

***French liaison in real life:
what filled pauses in conversational speech tell us about the status of liaison consonants***

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French liaison involves the realization of a consonant (liaison consonant = LC) in sequences Word1-LC-Word2, with the conditions that Word2 is vowel-initial and LC does not appear in Word1 and Word2 in isolation (1)

- (1) *les amis* [le-z-ami] ‘the friends’ vs. *les* [le] *amis* [ami]

Two of the more challenging issues of this complex multifaceted process concern the lexical status of LCs (final of Word1, initial of Word2, morphemic, epenthetic, part of larger constructions; see Côté 2011 for a review) and the heterogeneity of the phenomenon in terms of frequency and mode of realization, which questions its unity. In these debates, certain types of data have played a particular role. Liaison without *enchaînement*, in particular, has been mobilized in favor of traditional analyses that place LCs at the end of Word1 (Encrevé 1988; Scheer et al. 2015). Conversely, liaison consonants separated from Word1 by an intonational boundary support competing analyses (Ågren 1973; Morin & Kaye 1982; Lucci 1983; Green & Hintze 1988; Tranel 1990; Post 2000; Morin 2003; Miller & Fagyal 2005). This is particularly the case in epenthetic structures (3) and in right-hand dislocated constructions (4) (Tranel 1990; Côté 2005; Plénat 2008).

- (3) *un robuste, mais petit*, [t]enfant (Morin 2003) ‘a small, but strong, child’

- (4) *j'en ai un*, [n]ami ‘I have one of them, friend’

Liaison separated from Word1, though the mirror image of liaison without *enchaînement* separated from Word2, has not received the same attention, no doubt because of the rarity and specificity of these constructions. In fact, we should be making a triple opposition between the default liaison, which is attached to both Word1 and Word2, liaison separated from Word2 (called ‘without *enchaînement*’) and liaison separated from Word1.

This paper aims to contribute to the issue of the lexical status of liaison by examining a new type of data: Word1-LC-Word2 sequences containing a filled pause, where the LC may be omitted (2c), realized before the filled pause (separated from Word2; 2a) or after the filled pause (separated from Word1; 2b).

- (2) *les euh amis* a. [le-z-œ-ami] b. [le-œ-z-ami] c. [le-œ-ami] ‘the uh friends’

More than a 1000 occurrences of liaison-triggering Words1 followed by a filled pause (*euh*, *eum*) and a vowel-initial Word2 were extracted from 350 hours of conversational Canadian French taken from the PFC corpus (Durand et al. 1999; Côté & Saint-Amant Lamy 2023). LCs are realized on average in 13% of contexts (131/1021), but the rate of realization varies greatly across liaison contexts, ranging from 0% to 78%. When realized, LCs appear after the filled pause in 65% of cases (85/131). This corresponds to the default prosodic affiliation of LCs, which syllabify with the initial vowel of Word2, but challenges the traditional analysis of LCs as belonging to Word1. LCs occur before the filled pause only in the presence of specific factors (articulatory, morphological, semantic) which strengthen the link between the LC and the preceding word.

I adopt a constructionist approach to liaison (Bybee 2000, 2001), whereby liaison consonants (LC) are part of specific constructions Word1-LC-Word2, but not lexically attached to either word. In the presence of a filled pause, LCs are realized with the word that presents the stronger attracting factors, with the prosodic factor favoring Word2 by default. This is reminiscent of

Bertinetto et al.'s (1994, 2007) approach to syllable boundaries, which fall at points of minimal intersegmental cohesion. This proposal naturally accounts for liaison without *enchaînement* (Encrevé 1988; Scheer et al. 2015), where orthography strengthens the association of LCs with Word1. Liaison is thus compatible with a unified construction-based representation, with heterogeneity in the position of LCs following from the variety of factors susceptible to attract LCs toward Word 1 and Word2.

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