The properties of French wh-in-situ are subject to debate in the literature (see for instance Chang, 1997, Cheng and Rooryck, 2000, Mathieu, 2004, Adli, 2006, Déprez, Syrett and Kawahara, 2013). According to Glasbergen-Plas (in press), at least part of these controversies can be explained when one assumes that there are two possible ways of deriving wh-in-situ, only one of which is acceptable for all speakers. Moreover, the type of wh-in-situ questions that is generally acceptable imposes strict conditions on the context in which they can be used (cf. Poschmann, 2015 for German and English).

Glasbergen-Plas’ proposal for contextually restricted wh-in-situ involves the presence of a contextually bound choice function (cf. Reinhart, 1998, Kratzer, 1998), which needs to be recoverable in the context for both interlocutors. When applied to the set determining its restriction, the choice function will fix the reference of the wh-phrase. If the right contextual restrictions are met, no intervention effects occur (for the effect of context on intervention effects, see Engdahl, 2006, Baunaz, 2011). Furthermore, the presence of contextual restrictions correlate with the presence of a final rise (Glasbergen-Plas, in press).

In this presentation, I will discuss some consequences of Glasbergen-Plas’ proposal. First, I will make a comparison between contextually restricted wh-in-situ and identity questions, e.g. contextually restricted Tu as vu qui ? ‘You saw who?’ and Who is the person that you saw? Even though the two types of questions resemble each other in the sense that they both introduce a similar presupposition (which I will call an ‘extra strong presupposition’), the way this presupposition comes about is not the same.

Combining Glasbergen-Plas’ proposal with insights from Biezma (2018, 2020), I will assume that wh-in-situ questions that introduce an extra strong presupposition are uninformative declaratives. However, contrary to what Biezma assumes, this declarative is presented as a declarative question, and the contextual restrictions are stronger. The strength of the contextual restrictions is due to the presence of the contextually bound choice function.

The declarative question status of the wh-in-situ question explains why the contextually restricted wh-in-situ question ends in a rise (this rise is similar to the one in yes-no questions/denominative questions, see for instance Cheng and Rooryck, 2000). In declarative questions, the rise is often claimed to indicate that the speaker wants to add the information to the common ground but is still hesitant about doing so. In more standard cases, this is so because the speaker is not sure about the truth of the proposition (Gunlogsen, 2002, Westera, 2013, 2017). In the case of contextual wh-in-situ this is not the problem: as all information is given in the context, there is not much to worry about in this respect. The hesitation rather comes from the fact that the proposition is not an informative answer to the question under discussion that it evokes (e.g. Qui as-tu vu? for the in situ question Tu as vu qui ?). The reason for this is that for the speaker the answer could be a realization of all alternatives, depending on which individual in the actual world bears the same index as the salient antecedent of the wh-in-situ phrase. By uttering a contextually restricted wh-in-situ question, the speaker indicates that the noun phrase answering the question should be coreferential with a specific salient discourse referent in the context, which makes these questions similar to identity questions.
References


