

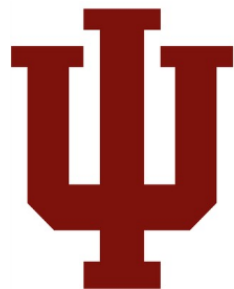
# Variable interrogative structures in French L2-L2 informal discourse

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# Introduction

Research interest: The acquisition and use of sociolinguistically variable structures in adult L2 French learners, especially in near-native speakers (NNS)

- *ne*-deletion in negation
- Interrogative structures
- 1<sup>st</sup> person plural: *on* vs. *nous*
- Null objects

Dewaele (2007: 20): “Acquiring sociolinguistic competence in French equates the ability to navigate a social minefield,” but, “What is a minefield for learners is a rich area of investigation for researchers.”

# Basic concepts

- Type I vs. Type II variation in SLA (Adamson & Regan, 1991; Rehner 2002)
  - Type I: (morpho)syntactic deviation from NS grammars (L2ers produce “incorrect forms”)
  - Type II: variants produced in L2 speech that also exist in NS speech (not “correct” or “incorrect” grammar, but conditioned by various social and linguistic factors)
- White (2003): In principle, no sociogrammatical variable should be unacquirable in SLA
- Type II: Multiple ways of forming questions in French (cf. syntax and intonation)
- Classroom instruction vs. naturalistic input
- Pragmatic factors and levels of formality
- = a particularly treacherous minefield for learners

# Interrogative structures in French

- From Coveney (2002); based on previous work by Pohl (1965), Price (1971), AI (1975)

Function	Type	Example	Gloss
Yes-No Questions (YNQ)	1. [SV]	Il est là ?	<i>Is he there?</i>
	2. [ESV]	Est-ce qu'il est là ?	<i>Is he there?</i>
	3. [V-CL]	Est-il là ?	<i>Is he there?</i>
Wh-questions (WHQ)	4. [SVQ]	Elle s'appelle comment ?	<i>What's her name?</i>
	5. [QSV]	Comment elle s'appelle ?	<i>What's her name?</i>
	6. [QESV]	Comment est-ce qu'elle s'appelle ?	<i>What's her name?</i>
	7. [QV-CL]	Comment s'appelle-t-elle ?	<i>What's her name?</i>
	8. [QV NP]	Comment s'appelle ta mère ?	<i>What's your mother's name?</i>
	9. [Q=S V]	Qui est là ?	<i>Who's there?</i>

- 1. Careful style; writing
- 2. Neutral
- 3. Neutral / « inelegant » in writing
- 4. Colloquial (« *familier* »)

# Interrogative structures in French

- Other interrogative structures observed in L1 French (Coveney 2002)
  - hypercorrections or stigmatized variants (« *populaire, vulgaire* »)

Type	Example	Gloss
[E NP V-CL]	Est-ce que demain les sauveteurs pourront-ils s'approcher des alpinistes ?	<i>Will tomorrow the rescuers be able to reach the climbers?</i>
[Q=S V-CL]	Combien d'entre nous auraient-ils droit au titre d'hommes ?	<i>How many of us have the right to the title of men?</i>
[QkSV]	Quel âge que t'as ?	<i>How old are you?</i>
[seQkSV]	C'est quoi qui se passe ?	<i>What's happening?</i>
[QsekSV]	Qui c'est qui voulait une poire ?	<i>Who wanted a pear?</i>
[QEsekSV]	Qui est-ce que c'est que vous cherchez ?	<i>Who are you looking for?</i>
[SV-ti]	Où j'ai-ti vu ce nom-là ?	<i>Where did I see that name?</i>

# Previous studies (L1 French)

Study	Participants	YNQ			
		1. SV	2. ESV	3 V-CL	<i>n</i> =
Behnstedt 1973	formal middle-class	41	39	20	12,069
	colloquial middle-class	90		10	~900
	working-class	95		5	~1100
Terry 1970	plays	86	3	11	3016
Ashby 1977	middle-class	80	11	9	130
Pohl 1965	middle-class	82	9	9	270
	working-class	91	5	5	151
	elderly Belgian couple	86	14	1	816
Söll 1982	9-year-olds	91	8	1	452
Gadet 1989	n/a	88	10	1	154
Coveney 2002	overall	81	30	0	109
	17-22 yrs	91	9	0	45
	24-37 yrs	58	46	0	53
	50-60 yrs	70	36	0	11
Myers 2007	young adults	--	--	--	--

