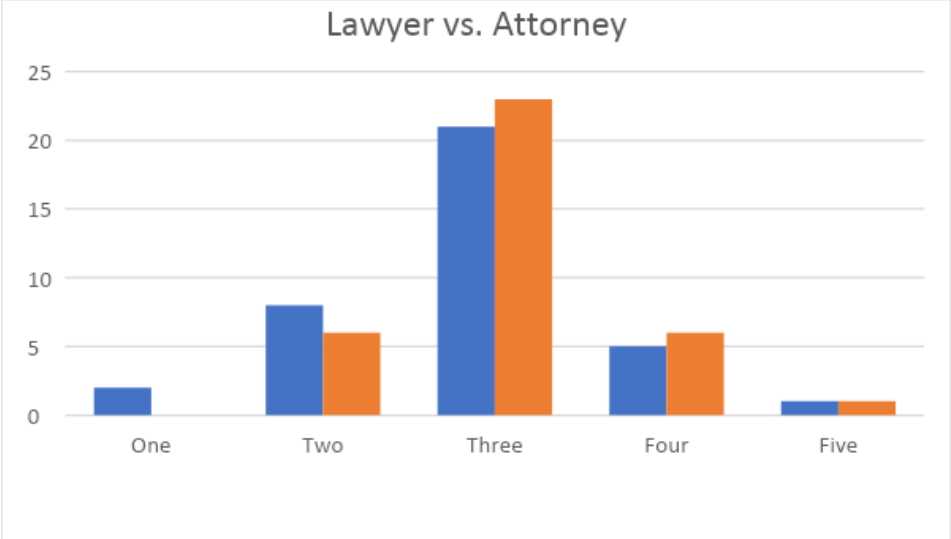
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Appendix A

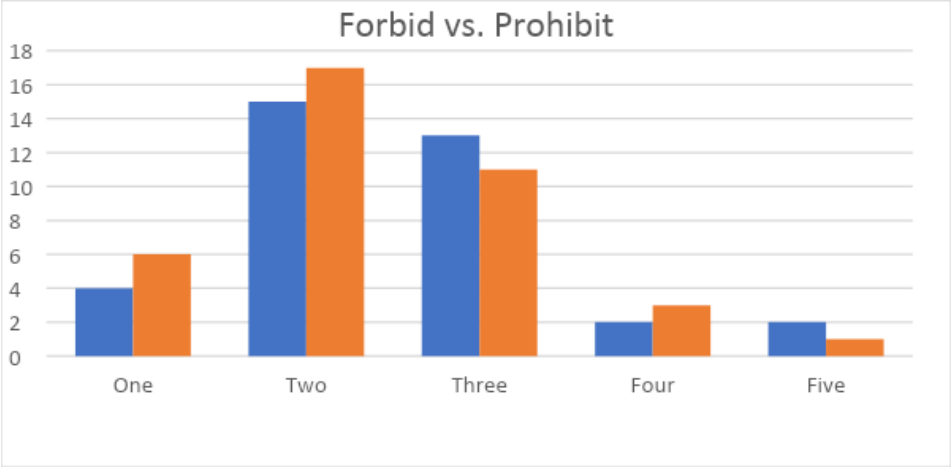
Individual Word Analysis
**Series 1 refers to words of Anglo-origin (blue)*
**Series 2 refers to words of French origin (orange)*

