

ALBERT VALDMAN

## THE LOI DE POSITION AS A PEDAGOGICAL NORM

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the past fifty years and more linguistics has been dominated by a static paradigm; for instance, Chomsky declares:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with the ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community ... (1965:3)

Even Martinet, one of whose major contributions has been an account of shifts in the equilibrium of phonemic systems that trigger language change, proposes that language change can best be studied by assuming homogeneous and static synchronic stages:

Pour simplifier notre analyse, nous supposerons que la langue qui évolue est celle d'une communauté strictement unilingue et homogène, dans le sens que les différences qu'on y pourrait constater ne correspondraient qu'aux stades successifs d'un même usage, et non à des usages concurrents. Ceci, bien entendu, ne correspond guère à la réalité telle qu'on l'observe ... où s'enchevêtrent toutes sortes d'influences et où existent concurremment des usages d'origine sociale et géographique variée. (1960:178)

Currently some linguists (Labov, 1970) are expressing serious doubts about the ability of static models to account for language change or to describe the full range of language used by a given group of speakers, but more particularly a static view of language has caused applied linguists to neglect problems which daily confront language teachers.

Applied linguists have devoted themselves primarily to various types of static descriptions: contrastive analyses of two compatible aspects of the structure of the learner's native language and the target language which, again, are based on the speech of an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community; descriptions of aspects of the target language made accessible to language teachers and materials-writers, etc. But, for instance, contrastive analyses of two static systems are often misleading and fail to predict points of interference. For example, a contrastive phonology of American English and French destined to French learners of American English would show that English has a set of fricatives [θ] and [ð] which

have no near-equivalents in French and which, therefore, would in initial stages of instruction be reinterpreted as the fricatives [f] or [s] and [v] or [z] respectively or the stops [t] and [d] respectively, all of which occur in French. But in fact all American English speakers, though variably depending on region, social level, and style, produce for each of the two phonemes in question articulations ranging from a dental fricative to a dental stop. One would expect French speakers to favor reinterpretation of the phonemes [θ] and [ð] as dental stops since these are contained in the range of realizations of the target phonemes. But presumably, a posteriori observations indicate that the favored reinterpretations are in the direction of the labio-dental and dental fricatives, a fact that, incidentally, seriously weakens the predictive power of contrastive analysis.

A teacher who has achieved a high level of proficiency in the target language would also have acquired the variability in the realization of linguistic units that characterize native speakers, and recorded samples of target language speech to which the learner would be exposed would display a wide range of variation. Faced with the inherent variability of the raw data to which the learner is exposed, the teacher and the materials-developer may adopt one of two attitudes. He may hope that the learner will acquire the native speaker's range of variation by imitation or he may provide the learner with a more stable model for imitation. This article starts from the contention that at initial stages of instruction the learner must be exposed to contrived samples of the target language which exhibit less variation than normal native speech, and that in order to simplify his learning task he must be given principles which will enable him to produce fairly homogeneous speech. But the reduction of the inherent variability of natural speech cannot be effected arbitrarily and one of the important tasks of applied linguists is the formulation of pedagogical norms — more homogeneous speech patterns — which nonetheless must be acceptable to native speakers, which must reflect important generalities of the system underlying the target language data, and which must not inhibit ultimate acquisition of the full range of variation displayed by native speakers.

In this article I discuss the various factors involved in the elaboration of a pedagogical norm which will enable learners of French to distribute mid vowels in a manner which is simpler than the colloquial and formal usage of the prestige speakers of the language, educated middle class Paris speakers. This pedagogical norm, the *Loi de Position*, has generally been viewed by French phonologists as a descriptive statement: any mid vowel occurring in a closed (checked) syllable is open (low-mid) but close (high-mid) when occurring in an open (free) syllable. Pierre Delattre construed the *Loi de Position* in addition as a deep-seated principle which accounts for changes in the French vowel system. For example he explained the length of high-mid vowels in checked syllables (*paume* [po:m] or *neutre* [nø:tr]) by the fact that the presence of these vowels in that environment violated the *Loi de Position* and that the compensatory length served, as it were, to "open" the syllable so that the *Loi de Position* would then hold:



Ainsi l'[o] fermé de *paume*, afin de s'accorder avec la Loi de Position et les habitudes articulatoires du français, tend à se rendre "libre", à ouvrir la syllabe, c'est-à-dire à repousser l'[m] vers une syllabe suivante: (po\_\_m). C'est cela qui allonge [o]. (1959:552)

In his pedagogically oriented publications (1948, for instance), Pierre Delattre, the applied linguist, seemed to have recognized that the Loi de Position could serve as an efficient pedagogical norm, and I should like to think that were he among us he would consider the following exposition as a logical extension of his thinking.