# Previous studies (L1 French)

Study	Participants	WHQ					
		4.SVQ	5.QSV	6.QESV	7.QV-CL	8.QV NP	<i>n</i> =
Behnstedt 1973	formal middle-class	25	10	3	50	12	4367
	colloquial middle-class	33	46	12	3	2	446
	working-class	12	36	8	0	9	587
Terry 1970	plays	13		39	49		1515
Ashby 1977	middle-class	39	7	39	13	2	85
Pohl 1965	middle-class	10	8	47	36		155
	working-class	9	28	54	10		69
	elderly Belgian couple	2	3	66	28	1	184
Söll 1982	9-year-olds	13	32	42	4		364
Gadet 1989	n/a	22	39	27	12	0	41
Coveney 2002	overall	50	28	49	6	3	111
	17-22 yrs	56	26	46	0	--	28
	24-37 yrs	51	28	49	6	--	71
	50-60 yrs	29	25	50	17	--	12
Myers 2007	young adults	34	33	29	4	--	171

# *Variability in Spoken French*

## (Coveney, 2002)

Recordings of interviews/conversations with L1 French speakers

Communicative function (CF) of an interrogative

- Examples: request for information, request for advice, check for comprehension, tentative assertion, etc.
- Creates constraints on possible variants
  - [SV] Vous travaillez ce soir ?
  - [ESV] Est-ce que vous travaillez ce soir ? 'Do you work tonight?'
  - [V-cl] Travaillez-vous ce soir ?
- But:
  - [SV] Tu connais bien Nancy alors ?
  - [ESV] #Est-ce que tu connais bien Nancy alors ? 'You know Nancy quite well then?'
  - [V-cl] #Connais-tu bien Nancy alors ?
- So [SV] is a categorical token for this question (positively-biased affirmative)
- cf. Negatively-biased negative:
  - Tu travailles pas ce soir alors ? 'You're not working tonight then?'

Analyzed as tokens of the variant occurring as a percentage of all potential occurrences of this variant (rather than as a percentage of all YNQ or WHQ)



# *Variability in Spoken French*

## (Coveney, 2002)

Target of question as communicative function

- 1) Speaker wants answer from addressee
  - 2) Quoted questions / self-directed questions
    - Tu te dis “ouais, est-ce que je vais y aller?”
    - Donc il m’a dit...mais qu’est-ce qu’il m’a dit?
- = speaker wants answer from self or does not wish to elicit answer from addressee

Coveney (2002: 206):

	[SV]	[ESV]
Speaker wants answer:	93%	7%
Quoted/self-directed:	38%	62%

“In Yes/No interrogatives, a speaker wishing to elicit the answer from an interlocutor tends to use [SV], whereas a speaker not wishing to elicit an answer tends to use [ESV]” (p. 207)

# Previous studies: L2 French

- Instruction of question formation in L2 French; Etienne & Sax (2009) study of French textbooks used in American classrooms:
  - [SV] : « informal or very informal » for some textbooks
  - [SVQ] and [QSV] : completely absent in some textbooks
  - In general, much inconsistency in presentation of interrogative structures
    - “Où allons-nous en vacances cet été ?”                      *Where are we going on vacation this summer?*
    - cf. On va où en vacances cet été ?
- Sociolinguistic studies on L2 French (e.g., Dewaele, 1999; Sax, 2003)
  - Study-abroad and target community exposure does increase informal variant usage
  - Production still deviates from NS norms; L2ers overrely on formal structures
    - cf. inversion, “Puis-je aller aux toilettes ?”                      *May I use the bathroom?*

# Previous studies: L2 French

Study	Partici- pants	L2 experience	YNQ			
			1. SV	2. ESV	3. V-CL	<i>n</i> =
Dewaele (1999)	15	“French majors”	50	41	10	214
Sax (2003)	30	(overall)	No analysis of YNQ carried out			
	14	long SA				
	6	short SA				
	10	no SA				
van Compernelle & Williams (2009)	30	(overall)	56	34	11	461
	10	1 <sup>st</sup> year	54	36	10	113
	10	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	30	50	20	141
	10	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	74	21	5	207

