Do French-speaking learners simply omit the English /h/?
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It is commonly considered that French-speaking learners of English tend to drop /h/. In such cases, a hard vowel onset is often observed, suggesting the presence of a glottal stop preceding the vowel, whereas [h] is characterised by an open glottis.

First, recordings of the nursery rhyme “Humpty Dumpty” of 37 French students were acoustically analysed. The H2/H1 ratio (i.e. relative amplitude of the first two harmonics) at the onset of the first vowel in words beginning with /h/ was measured as an indication of voice quality. As expected, out of the 14 students who dropped /h/ at least once, 11 showed a higher H2/H1 ratio on average when /h/ was not pronounced.

Second, glottal opening measurements were conducted on 9 test words beginning with /h/ or null consonant produced by a native speaker of French, using ePGG (external lighting and sensing photo-glottography). The results suggest more clearly than the H2/H1 ratio data that the glottis is closed when /h/ is dropped.

The data comparison shows the advantage of articulatory measurements such as ePGG when acoustic data alone do not provide sufficiently clear information on certain articulatory phenomena such as glottal aperture.