## 2. THE LOI DE POSITION AS A DESCRIPTIVE GENERALIZATION

The description of the French mid vowel system has constituted a vexing problem for phonologists. While at least three pairs of contrasting vowels must be posited on the basis of word-length minimal pair contrasts such as [e] *fée* vs. [ɛ] *fait*, [o] *paume* vs. [ɔ] *pomme*, and [ø] *jeûne* vs. [œ] *jeune*, these contrasts do not obtain in all positions. In addition the contrast between the high-mid and low-mid member of each pair appears to be neutralized in medial position and there is wide variation in the distribution of members of each of the three pairs in individual words determined by geographical, social, and stylistic factors. First I review the distribution of mid vowel phones from the standpoint of a static description of the ideal speaker-listener's competence and then survey dialect and stylistic variation.

Interpreted as a descriptive statement the Loi de Position is clearly inadequate, for, if we leave aside for the sake of simplicity of exposition the long phone [ɛ:] occurring in final checked syllables, it is tantamount to the claim that only three underlying mid vowels need to be posited and that these underlying vowels are mapped into observable phones by a rule such as

$$(1) \quad V[\text{mid}] \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} V[\text{high-mid}] / \text{---} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} -\# \\ \text{CV} \end{array} \right\} \\ V[\text{low-mid}] / \text{---} \text{C} \end{array} \right\}$$

where  $-\#$  represents final position, CV represents any syllable, and C stands for any permissible syllable-final consonant or consonant cluster. Even assuming another rule such as

$$(2) \quad V[\text{mid}] \rightarrow V[\text{long}] / \text{---} z \check{z} v r$$

the data displayed in Table I and based on the testimony of Scherba (1957) and Trager (1955), among others, cannot be accounted for.

In particular, the Loi de Position and the accompanying rule that lengthens all mid vowels before the so-called lengthening consonants [z ʒ v r] could not account for the occurrence of low-mid [ɛ] in -CV, as in *fait*, where it contrasts with [e], as in *fée*; for the occurrence of high-mid [ø] and [o] in final syllables checked by lengthening consonants, as in *creuse* and *rose*; and for the occurrence of the high-mid

TABLE I

*Distribution of mid vowel phones*

Environ- ment	Front Unrounded	Front Rounded	Back Rounded
-#	[e] fée [ɛ] fait	[ø] feu	[o] faux
-C (C)	[ɛ] mètre [eː] maître	[øː] jeûne [œ] jeune	[oː] pomme [ɔ<] pomme
-[ʒ z v]	[ɛː] beige	[øː] creuse	[oː] pause [ɔ<] loge
-[r]	[eː] père	[œː] peur	[ɔː] port
Medial free	[E] laissons, les sons	[ə] cela	[ʌ] l'office [ɔ<] l'office
syllables	[e] les sons [ɛ] laissons	[ø] ceux-là [œ] cela	[ʌ] l'aumônier [o] l'aumônier

long phones [øː] and [oː] before non-lengthening consonants, as in *jeûne* and *paume*; in the latter environment the high-mid lengthened vowels contrast with the short low-mid vowels predicted by the two rules.

The Loi de Position also fails to account for the low-mid phones occurring in medial open syllables: [ɛ] as in *laissons* or *mettons*; [œ] as in *jeunesse*, *européen*, and centralized [ɔ<] as in *l'office* or *joli*. Nor does it account for the so-called intermediate vowels [E], [ə], and [ʌ], that occur usually in normal style and which in a Prague-style analysis are interpreted as the realization of the mid vowel archiphonemes. Note that there is little phonetic difference between the latter two phones and they may be considered the realization of a second-level archiphoneme which subsumes all rounded mid vowels; in other words, *le fils* and *l'office* are homophonous (Martinet, 1958).

