

**French liaison:
How TV-presenters challenge the floating segment-hypothesis**

The liaison is by far the best known example of phonological variation in French. The classical normative approach distinguishes three cases: *obligatory* (*les [z] amis*), *facultative* (*c'est ([t]) un ami*) and *forbidden* (*et // un ami*) liaison (Delattre 1947). This categorization has been revisited by corpus phonology since the 1970s and renamed with the descriptive terms *categorical*, *variable* and *unattested* liaison (De Jong 1994, Bybee 2001, Durand/Lyche 2008). Not only the pronunciation of "normal" speakers was analysed, but also the public speech of professional speakers, both of intellectuals and radio journalists (Ågren 1973) and politicians (Encrevé 1988, Laks 2009). A surprising result of the Encrevé 1988 study was that the liaison without resyllabification (*c'est [t] // un ami*) was produced rather frequently, which led to the auto-segmental hypothesis of liaison consonants as floating segments.

We are now studying another type of professional speakers: TV presenters. Our corpus contains a total of 30 speakers (10 from France, Switzerland and Canada respectively) in three situations (news broadcasts, lecture of a text and spontaneous speech), about 12 hours in total. The data was coded following the conventions of the PFC protocol (*Phonologie du Français Contemporain*; www.projet-pfc.net, Durand/Laks/Lyche 2009, Detey et al. in press), allowing direct comparison to "normal" speakers of the PFC corpus. In contrast to the politicians described in Encrevé 1988, the TV presenters rarely produce liaisons without resyllabification. However, they present another particularity, regarding the facultative liaison: their behaviour is surprisingly homogenous. In some cases, the realization is rather categorical (e.g. *est [t]* in the PFC text), in others, it is unattested (e.g. *toujours //*). While these results confirm the PFC-findings for the spontaneous speech of "normal" speakers, where some facultative liaisons are very frequent and others very rare (Durand/Lyche 2008), a so clear cut division has not been observed yet in reading tasks. The explanation for this obviously lies in the professional background of our speakers. Our findings therefore suggest that variable liaisons are more a phenomenon of sociolinguistics than of phonology, a sort of hypercorrection inspired by the graphic form.

On a theoretical level, our empirical results provide evidence for the thesis of Laks 2005 that French liaison does not constitute a single phenomenon, but two different ones: firstly, the categorical liaison can be interpreted as a morphological prefix or part of a construction, and secondly, the variable liaison can be considered as epenthesis from the (visual) graphic level. The latter can be seen as a socio-stylistic indicator, referring to orthographic knowledge, and at the same time to linguistic insecurity. In this perspective, the concept of floating consonants is reduced to some special contexts, in which it becomes a cognitive fundament (not only auditory but also visual representations).

Bibliography

- Ågren, J. (1973). *Étude sur quelques liaisons facultatives dans le français parlé de la conversation radiophonique*. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press.
- Bybee, J. (2001). *Phonology and Language Use*. Cambridge: CUP.
- De Jong, D. (1994). La sociophonologie de la liaison orléanaise. In: C. Lyche (ed.), *French Generative Phonology: Retrospective and Perspectives*. Salford: AFLS/ESRI, 95-130.
- Delattre, P. (1947). La liaison en français, tendances et classification. *The French Review* 21: 128-147.
- Detey, S. et al. (eds.) (in press): *Varieties of Spoken French*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Durand, J. and C. Lyche (2008). French liaison in the light of corpus data. *Journal of French Language Studies* 18: 33-66.
- Durand, J., Laks, B. and C. Lyche (2009). Le projet PFC: une source de données primaires structurées. In J. Durand, B. Laks and C. Lyche (eds.), *Phonologie, variation et accents du français*. Paris: Lavoisier/Hermes Science, 19-61.
- Encrevé, P. (1988). *La liaison avec et sans enchaînement. Phonologie tridimensionnelle et usages du français*. Paris: Seuil.
- Laks, B. (2005). La liaison et l'illusion. *Langages*, 158: 101-125.
- Laks, B. (2009): Dynamiques de la liaison (1908-1999). In: Baronian, L. and F. Martineau (eds). *Le Français d'un continent à l'autre*. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 237-267.