

ROMANCE GLIDES REVISITED

An OT analysis of high vowels/glides alternation in French and Italian

Baroni Antonio

University of Padua

Department of Linguistic and Literary Studies

PhD Student

antonio.baroni@studenti.unipd.it

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This contribution examines the data and the analysis carried out by Alf Lombard in his book *Le rôle des semi-voyelles et leur concurrence avec les voyelles correspondantes dans la prononciation parisienne* (1964) in which he claims that in Parisian French unstressed high vowels /i, y, u/ surface as the corresponding glides [j, ɥ, w] unless they are preceded by a consonant followed by a liquid (cf. Hall 2006).

In the first section of the paper, the criteria identified by Lombard for the high vowel/glide alternation in French are formalised in an Optimality Theory framework (a linguistic model developed by Prince & Smolensky (1993/2004), in which phonological constraints are universal and violable and cross-linguistic differences are explained by different constraint rankings).

In section two, following Lombard's suggestion, French glides distribution is compared with that of another Romance language, Italian, in which high vowels/glides alternation is very often subjected to variation and therefore an underlying representation with a segment unspecified for the feature [syllabicity] has to be posited.

In section three, French and Italian definite masculine article allomorphy before words beginning with a glide is examined. It is shown that in both languages orthography affects native speakers' decision, since words beginning with [w] select the same article allomorph which would appear before a vowel, unless [w] is spelled with the non-native grapheme <w> (cf. *l'oiseau* [wazo] vs. *le whisky* [wiski] in French, *l'uovo* [wovo] vs. *il walkman* [wɔlkmen] in Italian). In French orthography also affects article allomorph selection before [j] (*l'ion* [jɔ̃] vs. *le yacht* [jɔt]) but in Italian a MARKEDNESS constraint bans sequences of a lateral followed by [j] (McCrary 2004), regardless of spelling (*lo ione* [jone], *lo yacht* [jɔt], **il/l'ione*, **il/l'yacht*).

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