Consonant-liquid clusters and schwa /ə/ epenthesis in Windsor Ontario French

Under the *Phonologie du français contemporain* project (Durand and Lyche 2003), we examine certain phonological idiosyncrasies of the variety of French spoken in the Windsor, ON area. Past research has shown that, as in the case of many varieties of Canadian French, the phonetic realization of French in Southwestern Ontario is heavily influenced by English (Nadasdi 2005, Rehner & Mougeon 1999). First, we look at the phenomenon referred to as R-alternation, where /R/, common in standard (Walker 2001) and Québécois French, and /r/, common in English. Our aim is to explore whether the /r/ variant is more frequent when preceded by certain types of consonants; and whether the appearance of the variant is dependent upon the position of the cluster within the word or larger phonological domains (phonological word, accentual group, etc.). Second, we look at the epenthesis of /ə/ (schwa) that seems to appear in all consonant-liquid clusters (Colantoni and Steele, to appear). In this case, we examine whether the occurrence of /ə/ epenthesis is dependent upon the type of consonant-liquid combinations, and again, whether the position of the cluster within the word or in the prosodic structure is a determining factor. 224 instances of consonant-liquid clusters were extracted from the recordings of semi-directed conversations by four speakers within the PFC Windsor corpus. These clusters were analyzed using PRAAT, a computer program for acoustic speech analysis. We discuss the methodological problems encountered in this type of approach, as well as our preliminary results.


