

# A morphological convergence between consonant liaison and schwa deletion in the Picard and Walloon dialects of French

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## 1. Noun-phrase internal inflection in Walloon and Picard

Many dialects of Gallo-Romance appear to have developed two patterns of declension for adjectives, a strong declension (typically for adjectives before N in an NP → (Det) Adj N ...) and a weak declension (typically for adjectives after state verbs in a VP → V ... Adj ...), to borrow and modify a terminology sometimes found in the description of Germanic languages.<sup>1</sup>

Walloon and Picard dialects also participate in this distinction, although less conspicuously. This is perhaps why it is often analyzed as a sandhi phenomenon ("syntactic phonetics" says Remacle 1952: 140). In Liège Walloon, for instance, weak adjectives are invariable for number, strong adjectives take a specific marker *ès* [ɛ] for fem. plural:<sup>2</sup>

- (1) (*il est, i sont, èlle est, èle sont*) [nø:r] '(he is, they are, she is, they are) black'
- (2a) *on* [nø:r] *diâle* 'a black devil (masc. sg.)'
- b) *dès* [nø:r] *tchivès* 'black hair (masc. pl.)'
- c) *dès* [nø:r z] *ouy* 'black eyes (masc. pl.)'
- d) *li* [nø:r] *sipène* 'the black thorn (fem. sg.)'
- e) *dès* [nø:r ɛ] *gruzales* 'black currants (fem. pl.)'
- f) *dès* [nø:r ɛ z] *amonnes* 'black berries (fem. pl.)'

One will also note a liaison [z] after weak pl. adjectives of both genders when the following noun begins with a vowel, as in most Northern French dialects (cf. Morin 1986: § 11). Slightly different paradigms may be observed in other Walloon and Picard dialects.

In all previous analyses *ès* is treated, as we did in this presentation, as a particular declension for the adjective.<sup>3</sup> We would like to challenge this here, and suggest that these noun-phrase internal inflections are not

affixes attached to the adjective, but rather syntactic binders between the adjective and the noun, or perhaps prefixes to the following noun, just as one can propose for the pl. [z] liaison in those dialects.

## 2. Distribution of internal inflection

We will compare first the characteristics of the distribution of inflectional *ès* in various dialects.

### 2.1 Gender

Almost everywhere, *ès* is reported only after fem. adjectives.<sup>4</sup> Roux Walloon is the only exception: Adriaens (1974: 67–69) notes a pl. [ručɛ] for masc. adjective [ruč] 'red' in the speech of the older generation; use of *ès* for masc. pl. adjectives is not general, however, and is not found, e.g. after [dup] 'double' or [prop] 'clean' (which, however, are regular in the feminine).<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2 Phonological shape of the following noun

In Walloon<sup>6</sup> the presence of *ès* is independent of the phonological shape of the following word. In Gondecourt Picard, *ès* is not normally found before nouns beginning with a vowel; thus in paradigm (2), the case corresponding to (2f) would differ, e.g. [de bæ:l e fil] 'nice girls' vs. [de bæ:l z aluet] 'nice larks'. When the liaison consonant [z] is absent, however, in words which historically began with a now deleted consonant, *ès* is retained, e.g. [ʃe prœmijɛr e of] 'the first waffles (fem.)' (Cochet 1933: 243). In Boulogne Picard, *ès* is optional before a [z] liaison (Haigneré 1903: 283).

### 2.3 Phonological shape of the adjective

**2.3.1** Number of syllables: In some Walloon dialects, *ès* is optional after adjectives containing two or more syllables, e.g. Perwez Walloon (Henrard 1949: 45, n. 529). Elsewhere *ès* is not reported to depend on the syllable count.

**2.3.2 Vocalic ending:** This parameter does not apply to most dialects of Walloon and Picard, in which all fem. adjectives now end in a consonant (either historic, transitional, or analogical). In the Verviers domain, however, some fem. adjectives ending in *-é*, *-i*, *-ou* did not acquire a transitional glide: they are invariable in La Gleize Walloon, but followed by *ès* in some nearby villages (Remacle 1952: 142, Legros 1981: 174–175): *dès n'mé-ès soûrs* 'half sisters'.

