

Intra-grammar variation and vowel deletion in Canadian French

Many of the most studied processes of French phonology have to do with vowel-vowel sequences: they either seemingly serve to create hiatus (h-aspiré: Boersma, 2005; Gabriel and Meisenburg, 2005) or to avoid it (liaison: Chevrot *et al.*, 2005 and references therein). These processes are generally understood to involve some variability, but previous studies have tended to conflate inter- and intra-speaker variation. To what extent true intra-grammar variation is involved is therefore not clear. In this research on hiatus in Canadian French, I focus on intra-speaker variation in order to discover the extent to which the apparent variability needs to be accounted for within a single grammar.

I base my research on a corpus I have constructed that is uniquely suited to addressing the scope of intra-speaker variation. It contains a large number of high-quality recordings of three young female speakers engaged in informal conversation in a variety of settings, drawn from web extras from a Québécois reality television series. This data shows evidence of robust variation within individual speakers. Single speakers produce both sequences with hiatus and without in similar and identical environments, as in (1) and (2).

(1) *hiatus:* [jãnaœ] il y en a un [...] ‘there is one [...]’ (I/4/33)

(2) *diphthongization:* [jãnaœ̃] il y en a un [...] ‘there is one [...]’ (I/4/4)

Furthermore, the same speaker may make use of a variety of anti-hiatus repairs (including diphthongization, coalescence, vowel deletion, glide formation and insertion) within the same context. For the purposes of this poster, I focus on vowel deletion.

I present a systematic analysis of a single speaker (with data from additional speakers as validation) in light of Casali’s (1997, 1998) work on vowel deletion. The focus of his research is on uncovering the factors that determine which of two vowels in a potential hiatus sequence will be deleted. The cross-linguistic tendencies found in his work are generally borne out in my data: all else being equal, there is a preference for deleting V1 rather than V2, preserving vowels from lexical words/morphemes and preserving monosegmental morphemes.

However, no single constraint ranking available within his analysis accounts for all the data: there is true variation at work in terms of the choice of vowel to delete (cf. (3) & (4)), as well as whether hiatus or vowel deletion will surface ((5) & (6)).

(3) *V1 deletion:* /pa#avwar/ -> [pavwar] pas avoir ‘to not have’ (I/3/79)

(4) *V2 deletion:* /va#ale/ -> [vale] va aller ‘will go’ (I/M/25)

(5) *hiatus:* [ʒey] j’ai eus ‘I had’ (I/4/21)

(6) *V1 deletion:* [ʒy] j’ai eu ‘I had’ (I/12/24)

Moreover, in a discourse context, there is the potential for underlying sequences made up of multiple vowels (as in (7) for example), which may be realized in more than one way.

(7) *glide formation & V deletion:* /si#i#a#œ̃/ -> [sjœ̃]
s’il y a un [...] ‘if there is a [...]’ (I/13/16)

To deal with this intra-grammar variation, I compare the extent to which various approaches to variability within Optimality Theory (crucial non-ranking (Anttila, 1997), the selection of ‘non-optimal’ candidates (Coetzee, 2006) and stochastic evaluation (Boersma and Hayes, 2001)) can be incorporated into the framework set out by Casali. Overall, these findings provide a new type of evidence to support the tendencies identified by Casali as well as a demonstration that true intra-grammar variation is at play for hiatus in Canadian French.

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