It might be advanced correctly that the high-mid vowel [ø] seldom occurs in checked syllables except before [z], but the other two sets of exceptions to the Loi de Position are attested in a large variety of forms: final [ɛ] occurs in the realization of many different morphemes, the imperfect and conditional endings *-ais*, *-ait*, and *-aient* among others, and occurs before a variety of permissible final consonants. (See Table II).

The Loi de Position is often confused with deep-level morphophonemic alternations labelled Mid Vowel Adjustment (Schane, 1968). Mid Vowel Adjustment accounts for the alternation of underlying low-mid vowel + final (latent or truncatable) consonant vs. high-mid vowel + Ø in stems: *dernière/dernier*, *sotte/sot*, and *veulent/veut*. Mid Vowel Adjustment accounts, for instance, for the common surface output of *saut*- "jump" and *sot*- "fool" when they occur in final position (that is, not followed by any suffix) although their underlying vowels are, respectively, underlying *o* and underlying *ɔ*:

Underlying form	soT	sɔT
Liaison (Latent Consonant Truncation)	so	*sɔ
Mid Vowel Adjustment	—	so
Phonetic Realization	[so]	



TABLE II

*Distribution of the six mid vowel phonemes relative to word-final boundary and permissible final consonants*

Environment	Vowel					
	e	ɛ	ə	o	œ	ø
Free syllable#	poignée	poignet	×	peau	×	peu
checked syllable						
-C	(aurai-je)	aurai-je	loge	l'auge	×	(Maubeuge)
ž		sept	hotte	hôte	×	(meute)
t		pèse	×	pause	×	creuse
z		raide	rode	rôde	×	(Eudes)
d		sel	sol	saule	veulent	(veule)
l		benne	bonne	Beaune	jeune	(jeûne)
n		chef	étouffe	sauf	bœuf	×
f		lève	love	mauve	peuvent	×
v		serre	sort	×	sœur	×
r		oreille	×	×	feuille	×
j		guêpe	tope	taupe	×	×
p		plèbe	robe	aube	×	×
b		sec	roc	rauque	×	×
k		caisse	cosse	causse	×	×
s		pêche	poche	embauche	×	×
š		aime	homme	heaume	×	×
m		bègue	vogue	×	×	×
g		règne	grogne	×	×	×
ñ						

Since [ə] does not occur in final position, it might be argued that this alternation is indeed an instance of the Loi de Position, but this argument is easily refuted by comparing the surface outputs of *dernier*- and *épais* both of which contain underlying [ɛ] and latent consonants:

Underlying form	dɛrnjɛR	epɛS
Liaison	*dɛrnjɛ	epɛ
Mid Vowel Adjustment	dɛrnjɛ	—
Phonetic Realization	[dɛrnjɛ]	[epɛ]

If Mid Vowel Adjustment is not applied to *dernier*-, the non-permissible pronunciation \*[dɛrnjɛ] results, and if Mid Vowel Adjustment were applied to *épais*-, one would be forced to claim that the pronunciation [epɛ] generated by that rule is the only one permissible; in fact the orthoepic pronunciation is [epɛ]. If the Loi de Position held, of course, the output of *épais*- would be obligatorily [epɛ] and there would be no justification for distinguishing between the two rules.

### 3. THE LOI DE POSITION AS AN INHERENT PHONOLOGICAL TENDENCY

French phonologists generally imply, if they don't actually state explicitly (Delattre, 1948:22; Malmberg, 1941:245) that the Loi de Position reflects an inherent tendency

of the French phonological system. Data that constitute counter-examples to the Law of Position are ascribed to the influence of "extraphonological" factors such as morphophonemic analogy, the influence of the orthography, academic purism, etc. A typical statement is contained in Malmberg (1941:245):

La raison pour laquelle cette tendance [Loi de Position] n'a pas abouti est essentiellement de nature *extraphonique*. Ce sont des facteurs qui ne sont ni phonétiques ni phonologiques qui empêchent la langue de suivre son penchant naturel et qui maintient en partie un système qui ne correspond plus à son génie ... La véritable structure d'un système phonologique se manifeste parfois — et c'est justement le cas en français — mieux dans ses tendances que dans une prononciation réglée et freinée par une tradition puissante et maintenue artificiellement par l'enseignement et par l'action des puristes.