## 2.4 Syntactic conditions

Inflectional *ès* is limited to the last adjective in a coordination, e.g. La Gleize Walloon *dès bèles èt bounès bièsses* 'nice and good animals' and not *\*bèlès èt*, and is absent in elliptical constructions without nouns, e.g. *c'è dès bèles*/*\*c'è dès bèlès* 'they are good ones'. On the other hand, in sequences of adjectives before a noun, some dialects will have *ès* after each adjectives, e.g. La Gleize Walloon *dès bèlès fwètès djônès fèyes* 'nice strong young girls' (cf. also Legros 1981: 166–167). Haigneré (1903: 284) opposes this Walloon usage to that of Boulogne Picard where only the last adjective is marked, e.g. *deux bell' grandès femmes*.

## 3. Initial phonetic development

**3.1** Several explanations have been given for the development of inflectional *ès*: Hrkal (1911: 253), Bruneau (1913: 47–48), Cochet (1933: 32), all wanting according to Duraffour (1939), who sees its origin in a sandhi phenomenon similar to the ones that lead to related declensions in some Occitan and Francoprovençal dialects, e.g., in Certoux Franco-provençal final [a] has been retained in close syntactic units (Adj. + Noun) but has been lost before pause: thus [bɛla] 'nice (fem. sg.)' before a noun and [bæl] after the copula. This model is partly inappropriate – Remacle, Warnant, and Legros will note – as it predicts the retention of *ès* not only after pl., but also after sg. adjectives. Furthermore, Duraffour's hypothesis, by trying to account simply for the difference between masc. and fem. adjectives, creates a problem for the chronology of Walloon and Picard. It requires that there has never been a neutralization between unstressed final Latin [a] and the other final vowels that

survived in Old French, as in *roge* < *rubia* and *roge* < *rubiu*, which is contrary to philological evidence.

I think that Duraffour was right to see the source of inflectional *ès* in a former sandhi phenomenon in which some historically post-stressed vowels *e* were retained only in close syntactic units. The present analysis considers that the presence of a following *s* was decisive, not the quality of the original Latin vowel. In the process that led to the disappearance of word-final *s*, a preceding *e* acquired a new distinct quality and failed to syncope in close syntactic units.

The real problem is not the absence of syncope – this is the expected result – but the loss of *s* which does not normally occur word-internally in Walloon (cf. Morin 1986: § 3.2), although it does in Picard. The mechanism responsible for this loss, whatever it is, is certainly the same that deleted final *s* in pl. determiners *les*, *des*, *ces*, *mes*, etc.

This historical analysis is compatible with the overall distribution of *ès* in the various dialects if one allows for a different morphological development in each of them.

**3.2** This analysis predicts that *ès* is more likely after monosyllabic adjectives, which are prone to become proclitics, as in Perwez Walloon (cf. 2.3.1). Elsewhere, *ès* could be a morphological generalization of a function it acquired after monosyllabic adjectives, or the normal phonetic development in dialects where the prosody allowed larger adjectives to be attached to the following noun.

**3.3** Under this proposal one should also have *ès* after masc. adjectives historically ending in *-es*.<sup>7</sup> Some relics of this state of affairs may be found in Roux Walloon (cf. 2.1), which would be in the last stage prior to complete regularization. The specialization of *ès* as a fem. marker is not surprising as most masc. adjectives did not end in *e*. Conversely, *ès* is not expected after fem. adjectives where final *e* combined with a preceding vowel. In most Walloon dialects a transitional glide seems to have developed before syncope of *e*, while an analogical consonant (plus *ès* in the pl.) has been added to fem. adjectives in many Picard dialects. One expects, then, all fem. adjectives to behave alike. In the Verviers domain, La Gleize Walloon may be one instance where final *e* combined with a previous vowel (cf. 2.3.2). If this is the case, the extension of *ès* sometimes found in Verviers is a morphological extension of *ès* after all fem. adjectives, which is the counterpart to the loss of *ès* after masc. adjectives.



