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Norm and Ideology in Spoken French

A Sociolinguistic History of Liaison

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Part I

Models



1

Ideology and Language Change

1.1 Kroch's Model of Language Variation

In a seminal article published in *Language and Society* in 1978, Anthony Kroch appeared to question one of the core tenets of linguistics. The axiom 'Linguistics is descriptive, not prescriptive' had become as much a *raison d'être* as a guiding principle for a discipline determined to challenge language-related prejudice. Linguists generally, and sociolinguists in particular, had been at pains to stress the equality of all varieties, and reject folk-linguistic stereotypes associated with regionally or socially defined speaker groups. So when Kroch observed, citing evidence from Labov's famous (1966) New York City survey, that 'prestige dialects require special attention to speech' and 'non-prestige dialects tend to be articulatorily more economical than the prestige dialect' (1978: 19–20), he was acutely aware that his views could be characterised as reviving prescriptive stereotypes of 'lazy' working-class usage.

As he made clear, however, Kroch's intention was not in any way to be judgmental or prescriptive. In claiming that 'working-class speech is more susceptible to the processes of phonetic conditioning than the prestige dialect' (p.18), Kroch was simply arguing that language change has an ideological component which, however inconvenient it might be, could no longer be ignored. While working-class speech follows 'natural' phonetic conditioning processes,¹ higher status groups, he claimed, actively

¹For a definition of 'natural' he cites principles of 'naturalness' presented by Miller (1972) and Stampe (1972); on 'naturalness' in non-standard varieties see also Anderwald (2011).

resist these same processes in order to maintain social distinction (1978: 30):

Our position, as stated earlier, is that prestige dialects resist phonetically motivated change and inherent variation because prestige speakers seek to mark themselves off as distinct from the common people and because inhibiting phonetic processes is an obvious way to do this. Thus, we are claiming that there is a particular ideological motivation at the origin of social dialect variation. This ideology causes the prestige dialect user to expend more energy in speaking than does the user of the popular vernacular.

Presenting evidence from a range of studies, Kroch cites three examples of phonetic change, namely (i) consonantal simplification (ii) vocalic processes of chain shifting and (iii) assimilation of foreign phonemes to a native pattern, all of which, he argues, are further advanced in non-standard varieties. Among higher status groups, by contrast, resistance to such linguistic processes demands a particular effort 'motivated not by the needs of communication but by status consciousness' (p. 19), which procures social advantage for the user. Linguistic conservatism on the part of elite groups, viewed by Kroch as the embodiment of their ideological value-system, had also been observed by Bloomfield (1964 [1927]: 393–94) half a century earlier:

These dialects are maintained by social elites and such elites are by and large conservative. The use of conservative linguistic forms is for them a symbol of their whole value system. From this standpoint the conservatism of the literary language has basically the same source as that of the spoken prestige dialect, since the standards of the literary language are set by the elite.

Kroch's emphasis on the ideological dimension has been challenged in recent years by commentators who associate linguistic conservatism not with ideology, but with isolation (see especially Trudgill 1992, 2011). Isolation may even promote the very opposite of the simplifying changes Kroch associates with low-status speakers. Milroy and Margrain (1980), for example, highlight the exceptional phonological complexity of the

working-class vowel system of English in Belfast, a relatively peripheral city within the United Kingdom in which close-knit communities inhabit what Milroy (1980) describes as ‘urban villages’. Andersen (1988) has noted the prevalence of ‘exorbitant phonetic developments’ in isolated communities, such as *kugv* (‘cow’) /ku:/ > /kigv/ in Faroese (see Trudgill 2011: 153), which again appear to run counter to the expectations of Kroch’s model. One can also, moreover, point to counter-examples within the evidence which Kroch himself cites. He notes, for example, that /r/-deletion in New York is a simplifying change which, according to Labov’s (1966) evidence, is both further advanced among working-class speakers and stigmatised by elite groups. Within England, however, the pattern is reversed: the prestige accent RP (Received Pronunciation) is notably non-rhotic, while some low-status varieties retain non-prevocalic /r/; similar remarks apply to ‘HAPPY-tensing’ in many British English varieties, where replacement of a lax unstressed final vowel by a tense one results in increased articulatory effort. But Kroch is careful not to claim that ‘regular phonological processes can all be reduced to simplification of some sort’ (p.23, fn. 9), and among the ‘established prestige dialects’ to which he restricts his remarks, his model has a clear and obvious relevance to the case of standard French, a language which has probably seen more rigid top-down codification than any other.

1.2 The ‘Least Effort’ Principle

Similar observations had certainly not been lost on French commentators. Kroch himself (p.18, fn.4) cites Schogt (1961: 91), who had drawn attention to class-based differences in speech, and notably the conservatism of upper-class varieties, contrasting ‘la langue populaire riche en innovations, qui a pour elle le grand nombre, et la langue des classes aisées, qui est plus conservatrice et qui s’impose par son prestige’. In similar vein, simplifying tendencies in working-class speech had been subsumed in a broad ‘principe du moindre effort’ or ‘least effort principle’,²

²The term ‘loi du moindre effort’ in the context of the French language appears to have been first used in a little-known article by Léon Bollack (1903; see Hornsby and Jones 2006), who identifies

which had been central to at least two descriptive works (Bauche 1920; Guiraud 1965) on *français populaire* (broadly conceived as the working-class speech of Paris),³ as well as strongly influencing Frei's (1993 [1929]) *La Grammaire des Fautes*. The least effort principle in these works is not restricted to phonetic processes as for Kroch, and includes for example the elimination of inflectional redundancy which distinguishes spoken French from the formal written code: *les petites princesses arrivent* for example has four suffixal plural markers (underlined) in writing, but only one marker *les* [le] in speech. Informal deletion of the negative particle *ne* (e.g. 'je sais pas' for 'je ne sais pas') is known to be more common in working-class than in middle-class speech (see Ashby 1981; Coveney 2002: 55–90), and can be understood again in terms of the least effort principle, in that it reduces the number of explicit markers of negation from two (*ne* and *pas*) to one (*pas*). The same principle can be seen to have been extended further in the colloquial, and still highly stigmatised, *t'inquiète !* for *ne t'inquiète pas !*, where both *ne* and *pas* can be deleted because word order in the case of the negative imperative is itself a marker of negation (contrast the positive imperative *inquiète-toi !*, where the pronoun follows rather than precedes the verb).

Echoes of Kroch's claims regarding the conservatism of elite groups are also to be found in prescriptive works. The *Avant-Propos* (p.V) to Fouché's (1959) *Traité de prononciation française* (which, the author notes, is based on investigations 'dans divers milieux cultivés de la capitale'), for example, recalls Kroch's comments on ideology and the phonetic assimilation of loan words:

Mais déjà pour certains exemples, la prononciation à la française a provoqué chez plusieurs de nos informateurs un léger sourire et parfois davantage. Nous pensons en particulier au nom propre anglais *Southampton*, prononcé à la française *Sou-tan-pton* ou *Sou-tan-pton(e)*. C'est qu'un nou-

simplifying tendencies with 'éléments transformistes' destined to overcome the conservatism of standard French (in similar vein, Frei 1929 would see non-standard French as 'français avancé', heralding the standard language of the future). Bollack's focus, however, was on writing rather than speech, and his use of the term is not linked to social class or ideology.

³And, by extension, francophone France more generally: 'le français populaire de Paris est, avec quelques différences sans grande importance, le français populaire de toute la France, de la France, du moins, qui parle français' (Bauche 1920: 183).

veau courant s'est fait jour. En effet, on répugne de plus en plus dans les milieux cultivés à prononcer les noms propres étrangers d'introduction récente comme s'ils étaient français. Seule la masse continue l'ancienne mode.

Whether or not this represented an innovation as the author suggests (we will see evidence in Part II that this trend was in fact far from new), the evident disdain in *milieux cultivés* for regular processes of assimilation practised by *la masse* is laid bare in Fouché's account and is entirely consistent with Kroch's claims. In fact, Fouché's example neatly illustrates the way elite groups maintain social advantage through language. By resisting phonetic assimilation of loan words, members of privileged groups are able to signal a degree of familiarity with the donor languages, and thereby possession of a cultural capital unavailable to those without access to high-level education. As Bourdieu observes (1982: 51–52), the linguistic capital enjoyed by elite groups can only be procured at significant cost in terms of time, effort and (by implication) money:

La langue légitime doit sa *constance (relative) dans le temps* (comme dans l'espace) au fait qu'elle est continûment protégée par un travail prolongé d'inculcation contre l'inclination à l'*économie* d'effort et de tension qui porte par exemple à la simplification analogique (*vous faites* et *vous disez* pour *vous faites* et *vous dites*). (Author's emphasis.)

