How prosody can explain a superficial givenness constraint on French in-situ questions

Spoken French can employ two different strategies to form information-seeking questions: the wh-word can be fronted (1a) or it can appear in-situ (1b).

(1) What are you doing tonight?
   a. Qu’est-ce que tu fais ce soir?
   b. Tu fais quoi ce soir?

There is a substantial body of literature explaining speakers’ choice between (1a) and (1b). Both have the same semantic meaning, i.e. they have the same set of possible answers in a Hamblin (1973) framework of question semantics (see Adli (2006), Baunaz & Patin (2009)). To account for the co-occurrence of (1b), the use of information-seeking in-situ questions is said to be pragmatically restricted, being related to notions of ‘givenness’ (e.g. Hamlouhi(2010), Déprez et al.(2012)). Material surrounding the wh-phrase should be de-accented, keeping pitch prominence on the wh-word alone as the criterion to licence wh-in-situ in French. I conducted a series of qualitative interviews that gives rise to three issues with this account:

1. French in-situ questions can have an information-seeking (iWiQ) and an echo (eWiQ) interpretation, but both are different pragmatically, syntactically and in their prosodic features.
2. iWiQs only allow for clitics prior to the wh-phrase and use dislocation, word order variation and clefting to achieve this minimality. There is no such constraint for material following the wh-phrase:
   Ann vient à la fête avec qui ? (eWiQ ✓ iWiQ x)
   Anne, elle vient avec qui à la fête ? (eWiQ ? iWiQ ✓)
3. If put into the right form, iWiQs can be used out-of-the-blue:
   Je peut trouver où un kiosk ?

Proposal: The well-formedness condition of iWiQs is dictated by the requirement that only clitics and the verb predicate precede the wh-word (the givenness inference is only a byproduct of this constraint). I argue that this is the result of an information-structure-prosody constraint:

First AP Constraint: The wh-phrase will need to sit at the right boundary of the first AP

![Figure 1: Stylized surface structure of a WiQ](image-url)

To ensure the form in figure 1, clitics have to replace full DPs, as they would create their own AP. Every intervener that forms its own AP is also automatically out. My account would fit into
Richards (2016) contiguity theoretical description of wh-movement, as both iWiQs and eWiQs are contiguity prominent, but differ in prosodic constraints on French.

References