3.4 This analysis also predicts the absence of *ès* before a vowel, when the historical final *s* was retained as a liaison: the preceding *e* was not modified and should have syncopated. This is noted in some Picard dialects (cf. 2.2). Elsewhere *ès* is analogical. Analogical leveling is also frequent in the history of determiners. In Liège Walloon, for instance, phonetic evolution predicts the vowel in pl. determiners *les*, *mes*, *ces*, etc. to be a syncopatable [i] before a [z] liaison, e.g. \**d[i]s-èfants* 'children' as in *d[i]zeûr* 'above'. Instead one notes [ɛ], the normal reflex before a consonant; thus *d[ɛ]-s-èfants* as in *dès fêyes* [dɛ fɛy] 'girls'.

## 4. Further evolution

We have seen in the previous section how the morphologization of *ès* can account for the changes in its evolution. If *ès* is interpreted as a fem. pl. marker, one understands why it disappears after masc. adjectives and why it is extended to all the fem. ones where it was originally absent. We now turn to changes that may have occurred due to interaction with other parts of the grammatical system.

### 4.1 Relation with the determiner system

Remacle (1952: 141) and later Warnant (1969: 646) note similarities with the determiner system in Liégeois Walloon, where the plural is often marked by [ɛ] before consonant and [ɛz] before vowel, e.g. *l[ɛ] gruzales/l[ɛz] amonnes* 'the currants/the berries' (cf. 2 e-f).

The influence of the determiner system on the strong adjective declension is unequivocal in the Occitan dialect of Vinzelles described by Dauzat (1900: 32). There the historical inflection [i] for masc. pl. strong adjectives is being replaced by [ü:], after the ending of the definite masc. pl. article [lü:], e.g. [də žɛti ɔbrə] or [də žɛtü: ɔbrə] '(some) beautiful trees'.

Its influence in Picard and Walloon dialects is not as obvious, although the parallelism between determiners and inflectional *ès* is sometimes striking. As we noted previously, the vowel [ɛ] found in the determiners *les*, *des*, *ces*, *mes*, etc. and inflectional *ès* before a [z] liaison are both analogical in Liège Walloon. Gondecourt Picard, on the other

hand, shows no analogy in either case, cf. sec. 2.2 and the form of the determiners in [le fyuv] 'the fevers', and [(œ)lz ø] 'the eggs' or [me frer] 'my brothers' and [(œ) mz afẽõ] 'my children'.

Similarities between the determiner system and inflectional *ès* in Walloon and Picard, however, need not result from an influence of one on the other, as much as from a parallel development. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how the pl. markers in the determiner system – which are identical for both genders – could have had an influence on fem. and not on masc. adjectives.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4.2 Sandhi properties

Many Walloon dialects, and perhaps some Picard also – the philological data are not always explicit – possess two very distinct sandhi patterns, an external sandhi with word-final obstruent devoicing, word-final consonant cluster simplification, etc. (cf. Francard – Morin 1986) and an internal sandhi with none of these adjustments. The proposed phonetic development predicts that internal sandhi should be associated with inflectional *ès*, e.g. Liège Walloon should have *\*grandès fêyes* 'big girls'. However, the adjectives regularly have their external sandhi form before *ès*: *grantès fêyes* as in *grande amice* [grāt amis] 'good friend (fem.)' and not as in *grandeûr* 'size'. For Duraffour (1939: 155), this is a paradigmatic regularization after the weak form.<sup>9</sup> And indeed, one could interpret an idiom like *pôvrès djins* 'poor people' in Liège Walloon – which alternates with the more regular form with external sandhi *pôvès djins* – as a relic from the original state.

