

## **The extent to which the Breton language is influenced by French at the junction of two words**

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The Breton language has been taught at school for over thirty years, so it is now possible to see to what extent it has resisted the influence of French, which is currently spoken everywhere in Brittany. Teachers are aware of the difficulty in properly teaching Breton syntax, which is so different from French in many ways. I examined a phenomenon that is rarely covered by books, or if so only in passing : the liaisons, meaning the changes at the junction of two words. The liaisons affect especially correlative consonants, in a very different way to French. It is therefore now possible to measure precisely how Breton has been affected by the French way of linking words. I was troubled by the difficulties my pupils had in the pronunciation of Breton, particularly the liaisons. The link between French and Breton seemed clear to me: almost every new Breton learner speaks French as a first language. And that first language is not neutral and generally learners speak Breton with the French pattern.

First of all I tried to understand the French way of linking words. The answer was not clear. For this is a point that French schools do not explain and do not teach. Of course every French native speaker knows how to make liaisons in French, but it is very difficult for anyone to explain the system, even for a teacher. For it is not a simple system. We have to mention the obligatory liaisons, the forbidden ones and the facultative ones. But there is a difference too between what is really called a liaison (when a mute consonant in the word alone is heard at the junction) and what is called linking (when the last consonant, pronounced in each case, is simply attached to the word behind, without changing the nature of it). My study concerned the twelve correlative consonants (p/b, t/d, k/g, s/z, ch/j and f/v). Generally the French way to perform liaisons is by devoicing. The most frequent consonant is t/d, both pronounced [t]. One exception: the -s mute is voiced in liaisons. In Breton the last consonants are pronounced. So we cannot speak of liaisons in Breton, but more precisely of linking. But where the consonant does not change in French linking, it is regularly voiced in Breton (HEMON, FAVEREAU).

Based on this, I call liaison the structure used in Breton in this context. Two facts are to be noted : first, textbooks do not mention liaisons (not a word about them in 52% of the Breton school books analysed). But another reason is that Breton learners work more on reading and writing than speaking with native speakers. And on this point we have to mention the Buben effect, e.g. the influence of writing on pronunciation. I also measured this in my research on bilingual Breton schools.

Conclusion: My study shows the way the Breton language is applying liaisons after thirty years of teaching. What kind of methodology can be put in place if Bretons want to limit the influence of French on their own language ? As far as pronunciation is concerned, I propose a corpus of four basic rules, with liaisons being the fourth. Teaching the basic differences between the two languages is essential. But another method could be to change the conventional spelling system on final consonants as suggested in 1953 and 1975, but which has never been acted on, meaning the system used in bilingual schools is the same today as it was in 1941.