

Information Structure in Romance languages: from sentence to discourse

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Université
Paris Cité



*In memory of
Manuel Leonetti Jungl*



Outlook

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ QUD-based model of Information Structure
 - ▶ QUD-based model applied to non-assertive speech acts
- ◆ Non-canonical questions
 - ▶ Reason questions in French
- ◆ Future perspectives

Information Structure in Romance languages: from sentence to discourse

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IS ~ syntax / prosody

Focus fronting ([Brunetti 2004, 2009a](#))

Clitic left and right dislocations ([Brunetti 2009b,c](#), [Brunetti et al 2012](#), [Brunetti et al 2020](#))

Subject inversion ([Brunetti and Bott 2011](#))

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Brunetti 2009

(1) Italian, (C-Oral-ROM corpus, Cresti and Moneglia 2005)

d. la CARTOMANTE c'è i' sabato sera
the fortune-teller there-is the Saturday night
'The fortune teller is there, on Saturday night'

Information Structure in Romance languages: from sentence to discourse

Brunetti 2009

(1) Italian, (C-Oral-ROM corpus, Cresti and Moneglia 2005)

- a. 'So you know, I saw a poster in Florence about an Indian restaurant, in Pisana street' [...]
- b. e poi invece i' sabato sera [...] fanno l'oroscopo
'and then, instead, on Saturday night [...] they make the horoscope'
[...]
- c. no scusami
'No, forgive me'
- d. la CARTOMANTE c'è i' sabato sera
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FOCUS

BACKGROUND

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corrective FOCUS

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▶ focus-background partition; contrastive topics

The QUD-based model of IS annotation

[Riester, Brunetti, and De Kuthy 2018](#)

[Brunetti, De Kuthy, and Riester 2021](#)

[Brunetti 2024](#)

See also Riester 2019, De Kuthy et al 2018

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- ◆ Discourse is structured via implicit or explicit questions (QUDs)...
- ◆ ...from which each utterance's information structure is derived

(cf. Van Kuppevelt 1995, Roberts 1996, Ginzburg 1995)

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- ◆ Principles to formulate the implicit Question Under Discussion :
 - ▶ A QUD must be congruent with its answer.
 - ▶ A QUD must be made of **all the given content** of its answer.
 - ▶ A QUD can **only** consist of **given content**.

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(2) Italian, blog interview

a. Spesso si pensa che sia bilingue solo chi è stato esposto a due lingue fin dalla tenera infanzia

‘It is often thought that a bilingual is just someone who has been exposed to two languages from early childhood’

Q :

b. e parla le due lingue in modo perfetto e equivalente

‘and speaks the two languages in a perfect and equivalent way’

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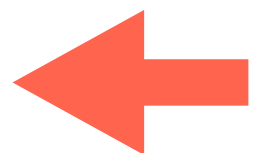
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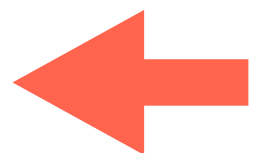
a. Spesso si pensa che sia bilingue solo chi è stato esposto a due lingue fin dalla tenera infanzia

‘It is often thought that a bilingual is just someone who has been exposed to two languages from early childhood’

Q1 : *From what age exactly?*

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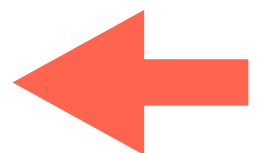
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Q1 : *From what age exactly?* ← not congruent with **b!**

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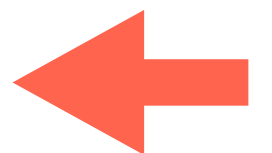
a. Spesso si pensa che sia bilingue solo chi è stato esposto a due lingue fin dalla tenera infanzia

‘It is often thought that a bilingual is just someone who has been exposed to two languages from early childhood’

Q2 : *And what else does a bilingual do?*

b. e parla le due lingue in modo perfetto e equivalente

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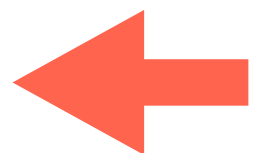
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‘It is often thought that a bilingual is just someone who has been exposed to two languages from early childhood’

Q2 : *And what else does a bilingual do?* ← not all given content of **b** is used

b. e parla le due lingue in modo perfetto e equivalente

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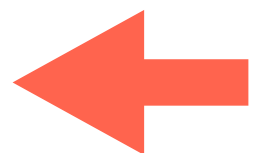
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Q3 : *And how does a bilingual speak the two languages?*

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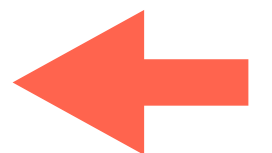
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Q3 : *And how does a bilingual **speak** the two languages?*  not all content is given!

