

# Wh-In Situ in French as a Function of Discourse Factors

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## Puzzle

In French information-seeking questions, the question term (wh) can be either fronted (wh-ex situ) or left in situ (I-2)

- (1) Où vas-tu? [ex situ]
- (2) Tu vas où? [in situ]

Being always possible, the ex-situ option is often seen as the “default” option. Wh-in situ is more restricted in distribution, as it is impossible in embedded questions.

- (3) a. Je me demande où tu vas.
- b. \*Je me demande tu vas où?

Yet, in all other contexts, wh-in situ is grammatical, which suggests that the choice of this forms is not merely governed by syntactic factors alone. The question of what conditions the choice of wh-in situ remains a topic of continuous debate.

### Our Research Question:

What role does discourse situation and the nature of the speaker- addressee interaction play in conditioning wh-in situ?

## Previous Research

Previous research suggested that wh-in situ is tied to both (i) strong presupposition and (ii) rising prosody [1], but both claims have since been challenged, see [3], [5].

Recent research sought to connect wh-in situ to information structure [5], [8], [9] and speaker-addressee pragmatics [4], [6].

Furthermore, although discourse situation was also taken to be important, corpus results in the literature, generally uncontrolled for size, vary a lot with no clear pattern for in situ [2].

Here we further probe the role of discourse situation (formality), the speaker/addressee relation, as well as the information state (familiarity/expertise) via a **corpus-study** and a forced-choice **experiment**.

## References

- [1] Cheng, L. L. & Rooryck, J. E. C. V. (2000). Licensing Wh-in situ. *Syntax*. [2] Coveney, A. (1996). Variability in Spoken French : a socio-linguistic study of interrogation and negation. Exeter, Elm Bank Publications [3] Déprez, V., Syrett, K. & Kawahara, S. (2013). The interaction of syntax, prosody, and discourse in licensing French wh-in-situ questions. *Lingua*. [4] Engdahl, E. (2006). Information packaging in questions. Empirical issues in syntax and semantics. [5] Gotowski, M. & Becker, M. (2016). An information-structural account of children’s wh-in situ questions in French. In Proceedings of GALANA 6. [6] Mathieu, E. (2004). The mapping of form and interpretation: The case of optional wh-movement in French. *Lingua*. [7] Myers, L. L. (2007). WH-interrogatives in spoken French: A corpus-based analysis of their form and function (PhD Thesis). [8] Pires, A. & Taylor, H. (2007). The syntax of wh-in-situ and common ground. In the Proceedings of CLS (Vol. 43.2). [9] Tieu, L. (2012). Semantic-pragmatic conditions on wh-in-situ in English. Presentation at the 86<sup>th</sup> LSA.

## Corpus-Based Analysis (ESLO)

### Procedure

We analyzed corpora from the Enquêtes SocioLinguistiques à Orléans (**ESLO**) database, a collection of recorded interviews in a variety of situations/settings.

Corpora were categorized on formality of **discourse situation** based on (i) description of the corpus, and (ii) an independent measure of formality (tu/vous counts). We coded a sample of ~1,000 questions from each sub corpora.

Question were coded by types, and sample of wh-questions were extracted. Fragment questions were excluded. All non-subject wh-questions were coded as either fronted or in situ.

