

French wh in situ: Where are we and where do we go from here?

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We argue that the Q/wh head in the French root left periphery can be licensed by Agree without Move, while embedded Q/wh requires Agree+Move. We show that this property of French explains the distribution of wh in situ in the language.

Most studies of French interrogatives, from Obenauer (1994) on, have either assumed or argued that the wh in-situ forms such as (1a) differ in many respects from their wh-ex-situ counterparts, exemplified by (1b) (Cheng & Rooryck 2000; Mathieu 1999, 2002, 2004, 2009; Boeckx 1999, 2003; Starke 2001; Adli 2006 and Baunaz 2008, 2011, 2016; Baunaz & Patin 2011, 2012; Déprez et al. 2013; Glasbergen-Plas et al. 2021, Faure & Palasis 2021, a.o).

- (1)a. Tu as invité qui? b. Qui t'as invité?
You have invited whom who you have invited
'Whom did you invite?' 'Whom did you invite?'

It is safe to say that scholars agree on three properties of wh-in situ. (i), it is incompatible with subject clitic inversion, (2); (ii), it never appears with *est-ce que* reinforcement, (3) and (iii), it is excluded from indirect questions, (4).

- (2) *As-tu invite qui? (3) *Est-ce que tu as invite qui?
Have-you invited who? ESKE you have invited who
(4) *Paulse demande elle a invité qui.
Paul REF wonders she has invited who
'Paul wonders whom she invited.'

Concerning other syntactic properties of wh in situ, there are fundamental data disagreements in the relevant literature (see e.g., Zimmerman and Kaiser 2019, Glasbergen-Plas 2021, (GP)). One point of disagreement is over the (im)possibility of long construal, as in (5). According to Cheng & Rooryck (2000) (CR), it is ungrammatical. For Bošković (2000), it is restricted to specific verb classes. Other researchers perceive no grammaticality difference between in situ long construal and long movement (Starke 2000, Baunaz 2011).

- (5) Tu penses qu'elle a invite qui à sa fête?
you think that=she has invited whom to her party
'Whom do you think she invited to her party?'

Experimental results support the liberal view: Oiry (2011) found that long-construal wh in-situ is possible in adult French (used as controls in her experiment). Tual's (2017) acceptability judgment experiment showed that long construal in-situ questions are as acceptable as their long-moved ex-situ counterparts. GP points to the same conclusions. Tual (2017) and GP also observed that in indirect questions, in situ wh is impossible.

A second point of disagreement regards the availability of wh in situ under the scope of negation. Some work has argued that wh in situ is fine in this configuration (Baunaz 2011, GP, Starke 2001), at least in presuppositional contexts, but since this empirical point has not yet been firmly established, we carried out an experiment to evaluate it. We wanted to ascertain whether long-construal in-situ questions are acceptable under negation in the embedded clause. We explored this point by comparing in situ and ex situ wh on a well-known "intervention effect" that has been described as blocking covert wh movement (Beck 1996 and subseq. work).

Our acceptability judgment experiment tested (7p Likert scale) wh-questions featuring wh-phrase in situ vs. ex situ (*wh-situ*) in 2 syntactic contexts (*syntactic context*): in indirect questions vs. in direct biclausal wh-questions with long distance movement. We also manipulated the presence of negation in the embedded clause (*pos. vs. neg. embedded clause*). The target questions were presented within a dialogue (analogous across conditions) that introduced a set of possible values for the wh-element. We created 36 items under 8 conditions.

The resulting 256 stimuli were divided into 8 lists with a Latin square procedure; each list was presented with 32 fillers. We tested 60 native speakers of French (born and living in France).

Our results are shown in Fig 1. A mixed model revealed that in long distance questions, in situ wh phrases are rated no differently from ex situ wh-phrases in negative clauses ($p>.05$), while in positive clauses, in situ wh-phrases were rated even significantly higher ($p<.01$) than ex situ wh-phrases. In contrast, in indirect questions, wh-elements in situ are rated significantly lower than wh ex situ ($p<.001$), independently of the presence of negation.