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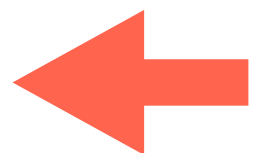
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Q4 : *And what else does a bilingual do with the two languages?*

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b. e [parla]_F le due lingue [in modo perfetto e equivalente]_F

‘and [speaks]_F the two languages [in a perfect and equivalent way]_F’

The QUD-based model of IS annotation

Complex parallelism (contrastive topics)

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(3) French, CFPP2000 corpus (Branca-Rosoff et al 2012)

alors j' suis rentrée [...] à l'école euh au niveau d'la rentrée scolaire en septembre ...
'So I started school hum at the beginning of classes in September...'

en fait [...] la première semaine mes parents m'emmenaient à l'école [...]
'in fact, the first week my parents brought me to school' [...]

et après dès qu'on a emménagé euh bah ça allait
'and then, when we moved hum well it was fine'

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A₂: alors j' suis rentrée [...] à l'école euh au niveau d'la rentrée scolaire en septembre ...
'So I started school hum at the beginning of classes in September...'

Q₃ : What happened, when you started school?

> Q_{3.1}: What happened during the first week?

> > A_{3.1} : en fait [...] [la première semaine]_{CT} [mes parents m'emmenaient à l'école]_F [...]
'in fact, the first week my parents brought me to school' [...]

> Q_{3.2}: What happened after you moved?

> > A_{3.2} : et [après dès qu'on a emménagé]_{CT} euh bah [ça allait]_F
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(Riester, Brunetti, De Kuthy 2018)

- ▶ information structure of adjuncts (Brunetti et al 2021)

- ▶ contrastive focus and topic (Brunetti 2024)

- ▶ information structure of non-assertive utterances

(Brunetti and Riester to appear)

The QUD-based model...

...applied to questions

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Brunetti and Riester to appear

Explicit questions :

==> are QUDs (Riester, Brunetti and De Kuthy 2018)

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Explicit questions :

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==> have their own information structure

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(4) Catalan, Planas-Morales and Villalba (2013)

I què **hi** feia, **a casa de Clayborne?** *clitic right dislocation*
and what **CL.LOC** do.PST.3SG **at house of Clayborne**
'What was he doing at Clayborne's house?'

(5) English, Krifka (2011)

What did **BILL** bring?

accent

(6) Japanese, Tomioka (2009)

Eego-**wa** tyanto yatte-ok-e.
English-TOP without-fail do-prepare-IMP
'At least, prepare yourself for English'

wa morpheme

The QUD-based model...

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Brunetti and Riester to appear

Explicit questions :

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How is it obtained?

The QUD-based model...

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Explicit questions :

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How is it obtained?

In the same way as for assertions

The QUD-based model...

...applied to questions

Brunetti and Riester to appear

(7) Italian

a. Francesca è andata a Firenze.
‘Francesca went to Florence’

b. Come ci è andata?
how CL.LOC is gone
‘How did she go there?’

The QUD-based model...

...applied to questions

Brunetti and Riester to appear

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Beyssade et al. 2003, Beyssade et al.
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Illocutionary view of information structure

The QUD-based model...

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Illocutionary view of information structure

- (8) C'est [pour Chirac]_F que Mathilde a voté.
'It is [Chirac]_F that Mathilde voted for'

(Beyssade 2013: 321)

ASSERT $\langle \lambda x$ Mathilde a voté pour x, Chirac $\rangle$

QUEST $\langle \lambda x$ Mathilde a voté pour x, Chirac $\rangle$

SURPRISE $\langle \lambda x$ Mathilde a voté pour x, Chirac $\rangle$

etc.

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Focus is new content ...

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Focus is new content ...

representing what the speaker is informing the hearer about in assertions

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Focus is new content ...

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Focus is new content ...

representing what the speaker is informing the hearer about in assertions

representing what the speaker is questioning the hearer about in questions

representing what the speaker is ordering the hearer about in orders

etc.

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The QUD-based model...

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a. Francesca è andata a Firenze.
'Francesca went to Florence'

Q: *What does the speaker **ask** about Francesca going to Florence?*

b. [Come]_F ci è andata?
how CL.LOC is gone
'How did she go there?'

The QUD-based model...

...applied to questions

Brunetti and Riester to appear

(9) French, CFPP2000 corpus

alors donc je vais commencer par des questions euh qui portent sur euh la résidence dans dans votre quartier du septième arrondissement

‘so I’ll start with questions that are about the residence in your neighbourhood, in the 7th district’

[...]

Q₃: Qu’est-ce qui vous plaît le le plus dans ce quartier?

‘What do you like the most in this neighbourhood?’

The QUD-based model...

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Brunetti and Riester to appear

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‘so I’ll start with questions that are about the residence in your neighbourhood, in the 7th district’

[...]