# Previous studies: L2 French

Study	Partici- pants	L2 experience	WHQ					<i>n</i> =
			4. SVQ	5. QSV	6. QESV	7. QV- CL	8. QV NP	
Dewaele (1999)	15	“French majors”	9	9	35	25	22	100
Sax (2003)	30	(overall)						254
	14	long SA	54	n/a	20	4		97
	6	short SA	24	n/a	44	21		62
	10	no SA	3	n/a	44	27		95
van Compernelle & Williams (2009)	30	(overall)	No analysis of WHQ was carried out					
	10	1 <sup>st</sup> year						
	10	2 <sup>nd</sup> year						
	10	3 <sup>rd</sup> year						

# Learnability of variable interrogatives in NNS

- Identify whether NNS pattern like NS concerning formal/informal variant usage
- Identify whether NNS pattern like NS with regard to categorical constraints and communicative functions
  - Nonnatives presumably have no initial constraint on these forms and therefore must identify asymmetries from NS input
  - Check for possible examples of divergence from NS norms as well as use of [SV]/[ESV] with self-directed and quoted questions

# Interlocutor status

Previous studies on sociolinguistic variation in L2 French: Interlocutor L1 status

Study	Variable(s) studied (examples)	Interlocutor: French status
Painchaud et al 1982	<i>ne</i> -deletion	L1
Trévisé & Noyau 1984	<i>ne</i> -deletion	L1
Regan 1996	<i>ne</i> -deletion	L2
Thibault & Sankoff 1997	<i>ne</i> -deletion	L1
Rehner & Mougeon 1999	<i>ne</i> -deletion	L1
Dewaele & Regan 2002	<i>ne</i> -deletion	L1 (bilingual French-Dutch)
Dewaele 1999; 2004	<i>ne</i> -deletion; Interrogatives	L1 and L2
Thomas 2004	liaison; <i>ne</i> -deletion	(no interlocutor)
Sax 2003	<i>ne</i> -deletion; Interrogatives; <i>nous/on</i>	L1
van Compernelle & Williams 2009	Interrogatives	L2 (some presumed L1)
Howard 2012	<i>ne</i> -deletion; <i>nous/on</i>	L2
van Compernelle & Williams 2012	<i>ne</i> -deletion	L2 (some presumed L1)

# Research Questions

- 1) Are French near-native speakers (NNSs) capable of nativelike production of variable interrogative structures in informal discourse?
- 2) How might production of this sociolinguistic variable be conditioned by the native language of one's interlocutor (i.e., NS or NNS of French)?

# Participants

6 L2 French adult speakers (NNS)

- L1 English (U.S., U.K., Canada)
- 2 male, 4 female
- Age: range 28-86; mean 48.8
- Education: bachelor's degree (equivalent) up to PhD
- Length of Residence in France: range 5-36; mean 13.5

5 French native speakers (NS)

- 1 male, 5 female
- Age: range 24-63; mean 37.7
- Education: master's degree + 1 PhD



# Tasks

Modeled from Donaldson's (2008) work on NNS:

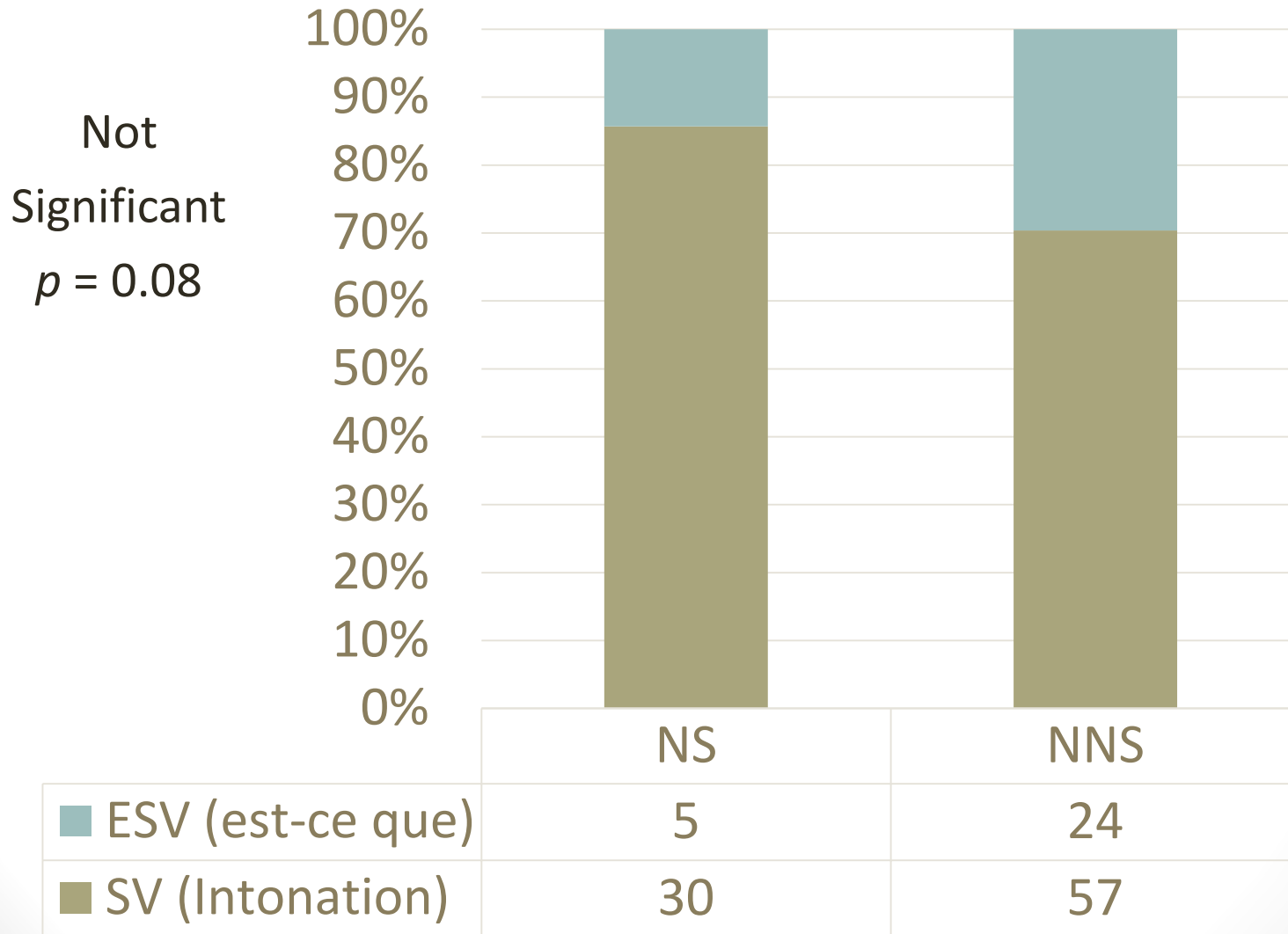
- 1) Two audio-recorded conversations: NNS-NS dyad; NNS-NNS dyad
  - Informal conversation without topic prompts
- 2) Acceptability Judgment Task (cf. Birdsong, 1992)
- 3) Background questionnaires on language use and cultural integration

