

## On the underestimated role of lifestyle: Syntactic variation in French

This paper presents findings from a second empirical study on the correlation between different social variables and interrogative word order variants in French. It follows up issues in Adli (2004) and Adli (2005). Adli (2004) analyzed social effects for graded grammaticality judgments on the French *wh*-in-situ form S V Q and the form with *wh*-movement Q S V showing on the one hand a predominant effect of the sociocultural variable lifestyle (Bourdieu 1979), and on the other no effects with several sociodemographic variables. Given that the operationalization of lifestyle is highly dependent on time and space, i.e. on the specific era and society under investigation, Adli (2005) studied the correlation between *wh*-variants and lifestyle in Tehran confirming the effect of lifestyle. We can therefore already build on the concrete hypothesis that lifestyle is a central concept of variation at the level of syntax which holds in cultural environments as different as urban societies in France and Iran. Essentially three new insights of presumably general scope are emerging in variationist sociolinguistics, namely (i) that many quantitative studies might simply miss an important social variable if they only remain within the standard set of sociodemographic variables and/or with the classic concept of social class without integrating a construct of the subjective side of social structure such as lifestyle, (ii) that, contrasting with a common assumption (see Winford 1996), syntax *is* subject to social variation, and (iii) contrasting with another common bias (see Labov 1996) grammaticality judgments do map social effects.

At this stage it is particularly insightful to turn back to French and to address the following remaining issues. The present study has been carried out with 102 French native speakers in Paris. First, showing a particularly rich repertory of *wh*-variants (Behnstedt 1973), this work covers not only two but six different word order variants in simple *wh*-questions. Second, different French *wh*-word-orders correlate with different registers, in particular with respect to the distinction orality vs. literacy (Koch & Oesterreicher 1990). As a methodological consequence, we have not only applied the grammaticality judgment test for written stimuli described in Adli (in press), but also a newly developed version for auditory stimuli. In other words, we now could also present constructions specific to the spoken variety in non-written form. Third, the operationalization of lifestyle embraced a far wider array of social scales and subscales. While in Adli (2004) this variable had been based on 54 items concerning the two scales *leisure activities* and *media*, the present study applies statistical factor- and cluster-analytical data reduction to approximately four times as many items. Apart from adding new media subscales (e.g. the Internet), two new dimensions of sociocultural orientation were included: *clothing and appearance* and *socio-political and ethical values*. Fourth, the correlation with modern socio-economic indicators, e.g. the index of housing density (INSEE 2005), is analyzed.

Repeated-measures ANOVAs reveal a salient effect of lifestyle further corroborating the assumption that it is a crucial sociolinguistic variable deserving more attention from sociolinguists. Furthermore, the consideration of a multitude of *wh*-word-order variants shows that an effect of lifestyle is not detectable or not equally salient for all these constructions. Following Bourdieu (1982) we assume a correlation between sociocultural lifestyle and linguistic style. We argue that the different “sensitivities” with respect to lifestyle can be explained by different stylistic properties of the sentences which convey them varying importance as a means for expressing social distinction.

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