

Cross-language differences in hiatus resolution

Initial vowels have sparked considerable interest among researchers as they frequently lead to hiatus, the adjacency of two vowels belonging to separate syllables. Studies have shown that Polish resolves vowel hiatus by means of glottalisation (e.g. Schwartz 2013). In contrast, both English and French are known for *sandhi*-linking, whereby adjacent heterosyllabic vowels undergo diphthongisation or gliding (e.g. Broadbent 1991; Walker 2001). However, there exists a small group of French words starting with an *h-aspiré* which resist linking and favour glottalisation. Hence, the language shares some features with English and some with Polish.

The exposure to linking in French could be expected to give an advantage to L2 French learners in perceiving word boundaries in linked initial vowels in their L1 Polish. In order to address this hypothesis, I conducted a word counting task (Schwartz 2017) requiring participants, divided into two groups according to their knowledge of French ($n = 29$) and lack thereof ($n = 23$), to decide whether they have heard one or two words. The two-word phrases had an initial vowel in the second word, of which half were linked and half were glottalised. Contrary to what was hypothesised, linked stimuli elicited similar RTs from participants in both groups ($p > 0.05$). However, a facilitatory effect was found for glottalised stimuli for participants without any knowledge of French ($p < 0.01$).

The experiment results are in line with the assumptions of the Onset Prominence framework (e.g. Schwartz 2016). Earlier studies have shown that the Vocalic Onset node, representing the ambiguous transition between a stop consonant and a vowel, is associated with a consonant in English and with a vowel in Polish. Since the L2 French participants reacted significantly more slowly to glottalised stimuli, the affiliation of the VO node is different for Polish and regular French vowels. Therefore, it is hereby proposed that the VO parameter setting for French is consonantal for the great majority of regular vowels, and vocalic for the *h-aspiré*.

References:

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