1.3 The Ideology of the Standard

Bourdieu's conception of *la langue légitime*, a totemised prescriptive standard imposed by state sanctioned elites, is best viewed in terms of what James and Lesley Milroy (2012) have termed 'the ideology of the standard'. Lesley Milroy (2003: 161; cited by Armstrong and Mackenzie 2012: 26) has defined a language ideology as 'a system for making sense of the indexicality inherent in language, given that languages and language forms index speakers' social identities fairly reliably in communities'. Like all ideologies, it is largely unconscious and represents an internalised set of beliefs which are perceived by those who hold them as 'received wisdom' or simply 'common sense'. As Armstrong and

Mackenzie (2012: 6) point out, the ideology of the standard in particular legitimises a hierarchical ordering of society and contains a normative element, directing the way speakers ought to behave. The standard itself ‘borrows prestige from the power of its users’ (*ibid.*), who have an interest in its maintenance and therefore generally oppose change as Kroch suggests. This ideology is extraordinarily powerful and pervasive in France, where, as Brunot (1966: III, 4) famously observed, ‘le règne de la grammaire.. a été plus tyrannique et plus long qu’en aucun pays’.⁴ In his seminal sociolinguistic account of standardisation in France, Lodge (1993: 156) sets out its three core tenets, which we summarise below:

1. The ideal state of a language is uniformity: non-standard language is improper and change is to be deplored.
2. The most valid form of the language is to be found in writing; speaking is considered to be ‘less grammatical’ than the written form and the purest form of the language is to be found in the work of the best authors.
3. The standard language, which happens to be used by those with most power and status, is inherently better than other varieties. Other sociolects, which happen to be used by those with little status and power, are seen as debased forms of the standard and can be dismissed as ‘sloppy’ or ‘slovenly’ ways of expressing oneself.

The first of these beliefs demonstrates why standardisation should be seen as an ideology rather than simply a process. As language is always subject to variation and change, the ideal of uniformity, manifested in a one-to-one relationship between correct form and meaning, can never fully be realised, even with the support of purist institutions, which attempt to eliminate variability from the legitimised variety. The most iconic of these institutions is the *Académie Française*, founded by Richelieu in 1635, the conservatism of which drew this stinging rebuke from Fénelon in an open letter in 1714: ‘On a appauvri, desséché et gêné notre

⁴ Cf. Klinkenberg (1992: 42) ‘le français offre sans doute l’exemple le plus poussé qui soit de centralisme et d’institutionnalisation linguistique’. The opening chapter of L.C. Harmer’s *The French Language* (1954) is appropriately entitled ‘A Nation of Grammarians’, a label attributed to Duhamel (1944: 50).

langue.’ In more recent times this conservatism has found expression in opposition to loan words from English, and resistance to feminisation of professional titles. The second core belief in particular, that the written language is inherently superior,⁵ is especially deep-rooted in France, and has notably hampered many an attempt to reform the orthographic system. In a culture which identifies French with its written form, reform proposals are not infrequently pilloried as attacks on the language itself (see Désirat and Hordé 1976: 218–20)⁶ and indeed the complexities of French spelling which make it so difficult to learn are held up as something of a virtue.⁷ Standard forms are seen not merely as correct, but also as inherently more beautiful than low-status variants. As we will see repeatedly below in respect of liaison, purist strictures are often defended in terms of the *harmonie* of the favoured forms, or the *cacophonie* of those proscribed, without any need being felt to explain how *harmonie* or *cacophonie* are defined.

The most steadfast defenders of the status quo tend, of course, to be those who have had the means, time and resources to master the complexities of the standard written norm. The minority who do so secure

⁵ Cf. Kroch (1978: 30):

The influence of the literary language on the spoken standard is one manifestation among others of a socially motivated inhibition of linguistic change. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that prestige dialects not only inhibit changes that violate written forms but also resist changes in such features as vowel quality long before those changes would cause noticeable contradictions between the written and the spoken forms.

⁶ The widely-held belief that ‘correct’ French is to be equated with its written form is neatly illustrated by a hypercorrection, and a purist response to it. In Etiemble’s famous (1964) broadside against Anglo-American loanwords, *Parlez-vous français?*, the singer Dalida is quoted as having said ‘je n’en ai pas prises [pʁiz]’ during a television interview, in what appears to have been an unsuccessful attempt to make a past participle agreement. Rather than comment on the inappropriateness to speech of what is essentially an arcane orthographical rule, formally inculcated through years of daily school *dictées* but rarely mastered by French native speakers, Etiemble (p. 282) excoriates this non-native French speaker for ‘une belle grosse faute contre notre syntaxe’. That a man of the left, and a champion of French independence from US capitalism, should find himself judging a relatively uneducated immigrant by the exacting orthographic standards of a privileged class does not appear to have been viewed at the time as in any way incongruous.

⁷ Ball (1997: 191–92) lists some of the more vitriolic responses to the proposed 1990 spelling reforms, which included the following from Yves Berger in the November 1990 edition of *Lire*: ‘Stupide, inutile, dangeureuse : c’est une entreprise qui relève de la pure démagogie, de l’esprit de Saddam Hussein’.

the considerable social advantages which accrue from the third core belief, that the standard variety is inherently superior. These include improved educational outcomes, enhanced employment opportunities, professional success, and even favourable treatment from medical professionals, who pay greater attention and offer more positive diagnoses to middle-class patients (see Bourdieu 1982: 45 fn.21). By contrast, those who do not are left in a state of linguistic insecurity which hampers their self-esteem and restricts life chances,⁸ and are subject to sanction by a normative establishment, whose primary purpose, for Bourdieu, is to maintain the value of the linguistic capital monopolised by elites (1982: 49):

La dépossession objective des classes dominées (...) n'est pas sans rapport avec l'existence d'un corps de professionnels objectivement investis du monopole de l'usage légitime de la langue légitime qui produisent pour leur propre usage une langue spéciale, prédisposée à remplir *par surcroît* une fonction sociale de distinction dans les rapports entre les classes et dans les luttes qui les opposent sur le terrain de la langue. Elle n'est pas sans rapport non plus avec l'existence d'une institution comme le système d'enseignement qui, mandaté pour sanctionner, au nom de la grammaire, les produits hérétiques et pour inculquer la norme explicite qui contrecarre les effets des lois d'évolution, contribue fortement à constituer comme tels les usages dominés de la langue en consacrant l'usage dominant comme seul légitime, par le seul fait de l'inculquer.

Central to Kroch's thinking is what Bourdieu above and elsewhere refers to as *distinction* (see especially Bourdieu 1979), that is the

⁸Gueunier et al. (1978) contrast attitudes among speakers in Tours, a city traditionally associated with 'good' French, with those observed in areas of linguistic insecurity such as Lille, where a working-class male informant bemoaned his own perceived inability to speak his native language (p.157):

Nous, les gars du Nord, on fout des coups de pied à la France ... s'appliquer, on peut y arriver, mais..on arrivera jamais à parler français, c'est pas vrai! ... Je pourrais aller à l'école pendant dix ans, ben j'arriverais jamais à parler le français.

maintenance and regular use by elite groups of various symbols of cultural capital, in this case prestige linguistic forms, which enable them to distance themselves socially from the majority of the population. Their capacity to do so depends on the inaccessibility to all but a privileged few of certain elements of the prestige norm. This in turn raises the question of what ‘inaccessible’ might mean in this context, to which thus far we have offered only a partial answer. For Kroch, elite groups are schooled to use variants associated with careful or prepared speech which are not subject to what he considers normal phonetic conditioning, and which therefore require greater thought and articulatory effort. Linguistic forms can, however, also be inaccessible to low-status groups because they can only be learned through formal education, to which they have restricted access.⁹ This is particularly true of those which (a) do not occur, or no longer occur, in speech and therefore are not acquired as part of mother-tongue competence and (b) require detailed knowledge of complex prescriptive rules, both of which are present in abundance in written standard French. In fact, such is the distance between informal spoken and formal written French that some scholars (e.g. Massot 2005, 2006; Hamlaoui 2011; Zribi-Hertz 2006, 2011) have proposed a diglossic model for modern French in which the L functions are fulfilled by a mother-tongue variety which Massot labels *français démotique* (FD), and the H functions by *français classique tardif* (FCT), an archaic variety which has to be learned via formal education. While the diglossia hypothesis remains controversial (see Coveney 2011 for critique),¹⁰ the maintenance in writing of moribund tense and mood forms (e.g. the past historic, past

⁹Citing the example of the French vowel system, which has undergone significant simplification from twelve to seven oral vowels, Armstrong and Mackenzie (2012: 19) link social distinction to maintenance of a conservative written standard, a theme we develop below:

The elements in the maximal twelve-vowel system, redundant in this linguistically functional view, continue however to serve a sociolinguistic purpose, as indeed is typical generally of ‘conservative’ elements in a linguistic system. This is facilitated in part by the fact that the functionally redundant elements in the twelve-vowel system have orthographic correlates, which are not equally accessible to all speakers.

