

“*Quan’ i’ pleut, et tout*” : using media archives for longitudinal analyses of phonological variation in the French media

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Studies of phonological variation in French have been traditionally carried out on small, balanced, and tightly controlled corpora that are built to test specific hypotheses of theoretical interest. By virtue of their precise but limited scope, they are unavailable for development into larger databases and cannot have much longitudinal depth. Such proprietary datasets typically serve the purposes of laboratory or fieldwork-type investigations and often share many similarities with sociolinguistic corpora (Kendall 2011). While several contemporary databases, such as the PFC (*Phonologie du Français Contemporain*) corpus, represent a major break with this tradition by introducing teachers, researchers, and the general public to “the richness and diversity of spoken French attested in each of its variety in the entire *francophonie*”¹ (Eychenne and Laks 2012:7), these types of corpora need more time and data to allow systematic longitudinal comparisons of different speech styles and genres.

In this paper, I present the results of a longitudinal analysis of variable liaison, schwa, and consonant cluster simplification in an archival corpus of broadcast media samples recorded for over thirty years with the same *hip hop* (break dance, graph, and rap) artists in France. Built from multiple interviews available in the INA (*Institut National de l’Audiovisuel*) media archives in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, the corpus is comprised of over twelve hours of transcribed and tagged public speech from the early 1980s until the late 2000s. Similar to previous studies of the speech of well-known media and political personalities (e.g. Podesva et al. 2002; Harrington 2006), the corpus was built to probe for patterns of both stable and emerging phonological phenomena in a specific genre of public speech. It was also hoped that these samples, structured into a single corpus, could provide some insights into the co-occurrence of phonological variants with other variable morpho-syntactic and discourse-pragmatic phenomena over time.

The first results indicate that the omission of obligatory liaisons and the systematic simplification of word-final consonant clusters became more frequent in the interview samples over time, while schwa tagging remained stable in thirty years. While there were considerable individual differences, starting from the mid-1990s, previously unattested features also appeared in the samples. One such feature was the palatalization of word-initial stop consonants after high vowels, a finding corroborated by other studies of broadcast media (see e.g. Candea et al. 2013). As expected, other variable features were also attested, including general extenders such as *et tout* and *etc.* (see Secova 2017) that seem to have been absent in the speech of the same artists just a decade earlier.

Rather than offering definitive conclusions about patterns of variation, I propose to discuss these results in terms of insights that they can provide into the dynamics of phonological and morpho-syntactic variation in stylized speech performances in the media over time.

¹ « la richesse et la diversité du français oral, attestées par chacune de ses variétés et par la francophonie dans son ensemble »

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