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The Problem Of Liaison In French: A Sociolinguistic Approach To Facts, In Abidjan

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Abstract : The objective of this study is to show that the frequency of French liaison among Ivorian speakers is related to sociolinguistic factors. In addition, it is first of all a question of presenting the liaison as carried out by different groups of persons. Secondly, to perform a quantitative study in view of the productions and propose finally a didactic result. The results reveal that the implementation of this language practice depends on the characteristics of the respondents. The link rate is based on sex, age, employment, grammatical class of the word, consonant of the link. Concerning this last criterion, for example the link consonant [s] made/z/ admits variations. Consideration of variable links is the reason for the variationist approach used in this work.

Keywords: liaison, French, variationist approach, sociolinguistics

LA PROBLEMATIQUE DE LA LIAISON EN FRANÇAIS : UNE APPROCHE SOCIOLINGUISTIQUE DES FAITS, À ABIDJAN

Résumé : Cette étude a pour objectif de montrer que la fréquence de la liaison en français chez les locuteurs Ivoiriens est liée à des facteurs sociolinguistiques. En outre, il s'agit premièrement de présenter la liaison telle que réalisée par différents groupes de personnes. Deuxièmement de faire une étude quantitative au vue des productions pour enfin proposer une remédiation didactique. Les résultats révèlent que la réalisation de cette pratique langagière dépend des caractéristiques des enquêtés. Le taux de liaison est en fonction du sexe, de l'âge, de l'emploi, de la classe grammaticale du mot, de la consonne de la liaison. Concernant ce dernier critère, par exemple la consonne de liaison [s] réalisée /z/ sont variables. Le fait de tenir compte des liaisons variables est la raison pour laquelle nos travaux ont été menés dans une approche variationniste.

Mots-clés : liaison, français, approche, sociolinguistique

Introduction

Liaison in French is part of the reading exercises, from the first year elementary course (CE1), in primary schools in Côte d'Ivoire. As far back as our memories go, the liaison consisted in pronouncing the final consonant of a word in association with the initial vowel of the next word, taking into account the exceptions that are called forbidden liaison. In Côte d'Ivoire, it is said repeatedly [ʒezy zε rwa] (Jésus est roi, Jesus is king). This shows that the liaison is made all-round. Despite this approach, liaison is a linguistic phenomenon. As Sonia Ferrat means (2012 : 2)¹.

Communément, on appelle liaison l'union de deux mots à l'oral. La liaison se révèle être un phénomène linguistique lié à la fois à la morphologie et à la syntaxe. Des changements phonétiques vont apparaître entre les mots. En effet, la consonne finale d'un mot (Mot1) va s'unir à la voyelle initiale du mot suivant (Mot2). La consonne finale, muette dans un mot isolé, va alors devenir sonore. La liaison est prononcée avec une consonne de liaison qui n'est présente à l'oreille ni dans le mot 1 ni dans le mot 2. Le français est une langue à dominante syllabique de type consonne/voyelle, c'est donc pour cela que l'union d'une consonne finale et d'une voyelle initiale devient audible. L'apparition de cette consonne va permettre la formation d'une structure syllabique de type consonne/voyelle lorsqu'un mot se termine par une consonne et que le second commence par une voyelle. Les consonnes de liaison les plus fréquentes sont le /n/, le /z/ et le /t/. Dans la langue française, deux contextes de liaison coexistent : le contexte de liaison obligatoire et le contexte de liaison facultative.

(Sonia Ferrat, 2012 : 2)

The notion of our study being defined, the observation is that, on a daily basis, the liaison is less and less practiced by Ivorian speakers. Indeed, where a compulsory liaison is expected, the speaker does not need it. Thus, in our study, it is a question of addressing the sociolinguistic aspect: how many liaison? In what context? Is this practice related to the sex, the age or the function of the speaker? These are the answers to these questions that will be the main theme of this article, after defining the theoretical framework and methodology of the research. Our conclusions will be in a didactic framework.

