

## Refining Current Insights into *wh*-in-situ interrogatives in Contemporary Hexagonal French

The present-day French of France is typologically unique in displaying in its various varieties and registers a wide range of syntactic forms for in particular root non-subject information-seeking *wh*-questions. Abstracting away from additional clefting, which results in a bafflingly vast number, Hexagonal French has no less than five basic constructions for direct *wh*-interrogatives, viz. constructions with

- (i) a sentence-initial *wh*-phrase and V(erb)–S(ubject) order, exemplified in (1a)-(1a’),
- (ii) a sentence-initial *wh*-phrase and S<sub>non-clitic</sub>–V–S<sub>clitic</sub> order, such as in (1b),
- (iii) a sentence-initial *wh*-phrase followed by the interrogative particle *est-ce que* and S–V order, illustrated in ((1c)),
- (iv) a sentence-initial *wh*-phrase and S–V order, as in ((1d)),
- (v) a sentence-final *wh*-phrase and S–V order, shown in ((1e)).

- (1) a. Où est-il allé ?  
a’. Où est allé Jean ?  
b. Où Jean est-il allé ?  
c. Où est-ce qu’il /que Jean est allé ?  
d. Où il / Jean est allé ?  
e. Il / Jean est allé où ?  
‘Where did he / John go?’

The last two decades have specifically seen an increasingly fierce debate on the particulars of the *wh*-interrogative construction in (1e), commonly referred to as *wh*-in-situ and usually encountered in the spontaneous spoken language. In fact, many claims have been put forth that are essentially based on the view that *wh*-in-situ in French underlies numerous restrictions (e.g. Chang 1997; Boeckx 1999; Bošković 2000; Cheng & Rooryck 2000; Boeckx et al. 2001), a view that has not gone unchallenged (e.g. Mathieu 2004; Etxepare & Uribe-Etxebarria 2005; Adli 2006; Baunaz 2011; Bayer & Cheng 2017). Inter alia, it has been argued that *wh*-in-situ in French is excluded with modals ((2)), in embedded clauses ((3)), and in non-presupposed situations ((4)).

- (2) \*Il **peut** rencontrer qui ?  
‘Who can he meet?’ (Chang 1997: 19)
- (3) \*Jean pense **que Marie a acheté quoi** ?  
‘What does John think that Mary bought?’ (Cheng & Rooryck 2000: 12)
- (4) — Jean a acheté quoi ? — Un livre. / Une voiture. / \***Rien**.  
‘What did John buy? – A book. / A car. / Nothing.’ (Boeckx 1999: 69)

Given such controversy as well as the disregard so far for various issues that might conceivably be also pertinent regarding the availability of *wh*-in-situ in French, the aim of this paper is threefold. First, the paper compiles the numerous proposals put forward in the last twenty years. Second, based on a large-scale corpus limited both temporally and geographically, it puts to test each of the contentious claims pertaining to the realm of syntax as well as several assertions regarding the field of pragmatics. Third, the possible relevance of further factors not yet addressed in the literature, such as verb type, tense, mood, and subject type, is investigated.

The corpus underlying these investigations consists of a selection of 33 novels, comprising overall 13,494 pages. The selected novels had been published in the last two decades, with the vast majority in recent years, and written by 19 renowned and for the most part award-winning authors, all native speakers of Hexagonal French. Containing each a multitude of (fictitious) dialogue, these pieces of writing feature altogether 1,325 *wh*-in-situ interrogatives. All of these genuinely information-seeking constructions were unequivocally determined against the backdrop of the general availability in such a literary corpus of the respective context in which clauses with a postverbal *wh*-phrase show up. This state of affairs is of particular relevance, given the identity in form of *wh*-in-situ interrogatives and echo questions with a postverbal *wh*-phrase, which essentially differ from the former in that their *raison d'être* is not associated with the request for information, but rather relates to improper hearing / understanding or incredulity.

Preliminary results crucially indicate that *wh*-in-situ interrogatives in contemporary Hexagonal French are by far less restricted than commonly claimed. Regarding the three restrictions illustrated in (2)-(4) above, the corpus data reveal that none of these actually hold. In particular, *wh*-in-situ is possible with modals ((5)), in embedded clauses ((6)), and in non-presupposed situations ((7)).

- (5) Cela **pouvait** intéresser qui ?  
 ‘Who could be interested in this?’
- (6) [...], vous pensez **qu’il leur sert à quoi** ?  
 ‘... what do you think that he serves them?’
- (7) — T’es allé faire quoi dans les bois ? — **Rien**.  
 ‘What did you intend to do in the woods?’ – Nothing.’

The corpus data furthermore demonstrate that *wh*-in-situ interrogatives in present-day Hexagonal French occur in all of the tenses encountered in the spontaneous spoken variety, among which the pluperfect ((8)).

- (8) — Vous **aviez prévu** quoi, pour calmer le jeu ?  
 ‘What had you planned to calm things down?’

In view of such findings, this paper fundamentally argues that *wh*-in-situ in contemporary Hexagonal French meets with a relatively small number of syntactic and pragmatic restrictions and, thus, constitutes a full-fledged direct interrogative construction of its own.

### References

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