It is in the speech of the untutored folk that phonologists search for manifestations of the inherent tendencies of the phonological system, and in fact Malmberg reports (1941:234-5) that in working class and lower class speech (*le français populaire*) nouns ending with the graph *-et* such as *billet*, *carnet*, etc. are pronounced [e] and that the future and the conditional endings tend to be homophonous. Today, it would seem that the unguarded (i.e. fast colloquial) speech of middle class Paris speakers can hardly be demarcated from *français populaire* (Guiraud 1965), and that it too should manifest the inherent tendencies of the phonological system. Indeed, Hall (1948:9) claims that in fast colloquial speech [e] and [ɛ] and [ø] and [œ] are in complementary distribution. But more detailed observations of the phonological behavior of French speakers based on actual corpuses of materials contradict these various assertions. On the basis of data collected in his pioneering questionnaire-based research (1945), Martinet hesitates to draw any conclusion about the distribution of [e] or [ɛ] in monosyllabic function words such as *mes*, *tes*, *ses*, *les*, etc., or such items as *gai*, *quai*, *serai* and *cahier*.

Deyhime (1967) has administered Martinet's questionnaire to a large group of university students in their early and middle twenties and refined Martinet's procedure by observing directly the respondents' pronunciation of questionnaire items rather than relying on their own subjective impressions. His observations indicate that Northern French and Paris speakers are more likely to use [ɛ] than [e] in final position and that a majority of Southern speakers show the same tendency. Compare the percentages of [ɛ] pronunciations for the items *les*, *quai*, and *serai* on the part of Paris, Northern French, and Southern French speakers respectively:

	<i>quai</i>	<i>serai</i>	<i>les</i>
Paris	89	67	64
Northern France	77	58	53
Southern France	66	66	34

These figures cast a doubt on the reliability of early descriptions of French vowel variation which fail to specify the items on the basis of which generalizations are made or to identify the geographical or social origins of speakers.



The focus of language variation is the individual morpheme — “chaque mot a sa propre histoire” — and the individual speaker, and tendencies of the French phonological system can be adequately charted only by a procedure such as the one Martinet (1964) suggests for the elaboration of a French pronouncing dictionary: morphemes such as *lait*, *quai*, *cahier*, *-ais*, etc. subject to variable pronunciation would be submitted to respondents representative of various areas or social strata and the relative proportion of variant pronunciations listed, e.g. *cahier*: [e] 9, [ɛ] 1 (Martinet, 1964: 355).

Of particular significance in evaluating the Loi de Position as a valid generalization of the pronunciation habits of the lower social strata is Pierre Léon's study of the distribution of the front unrounded vowels among working class adolescents contained in this volume (pp. 302–312). Léon interviewed a group of 31 fourteen-year old boys from working class families in Paris and its suburbs to determine the distribution of front unrounded vowels, including long [e:], in their speech. The subjects were asked to read sentences containing a wide variety of key variable words such as *gai*, *quai*, *sais*, *billet*, *ticket*, *épais*, *épée*. Their responses were recorded and analyzed by a group of 13 judges, 3 of which were trained phoneticians and the others graduate students with extensive experience in phonetic transcription. Results show conclusively that the contrast [e] vs. [ɛ] is very stable in final position among speakers whose behavior cannot be said to be greatly influenced by extraphonological factors. The striking differences between recent observation and the testimony of early phonologists should not be interpreted as reflecting any significant change in the system but simply indicate that to transcend subjective impressions phonological data must be collected systematically by the use of rigorous field procedures from carefully described large populations and that they should be analyzed by groups of trained judges rather than the analyst exclusively.

