

How context affects intervention effects in French *wh*-in-situ questions

The puzzle. As has originally been observed for split constructions (1a) (Obenauer 1976; De Swart 1992), *wh*-in-situ questions in French display ‘intervention effects’ (1b) (e.g. Chang 1997; Mathieu 1999; cf. Beck 1996): the in-situ *wh*-phrase is blocked in the presence of a so-called ‘intervener’, such as a quantificational expression or negation. Yet Starke (2001) and Baunaz (2005, 2011, 2016) show that in some contexts, intervention effects do not occur (2).

- (1) a. **Combien* as-tu **beaucoup** consulté *de livres* ?
how.many have you a.lot consulted of books
‘How many books have you read a lot?’ (De Swart 1992: 390, (13))
- b. ***Tous les témoins** ont reconnu *qui* ?
all the witnesses have recognised who
‘Who have all the witnesses recognized?’
- (2) [context] During a trial, witnesses and defendants are confronted.
One of the defendants has been accused unanimously. The journalist asks:
Et **tous les témoins** ont reconnu *qui* ? (Baunaz 2016: 157, (40b))

This paper investigates the contexts which void intervention effects. We propose the generalisation in (3), which takes Starke and Baunaz’ insight, but offers an alternative explanation based on Büring’s (2016) theory of givenness.

- (3) Intervention effects are absent when the question is ‘Maximally Given’

The analysis of Starke and Baunaz: specificity. Starke (2001) and Baunaz (2005, 2011, 2016) claim that a context in which intervention effects are absent is one that allows for the use of a presuppositional *wh*-phrase. Two types of presupposition play a role, of which the most relevant one here is ‘specificity’. A question with a specific *wh*-phrase asks for the identity of an individual who is already familiar from previous context. In (2), for example, the journalist knows that there exists a defendant who has been accused by all witnesses (but not the exact identity of the defendant). The speaker infers that the interlocutor has a specific individual in mind and asks for its identity. Presupposition is encoded as a nanosyntactic feature on the *wh*-phrase, which interacts with the intervener according to the principles of Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 2004). Only if the *wh*-phrase has a presuppositional feature, but the intervener does not, can the *wh*-phrase co-occur with the intervener.

Our proposal: Maximal Givenness. Using Büring’s (2016) definition of givenness, our term Maximal Givenness signifies that the entire *wh*-in-situ question is given. Within Büring’s framework, an expression is given if it is entailed by a ‘contextually salient meaning’. When the expression is not a proposition, existential closure is applied to allow for the entailment relation. For a question like the one in (2), we assume the standard denotation ‘{all the witnesses have recognized x (person)}’ (cf. Hamblin 1973). Existential closure turns this into ‘ $\exists x$ [all the witnesses have recognized x (person)]’. In the context in (2), this is entailed by a contextually salient meaning, namely ‘ $\exists x$ [x a defendant who has been accused unanimously by all the witnesses]’. The context therefore makes the question Maximally Given.

Advantages of Maximal Givenness over specificity. The current proposal using Maximal Givenness has a number of important advantages over the analysis of Starke and Baunaz.

First, we argue that applying the concept of specificity to *wh*-phrases is problematic in itself. The term has previously been used in the literature to describe non-*wh* NPs. For instance, Ionin (2006) describes the specific indefinite *this* as referring to exactly one individual in the mind of the speaker. However, a speaker does not use a *wh*-phrase to refer to a specific individual she has in mind. Instead, Starke and Baunaz suggest that the speaker infers that the interlocutor has the specific individual in mind. This assumes that people can infer what is in another person's mind well enough for it to influence the grammar. However, even if the interlocutor would have an answer to the *wh*-question in mind, it would not be the specific *wh*-phrase itself.

Second, the predictions of Maximal Givenness are in some cases more precise. For example, Starke (2001) analyses *pas* 'not' as an intervener, except for *wh*-phrases with the feature 'Specific-Q'. Yet according to Baunaz (2011, 2016), *wh*-phrases that are not specific but hold a weaker presuppositional feature can also co-occur with *pas*. As we will show, this contradiction is due to an ambiguity in Baunaz' proposal, which means that the same data can be analysed in two ways. In contrast, Maximal Givenness forms a straightforward explanation of these data.

In addition, the current proposal removes the need to add a feature on the *wh*-phrase; Maximal Givenness is simply part of the information structure of the sentence. Also, presupposition is a semantico-pragmatic notion. It is a just stipulation to represent it as a feature on a lexical item (the *wh*-phrase).

Finally, Maximal Givenness can lead to an explanation for the existence of speaker variation and graded judgments. For instance, the discourse in (4) makes to some extent salient '∃x [your daughter does not eat x]', which would make the question Maximally Given.

(4) A has just complained that her children are rather picky about what they eat.

A: Mon fils ne mange pas de poisson.

my son NE eats not fish

'My son doesn't eat fish.'

B: Et ta fille, elle ne mange pas quoi ?

and your daughter she NE eats not what

'What about your daughter? What doesn't she eat? (Engdahl 2006: 100, (23))

However, the speaker must take the comment that the children are 'rather picky' to imply that there is something that each child does not eat at all, which depends on the speaker's interpretation. As such, the context makes the question 'somewhat' Maximally Given, which predicts speaker variation and intermediate judgments.

In conclusion, we will show that the generalisation in (3) explains the lack of intervention effects in certain contexts in a more principled way and we will discuss the predictions of this proposal.

Selected references. Baunaz, L. (2011). *The grammar of French quantification*. Heidelberg: Springer; Büring, D. (2016). *Intonation and meaning*. OUP; Starke, M. (2001). *Move dissolves into Merge: A theory of locality* (PhD dissertation).