Research Article

Richard Waltereit*

Inferencing, Reanalysis, and the History of the French *est-ce que* Question

https://doi.org/10.1515/opli-2018-0004
Received August 8, 2017; accepted March 16, 2018

Abstract: In this paper, I discuss critically the traditional view of reanalysis, taking into account recent debates about the concept. In particular, I argue that the debate about reanalysis tends to conflate two interpretations of reanalysis: reanalysis as a type of language change among other ones, and reanalysis as the recognition or "ratification" of any kind of change. I offer a possible explanation of that potential confusion. I then illustrate this distinction using the history of the French est-ce que question as a case study. I report original diachronic research on the history of that construction. Further, I discuss implications both at a conceptual-theoretical level and at a practical level for further diachronic research. The paper concludes with a summary and discussion of the findings.

Keywords: Reanalysis, Language change, interrogatives, Conventionalization

1 Introduction

Reanalysis is a long-established and intuitively appealing type of language change. In its classical understanding, it is a “change in the structure of an expression or class of expressions that does not involve any immediate or intrinsic modification of its surface structure” (Langacker 1977). The French *est-ce que* question is often assumed to be an example of reanalysis in this vein (cf. Brunot/Bruneau 1969, Haspelmath 1998, Harris & Campbell 1995, Waltereit 1999, Waltereit & Detges 2008):

(1) [Est-ce$_i$ [que mon amie est morte]$_i$]
is that that my friend is dead
(2) [Est-ce que]$_{\text{part}}$ mon amie est morte]
INT my friend is dead

According to this view, at an earlier diachronic stage (stage one), illustrated by example (1), there is a complex sentence with a matrix clause *est-ce* ‘is that’, with a subordinate clause *que mon amie est morte* ‘that my friend is dead’, and the matrix clause subject *ce* referring forwards to the subordinate clause. At a later diachronic stage, illustrated by (2), the constituent boundaries of the utterance would have changed to a monoclausal structure, where the erstwhile matrix clause, together with the complementizer *que*, would have turned into an interrogative particle. By contrast, the surface structure and order of items would not have changed, in line with Langacker’s definition of reanalysis.

Since inference pertains to comprehension rather than production, it is a hearer activity. Likewise, reanalysis is normally seen as a hearer-driven change (Detges/Waltereit 2002, Eckardt 2006, Schwenter/

Article note: This paper belongs to the special issue on Inferences in Interaction and Language Change, ed. by Oliver Ehmer & Malte Rosemeyer.

***Corresponding author: Richard Waltereit ,** Humboldt-University, Berlin, E-mail: richard.waltereit@hu-berlin.de

Waltereit 2010). It is therefore natural to ask what is the relationship between the two.

In section 2 of this paper, I discuss critically the traditional view of reanalysis, taking into account recent debate about the concept. In particular, I argue that the debate about reanalysis tends to conflate, with some confusion as an effect, two interpretations of reanalysis: reanalysis as a type of language change among other ones, and reanalysis as the recognition or "ratification" of any kind of change. I will offer a possible explanation for that potential confusion. In section 3, I then illustrate this distinction using the history of the French *est-ce que* question as a case study. Here, I will report original diachronic research on the history of that construction. In section 4, I discuss implications both at a conceptual-theoretical level and at a practical level for further diachronic research. The paper concludes with a summary and discussion of the findings.

2 Two types of reanalysis

In this section, I argue that reanalysis is widely used in two different senses in historical linguistics. In one sense, it refers to an assumed type of language change among others; in the second sense, it refers to the acceptance by a speech community that any language change implies. Both of these uses of the term are linked to very fundamental assumptions about language change that I will briefly review.

2.1 Two broad approaches to language change

Following Croft (2000), it is possible to distinguish two broad approaches to language change in the historical linguistics literature: the structuralist-generative and the variationist approach.

Under the structuralist-generative approach, language change begins with an innovation; an innovation is a new way of saying things, at whatever level of linguistic description that may be appropriate. Such an innovation may, but need not, subsequently spread in the speech community. Spread in the linguistic community makes the innovation more widely noticeable and may lead to its eventual conventionalization as a rule of the language in question. Crucially, however, the structuralist-generative approach focuses on the innovation itself: its structural relationship with other items in the language, its relationship with any item it replaces, and so on. The innovation may arise in language acquisition or in adult speech; within that approach, generative thinking tends to focus on the former, whereas cognitive-functional approaches tend to focus on the latter. In any case, though, in the structural approach, whether generative in the narrow sense or cognitive-functional, spread in the speech community tends to be seen as a derivative issue that is independent of the innovation. While spread in the community and conventionalization are not seen as uninteresting, they are not the primary concern of research within this tradition. By implication, the structuralist-generative approach focuses very much on the individual speaker, since the innovation is conceived of as a singular event that can only take place in the individual.