Deyhime's data and various anecdotal or semi-anecdotal observations, e.g. Simon (1970), do support the widely held opinion that Southern French speakers have a mid vowel system characterized by the Loi de Position. My own research among middle class and working class speakers from the Alpes Maritimes and Var departments indicate that this system is being modified in the direction of Paris speech, however. While in spontaneous style, defined as recorded free conversation, members of mid vowel pairs are usually in complementary distribution, instances constituting counter-examples to the Loi de Position abound in careful style, defined as recorded reading of sentences and minimal pairs. In addition to the informants' overt responses, an effort was made to assess their ability to discriminate among members of mid vowel pairs in positions where they contrast in the orthoepic norm as well as their preference for the local or the orthoepic norm pronunciations. For example, informants listened to a sentence such as *Voici le saule* [so:l] and were to determine whether what they heard was *Voici le sol* or *Voici le saule*, or they were given the variant pronunciations [goʃ] and [gəʃ] for *gauche* and were asked which variant they would normally use or which they prefer. All informants were able to distinguish between members of the mid vowel pairs investigated ([e] vs. [ɛ] and [o] vs. [ɔ]) although they indicated



preference for the local pronunciation: *saule* [sɔl], *épais* [epe], etc.

From the point of view of a dynamic description of a phonological system such factors as morphophonemic analogy, the influence of the conventional orthography, and academic purism are not extra-systemic. In fact in French the conventional spellings serve to reinforce the effect of morphophonemic analogy, which I would prefer to label "influence of the underlying form". It was shown above that different underlying vowels have to be posited for the second syllable of *épais* and *épée* and for *sot* and *saut* since, except for Southern speakers, two mid vowels alternate in the realizations of the first member of each pair and its derivatives but only the high-mid vowel appears in the realizations of the second member or its derivatives: *épais* [e] ~ [ɛ], *épaisse* [ɛ], *épaisseur* [e] ~ [ɛ] but *épée* [e]; *sot* [o] *sotte* [ɔ], *sottise* [o] ~ [ɔ] but *saut* [o], *sauter* [o]. It is important to note that underlying vowels are determined by the examination of morphophonemic alternations rather than from etymological considerations. The spellings *ô* and *au*, for example, reinforce the preservation of the underlying *o* and this accounts for the predominance of [o] in the phonetic output of words containing that underlying vowel. The nature of the underlying vowel and the influence of the conventional spelling do not operate independently from such factors as style and social dialect. Speakers of the prestige dialect — cultivated upper class Paris speakers — are more likely to be influenced by the spelling of morphemes in their more self-conscious styles and registers and, presumably, working class and lower class speakers are less influenced by spelling than middle class speakers. These are mere suppositions, of course, until data are obtained about style and register switching collected with the aid of more rigorous and delicate eliciting procedures such as those employed by Labov (1966), for instance.

The conclusion that emerges from a review of descriptive facts taken broadly to include dialect and stylistic variation is that all one could claim in favor of the Loi de Position is that it might accurately characterize the pronunciation habits of Southern French speakers. Statements about the distribution of mid vowels found in many pedagogically oriented descriptions to the effect that "the majority of the French ... pronounce [e] in an open syllable; [ɛ] in a closed syllable" (Nachtmann 1969:38) or that "in rapid colloquial speech ... whether one says /ø/ or /œ/ or /e/ or /ɛ/ becomes clearly predictable according to the environment in which the sounds are used" (Politzer 1960:75) are grossly inaccurate.

The distribution of mid vowel phones (see Table I) suggests that instead of the traditional  $3 \times 2$  symmetrical set of phonemes, one might prefer to posit two subsets: a three-vowel unrounded set consisting of /e/, /ɛ/, and /ɛ:/ and a four-vowel symmetrical set consisting of the round vowels /ø/, /œ/, /o/, and /ɔ/ (see Table III).