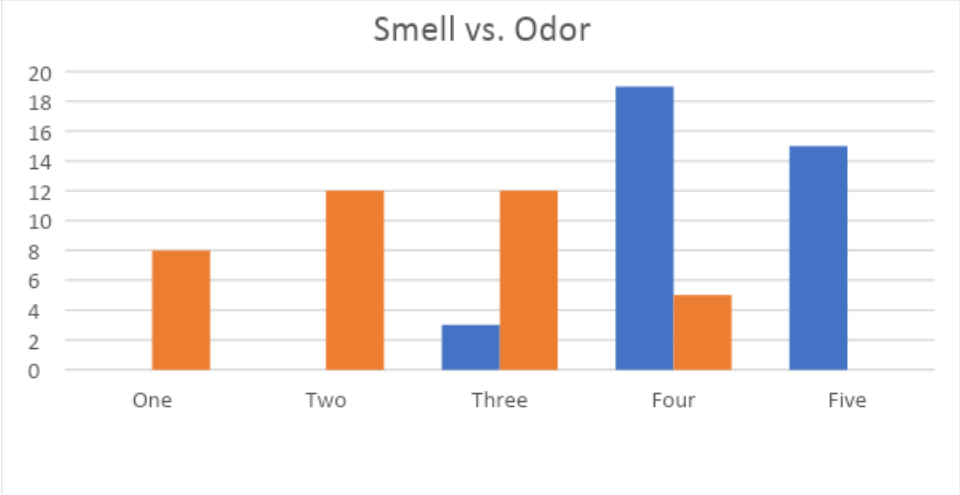


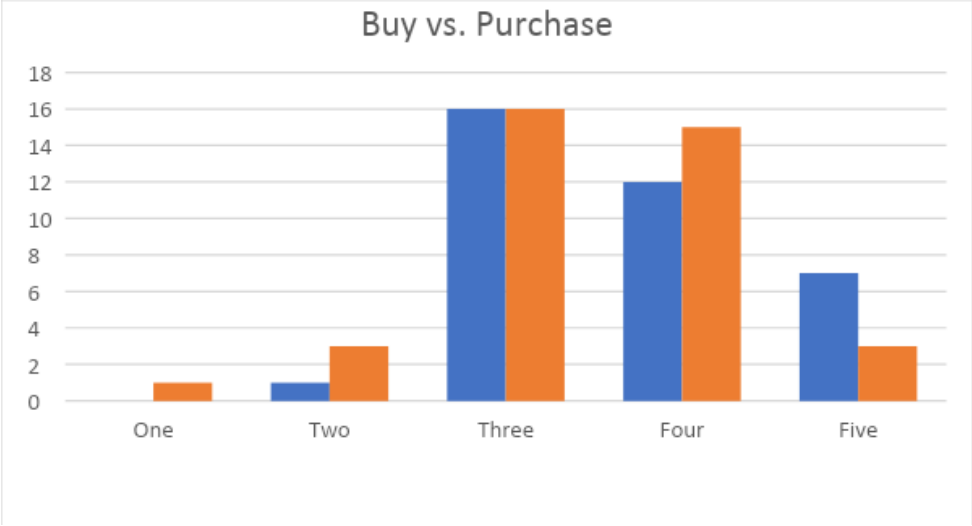


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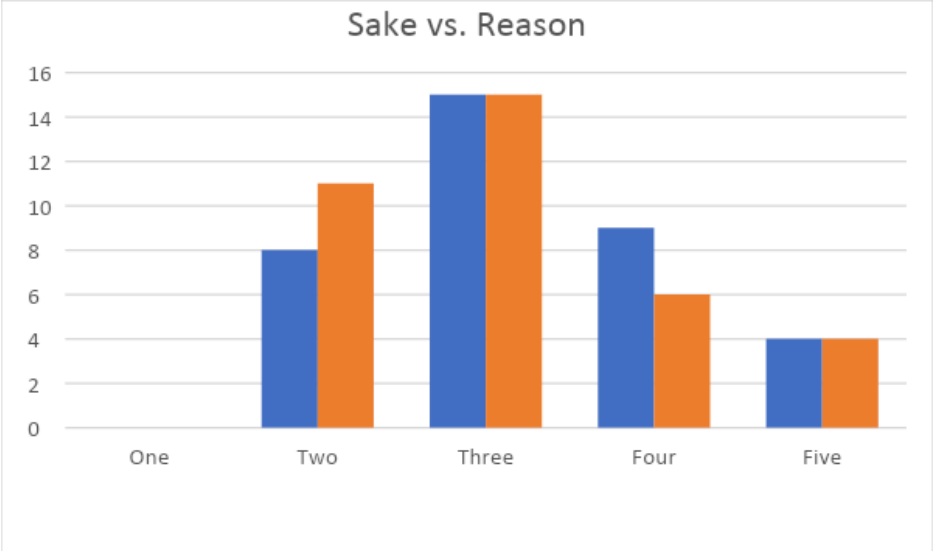


