

**Mid-vowels in Briançon French:  
Conflict between regional and national norms  
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Faced with the leveling influence of standard/Reference French, some regional speakers, in particular in the south of France, feel growing pressure to abandon their local characteristics in favor a more normative form of language. The traditional dialect division of France between northern and southern varieties is exemplified in the distribution of mid-vowels. In the south, these vowels are in an allophonic distribution known as the law of position: high-mid vowels are found in open syllables (as in 1) and low-mid vowels in closed syllables (as in 2).

(1)	taie	[tɛ]	‘pillow case’ (but [tɛ] in RF)
	jeu	[ʒø]	‘game’
	peau	[po]	‘skin’
(2)	tête	[tɛt]	‘head’
	jeûne	[ʒœn]	‘fasting’ (but [ʒøɛn] in RF)
	paume	[pɔm]	‘palm’ (but [pom] in RF)

Northern and Reference French (RF in the examples above) show phonemic oppositions. More precisely, [ɛ] and [ɛ̃] contrast in open syllables, hence distinguishing *taie* [tɛ] and *thé* ‘tea’ [tɛ̃], whereas [o] and [ɔ] on the one hand, and [ø] and [œ] on the other hand, contrast in closed syllables: *paume* [pɔm] contrasts with *pomme* ‘apple’ [pɔm] and *jeûne* [ʒøɛn] with *jeune* ‘young’ [ʒœn].

This presentation analyzes the pronunciation of mid-vowels in the area of Briançon, a small town in the southeast of France that has remained isolated from outside influence for many years. Due to its location in the south, speakers are expected to adhere to the law of position. However, with the leveling influence of Reference French, the national norm has become more prevalent than before. To analyze the resolution of the conflict between these two norms among young adults, about 40 informants ranging in age from 15 to 39 were recorded in a semi-formal situation involving the reading of several sentences interspersed with short conversations. A total of about 2000 vowels were extracted from the recordings. Their first and second formants were then measured with Praat to determine whether informants follow the law of position (the southern norm) or the national norm.

Statistical analysis using GoldVarb shows that several factors are significant in accounting for the variation in the deviation from the regional norm. First, not all three vowels are affected equally since more deviations from the law of position are observed for /O/ and /œ/ than for /E/. This is probably due to the stigma associated with deviations from the national norm for these two vowels, whereas there seems to be less negative reaction to regional pronunciation of /E/, probably because this vowel is also subject to more variation in northern French. Among social factors retained, we observe an interaction between age and gender which shows that younger women are more likely to move toward the national norm than men the same age. Additionally, the origin of the

parents (whether both parents or just one are from Briançon and which one is local) and the profession (or professional aspiration) show an influence in the realization of mid-vowels.