This proposal, however, is inappropriate, at least for Liège Walloon. It predicts that adjectives ending (before pause) in [f] or [s] would retain this consonant before *ès*. Instead these consonants become [v] and [z] respectively, as is the case of all [f] and [s] in external sandhi before a vowel, e.g. *(il est) pôve* [po:f], but *on pôve ome* [õ po:v ɔm] 'a poor man'. If one were to explain this change through analogy, one would have to say that adjectives before *ès* have been regularized after the external sandhi form before vowel. A simpler and less circular explanation is that we obtain external sandhi with *ès* because it is not a suffix, but rather an internal noun phrase marker or a prefix to the following noun, as I will argue.

Unlike the situation in German, where both adjectives in a coordination take the same declension, inflectional *ès* appears only after the last one in Walloon or Picard (cf. 2.5),<sup>10</sup> which suggests two possible syntac-

tic analyses: (1) [[des]<sub>DET</sub> [bèle èt boune]<sub>ADJ</sub> [ès] [bièsses]<sub>N</sub>]<sub>NP</sub>, where the two coordinated adjectives make up a single constituent just before [ès] and syntactically [ès] can be compared to the linking preposition *de* found in French in *beaucoup de personnes* 'many persons' but not in *plusieurs personnes* 'several persons', or (2) [[des]<sub>DET</sub> [bèle èt boune]<sub>ADJ</sub> [ès+bièsses]<sub>N</sub>]<sub>NP</sub>, where *ès* is a prefix of the noun *bièsses*.

In the first analysis [ès] could be either phonologically attached to the previous adjective as an enclitic, or to the following noun as a proclitic. In both cases, one would account for the external sandhi. This is obvious if [ès] is a proclitic attached to the following noun. This would also be true if [ès] were enclitic, as external sandhi is also found before such constituents, e.g. Haust (1933: 240) writes for Liège Walloon *dimande ènn'i* (cf. Fr. *demandes-lui-en*) 'ask him for some' which is the conventional representation for [dimātenni], with devoicing of word-final /d/ before the enclitic sequence *ènn'i*. If both analyses are possible, what evidence is there to support one or the other?

In the dialects where the presence of *ès* depends on the phonological shape of the preceding adjective (cf. 2.3), this distribution could be simply explained if *ès* were enclitic. Still, this is not an absolute necessity; the distribution could also be lexicalized (as in the case of *de* in French after *beaucoup* but not *plusieurs*).

One strong argument against the enclitic (or suffix) status of inflectional *ès* is its absence of stress. All historically unstressed suffixes or enclitics have either lost their unstressed vowel or attracted a preceding stress, e.g. O. W. *loke-me* > L. W. *loukez-m'* [lukɛ:m] '(you-pl.) look at me' with loss of final unstressed *e*, but O. W. *loke-me* > L. W. *louke-mu* [lukmü] '(you-sg.) look at me' with the stress now falling on the enclitic. Similarly, the historically unstressed verb suffix *-ent* survives in Liège Walloon as stressed [ɛ], as in *i tchantèt* [ičātɛ] 'they sing'.<sup>11</sup> Inflectional *ès* would therefore be exceptional as being the only word-final vocalic suffix or enclitic without stress.

Native speakers' judgement – in the form of naïve spellings – also shows that *ès* is not felt to be part of the preceding adjective. It is often represented as the (proclitic) conjunction *et* 'and' or as the (proclitic) preposition *en* 'in', in the dialects where it is homophonous with *ès* (cf. Cochet 1933: 31 and Remacle 1952: 141, who gives examples from as early as the 13th century).

The evidence gathered here converges to show that *ès* is phonologically attached to the following word. Analyses of *ès* as a proclitic or as a prefix are both possible. We now examine the cases of Gondécourt Pi-

card and Liège Walloon where we find further support for such analyses, but also note their limitation as soon as one integrates them into the grammar of each specific dialect.

