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# Postverbal *liaisons* in traditional songs: a morphological reanalysis?

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Côté (2005: 67) synthesizes the main analyses that have been suggested for the morphophonological phenomenon of *liaison*, a consonantal external sandhi occurring for example in French and which has been seen either as a truncation, a suppletion or a floating segment (or an epenthesis). Bürki and Laganaro (2014: 169) give the following definition of *liaison*: “some words in French entail two realizations (or variants), the second differing from the first one by an additional consonant in specific contexts” [our translation], thus taking sides with proponents of a suppletion hypothesis. Studies of *liaison* in morphology (e.g. Bonami & Boyé, 2003 or Plénat & Plénat, 2011) have mostly focused on suppletion of adjectival forms occurring before nouns. Among the epenthetic hypothesis, some *liaisons* could also have been given a morphological role, i.e. [z] *liaisons* are often seen as a plural marker (cf for instance the review of literature made by Mallet 2008: 59-61).

Postverbal *liaisons* usually occur after verbal suffixes (which constitute a *portemanteau* morph as French verbal suffixes reflect at the same time tense, mood, number and person in a unit that is not dividable anymore) and can be produced, under certain conditions, almost exclusively before a vocalic-initial word. As an illustration, consider example (1) from our ethnomusicologist corpus of traditional French songs collected in the 1960s among adult singers in Central France<sup>1</sup>:

(1) <sup>2</sup> nous = couch-er-ons	ensemble
nu = kuʃ-ər-ɔ̃	zāsāblə
SBJ.1.PL = sleep-FUT.IND-1.PL <sup>3</sup>	together
‘We will sleep together’	

If produced, postverbal *liaisons* after verbs conjugated in first or second person involve the segment [z] while after verbs conjugated in the third person, another segment is involved, [t]. Previously, this has partly been noticed by Morin & Kaye, who have proposed [t] to be a “verbal marker” (Morin & Kaye, 1982: 323). A more fine-grained analysis has been presented by Tranel, who noted that [t] was “the linking consonant for verbs conjugated in the third

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<sup>1</sup> Primary data come from the Jean Dumas fund (*fonds Jean Dumas*) and are available online on the Interregional base of French oral heritage (*Base inter-régionale du patrimoine oral*) at <http://patrimoine-oral.org/dyn/portal/index.seam?aloId=11898&page=alo&fonds=&cid=1535>. Songs are being transcribed and annotated for *liaisons* and *pataquès* in an ongoing project using CLAN (MacWhinney, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> All examples presented in this paper come from our sung corpus.

<sup>3</sup> Here the morphemic gloss we use is based on the Interlinear morphemic gloss proposed by Lehmann (see Lehmann, 2004).

person (singular and plural)” (Tranel: 1987, 175) while [z] was “the first and second person marker for both singular and plural conjugated verbs” (Tranel: 1987, 176).

In our corpus, some *liaisons* seem quite unexpected regarding the written form of the verb. These *liaisons* are called *pataquès* and are generally unwritten (see examples (2), (3) and (4) below). As these occurrences are produced in songs, some may say it is related to an anti-hiatu strategy, that is producing a consonantal epenthesis between two vowels to respect the canonical syllabic structure of the language. Morin did not observe this in the historical development of liaison for spoken French (see Morin, 2005), but it leads us to the following question: is *pataquès* just a phonological process? Postverbal *liaisons*, expected or not, would be studied in this presentation as we can notice that the choice of the consonant produced and its place does not seem random.

Was there a reanalysis of postverbal *liaisons* as morphemes? Although these *liaisons* are quite rare in current everyday language (for example in the PFC corpus<sup>4</sup> only 23% of the *liaisons* are realized in postverbal contexts<sup>5</sup>), they can be noticed in distance varieties (see Koch & Oesterreicher, 2001 on the concept of distance/immediacy) such as songs or among politicians. In a usage-based perspective, it could be hypothesized that hearers extract some regularities from their linguistic input and assign them a morphological role before reusing them analogically in similar syntactic contexts. We could rise the hypothesis that for our sung corpus a morpheme –z would have been extracted in postverbal contexts as a marker dealing with speech-act participants (speaker and addressee) and that a morpheme –t would have been extracted in these contexts as a marker dealing with non-speech-act participants (sometimes referred to as other). Typologically, this would be related to the concept of person hierarchy, sometimes proposed in the literature as 1, 2 > 3 (Siewierska 2014: 151). This ranking fits our case the most, as the subject would be indexed on the verb with a suffix: -z, attributed to subjects for whom the referents are speech-act participants and -t, attributed to subjects for whom the referents are non-speech act participants. That first and second persons would be indexed differently on the verb could be linked to another typological concept: the animacy hierarchy where human > animate > inanimate > abstract (Siewierska 2004: 149), as speech-act participants are necessarily human contrary to non-speech act participants for whom it is not an obligation, thus assuring a direct indication of the humanness of the subject. For the singular in written Old French, Andrieux & Baumgartner (1983: 58 [Morin & Bonin,

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<sup>4</sup> See Durand et al., 2011 for more information on the project Phonology of Contemporary French (*Phonologie du Français Contemporain*).

<sup>5</sup> The *liaisons* contexts were extracted from the online research database in June, 2019 when occurring after a word tagged as a present (VER:pres), a conditional (VER:cond) or an imperfect form (VER:impf). Part-of-speech tagging has not been controlled and uncertain occurrences have been excluded.

<sup>6</sup> We have very few spoken data in the Jean Dumas fund. Thus comparing spoken vs sung productions of our singers, especially since we knew that French was not the only language used by our informants who also spoke some regional language, did not seem relevant.



analogy or by oral analogy from Latin to French. Instead, we would rather like to emphasize that verbs conjugated at the first person singular did not present any < s > in Latin, contrary to some French verbs.

### Abbreviations

=: clitic boundary	F: feminine	INDEF: indefinite	PRS: present
1, 2, 3: 1st, 2d, 3d person	FUT: future	M: masculine	SBJ: subject
ASS: associative	IMP: imperative	NFIN: non-finite	SG: singular
DAT: dative	IMPF: imperfect	OBJ: object	SUP: superlative
DEF: definite	IND: indicative	PL: plural	

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