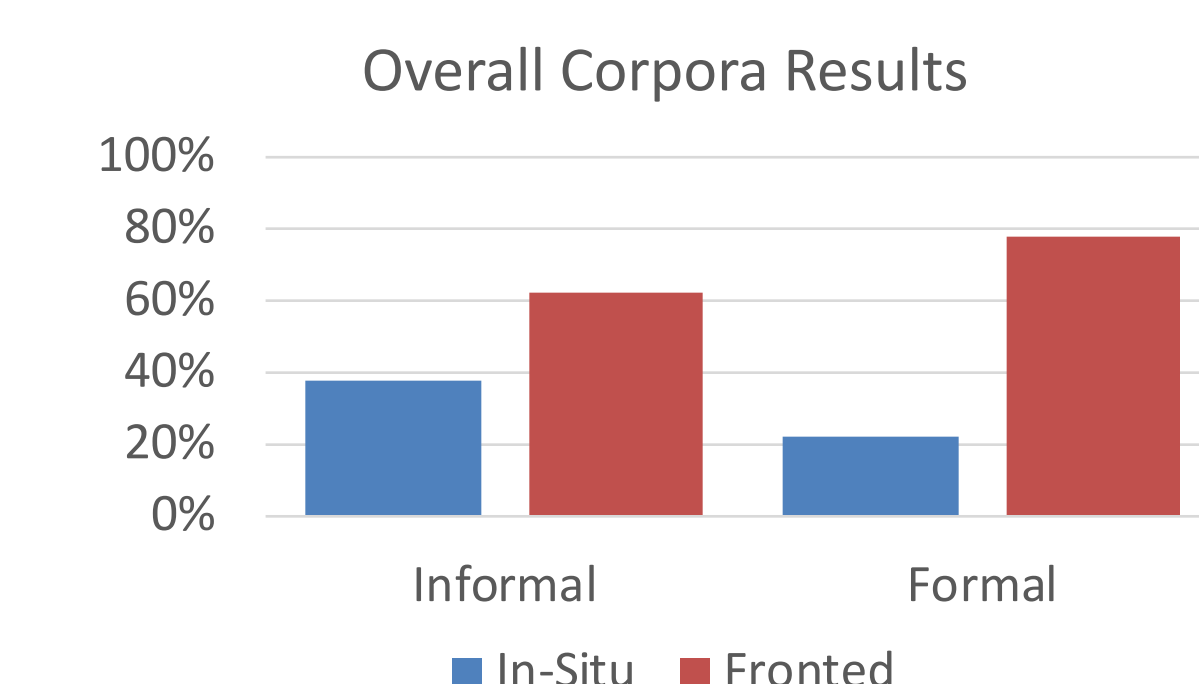
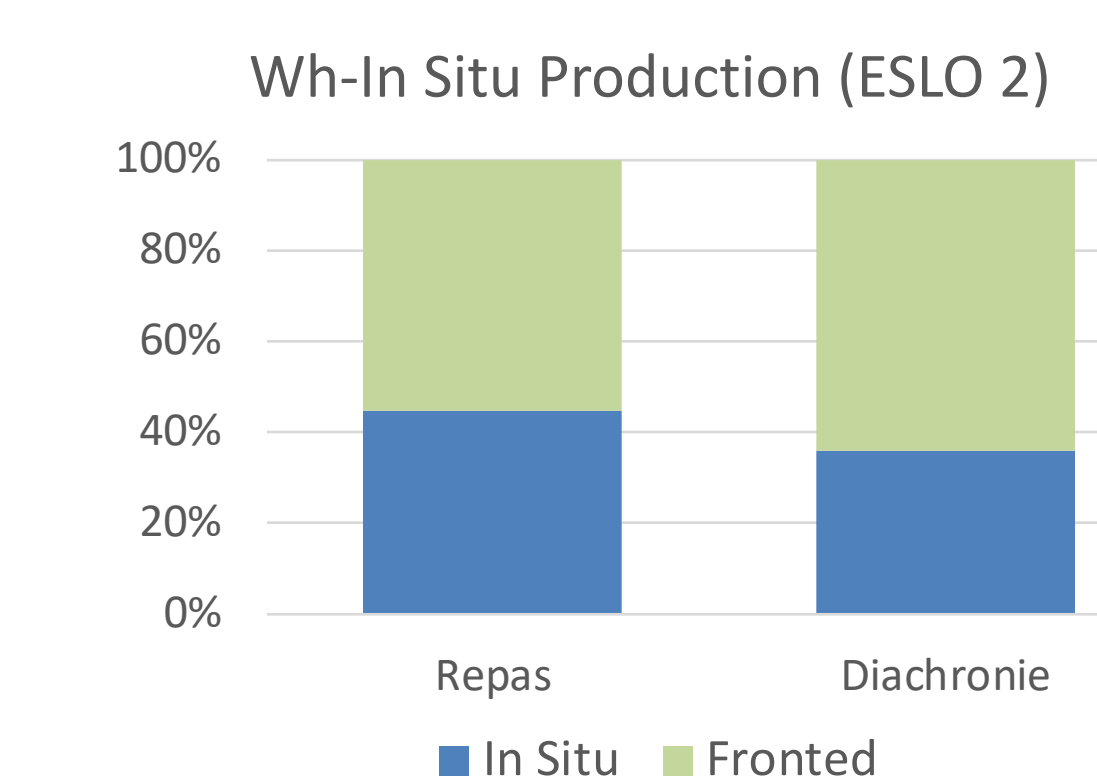
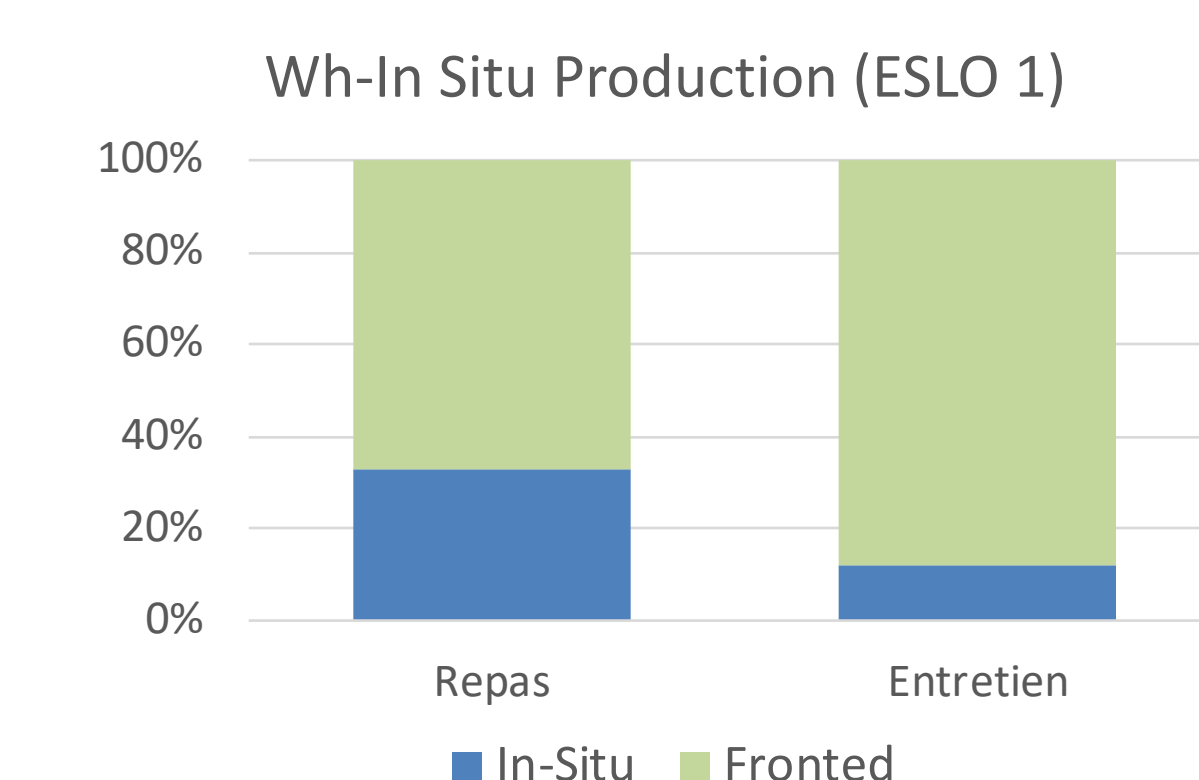
ESLO 1	Repas 1 (Informal)	Entretien (Formal)
Discourse Situation	mealtime interactions	formal interviews
# of Informal Pronouns	206	3
# of Wh-Questions	175	172

