

Orthography is not a factor in the acquisition of empty onsets in French

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In a French written text, we can find a lot of orthographic words starting with the letter <h> (e.g. <hippopotame>, ‘hippopotamus’). This graphic <h> has no phonetic realization in words in isolation (e.g. *hippopotame* [i.pɔ.pɔ.tam]). Nonetheless, there are some differences concerning the linguistic behavior of these words in speech that allows us to classify them in two categories :

- *h-muet* words : the <h> is only a graphic marker, reminding us the Latin origin of the word (e.g. *honneur* [ɔ.nœʁ], from the Latin *honor*.)
- *h-aspiré* words : the <h> is not only a graphic marker but has an added value in oral realizations, perfectly describe by Côté (2008a: 65). "The so-called *h-aspiré* corresponds to the property of some morpheme-initial vowels to block process that apply with normal initial vowels, and trigger processes that do not apply with regular vowels"

In fact, *h-aspiré* blocks the phonological processes of liaison and elision as in (1) and (2).

- (1) *h aspiré* : *le(s) hérissons* → [lɛ.e.ʁi.sɔ̃] (‘the hedgehogs’)
voyelle : *les[z]abeilles* → [lɛ.za.bɛj] (en. ‘the bee’)
- (2) *h aspiré* : *le hérisson* → [lɛ.e.ʁi.sɔ̃] (en. ‘the hedgehog’)
voyelle : *l'état* → [lɛ.ta] (en. ‘the state’)

These properties of *h-aspiré* entail a debate on the phonological status of this phenomenon and on the formalization of this context. Some researches suggest that *h-aspiré* characteristics are only “constrained by orthography” (Tranel, 1981 : 288). Some others consider its phonological status and suggest a phonological empty position onset for *h-aspiré* words (Pagliano, 2003 ; Sung, 1989 ; Girard & Lyche, 1997). This empty onset could be filled by a glottal stop (e.g. *tout hongrois* [tu.ʔɔ̃g.ʁwa], en. *all Hungarian*), often realized by French speakers in *h-aspiré* sequences (Gabriel & Meisenburg, 2004).

Some researches have already shown the importance of empty positions in first language acquisition (Demuth & Kehoe, 2006) but no studies evaluate the role of literacy in this process. Moreover some studies show that literacy can effect phonology as orthographic forms change phonological representations (Peerman et al., 2009 ; Chevrot et al., 2000 ; Bürki & Frauenfelder, 2012 ; Alegria & Leybaert, 1991 ; Metsala & Walley ; 1998 ; Ruvoletto, 2011).

Literacy seems to have a controversial role in the acquisition of empty position associated to schwa in second language and third language French speakers. Schwa is usually linked to *h-aspiré* phenomenon because both involve floating segments (Clements & Keyser, 1983; Encrevé 1988 ; Tranel, 1987) and an empty syllabic positions (Anderson, 1982, Charette, 1991). In acquisition studies of French as second or third language, Bordial (2012) and Lyche & Skattum (2012) affirm that schwa is not in phonological representations but only in orthography. On the contrary, Andreassen & Lyche (2016) and Racine et al. (2015) proposed a phonological representation of schwa which doesn't depend on orthographic forms.

The aims of this “make a claim” is to clarify the influence of orthography in the acquisition of empty onset *h-aspiré* initial word in French native speakers. We proposed a phonological representation which also confirms the importance of a phonological empty position and we show that this empty position is in phonological representations and is not acquired by exposure to literacy or orthographic forms.

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