

New Insights on Question Formation in Colloquial French

1 The Issue Modern Metropolitan French exhibits different wh-question strategies whose usage is partially restricted by register (colloquial vs. standard/formal). The colloquial register allows for both in- and ex-situ wh-questions to occur (Coveney 2002, 2011, Faure & Palasis 2021), see (1).

Both wh-in-situ questions (1a) and wh-ex-situ questions (1b) are true information-seeking questions, i.e. (1a) is generally not associated with an echo reading unless prosodically marked (Glasbergen-Plas et al. 2021). The question what exactly causes the different structures in (1a) and (1b) to surface has not been sufficiently answered yet. Whereas it has been reported that wh arguments (such as *qui* ‘who’, *quoi* ‘what’, *où* ‘where’), are more likely to occur in situ (Reinhardt 2019), I present evidence that the opposite is true for wh adjuncts (*comment* ‘how’, *pourquoi* ‘why’). In a rating study, ex-situ questions were systematically preferred over their in-situ counterpart. Furthermore, my study could not confirm that the ex-situ realisation of *pourquoi* asks for a reason, while the in-situ counterpart asks for a purpose, as suggested by Aoun (1986). This study indicated however that information structure related factors could improve the acceptability of in-situ questions.

2 Exclusivity? Taking the colloquial variant of French as a wh-in-situ language, Faure & Palasis (2021) suggest that semantic exclusivity causes speakers to prefer wh-ex-situ over wh-in-situ questions as illustrated in (2).

In (2), the speaker A implies that out of the possible answer set {Marie, Paul, Guillaume}, not all members are part of the answer. The conjunction ‘or’ indicates that they have seen not all people. This implication causes the only acceptable follow-up question by B to be the ex-situ variant. Conversely, if speaker A had indicated that they had to see all three members of the answer set, only the in-situ variant would be an acceptable reaction.

3 Testing the hypothesis I will conduct a rating study in which speakers rate the acceptability of three in- and ex-situ wh arguments (*qui* ‘who’, *quoi* ‘what’ and *où* ‘where’), in contexts expressing either exclusivity ([+Excls]) or not ([–Excls]). Should the hypothesis by Faure & Palasis (2021) be correct, in-situ questions should be rated higher in [–Excls]-contexts and lower in [+Excls]-contexts, where as the opposite would be true for ex-situ questions. The questions will be presented as shown in (3).

The possible answer sets are introduced by the addressee themselves and always consist of three members. In the [+Excls] condition, this set is closed by the conjunction *ou* (*or*) before the last member of the set, in the [–Excls] condition all set members are separated by commas and three dots were added after last element so that it becomes clear that the set is open and an [+Excls]-interpretation can be excluded.

Initial interviews with three native speakers indicated that, regardless of the [Excls]-condition, in-situ-questions were largely preferred over ex-situ questions. An online rating study with 100 participants will be conducted in order to provide more robust data and its result and implications in conjunction with my study on *pourquoi* will be presented during my talk.

Examples and figures

(1) 'Who have you seen?'

a. T' as vu **qui** ?
2SG.colloq. have seen who

b. **Qui** t' as vu ?
who 2SG.colloq. have seen

(2) A: At work, I had a computer issue. I had to go to Marie, Paul or Guillaume to solve it.

B: Ah oui? Et **qui** t' as vu, finalement ?
really and who 2SG.colloq. have seen eventually

B: #?? Ah oui? Et t' as vu **qui**, finalement ?
really and 2SG.colloq. have seen who eventually

(Faure & Palasis 2021: 85)

(3)

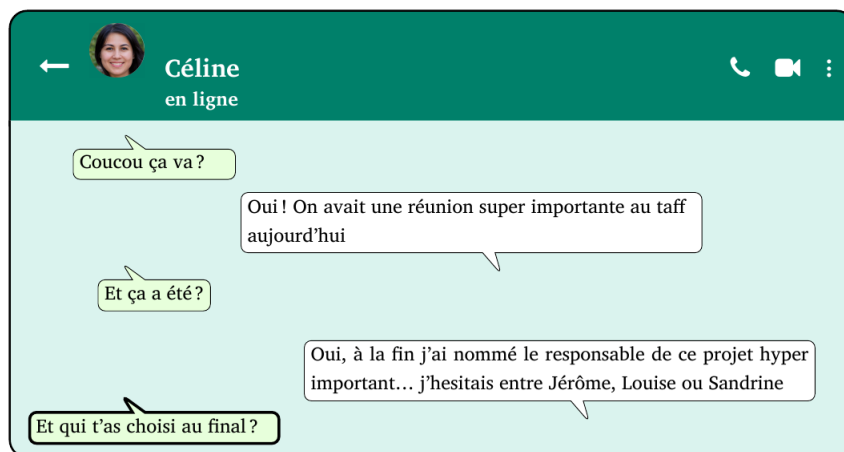


Figure 1 Example of an ex-situ questions in an [+Excls] condition.

Selected References

- Aoun, J. 1986. *Generalized binding*. De Gruyter. Coveney, A. 2002. *Variability in spoken French*. Elm Bank. Coveney, A. 2011. A language divided against itself? In *Le français en contact. Hommages à Raymond Mougéon*. F Martineau & T Nadsadi (eds.). Presses de l'Université Laval. Faure, R & K Palasis. 2021. Exclusivity! *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 39. Glasbergen-Plas, A et al. 2021. The prosody of French *wh*-in-situ questions: echo vs. non-echo. *Journal of Linguistics* 57. Reinhardt, J. 2019. *Regularity and variation in French direct interrogatives*: University of Konstanz dissertation.