The following generalizations seem to us at this point to be firmly established empirically: (i) wh in situ is *acceptable* in both short and long construal; (ii) wh in situ is *acceptable* under negation; (iii) wh in situ is *unacceptable* in indirect questions. These can and should be used to evaluate competing analyses of wh in situ as well as to sketch out more clearly the research agenda for future work in this area.

One line of analysis, (e.g., CR 2000), holds that wh-phrases in situ undergo covert (LF) movement. It is, however, difficult to square a covert movement analysis with the ban on wh in situ in indirect questions.

One fact that might be taken to militate in favor of a movement account is the subject-nonsubject asymmetry discussed in Koopman (1983), Plunkett (2000) and Shlonsky (2012, 2017): French wh in situ is considerably less acceptable in (embedded) subject position than it is in object position. Whether this asymmetry is expressed in ECP terms or in terms of Rizzi's *Criterial Freezing*, it constitutes diagnostic evidence for movement. Since covert movement does not seem to be a viable analytic option, consider an overt movement option, with the lowest copy spelled out, instead of the highest one. The unavailability of wh in situ in indirect questions again does not follow and requires a separate explanation. A further problem for "overt movement with low spellout" is that it incorrectly predicts that parasitic gaps should be acceptable in in situ contexts, contrary to fact.

A different perspective is pursued in Bobaljik & Wurmbrand 2015, (BW), who argue that questions with optional wh in situ are not syntactic questions, but declarative sentences in which wh is focalized in situ and the clause containing it is pragmatically interpreted as a question. As the authors note, this view predicts the impossibility of wh in situ in indirect (selected) questions. It also explains why wh in situ is impossible with *est-ce que* and with subject-clitic inversion, both of which are only possible in syntactic questions. No intervention by negation is also predicted since the focalized wh does not undergo movement.

One difficulty we discern with BW is that French in-situ is productive (Huková 2006, Adli 2015, Guryev 2017, a.o.), not only to a much larger degree than English and German, but also in comparison with other optional wh in situ languages like Spanish and Portuguese (Kaiser & Quaglia 2015). Under the proposed theory, the crosslinguistic differences must be pinned to pragmatics but it is far from clear how to do that. Moreover, Italian has a very productive use of focus in situ but wh in situ is unacceptable.

It seems, rather, that French has some syntactic property, not shared by other languages, that favors wh in situ. **Our proposal is that the Q/wh head in the French root left periphery can be licensed by Agree without Move, while embedded Q/wh requires Agree+Move.** This is a familiar point of variation among functional heads both across and within languages and yields the requisite empirical results, namely, no obligatory wh movement except in indirect

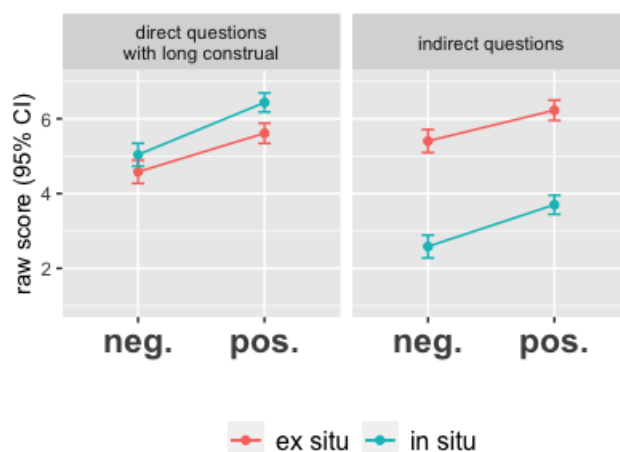


Fig. 1 Acceptability of in situ and ex situ wh-phrases in positive and negative indirect questions and long-distance direct questions

questions. The ban on subject wh in situ follows from a natural extension of Criterial Freezing:
An expression in a criterial position cannot be probed.