



# THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNING DURATION AND TASK TYPE ON THE REALIZATION OF LIAISON BY INDONESIAN STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** Every language has its own rules and characteristics in phonetics. Connected speech is one of the most significant features of the French language and one of them is liaison. This phenomenon poses a particular difficulty and affects the oral competence of students whose first language doesn't have the same phenomenon. The purpose of this study is to explain the influence of learning duration and task type on its realization. The participants were 44 FLE students of Lampung University. This study used a mixed-method approach with reading and speaking tests as well as interviews as data collection techniques. Data analysis was supported by the use of PRAAT software. The results showed that, in general, the realization rate of liaison is quite low. In this study, the learning duration was found to have no effect on liaison realization. On the other hand, its realization in spontaneous speaking was higher than in reading text. Differences in the phonological system and phoneme-grapheme transparency between French and Indonesian language, as well as a lack of concept understanding and of exposure to communication by native speakers, are some of the factors that influence the realization.

**Keywords:** French as Foreign Language (FLE); obligatory liaison, facultative liaison; forbidden language

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Speech is a continuous activity. The sequences of sounds in utterances can undergo modifications that cause the pronunciation of the constituent words to sound different than if they were spoken separately. These changes include liaison. This phenomenon is common and is a characteristic of spoken language (Norris, 1995; Griffée, 1995; Moh-Kim, 1997; Rogerson, 2006 in Nawafleh, 2023). The modifications are also influenced by the context (Juliana, 2018).

Haičman (2023) states that pronunciation is a reflection of each language that is specific and important. One form of connected speech in French is liaison. Although the same term is also found in English, the meaning and function in French is not exactly the same. This phenomenon is defined as the pronunciation of a silent consonant at the end of a word when it is followed by another word beginning with a vowel (Fougeron et al., 2001; Sampson, 2001; Bonami et al., 2004; Bybee, 2005; Abry & Abry, 2007; Grevisse & Goose, 2008; Kamoun et al., 2016; Gadet in Ferrat, 2012; Chevrot et al., 2013; Howard, 2013, Andreassen & Lyche, 2016). Delattre (1957) normatively divides liaison into three categories, namely obligatory (liaison obligatoire/LO), facultative (liaison facultative/LF), and prohibited (liaison interdite/LI).

For FLE (*Français Langue Étrangère*/French as a foreign language) students, especially those

whose first language does not have similar phenomena, this poses a particular difficulty. In this context, Tennant (2015), Hallin (2016), Andreassen & Lyche (2016), Detey, Kawaguchi & Kondo (2016), and Harnois-Delpiano (2016) studied liaison realization by students from consecutively Canada, Sweden, Norway, Japan, and Korea, and the results showed that the higher the students' language proficiency level, the higher the level of liaison realization. Meanwhile, Valetopoulous' (2016) research on Greek students showed no differences between two groups of students having different level. Based on language task types, Tennant (2016), Stridfeldt (2023), and Racine (2016) showed that FLE learners from Canada, Sweden, and Spain realized more liaison in spontaneous speech (conversation) than in reading texts, while research by Andreassen & Lyche (2016) on Norwegian FLE students showed that there is no significant difference in both task types.

The research results by Thomas (2002), Howard (2006), and Detey, Kawaguchi & Kondo (2016) on FLE students from Canada, Ireland, and Japan show that the level of LO realization among students who have lived in French-speaking countries is higher than that of students who only study in their own countries, while for the LF category, the results are the opposite. On the other hand, research by Racine (2016) on students from Spain shows those who have never



lived in those countries performed better in liaison.

Those study mention several factors that influence liaison realization, including lack of practice, lack of awareness, and most importantly, differences in the phonological system between students' first language and French. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no study that examines realization from a learning perspective in greater depth. Liaison is a connection between words that can only be applied in certain word sequences. In addition, the consonants used as connectors are not always silent consonants from the first word being connected; some consonants undergo changes. Therefore, mastery of liaison is related to understanding the concept of liaison itself. In other words, aspects related to learning, particularly the teaching/learning of phonetics (especially liaison), have not been examined in relevant studies. Therefore, this study aims to examine the realization of liaison more comprehensively in FLE learners whose first language is b.