Observe that both /e/ and /ɛ:/ correspond to the high-mid round vowels /ø/ and /o/, the latter and /e/ are realized as short phones in final position (*maux*, *nœud*, *né*) while they and /ɛ:/ are realized as long phones in final checked syllables (*feutre*, *faute*, *faîte*), whereas /ɛ/ corresponds to the low-mid round vowels /œ/ and /ɔ/ which are realized as long phones before final /r/ (*peur*, *port*, *père*) and as short phones in syl-



TABLE III

*Mid vowel phonologic systems*

(Front) Unrounded Vowels			Rounded Vowels		
High-mid	e		High-mid	ø	o
Low-mid	ɛ	ɛ:	Low-mid	œ	ɔ
	short	long		front	back

lables checked by other consonants with the exception of /v z ʒ/ (*veulent, vole, veine*). It is no doubt the case that subjective reactions of speakers to violations of the orthoepic norm in the distribution of mid vowels in morphemes will also not pattern symmetrically. That is, given pronunciations [ire] for *irais*, [ke] for *quai*, [le] for *lait*, etc., speakers of various social strata and geographical provenience will not judge them as "incorrect" or inelegant as often or as vehemently as pronunciations [gəʃ] for *gauche*, [rəʒ] for *rose*, [kət] for *côte* or [œrœz] for *heureuse*, [ʒœn] for *jeûne*, etc. Preliminary results of the research I have undertaken with Southern French speakers suggests that the use of [ə] for [o] in such words as *gauche, côte, faute* are considered stereotypes of a working class or lower class South French pronunciation. To change these anecdotal observations to reliable data would necessitate the administration of listener reaction tests of the matched guise type developed by Lambert and his associates (1960) and refined by Labov (1966). For example, French speakers from various geographical areas and social strata would hear bidialectal speakers produce variant pronunciations of words and select from a list of positions arranged in descending scale with regard to prestige and remuneration (e.g. manager, administrative secretary, clerk-typist, machine operator, laborer) the one most suitable for the speakers in each of their guises.

#### 4. THE LOI DE POSITION AS A PEDAGOGICAL NORM

In view of the descriptive facts presented in Sections 2 and 3 above, it is clear that the Loi de Position can only be proposed as a pedagogical norm, an approximation to the actual speech behavior of French speakers which will nonetheless permit the foreign learner to communicate effectively within the context of the natural and meaningful use of language. The adoption of a pedagogical norm such as the Loi de Position would require a radical change of attitude on the part of FL teachers and in particular a departure from insistence on the production on the part of the learner, at least in initial stages of instruction, of fully grammatical and phonologically accurate sentences. Within the context of a course of study leading to proficiency in listening comprehension and speaking, the primary goal will need to be defined as the accurate transmission



of a message with less than perfect form (Jakobovits, 1970:23). The Loi de Position needs, then, to be evaluated now as a pedagogical norm.

A pedagogical norm may be evaluated on the basis of three criteria (these are presented without any attempt at relative weighing): (1) the degree to which it reflects the speech habits of target language speakers; (2) the degree to which it reduces dialect and style variation to a simple pattern; (3) the degree to which it fits into a progressive sequence leading to speech habits characteristic of a certain group of speakers using a particular style or register. In the case of the teaching of French the frame of reference for criterion (1) is the speech of the majority of French speakers and that for criterion (3) is the orthoepic norm which presumably reflects the monitored speech of upper middle class Paris speakers.

First, it is only in the speech of Southern French speakers relatively sociologically isolated from the orthoepic norm that high- and low-mid paired vowels occur in perfect complementary distribution; even so, samples among working class speakers in the Alpes Maritimes and Var departments show a wide fluctuation in the distribution of high-mid and low-mid vowels. Many speakers in Northern France use [e] and [ɛ] in near complementary distribution but show contrasts between the high-mid and the low-mid rounded vowels such as *paume* vs. *pomme*, *saule* vs. *sol* and *jeûne* vs. *jeune*, *jeudi* vs. *je dis*, *le retour* vs. *leur tour*.

Second, the Loi de Position constitutes a very simple pattern and provides a very useful frame of reference for the foreign learner: open (low-mid) vowel in closed (checked) syllables; close (high-mid) vowel in open (free) syllable. In addition, since the learner must produce six different vowel timbres, the Loi de Position is compatible with a method for the teaching of French pronunciation anchored, as was Pierre Delattre's for instance (Delattre, 1948), on the acquisition of the articulatory set of the target language in the preliminary stages of instruction. The learner must learn to distinguish and differentiate high-mid from low-mid vowels although he will not be asked to contrast them in any environment, for according to Delattre's method the learner cannot freely substitute high-mid vs. low-mid members of a vowel pair for each other, that is, pronunciations such as \*[dɔ] for *dos*, or \*[poʃ] for *poche* are not permitted. The learner must also produce tense and steady-state high-mid vowels in final open syllables, which is particularly difficult for English speakers, for instance, in whose native language steady-state vowels generally do not occur in this position: compare *bet/bait* but *bay*, *bought/boat* but *bow*.