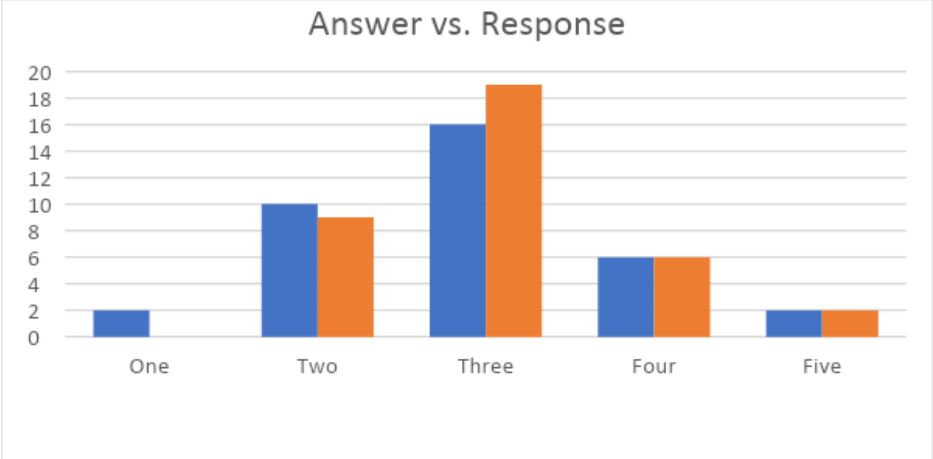


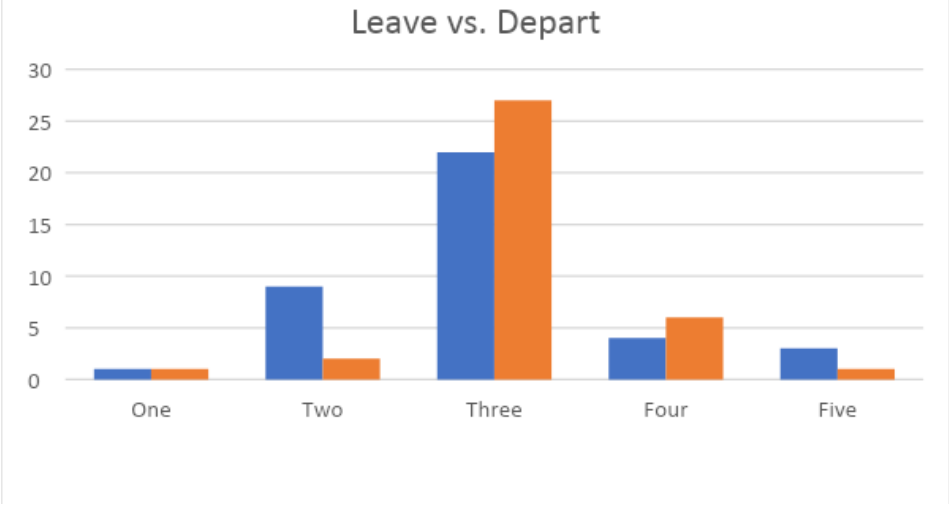


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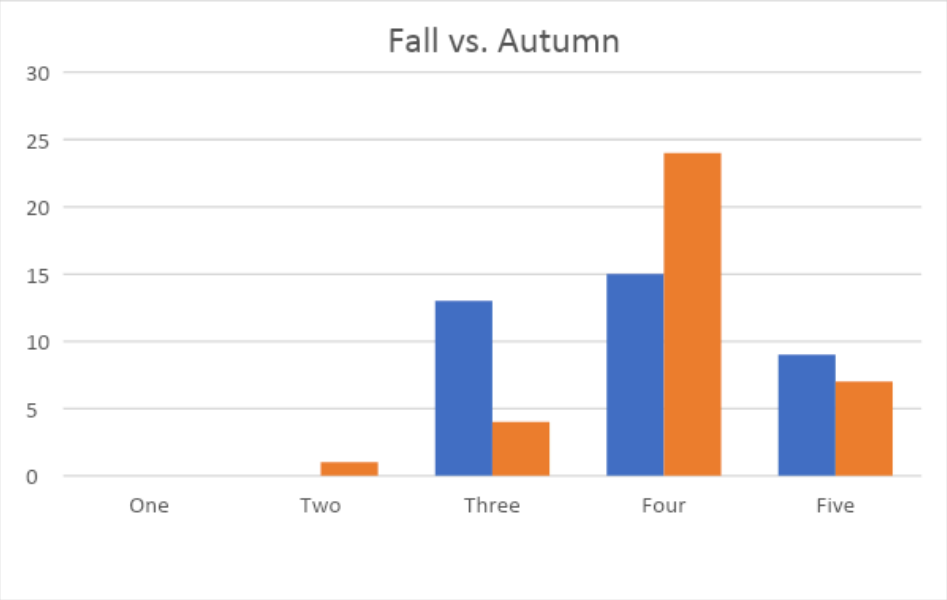






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Comments Left by Respondents to Describe Writer

	Anglo Origin (Left)	French Origin (Right)
Lawyer vs. Attorney	Rigid, closed, stern, well-educated, concise, distant, straightforward	Empathetic, straight to the point
Fall vs. Autumn	Eager, calm	Innocent, positive, observant, kind, simple, warm, welcoming, child-like
Want vs. Desire	Compassionate, social, empathetic, enthusiastic, demanding	Grotesque
Forbid vs. Prohibit	Strict, serious	Strict, serious, stern, factual, assertive, intimidating
Smell vs. Odor	Excited, kind, sweet, warm	Displeased, observant, disgusted
Buy vs. Purchase	Excited, loving, happy	Excited, eager, happy
Answer vs. Response	Impatient	Stoic, optimistic
Sake vs. Reason	Caring, cautious	Full of wisdom, optimistic
Leave vs. Depart	Demanding, anxious	Rigid, serious

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Sentences Used for Questionnaire

1. Lawyer The lawyer met with their client to discuss the case.
2. Autumn The color of autumn leaves is very pretty.
3. Want For my birthday, I want to have a birthday dinner with my family and friends.
4. Prohibit Smoking inside most places of business is prohibited.
5. Response John is waiting for a response to his job application.
6. Leave In order to make it to work on time, I need to leave home by 7:30 AM.
7. Reason The reason you should exercise is because it improves your mood
8. Buy My dad bought my mother flowers for Mother's Day.
9. Odor The odor of garbage is displeasing.
10. Attorney The attorney returned home late due to the difficult case.
11. Answer It is very time-consuming to find the answer for math problems.
12. Desire Children desire their parents' attention more than anything else.
13. Sake For the sake of safety, always buckle your seatbelt when in a moving vehicle.
14. Forbid Texting while driving is forbidden by the law.
15. Purchase I purchased a new computer during Cyber Monday sales.
16. Smell I love the smell of freshly baked cake.
17. Depart The train to New York departs at 6:30 tonight.
18. Fall Fall is my favorite season because of its cool weather.