# Results: AJT

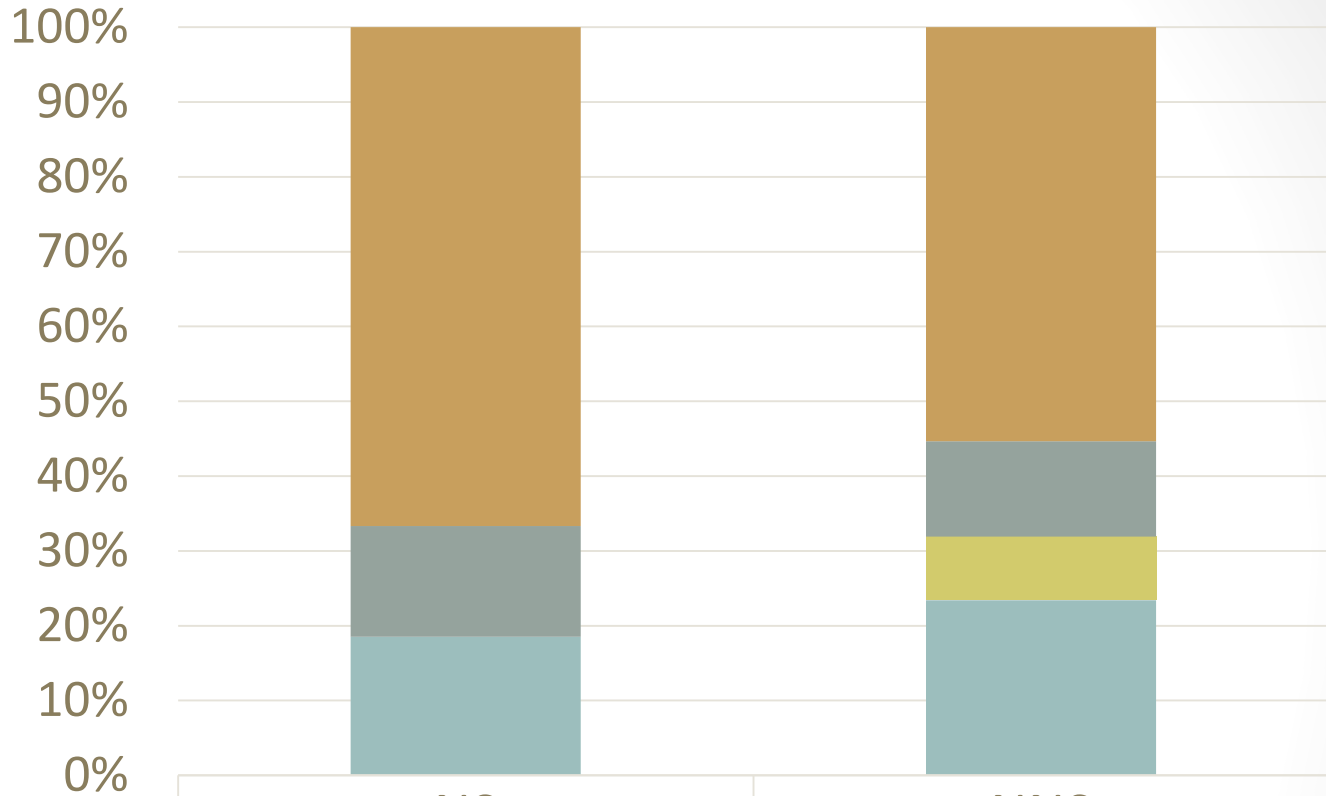
- On the Acceptability Judgment Task, L2 French speakers performed within the ranges of Birdsong's (1992) and Donaldson's (2008) near-native speakers

Study	Grammatical structures (range 1-5)	Ungrammatical structures (range 1-5)	Structures of questionable grammaticality (range 1-5)
Birdsong (1992)	3.70	1.91	2.61
Donaldson (2008)	3.64	1.70	2.27
Black (2014)	3.70	2.05	2.74

