

C O N T E N T S

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P R O N U N C I A T I O N

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Pronunciation module consists of this Description and a set of computerised listening exercises: it teaches you all the speech-sounds of French. The variety taught is standard French as spoken by the educated middle classes in France.

2. INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS

2.1. Consonants

2.1.1. Plosives

p Voiceless bilabial plosive, unaspirated.

Like English *p*, but without the following puff of breath. **pɛʁ** *father*.

b Voiced bilabial plosive.

Like English *b*, but with more buzz. **bɛl** *nice*.

t Voiceless denti-alveolar plosive, unaspirated.

Like English *t*, but with the tongue pushed against the front teeth and without the following puff of breath. **tɛt** *head*.

d Voiced denti-alveolar plosive.

Like English *d*, but with the tongue pushed against the front teeth and with more buzz. **dɛʁnje** *last*.

k Voiceless velar plosive, unaspirated.

Like English *k*, but without the following puff of breath. **kɛl** *which*.

g Voiced velar plosive.

Like English *g*, but with more buzz. **gɑʁd** *watch*.

2.1.2. Nasals

m Voiced bilabial nasal.

Like English *m*. **mɛʁ** *mother*.

n Voiced denti-alveolar nasal.

Like English *n*, but with the tongue pushed against the front teeth. **nɔʁ** *our*.

ɲ Voiced palatal nasal.

Like the *ny* sound in English *onion*. **ɔ̃ʁse** *teach*.

2.1.3. Trill

ʁ Voiced uvular trill.

A sort of gargle, made by bouncing the uvula up and down between the tongue and the roof of the mouth. **biʁ** *laugh*.

2.1.4. Fricatives

f Voiceless labio-dental fricative.

Like English *f*. **fɛʁ** *do*.

v Voiced labio-dental fricative.

Like English *v*. **vɛʁ** *towards*.

s Voiceless alveolar fricative.

Like *ss* in English *hiss*. **sɛz** *sixteen*.

z Voiced alveolar fricative.

Like *z* in English *lazy*. **zɛʁo** *zero*.

ʃ Voiceless post-alveolar fricative.

Like *sh* in English *shush*. **ʃak** *each*.

ʒ Voiced post-alveolar fricative.

Like the *zh* sound in English *measure*. **ʒamɛ** *never*.

2.1.5. Approximants

l Voiced alveolar lateral-approximant.

Like English *l*. lɛtɚ letter.

j Voiced palatal approximant.

Like *y* in English *yoyo*. jɛs yesterday.

ɥ Voiced labial-palatal approximant.

Like English *w*, but with the lips compressed and the front of the tongue lifted up. ɥit eight.

w Voiced labial-velar approximant.

Like English *w*. wi yes.

2.2. Vowels

2.2.1. Oral vowels

i Close front unrounded vowel.

Like *ee* in English *flee*, but shorter. imaʒ picture.

e Close-mid front unrounded vowel.

Halfway between English *bet* and *bit*. ete summer.

ɛ Open-mid front unrounded vowel.

Like *e* in English *dress*. ɛr air.

a Open central unrounded vowel.

Like *a* in English *path*, but shorter, and with the tongue further forward. avwaʁ have.

ɔ Open-mid back rounded vowel.

Like the vowel-sound in English *thought*, but shorter. ɔm man.

o Close-mid back rounded vowel.

Halfway between English *lot* and *foot*. o water.

u Close back rounded vowel.

Like *oo* in English *moon*, but using an old-fashioned pronunciation with strongly rounded lips and the middle of the tongue pushed down, and shorter. uvʁ opens.

ə Mid central unrounded vowel.

Like *a* in English *about*. mɛsjø gentleman.

y Close front rounded vowel.

Like *ee* in English *flee*, but said with rounded lips, and shorter. yn one.

ø Close-mid front rounded vowel.

Halfway between English *bet* and *bit*, but said with rounded lips. dø two.

œ Open-mid front rounded vowel.

Like *e* in English *dress*, but said with rounded lips. œr hour.

Note 1: Many speakers use *e* in words where others use *ɛ*, and vice versa. Some speakers use a third sound, half-way between *e* and *ɛ*, in some words.

Note 2: Some speakers have two different versions of the sound *a*, using a front variety in some words and a back variety in others.

2.2.2. Nasal vowels

ã Open-mid front unrounded nasal vowel, lowered.

Like *a* in English *trap*, but said through the nose. ãpo tax.

œ̃ Open-mid front rounded nasal vowel.

Like *e* in English *dress*, but said with rounded lips and through the nose. œ̃ one.

õ Open back rounded nasal vowel.

Like *o* in English *lot*, but said through the nose. õfõ child.

õ̃ Close-mid back rounded nasal vowel.

Halfway between English *lot* and *foot*, but said through the nose. õ̃z eleven.

Note 1: The symbols used in this course to represent the nasal vowels are not the traditional symbols, but they reflect the sounds more accurately.