¹⁰For a discussion of the diglossia hypothesis with respect to variable liaison, see Hornsby (2019).

anterior and imperfect subjunctive) which have long since been lost from the spoken language, together with a complex system of agreements and verb endings which are for the most part not realised in speech, is certainly consistent with Bourdieu's characterisation of standard French as 'une langue semi-artificielle' (1982: 51).

Bourdieu paints a picture of a linguistic marketplace in which the highest values accrue to the most inaccessible 'goods', namely those associated with a highly codified standard, against which all others are viewed as defective or devalued. This engenders a perpetual scramble for prestige in which the dominated seek desperately to increase their market value through acquisition of linguistic capital, while the dominant elites seek constantly to distance themselves from them by using forms to which only they have access. There are clear echoes here of Fischer's (1964: 286) views on the mechanism of language change, as quoted by Kroch (1978: 21):

Martin Joos (1952) (...) speaks of 'the phonetic drift, which was kept going in the usual way: that is, the dialects and idiolects of higher prestige were more advanced in this direction, and their speakers carried the drift further along so as to maintain the prestige-marking differences against their pursuers. The vanity factor is needed to explain why phonetic drifts tend to continue in the same direction; the "inertia" sometimes invoked is a label not an argument'. This protracted pursuit of an elite by an envious mass and the consequent 'flight' of the elite is in my opinion the most important mechanism in linguistic drift, not only in the phonetic drift which Joos discusses, but in syntactic and lexical drifting as well.

Within this 'marketplace', values are protected by a court of linguistic arbiters whose decisions are not to be questioned:

Nul n'est censé ignorer la loi linguistique qui a son corps de juristes, les grammairiens, et ses agents de contrôle, les maîtres de l'enseignement, investis du pouvoir de soumettre universellement à l'examen et à la sanction juridique du titre scolaire la performance linguistique des sujets parlants. (Bourdieu 1982: 27)

This ‘corps de juristes’ is, of course, rarely open about its role in maintaining social distinction, though the subjective social basis of judgement in Vaugelas’ (1970 [1647]) *Remarques sur la langue française* is set out clearly in the *Préface*, which links notions of *bon usage* both to a social elite, setting ‘la plus saine partie de la cour’ against ‘la lie du peuple de Paris’. There is, moreover, a disarming frankness about the Academy’s 1673 rejection of modest spelling reform proposals (see Chap. 3): ‘Généralement parlant, la Compagnie préfère l’ancienne orthographe, qui distingue les gens de Lettres d’avec les Ignorants et les simples femmes.’¹¹ Indeed, as seventeenth-century grammarians attempted to provide for French the fixity and prestige which would establish the language as a legitimate heir to Latin, the need for a complex set of rules accessible only to the few was never far from their minds. As Poplack et al. (2015: 16) observe, if French were to be taken seriously as a prestige language then, bluntly, it had to be difficult to master: ‘To achieve the required legitimacy, the language would need rules; apparently, the more intricate and dogmatic, the better.’

It would be hard to imagine an area of the prescriptive norm more subject to intricate and dogmatic rules than liaison, which makes it an ideal testing ground for Kroch’s model of variation and change. As we shall see in Chap. 3, liaison consonants recall a period when final consonants were generally pronounced: their variable retention in a limited range of environments would therefore seem to reflect linguistic conservatism. Non-realisation of final consonants, on the other hand, is consistent in at least two respects with simplifying processes associated with lower-status groups in Kroch’s model: the loss of a consonant in coda position firstly represents an overall reduction in articulatory effort, and secondly, by generalising the zero final consonant form to all contexts, it offers allomorphic regularisation. As the orthographic residue from a former pronunciation, liaison consonants are particularly favoured in styles which involve reading aloud (e.g. poetry recital), and elsewhere can be used by skilled speakers, for example in set-piece political speeches, to invoke the authority of the written word, which exerts inordinate power

¹¹Cited in ‘L’orthographe : histoire d’une longue querelle’: <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/lorthographe-histoire-dune-longue-querelle> (accessed 22.2.2020).

in the francophone world. The intricacies of liaison are generally mastered only by a highly literate elite, while presenting numerous pitfalls for the unwary or inexperienced. Mindful of these dangers, Passy (1906: 130), in his *Les Sons du Français*, a non-prescriptive work intended to further the cause of orthographic reform, references in a footnote a comment by a protagonist in Eugène Labiche's 1867 one-act vaudeville comedy *La Grammaire*: 'J'évite les liaisons. C'est prétentieux... et dangereux.'

It is worth recalling the original context of the play, which would have been familiar to much of Passy's audience. A relatively ill-educated former shopkeeper, François Caboussat, finds his social and political ambitions hampered by his problems with spelling. This was not the only Labiche play in which orthography figured prominently for comedic or satirical purposes (see Portebois 2006: 45–56), but it was the first to make spelling its central theme. Caboussat bemoans his own inability to form past participle agreements correctly, associating liaison very clearly both with elevated speech and the written word:

Je suis riche, considéré, adoré... et une chose s'oppose à mes projets... la grammaire française!... Je ne sais pas l'orthographe! Les participes surtout, on ne sait par quel bout les prendre... tantôt ils s'accordent, tantôt ils ne s'accordent pas... quels fichus caractères! Quand je suis embarrassé, je fais un pâté... mais ce n'est pas de l'orthographe! Lorsque je parle, ça va très bien, ça ne se voit pas... j'évite les liaisons... À la campagne, c'est prétentieux... et dangereux... je dis: "Je suis allé..." (Il prononce sans lier l's avec l'a.) Ah! dame, de mon temps, on ne moisissait pas dans les écoles... j'ai appris à écrire en vingt-six leçons, et à lire... je ne sais pas comment.

Caboussat perfectly exemplifies the *petit bourgeois* identified by Bourdieu, whose desperate attempts at social advancement are thwarted by a lack of linguistic or cultural capital. He also illustrates the ideological power of the written word in a country which still views writing as the norm and speech a poor deviation from it. Grammar in the mind of this socially aspirant individual is associated with writing and his perceived inability to speak correctly—not knowing for example how to form 'dangerous' linguistic liaisons or observe the rules of preceding direct object agreement—derives primarily from his difficulties with spelling. Its links

to an arcane orthographic system and complex set of prescriptive rules make variable liaison a prime locus of social distinction, strewn with traps for the unwary Caboussats of this world.¹²

As important as knowing the social rules is having the social confidence to know how and when to break them and thereby avoid ‘l’hypercorrection d’un parler trop châtié, immédiatement dévalué par une ambition trop évidente, qui est la marque de la petite-bourgeoisie de promotion’ (Bourdieu 1982: 56). Liaison is therefore as much of interest for the complexity of its prescriptive rules as for the social sanction associated with applying them too rigidly, a danger of which Passy (1906: 130) warns his readers:

L’emploi des liaisons varie considérablement selon le style et selon les personnes. Dans le langage littéraire on lie beaucoup plus que dans le style familier; mais ce sont surtout les instituteurs, les professeurs de diction, et encore plus les personnes peu instruites essayant de ‘parler bien’, qui introduisent des liaisons en masse. Parfois alors elles se trompent et emploient mal à propos (z) ou (t) comme son de liaison [*des cuirs, des velours*]¹³

1.4 Plan of This Book

By virtue of its complexity and opacity to outsiders, liaison merits examination in the context of the ideological model of Kroch and Bourdieu as outlined above. In the remainder of Part I we will present an established model of liaison and examine some of the theoretical and practical questions it raises, before considering some comparable phenomena in

¹² Cf. Bourdieu (1982: 42; fn. 18):

Seul le facultatif peut donner lieu à des effets de distinction. Comme le montre Pierre Encrevé, dans le cas des liaisons catégoriques, qui sont toujours observées par tous, y compris dans les classes populaires, il n’y a pas de place pour le jeu. Lorsque les contraintes structurales de la langue se trouvent suspendues, avec les liaisons facultatives, le jeu réapparaît, avec les effets de distinction corrélatifs.