## 5. Inflectional *ès* in Gondecourt Picard

**5.1** It must be noted first that *ès* [e] in Gondecourt Picard may be analyzed as a contextual variant of the pl. liaison [z]. If one ignores here the liaison [t] and [st] found after verbs in some dialects of Walloon, one can say that liaison has completely disappeared in Walloon and Picard except after pl. determiners and pl. strong adjectives, e.g. Liège Walloon *on gros abe* [õ grõ ɔ:p] 'a big tree' and *dès gros-abe* [dɛ grõ z ɔ:p] 'big trees' or Gondecourt Picard [œ grõ ab] 'a big tree' and [de bẽõ z afẽõ] 'nice children'. The NP internal declension in Gondecourt Picard could be analyzed as the following set of prefixes attached to the noun: { $\emptyset$ ; sg.}, {e/\_\_\_C, z/\_\_\_V; fem. pl.} and { $\emptyset$ /\_\_\_C, z/\_\_\_V; masc. pl.}. (A similar analysis is not as simple in Liège Walloon, for instance, where inflectional *ès* and liaison [z] are not mutually exclusive.)

**5.2** If we examine the properties of *ès* in Gondecourt Picard we find one more reason why it should be analyzed as a proclitic or a prefix attached to the following noun. Cochet (1933: 80–81) notes a form of vowel harmony which accounts for the distribution of two allomorphs of /i/: [i] after a front vowel, e.g. [lœ fil] 'their daughter' and [ɪ] after a back vowel, e.g. [vu fil] 'your daughter'. This harmony is effective only when the preceding vowel belongs to the same lexical word or to a proclitic, not when it belongs to a different phonological word, e.g. [œn bæ:l fil] 'a beautiful girl'. Still, harmony operates after inflexional *ès*, e.g. [de bæ:l e fil] 'beautiful girls', which requires *ès* to be phonologically attached to the following word. This demonstration, however, is not as strong as one would like. The problem is not addressed specifically by Cochet, and the present analysis is based on relatively few examples.

**5.3** If one can assume that *ès* is phonologically attached to the following noun, it is more difficult to decide whether it should be considered a prefix or a clitic.

One can find before most consonant-initial fem. pl. nouns a vowel [e],

either after an adjective, as we have seen, or after most pl. determiners. The only exceptions are the possessives [nu, vu, lœ] 'our, your, their', where furthermore all oppositions of number are neutralized: [vu fil] is either 'your daughter' or 'your daughters'. One could perhaps decide that [e] is a pl. prefix before all consonant-initial fem. nouns (similarly [z] would be a pl. prefix before all vowel initial nouns), and dispose of the few exceptions as idiosyncratic constructions.

Under such an analysis, however, the final [e] after masc. pl. determiners would receive a completely different interpretation. In [ʃe ka:] 'the tomcats' and in [ʃe ka:t] 'the (female) cats' the two vowels [e] have different analyses; in the masc. form [e] is a pl. marker belonging to the pl. determiner [ʃe], in the fem. form it is a prefix attached to the following noun. We will see later that a prefix analysis is possible, but only if one does not require the prefix to appear before all occurrences of a pl. noun.

## 6. Inflectional *ès* in Liège Walloon

Inflectional *ès* in Liège Walloon has been extended to new forms, in particular after one quantifier: *pluzieûrès poyes* 'several hens', after some cardinals: e.g. *trazès piceûres* '13 tricks' – the extension of liaison [z] after cardinals is also possible, e.g. *cing z-éfants* 'five children' (cf. Warnant 1969: 630) – or after the pre-adjectival adverb *fwêr* 'very': e.g. *dès fwêrès bravès djins* 'very nice people' (not all of these extensions are found in Liège proper, cf. Legros 1981: 167). This could be explained as an extension of the masc.-fem. distinction to quantifiers, cardinals, and adverbs (although in the case of *fwêr*, one would have expected the fem. form of the corresponding adjective, i.e. *\*fwêtès*); but as we have seen this would require *ès* to be a very atypical suffix.

These facts can be accounted for simply if *ès* is a proclitic or a prefix attached to the following noun or adjective. Contrary to Boulogne Picard, and probably also Gondecourt Picard, where only nouns may receive a proclitic or a prefix *ès*, Liège Walloon must include rules in its grammar which allow both nouns and adjectives to do so (cf. 2.4).