Note 2: Some speakers collapse *ã* and *œ̃*, using *ã* for both.

s/i il vø	sil vø	<i>if he wishes</i>
l/ə məsjø	lə məsjø	<i>the gentleman</i>
l/a mɛʁ	la mɛʁ	<i>the sea</i>
s/i ty vø	si ty vø	<i>if you wish</i>
l/ə #õz	lõz	<i>the eleven</i>

b. A sandhi consonant is removed when it comes before a consonant or at the end of the phrase, but retained when it comes before another vowel. If it is retained, it forms part of the following syllable:

le/z bj ɛʁ	le bj ɛʁ	<i>the beers</i>
ẽ/n kafe	ẽ kafe	<i>a coffee</i>
tʁwa/z fwa	tʁwa fwa	<i>three times</i>
... boku/p#	boku	<i>...a lot.</i>
... ẽ/n#	ẽ	<i>...one.</i>
... tʁwa/z#	tʁwa	<i>...three.</i>
no/z ami	no zami	<i>our friends</i>
ẽ/n aksi dõ	ẽ naksi dõ	<i>an accident</i>
tʁwa/z aksi dõ	tʁwa zaksi dõ	<i>three accidents</i>

4.2. Blocked sandhi

Some words beginning with a vowel behave under sandhi as though they were at the beginning of a phrase: this means that any word that precedes them behaves as though it came at the end of its phrase. Such words are shown in this course with an initial #. For example:

si/z #e...	sis e sɛt	<i>six and seven</i>
l/a #ɥitj ɛm...	la ɥitj ɛm fwa	<i>the eighth time</i>
se/z #õz...	se õ zami	<i>these eleven friends</i>

4.3. Special cases

The words shown below behave in special ways under sandhi. (The double slash is used in this course to show that they behave differently):

- kõmõ//t *how* retains its t only in the phrase kõmõ tale vu *how are you*.
- kõ//t *when* retains its t only in the expression kõ tɛs kə... *when is it that....*
- apʁɛ//z *after* does not retain its z in the phrase apʁɛ ø *after them*. Otherwise it shows normal sandhi: apʁɛ zyn mi nyt *after a minute* apʁɛ dø mi nyt *after two minutes*.
- sã//k *five*, si//z *six*, #ɥi//t *eight* and di//z *ten* lose their final consonant before another consonant, and retain it before a vowel, as is normal: sã fam *five women*, di fam *ten women*, ɥi tòm *eight men*, si zòm *six men*. But they also retain their consonant at the end of the phrase, in which case the final z of si//z and di//z changes to s: ʒõ vø sãk *I want five of them*, ʒõ vø swasõt dis *I want seventy of them*. These numbers behave in this way not only when they stand alone, but also when they form the final element in a compound number.
- nœf// *nine* is spoken as nœv in the two expressions nœ vœʁ *nine o'clock* and nœ võ *nine years*. Otherwise it shows no sandhi.
- vã//t *twenty* retains its sandhi /t when followed by another number in the same string: vãt dø 22, vã te õ 21, vã tɥit 28 (ignoring the blocks on #e and #ɥit). Otherwise it behaves normally, retaining its t before vowels but losing it before consonants and at the end of the phrase.

- **sõ**// 100 in the sing. shows no sandhi: **sõ adʁɛs** 100 addresses, **sõ ẽ** 101.
- **sõ**//z 100 in the plural, and **katɛvã**//z 80, when followed by a noun, behave normally: **dø sõ zadʁɛs** 200 addresses, **dø sõ pɛʁsɔ̃** 200 persons, **katɛvã zɔ̃fɔ̃** 80 children, **katɛvã vwatyɔ̃** 80 cars. When they are followed by another number in the same string, however, they lose the sandhi consonant: **dø sõ ẽ** 201, **katɛvã ẽ** 81.
- **gʁõ**//t *great* is **gʁõt** when masc. and before a vowel, but **gʁõd** when fem.: **ẽ gʁõ tɔ̃m** a great man, **yn gʁõd fam** a great woman.
- **tu**//t *everything* retains its t before some verb-forms that begin with a vowel, but not before all. This feature is dealt with in the forthcoming Grammar module of this course.
- similarly **ʁjã**//n *nothing* retains its n in some grammatical contexts but not others (dealt with in the forthcoming Grammar module).
- **kõ**//t *when* retains its t before subject-pronouns that begin with a vowel, but not otherwise: **kõ til paʁ** whenever he leaves, **kõ aʁsɛn paʁ** whenever Arsene leaves.

4.4. Omission of ə

The sound ə can often be omitted - that is, not pronounced. The exact circumstances are many and complicated, but a good simplification is that it can be omitted if its omission leaves no more than two consecutive consonants, and those consonants are between vowels. So **tʁwa edəmi** *three-and-a-half* can be pronounced as **tʁwa edmi** because in **edmi** the two consonants have a vowel on each side of them. But the beginning of a phrase does not count as a vowel, so **#dəmi** cannot become ***#dmi**.

Omission of ə depends not only on complicated rules, but also on how colloquially a person is speaking: people speaking more colloquially leave out more instances of ə. In the examples used in this course, ə is almost always omitted where possible.

4.5. Grammatical constraints

Sandhi is described above as applying to certain sounds that come before a vowel, and certain sounds that come before a consonant; but the two sounds (the sound undergoing sandhi and the sound that follows it) must be in the same grammatical phrase. In other words these two types of sandhi - sandhi-before-a-vowel and sandhi-before-a-consonant - do not operate across phrase boundaries. The third type of sandhi - sandhi-at-the-phrase-boundary - obviously doesn't cross phrase boundaries either.

The main types of grammatical phrase are the noun group, the pronoun group and the verb group. This course deals with sandhi within each of these as part of its grammar.

4.6. Stylistic variation

This account is written as though sandhi were the same for all speakers and in all styles, but this is not the case. This course describes the usage of educated people speaking colloquially: but on more formal occasions speakers will retain some consonants that this course says are dropped. In the other direction, less educated speakers will drop consonants described here as retained. Some groups of speakers have particular variations, too, such as a sandhi /t on **sõ**/t 100. In short, you have to listen carefully to native speakers, and imitate the usage of those you like.

6. SOURCES

Price, G. (1991). *An Introduction to French Pronunciation*. Oxford; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.