ESLO2	Repas 2 (Informal)	Diachronie (Formal)
Discourse Situation	mealtime interactions	formal interviews
# of Informal Pronouns	205	8
# of Wh-Questions	132	134

### Results

For ESLO1, comparing the production of wh-in situ, we found a difference in rates between corpora (33% in situ for Repas vs. 12% for Entretien). This difference is statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), as confirmed via a mixed effects logistic regression model.

For ESLO2, we found the same trend, but not a significant difference in rates (45% vs. 36%), based on a small sample.



A mixed effects logistic regression model reveals a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) when ESLO 1 + 2 are evaluated together, with corpus as a random effect.

## Experiment

**Experimental Design:** Participants were given a context situation with an interlocutor description, prompting a dialogue. They were asked to select between a fronted and an in-situ question to continue the dialogue. We manipulated speaker/addressee **familiarity** (familiar vs. non-familiar) and addressee **expertise** (expert vs. non-expert), resulting in a 2X2 design.

Ex: Non-Familiar/ Expert Scenario: When in a store looking at jeans, and you say to the salesperson: Bonjour, ce jeans coûte combien / Bonjour, combien coûte ce jeans?

**Participants:** 82, recruited online from a French university. The study was created and hosted on Ibex Farm.

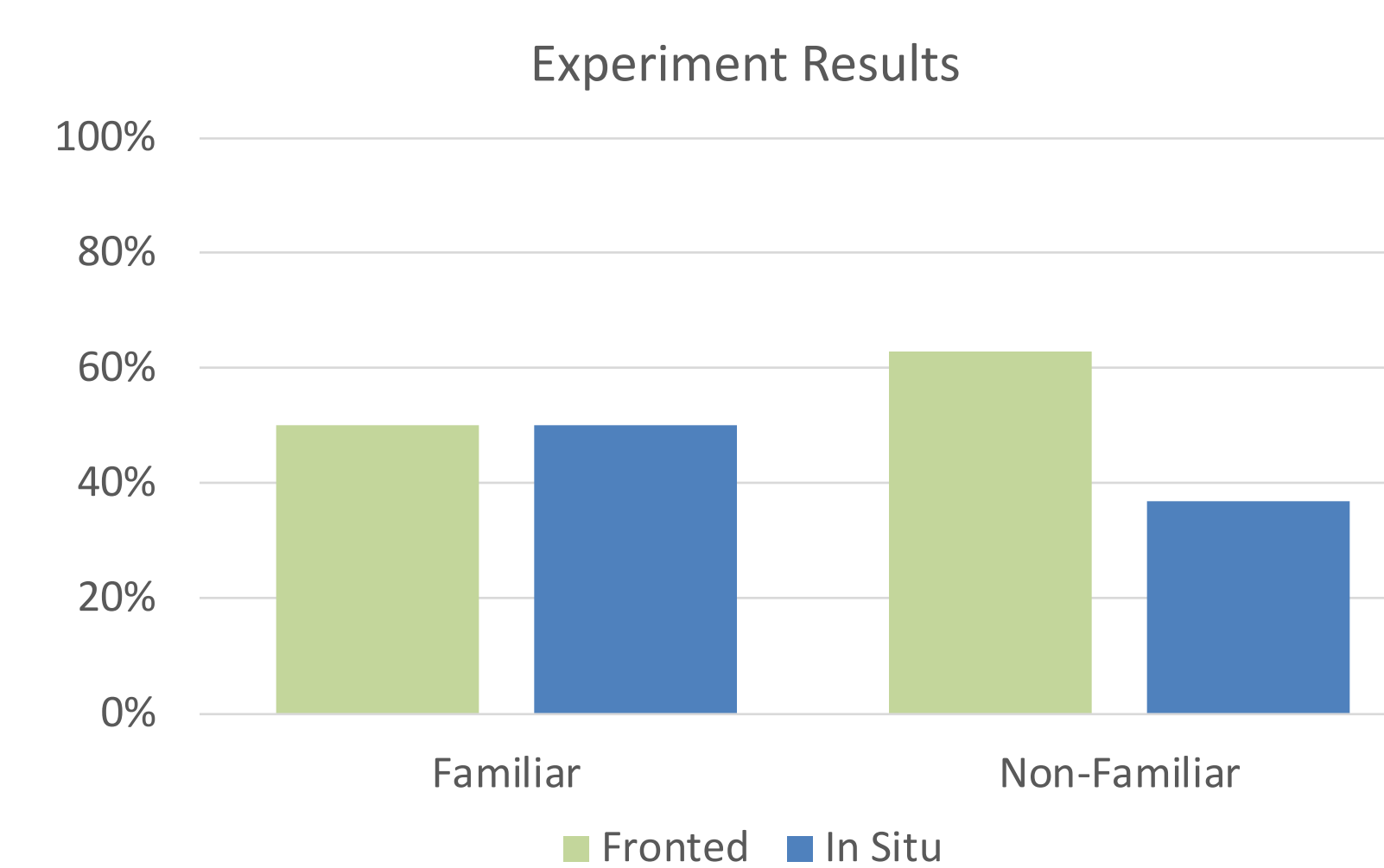
**Materials:** 16 target questions (4 per condition) + 16 fillers for a total of 32 questions.

### Results:

- Significant effect of familiarity ( $p < 0.05$ ) – speakers are more likely to select wh-in situ when the addressee is a known person in some capacity.
- Significant effect of expertise ( $p < 0.01$ ) – speakers produced more in situ when addressees were “non-experts” (perhaps suggesting the role of discourse setting here too).
- Overall, participants selected more wh-in situ questions!

	Familiar	Non-Familiar
Expert	180	160
Non-Expert	235	168
Total #	415	328

Raw Counts of Wh-In Situ Responses per Condition



## Conclusions

- ❖ Although wh-in situ is intuitively seen as the more informal choice, this has not been confirmed in previous research. We suggest the need for a more nuanced picture.
- ❖ The choice of in-situ increases in informal situations where speakers are familiar with one another– but this alone does not exclude fronted wh-questions, which are overall preferred in naturalistic contexts.
- ❖ Experimental data confirms that familiarity increases the likelihood of wh-in situ, and that expertise is a relevant variable. Expertise, however, increased ex-situ (contra Engdahl 2006/Myers 2007).
- ❖ In none of these contexts is either form “required”– rather preference reflects the interaction of multiple pragmatic factors.

## Remaining Questions

1. How does (in)familiarity interact with discourse context (current sample is too small to address this)?
2. Is there a diachronic shift that points to increased rates of in situ?

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Connor Kaminski, Matt Loder, Serena Luckhoff, and all RAs from the CELL lab at Rutgers.