Like the structuralist-generative approach, the variationist approach distinguishes innovation and spread in the community, but with a flipped foreground-background relation. Under this approach, variation is always there, so that there is not that much focus on individual innovations. In fact, at least in phonology, innovations are seen as a necessary by-product of ordinary speech (Ohala 1981, 1989). Language change, in essence, then, is the socially motivated shift in usage patterns of variants. In other words, under this approach, language change is spread through the speech community.

In the following, I will argue that the distinction of innovation vs. spread is important for, and may go some way towards explaining, the various readings of the term "reanalysis" in the literature.

2.2 2.2 Reanalysis as a type of language change

One concept of reanalysis is that it is a type of language change among others, such as grammaticalization, analogy, or others. This interpretation is linked to the structuralist-generative view of language change, where change is always set off in the individual and then, at a later stage, spread in the community. A key difference, however, between reanalysis and other types of language change is that reanalysis is based in (read: initiated by) the hearer, rather than the speaker. In that sense, reanalysis is hearer-driven change. The following characterizations may serve to illustrate this view.

Eckardt's (2006) *Avoid pragmatic overload* principle takes the idea that there is an economy of hearer inferencing as a starting point. If, based on the established conventional meaning of items used by the speaker, a successful interpretation were possible only via excessive inferencing, then the hearer may assume a new conventional meaning of the items.

A similar notion was proposed in Detges & Waltereit (2002), with their *Principle of Reference*. It stipulates as a principle of interpretation: "Match the sound string you hear with what seems to be its function in the situation" (Detges & Waltereit 2002: 156). One example of reanalysis in this vein is the rise of the Spanish *se*-impersonal construction, thought to arise from the *se* middle construction (cf. Lapesa 2000: 808-817, Detges & Waltereit 2002: 152-153):

(3) Before reanalysis: *se* as a clitic middle marker
se vende$_i$ cerveza$_i$ en el patio
'Beer is being sold in the courtyard'

(4) After reanalysis: *se* as impersonal subject clitic
se vende$_i$ cerveza$_i$ en el patio
'(Some)one sells beer in the courtyard'

Since both interpretations, 'beer is being sold in the courtyard' and '(Some)one sells beer in the courtyard', may be construed as referring to the same event while implying a different syntactic analysis of the clause, one of them (in this instance, (4)), would have arisen from the other via inferencing.

Hansen (2008) distinguishes a wider concept of *reinterpretation* from a more specific one of *reanalysis*. Reinterpretation is a change of meaning, without change of syntactic boundaries, as a result of pragmatic ambiguity in the situation. Reanalysis has the additional characteristic of a change of syntactic boundaries. Reanalysis of the Spanish middle, as in (4), would be an example of reanalysis in this more specific sense. Hansen quotes an example of a metonymic lexical change from Koch (2004). In Latin *focus*, originally 'hearth', the meaning changed to 'fire', presumably by metonymic reinterpretation (cf. Koch 2004). A similar distinction was made in Waltereit (1999). In addition, Waltereit (1999) proposed lexical change in verb valency as a third type of reinterpretation/reanalysis. In diachronic metonymic changes in the lexicon, semantic roles can change. For example, based on French historical lexicographic data, Waltereit (1999: 26) reports that French *risquer* 'to risk' was used from the 16th century with a direct object denoting the 'stake', e.g. *risquer sa vie* 'to risk one's life', whereas from the 18th century, it was used also with a direct object denoting the 'risky activity', e.g. *risquer le passage* 'to risk the passage'. These readings are exemplified by examples (5) and (6), respectively.

(5) Mon maistre est bon et genereux, et j' ay pour luy risqué ma vie
'My master is good and generous, and I've risked my life for him'
(Tristan L'Hermite, *Les vers héroïques*, 1648, FRANTEXT)

(6) Les arabes ne pouvoient pas risquer les mouvemens necessaires pour leur retraite, en présence ni même dans le voisinage d' une armée ennemie
'The Arabs couldn't risk the moves necessary for their retreat, in the presence, or even in the proximity, of an enemy army'
(Jean Abbé Terrasson, *Sethos, histoire, ou Vie tirée des monumens anecdotes de l'ancienne É g y p t e* , 1731, FRANTEXT)

Changes like these may be considered an intermediate case between "reanalysis" and "reinterpretation", in that, like the former but unlike the latter, they involve a multi-constituent structure, whereas, unlike the former but like the latter, they do not involve any shift of structural boundaries.

