

The acceptability of exceptional and innovative liaison in Canadian varieties of French

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This paper investigates *liaison* productivity and exceptionality in Quebec French (QF) and other Canadian varieties (OCF) – see esp. Côté (2005, 2011). Typically, the liaison consonant of a determiner like *un* [n] or *les* [z] is produced before vowel-initial nouns, including *b-muet* words that are spelled with an initial silent <h> (1a). However, a small set of vowel-initial *b-aspiré* nouns are exceptional, in that they traditionally block liaison (1b):

(1a)	joli hiver	[ʒɔli.ivɛʁ]	<i>pretty winter</i>	(1b)	joli hibou	[ʒɔli.ibu]	<i>pretty owl</i>
	un hiver	[œ̃n ivɛʁ]	<i>a (one) winter</i>		un hibou	[œ̃.ibu]	<i>an owl</i>
	les hivers	[lez ivɛʁ]	<i>the winters</i>		les hiboux	[le.ibu]	<i>the owls</i>

Recent production studies (Tessier *et al.*, 2021, *to appear*) have found that QF speakers are in fact quite variable in blocking liaison, even with common *b-aspiré* nouns (see also Zuraw & Hayes, 2017). Since participants in these studies only produced one token for each determiner + noun, however, this inter-speaker variability is open to many interpretations. Compared to dictionary standards, what is the scope of *b-aspiré* words’ exceptionality? To the extent that innovative forms like [lezibu] (*cf.* 1b) are judged acceptable, are traditional [le.ibu] forms judged *less* acceptable? Or do (some) speakers simply accept both?

Methods This paper reports the results of a companion acceptability judgment study, completed by the production participants from Tessier *et al.* (to appear). The dataset includes 30 native QF speakers and 15 native OCF speakers. Each participant provided judgments on a 0-5 Likert scale as to the acceptability of auditorily-presented forms with and without liaison for three *b-aspiré* nouns (*hiboux*, *homards*, *hasard*) and two *b-muet* nouns (*hôpitaux*, *hiver*), preceded either by *un* or *les*. In coding, we calculated a difference Δ score for each participant’s responses to each noun, defined as their rating of the traditional form (e.g., [lezivɛʁ, le_ibu]) minus their rating of the innovative form ([le_ivɛʁ, lezibu]). Higher Δ scores correspond to a stronger preference for traditional variants.

Results As expected, all speakers judged liaison with regular *b-muet* words much more acceptable than its absence; the high Δ values on the left side of Fig. A shows this for QF speakers (white bars) and OCF speakers (grey bars). *H-aspiré* words, on Fig. A’s right side, differed. For both groups, the lower Δ s reveal that innovation with *b-aspiré* words is relatively more acceptable than with *b-muet* words. For OCF speakers, the Δ s are near zero – i.e., realizations with and without liaison are judged equivalent. Mixed regression modeling confirms these effects ($p < .001$ for location, noun type, and their interaction).

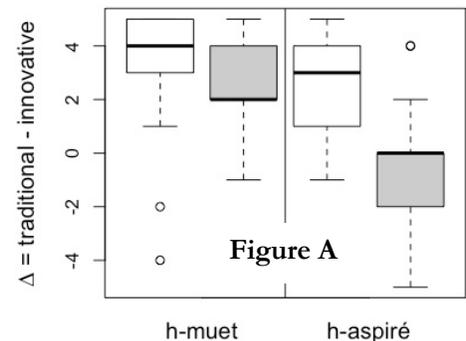
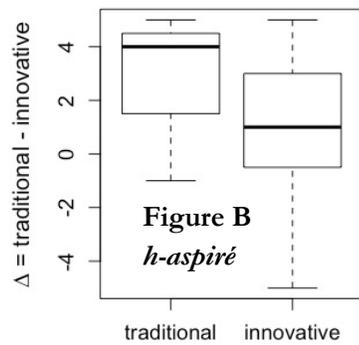


Fig. B plots all participants’ Δ scores for *b-aspiré* words only, split according to their productions of such words in Tessier *et al.* (to appear). In that previous study, 12 of the QF participants were categorized as ‘traditional’ for blocking liaison with all eight *b-aspiré* items they produced – while the remaining QF participants and all OCF participants were labeled as ‘innovative’ for producing at least one *b-aspiré* word with liaison. Fig. B shows that this split is also predictive of their acceptability judgment data: traditionalists have significantly higher Δ s than innovators, meaning they were less accepting of liaison with *b-aspiré* words.

Discussion Production and acceptability data both suggest that, for a wide range of French-speaking Canadians, *b-aspiré* words are represented as more susceptible to liaison than is standardly assumed. The extent of this innovation varies as a function of language variety (tied here to location) and also individual grammar. We discuss what types of accounts of *b-aspiré* representation can be reconciled with these facts (*cf.* Gabriel & Meisenberg, 2009; Smolensky & Goldrick, 2016), and what types of theoretical models can capture such patterns of lexical exceptionality at the individual and population levels.

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