# Results: NS and NNS - YNQ



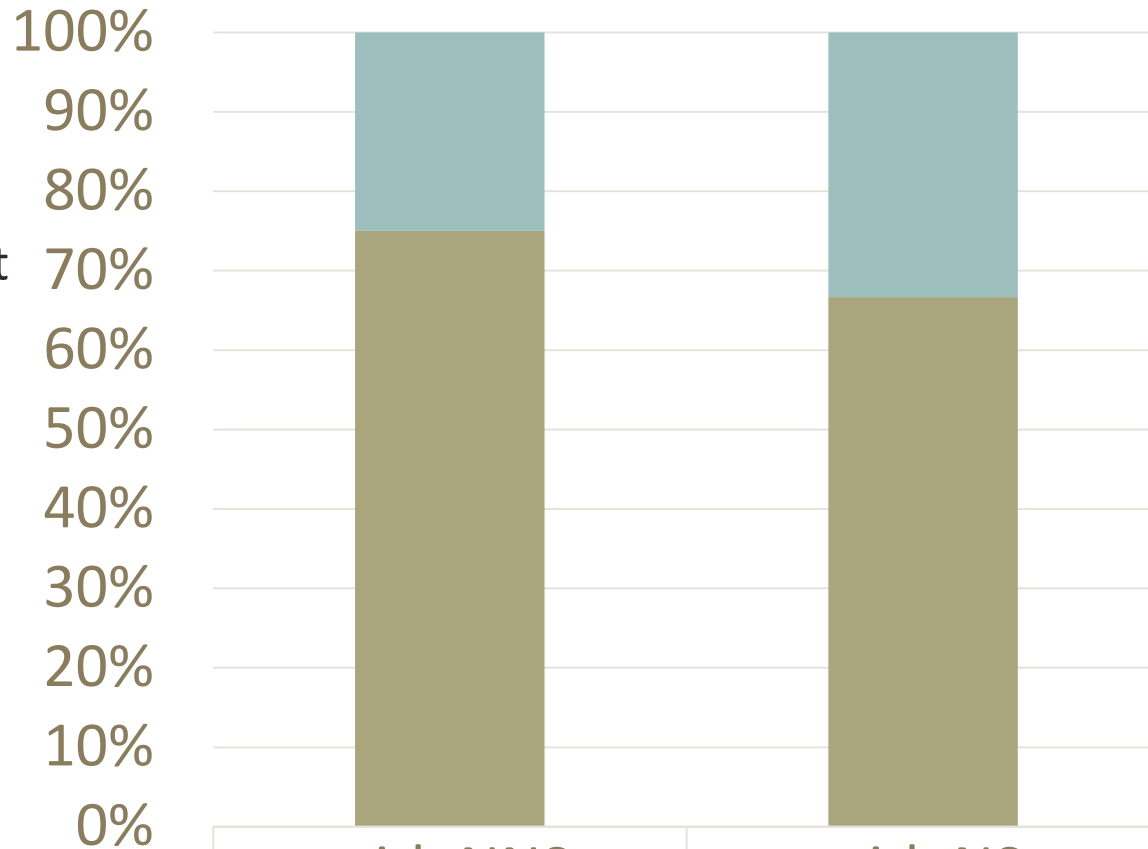
# Results: NS and NNS – WHQ



	NS	NNS
4. SVQ	18	26
5. QSV	4	6
6. QESV	0	4
6.bis. qu'est-ce que	5	11
7. QV-cl	0	0