Traditionally, reanalysis is usually understood as a hearer-driven change, as stated most explicitly by Hopper & Traugott (2003: 50): "In reanalysis, the hearer understands a form to have a structure and a meaning that are different from those of the speaker, as when [Hamburg] + [er]' item (of food) from Hamburg' is heard as [ham] + [burger]" (cf. also Detges & Waltereit 2002), or implied by reference to the interpretation process (Campbell 1998: 227). Similarly, Whitman 2012 discusses critically the alleged role of "misparsing" in syntactic change, again implying the hearer's perspective.

Under the structuralist-generative approach to change, then, reanalysis is different from other types of change in that the individual whose departure from existing conventions sets off the change is not the speaker but the hearer. It could be suggested that by this shift from speaker to hearer alone, reanalysis is already moving closer to the variationist notion of change, which focuses on the community as the agent of change, as opposed to the individual.

2.3 Reanalysis as a generic term for language change

Alongside its use as a distinct and identifiable type of language change alongside others, "reanalysis" is also often used in the literature to refer to not a type of language change per se, but to the fact that something has changed, i.e. to essentially any kind of language change. A few examples for this wider reading of "reanalysis".

"Reanalysis [...] occurs in any type of functional change" (Detges/Waltereit 2002: 190)

"As we have defined it, reanalysis refers to the replacement of old structures by new ones. It is covert." (Hopper/Traugott 2003: 63).

Both these sets of authors make their statements as part of general treatment of reanalysis, where it is implied that reanalysis is a type of language change among others as discussed in section 2.1.. Neither notes that their respective characterizations of reanalysis as quoted here would seem to apply to any kind of change.

Eckardt's (2006: 236) characterization of reanalysis, while construed as a type of change, would appear so wide-ranging that any semantic-syntactic reorganization would fall under it:

> Semantic reanalysis: The process of semantic reorganization of a sentence whereby the salient overall conveyed information remains the same, but is composed in a different manner. What may have previously been in part assertion, in part implication, turns entirely into a literal assertion after reanalysis. Semantic reanalysis may have repercussions on the meaning of parts of the sentence (constructions, phrases, words, affixes), leading to a changed meaning under the new semantic composition of the sentence.

Although Eckardt uses the label "semantic reanalysis" in this definition, she uses the term as co-extensive with "structural reanalysis" and "reanalysis" in her book.

De Smet (2009) goes further in this direction. Based on corpus analysis and a detailed discussion of English *worth*, *worthwhile*, and the *for...to* construction, he finds that these changes, which would seem to fall under reanalysis as traditionally understood (the *for...to* construction even being an often-cited case of reanalysis), break down into lower-level changes. This makes reanalysis potentially an "epiphenomenon" (de Smet 2009: 1752). Despite his reservations over continuing to use the term "reanalysis" for these changes as one would traditionally do, De Smet is hesitant to dismiss reanalysis altogether:

> If reanalysis can be broken down into more fundamental mechanisms, it becomes epiphenomenal to those mechanisms. Eventually, reanalysis is not itself a mechanism of change then. At the same time, it is possible that reanalysis still represents a particular going together of (more fundamental) mechanisms of change under particular linguistic circumstances. As a specific constellation of mechanisms, then, reanalysis may be a linguistically significant type of change. (De Smet 2009: 1752)

In a later paper, De Smet (2013) takes his critique of reanalysis even further, again, though, without abandoning the term altogether. The title of the paper "Does innovation need reanalysis?" would seem to imply an understanding of reanalysis where it accounts for change *tout court*, since any change requires by definition an innovation. Also more specifically, in that paper he discusses the extent to which a reanalysis may have been posited in the literature not necessarily on the basis of empirical evidence for that particular type of syntactic change, but rather because it was mandated by independent theoretical assumptions:

> [T]he need for reanalysis to a degree stems from the assumptions made by specific models of synchronic syntactic theory. When those assumptions are changed, the apparent logical necessity of reanalysis disappears. For example, the systematic application of constituency structure necessitates interpreting a variety of changes as rebracketings. But if constituent structure is thought of as variable or gradient, the same changes can be considered in a new light (De Smet 2013: 42).

In other words, reanalysis can be seen, up to a point, as an artefact of whatever assumptions about syntactic structure the author subscribes to, rather than as an empirical phenomenon that can be independently observed.

In fact, under this view, reanalysis would, again, seem to be directly related to the structuralist-generative model of change (see section 2.1), where language changes as a consequence of an individual's activity. The structuralist-generative model of change is historically linked to the idea of language as a "system" that runs in a stable fashion, and for that very reason has no inherent need to change. Coseriu (1978[1957]) called this the "paradox of language change"– if synchronically, languages are perfectly running systems, then there is no reason why they should change at all (cf. Detges & Waltereit 2008: 1).