Q₃: [Qu’est-ce qui]_F [vous plaît le le plus]_{CT} dans ce quartier?

‘What do you like most in this neighbourhood?’

[= Concerning what you like in the neighbourhood, *what is it?*]

The QUD-based model...

...applied to questions

Brunetti and Riester to appear

(10) Italian, blog interview

> Q: *What do different mothers do?*

> > Q: [La mamma che parla la lingua minoritaria per crescere i suoi bambini
bilingui]_{CT}, [cosa]_F fa?

‘The mother who speaks the minority language, in order to grow her
bilingual children, what does she do?’

> > > A: Parla la propria lingua ai figli.

‘She speaks her own language to her children’

> > Q: E [la mamma non madrelingua]_{CT}, [cosa]_F fa?

‘And the non-native mother, what does she do?’

> > > A: La stessa cosa

‘The same thing’

The QUD-based model...

...applied to questions

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cf. Bocci et al 2021

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Q: What does the speaker ask about Francesca going to Florence?

b. [Come]_F ci è ANDATA?

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The QUD-based model...

...applied to non-assertive speech acts

Brunetti and Riester to appear

The QUD-based model...

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Brunetti and Riester to appear

(11) Italian

a. Non mi piacciono i miei denti.

‘I don’t like my teeth’

b. Vai a lavarte-li, i tuoi denti!

go to brush-CL.PL.ACC the your teeth

‘Go BRUSH your teeth!’

The QUD-based model...

...applied to non-assertive speech acts

Brunetti and Riester to appear

(11) Italian

- a. Non mi piacciono i miei denti.
'I don't like my teeth'

*Q: What does the speaker **order**, concerning the hearer's teeth?*

- b. [Vai a LAVARTE-li]_F, i tuoi denti!
go to brush-CL.PL.ACC the your teeth
'Go BRUSH your teeth!'

Non-canonical questions

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Dayal 2016, Farkas 2022

Non-canonical questions

- French *comment* 'how' asking for the «reason»

Brunetti, Yoo, Tovenà, Albar 2021
Brunetti, Tovenà, Yoo 2022

Non-canonical questions

- French *comment* ‘how’ asking for the «reason»

Brunetti, Yoo, Tovenar, Albar 2021
Brunetti, Tovenar, Yoo 2022

(12) French (Brunetti et al 2021, 248)

- a. *Comment* tu pourrais refuser sa proposition?!
‘How could you refuse their proposition?’
- b. Je sais, mais j’ai déjà accepté un poste aux Etats Unis...
‘I know, but I’ve already accepted a position in the USA...’

Non-canonical questions

- ▶ French *comment* 'how' asking for the «reason»

Brunetti, Yoo, Tovenar, Albar 2021
Brunetti, Tovenar, Yoo 2022

- ➡ the speaker asks for the reasons of...
- ➡ ...some unexpected fact...
- ➡ ...in order to be able to revise their assumptions and make sense of it
- ➡ emotional load : surprise, concern, reproach

Non-canonical questions

- French *comment* ‘how’ asking for the «reason»

➡ emotional load : surprise, concern, reproach

Koshik 2003, Dekhissi and Coveney 2021, Celle and Pélissier 2022

Cf. non-argumental *qu’est-ce que* (Dekhissi and Coveney, 2021: 289)

(13) *Qu’est-ce* t(u) as été te mêler de ça, toi?! C’est pas ton problème
‘Why did you meddle in that?! That’s not your problem’

Non-canonical questions

- ▶ French *comment ça* and Spanish *cómo que* ‘how that’

Fließbach, Brunetti, Yoo 2024

Non-canonical questions

- French *comment ça* and Spanish *cómo que* ‘how that’

Fließbach, Brunetti, Yoo 2024

(14) French, Film L'enquête

- DENIS : Quand est-ce que vous le sortez mon bouquin, alors ?
‘When are you publishing my book, then?’
- EDITOR : Je sais pas
‘I don’t know.’
- DENIS : *Comment ça* tu sais pas ?
‘HOW THAT you don’t know?’
- EDITOR : Orban a demandé une deuxième expertise juridique [...]
‘Orban has asked for a second legal expertise [...]

Non-canonical questions

- French *comment ça* and Spanish *cómo que* ‘how that’

(15) Spanish, film ‘Estoy vivo’

Fliessbach, Brunetti, Yoo 2024

- El auténtico Marvin murió hace dos días. Algo invadió su cuerpo entonces.
‘The real Marvin died two days ago. Something has invaded his body since then.’
- Algo... ¿Cómo que algo?
‘Something... HOW THAT something?’
- Un ente hostil [...] Un espíritu. Un ser incorpóreo.
‘A hostile body [...] A spirit. An incorporeal being.’