¹ [Our own translation] Commonly, the union of two words when speaking is called liaison. Liaison is a linguistic phenomenon linked to both morphology and syntax. Phonetic modifications appear between words. Indeed, the final consonant of a word (Wor 1) will unite with the initial vowel of the next word (Wor 2). The final consonant, silent in an isolated word, will then become sound. The liaison is pronounced with a connection consonant which doesn't sound in the ear either in word 1 or in word 2. French is a predominantly syllabic language of consonant/vowel type, that is the reason why the union of a final consonant with an initial vowel is pronounced. The appearance of this consonant will allow the formation of a syllabic structure of consonant/vowel type when a word ends with a consonant and the second begins with a vowel. The most common link consonants are/n/, /z/ and/t/. In the French language, two liaison contexts coexist: the compulsory liaison context and the optional liaison context.

1. Theoretical framework

Previously compulsory liaison can be made or not. They are made in a variable way. The frequency of their production becomes an index of social belonging. These reasons justify the use of the following theoretical frameworks:

- The sociolinguistics of variation: according to Jacques Durand & alii (2011 : 110-111),

If there is one dimension of the phenomenon of liaison in French that caught the attention it is its extreme socio-stylistic variability, at least within data captured on the fly. However, it would be difficult to quote a large survey to illustrate and quantify the different aspects of that variation. Although the diatopic, diaphasic, diastratic and diachronic variations of the liaison have been the subject of countless comments, all of which are generally taken from one another, documentation of the phenomenon based on accurate and quantitatively relevant variational data is still largely lacking.

- Usage: this study is based on the facts that mark the liaison production among Ivorians. They will reproduce what they hear or what is often said as a child would do. As far as liaison is concerned, the child's language environment will familiarize him with a certain number of facts that he will try to memorize. Moreover, the notion of use is not far from social representations. In other words, what are the social practices of liaison at the level of the population selected for this study? according to Dominique Legallois and Jacques François (2011, p 9), "The word usage has two central meanings in FLU². Usage can be synonymous with use, and can then refer to the linguistic act as a particular event (which English can make by the word use); but it can also be synonymous with habit, regularity».

2. Methodology

We use the quantitative method to analyze the production of the target population: 2nd cycle students aged 16 to 18, teachers aged 30 to 52. We proposed to our target a text containing obligatory (now OL) and prohibited (PL) liaison. Optional liaison are not part of our corpus. In total, there were 14 respondents distributed as follows :

- 7 upper secondary students (4 girls and 3 boys)
- 7 teachers (4 women and 3 men)

² Linguistique fondée sur l'usage (Linguistics based on use).

To divert the attention of the respondents from the liaison and to have spontaneous productions, we have told them that our goal is to check the time of reading the texts. They have been told individually to read loudly the following corpus: Obligatory Liaison (OL) and Prohibited Liaison (PL). In the OL text we have inserted a PL.

OL:

- 1- un élève monte dans un tricycle.³
- 2- Malheureusement son habit s'accroche à un bout de fer et se déchire.
- 3- Deux hommes viennent à son aide en lui disant : « nous allons t'aider ».
- 4- Ils ont essayé de coudre le vêtement.
- 5- Des femmes apportent leur contribution.
- 6- Elles arrivent à mieux coudre le pantalon de l'élève.
- 7- En allant à l'école, il remercie ses bienfaiteurs.

LI :

- 8- Et un monsieur lui remet de l'argent pour prendre un taxi pour le retour.⁴
- 9- Après ses cours, il arrête un taxi sur lequel est mentionné : « Jésus est roi ».
- 10- Il préfère ne pas prendre un tel taxi. Finalement il opte pour le bus.
- 11- L'enfant a réussi à emprunter un bus où se trouvent un prêtre et des parents d'élèves.

In view of our corpus, all consonants are not for liaisons.

3. Liaison: grammatical aspect relating to the corpus

According to Julien Eychenne (2011, p 80), « La liaison en français est la manifestation d'un phénomène de joncture (ou sandhi) entre deux unités morfo-lexicales dans un environnement linguistique donné »⁵. This is how our corpus suggests the following obligatory and prohibited liaison:

³ 1- a student gets on a tricycle / 2. Unfortunately her clothing clings to a piece of iron and tears. / 3- Two men come to his help and say, "We are going to help you." / 4- They tried to sew the garment / 5- Women are contributing. / 6. They can sew the student's pants better. / 7- When he went to school, he thanked his helpers.