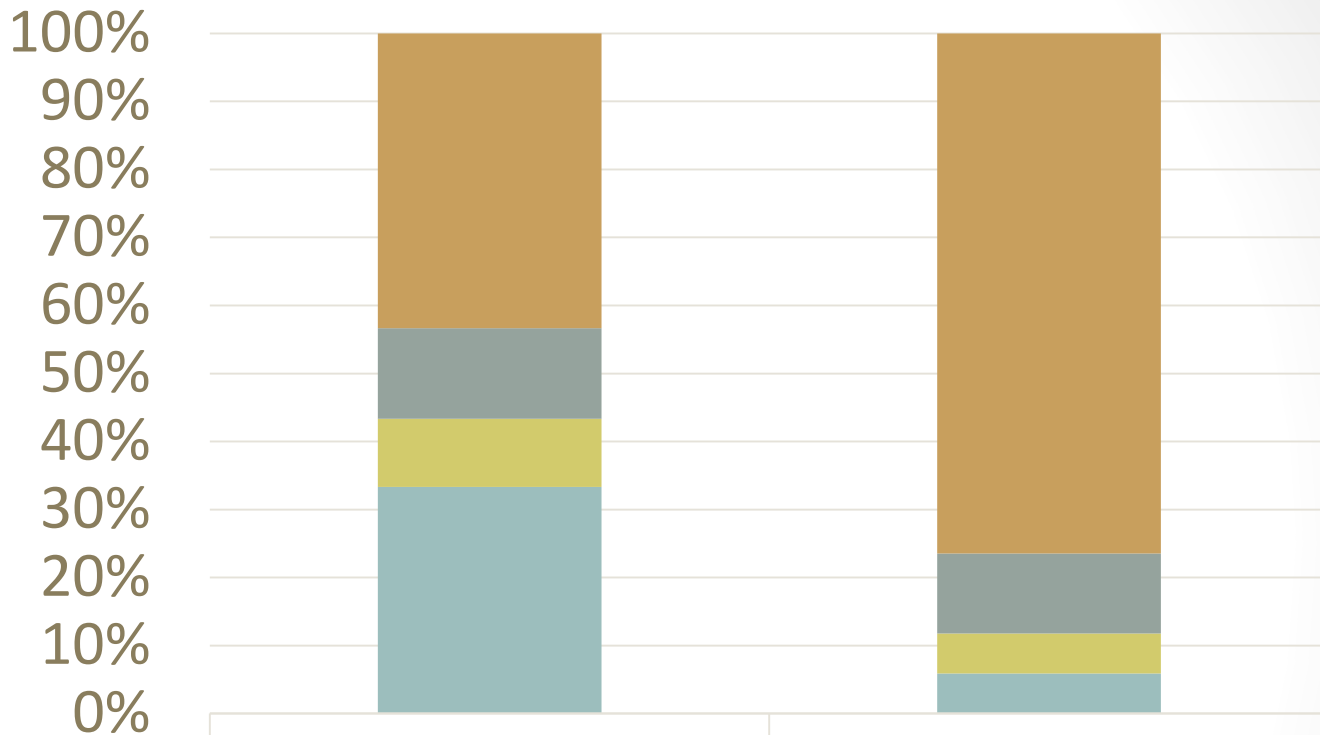
# Results: NNS by conversation - YNQ

\*Slightly higher  
usage % of SV but  
not-significant:  
 $p = 0.41$



■ ESV (est-ce que)	9	15
■ SV (Intonation)	27	30

# Results: NNS by conversation - WHQ



■ 4. SVQ	13	13
■ 5. QSV	4	2
■ 6. QESV	3	1
■ 6.bis. qu'est-ce que	10	1
■ 7. QV-cl	0	0

# Communicative functions

- L2 speakers: no examples found of categorical constraint violations
- Self-directed and quoted questions (all numbers are raw totals):

Particip.	YNQ				WHQ				
	1. SV	2. ESV	3. V-cl	n =	4. SVQ	5. QSV	6. QESV	7. QV-cl	n =
NS	1	5	0	6	0	1	0	2	3
NNS	1	5	0	6	3	1	9	1	14
Overall	2	10	0	12	3	2	9	3	17

Comment dirai-je?

‘How can I say it?’

Quand souhaiteriez-vous venir?

‘When would you like to come?’

	Coveney (L1):		current study (L2):	
YNQ:	[SV]	[ESV]	[SV]	[ESV]
Speaker wants answer:	93%	7%	70%	30%
Quoted/self-directed:	38%	62%	17%	83%

# Conclusions

Little difference in interrogative structures between NS and NNS

- Conversation is predictably informal in nature
  - High social convergence in each conversation pair (same ages, sex, and/or education/social standing)
  - Physical environment (home/neutral location; recording equipment less noticeable; absence of researcher during recording)
- Both groups of speakers adhere to a very similar level of informality
- NNSs pattern like NSs with regard to certain tendencies in interrogative structures
  - Categorical constraints obeyed
  - Sensitivity to communicative functions observed according to the addressee of the question



# Conclusions

Concerning the status of the interlocutor as L1 or L2 French speaker, there appears to be little difference in the choice of variable WHQ

- Only *qu'est-ce que* shows asymmetries (increase w/ NSs) but there is no corresponding increase of informal [SVQ] w/ NNSs
- More data is needed to make any substantial claims ( $n = 47$ )

However, NNSs don't resort to "classroom" French interrogatives or divergence from NS norms in an informal setting with another NNS

- Inversion is essentially absent for both NSs and NNSs

For at least a subset of sociolinguistic variables, a native speaker is not necessary in the conversation sphere in order to have native-like usage of these variables

- Informal setting likely facilitates nativelike informal usage
- This behavior also applies to *on/nous* and (for some speakers) *ne*-deletion

**Merci ! Thank you !**

Avez-vous des questions ?

Est-ce que vous avez des questions ?

Vous avez des questions ?

Special thanks to Amber Panwitz for help with data collection.

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# Participants: NNS

ID#	Age	Sex	CoB	AOI	AOA	LOR	Educ.	Profession	RR
1E	28	F	USA	11	23	5	MA	ESL teacher	Normandy
2E	43	M	USA	4	27	16	BS	Engineer	Normandy
3E	42	F	Canada	6	36	6	BA	ESL professor	Alsace
4E	60	F	USA	12	24	36	PhD	ESL/English Lit professor	Alsace
5E	86	M	UK	58	75	11	MA	retired	Normandy
6E	34	F	Philippines	12	27	7	MA	student/ESL teacher	Normandy

Abbreviations: CoB = country of birth; AOI = age of first instruction in French; AOA = age of continuous exposure to French (beginning of long-term stay in France); LOR = length of residency (years); Educ. = highest education level completed; RR = region of residence in France

# Participants: NS

<b>ID#</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>CoB</b>	<b>Educ.</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>RR</b>
<b>1F</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>MA</b>	<b>engineer</b>	<b>Normandy</b>
<b>2F</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>MA</b>	<b>librarian</b>	<b>Normandy</b>
<b>3F</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>MA</b>	<b>secretary</b>	<b>Alsace</b>
<b>4F</b>	<b>25-30</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>MA</b>	<b>administrative assistant</b>	<b>Alsace</b>
<b>5F</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>DEA</b>	<b>retired (university professor)</b>	<b>Normandy</b>