

The evolution of *yes/no* question formation in French

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1. Variants of *yes/no* questions

a. **Inversion**

As-tu (INV) déjà parlé avec un vrai Français de France là?
 (XX.105.2768) ¹
 ‘Have you ever spoken to a real Frenchman from France?’

b. **Complex-Inversion**

Et *Le roi est-il* (C-INV) icitte? (XIX.036.3932)
 ‘And the king is he here?’

c. **Intonation**

Ah, toi *tu restes pas* (INT) avec tes parents? (XX.112.1819)
 ‘Oh, you don’t live with your parents?’

d. ***Est-ce que***

Mes bombes *est-ce que* (ECQ) je les largue ici? (XX.078.1502)
 ‘My bombs, do I throw them here?’

e. ***-tu***

Tu vas-tu (TU) être plus marié oubedonc moins marié?
 (XX.079.1471)
 ‘Are you gonna be more married or less married?’

2. “Variable context”:

Every (non-rhetorical) question requiring a *yes/no* answer

¹Codes refer to corpus, (XIX =*Récits du français québécois d’autrefois* (Poplack & St-Amand 2002); XX =*Corpus du français parlé à Ottawa-Hull* (Poplack, 1989); XVII =*Corpus of popular French plays*), speaker and line number. Examples reproduced verbatim from audio recordings or plays.

3. Data

Century	Source	Time span
20	<i>Corpus du français parlé à Ottawa-Hull</i> Poplack (1989)	(spkrs b. 1898-1965)
19	<i>Récits du français québécois d’autrefois</i> Poplack & St-Amand (2002)	(spkrs b. 1846-1895)
17	<i>17th-century popular French plays</i>	(1629-1663)
15-20	<i>Répertoire historique des grammaires du français</i> Poplack, Jarmasz, Dion, Rosen & Leblanc (ms)	(1530-1998)

4. Exclusions

a. **Wh-questions**

Il dit « *Pourquoi* tu as pas tué l’ours blanc? » (XIX.036.2670)

b. **Fixed expressions**

Hey, ça fait longtemps, *tu sais*? (XX.096.79)

c. **Non-sentential questions**

Les pattes rondes ça? (XIX.043.2452)

d. **Imperatives**

Allons aux moutons? (XIX.054.1893)

e. **Rhetorical questions**

Tu as peut-être déjà vu ça ces chartières là ou entendu parler... ? (XIX.18.820)

f. **Echo questions**

“Ah moi j’aime pas ça”. “*Tu aimes pas ça?* (XX.103.398)

g. **Questions formed with interrogative tags**

Ils grasseyent eux-autres à Montréal, *hein?* (XX.089.1725)

5. Distribution of variants in Quebec French and European French

	Quebec French		European French				
	This study	Fox 1982	Pohl 1965	Terry 1970	Ashby 1977	Söll 1982	Coveney 2002
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Intonation	35	36	86	86	80	91	79
-tu	33	34	0	-	-	-	-
Inversion	26	29	0	11	9	1	-
Est-ce que	6	1	14	3	11	8	21
Complex-inv.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	776	871	816	3016	130	452	180

6. Variable rule analysis of extralinguistic factors selected as significant to variant choice: 20th-century (affirmative questions only)

Variant	Inversion	-tu	Intonation	Est-ce que
Total N	205	247	186	50
Corrected mean:	.30	.36	.27	.07
Sex				
Female	[]	.55	[]	[]
Male	[]	.45	[]	[]
Age				
35+	.56	.42	[]	100%
15-34	.37	.69	[]	-
Socioeconomic class				
Upper middle	[]	[]	[]	.85
Working	[]	[]	[]	.16

Factors not selected as significant:

Sex	x		x	x
Age			x	
Socioeconomic class	x	x	x	

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7. Variable rule analyses of factors selected as significant to variant choice: 17th, 19th and 20th centuries (affirmative tokens only)

Variant	Inversion						<i>-tu</i>			<i>Est-ce que</i>			Intonation		
	Pronominal			Complex			17	19	20	17	19	20	17	19	20
Century	17	19	20	17	19	20	17	19	20	17	19	20	17	19	20
Total N	502	289	205	57	2	0	0	157	247	10	3	50	205	171	186
<i>Corrected mean:</i>	.65	.47	.30	.07	-	-	-	.25	.36	.01	-	.07	.27	.28	.27
Subject type															
<i>tu/vous</i>	[]	.77	100%	-	-	-	-	.31	.36	-	-	.37	.59	[]	[]
Others	[]	.06	0%	100%	-	-	-	.88	.70	-	-	.69	.42	[]	[]
Verb frequency															
Frequent (21+)	.56	[]	[]	[]	-	-	-	[]	[]	-	-	[]	.46	[]	[]
Mid (6-20)	.42	[]	[]	[]	-	-	-	[]	[]	-	-	[]	.52	[]	[]
Rare (1-5)	.38	[]	[]	[]	-	-	-	[]	[]	-	-	[]	.60	[]	[]
Verb form															
Synthetic	.51	.53	.47	[]	-	-	-	[]	[]	-	-	[]	.48	[]	[]
Periphrastic	.40	.37	.64	[]	-	-	-	[]	[]	-	-	[]	.64	[]	[]
Verb semantics															
"Cognitive"	.58	.64	.77	.34	-	-	-	[]	.43	-	-	-	.43	.38	[]
Others	.45	.44	.36	.61	-	-	-	[]	.54	-	-	100%	.55	.56	[]
Verb syllables															
Polysyllabic	[]	[]	.64	.39	-	-	-	[]	.33	-	-	.63	[]	.42	[]
Monosyllabic	[]	[]	.45	.58	-	-	-	[]	.57	-	-	.45	[]	.54	[]
Style															
Careful	[]	.27	.44	[]	-	-	-	.19	.46	-	-	.65	[]	.80	.52
Casual	[]	.52	.61	[]	-	-	-	.54	.58	-	-	.24	[]	.47	.45

Factors not selected as significant:

Subject type	x				-	-	-			-	-			x	x
Verb frequency		x	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x		x	x
Verb form				x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x		x	x
Verb semantics					-	-	-	x		-	-				x
Verb syllables	x	x			-	-	-	x		-	-		x		x
Style	x			x	-	-	-			-	-		x		