Non-canonical questions

- ▶ French *comment ça* and Spanish *cómo que* ‘how that’

Fliessbach, Brunetti, Yoo 2024

- ➡ 1) clarification request
- ➡ 2) expression of surprise
- ➡ 3) disagreement

Non-canonical questions

- ▶ French reason questions

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024

Non-canonical questions

► French reason questions

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024

- a) Pourquoi
why tu as planté des oliviers dans ton jardin ?
- b) Comment ça
how that_{DEM} tu as planté des oliviers dans ton jardin ?
- c) Comment se fait-il que
how RFL does-it that tu as planté des oliviers dans ton jardin ?
- d) Qu'est-ce que
what-is-it that tu as planté des oliviers dans ton jardin ?

‘Why/How come did you plant olive trees in your garden?’

Non-canonical questions

► French reason questions

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024

- a) **Pourquoi...**
- b) **Comment ça...**
- c) **Comment se fait-il que...**
- d) **Qu'est-ce que...**

...tu as planté des oliviers
dans ton jardin ?

'Why did you plant olive
trees in your garden?'

Non-canonical questions

► French reason questions

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024

- a) **Pourquoi...**
- b) **Comment ça...**
- c) **Comment se fait-il que...**
- d) **Qu'est-ce que...**

...tu as planté des oliviers
dans ton jardin ?

'Why did you plant olive
trees in your garden?'

Ils étaient en promotion.

'They were on sale' (**REASON**)

(C'est) pour produire de l'huile d'olive.

'(It's) in order to produce olive oil' (**GOAL**)

On devrait planter des fleurs pour aider les abeilles !

'One should plant flowers to help bees!' (**REPROACH**)

Tu as toujours parlé d'acheter des pommiers !

'You've always said you would buy apple trees!' (**SURPRISE**)

Non-canonical questions

- French reason questions

Experimental study

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024

Non-canonical questions

- French reason questions

Experimental study

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024

Experiment 1 - Experiment 2 - Experiment 3

Non-canonical questions

► French reason questions

Experimental study

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024

Experiment 1 - Experiment 2 - Experiment 3

Coherence judgments

Conversation between two cousins.

Why did you plant olive trees in your garden? Were they on sale?

The continuation is coherent with the underscored part.

Not at all ----- *Absolutely*

Non-canonical questions

► French reason questions

Experimental study

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024

Experiment 1 - Experiment 2 - Experiment 3

Metalinguistic judgments

Conversation between two students. One says:

« **Why did you plant olive trees in your garden?** »

The person who pronounces the sentence in boldface...

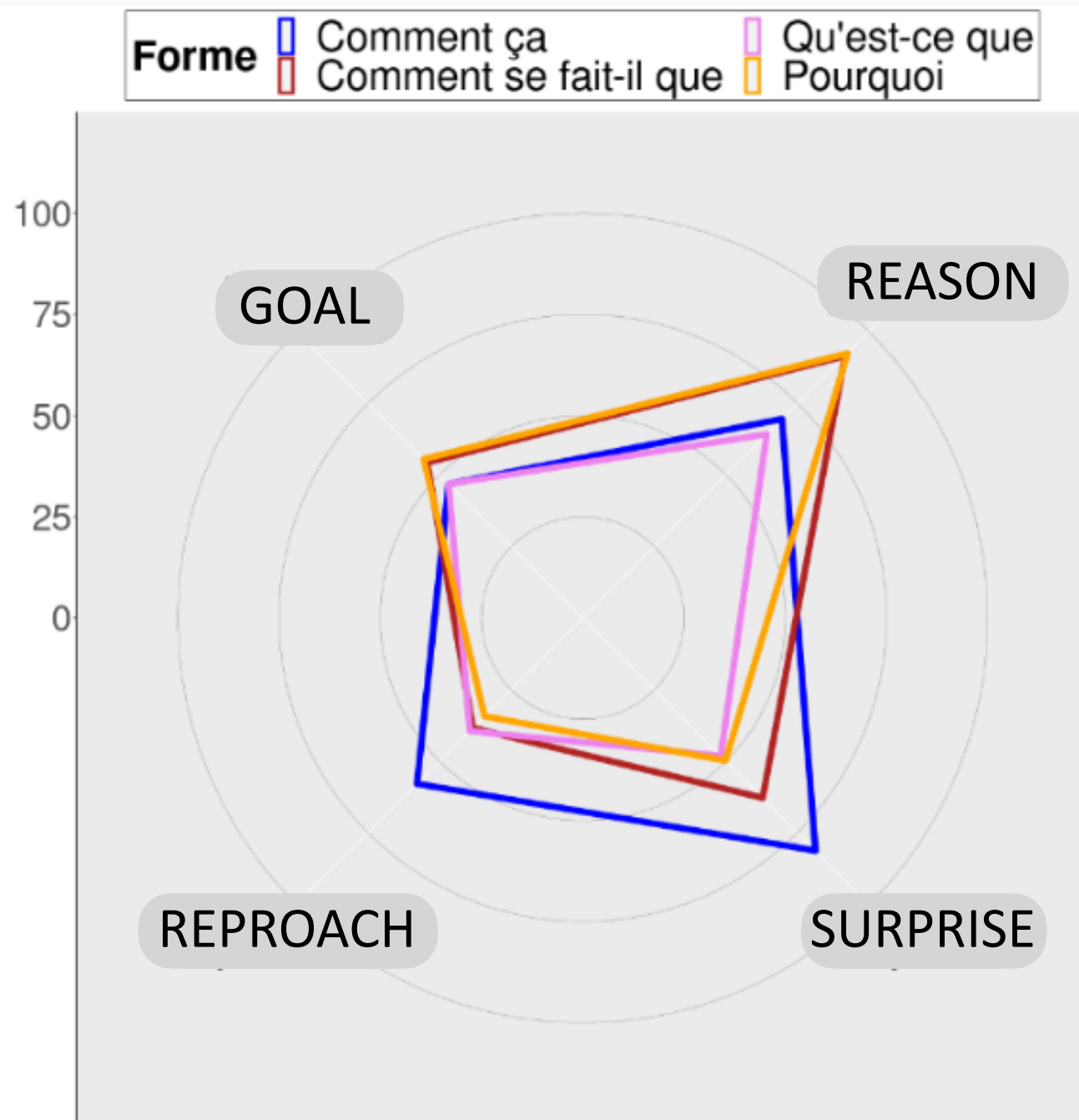
...is surprised	Not at all	----- -----	Absolutely
...is displeased	Not at all	----- -----	Absolutely
...wants to know the reason	Not at all	----- -----	Absolutely
...wants to know the goal	Not at all	----- -----	Absolutely

