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BA Thesis Report:
Kristýna Melišová
“Linking in French Speakers of English”

This thesis compared different types of phonetic linking mechanisms in French learners of English (even though at least one person seems to have been a bilingual speaker rather than a language learner). Three treatments were administered: spontaneous speech, reading a text, and reading unconnected sentences. Linking was identified in all three conditions, and a sociolinguistic analysis of speaker sex and age was attempted. In general, the methods are appropriate and the results are informative. The thesis is well-organized and -written.

The introduction covers a range of relevant literature and provides a good theoretical background for the reader. One could have made an effort to find more recent literature for some of the sub topics.

The methods are generally fine. I was wondering about a few things, though. (1) If the only information extracted from Praat with the script was the „labels“ of the segments (i.e., words, preceding words) and the point tiers labelled with particular linking mechanisms (as stated on page 29), why was Praat necessary at all? For the manual annotation based on „attentive listening“, the sound files and an Excel sheet would have sufficed for acoustic classification. With actual acoustical measurements gleaned from Praat, the study could have been strengthened considerably.

(2) It is stated that „*Conversations, texts and phrases were analysed on the basis of attentive listening and they were manually labelled in a point tier using labels*“

Here, reliability of the manual annotations should have been established by having a second person annotate a small number of items and compare if the two coders agree on the linking phenomena.

(3) „*It is necessary to note here that the stress-placement evaluation is not based on the actual position of the stress as it was produced by the speakers but on its canonical placement in the English language*“

I understand that this can be a lot of work and would have gone beyond what can be expected of a bachelor thesis. Nonetheless, I wonder how many stress misplacements actually occurred. One could have taken a small sample of the overall data (maybe 10% of the polysyllabic words) and checked for accurate stress placement. This would have given an estimate of the percentage of incorrect stress placement in the sample.

Further on, it is stated that „*There were 161 words with the primary stress on the first syllable, and 166 words with the primary stress on the second syllable.*“

Listening to 327 words and quickly note down if the stress was placed correctly/ incorrectly would not have taken long. One could have made notes on stress during the manual annotations. It certainly would have contributed greatly in terms of data analysis.

In the results section, the tables and graphs are very nice and informative. I also appreciate the inclusion of the stimuli in the Appendix.

The gender and age analyses are well done and rather interesting. I wonder if phonetic ability has something to do with it, rather than global English proficiency. It is known that women tend to perceive/ produce phonetic contrasts a little better than men, in general. Even though all participants officially had the same proficiency level in English (B1), phonetic abilities may differ. This could explain the different rates of linking and glottalization in different gender and age groups.

On a more general note, it is problematic to compare reduction processes (for instance h-deletion) without a consideration of the phonetic mechanisms that commonly guide acoustic reduction. It would have benefitted the thesis to include some discussion of theories on acoustic reduction.

Minor comments:

The references list contains a multitude of errors and does not adhere to one citation style. Punctuation and font (Italics) are rather varied and the information included for some items is unusual (for instance,

the place where a journal is published). Page numbers, issue numbers etc. are often omitted. Once it says „Available online from“ but no URL is provided.

Typing mistakes:

Page 36: „The linking-glottalization ratio id provided in the Figure 7“

Page 42: „The fact that none of them produced [r] in the context of non-high vowels where confirms the theory that“

Questions for the defence:

1. Please elaborate on the sociolinguistic aspect of your work.
2. What is your explanation for the age-related findings of your study? Could there be an effect of different teaching methodologies or are young French ESL learners more familiar with English pronunciation?
3. How do you explain the large variability among the study group in terms of the linking phenomena that you investigated in your study?

In summary, the thesis represents a well-planned study that utilized appropriate methodology to achieve interesting results. Despite some areas of concern (as outlined above), the main objectives of a B.A. work have been fulfilled. I suggest the thesis to be accepted with a grade of *výborně* or *velmi dobře*, depending on the student's performance at the oral defense.

Eva Maria Luef, PhD

