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*Enchaînement in non-liaison context in L1 and L2 French: a comparative study*

All second language (L2) learners of French are aware of the phenomenon of *liaison*, where a final latent consonant surfaces only in certain (socio)-linguistic contexts, when the following word starts with a vowel. This phenomenon is stressed in teaching from the early stages of instruction, which focuses on mandatory *liaison*. For example, in “les enfants” (the children), the “s” is pronounced as [z], but would be silent if the noun started with a consonant. Crucially, the latent [z], when anchored to the melody, becomes the onset of the next syllable (following word), which means that the *liaison* is *enchaînée* (linked). This phenomenon of *enchaînement* can also happen independently of *liaison* contexts, with words that end in a fixed final consonant, when the following word starts with a vowel. There are subtle differences between these *enchaînement* contexts: in case of hesitation, *liaison* contexts will usually result in *enchaînement*, whereas non-*liaison* contexts will most likely not. Low fluency thus does not favor *enchaînement*.

The *enchaînement* is a result of the French language preferring the syllable structure CV (consonant-vowel, 76%), which is different from English (40%) (Delattre & Olsen, 1969). The task of the L2 learners has multiple challenges: deciding when a final consonant is latent vs. fixed, and resyllabification with a pronounced final consonant. Previous L2 studies focused mostly on the *liaison* phenomenon (see Wauquier, 2009, for a summary of various production and perception studies) noting that a big proportion of *liaison* in L2 French is realized without *enchaînement* (Mastromonaco, 1999; Thomas, 2004), which is different in child acquisition (Wauquier, 2009).<sup>1</sup> However, studies usually do not focus on *enchaînement* on its own, in non-*liaison* contexts, which is the purpose of the current investigation.

This study discusses data obtained from a group of L1 English students ( $n=16$ ) enrolled in French phonetics (a 400-level course). Pre-test and post-test analysis will indicate if awareness of the phenomenon has an influence on the proportion of *enchaînement* realization, compared to a baseline of native speakers (NSs) of French ( $n=15$ ). For the group of L2 learners, *enchaînement* was introduced early in the semester, with and without *liaison*. There were frequent listening/perception activities to train the students in its identification, as well as regular transcription activities that required syllable restructuring, in addition to oral practice. Furthermore, it was tested on the mid-term and the final exam. Therefore, awareness of *enchaînement* was not simply operationalized as a topic mentioned in passing, but it was an integral part of their training in French phonetics.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to mention that in political speech, *liaison non-enchaînée* is very common. However, this is not part of the typical input the L2 learners are exposed to, as it is not typical in L1 acquisition or production either. In fact, as per Wauquier (2009), the optional *enchaînement* in L1 acquisition (in *liaison* context) is associated with the acquisition of pragmatic competence.

The pre-test and post-test consisted of reading and recording of approximately 30 sentences each, containing 18 potential cases of *enchaînement* in non-*liaison* context each. The participants were not aware of the purpose of the study<sup>2</sup>. The examples were not the same, but they were very similar in terms of syntactic context, and *liaison* or *enchaînement* consonant. For example, the pre-test contained example 1, whereas the post-test contained the corresponding example 2, where [t] is the *enchaînement* consonant. A short dialogue between the researcher and the participant was recorded for the pre-test and the post-test as, to compare the results between sentence recording (usually self-monitored) and spontaneous speech.

1) sept élèves - [sɛ.te.lɛv] (seven students)

2) sept étudiants – [sɛ.te.ty.djã] (seven students)

Analysis of the sentence reading results indicate that the NSs of French produced the *enchaînement* in 93.7% and 94.07% of the cases possible for the pre-test and post-test respectively, difference that was not significant. They produced the final fixed consonant 100% of the time in both the pre-test and post-test. Given their NS status, it was highly expected that this group would have similar patterns in the pre-test and post-test. In contrast, the L2 learners in the phonetics course produced the *enchaînement* in 48.6% of the cases possible on the pre-test and 63.5% of the cases possible on the post-test, difference that was significant,  $t(15)=4.402$ ,  $p=0.001$ . The L2 learners produced the final stable consonant in 91.66% of the time in the pre-test and 94.09% of the times in the post-test, difference that was not significant,  $t(15)=1.192$ ,  $p=.252$ . When the potential *enchaînement* contexts were adjusted for the numbers of cases in which the final stable consonant was pronounced by the L2 learners<sup>3</sup>, the difference between the pre-test and post-test is the following : 53.03% and 67.52% respectively, difference that is significant,  $t(15)=3.563$ ,  $p=0.003$ .

The data obtained will be also compared with another group of L2 learners enrolled in a French literature or French grammar 400-level course, to elucidate if simply exposure to more of the relevant input could have the same effect on *enchaînement* production in the pre-test and post-test. A preliminary analysis indicates that the average *enchaînement* realization changed minimally (52% to 56%, ns). However, the results seem to indicate a lot of individual variability. The data will be also discussed with respect to item types, to determine if some contexts are more susceptible to improvement than others. Fluency will be also considered, given that hesitation (similarly to lower fluency) would not favor resyllabification in non-*liaison* context.

### References:

Delattre, P., & Olsen, C. (1969). Syllabic features and phonic impression in English, German, French and Spanish. *Lingua*, 22, 160-175.

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<sup>2</sup> The pre-test and post-test were designed to cover a large variety of features of French pronunciation and were part of regular teaching. Both the pre-test and pre-test were very low stakes, to ensure comparable results.

<sup>3</sup> This adjustment was necessary because if a participant does not anchor to the melody a final stable consonant (that should be always anchored), then the *enchaînement* context is essentially compromised.

Mastro Monaco, S. (1999). *Liaison in French as a Second Language*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto.

Thomas, A. (2004). Phonetic norm versus usage in advanced French as a second language. *International Review of Applied Linguistics* n° 42, 365-382.

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