

## VARIATION IN FRENCH PARTIAL INTERROGATIVES: SOCIAL MEANING AS A KEY FACTOR

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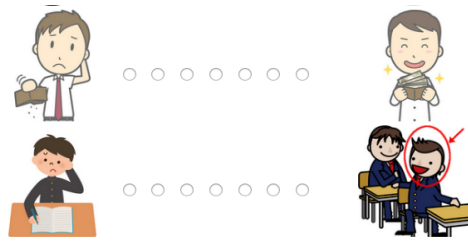
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French partial interrogatives show considerable variation (Coveney, 2011). Among others, the *wh*-element can be in a declarative argumental position (in situ, IS, “Ils mangent où ?”/“They eat where?”), or it can be in a fronted position, with subject-verb inversion, FINV (“Où mangent-ils ?”/ “Where eat they?”) or without inversion, F (“Où ils mangent ?”/“Where they eat?”). Syntactic constraints have been used to explain the differences in frequency of use for those variants (e.g. fronting is sometimes analysed as structurally more 'complex' because of an underlying movement; Jakubowicz, 2011). We argue that a considerable part of the variation can be explained by socio-pragmatic factors. From a sociolinguistic view, previous research mostly studied the preferred use of linguistic variants by specific social groups (Quillard, 2001). We extend this perspective in the framework of social meaning games (Burnett, 2017), where variation is a tool to socially position oneself in a specific context of interaction. This framework is based on Eckert's (2012) Third Wave approach, Lewis' (1969) signalling games and the Probabilistic Pragmatics framework (Goodman & Lassiter, 2015).

**Task.** We ran an auditory matched-guise task (MGT; Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum, 1960), where participants had to listen to short dialogues and then position the most recent speaker on six different 7-point scales (52 participants; age 18-77 y.o., mean = 26, median = 22; 36/16 self-identified females/males). To be comparable to planned experiments with children, the scales were represented by drawings which were previously normed in a separate online experiment for social stereotypes they were most associated with (Figure 1). The social meaning of each pair of drawings was introduced to participants at the beginning of the experiment. They were asked to position themselves on the scales as an introduction to the task.

**Design and Items.** In the 30 target items (mixed with 33 fillers, Table 1), the second speaker uttered an interrogative sentence, reacting to a context sentence from his/her interlocutor that provided either a formal or an informal setting (context formality was normed in a pretest). The interlocutors were 2 male and 2 female French native speakers and their voices were normed for gender-typicality and “colloquialness” in a pretest. Gender of the speakers was crossed so that all four gender combinations in the dialogues were presented to participants: 1<sup>st</sup> male and 2<sup>nd</sup> female, 1<sup>st</sup> female and 2<sup>nd</sup> male, both male, both female.

