The grammar(s) of glide formation in French

A longstanding theoretical description of the phonological grammar of Standard French claims that nuclear diphthongization is no longer active therefore any word-medial glide resulting from active derivation must take a position in the preceding onset and by corollary a branching onset in the preceding environment would block glide formation as in (1):

(1)  
   a.  CV+V → CGV  
   b.  CLV+V → CLV.GV

Often the study of glide formation is limited to a data set which does not represent the true variability of the grammar.

The data in figure 1 demonstrate clearly that while this description may account for the data of Standard French rather handily as in (1), it cannot account for the variable glide data attested in non-standard varieties of French as in figure 1.

As much for a detailed description of the variation as for the elaboration of an adequate grammatical model, glide formation phenomena must be examined in a much more extensive corpus of French (standard and non-standard varieties alike) in order to properly document that which is shared and that which is not shared in these various grammars.

To this end, this pilot study examines glide formation in a divergent sample of French varieties (Canadian French, Belgian French and Midi French, for example). In a preliminary variable rule analysis conducted on one non-standard variety of French, it was determined that the factors most significant to glide formation were in fact the internal factors and most particularly the preceding context (single consonant versus cluster). This study examines these internal factors (which segment in the preceding context, which vowel in the following context, and which prosodic domains) to specifically determine which the most hospitable environment is in word-medial glide formation across these divergent varieties and to determine what is common and what is not common to the phonological grammar of these varieties.
Bibliography


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