⁴ 8. and a gentleman gives him money to take a taxi to go back. / 9. After his classes, he stops a taxi on which is mentioned: «Jesus is king»./ 10. He prefers not to take such a taxi. Finally he decides for the bus. / 11. The child managed to get on a bus with a priest and students' parents.

⁵ [Our translation] "Liaison in French is the manifestation of a phenomenon of junction (or sandhi) between two morfo-lexical units in a given linguistic environment"

- 1- a- Un élève [œ̃nelev], b- dans un [dãzœ̃]⁶
- 2- Son habit [sõnabi]
- 3- a- Deux hommes [døzòm], b- son aide [sõnød], c- nous allons [nuzalõ]
- 4- Ils ont [ilzõ]
- 5- Des femmes apportent [dɛfam apɔrt]
- 6- Elles arrivent [ɛlzariv]
- 7- En allant [ãnalã]
- 8- Et un [e œ̃]
- 9- Jésus est [ʒezy ɛ]
- 10- il opte [il ɔpt]
- 11- a- l'enfant a [lãfã a], b- trouvent un [truv œ̃]

In the lexical status of link consonants, there are several possibilities. As Marie-Hélène Côté (2010, p. 1280) means « toutes les consonnes de liaison n'ont pas à être soumises au même mécanisme et plusieurs reconnaissent l'existence de plusieurs catégories de consonnes de liaison »⁷.

The French language has seven consonants of liaison: [g], [k], [n], [p], [r], [t], [z]. Our corpus counts three [n], [t], [z]. The liaison in [t] has two graphies t and d. as for graphemes s, x and z, they are realized [z] during the liaison. The context of the liaison is made according to the grammatical belonging of the lexème 1 and lexème 2:

- In 1a, 1b, 2, 3a and 3b, there is an obligatory liaison (OL) between a determiner and the following noun or adjective.
- In 3c, 4, 6 and 7, there is an OL between a personal pronoun and the following verb.
- In 5, we are in a prohibited liaison (PL) context between a plural noun and a verb.
- In 8, there is PL after the conjunction *et*.
- In 9, there is PL after a proper name.
- In 11, there is PL after a name in the singular

After having reviewed the OL and PL of our corpus, how do these liaisons occur among our respondents? This will be discussed in the next session.

⁶ 1- a- One student , b- in a / 2. His cloth / 3. a- two men , b- his helper , c- we're going / 4.They have (something) / 5. Women bring (something). / 6. They are coming. / 7. By going / 8. And one /9. Jesus is / 10. He decides / 11- a- the child has, b- find a

⁷ “not all liaison consonants need to be subjected to the same mechanism and many recognize the existence of several categories of liaison consonants.”

4. Fact-based liaison in Abidjan: the case of our respondents or readers

4.1 Obligatory liaison: production of male teachers aged 30 to 55

Readers	duration	Number of occurrences and percentage		unrealized occurrences
		Realization	non-realization	
Reader 1 SVT	1mn07s	7 i.e. 77,78 %	2 i.e. 22, 22%	Ex. in 4) ils ont [ilɔ̃] Ex. in 6) elles arrivent [ɛlariv]
Reader 2 Mathematics	1mn 01	7 i.e. 77,78%	2 i.e. 22,22 %	Ex. in 4) ils ont [ilɔ̃] Ex. in 6) elles arrivent [ɛlariv]
Lecteur 3 History and Geography	1mn 07	9 i .e .1 0 0 %	0 i.e. 0%	

There are 9 obligatory liaisons:

[œ̃nelev], [dāzœ̃], [sɔ̃nabi], [dɔzɔm], [sɔ̃nɛd], [nuzalɔ̃], [ilzɔ̃], [ɛlzariv], [ānalā̃].

The reader 1, SVT teacher, realizes a playback time of 1mn 07s, realizes 7 obligatory liaisons on the 9 but does not realize the 2 others. The unrealized sequences are in 4) ils ont *[ilɔ̃] and in 6) elles arrivent * [ɛlariv].