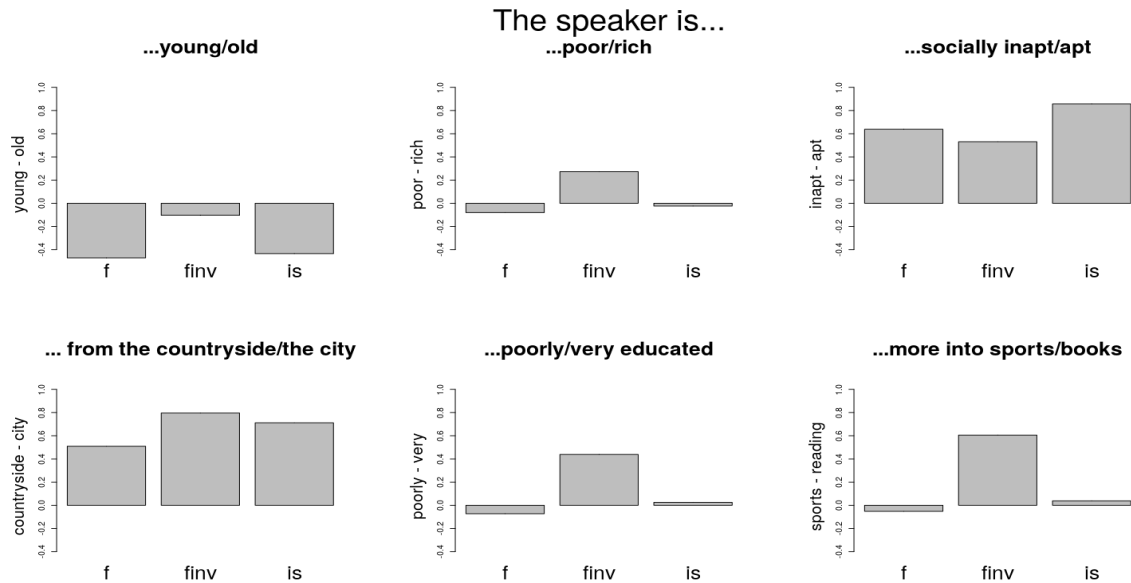
**Results.** We recoded the scales to values from -3 to +3, and analyzed the positions on the social scales attributed to the speakers with cumulative link mixed models (R *original* package; Christensen, 2018). Judgments on the social scales vary depending on the question type: compared to fronted and in situ questions, fronted and inverted interrogatives are associated with higher education, with a preference for reading over doing sports, but also with some degree of “social-awkwardness” (Figure 2,  $p < 0.05$ ). These general judgments are modulated by several factors. Context formality can nuance a preference: for example, a speaker will seem more educated and a more frequent reader when using FINV structure in formal contexts than in informal ones (Figure 3,  $p < 0.05$ ). Gendered-interaction stereotypes are also at play: for instance, the same speaker will be judged differently depending on whether he/she interacts with a female or with a male interlocutor (Figure 4,  $p < 0.05$ ). This effect needs to be explored in future work. Possibly, broader social stereotypes are at play here, with different expectations weighing on bi-gendered interactions than when speakers are of the same gender.



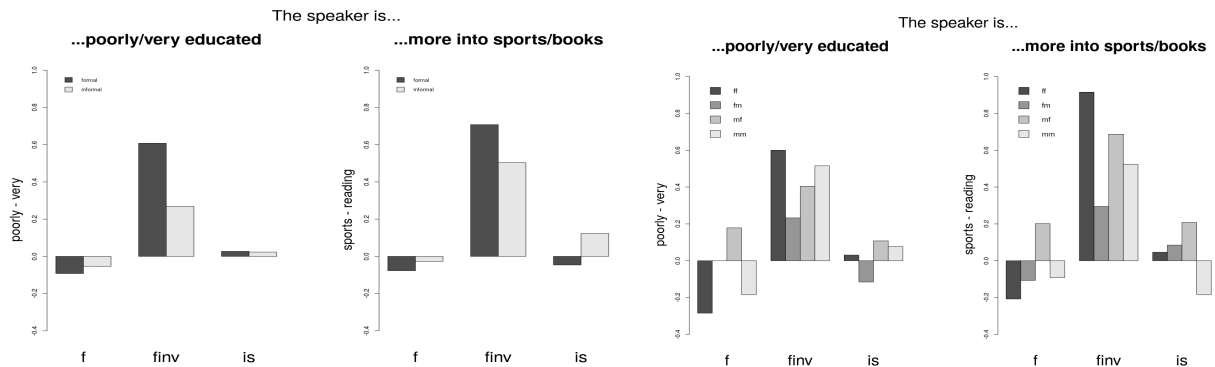
**Figure 1:** Examples of stereotypical scales for RICHNESS and SOCIAL APTITUDE (a female version was presented for female speakers)

Context	Condition 1	Sentence to judge	Condition 2
Eh, Jean il arrive demain.	INFORMAL	a. Il arrive à quelle heure ?	IS
		b. À quelle heure arrive-t-il ?	FINV
		c. À quelle heure il arrive ?	F
Jean arrive demain.	FORMAL	a. Il arrive à quelle heure ?	IS
		b. À quelle heure arrive-t-il ?	FINV
		c. À quelle heure il arrive ?	F

**Table 1:** Example of target item in all conditions



**Figure 2:** Results depending on the interrogative structure, values on the y-axis represent scales from -3 to +3



**Figure 3:** Results depending on the interrogative structure and on context formality

**Figure 4:** Results depending on the interrogative structure and on speakers' genders

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