¹³ Passy appears to suggest here that *cuir* and *velours* refer to false liaison involving [z] and [t] respectively. General usage has, however, settled on *velours* for [z] and *cuir* for [t].

contemporary English (Chap. 2). In Part II, we will offer a diachronic perspective, focusing in Chap. 3 on the loss of final consonants from the Late Latin period onwards, before examining in Chap. 4 the views of prescriptive grammarians, whose resistance to phonetic change created conditions in which, in Armstrong's (2001: 202) words:

The situation was ready for the imposition or consolidation by upper-class speakers of a linguistically arbitrary system; one that is not transparently rule-governed, but can only be learned through long immersion in the appropriate milieu. Clearly, the motivation for developing or maintaining such a system is to be able to distinguish members of the group from non-members. We can draw a parallel between variable liaison and any in-group code whose function is to mystify non-initiates.

Attention turns in Part III to the way in which speakers negotiate the complexities of variable liaison, drawing on research from over four decades. Chapter 5 considers liaison from a geographical perspective, while Chap. 6 examines some surprising and often contradictory findings from variationist studies which have explored its relationship with familiar extralinguistic factors such as class and gender. Chapter 7 reports on our own findings from the 'Four Cities' project, focusing particularly on differences between scripted and unscripted speech, before investigation in Chap. 8 of a very particular group of speakers, the so-called *professionnels de la parole publique*, whose use of liaison has long been known to diverge significantly from that of the general population. We will see throughout Part III that the complex and multi-faceted nature of liaison as a variable phenomenon makes broad brush generalisations dangerous, and forces the researcher to construct the bigger picture from small and often in themselves statistically insignificant pieces of data. In Part IV, we attempt to draw some general conclusions from the findings available, notably concerning the relationship between liaison and literacy, and in doing so lay the foundations for a twenty-first-century style model.

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2

What Is Liaison?

2.1 Definitions

Liaison is an external sandhi¹ or ‘joining’ phenomenon which involves the pronunciation of a normally silent word-final consonant before a vowel. It bears some similarities, both historically and synchronically, to such English phenomena as ‘linking *r*’ in non-rhotic dialects (e.g. *a pair /r/ of trousers*) and indefinite article allomorphy (*a pear/an apple*). It is of particular interest in French because of the complex conditions under which it may/may not be realised.

It should first be noted that French final consonants may be stable or unstable, and are not as uncommon as is sometimes supposed: Tranel (1987: 154–55), citing Juillard’s *Dictionnaire inverse de la langue française* (1965: 437–56), claims that consonant-final words in fact slightly outnumber those which end in a vowel. Stable consonants fall into two categories, the first of which emerged from the loss of final unstressed or ‘mute’ *e* (*e-muet*) in most varieties of French, including reference French (RF).² As Posner observes (1997: 263), this vestigial orthographic final

¹ A general term, originating from the work of Sanskrit grammarians, for the phonological modifications that occur between juxtaposed forms.’ (Brown and Miller 2013: 393).

² Detey et al. (2016: 56):

Over the last ten years, the expression *Reference French* (RF) has spread in the literature and often replaces *Standard French*. This label is often preferred for its ability to allow for a

vowel, still realised as schwa [ə] in some meridional French varieties, has been seen historically to ‘protect’ preceding consonants from the elision which might otherwise have taken place, as can be seen for example in *vase* [vaz], *bonne* [bɔn], *ingrate* [ɛ̃gʁat] (compare *vas* [va], *bon* [bɔ̃], *ingrat* [ɛ̃gʁa]). A second stable group comprises word-final consonants which either survived the large-scale erosion which took place between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries or were restored to pronunciation by grammarians at a later date (see Chap. 3), as in *chef* [ʃɛf], *dot* [dɔt] or *tir* [tiʁ]. Unstable consonants are realised either consistently or variably in prevocalic position but not prepausally or before a consonant, for example *les* [lez] *enfants* but *les* [le] *filles* or *mettez-les* [le]. Liaison in French denotes the realisation of these unstable consonants in prevocalic position, and represents a particular case of the wider phenomenon of forward syllabification or enchaînement in French,³ by which word-final consonants become the onsets of following word-initial ones (e.g. *chef impressionnant* [ʃɛ#fɛ#pʁɛ#sjɔ̃#nɑ̃]), which affects both stable and unstable final consonants.⁴ Liaison occurs non-variably in some contexts (e.g. *ils*-[z]-*ont*; *mon*-[n]-*ami*), and variably in others (e.g. *trop*-[p]/Ø-*aimable*; *les trains*-[z]/Ø-*arrivent*; see Sect. 2.2 below). For Fagyal et al. (2006: 65) liaison reflects a strong cross-linguistic tendency to avoid hiatus, that is to provide all syllables with an onset,⁵ which can even override grammatical considerations in some cases, for example in the suppletive use of masculine possessive adjectives with vowel-initial feminine nouns (*mon amie*; *son horreur*), or conversely the use of the demonstrative *cet* (homophonous in most varieties with the feminine form *cette*) before

plurality of ‘references’, thus avoiding the all too frequent focus on hexagonal French. On the other hand, just like Standard French, it remains an abstract set of features that speakers may come close to, depending on a number of social and geographic factors. (Authors’ emphasis.)

³ Delattre (1966a: 39) argues for a qualitative difference between the two in that the increase in articulatory tension in the case of liaison is marginally greater than for *enchaînement*: ‘L’union consonne-voyelle est donc plus étroite dans la liaison que dans l’*enchaînement*’.

⁴ Although a marginal phenomenon for most speakers, liaison without enchaînement (e.g. *j’avais un rêve* [ʒa.vɛz.ʁɛ.ʁɛv]) is possible and was a particularly common feature of political discourse in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see Encrevé 1988 and 8.4 below).

⁵ For an excellent discussion of syllabification in French, based on the maximum onset principle (see McMahon 2002: 111–12) and the sonority hierarchy, see Fagyal et al. (2006: 54).

vowel-initial masculine nouns (*cet homme*). But an explanation for liaison based solely or even largely on hiatus avoidance seems implausible given both the wide range of environments in which liaison does not occur, and evidence of an apparent decline in liaison in familiar usage (see Sect. 6.6 below).

Historically, liaison consonants represent vestigial realisations of word-final segments which have been lost in all but prevocalic environments. Liaison is blocked for a small, unproductive group of lexemes known inappropriately (for aspiration of orthographical *h* is no longer involved) as the *h-aspiré* set, consisting of fifth to eighth century CE Germanic borrowings which retained initial /h/. This consonant was later lost, leaving what amounts to an inaudible barrier to elision and liaison, setting this group apart from other orthographically *h*-initial lexemes, which follow the pattern of vowel-initial lexemes in these two respects (Table 2.1).

Liaison in contemporary French is traditionally seen to affect 6 consonants: /z/, /t/, /n/, /ʁ/, /p/, and /k/, as in the following examples (Table 2.2).

Liaison in contemporary French with /p/ is essentially limited to two adverbs *beaucoup* and *trop*, while liaison with /g/ is listed as a possibility only with *long* by Tranel (1987: 174) as an alternative to the canonical /k/⁶ in this context, which is seen as archaic. Voiceless /k/ has traditionally been preferred here in prescriptive works, recalling the position in Old French where, as in Germanic, final oral stops were devoiced (hence *grand* [t] *homme* in spite of a general tendency for masculine adjectives in liaison to correspond to the feminine form (here *grande* [gʁãd]). Devoicing affects the stops /d/ and /g/, but not /b/, which generally occurs either before mute *e* (see above) or in recent borrowings with a stable final consonant (*club*, *toubib*). No liaison occurs after final *-mb* sequences (e.g. *plomb*). Conversely, voiceless fricatives such as /s/ became voiced intervocalically, hence [z] not [s] in liaison contexts, giving potentially three forms: zero, voiced and voiceless consonant. This pattern can still be observed for the numerals *six* and *dix*, and until recently also for *neuf*,

⁶Tranel (1987: 174) recommends /k/ only in the context of *sang impur* in the French national anthem *la Marseillaise*, but notes that even here it is unnatural for most speakers as liaison after singular nouns is generally very rare in modern French.

