

# International Linguistic Association

## *Monthly Lecture Series*

**Saturday, October 5, 2024. 11 AM – 12:00 PM (EST) on Zoom**

**Dr. Francisco Antonio Montaña**

*Lehman College, CUNY*

**Sibilants at the edge and beyond: Deletion, preservation and exceptionality  
in Old French word-final /s/-clusters**

**Abstract:**

Sibilants in early French prove exceptional in numerous regards, not only in their distinct diachronic trajectory and clustering possibilities with respect to other obstruents, but more notably in their unique ability to occupy positions unavailable to most other segments in consonant groups at the edge of words, in word-initial and word-final consonant sequences. In this presentation, building upon Montaña's (2024) analysis of word-medial OF coda /s/ deletion as a syllable-contact effect and incorporating Jacobs' (1994) and Rainsford's (2020) more general characterization of Old French (OF) word-final consonant sequences as the onsets of empty-headed syllables, I propose a coherent account of the deletion or maintenance of post-nuclear /s/ in early French diachrony, offering an explanation for similarities and contrasts in outcomes between word-medial contexts and those at word edges, especially at the word-final edge but also drawing connections to the unique properties of word-initial /sC/ clusters at the opposite leftmost word edge. Beyond word-medial contexts where /s/ deletes in heterosyllabic clusters (e.g. 11-12th century *isle* [iz.lə] > [i:.lə] 'island', *blasmer* [blaz.mer] > [bla:.mer] 'blame-inf', and by 13th century *feste* [fɛs.tə] > [fɛ:.tə] 'party' [Pope 1952]), /s/ also deletes in certain word-final sequences, namely, cluster-initially (*gost* > g[u:]t 'taste' [Pope 1952]) but not cluster-finally (*cors* 'body-nom.sg' [Jacobs 1994]), cluster-internally (*detuerst* 'twist-3rd.sg.past') or as a singleton coda (*pais* [paj.is] 'land' [Rainsford 2020]). The locus of /s/ deletion strongly aligns with certain word-final consonant sequences that include the onset of an empty-headed syllable, as proposed by Jacobs (1994) and Rainsford (2020), and this is congruent with Montaña's (2024) syllable-contact account: the deletion or survival of /s/ in word-final syllables depends on if it precedes the onset of an empty-headed syllable, as per Jacobs and Rainsford, thus making it a natural outcome if such clusters actually represent coda-onset syllable-contact sequences like those found word-medially. This characterization furthermore offers an explanation for why word-

final singleton /s/ does not delete in the word-level phonology during OF (though it does variably in the phrase-level phonology before consonant-initial words, the seeds of the modern-day French liaison process incipient in late OF, compatible with my analysis), given it holds no syllable-contact relation with a following consonant at that level of representation, reinforcing the syllable contact account. Finally, I draw links between the status of /s/ in word-final clusters to other notable properties of early French, including the diachronic evolution of prothesis of word-initial /sC/ clusters as well as interactions with schwa in word-final syllables, underscoring important dynamics of the evolving word- and phrase-level phonological tiers in early French.

- Jacobs, Haïke. 1994. "Catalexis and stress in Romance." In *Issues and Theory in Romance Linguistics: Selected Papers from the Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages XXIII, April 1-4, 1993*, edited by Michael L. Mazzola, 49-65. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Rainsford, Thomas M. 2020. "Syllable structure and prosodic words in Old French." *Papers in Historical Phonology* 5: 63-89.
- Montaño, Francisco Antonio. 2024. "Syllable contact effects as a diachronic precursor to mora licensing in early French /sC/ clusters." *Romance Languages and Linguistic Theory 21: Selected papers from the 52nd Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages*. Special issue of *Isogloss: Open Journal of Romance Linguistics* 10(2)/2: 1-36.
- Pope, Mildred Katharine. 1952. *From Latin to Modern French with Especial Consideration of Anglo-Norman: Phonology and morphology* (2nd edition). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Pope, Mildred Katharine. 1952. *From Latin to Modern French with Especial Consideration of Anglo-Norman: Phonology and morphology* (2nd edition). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

**Date & Time: October 5, 2024 at 11:00 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)**

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## About the Speaker

# Dr. Francisco Antonio Montaña



**Francisco Antonio Montaña** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Languages and Literatures at Lehman College of the City University of New York (CUNY), where he additionally serves as the Director of the Interdisciplinary Program in Linguistics. He received his A.B. in French from Princeton University (2003) and an M.A. in French Linguistics (2006) and a dual Ph.D. in French and Linguistics (2017) from Indiana University, Bloomington. A member of the faculty at Lehman College since 2008, first as a full-time lecturer (2008–2019) and then as an assistant professor (2019–present), he additionally has served as the Review Editor of *WORD*, the journal of the International Linguistic Association since 2024. Dr. Montaña's research has been presented at national and international venues and is published in several peer-reviewed journals such as *Isogloss: Open Journal of Romance Linguistics and Languages*. His research interests include comparative Romance linguistics, phonology, French linguistics, historical phonology, language contact, syllable-sensitive phonological change, consonant cluster phonotactics, and language pedagogy. He is a member of the International Linguistic Association, Linguistics Association of Canada and the United States (LACUS), Phi Beta Kappa, the Modern Language Association, and Pi Delta Phi. He received Lehman College's School of Arts and Humanities Faculty Recognition Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2012.

More information about Francisco Antonio Montaña [here](#).