Non-canonical questions

- French reason questions

Experimental study

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024

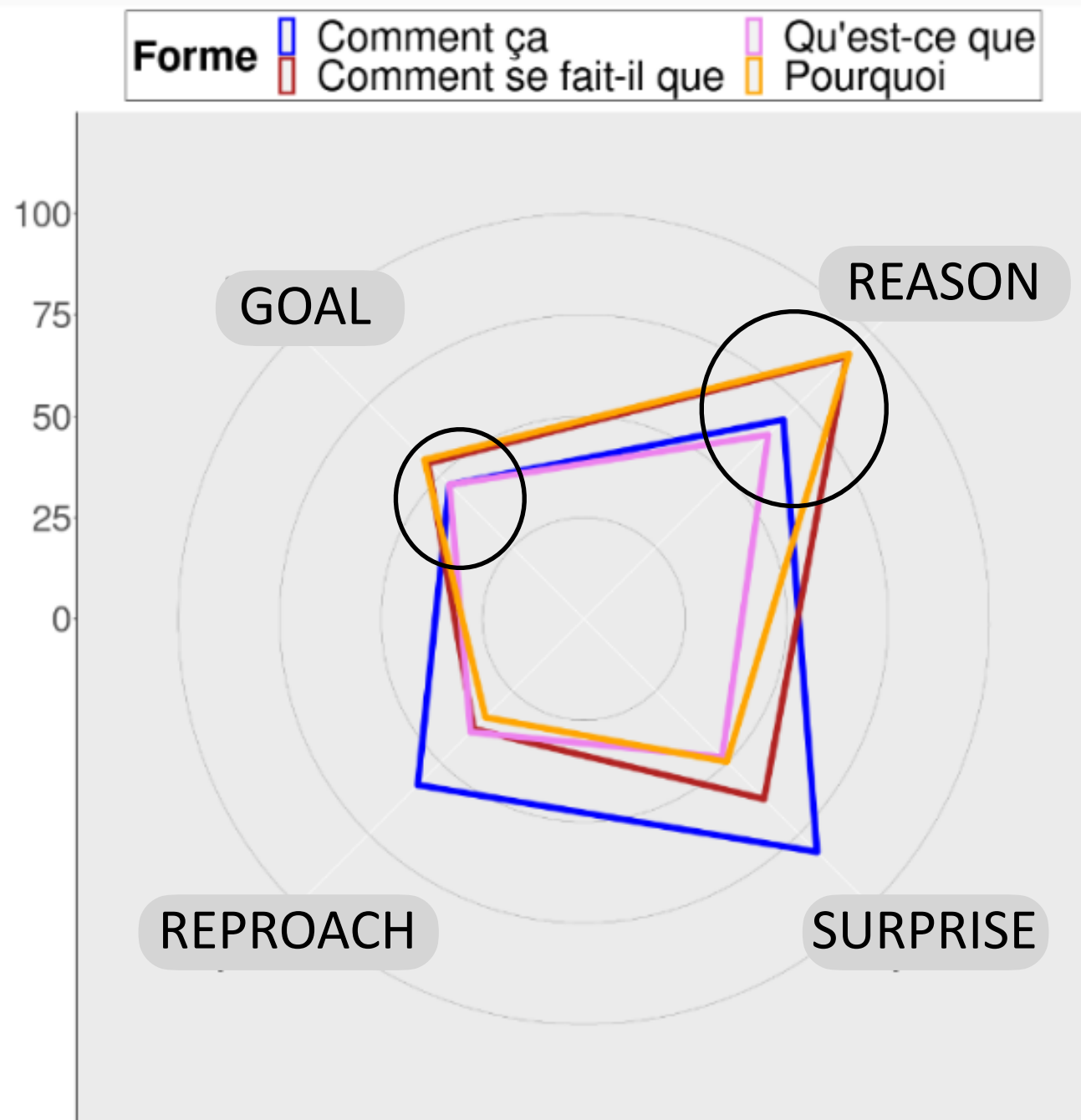


Non-canonical questions