Table 2.1 Liaison and elision with *h-aspiré* and non *h-aspiré* lexemes

<i>h</i> -initial	<i>h-aspiré</i> initial
l'homme	le hibou
l'haleine	la hache
les [lez] hirondelles	les [Ø] hiboux
cet hélicoptère	ce [Ø] héros

Table 2.2 Canonical RF liaison consonants

Liaison consonant	Examples	Liaison context
/z/	bons [z] amis soldats [z] américains les [z] enfants	plural adjective + noun plural noun + adjective plural determiner + noun
/t/	veut [t] -il? grand [t] homme ils arrivent [t] à l'heure	verb + clitic adjective + noun verb + complement
/n/	un/mon [n] accueil bien [n] aimable	article/possessive adjective + noun adverb + adjective
/ɛ/	léger [ɛ] accent aimer [ɛ] un enfant	adjective + noun infinitive + complement
/p/	beaucoup [p] aimé trop [p] aimable	adverb + complement
/k/-/g/	long [k/g] été sang [k/g] impur	adjective + noun set expression

where [v] is heard prevocally. Linking with /v/ however represents a case of enchaînement rather than liaison, because the final consonant is now stable and *neuf*[^{nœf}] is preferred preconsonantly to the archaic [^{nœ}]:

j'en ai six/dix/neuf [sis] [dis] [^{nœf}]
 six/dix/neuf personnes [si] [di] ([^{nœ}])
 six/dix/neuf ans [siz] [diz] [^{nœv}]

The most common liaison consonants are /z/, /n/ and /t/, in this order for the PFC corpus (see Sect. 6.3.1); other researchers have reported a different ordering, but generally /z/ occurs more frequently than /t/ (see Durand et al. 2011: 124).

Liaison is of particular interest to variationists for a number of reasons. Firstly and most obviously it is subject to a highly complex prescriptive

norm which even native speakers struggle fully to master. More importantly, it is a variable phenomenon which, as we shall see in Part 3, defies normal sociolinguistic assumptions, not least because it shows greatest variability in the formal usage of higher status groups, rather than in working-class vernacular. This, for Encrevé (1988: 46), makes it a *phénomène sociolinguistique inversé*:

Toutes les données connues et toute observation directe indiquent, en effet, que ce sont les locuteurs du français les plus scolarisés qui présentent le plus large système de variation sur la liaison. La partition traditionnelle entre liaisons obligatoires, facultatives et interdites, reprise à juste titre par tous les phonologues modernes, témoigne bien que, pour la liaison, même les tenants les plus stricts de l'homogénéité du bon usage n'ont pas pu renvoyer la variation à la ténèbre de la performance ou de l'agrammaticalité [...] la liaison oblige au contraire à chercher dans le « standard » la variation.

2.2 Delattre's Liaison Typology

As noted above, some liaisons are categorically made by all French native speakers, while others are variably realised. In a third set of environments, a final orthographical consonant is never realised in prevocalic position (e.g. after *et*). While these essential facts about liaison have been known at least since the seventeenth century, this tripartite model of what came to be known as *liaisons obligatoires*, *facultatives* and *interdites* respectively was first set out fully and explicitly in the mid-twentieth century by Pierre Delattre, in three articles published in *French Review* (Delattre 1947; 1955; 1956) and reprinted in the same volume (Delattre 1966a, b, and c), to which in-text reference will be made here. Delattre's model remains influential more than seventy years after its initial elaboration, underpinning many later descriptive and prescriptive approaches (e.g. Fouché 1959; Ågren 1973; Malécot 1975b; Léon 1978; Tranel 1987). It is presented in detail in the first of Delattre's articles, and summarised in his *Tableau Simplifié*, which we reproduce below.

While the *obligatoires* and *interdites* sections mirror the familiar *Dites... ne dites pas* columns of contemporary prescriptive works, most of

Delattre's three articles are devoted to the more complex—and sociolinguistically more interesting—question of the determinants of *liaisons facultatives*, where the link consonant may or may not be realised. Delattre outlines 10 *tendances générales* for his *facultative* category (1966a [1947]: 40–42). These include warnings against (2) making liaisons across sense groups (*Le petit/attend sa maman*), or generally with /n/ after nasal vowels (6), except with a small set of adjectives, for example *mon, ancien* (6 and 7), where denasalisation of the vowel is also recommended. Short words (5) favour liaison, as do plurals rather than singulars (4) and transitions generally from grammatical or functional elements to lexemes with full semantic content (3) (*nous arrivons; les amis*).

The second of Delattre's articles (1966b [1955]) sets out in detail the following five key factors affecting liaison generally (pp. 57–62):

1) Style

It is noteworthy that Delattre sees this factor as 'de beaucoup le plus fort'. He identifies four styles: *conversation familière*, *conversation soignée*, *conférence* (i.e. public lectures or speeches) and *récitation de vers*, the first two of which (although Delattre does not mention this point directly) are presumably unscripted, while the last two imply reading aloud, or recitation of scripted material. By way of illustration, he offers the sentence:

Des (1) hommes (2) illustres (3) ont (4) attendu

and suggests that in *conversation familière* only liaison (1) would be realised, while (1) and (4) would be typical in *conversation soignée*. Liaison (2) would be added in *conférence*, and all four liaisons would be realised in *récitation de vers*.

2) Syntax

Delattre underlines a point made by almost all commentators since the seventeenth century, namely that closeness of union between two elements favours liaison, using the now discredited 'potential pause' criterion⁷ to determine the degree of union between juxtaposed elements. In

⁷ For critique, see Harris (1972).

his example above, he argues that a pause is more likely between the noun phrase *hommes illustres* and the verb phrase *ont attendu* than between *ont* and *attendu*: accordingly the degree of syntactic bonding in the first case is graded at 2 (on a scale from 0 to 10), while the latter is graded at 7. Delattre's gradings are reproduced below (1966b [1955]: 58):

- 10: Entre le déterminatif et le nom : *des enfants*
- 10: Entre l'adjectif et le nom : *de beaux enfants*
- 10: Entre le verbe et le pronom personnel : *ont-ils*
- 9: Entre l'adverbe et le modifié : *tellement aimable*
- 8: Entre la préposition et son complément : *pendant un jour*
- 7: Entre l'auxiliaire et le participe passé : *vous avez aidé*
- 6: Entre l'auxiliaire et l'infinitif : *vous allez aider*
- 5: Entre le nom et l'adjectif : *des enfants intelligents*
- 4: Entre le verbe et son complément : *il désirait un cadeau*
- 3: Entre le pronom et le verbe : *les miens attendront*
- 2: Entre le nom et le verbe : *les enfants attendront*
- 1: Entre la conjonction et ce qui suit : *pourtant il est là*
- 1: Entre la conjonction et ce qui précède : *il sortait et ne rentrait plus*

3) Prosody

Delattre lists three potentially important interactions between syntax and prosodic factors. The first of these is length: generally the longer the linked element, the weaker the syntactic bond and therefore the lower the likelihood of liaison. This is particularly true for subject-verb sequences: thus *les plus petits des enfants attendront* is less likely to show liaison than *les enfants attendront*; a longer second element (e.g. *les enfants attendront longtemps leurs parents*) would similarly tend to inhibit liaison. The importance of the first element in particular is recognised notably in the PFC project, which employs separate codings for mono- and pluri-syllabic words. The second factor is intonation—a declarative, falling intonation favours liaison while a rising, interrogative one blocks it. Finally, *accent*

d'insistance on the first syllable may be accompanied either by lengthening the first vowel (e.g. *C'est IMpossible*) with liaison omitted, or by using liaison without enchaînement [set#ɛ̃pɔsibl].

