

French Liaison and Vowel Elision are symmetrical OCP effects

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In this presentation, I aim to propose that *French Liaison* and *Vowel Elision* are both conditioned by the *Obligatory Contour Principle* (Leben 1973, McCarthy 1986). I propose this analysis in the Strict CV framework introduced in Lowenstamm (1996) and slightly improved in Carvalho (2002) and Enguehard (2017).

French Vowel Elision is a V/∅ alternation (∅ is traditionally represented with “ ’ ”): underlying final vowels are pronounced before a consonant, but they are elided before a vowel (1a). French Liaison is a C/∅ alternation (consonant realization is traditionally represented with “ _ ”): underlying final consonants are pronounced before a vowel, but they are elided before a consonant (1b). Both these phenomena are exceptionless in clitics, but they can be optional between major categories¹.

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|-----|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|------------|
| (1) | a. Vowel Elision | | b. Liaison | | |
| | _V | <i>l’ami</i> | ‘the friend’ | <i>un_ami</i> | ‘a friend’ |
| | _C | <i>le pote</i> | ‘the buddy’ | <i>un pote</i> | ‘a buddy’ |

Schane (1967) convincingly argues that these two phenomena are symmetrical. Descriptively, they both result from the truncation of an [α cons] segment before another [α cons] segment. This symmetry is illustrated in (2).

(2)		V Elision	C Elision
	before V	+	-
	before C	-	+

In order to account for Liaison, Encrevé (1983) and Lowenstamm (1999) propose that: **i.** underlying final consonants are floating, and **ii.** vowel-initial words begin with an empty onset which can host the final consonant of the preceding word (3a). Despite the strengths of this analysis, it fails to account for the parallel with Vowel Elision. If we assume that the skeleton results from the repetition of a CV syllable (see Lowenstamm 1996), we *always* expect an available docking site for vowels, even before vowels (3b).

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|------------------------|--|
| (3) a. → <i>un_ami</i> | b. → * <i>le ami</i> (expected: <i>l’ami</i>) |
| C V + C V C V | C V + C V C V |
| / | : |
| ẽ n a m i | l ə a m i |

In the line of Carvalho (2002) and Enguehard (2017), I alternatively assume that the strict periodicity of skeletal positions is due to OCP (i.e. no CV units). Accordingly, the skeleton does not necessarily begin with C and it does not necessarily end with V. I show how this proposal accounts for the symmetry between Liaison and Vowel Elision in a very simple way.

Look at the elision cases in (4a). By assumption, apocope results from the deletion of final skeletal positions, hence the presence of final floating segments.² (The segments themselves are not deleted since they reappear in other contexts.) In (4a), the resulting skeleton is made of a strict periodicity of C and V positions. Thus OCP is not violated (everything is OK).

1 This is due to syntactic parameters which are not relevant for this study (see e.g. Selkirk 1974 on Liaison).
 2 The careful reader has certainly noticed that final positions of nouns /ami/ and /pot/ are not deleted in (4a). This is only due to a trivial simplification of their phonological representations. These should be represented as /potə/ and /amik/ (with the final consonant /k/ observed in the derived adjective *amical* ‘friendly’).

Now, what happens in the retention cases (4b)? Following apocope, final skeletal positions should be dropped. However, this operation fails to occur when the final segment stands before a segment of the opposite category (2). It is important to observe that such an apocope would result in a succession of two C-positions (4b.i) or two V-positions (4b.ii). Such configurations (bold) violate OCP.

(4) a. Elision cases (no violation of OCP)

i. → *l'ami*

C	+	V	C	V
l	ə	a	m	i

ii. → *un pote*

V	+	C	V	C
ẽ	n	p	o	t

b. Retention cases (violation of OCP)

i. → **l'pote* (expected: *le pote*)

C	+	C	V	C
l	ə	p	o	t

ii. → **un ami* (expected: *un_ami*)

V	+	V	C	V
ẽ	n	a	m	i

One possible repair mechanism for OCP violations is the addition of phonological material (see e.g. Yip 1988 about English epenthesis). Accordingly, the ill-formed configurations in (4b) can be repaired by addition of a skeletal position (boxed): V between two *CC (5a) and C between two *VV (5b). The presence of such an additional skeletal position genuinely triggers the association (i.e. retention) of final segments, consonants *as well as* vowels.

(5) a. → *le pote*

C	V	+	C	V	C
l	ə		p	o	t

b. → *un_ami*

V	C	+	V	C	V
ẽ	n		a	m	i

To conclude, I argue that the hypothesis of an OCP-driven skeleton can derive the symmetry between French Liaison and Vowel Elision. This result, arguably, cannot be achieved with the traditional Strict CV framework of Lowenstamm (1996). Thus, this analysis is a valuable step towards a more general understanding of sandhi effects in autosegmental phonology.

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