It now needs to be shown whether the Loi de Position can be the first step in a gradual progression whose end result is a distribution of the high-mid and low-mid vowel generally characteristic of the pronunciation of educated middle class speakers using a relatively carefully monitored style. In that style, [e] and [ɛ] contrast in final position, [ɛ] occurring in the imperfect and conditional endings and in most words ending in the spellings *ai*, *ais*, *ait*, *aie*, *ès*, and *et*, and high-mid and low-mid vowels contrast in final position. In non-final syllables high-mid and low-mid members are generally in free variation except that the timbre of underlying vowels is preserved



in derivatives or inflectionally related forms. For example, the [ɛ] of *aid-* which occurs finally in such forms as *aide*, *aides*, etc. would be preserved in *aider*; the [o] which occurs finally in *donne* would be preserved in *donner*, the [o] which occurs in *saute* would appear in *sauté*, and the [œ] which occurs in *jeune* would appear in *jeunesse*.

Let us assume that the learner has been instructed to distribute mid vowels according to the Loi de Position. It would be desirable that in initial stages of instruction he be exposed only to contrived materials which do not contain instances of counter-examples. But past the initial stages constraints imposed by the need to teach grammatical patterns and vocabulary sufficient to treat a variety of topics would make it impossible to select only words containing mid vowels distributed according to the Loi de Position. It needs to be determined what types of violations of the Loi de Position would be likely to be encountered in an elementary or intermediate French course. It would seem that the words contained in the *Dictionnaire Fondamental de la Langue Française* (derived from the *Français fondamental* first and second level) would provide a representative corpus of words that elementary and intermediate students would be likely to encounter. It was decided to work from a modified list of 3124 *Français fondamental* content words ranked according to their lexical valence (Savard, 1970).

First a list was made of words that would constitute violations of the Loi de Position in final position. There were 64 words that in the orthoepic norm end in [ɛ], 18 that would contain [o] in final checked syllables, and 36 that contain [ø] occurring in final checked syllables; of the latter, all except *neutre* were the feminine form of adjectives consisting of a stem plus the adjectival suffix *-euse/-eux*. Only three items were found that contained an underlying *æ* occurring in a free non-final syllable: *pleurer* (*il pleure*), *seulement* (*seul*), *heureux* (*heur*). The number of words containing underlying *ε* and *e* in free non-final syllables was very large and only those ranked among the first 1000 of the Savard list were considered; approximately 50 instances of each of the two vowels were found in this environment.

Since all instances except one of [ø] occurring in a final checked syllable and five of the eighteen instances of [o] occurring in that environment (*cause*, *chose*, *dispose*, *propose*, *repose*) were found before /z/, the Loi de Position may be amended by an additional rule that applies only to round mid vowels:

$$(3) \quad V \begin{bmatrix} \text{Mid} \\ \text{Round} \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow V[\text{high-mid}] / \begin{cases} \text{---} \# \\ \text{---} z\# \end{cases}$$

All other items ending in [o] (*côte*, *chaude*, *chauve*, *fausse*, *faute*, *gauche*, *grosse*, *haute*, *jaune*, *pauvre*, *sauce*, *sauf*, *saute*) would have to be considered idiosyncratic and memorized as a list. The words and the inflectional endings (imperfect-conditional) pronounced with a final [ɛ] in the orthoepic norm are too numerous to be handled as idiosyncratic items, nor can any rules couched in terms of the spelling be formulated, since in the 64 items in which final *ε* occurs it is represented by eight different graphs: *et*, *ès*, *ai*, *ay*, *ait*, *aid*, *aie*, *ais*. Items with medial underlying *ε* and *ɔ*, e.g. *aimer* and