4) Phonetics

Four additional factors, argues Delattre, are purely phonetic and not affected by considerations of style or syntactic bonding:

- a. Vowel+Consonant sequences (VC) (e.g. *des noms amusants*) liaise more readily than Consonant+Consonant (CC) sequences (*des contes amusants*)
- b. Similarly, CC sequences allow liaison more readily than CCC ones (e.g. *des actes historiques*)
- c. Liaison is possibly also favoured where the vowels are similar (e.g. *vous avez été*) and disfavoured where they are not (e.g. *tu as été*)

5) Historical factors

Delattre identifies three historical phenomena which have been maintained over centuries, continuing to override other factors:

- a. Liaison with singular nouns ending in a nasal consonant is absolutely ruled out, even in poetry recital or classical theatre. This is because nasal consonants were absorbed into the preceding vowel, which nasalized, rather than being deleted in preconsonantal and pre-pausal positions. Nasal consonants were maintained after open syllables word-internally, without the preceding vowel undergoing nasalization: a similar pattern is evident in closely bonded sequences (e.g. Adj. + N *bon ami* [bɔnami] or *mon amour* [mɔnamuʁ]), where liaison does occur and the vowel may additionally be denasalized.
- b. Liaison is much rarer with singular nouns than with plurals because /s/ was the most resistant of the word-final consonants to phonetic erosion, on account both of its structural importance as a flexional

marker, and of grammarians' efforts to maintain it (see Dauzat 1930: 97).

c. *h aspiré*—see above.

In the last of the three articles (1966c [1956]), Delattre turns to frequency of liaison in the case of his *facultative* category. His evaluations of relative frequencies for different liaison contexts in 'conversation naturelle de la classe cultivée' (1966a [1947]: 49–50) is subjective rather than empirical, and he readily acknowledges a multiplicity of external factors potentially influencing even this style—from the clothes worn by the interlocutor to the time of day or the weather—for which it is impossible to control. But nonetheless he identifies six broad frequency bands, labelled *très fréquente*, *assez fréquente*, *mi-fréquente*, *peu fréquente*, *rare*, and *très rare*, which he applies to five broadly defined liaison environments:

A Following a plural noun

Liaison here ranges from *peu fréquente* (e.g. Plural Noun + Adj.) to *rare* (e.g. Plural Pronoun + Adj., *Les uns aimables, les autres arrogants*).

B After verbs

A full range of frequencies is observed here from 'lie presque toujours' (e.g. *C'est impossible*) to 'lie presque jamais' (e.g. *Il a dit un mot*) via 'lie près de la moitié du temps' (*Il allait à l'école*).

C After invariables

In the category of *invariables* Delattre includes (i) adverbs and prepositions, after which liaison ranges from *très fréquente* to *mi-fréquente* and (ii) conjunctions, for which the corresponding range is *peu fréquente* to *très rare*. For group (i), liaison is seen as obligatory (1966c [1956]: 52) for monosyllables such as *en* and *très*, but *très fréquente* where the noun has a determiner (e.g. *chez un ami*), or before a past participle. Liaison with adverbs of negation falls into the *mi-fréquente* category,⁸ while the potential for enchaînement with the fixed consonant /s/ in *vers* puts liaison here in the *rare* category. For polysyllables, liaison is *assez fréquente*, but for adverbs

⁸The case of *plus*, which is ambiguous in meaning between 'more' and 'no more' if *ne* is suppressed, is resolved in favour of liaison for the positive meaning and no liaison for the negative, with the qualification that *plus* in the former case is [plyz] when it qualifies an adjective (*C'est plus* [plyz] *élégant*—it is more elegant) and [plys] before a past participle (*il a plus* [plys] *étudié*—he has studied more). See Delattre (1966c: 52).

preceding infinitives the nature of the bond with the infinitive is important: liaison is *assez fréquente* where the adverb qualifies the infinitive (e.g. *Vous devriez/ mieux étudier*) but *peu fréquente* where it qualifies a preceding verb (e.g. *J'aimerais mieux/ étudier*). For conjunctions generally ‘on lie peu’, and even less (‘la liaison est rare’) where the conjunction is polysyllabic (e.g. *assez, horriblement*).

D After singular nouns ending in s or t

Delattre advises that liaison in this context is *très rare*, to the point of being to all intents and purposes *interdite* for the purposes of instruction, but concedes that the title ‘Prisunic’ (from *prix unique*) reflects that fact that such liaisons are possible. He adds, somewhat censoriously (1966c: 53): ‘Tel recteur d’université, ayant, nous supposons, le sentiment de son importance, nous disait (en conversation intime) il y a quelques mois: *C’est un droit tindañiable!*’. Though such liaisons are very rare, they are more common, Delattre claims, with [z] than with [t].

E Liaison with dates

In cases such as *Le deux avril*, hesitation between liaison and non-liaison is attributed to the indeterminate status of the numeral between adjective (which favours liaison) and noun (which does not). Liaisons with *premier* (clearly an adjective) are seen as *très fréquentes* while liaisons with *deux* or *trois* are *peu fréquentes*. Monosyllabic *août* is seen to be slightly more receptive to liaison than *avril*.

2.2.1 The Delattre Model: A Retrospective Critique

Delattre’s model represents the first serious attempt to categorise different kinds of liaison and to weight variable liaison probabilities, and it has stood the test of time in so far as its essential tripartite structure remains unchallenged, even if the basic terminology of *obligatoire*, *facultative* and *interdite* environments has largely given way to the less prescriptive terms *invariable*, *variable*, and *erratique* respectively (Encrevé 1988: 46). Delattre was ahead of his time in identifying a wide range of linguistic

and stylistic factors affecting liaison, and his insights remain pertinent and influential more than six decades after they were first published.

The main drawback for a model conceived before the advent of modern sociolinguistic survey techniques, however, is that his observations are based on his own expert intuitions rather than on empirical data. Many of these intuitions have indeed stood up to experimental scrutiny: the link between length of conjoined elements and liaison, for example, has been borne out by a succession of empirical studies, including the PFC, while the group percentage liaison scores for relevant sequences in the ‘Four Cities’ Project reading exercise (see Chap. 7) were found by Hornsby (2019) to align perfectly with Delattre’s frequency bands referred to above.

There are, nonetheless, some internal inconsistencies and contradictions. Delattre hesitates for example over the status (*interdite* or *très rare*) of liaison after singular nouns ending in <s> or <t> (1966a: 52–53), and his coefficient of 3 (from a maximum 10) for Pronoun + Verb sequences seems difficult to square with his inclusion of the category *pronom personnel* + *verbe* in the *obligatoire* column of his *Tableau Simplifié* (see Table 2.3 above). But more importantly, as a number of subsequent commentators working with empirical data have demonstrated, many of his supposedly ‘obligatory’ liaisons in fact have proved to be highly variable, even in scripted styles (see Hornsby 2019: 585–87), and indeed the very basis for determining liaison frequency on the basis of grammatical categories has been questioned in the light of empirical findings. Recent empirical research (see in particular Côté 2017) has suggested that non-variable liaison is in fact restricted to a rather narrower hard core (*noyau dur*: see Ch. 5.1) of tightly bound elements for which liaison is consistently realised throughout the francophone world. With no reliable baseline data being available for the period in which Delattre was writing, we cannot be certain whether Delattre’s intuitions were simply unreliable, or whether some items have moved from the invariable to the variable category in the intervening period.

While Delattre was ahead of his time in attempting to quantify syntactic cohesion as a key determinant of liaison frequency, his measure seems rather makeshift and the basis for determining the coefficients is less than clear: why are Auxiliary + Infinitive sequences assigned as score of 6, for

Table 2.3 Delattre's *Tableau Simplifié* (after Delattre 1947: 152)

	OBLIGATOIRES	FACULTATIVES	INTERDITES
NOM	<i>déterminatif</i> + $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{nom} \\ \textit{nopronom} \\ \textit{adjectif} \end{array} \right.$ vos enfants deux autres un ancien ami	<i>nom pluriel</i> + des soldats anglais ses plans ont réussi	<i>nom singulier</i> + un soldat anglais son plan a réussi
VERBE	<i>pronom personnel</i> + <i>verbe</i> ils ont compris nous en avons <i>verbe</i> + <i>pronom personnel</i> ont-ils compris allons-y	<i>verbe</i> + je vais essayer j'avais entendu dire vous êtes invité il commençait à lire	
INVARIABLES	<i>invariables</i> <i>monosyllabiques</i> + en une journée très intéressant	<i>invariables</i> <i>polysyllabiques</i> + pendant un jour toujours utile	<i>et</i> + et on l'a fait
SPÉCIALES	<i>formes figées</i> comment allez-vous les Etats-Unis accent aigu tout à coup de temps en temps		<i>h aspiré</i> des héros en haut + <i>un, huit, onze</i> et <i>dérivés</i> la cent huitième en onze jours

example, while Pronoun + Verb sequences score 3? The measure is also confusing in that it mixes syntactic and non-syntactic criteria. Delattre suggests, for example, that for Noun + Adjective sequences the bonding coefficient of 5 reduces to 1 when the noun is singular, while in the case of Determiner + Noun sequences the coefficient falls from 10 to 0 when *h-aspiré* nouns are involved, in spite of the fact that in neither case is the essential syntactic relationship between the conjoined elements affected. Delattre's schema therefore appears to fall awkwardly between a measure of internal syntactic cohesion on the one hand and a general rule of thumb for determining liaison probabilities on the other.

