Language-internal evidence for resisting contact-induced change in Gascon and Languedocien

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INTRODUCTION: The Gascon and Languedocien dialects of modern Occitan spoken in the south-west of France have both been in intense long-term contact with French. Whereas Languedocien is typically more conservative in retaining Occitan phonological features than other dialects (Bec, 1973), Gascon appears to be sensitive to contact induced change (Mooney & Hawkey, 2019). We probe for language-internal evidence that may account for contact-induced distinctions in phonological processes between Gascon and Languedocien by testing for variation in the realization of /ʎ/. In both dialects, /ʎ/ is retained (Müller, 2011) in positions where it was lost during the development of modern French (Lodge, 2004). /ʎ/ is often realized in Gascon with an accompanying glide-like segment as [ʎj] and is typically realized word-finally as [j] like in French due to contact (Mooney & Hawkey, 2019). In contrast, Languedocien depalatalizes /ʎ/ to [l] word finally (Bec, 1973). We find that lateral segments are longer in [ʎj] variants of /ʎ/ in Languedocien than other segments in either dialect, thereby impeding loss of the lateral feature of /ʎ/.

METHODOLOGY: We analyze 181 tokens of /ʎ/ in all word positions in oral narratives performed in the contemporary dialects of Gascon and Languedocien in the *OcOr Corpus* (Vergez-Couret & Carruthers, 2018). There is one male and one female speaker per dialect. Each token was impressionistically marked as either [j], [ʎ], [ʎj], or [l]. The onset and offset of each variant were marked using *Praat* (Boersma & Weenink, 2018) and then measured for duration. We use mixed-effects logistic regression to predict which word positions are more likely to retain the palatal lateral and mixed-effects linear regression to predict the durations of the lateral and glide segments in tokens of [ʎj] in word-medial positions according to dialect.

RESULTS: Gascon realizes /ʎ/ as either [j] or [ʎj] and Languedocien realizes the phoneme as [j], [ʎj], [ʎ], and [l]. Both variants with palatal segments occur word-finally and word-medially in Gascon, however only [ʎj] occurs word initially. Like in Gascon, [j] and [ʎj] are found in both word-final and word-medial positions in Languedocien; however, [l] only occurs word-finally and [ʎ] word-medially; the Languedocien data does not include any instances of word-initial tokens for any variant. Figure 1 shows that variants with palatal laterals occur more frequently than other variants word-medially in Languedocien (p=0.0495) and Gascon (p=0.0048).

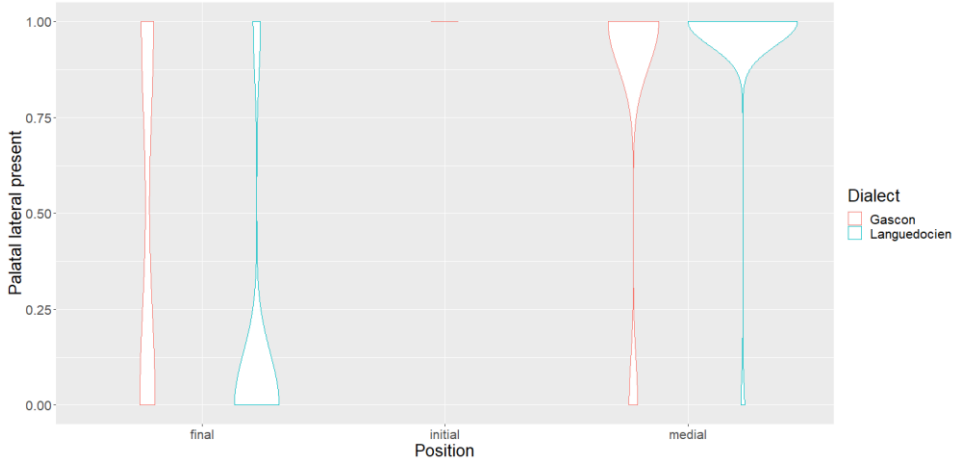

Figure 1: The effect of the word position of /ʎ/ on the realization of a palatal lateral by dialect. On the y-axis, 1 represents the presence of a palatal lateral and 0 represents its absence.

Figure 2 depicts the durations of both the glide-like transition and lateral segment in tokens of [ʎj] in word-medial positions according to speaker dialect. The lateral part of these segments in Languedocien are longer than other segments in either dialect (p=0.0009). There were no other significant effects in this model.

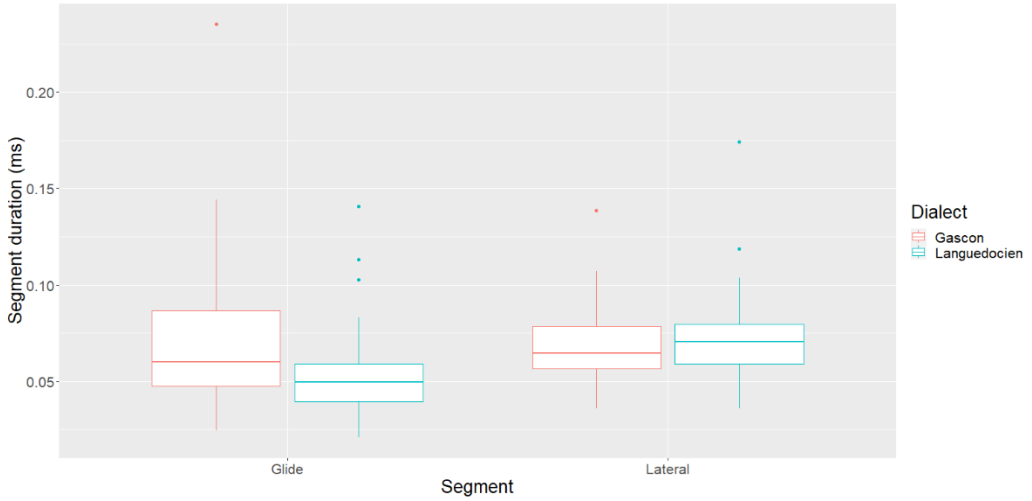

Figure 2: The duration of segments in [ʎj] tokens in word medial positions by dialect.

DISCUSSION: Our results suggest that /ʎ/ in Gascon optionally has a lateral segment whereas [j] is an obligatory segment. An analysis by word position demonstrates that variants with a palatal lateral are realized more often in word-medial positions than others in both dialects, even if accompanied by a glide-like transition. The duration analysis of [ʎj] in word-medial contexts demonstrates that for variants where both lateral and glide segments are present, lateral segments in Languedocien have a longer duration than other segments in either dialect. Our results support those of Mooney & Hawkey (2019) who found no differences between the durations of lateral and glide segments in a similar analysis of [ʎj] tokens in Gascon, and who thereby argue /ʎ/ variation is due to contact with French. However, for Languedocien we propose that the increased duration of the lateral segment renders the lateral feature of /ʎ/ more salient. Thus, this increased duration aides in impeding the loss of the lateral segment due to contact, given that synchronic perception may influence diachronic sound change (Ohala, 2003).

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