## 2. METHODS

This study involved 44 FLE students from Lampung University who were divided into two groups, namely 17 students in seventh semester

(group I) and 27 students from fifth semester (group II). The students from group I had studied French for  $\pm$  650 hours in class or equivalent to level B2 of the CEFR standard, while group II had studied for  $\pm$  350 hours or equivalent to level B1. Speaking tests for some communication situations (monologue), reading texts containing LO, LF, and LI, as well as interviews were used as data collection. These instruments validity was determined using expert judgment. Data analysis techniques were carried out by listening attentively to the recordings. The level of realization was measured by comparing the number of connected word sequences and of potentially connected sequences. Data reliability was assessed by interrater, namely the researcher and native speaker. In addition, spectrograms from PRAAT are used to present the data and to strengthen justification for the linking.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

There are several classifications of liaison. This study uses the one from Delattre. The following table shows the results of liaison realization for all categories in speaking and reading texts using this classification:

Table 1. Realization of liaison by Indonesian students in spontaneous speaking and reading texts

	Group	LO			LF			LI		
		R	P	%	R	P	%	R	P	%
<b>Spontaneous Speaking</b>	<b>I</b>	361	855	42.22	59	460	12.82	6	219	2.67
	<b>II</b>	213	544	39.15	54	304	17.76	18	149	12.08
<b>Reading Texts</b>	<b>I</b>	858	2349	36.52	66	675	9.77	26	297	8.75
	<b>II</b>	543	1479	36,71	46	425	10.17	20	187	10.69

\*) R = number of realized liaison, P=number of potential sequences

The table above shows that the level of LO realization of Group 1 in spontaneous speaking is slightly higher than of Group II, while in reading texts the level tends to be the same. On the other hand, both in speaking and reading texts, the level of realization among students in Group II is higher than in Group I. The prohibited liaison (LI) is also frequently applied by group II in both language practices. From these results, it can be seen that even though there is a difference of  $\pm$  200 hours of French language learning in class, it does not affect the better application of liaison. Group II, with fewer hours of study, actually had a better realization rate than Group I, although on the other hand, this group realized more LI. Meanwhile, regarding the differences in the types of language practices, it can be seen that there

are differences in the realization rates for both, namely that the realization in speaking for both groups was better than in reading texts.

### Discussion

In general, the level of liaison realization among Indonesian students is lower than that of other FLE students, for example, the LO realization of Swedish students (84.8%), Greek students (80.53%) (Valetopoulos, 2016), or Italian students in the Trieste corpus (94.48%) and the Milan corpus (79.13%) (Racine, et al. 2014). Similarly, for the LF category, the realization of these Indonesians FLE students is lower than that of several other students, such as students from Canada (15.05%), Sweden



(13.6%), Greece (19.80%), and Japan (19.29%), which also use the Delattre classification.

Indonesian FLE students in this study more often pronounce words individually, or without liaison. This implies that linking utterances is still

a challenge for these learners. The spectrogram image below shows the difference in context (word combination) linked with liaison and those without.

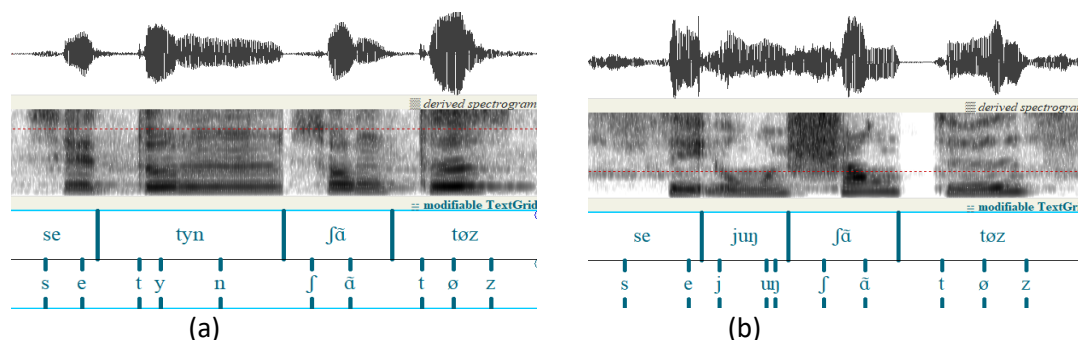


Figure 1. Spectrogram of realized LF (a) and non-realized LF for *c'est une chanteuse*

In the LO category, the contexts most frequently realized by both groups in speaking and reading texts tended to be the same, namely subject pronouns + verbs such as *nous allons*, determiners (numerals) + nouns such as *dix ans*, and determiners (possessive adjectives) + nouns such as *ses enfants*. The same results also occurred for the LF category, where the contexts most frequently realized by both groups were for patterns such as *c'est*, e.g., *c'est un/une*, and the verb *être* + *participe passé*, e.g., *je suis allé*. These contexts are basic forms or, in other words, combinations that are indeed productive in French. The similarity in the contexts most frequently realized by both groups implies the influence of memory in their application based on what is often heard or used. On the other hand, several other contexts have a 0% realization rate for both the LO and LF categories, such as monosyllabic prepositions + following words, for example *chez eux*, or monosyllabic adverbs such as *plus âgée*.