- French reason questions

Experimental study

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024



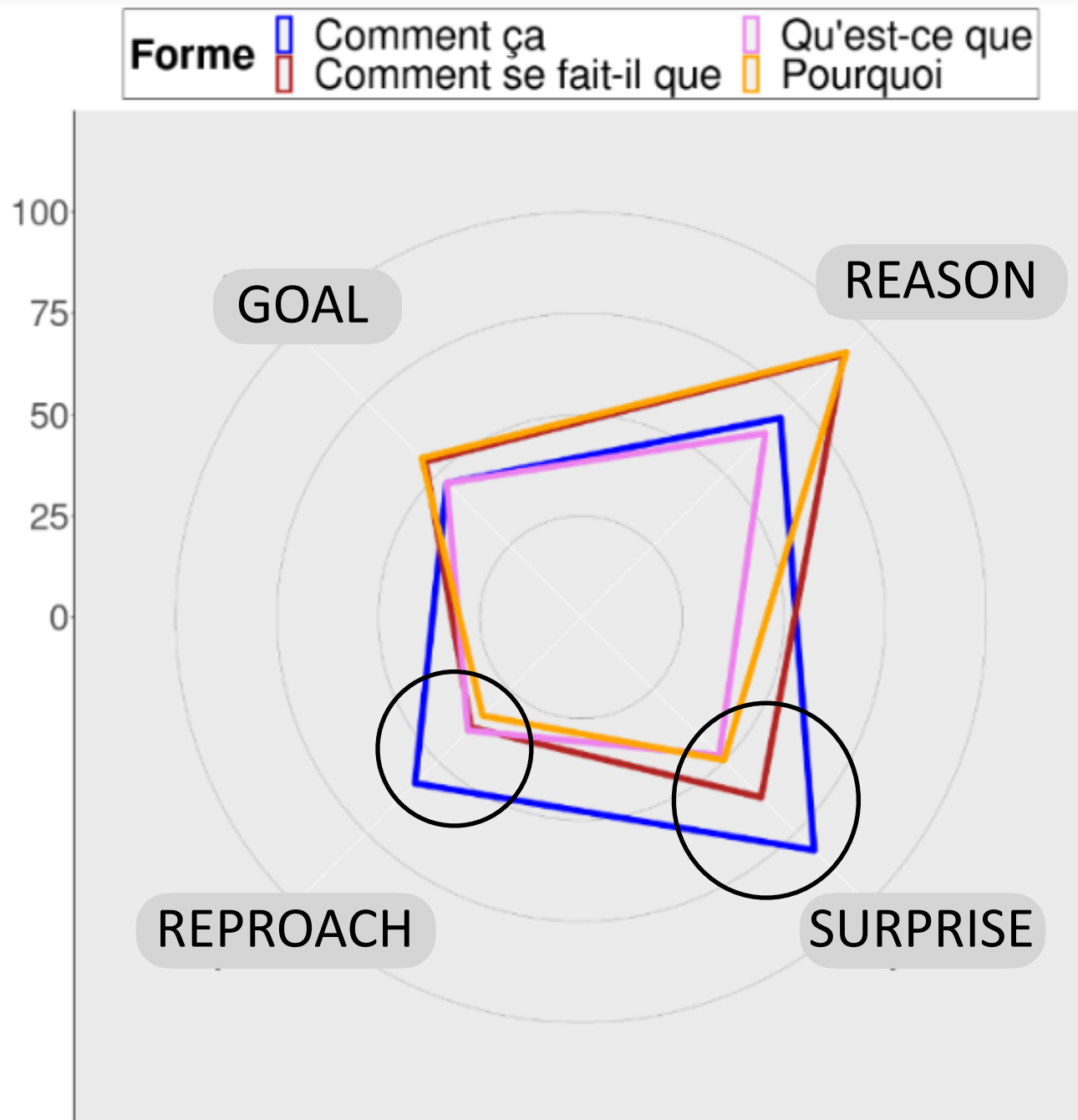
Lower scores for Reason and Goal with *Comment ça* and *Qu'est-ce que*