Delattre's rather rough and ready measure of cohesion reflects the fact that, while there is general agreement that the rhythmic group or in Grammont's (1914: 130) terms *le mot phonologique* is the domain of

liaison, the notion of internal cohesion on which it depends proves surprisingly elusive. For Bybee (2005), syntactic cohesion is linked not to grammatical categories per se as Delattre assumes but to frequency of co-occurrence. Liaisons which in her terms are ‘établies’, which we can interpret as meaning obligatory, are those which historically have occurred frequently enough to be easily memorable, irrespective of grammatical category. She cites, for example, data from Ågren (1973; see below Ch.8.2) which suggest that two syntactically similar frames *est* [t] + *un* + Noun and *suis* [z] + *un* + Noun have similar syntax but very different rates of liaison: 98.7% and 47% respectively. In terms of constructions, she suggests a continuum ranging from common fixed expressions such as *c’est*-[t]-*à-dire*, where co-occurrence is regular and frequent, and liaison occurs categorically as if word-internally, to constructions which combine frequently used closed class grammatical material (such as prepositions) with open class items (e.g. *dans* + NP) and finally at the other end of the spectrum, plural constructions of the form N + [z] + Adj which include two elements from open classes, where liaison is least likely and most restricted to frequently co-occurring items (e.g. *Champs-Élysées*).

Liaisons are more likely to persist, she argues, in high-frequency contexts, for the same reason as very common irregular verb forms are generally maintained. Thus, in sequences of the form Det + Noun + Adj non-liaison is more common than liaison, because vowel-initial adjectives in this schema constitute a minority and the default selection is for the liaison consonant not to be realised. Note that it is frequency of co-occurrence of different elements, rather than the frequency of individual linking words which is important.⁹ Similar arguments can be invoked to explain the pre-nominal linking form in *vieil aveugle*, which binds one of a small group of commonly occurring pre-nominal adjectives to an adjectival noun, while liaison is absent in *vieux aveugle*, where an adjectival noun is followed by a member of the open class of post-nominal adjectives, only a minority of which are vowel-initial, making non-liaison the unmarked choice.

⁹ Citing Sampson’s (2001) failure to get native speakers to liaise with /n/ in anything other than the monosyllable contexts *mon, ton, son* etc., Durand and Lyche (2008: 45–46) go so far as to suggest that native speakers may actively avoid unfamiliar potential liaison sequences in spontaneous speech.

Data from the PFC lend support to Bybee's frequency-based model. Liaison proves more frequent with *être* than with other verbs, but is considerably more common after *est* than after *était*, both of which show higher incidence of liaison than *étais*. Similarly, liaison with the prenominal adjective *grand* proves not to be invariable as one might expect of a prenominal adjective, showing a much higher incidence in the semi-lexicalised sequence *grand honneur* than in the less commonly occurring *grand émoi* (Durand et al. 2011: 116). Overall, Durand et al. (2011: 121) note that, of 111 broad construction types observed in the PFC database at the time of writing, just 21 very high-frequency constructions account for over 90% of the liaisons in the corpus (see Table 2.4 below). Of these, the vast majority involve liaison with /z/, /n/ and /t/ (23648/23953 tokens = 98.7%), with small contributions from /ʁ/ and /p/, which only occur in variable environments, in stark contrast to /n/, which only occurs in non-variable ones. At that point there had been no incidence of liaison /k/ in any of the PFC styles.

The nature of Delattre's four styles, finally, remains an open question. Are they to be envisaged as ranked in quantitative terms (i.e. we see a greater number of liaisons as the style becomes more formal) or in qualitative ones (i.e. a broader range of liaisons is available as the style becomes more formal, as his example sentence would appear to suggest), or some combination of both? Delattre gives us relatively little to work with here, but even with the data now available, we can only offer a partial answer to this question, to which we return in Chap. 9.

2.3 Status of the Liaison Consonant

As Durand and Lyche (2008) point out, the complexities of liaison have long provided a fertile testing ground for phonological theories. Within the generative paradigm alone, Encrevé (1988: 79–135) references seventy-five publications over a twenty-year period (1965–1984) which begins with Schane's (1965) French Truncation Rule,¹⁰ sees its explicit

¹⁰ First proposed by Damourette and Pichon (1911: 27) and developed by Schane (1965: 92), the French Truncation Rule treated final consonant deletion in preconsonantal position and elision of

Table 2.4 Liaison tokens and percentage realisations in high-frequency grammatical contexts in the PFC corpus (after Durand et al. 2011 Tableau 2; p. 122)

Ranking	Grammatical context	Tokens	Percentage of total PFC liaisons	Cumulative percentage of PFC total
1	PRO_L_VERBE	4629	27.5	27.5
2	DET_L_NOM	2086	12.4	40.0
3	PRP_L_NOM	1173	7.0	46.9
4	NUM_L_NOM	1026	6.1	53.0
5	PRP_L_VERBE	860	5.1	58.2
6	KON_L_VERBE	726	4.3	62.5
7	PRP_L_VERBE	712	4.2	66.7
8	KON_L_PRO	532	3.2	69.9
9	PRP_L_DET	482	2.9	72.8
10	DET_L_ADJ	433	2.6	75.3
...
21	VERBE_L_PRP	164	1.0	91.1
...
111	VERBE_L_NUM	1	0	100

abandonment by Schane himself eight years later, and its resurrection in another guise by Kaye and Lowenstrum (1984). In the absence of reliable empirical data, theoretical edifices have often been built on prescriptive models of French speech. Selkirk's highly influential (1972) work used Fouché's (1959) pronunciation manual as its source while Schane drew, *inter alia*, on Grevisse's *Bon Usage*. Inordinate attention was often paid to examples divorced from actual usage: Durand et al. (2011: 116) cite for example the case of *sot aigle*, a sequence whose frequency in natural speech they describe as 'proche de zéro'. Refinements to existing models have been made, and in some cases their theoretical bases called into question, as more empirical findings, most notably from the *Phonologie du Français Contemporain* project, have become available.

A particular focus of debate has been the status of the liaison consonant. Here generative treatments have generally started from the

final vowels (e.g. in *j'arrive*) in prevocalic position as parallel processes. It drew much criticism on account of the very different morphological and contextual constraints affecting each (see for example Dell 1973: 182).

assumption of an underlying consonant in the phonological representation of the link word W_1 , which is subject to deletion under specified conditions. This interpretation has advantages beyond presentational elegance, neatly capturing synchronic and diachronic regularities in the data. Masculine, feminine and liaison forms of an adjective such as *petit*, for example, can be derived by rule from a underlying representation (in this case /pətit/), which also provides the stem for other derivations (e.g. *petitesse*). At the same time, positing an underlying or latent consonant accounts for the historical facts¹¹ in so far as liaison recalls Old French word-final consonants, retained in the orthography, which have undergone phonetic erosion and survive only in prevocalic environments (see Chap. 3). But for all its attractions, the notion of an underlying final consonant seems counter-intuitive from a synchronic point of view in that it takes realisation of the liaison consonant as the default and specifies a set of conditions under which it is blocked, in the face of abundant evidence both that French copes perfectly well with hiatus at word boundaries and that in many cases of variable liaison it is non-liaison which is the default or unmarked form. What Durand et al. (2011: 123) term a *une compétence ultra liaisonnante* is also inconsistent with a failure by many speakers to identify the appropriate W_1 consonant. In the Four Cities project reading exercise for example (see Chap. 7), there was some liaison with the more common lexical item *long* (though none at all with *sang*), but when it did occur the linking consonant was more likely to be /t/ (50/192 occurrences) than canonical /k/ or /g/ (32/192 occurrences), in spite of an orthographical prompt which might have been expected to favour /g/, casting doubt on the psychological validity of a putative underlying /lɔ̃g/ for all speakers. PFC survey data presented further challenges to the notion of an underlying consonant in W_1 coda position, given that the liaison consonant typically occupies the W_2 onset position. In non-variable environments, we would expect by the *loi de position* under such an analysis that the ensuing closed syllable of the linking word W_1 would require a half-open vowel, for example in *les amis* [lɛzami],