According to Delattre (1947), there are several word sequences that are prohibited from being linked, namely after the conjunction *et*, determiners + nouns beginning with aspirated *h* (*h aspiré*), singular nouns as subjects + adjectives, words in different rhythmic groups, and in parts of sentences that undergo inversion with the following word. For this LI category, both in direct speech and in reading texts, participants most often applied liaison in the context after the conjunction *et*, for example, *et un poireau*.

Apart from context, another factor that also influences the realization of liaison is related to liaison consonants (*consonne de liaison*), hereafter abbreviated as CL. Historically, the final consonant grapheme in the bP vocabulary was

pronounced, but between the 12th and 16th centuries, the final consonant gradually ceased to be pronounced (Côté, 2011). The phenomenon of liaison, which pronounces these final consonants, is considered a trace or remnant of a concept that once existed in Old French (Abry & Abry, 2007; Côté, 2011). Theoretically, there are only CLs [z], [n], [t], [ʁ], [p], and [k or g] that have different productivity. In fact, CL [k or g] is considered no longer productive (Morin, 1982 in Côté, 2011) because it only occurs in the adjectives *long* and [p] in *trop* and *beaucoup*.

The results of this study show that liaison occurs more frequently in contexts with consecutive CL [z] > [n] > [t] in both speaking and reading texts. The linking consonant [z] generally originates from contexts such as subject pronoun + verb, e.g., *nous [z] avons* or *ils [z] ont*, or adjective + noun, e.g., *mes [z] amis*, and numeral + noun, e.g., *trois[z] ans*. The CL [n] is more commonly found in contexts of indefinite articles + nouns, for example *un [n] opéra*, and subject pronouns + verbs such as *on [n] est*, which is only found in the LO category. Meanwhile, CL [t] is dominated by the context of the pattern *c'est* and numerals + nouns such as in *c'est [t] un* and *vingt [t] ans*.

In addition to word sequences, the inappropriate CL is one of the factors that causes a low level of liaison realization. This error is more commonly found in reading texts due to the pronunciation of the final grapheme M1, for example in the words *grand* and *quand*, which are pronounced [gʁã] and [kã]. The grapheme <nd> at the end of both words does not represent any sound and is also called a silent consonant. The liaison consonant used should be [t], such as in *quand on*, which should be pronounced [kã.tõ] instead of [kã.dõ]. This is influenced by the



Indonesian orthographic system, in which the relationship between phonemes and graphemes is more transparent than in French.

The substitution of CL [z] by [s] is also the most common type of CL usage deviation. This phenomenon is also called devoicing (*dévoisement*). In his study of FLE students in Montreal, Jacques (1990) mentions the characteristics of French fricative consonants, including that the fricative consonants [v, z, and

ʒ] are prone to devoicing when they occur at the end of a word compared to when they occur at the beginning or between vowels (intervocalique). The likelihood of remaining voiced is about one-third of the production duration for [z and ʒ] and two-thirds for [v]. This explanation could be the reason why there are more errors of CL [z] substitution by [s]. The following spectrogram shows this phenomenon.

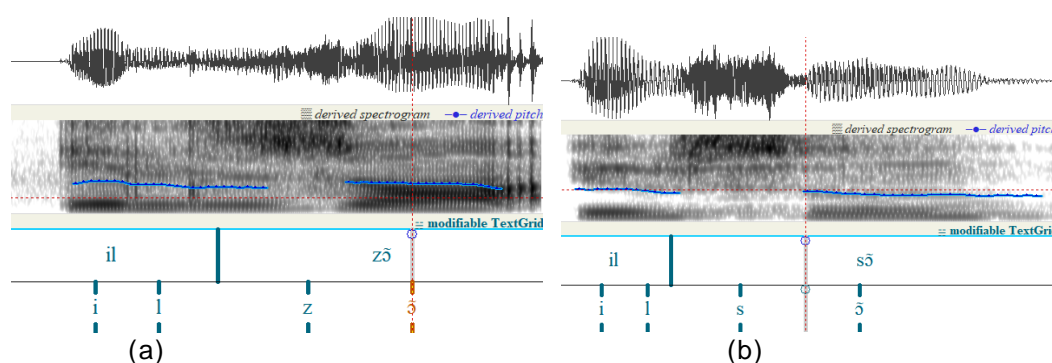


Figure 2. Spectrogram of LO realization *ils ont* with CL [z] and [s]

The above discussion has explained several factors that influence the realization of liaison from a linguistic perspective, such as differences in the phonological and orthographic systems between Indonesian and French. This realization is also influenced by non-linguistic factors. From the interview results, several factors related to teaching and learning were identified.

As something that is systemic, French also has rules related to the field of phonology that bind users of this language. Mastery of linguistic rules or theories, such as phonology, is a strong foundation for achieving good oral language competence. With a good theoretical understanding, learners can identify certain patterns and solve language-related problems more effectively, thereby building a deeper understanding of the meaning and context of language use (Najmi & Nursalim, 2020). The phonological stage in speaking is the last (third) stage after conceptualization (message) and formulation (words and structure), while in reading texts, this stage is included in the initial stage, namely the regularity of forms and letter combinations, which is then followed by the meaning stage.

