

French

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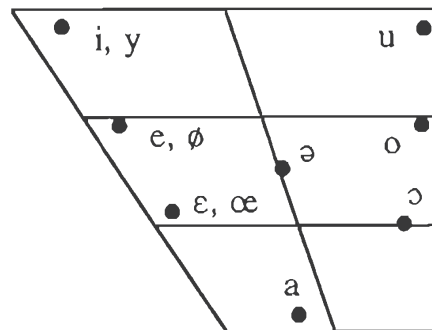
The following description of French is based on the speech of a young Parisian female speaker. Varieties of French have almost identical inventories; the main differences are to be found in the maintenance or loss of certain contrasts.

Vowels

Oral vowels. French vowels, which are all monophthongs, are normally described using four values for height and two or possibly three (front, central, back) for backness. All back vowels are rounded; there are both rounded and unrounded sets of front vowels.

The mid-high and mid-low vowels have limited overlap in their distributions, but cannot be regarded as allophones. The contrast between [e] and [ɛ] is found in open syllables in final position (e.g. [se] *ses* (3rd person possessive, plural) vs. [sɛ] *sait* 'knows' and [pwajɛ] *poignet* 'wrist' vs. [pwajɛ] *poignée* 'handful'). Elsewhere, [e] occurs in open syllables and [ɛ] in closed syllables: compare [se.vir] *sévir* 'to rage' vs. [sɛʁ.viʁ] *servir* 'to serve'. For the other pairs of mid vowels, the contrast between mid-high and mid-low is limited for the most part to closed monosyllables. In other environments, the mid-low vowels [œ] and [ɔ] occur in closed syllables and the mid-high vowels [ø] and [o] in open syllables. However, in addition to this general rule, the nature of the syllable-final consonant also has an effect: the mid-high vowels [ø] and [o] are found in syllables ending

i	si	si	'if'	u	su	sous	'under'
e	se	ses	'his, hers' (pl)	o	so	sot	'silly'
ɛ	sɛ	sait	'knows'	ɔ	sɔʁ	sort	'fate'
	sɛʁ	serre	'greenhouse'				
y	sy	su	'known'				
ø	sø	ceux	'these'				
œ	sœʁ	soeur	'sister'				
ə	sə	ce	'this'				
a	sa	sa	'his, hers' (f)				



in [z], and [o] is not found even in monosyllables ending in [ʁ], [ʁ], and [g] (Delattre 1966; Léon 1992). It is noticeable that our speaker often produces a markedly centralized allophone of [ɔ], especially before [ʁ]. This is transcribed [ɔ̃] in the passage below. Some speakers have a contrast between two low vowels [a] and [o]; our speaker has only one low vowel, [a], which is central. Schwa, [ə], is also a central vowel, with some rounding.

Some speakers retain a contrast between long and short vowels in a very few words, but most speakers no longer maintain any length contrast.

Nasalized vowels. Traditionally, French is described as having four distinctively nasalized vowels, [ɛ̃], [ɑ̃], [ɔ̃], and [œ̃]. However, our speaker, like many others, lacks [œ̃], which is replaced by [ɛ̃].

The vowel [ɛ̃] is produced with tongue and lip position very similar to its oral counterpart [ɛ]; however, several articulatory studies (e.g. Zerling 1984; Lonchamp 1988) have suggested that [ɑ̃] and [ɔ̃] differ substantially from their supposed oral counterparts [ɑ] and [ɔ]. The position of the tongue is similar in [ɑ̃] and [ɔ̃], and the main articulatory difference is that [ɔ̃] has a greater degree of lip rounding. These authors suggest that other symbols might be more appropriate for transcribing these two vowels, but we have retained the traditional usage as none of the alternative proposals has gained widespread acceptance.