However, one notes the same problems for a prefix analysis of *ès* as in Gondecourt Picard. In particular Legros (1981) discusses many cases where pl. determiners are not followed by [e].

## 7. Conclusion

This study shows the progressive morphologization of an initially simple sandhi phenomenon. Word-final *es* is regularly syncopated except in two specific syntactic groups: (1) Determiner + Noun/Adjective and (2) Adjective + Noun. The evolution of these two groups shows some parallelism and some divergences. The liaison consonant [z] remains in both cases as a pl. marker. The evolution of [ɛ/e] is more complex. After determiners, it is independent of gender. After adjectives, it becomes a marker of the feminine. In some dialects [ɛ/e] is generalized before the liaison [z], while others keep the original state where [z] automatically excludes [ɛ/e].

The syntactic interpretation of [ɛ/e] poses problems. After determiners it appears to be a morphological marker for some specific determiners (and is not extended automatically to all of them). After adjectives it appears to have been reinterpreted as a proclitic or a prefix on the following noun (and sometimes the following adjective). The choice between a proclitic and a prefix analysis is not easy. If inflectional *ès* is the proclitic form of some syntactic marker as I have suggested, its syntactic role is strange: why should nouns (and adjectives) enter different syntactic constructions on the basis of lexical features such as number and gender? If inflectional *ès* is analyzed as a prefix – which automatically means that the liaison [z] is also a prefix – its presence before a noun (and adjective in some cases) will be restricted to syntactic contexts where the noun (or the adjective) is preceded by an adjective.

### Notes

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1. Cf. Dauzat (1900: 32) who first notes this parallel and Ronjat (1937: 39–40) for a description of this distinction in Occitan.
2. Cf. Haigneré (1903: 281–284), Haust (1933: xxviii), Cochet (1933: 30–33), Duraffour (1939), Remacle (1952: 139–142), Warnant (1969), Adriaens (1974, 1975) and Legros (1981).

In this study *ès* will be used as a generic term, and does not necessarily represent its pronunciation in a given dialect. The transcription for Walloon is the same as in Francard – Morin (1986); for the other dialects, it represents a (tentative) phonological interpretation of the transcription given by the various authors.



3. Not all examples of *ès* reported in the literature are necessarily inflectional. In some dialects they may be epenthetic vowels after a group of two or more consonants, as is perhaps the case of Hollain Picard (Eppink 1973: 108). Other dialects may contain both morphological and epenthetic *ès*, as is perhaps the case in Valenciennes Picard (Dauby 1979: 22). In Gondecourt Picard (Cochet 1933: 78) these two vowels are phonetically distinct: [e] (inflectional) and [œ] (epenthetic); unfortunately the author chooses to use the same transcription /è/ for both.
4. One also finds analogical *ès* after masc. determiners, e.g. in La Gleize Walloon. As we will see later, pl. determiners often end in *ès* for both genders, and the morphological conditioning is different in both cases.
5. The paucity of examples makes it difficult to generalize. It is possible that masculine *ès* is limited to nouns ending in an affricate, which can only be [č].
6. In all dialects for which we have the relevant information: Liège, La Gleize, Oreye, Roux, and Tenneville.
7. As well as other words historically ending in *-es* which can be cliticized to a following word as *(en)cores* 'still', e.g. in [kore myü] 'still better' (cf. Duraffour 1939: 147).
8. To the best of my knowledge, no differences between masculine and feminine plural determiners have ever been reported. On the other hand, [ɛ] in pl. determiners is often deleted after vowels, e.g. Liège W. *avou l's-èfants* 'with the children', but not inflectional *ès*.
9. Adriaens (1974, 1975) adopts an analysis in which *ès* is an adjectival suffix that nonetheless triggers external sandhi, which is the synchronic counterpart to Duraffour's historical analysis.
10. This is also true for instance in the Occitan dialect described by Dauzat (1900).
11. In most Picard dialects, however, the unstressed vowel [e] or [œ] found after *t* appears to be synchronically an epenthetic vowel used to break up heavy clusters and is not found before pause.

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