The application of liaison is not only related to phonology but also syntax, because all three occur in specific syntactic units that have implications for meaning. Students must know in

which word order liaison can be applied because of its specific application. Therefore, understanding the concept of the three is essential for their realization in spoken language. This is in line with Krashen's (1982) monitor hypothesis in Pauzan (2024) that learned knowledge (learning rather than acquisition) can function as a monitor for checking and producing language.

The interview results revealed that only 14 participants (31.8%) understood the meaning of liaison. However, none of the participants were familiar with the classification of liaison, namely obligatory, optional, and prohibited. In addition, the majority of participants only knew the consonant [z] as CL. These results explain why some participants replaced CLs such as [n] or [t] with the consonant [z], and even some learners used it when it should not have been applied (referred to as *cuir*), for example, *les gens qui [z] habitant, pour [z] enfants, il m'a [z] alors*.

The status of pronunciation teaching is often considered to be like a stepchild in the context of L2 teaching (Norris & Ortega, 2002). One of them was conveyed by Elliott (1997) in Morin (2007) that language acquisition in the field of pronunciation has been neglected and seriously ignored in language classes. This neglect is considered one of several factors that hinder the



achievement of language skills, especially speaking and listening.

Several other factors that cause pronunciation teaching to be neglected, especially in the context of FLE (Français Langue Étrangère), are detailed by Dufeu (1996) as including an emphasis on written language over spoken language, a lack of explanations or exercises related to pronunciation in textbooks, a view of pronunciation as a complex phenomenon, phonetic exercises that emphasize sound oppositions rather than presenting language sounds that facilitate oral comprehension or contexts for producing sounds, and a lack of teachers trained in this field. Meanwhile, other factors that contribute to this neglect are that pronunciation does not have a central and integrated position in the curriculum (McDonald, 2002) and the lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials (Carbo et al., 2003; Jones, 1997).

Regarding the discussion of pronunciation segments in the classroom, the interview results showed that the majority, or 68.2%, responded that learning that emphasizes pronunciation is rarely applied in the classroom, even though the textbooks used are equipped with phonetic segments, including liaison. Therefore, it can be concluded that the lack of emphasis on phonological aspects in learning affects realization. In fact, the positive effect of direct teaching of liaison to improve pronunciation has also been demonstrated by De Moras (2013).

According to Long (2017) in Alahmadi (2019), language input is one of the most important components of the L2 acquisition process. Gass & Mackey (2014) also emphasize that learning cannot occur without input. According to them, input that can build language competence can be obtained by L2 learners through spoken or written language.

The important role of interaction with native speakers in learning a foreign language has been emphasized by many experts and studies. Interaction with native speakers increases L2 learners' participation in using the target language and gives them the opportunity to receive input and produce output in the target language. This interaction can improve both speaking and listening skills (Mahfouz & Ihmeideh, 2009). Scarcella & Oxford (1992) state that interaction with native speakers can provide a rich source for learning about the various registers in L2 that learners need to develop communicative competence. Rubin and Thompson (1994) in Thu (2009) also argue that the target language community provides a wealth of information about the nature of interaction and about the appropriate way of speaking.

The interview results show that the participants' exposure to French is minimal. Participants rarely access French communication with native speakers either directly or through other media. Input and exposure are still dominated by the use of French by teachers in the classroom. However, the use of liaison does not only apply to simple contexts. Krashen (1982), with his Input Hypothesis, states that L2 acquisition occurs through comprehensible input (input that is understood) and slightly above the current level of competence (i+1). So, contextual language exposure input can be slightly increased in complexity, such as listening to news, podcasts, etc. by native speakers. This can be used to internalize this form of connection.

## CONCLUSION

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that differences in the length of study, which means longer interaction with the French language, do not affect the realization of liaison. This is shown by the realization results of the two groups of participants who had a difference in study duration of  $\pm 200$  hours. Conversely, differences in linguistic practices involving orthography affect the level of realization. The transparency of the phoneme-grapheme relationship in Indonesian and the absence of silent letters are some of the reasons for the lower level of liaison realization in reading texts compared to speaking directly. In addition to linguistic factors, the realization of this type of connection is also influenced by non-linguistic factors such as a lack of understanding of concepts, teaching strategies, and a lack of input/exposure to French communication as in native speakers. The use of liaison not only makes speech sound smoother, more harmonious, and more natural, but its use is also related to sociolinguistic aspects. Therefore, its mastery needs special attention. Further research on this phonological phenomenon can be applied, particularly in the field of language acquisition, such as the effect of direct teaching on the realization of liaison and the relationship between production and receptivity, which may provide insights.

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