¹¹ Albeit at the expense of a description based not only on prescriptive sources but also an archaic orthography considerably out of step with modern spoken usage: '[Schane] postulait des formes de base assez proches à la fois de l'orthographe et du latin' (Durand et al. 2011: 103–104).

whereas in fact meridional varieties where the *loi de position* is strongly maintained are found consistently to produce [lezami] with a half-close vowel. This would suggest as Durand and Lyche (2008: 54) indicate that the liaison consonant must be either extra-metrical (/le.z#ami/), epenthetic between W_1 and W_2 (/le#z#ami/), or a prefix of W_2 (/le#z+ami/). Problems such as these lead Durand and Lyche to reject the classical generative position as the only one entirely incompatible with the data. The complexity of the phenomenon and dangers of a ‘one size fits all’ approach are however underlined by the behaviour of liaison /n/, which as the same authors point out (2008: 55) does form part of W_1 monosyllables *mon, non, ton, son*, for which the half-closed vowel in open syllable predicted by enchaînement in, for example, *mon ami* *[monami] does not occur. Metrical and autosegmental approaches, by contrast, posit a ‘floating’ consonant available as onset to the following W_2 or, in a refinement introduced by Encrevé (1983, 1988) to handle liaison without enchaînement, as coda to W_1 .

Epenthetic approaches reject underlying final consonants in favour of insertion rules in liaison environments, while analyses based on suppletion posit separate long and short forms of W_1 stored in the mental lexicon, to be realised in the surface under the appropriate rhythmic, syntactic, morphological and stylistic conditions. In both models the liaison consonant would have to be learned on a construction by construction basis, which is compatible with a frequency-based liaison acquisition model such as that presented by Chevrot, Chabanal & Dugua (2007; see also Chevrot et al. 2005), who argue for an initial acquisition stage in which a range of variants, e.g. for *arbre* [naʁbʁ], [zaʁbʁ], [taʁbʁ], are used fairly indiscriminately (e.g. *les arbres* [lɛnaʁbʁ]). At the second stage, these variants are accurately linked to the correct W_1 (*les arbres* [lezɑʁbʁ]), with high-frequency sequences learned first, and finally at the third stage abstract structures (in this case *les* + [z] X) are learned and applied to all relevant sequences. High-frequency constructions are mastered first, and the full range of obligatory liaisons have generally been learned by age 3–5. Variable liaison is acquired later, generally by age 6–8, and shows much greater developmental variability, with children from socially advantaged homes learning at a significantly faster rate than their disadvantaged peers.

2.4 Linking Consonants in English

Before considering liaison in past and present French, it is instructive to examine another language in which hiatus at word boundaries is variably resolved. Parallels can be drawn between liaison in French and the hiatus resolution system of vernacular British English, as investigated by Britain and Fox (2008), in the context of putative vernacular universals (see Chambers 2000, 2004). Their evidence suggests that urban growth and the associated contact between speakers of different varieties is promoting outcomes which are familiar both from other, unrelated dialects of English and from other languages.

Britain and Fox begin by highlighting the complexity of hiatus resolution in traditional vernacular English, identifying five main hiatus blocking strategies:

- (a) V +[high] –[front]/+[round] + [w] *Go inside* [gəʊ^wɪnsaɪd]
- (b) V +[high] +[front],–[round] + [j] *Jellyandice-cream* [dʒɛlɪjənɑɪskriːm]
- (c) V –[high] + [ɪ] *cider apple* [saɪdɜːɹæpəl]
+ [ɪ] *Vodka and tonic* [vɒdkə.əntɒnɪk]
- (d) *a* + [n] *an apple* [ənæpəl]
- (e) *the* /# V → [ði] + [w], [j] *the apple* [ðiːæpəl]

Hiatus glides are inserted after a high vowel (a and b): [j] with front and [w] with back rounded vowels, but (c) and (d), which involve consonants maintained only in prevocalic environments, bear the more obvious historical similarities to French liaison. Insertion of linking /r/ after low vowels notably restores in many cases a word-final consonant which has been lost from non-rhotic varieties in non-prevocalic environments, while in what has become known as ‘intrusive r’, an /r/ is inserted for which there is no etymological justification (e.g. after *vodka* in the example above). Similarly in (d) we see retention of a lost consonant in prevocalic position, /n/ having been lost from unstressed *an* in preconsonantal position during the Middle English period, resulting in the modern *a/an* allomorphy and the only orthographical representation of a

hiatus-breaking consonant in English. In Delattre's terminology, (c) represents a *liaison facultative*—almost certainly more frequent in the case of linking *r* than intrusive *r*—while (d) has been until recently, for most British English speakers at least, a *liaison obligatoire*. Finally, the definite article *the* is one of a number of items (including *to*, *my*, *you*) which have non-high vowels in unstressed preconsonantal position, but a high-vowel final allomorph which triggers the glide [w] or [ɹ] before a vowel.

The hiatus resolution system of traditional vernacular British English is therefore a complex system, involving phonotactic rules, at least four consonants [j w ɹ ɱ]¹² and allomorphy in articles and some common function words. Such a system might seem ripe for simplification, and Britain and Fox argue that a reorganisation of this kind is indeed underway, most notably in high-contact urban areas. They cite evidence, firstly, of 'variable lack of allomorphy' in the article system (e.g. *a old chap*) in a range of English dialects from Cambridgeshire to Sussex, and across the south west (2008: 10), and note similar findings in Sydney, New York and in African American Vernacular English. A more radical reorganisation appears to be in progress in East London, where findings from Tower Hamlets, an area closely traditionally associated with Cockney speech, but where 55% of the population now comes from a range of ethnic minority groups, indicate a profound inter-generational shift. While older Cockney English speakers mostly retain the traditional hiatus resolution system intact, adolescents in particular show absence not only of article allomorphy but also of linking /r/, and general tendency to use glottal stops [ʔ] as hiatus breakers. Older boys of Bangladeshi heritage appeared to be leading this change, closely followed by younger Bangladeshi boys. Quoting Lombardi (2002), Britain and Fox suggest that, as pharyngeals, glottal stops have the least marked place of articulation and are therefore to be expected as default epenthetic consonants at word boundaries, as is generally the case in children's English until the adult norm is acquired. The changes seen in East London may, moreover, be indicative of universal vernacular tendencies, and are in line with

¹²And possibly a fifth: [v]. Britain and Fox (2008: 8 fn) note that speakers who use the unstressed [ə] allomorph of *of* retain [və] prevocally: contrast *cup of tea* [kʌpəti:] with *cup of Earl Grey* [kʌpəvɜ:ɪlgrɪ]

similar changes observed independently in Singapore, South Africa and New Zealand (2008: 35).

Parallels between hiatus resolution in English and liaison in French should not be overplayed. Glide insertions represent, in Heselwood's (2006: 80) words, 'low level articulatory transitional phenomena' rather than vestigial or latent consonants as in the French case; except in the case of /r/, the phenomena which seem to offer the closest historical similarities to French liaison affect only a restricted range of common function words, and even insertion of linking or intrusive /r/ is governed by language-specific phonotactic rules which do not affect French liaison consonants. The vernacular system, for the most part, is neither subject to a prescriptive norm nor reflected orthographically, as in the French case. Nonetheless, a complex system which presents particular difficulties to post-adolescent learners appears to be undergoing simplification, most notably in areas where non-native L2 English speakers are present in large numbers. In Parts II and III of this book, we shall see how those who find themselves excluded from another highly complex, and in this case prescriptive, norm for hiatus at word boundaries have developed simplifying strategies of their own, and effected a system reorganisation in similar fashion.

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