ã	sã	<i>sans</i>	'without'
õ	sõ	<i>son</i>	'his, hers' (m sg)
ẽ	sẽ	<i>saint</i>	'saint'

Consonants

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular
Plosive	p b		t d			k g	
Nasal	m		n		ɲ	(ŋ)	
Fricative		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ			ʁ
Lateral Approximant			l				

	Palatal	Labial-Palatal	Labial-Velar
Central Approximants	j	ɥ	w

p	pu	<i>pou</i>	'louse'	f	fu	<i>fou</i>	'crazy'
b	bu	<i>boue</i>	'mud'	v	vu	<i>vous</i>	'you' (pl)
t	tu	<i>tout</i>	'all'	s	su	<i>sous</i>	'under'
d	du	<i>doux</i>	'sweet'	z	zo	<i>zoo</i>	'zoo'

k	ku	<i>cou</i>	'neck'		ʃ	ʃu	<i>chou</i>	'cabbage'
g	gu	<i>goût</i>	'taste'		ʒ	ʒu	<i>joue</i>	'cheek'
					ʁ	ʁu	<i>roue</i>	'wheel'
m	mu	<i>mou</i>	'soft'		l	lu	<i>loup</i>	'wolf'
n	nu	<i>nous</i>	'we, us'					
ɲ	ɑno	<i>agneau</i>	'lamb'		w	swɛ̃	<i>soin</i>	'care'
ŋ	paʁkiŋ	<i>parking</i>	'parking lot'		j	sjɛ̃	<i>sien</i>	'his, hers'
					ɥ	sɥɛ̃	<i>suint</i>	'grease on sheep's wool'

French voiced stops are typically fully voiced throughout; voiceless ones are described as unaspirated. When preceding high vowels, they are often followed by a short period of aspiration and/or frication. The velar nasal occurs only in final position in borrowed (usually English) words.

French has one rhotic, whose production varies considerably among speakers and phonetic contexts. The speaker presented here uses a uvular fricative [ʁ] that is sometimes reduced to an approximant [ʁ̥], particularly in final position; it may also be devoiced (for examples see the transcribed text), and can be reduced to zero in some word-final positions. For other speakers, a uvular trill [ʀ] is also fairly common, and an apical trill [r] occurs in some dialects. Vowels are often lengthened before this segment.

The approximants [w], [ɥ], and [j] each correspond to a high vowel, [u], [y], and [i] respectively. There are a few minimal pairs where the approximant and corresponding vowel contrast, but there are also many cases where they are in free variation. Contrasts between [j] and [i] occur chiefly in final position, as in [abej] *abeille* 'bee' vs. [abei] *abbaye* 'monastery'.

Word-final consonants are always released, and in keeping with a general favouring of open syllables, they are usually resyllabified as onsets when followed by a vowel-initial word (*enchaînement*). Underlying word-final consonants that are not pronounced before a consonant, are pronounced only when preceding a vowel in the same rhythmic group. This process, known as *liaison*, also contributes to this canonical open-syllable pattern.

Prosody

Although French is often described as having stress on word-final syllables, in connected speech this is pre-empted by the accent on the final syllable of a group of words (sense group or accentual group, see Vaissière 1992 for discussion).

Transcription of recorded passage

The transcriptional style adopted in this illustration is a relatively narrow one, which reflects the particular pronunciation used in the recording of the passage made for the illustration.

la biz e læ solɛʲ sə dispyte || jakɛ̃ asyɤã kilete læ ply fõɤ || kãt ilzõ vy ẽ
 vwajazœ ki savãse || ãvlope dã sõ mãto || i: sõ tõbe dakõɤ kə səlɥi ki
 aɤivkɛ læpɤãmje a læ lɥi fɛkote || sɔkə ɤəgãkde kõm læ ply fõɤ || alõɤ la
 biz sɤ miz a sufle də tut se fõɤs || me ply el sufle ply læ vwajazœɤ sɛkɛ sõ
 mãtotuɤ də lɥi || finalmã el ɤənõsa læ lɥi fɛkote || alõɤ læ solɛʲ kõmãsa
 bɤije || e o bu dɛ̃ mõmã læ vwajazœ ɤɛfofe ota sõ mãto || ẽsi la biz dy
 ɤɛkõnet kə læ solɛʲ etɛ læ ply fõɤ.

Orthographic version

La bise et le soleil se disputaient, chacun assurant qu'il était le plus fort. Quand ils ont vu un voyageur qui s'avavançait, enveloppé dans son manteau, ils sont tombés d'accord que celui qui arriverait le premier à le lui faire ôter serait regardé comme le plus fort. Alors, la bise s'est mise à souffler de toutes ses forces, mais plus elle soufflait, plus le voyageur serrait son manteau autour de lui. Finalement, elle renonça à le lui faire ôter. Alors, le soleil commença à briller et au bout d'un moment le voyageur, réchauffé, ôta son manteau. Ainsi, la bise dut reconnaître que le soleil était le plus fort.

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