

Poster: Question Variation: French wh-in-situ questions. An Interface Approach

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Background In this poster I want to take a fresh look at a variation phenomenon in the French language: wh-movement. Spoken Continental French can employ information seeking wh-in-situ questions (WiQs) (a) as well as wh-fronted question (WfQs)(b).

- (1) a. Qu'est-ce que tu fais ce soir? (*wh-fronted*)
What (+est-ce-que) you do tonight
"What are you doing tonight?"
- b. Tu fais quoi ce soir? (*wh-in-situ*)
You do what tonight
"What are you doing tonight?"

Are there any differences between both interrogatives and, if so, what kind of constraints do they underlay? In earlier accounts, WiQs were said to only appear in "presupposed" contexts (e.g. Chang (1997), Cheng & Rooryk (2000), Boeckx (2000)) where negative answers are not possible. However, this notion has since been revised (e.g. Adli (2006), Hamlaoui (2011), Baunaz & Patin (2011), Déprez et al. (2013)). Current texts confirm that French WiQs give rise to the same alternative set as their answers (i.e. in a standard Hamblin framework for questions) and have the same informational need. To account for the variation of posing questions in French, different constraints have been put forward. The majority nowadays are agreeing on "givenness" (i.e. in a broad sense) as the factor influencing the use of in-situ questions, namely that the non-wh-part of the question has to be given.

Issue Even though they are contextually given, full DPs to the left of the wh-word are strongly dispreferred by French speakers for WiQs. WiQs almost exclusively appear in a very minimal shape: only the verb and its cliticized arguments can be left to the wh-word. Full DPs seem to always be replaced by clitics and, when the referent is needed, it is dislocated to the right or left of the interrogative. A lot of French syntactical phenomena cannot solely be explained by "givenness".

Claim What I want to show in the poster is that the apparent sense of "givenness" has to be reevaluated. It is a byproduct of WiQs demanding a special prosodic shape to be well-formed. That is, the wh-word, the verb and its arguments have to form one single accentual phrase.

References Adli (2006) French wh-in-situ questions and syntactic optionality: Evidence from three data types. Baunaz & Patin (2011) Prosody refers to semantic factors: evidence from French wh-words. Boeckx (2000) Decomposing French questions. Chang (1997) Wh-in-situ phenomena in French. Cheng & Rooryck (2000) Licensing wh-in-situ. De Cat (2007) French dislocation: Interpretation, syntax, acquisition. Delais-Roussarie et al. (2015) Intonational Phonology of French: Developing a ToBI system for French. Déprez et al. (2013) Interaction of syntax, prosody, and discourse in licensing French wh-in-situ questions. Hamlaoui (2011) On the role of phonology and discourse in Francilian French wh-questions. Jun & Fougeron (2002) Realizations of accentual phrase in French intonation.