

Why are there more *pataquès* in French folk songs? The example of postverbal *pataquès*

In an ongoing project we focus on French *liaison*, a “sandhi phenomenon which involves the presence or absence of a consonant at the boundary between two words [...]: more specifically, the consonant may appear when Word-2 is vowel initial, but is absent when Word-1 or Word-2 is uttered in isolation” (Durand & Lyche, 2016: 363-364) and *pataquès*, i.e. the realization of *liaison* in unexpected contexts such as: *Je reviendrai* [z] *au pays* ‘I will return to my home country’, where no consonant is expected, or *Le plus jeune des trente chantait* [z] *une chanson* ‘The youngest of the thirty was singing a song’, where another consonant, [t], could have been expected. Our work is based on a corpus of traditional folk songs, the Jean Dumas collection¹, recorded in the 1960s in Central France, which come from an ethnomusicologist database. The songs are progressively being transcribed on CLAN (Computerized Language ANalysis, MacWhinney, 2014), then pre-annotated for *liaison* based on orthographic clues (later manually checked) thanks to a tool developed for the purpose of our research (Badin, 2019). This time-saving tool also provides lemmatization, PoS-tagging and metadata containing singers’ personal information for each token.

Liaison has been extensively studied in various theoretical frameworks that can be briefly summarized in two different approaches: a formal phonological one (Encrevé, 1988; Wauquier-Gravelines, 2005; Scheer, 2006) and a constructionist one (Bybee, 2001; Côté, 2005; Eychenne & Laks, 2017). The latter approach that is adopted here. Our aim is to understand why *pataquès* are more common in folk songs (3.55%; 105/2959) compared to corpora previously investigated (French speakers worldwide: MoDyCo & RUG, 2017 (0.06% (25/41946) in conversations and 0.24% (29/12296) in a reading task); child productions in parent-child interactions: LRL, 2017 (2.61%; 60/2296); etc.). In a usage-based perspective, we see *pataquès* as a peripheral phenomenon that is part of the same system as *liaison*, the core phenomenon. In this framework, grammar is not seen as an abstract structure underlying language use but as “the cognitive organization of one's experience with language”, strongly tied to the person's previous linguistic experience, in which every speaker takes part in organizing the grammar of the whole speech community (Bybee, 2006). Our singers’ experience (as singers/hearers) can thus influence their productions, or more specifically, their realization of *liaison* and *pataquès*.

¹ Available online at: <http://patrimoine-oral.org/dyn/portal/index.seam?aloId=11898&page=alo&fonds=&cid=1535>.

Observing the organization of the *liaison* system, we decided to first focus on a specific context: the construction Verb + X, in which not only the *liaison* consonants [z] and [t] can be produced but also *pataquès* occurrences. *Liaison* realization is higher in postverbal contexts in folk songs (57%; 312/547) than in contemporary conversations (17%; 2055/12051) as well as *pataquès* realization (10%; 57/547 vs 0.25%; 30/12051). This appears to be a common phenomenon in French traditional folk songs, which were orally transmitted without the normative pressure that contemporary singers may face. Outside of any sociolinguistic considerations, it thus seems that because the singers hear more *liaisons* than in other corpora, they also produce these *liaisons* in unexpected postverbal contexts.

References:

- Badin, Flora. 2019. *Liaisons sous Python*.
- Bybee, Joan. 2001. "Frequency effects on French liaison". *Typological studies in language* 45: 337-60.
- Bybee, Joan. 2006. "From usage to grammar: The mind's response to repetition". *Language*, 711-33.
- Côté, Marie-Hélène. 2005. « Le statut lexical des consonnes de liaison ». *Langages*, n° 2: 66-78.
- Durand, Jacques, and Chantal Lyche. 2016. "Approaching variation in PFC: the liaison level."
- Encrevé, Pierre. 1988. *La liaison avec et sans enchaînement: phonologie tridimensionnelle et usages du français*. Travaux linguistiques. Paris: Seuil.
- Eychenne, Julien, and Bernard Laks. 2017. « La Liaison En Français Contemporain: Normes, Usages, Acquisitions ». *Journal of French Language Studies* 27 (01): 1-12.
- LRL. 2017. *ALIPE (Acquisition de la Liaison et Interactions Parents Enfants)*. <https://hdl.handle.net/11403/alipe-000853/v1.1>.
- MacWhinney, Brian. 2014. *The CHILDES project: Tools for analyzing talk, Volume I: Transcription format and programs*. Psychology Press.
- Majorano, Marinella, Chiara Rainieri, et Paola Corsano. 2013. "Parents' child-directed communication and child language development: a longitudinal study with Italian toddlers". *Journal of Child Language* 40 (4): 836-59.
- MoDyCo, and RUG. 2017. *PFC - Phonologie du Français Contemporain*. <https://hdl.handle.net/11403/pfc/v1>.
- Scheer, Tobias. 2006. « Le squelette, le double flottement et les noyaux vides ». Paris.

Wauquier-Gravelines, Sophie, and Virginie Braud. 2005. « Proto-déterminant et acquisition de la liaison obligatoire en français ». *Langages*, n° 2: 53-65.