Question Variations: French wh-in-situ questions: An Interface Approach

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The Puzzle: Which question would French speaker choose:
1. Qu’est-ce que tu fais ce soir?
2. Tu fais quoi ce soir?
What (+est-ce que) you do tonight
You do what tonight

“What are you doing tonight?”

Literature:
- Both wh-in-situ as well as wh-fronted questions are possible strategies to form questions in spoken continental French.
- Earlier proposals categorized these questions as ‘presuppositional’ in that they should license a positive answer (e.g. Chang (1997), Cheng & Rooryck (2000), Boecks (2000), Zubizarreta (2003)).
- More recent proposals (e.g. Adj (2006), Baunaz & Patin (2011), Hamlaoui (2010), (2011)) point out that fronted and in-situ license the same answers (i.e. in a standard Hamblin framework for questions).
- Nevertheless, it is still maintained that the distribution of in-situ questions is more pragmatically constrained.
- Currently, there seems to be agreement that the in-situ interrogatives convey givenness, in the sense that the non-wh-part of the question has to be given (in a broad sense, i.e. evoked) to only keep the wh-word non-given.

Wh-in-situ require some notion of givenness.

A fresh look at wh-in-situ questions: Interrogatives without wh-fronting can have an information-seeking interpretation (WIQs) or an echo interpretation (Echos). They behave different pragmatically, syntactically and have different prosodic features.

Information-seeking Questions:
- Pose a subject-matter for inquiry
- Can be uttered out of the blue
- Propose a new topic or are part of a discourse strategy to find an answer to an unfolding question.
- No constraints
- Example:
  A: “What did you eat tonight?”
  B: “I ate pasta tonight.”

Echo Questions:
- Investigate what has been said
- Not possible out of the blue
- Try to clarify the previous discourse move
- Have strict discourse and intonational constraints (parallelism)
- Example:
  B: “I ate a skunk tonight.”
  A: “You ate what (?) tonight?”

Syntactic Differences: well-formed surface structures in French in-situ

WIQ Echo Question Variation: Manipulation

- Anne vient au concert avec qui?
  Subject: full DP
  Object: full DP

- Elle vient avec qui?
  Subject: clitic

- Elle vient avec qui, Anne?
  Subject: dislocated

- Elle vient au concert avec qui?
  Subject: clitic
  Object: full DP

- Elle vient avec qui au concert?
  Subject: clitic
  Object: word order

- Elle y vient avec qui, Anne, au concert?
  Subject: dislocation
  Object: dislocated

Issue:
- WIQs and Echos do not show the same surface structure:
  - For WIQs, full DPs cannot appear as arguments, only clitics.
  - For Echos, full DPs are fine.
- When reference to the clitic cannot be provided by the context, WIQs use syntactical means to remain minimal.
- WIQs use word order variation, (left and right) dislocation or clefting.

WIQs are only possible with clitics, no matter the “givenness” status of the arguments.

Where is the sense of „givenness“ coming from?
- The interpretation that all referents are cited can be conflated with „givenness“.
- However, dislocation is an information-structuring move and not derived by the need to mark givenness (De Cat (2007) and Delais-Roussarie et al. (2004), e.g. contra claims in Hamlaoui (2011)).
- Example (indefinite and brand-new dislocated element):
  (1) You are visiting your brother in a new city. You want to buy a newspaper in the morning.
  You ask him:
  A: Je trouve ça ou, un tabac ?
  I find that where a kiosk
  “Where can I find a kiosk?”

Other syntactic strategies driven by prosodic constraints: Focus
Focus realization is dispreferred in those cases, in which focus does not correspond to a default phrasing. If permitted by the syntax, clfiting is used (Féry (2001)).

(Who has climbed the mountain?)

Anne a escaladé la montagne.
Anne has climbed the mountain
Anne has climbed the mountain

(What did Anne climb?)

Anne a escaladé la montagne.
Anne has climbed the mountain
Anne has climbed the mountain

Proposal: WIQs form a single Accental Phrase (AP).
Constraint: The wh-word, the verb + arguments have to fit in one AP

Prosodic Cues to French WIQs:
- French (unlike other Romance languages) possesses no freely applicable lexical stress (e.g. Delais-Roussarie et al. (2015))
- Stress-marking is generated by the position of the word in the sentence.
- A sentence is divided into intonational phrases (IPs)
- IPs are again divided into accental phrases (APs)
- A word gets stress when it occupies the right-most position of an AP or the last of an IP
- Jun & Fougner (2002): AP-prosody is default movement pattern of /L(HIL)H/’
- The final H’ is the pitch accent.
- An AP can contain one or more content words plus function words.

Prosodic Parsing

WIQ prosody: H’ is assigned to the wh-word “qui” at the end of the first AP, while the object is outside of the first AP. Here, an additional boundary rise H’ is on “concert”.

Echo prosody: The wh-word gets sentence stress by closing the IP with the boundary tone H’ at a much higher pitch. Only in echos can full DPs be dephrased.

Conclusion:
- From the AP constraint follows:
  - Use of clitics
  - Syntactic restructuring with dislocation and clefts
  - Appearance of “givenness” as a byproduct

Future work:
- Where is this constraint coming from?
  - Are wh-insitu questions tied to the prosody of declaratives?
  - How is the interplay between prosody, syntax and information structure?
  - What drives the different prosodic features in interrogative sentences?

(suggestions are very welcome)