VARIATION IN FRENCH PARTIAL INTERROGATIVES

Well documented, studied for a long time, really long lists of variants, but 3 main constructions:
- In situ (Pas)
- Fronting
  - With V-S inversion (FINV)
  - Without V-S inversion (≠)
- Tu vois ? (You see who ?) S - V - WH

POSSIBLE FACTORS AT WORK IN THE VARIATION

- Syntax → e.g. “Fronting = underlying movement = complexity” (Jakubowicz 2011)
- Information structure → e.g. “IS = Focus position” (Beysade 2007, Boeckx 1999...)
- Phonology → e.g. “the longer the non-wh part → Fronting more likely” (Hamlaoui 2010)
- Sociolinguistics (here: variation reflects a sociocult; one social group = one preferred structure) → e.g. “Working-class people use more (60%) IS than upper-class people (40%)” (Quillard 2001)
- Academics, intellectuals use FINV than other people” (Asby 1977)

EXPERIMENT 1b (AJT 2)
Acceptability Judgments with informal/formal context

Participants & Procedure: 44 participants, 30/13/1 females/male/.nd, median 27 y.o.
- Online ratings of interrogatives with a short informal/formal context (scale 0-10)
- Items: 3x2 conditions x 5 items
- Results:
  - Confirmations of previous AJT1 overall results
  - Subjects sensitive to “type” → sensitivity to “context formality” (interaction type*age_groupe(>30), t=3.075, p<0.005)

EXPERIMENT 1c (AJT 3)
Acceptability Judgments with audio stimuli

Participants & Procedure: 46 participants, 28/8 females/male, median 37 y.o.
- Online/neutral/ratings of spoken interrogatives with a short formal/informal context (scale 0-10) / 2 questions: Is this ‘Good’ French? Is this ‘Suitable’ French?
- Type: Same conditions & items as in AJT 2, 30 items + 30 fillers
- Results (preliminary)
  - FINV → ‘good’ French but not ‘most suitable’ French in audio stimuli
  - FINV = ‘idealized’ French / Elite French
  - Subjects sensitive to “context formality” (interaction type*age_groupe(>30), t=2.075, p<0.05)

RESULTS (preliminary)

Mixed
Linear
Results:

EXPERIMENT 2
Matched-Guise Task (Lahond et al. 1986)

General goal
Explore the social cues associated with interrogative variants

Participants & Procedure:
- 58 participants, 47/11 females/male, median 34 y.o.
- Read interviews where all the journalist’s questions were built with only one of the three variants, then answer 9 questions about the journalist

Material:
- 4 interviews (1 filler) 6-9 WH questions by interview

Results:

FINV → ‘idealized’ French / Elite French
- Significant marks are associated with FINV (≥9 items)
- Age factor confirmed again & group of origin (e.g. for native Parisians (n=19), FINV = wealthy, and more so than for non-parisians (t=3.15, p<0.004)

CONCLUSIONS

- Speakers’ perception of constructions not always correspond to their use
- “FINV is inward in spoken French, though”
- “The generation gap” is a real thing → Age gap around ~30-40 y.o.
- Social meaning games may be at stake here:
  - Speakers perceive variation based on the standards of their social group
  - The way speakers form interrogatives in French affects how they are perceived

PERSPECTIVES

- AJT2 with audio stimuli: analyses underway, big influence of modality
- MCT with audio stimuli: sorting of items done, ranking underway
- Acquisition of those social cues associated with French WH-variants?