P-D Contractions in Québec French :
Deletion, liaison and suppletion

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1   Introduction

While Standard French allows P+D contraction only in the context of the prepositions *de* "of" and *à* 'to', Québec French (QF) extends this phenomenon to the prepositions *dans* "in" and *sur* 'on', as shown in Table 1. Illustrative examples for *dans* are given in (1).

Definiteness	Definite Determiner				Indefinite Determiner		
Number	Singular			Plural	Singular		Plural
Gender	M	F	M/F	M/F	M	F	M/F
	le [l]	*la* [la]	*l'* [l]	*les* [le(z)]	*un* [œ̃:(n)]	*une* [yn]	*des* [de(z)]
dans	—	[dã:]	—	[dɛ̃:(z)]	[dœ̃(n)]	[dyn]	—
sur	—	[sa:]	—	[se:(z)]	[sœ̃:(n)]	[syn]	—

Table 1: P-D contractions with *dans* and *sur* in Québec French

(1) a. *Oui je me rappelle avoir patiné **dans la** [d*ã***:]* *rue.* (FRAN-HOMA_004M25)
        'I remember skating in the street.'
    b. *J'étais bon **dans les** [d**ɛ̃:]** dictées.* (FRAN-HOMA_010M31)
        'I was good at dictation.'

The three main differences with *à* and *de* contractions are 1- the fact that P-D contraction with *dans* and *sur* is optional, 2- that it is possible with *un* and *une* and finally, 3- that QF allows degrees of contraction. For example, *sur les* can have four phonetic realizations, as a result of what has been argued to be three distinct phonological processes (Dumas 1974, Walker 1984).

(2)   a.   [syRle(z)]   no reduction
       b.   [syle(z)]   R-deletion
       c.   [sye(z)]   (intervocalic) L-deletion
       d.   [se:(z)]   vowel fusion

Many authors have provided descriptions of P-D contraction with *dans* and *sur* (Baronian 2006, Dumas 1974, Ostiguy and Tousignant 1993, Walker 1984), but to this date no quantitative study had yet attempted to measure its full extent, and document the linguistic and social predictors involved. Moreover, there is a debate in the literature with respect to the level of grammar at which the QF P+D amalgation takes place: while some authors argue that the amalgams are the result of a morphophonological phenomenon (Dumas 1974, Walker 1984); others argue that they have been lexicalized and thus enter the syntax as a single unit (Santerre *et al*. 1977, Baronian 2006). In this paper, we provide evidence that P-D contraction with *dans* and *sur* is essentially a postsyntactic phenomenon, but that *sur* does not involve a phonological process of R-deletion.

2   Methods

Our data come from a sub-corpus of 38 semi-directed interviews collected in 2012 in Montréal (FRAN-HOMA corpus), and annotated with Elan. Our analysis is based on more than 3000 tokens. Each P+DET combination was coded according to its phonological form (R-deletion (*sur*), pronounciation of the liaison consonant (*dans*), L-deletion, vowel fusion). In addition, each occurrence was coded according to linguistic (preposition, as well as definiteness, number and gender) and extralinguistic (gender, age, socioeconomic status) factors.
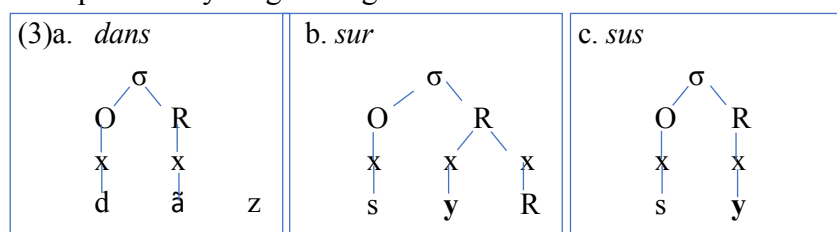
3   Results

The overall results of the study support the claim that QF allows different degrees of contraction. Moreover, a much higher rate of vernacular forms was found for preposition *sur* than for preposition *dans*. In order to better understand the origin of this lexical effect, the analysis of linguistic factors was carried out separately for each of the prepositions. The results of the

multivariate analyses show that, for both prepositions, the following three factor groups were retained as significant: the vernacular variant is favoured by plural, definite and feminine determiners. Crucially, however, our results show that presence/absence of R in *sur* is itself a distinct variable independent of P-D contraction.

4   Analysis

We propose two (partially) distinct analyses for *dans* and *sur.* Unlike *sur*, *dans* has **two allomorphs**, [dɑ̃] and [dɑ̃z], and the stem-final consonant is a liaison consonant. Adopting an autosegmental approach, we treat this liaison consonant as a floating consonant not attached to the skeleton (3a). P-D contraction with *dans* is possible only when the final consonant does not fill an empty onset position (typically before the consonant /l/), and is blocked otherwise (as in [dɑ̃zœ̃], the non-contracted variant of *dans un*). Vowel fusion with definite determiners is made possible by an independent process of L-deletion, itself a sociolinguistic variable (Poplack & Walker 1986), followed by vowel fusion and a process of compensatory lenghtening.

In contrast, *sur* is one of two **suppletive lexical variants** : Standard *sur* [syR] and vernacular *sus* [sy]. These two variants have been in competition since the Middle Ages, and are maintained in QF. The stem-final consonant in *sur* is a fixed consonant (3b), attached to the skeleton. There is no process of R-deletion in *sur*, and thus P-D contraction is systematically blocked. P-D contraction is only possible with the vernacular variant *sus* (3c)*,* under the same conditions of L-deletion, vowel fusion and compensentory lenghtening as *dans*.

(3)a. *dans*   b. *sur*   c. *sus*

This difference in the status of the stem-final consonants in *dans* and *sur/sus* accounts for the fact that *sur/sus* alternation is irrespective of the phonological form of the following word, and crucially also found in front of C-initial words, including the definite determiners *le* and *l'*.

5   Supporting evidence

Apparent time analysis of the data suggests two ongoing changes towards the more standard forms in QF: 1- a lexical change whereby the vernacular form *sus* is being replaced by *sur,* and 2- a morphophonological change showing that the P+D merging of prepositions *dans* and *sus*, although still relatively frequent, is a regressing phenomenon. Both shifts are led by women and in both cases the greatest users of vernacular forms are older men from the lower class.

6   Conclusion

The fact that P-D contraction with *dans* and *sus* is subject to linguistic and social constraints supports the hypothesis that these contractions have not been lexicalized and are still the result of phonological processes. These results put QF P-D contraction on a par with P-D amalgams in German, which have been argued to be post-syntactic contractions (Cabredo Hofherr 2012).

7   Selected References

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