VARIATION IN FRENCH PARTIAL INTERROGATIVES

Many variants of partial questions in French, well studied phenomenon
3 constructions under investigation here:

- **in situ** ([IS])
  - Tu vois qui ? (You see who ?)  S - V - WH
- **Fronting**
  - V-S inversion (FINV)
    - Qui vois-tu ? (Who see you?)  WH   V - S
  - no V-S inversion (L)
    - Qui t'vois ? (Who you see)  WH   S - V
  - Who do you see?

**EARLIER CORPUS STUDIES**

- **Repartition of variants by social groups (often written French)**
  - L'ADJ (Hamelart 2010)
  - CHILDREN sub-corpus (Thiberge 2017): at least 50/50 is/f, ~0% FINV (adults)
  - EPAC sub-corpus (Thiberge & Hemsforth, forthcoming): FINV belong to historians, IS is the way one can ‘connect’ with one’s everyday, popular audience

**SOCIAL MEANING AS A KEY FACTOR TO UNDERSTAND SOCIOLINGUISTIC NORM VIOLATIONS**

- Internal factors still play a role:
  - CHILDES
    - FINV → French ns +, wealthy +, educated +, reader +, Parisian +, relaxed -
  - Asymmetry (e.g. ‘good’ french vs. ‘suitable’ french)

**PHONESOLOGY**

- Possible factors at work in the variation
  - Syntax → e.g. ‘Fronting = movement = complexity’ (Jakobovitch 2011)
  - Pragmatics → e.g. ‘IS = focus position’ (Rivière 2007, Boreux 1999...)
  - Phonology → e.g. ‘long non-wh part → Fronting likely’ (Hamelart 2010)
  - Sociolinguistics (here: ‘variation reflects a social dialect: one social group = one preferred structure’)
  - e.g. ‘working-class people use more IS (>45%) than upper-class people (>55%)’ (Quilleard 2003)

**SOCIAL MEANING GAMES**

- Investigate other sociolinguistic factors:
  - ‘Different variants convey different social cues’
  - Long-term goal: Model these factors in social meaning games (Burnett 2017)

**EPAC sub-corpus**

- 58 participants, 28/30 females/male, median 28 y.o.
- 57 participants, 28/30 females/male, median 28 y.o.

**EXPERIMENT 1a (AJT 1)**

Acceptability Judgments with neutral context

**General goal**

- Assess French native speakers’ preferences in partial interrogatives

**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 3 conditions

Results:

- No significant difference
- Strong age effect (no preference in <30 y.o. (p=0.84, p>0.4), significant preference in >30 y.o. (p=0.003)

**EXPERIMENT 1b (AJT 2)**

Acceptability Judgments with informal/formal context

**Participants & Procedure**

- 44 participants, 38/6 females/male, median 27 y.o.
- Online ratings of interrogatives with a short formal/informal context (scale 0-10, ‘acceptability’ definition slightly refined)

**Participants & Procedure**

- 30 items + 30 fillers
- Subjects sensitive to ‘type’ are sensitive to ‘context formality’ (interaction type*age_group>0.3), p=2.675, p<0.05

**EXPERIMENT 1c (AJT 3)**

Acceptability Judgments with audio stimuli

**Participants & Procedure**

- 46 participants, 28/8 females/male, median 37 y.o.
- Ratings of spoken interrogatives with a short formal/informal context (scale 0-10, 2 questions: ‘Is this good French?’, ‘Is this suitable French?’)

**Results**

- FINV is good French but not most suitable French in audio stimuli
- F is not considered ‘suitable French’
- CONF uses written bias in perception of overall ‘correctness’
- Subjects do distinguish between ‘good’ French vs. ‘suitable’ French

**CONCLUSIONS**

- Speakers’ perception of constructions → ‘Up courses FINV is better French’
- Sometimes differs from their use: ‘FINV is weird spoken French, though’
- The ‘generation gap’ is a real thing → ‘As age gap around ~30-40 y.o.
- Social meaning games may be at stake here
- Speakers perceive variance based on the standards of their social group

**PERSPECTIVES**

- AJT2 with audio stimuli: Consideration underlying, big influence of modality
- MUT with audio stimuli: Norming of items done; running underway
- Acquisition of socio-social cues associated with French WH- variants

**REFERENCES**

- Sorbonne 5, pp 64-91.