Non-canonical questions

► French reason questions

Experimental study

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024



Lower scores for Reason and Goal with *Comment ça* and *Qu'est-ce que*

Higher scores for Surprise with *Comment ça* and *Comment se fait-il que*

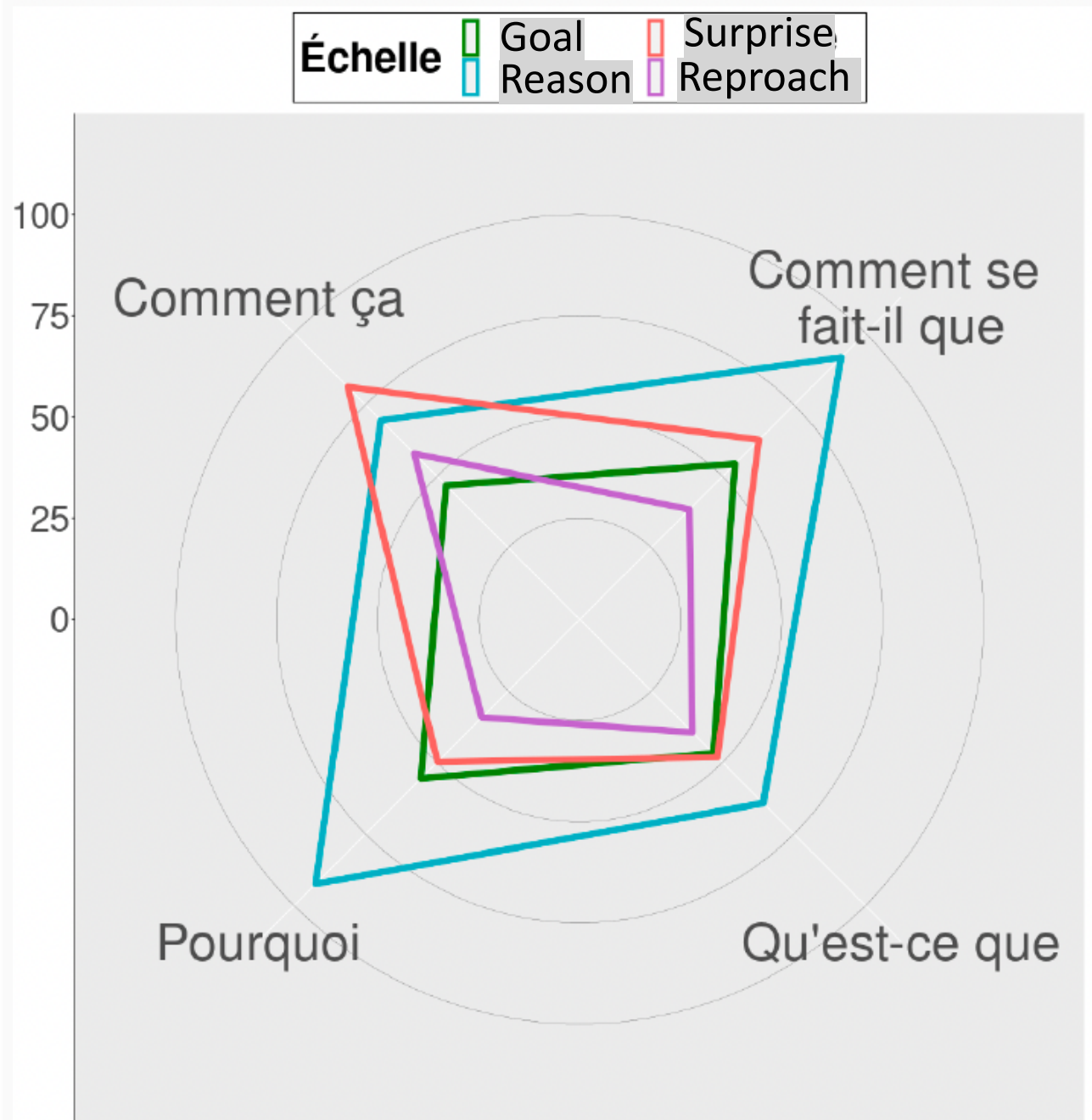
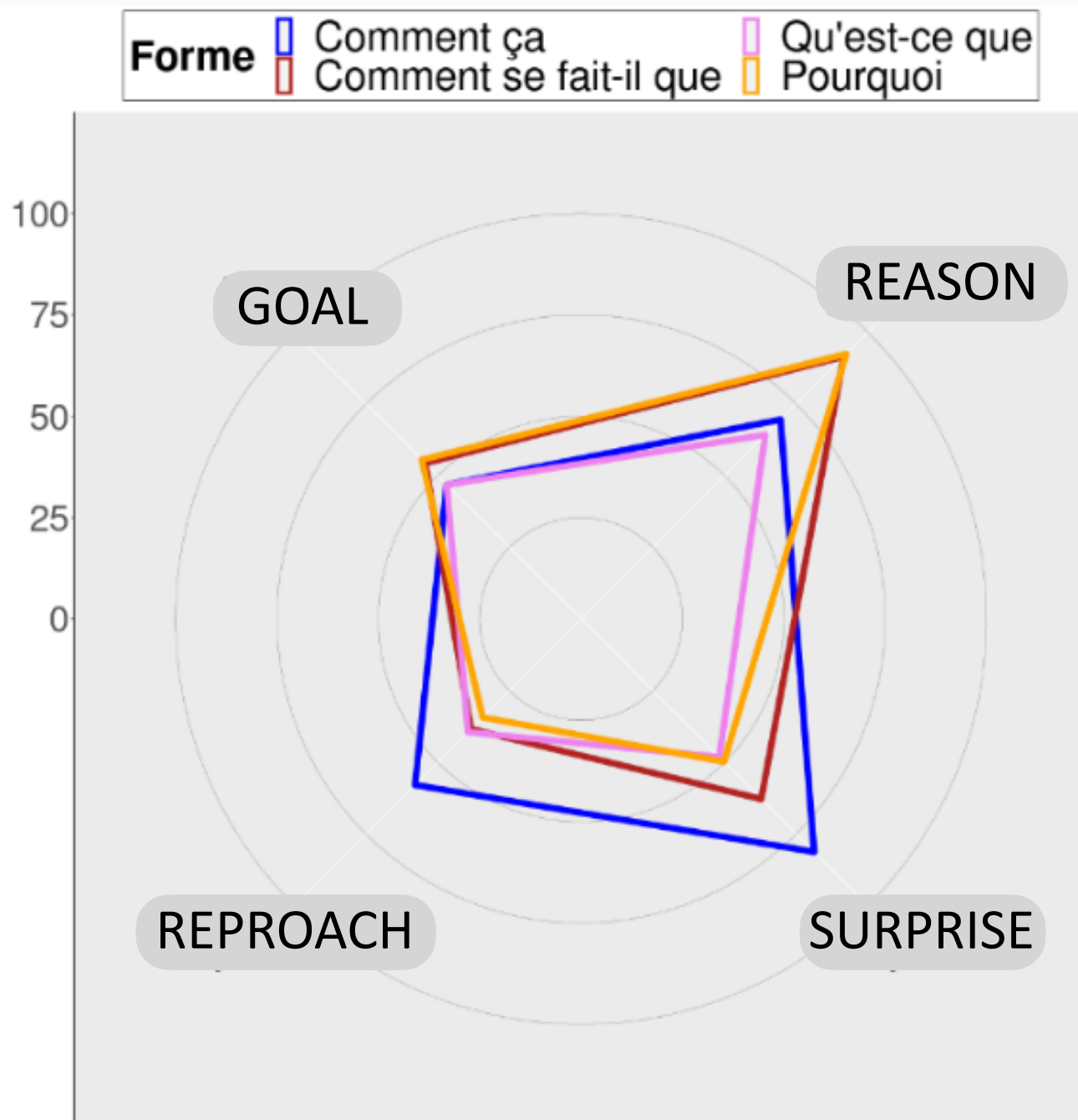
Higher scores for Reproach with *Comment ça* and *Qu'est-ce que*

Non-canonical questions

► French reason questions

Experimental study

Thiberge, Brunetti, Fliessbach 2024



Future perspectives

Future perspectives

♦ QUD-based research:

Future perspectives

- ◆ QUD-based research:
 - ▶ information structure of non-assertive speech acts

Future perspectives

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 - ▶ questions in monological discourse

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- ◆ QUD-based research:

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- ▶ discourse structuring from the point of view of other phenomena
 - discourse markers

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- ◆ QUD-based research:
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- ◆ fine-grained comparison of similar constructions through experimental work

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- ◆ fine-grained comparison of similar constructions through experimental work

- ▶ encoding of expressivity

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- ▶ discourse structuring from the point of view of other phenomena
 - discourse markers

- ◆ fine-grained comparison of similar constructions through experimental work

- ▶ encoding of expressivity
- ▶ add prosody to the picture

Thank you
Merci
Bedankt
Hvala vam
Gràcies
Grazie

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