The reader 2, teacher of mathematics, realizes a reading time of 1mn 01s, realizes 7 obligatory liaisons on the 9 but does not realize the 2 others. The unrealized sequences are in 4) ils ont *[ilɔ̃] and in 6) elles arrivent * [ɛlariv].

The reader 3, teacher of history-geography, realizes a reading time of 1mn 07s, realizes 9 obligatory liaisons on 9.

The Obligatory liaison rate is **85.19%** for male teachers. Out of 9 Obligatory liaison contexts, teachers performed 7 contexts and were unable to perform 2. These 2 contexts are the liaison that is realized [z] after the plural of the 3rd person of the male and female personal pronoun. The other contexts of realization in [z] have been realized. These are 1b- *dans un* [dãzœ̃], 3a- *Deux hommes* [døzœ̃m], 3c- *nous allons* [nuzalø̃].

4.2 Obligatory liaison: production of female teachers aged 30 to 55

Readers	duration	Number of occurrences and percentage		Example of urealized occurrences
		realization	Non realization	
Reader 4 Philosophy	1mn02	8 i.e. 88,89 %	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. in 4) ils ont [ilø̃]
Reader 5 Musics	55s	8 soit 88,89 %	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. in 4) ils ont [ilø̃]
Reader 6 Spanish	1mn04	8 i.e. 88,89 %	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. in 4) ils ont [ilø̃]
Reader 7 French	49s	8 i.e. 88,89 %	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. in 4) ils ont [ilø̃]

Reader 4, teacher of philosophy, realizes a reading time of 1mn 02, realizes 8 obligatory liaisons on the 9, but does not realize 1 obligatory liaison. The sequence not performed is in 4) ils ont *[ilø̃].

Reader 5, a musics teacher, realizes a reading time of 55 seconds, realizes 8 obligatory liaisons out of 9, but does not realize 1 obligatory liaison. The sequence not performed is in 4) ils ont *[ilø̃].

Reader 6, a Spanish teacher, realizes a reading time of 1mn 04 s, realizes 8 obligatory links out of 9, but does not realize 1 obligatory link. The sequence not not performed is in 4) ils ont *[ilɔ̃].

Reader 7, a French teacher, realizes a reading time of 49 seconds, realizes 8 obligatory links out of 9, but does not realize 1 obligatory liaison. The sequence not not performed is in 4) ils ont *[ilɔ̃].

The rate of completion of obligatory liaison is 88.89 per cent for female teachers. Out of 9 obligatory liaison contexts, they were not able to perform the liaison in a single context. Not all of them realize the liaison between the plural of the 3rd person of the male personal pronoun and the verb that follows. This is how the sequence in 4) *ils ont*, is realized *[ilɔ̃]. On the other hand, the female teachers pronounce the liaison in 6) *Elles arrivent* [ɛlzariv].

4.3 Obligatory liaison: production of girls aged 16 to 18

Readers	duration	Number of occurrences and percentage		Example of unrealized occurrences
		realization	Non realization	
Reader 8 High School student (in TD)	53s	8 i.e. 88,89 %	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. in 4) ils ont [ilɔ̃]
Reader 9 High School student (in TD)	49 s	8 soit 88,89 %	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. in 4) ils ont [ilɔ̃]

Reader 10 High School student (in TD)	1mn 07	8 soit 88,89 %	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. in 6) Elles arrivent [ɛlariv]
Reader 11 High School student (in TD)	1mn	8 i.e. 88,89%	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. in 6) Elles arrivent [ɛlariv]

Reader 8, a High School student (in TD), has a total reading time of 53s, realizes 8 obligatory liaisons out of 9, but does not realize 1 obligatory liaison. The sequence not performed is in 4) *ils ont* * [ilɔ̃].

Reader 9, a High School student (in TD), has a total reading time of 49s, performs 8 obligatory liaisons out of 9, but does not perform 1 obligatory link. The sequence not performed is in 4) *ils ont* * [ilɔ̃].

Reader 10, a High School student (in TD), has a reading time of 1mn 07s, performs 8 obligatory liaisons out of 9, but does not perform 1 obligatory liaison. The sequence not performed is in 6) *Elles arrivent* * [ɛlariv].

