

CENTRE LANGUAGE – VARIATION – MULTILINGUALISM
LINGUISTIC LECTURE SERIES
WINTER TERM 2022-23

JAN FLIESSBACH & JOHANNA ROCKSTROH
(UNIVERSITY OF POTSDAM)

TU SAIS QUOI? QU'EST-CE QUE TU RACONTES?
QU'EST-CE QUE TU AS? VERB INDUCED OBJECT
PLACEMENT PATTERNS IN FRENCH PARTIAL
INTERROGATIVES

Time: Wednesday, 25th January 2023 (4.15 p.m.)

Place: Campus Neues Palais, University of Potsdam



For further information scan the QR code or click [here!](#)

Abstract:

French partial interrogatives allow for fronted (OV) and in-situ (VO) wh-objects. This variability has been extensively studied from various sociolinguistic perspectives (Coveney, 2011; Elsig, 2009), and it has also received some attention in terms of referents that are given/new or in focus/background (Déprez, Syrett, & Kawahara, 2013; Hamlaoui, 2011). Yet the designs of these studies did not allow for an investigation of correlations between specific verbs and the placement of wh-object constituents. This is in part due to the fact that few corpora are large and varied enough to allow for such a perspective. We therefore resort to a very large parallel corpus of French-Spanish film subtitles (Lison & Tiedemann, 2016) that represents a close approximation of informal conversations (Levshina, 2017). Using a workflow based on OpusTools (Aulamo, Sulubacak, Virpioja, & Tiedemann, 2020), we extracted approx. 150.000 interrogatives with wh-objects from a subcorpus of approximately 9 million turns. We selected 20 verbs for investigation, among them both frequent and infrequent ones, and found that most of the verbs in both groups show a strong tendency for either OV or VO. We found that frequent verbs correlate with OV and infrequent verbs correlate with VO. Moreover, we found that OV and VO partial interrogatives correlate with differences in the translation of the verbs involved. French OV interrogatives are also translated more frequently with Pottsian expressives in Spanish (Potts, 2007). We interpret these findings as an indication that French OV and VO partial interrogatives including the same verbs are often not part of one envelope of variation, understood as two ways of saying the same thing (Labov, 2004, p. 7). We conclude that future studies need to control for verb identity when investigating sociolinguistic variation in French partial interrogatives.

References

- Aulamo, M., Sulubacak, U., Virpioja, S., & Tiedemann, J. (2020). OpusTools and Parallel Corpus Diagnostics. In *LREC'12* (pp. 3782–3789). ELRA.
- Coveney, A. (2011). L'interrogation directe. *Travaux de linguistique*, n°63(2), 112–145.
- Déprez, V., Syrett, K., & Kawahara, S. (2013). The interaction of syntax, prosody, and discourse in licensing French *wh-in-situ* questions. *Lingua*, 124, 4–19.
- Elsig, M. (2009). *Grammatical variation across space and time: The French interrogative system. Studies in language variation: Vol. 3*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Hamlaoui, F. (2011). On the role of phonology and discourse in Francilian French *wh*-questions. *Journal of Linguistics*, 47(1), 129–162.
- Labov, W. (2004). Quantitative Analysis of Linguistic Variation. In U. Ammon, N. Dittmar, K. J. Mattheier, & P. Trudgill (Eds.), *Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft: Vol. 3.1. Sociolinguistics. An international handbook of the science of language and society* (2nd ed., pp. 6–21). Berlin: de Gruyter Reference Global.
- Levshina, N. (2017). Online film subtitles as a corpus: an n-gram approach. *Corpora*, 12(3), 311–338.
- Lison, P., & Tiedemann, J. (2016). OpenSubtitles2016: Extracting Large Parallel Corpora from Movie and TV Subtitles. In *LREC'16* (pp. 923–929). ELRA.
- Potts, C. (2007). The expressive dimension. *Theoretical Linguistics*, 33(2), 165–198.