Syneresis, dieresis and preceding onsets: glide formation in continental French

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Canonical contexts for French glide formation (GF) are well documented (Kaye & Lowenstamm 1984, Tranel 1987, Walker 2001): high vowels /I Y U/ followed by another vowel show two outcomes: glides [j ɥ w] + vowel syneresis (1a) or high vowels [i y u] followed by glide+vowel dieresis (1b). These different outcomes are standardly explained by simple or complex preceding onsets.

1) Glide formation in ‘standard French’ (SF)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a. syneresis</th>
<th>b. dieresis</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. li+ons /li+5/</td>
<td>[ljɔ̃]</td>
<td>/pli+5/</td>
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<tr>
<td>ii. su+ons /sy+5/</td>
<td>[sljɔ̃]</td>
<td>/flu+5/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. nou+ons /nu+5/</td>
<td>[nwɔ̃]</td>
<td>/tRuw5/</td>
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Variability in GF is also attested, but less well documented (Bullock 2000; Durand & Lyche 1999).

This study examines the effect of preceding onsets on FG in Continental French. Drawing on PFC data (Durand, Laks & Lyche 2002) from Northern, Southern and Eastern dialect regions, we examine the wordlists, with 18 tokens of /i/ + vowel for 10-12 speakers from 12 different surveys. Using PRAAT 5.1.07 (Boersma & Weenink 2009), 2160 /I/ + vowel tokens are coded for dieresis versus syneresis using cues such as F1 onset, F2 stability versus transition, as well as for preceding onset and following vowel. We also measure each token’s formant values (F1-3), duration and intensity to determine the effect if any of preceding segments (oral stop, liquid, nasal or cluster). Results show greater variability than is ‘normatively’ described. To correlate acoustic cues with perceptual function, tokens are submitted to a perception test where linguistically informed participants listen to each token and choose the transcription (syneresis or dieresis) that best matches what they heard. We compare results to acoustic data to determine which distinct acoustic properties of syneresis versus dieresis may correspond to perceptual choices.

References