Reader 11, a High School student (in TD), has a reading time of 1mn, performs 8 obligatory liaisons out of 9, but does not perform 1 obligatory liaison. The sequence not performed is in 6) *Elles arrivent* * [ɛlariv].

The completion rate of obligatory liaison is 88.89 per cent for girls. The latter do not realize the liaison between the plural of the 3rd person of the personal male or female pronoun and the verb that follows.

4.4 *Obligatory liaison: production of boys aged from 16 to 18*

Readers	durati on	Number of occurrences and percentage		Example of urealized occurren ces
		realizati on	Non realizati on	
Reade r 12 High Schoo l stude nt (in TD)	50s	8 i.e. 88,89 %	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. in 6) Elles arrivent [ɛlariv]
Reade r 13 High Schoo l stude nt (in TD)	50s	8 i.e. 88,89 %	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. en 6) Elles arrivent [ɛlariv]
Reade r 14 High Schoo l stude nt (in TD)	56s	8 i.e. 88,89 %	1 i.e. 11,11%	Ex. en 6) Elles arrivent [ɛlariv]

The reader 12, High School student (in TD), totalizes a reading time of 50 s, realizes 8 obligatory liaisons out of 9, but does not realize 1 obligatory liaison. The sequence not performed is in 6) *Elles arrivent* * [ɛlariv].

The reader 13, High School student (in TD), totalizes a reading time of 56s, realizes 8 obligatory liaisons out of 9, but does not realize 1 obligatory liaison. The sequence not performed is in 6) *Elles arrivent* * [ɛlariv].

The reader 14, High School student (in TD), totalizes a reading time of 50s, realizes 8 obligatory liaisons out of 9, but does not realize 1 obligatory liaison. The sequence not performed is in 6) *Elles arrivent* * [ɛlariv].

The realization rate of obligatory liaison is 88.89% for boys. These students do not perform the liaison in 6) *Elles arrivent* * [ɛlariv].

5. Sociolinguistic analysis

The purpose of this study is to see if the rate of liaison is based on sex, age, employment, grammatical class of the word, consonant of the liaison. This chapter aims to summarize the issue

The realization rate of obligatory liaison is 85.19% for men, 88.89% for women, 88.89% for girls and 88.89% for boys.

57.14%, did not realize the liaison in 4), *ils ont* * [ilɔ̃], and 50% didn't realize the liaison in 6) *Elles arrivent* * [ɛlariv].

- Rate of the non realization in 4) *ils ont* * [ilɔ̃] : 66,66% of men 100% of women, 50% of girls and 0 % of boys didn't realize it.
 - Thus, the rate of the non realization related to the sex is : 33,33% of masculine people (men and boys) didn't realize the liaison in 4) *ils ont* * [ilɔ̃]; 75% of female people (women and girls) didn't realized the liaison in 4)
- Rate of non realization in 6) *Elles arrivent* * [ɛlariv] : 66,66% of men, 0 % of women, 50% of girls, 100% of boys didn't realize it.
 - Either the rate of non realization by sex: 83,33% from masculine people didn't pronounce the liaison in 6) *Elles arrivent* * [ɛlariv], 25 persons from feminine people didn't realize the liaison in 6).

In other words, most people of masculine sex say « *Elles arrivent* * [ɛlariv] » instead of [ɛlariv] and most people of feminine sex pronounce « *ils ont* * [ilɔ̃] » instead of [ilzɔ̃].

Conclusion

At the end of our study, we note that the failure to implement some obligatory liaisons is conditioned by sociolinguistic factors. The sequences that caught our attention are « Ils ont [ilzɔ̃] » and « Elles arrivent [ɛlzariv] ». Apart from the gender issues discussed in our analysis, our results verify that the grammatical class of the word plays a predominant role. Indeed, even though our analyses did not focus on that factor, we want to refer to it. This is the pronoun of the 3rd person of the plural male or female subject (*ils* or *elles*). Men do not realize the liaison of the pronoun of the 3rd person of the feminine plural when it is followed by a verb, while women do not realize the liaison of the pronoun of the 3rd person of the masculine plural when it is followed by a verb. We can conclude that the liaison can be made according to the sex and the grammatical class of the word.

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