Under this view of language change, inferences play a double role: First, there needs to be an inference that reflects the original innovation. The hearer needs to make a pragmatic inference that what is meant is not what is said. Then, an additional inference validates the change at conventional level, i.e. acknowledges that something is different not only on that occasion, but that conventions in the speech community at large have changed.

The former kind of inference may or may not be an invited one (cf. Traugott/Dasher 2002), i.e. one prompted by the speaker. Specifically, in the case of reanalysis as kind of language change, it is not – rather, it is an inference the hearer makes of their own accord. Now, this is precisely what it has in common with the second kind of inference – the recognition that conventions have changed. This recognition is something that the hearer does of their own accord. The speaker simply applies new conventions and doesn't specifically invite the hearer to recognize them. This holds for all changes, irrespective of whether or not the original innovation that led to the eventual change of conventions reflects an invited inference or an "uninvited" one, i.e. a reanalysis. For the original innovation, the inference is invited by the speaker, except for reanalysis (as a type of language change); for validation at conventional level, the inference is never invited, whatever the kind of language change.

It is probably for this reason that the term reanalysis is used in the two ways mentioned: in both its uses, as it reflects a hearer inference that is not specifically invited by the speaker.

2.4 Summary

I have discussed the recent controversy over the notion of reanalysis. While reanalysis is a long-established and intuitively appealing concept in diachronic linguistics, not inherently linked to a particular syntactic theory, it has also come under increased scrutiny in recent years. On the one hand, reanalysis as construed as a specific type of language change among others, has come to be seen increasingly as an epiphenomenon of other, more low-level types of change. On the other hand, reanalysis has also been implicitly discussed as something inherent in any language change under the structuralist-generative view of change, namely a recognition that something has changed, and that conventions of language are different. I have suggested that the reason for this conflation of two different readings of "reanalysis" may be that both imply a hearer inference that is not specifically prompted by the speaker. Taken together, these two readings suggest that

reanalysis is not a phenomenon in the empirical domain, but an analytical category on the theoretical plane. In this sense, reanalysis, in both its interpretations in the literature, is directly linked to assumptions of the structural-generative model about change.

In the following section, I will revisit a language change that has in the past been classed as a reanalysis. Apart from offering new empirical evidence, I will take this study as material to inquire further about the implications of the dual-faced nature of reanalysis for our understanding of actual language change.

3 Reanalysis in the history of the French *est-ce que* question

3.1 The *est-ce que* question and other interrogatives in Modern French

The *est-ce que* particle is one of the three major types of interrogative formation in French, both for yes/no-interrogatives and *wh*-interrogatives. The second one, referred to here as (Q) SV, is not marked by any change in basic word order. As a yes/no-question, it is marked by rising intonation. As a wh-question, it has a wh-word that can be either fronted or in-situ. The third type of interrogative, referred to here as (Q) VS, is characterized by inversion of subject and verb when compared to the basic declarative word order.

Table 1. Types of interrogative formation in French

	Yes/No **'Does Pierre arrive'?**	**Wh** **'Where are you going'?**
(Q) SV	*Pierre arrive?*	*Où tu vas?* (fronted) *Tu vas où?* (in-situ)
(Q) *Est-ce que*	*Est-ce que Pierre arrive?*	*Où est-ce que tu vas?*
(Q) VS (Inversion)	*Pierre arrive-t-il?*	*Où vas-tu?*

Traditionally, the choice between these formatives has been construed as one of formality levels, where (Q) SV would be the most colloquial one, the inversion question ((Q) VS) the most formal one, and the *est-ce que* question occupying middle ground (e.g. Ball 2000, Armstrong 2001). Hansen (2001) challenged this view and showed that the difference between the types of yes/no-interrogatives is not so much one of formality, but a discourse-semantic one: SV-interrogatives require a reply, but do not necessarily express wondering about a state of affairs, whereas the *est-ce que* question and the inversion question express wondering about a state of affairs, but do not necessarily require a reply. This is why, according to Hansen, the *est-ce que* and the inversion interrogatives are suited to rhetorical questions.

As explained above, yes/no SV – interrogatives have the same word order as the declarative, being marked as interrogative only by intonation. By contrast, as *wh*-interrogatives of the SV-type they are not as uniformly identified by intonation as their yes/no-peers are (Nilsenová 2006, Myers 2007: 238). These (Q) SV- interrogatives come with either the *wh*-element in situ (in which case word order and syntactic structure are the same as with the declarative counterpart) or fronted (in which case there is obviously a syntactic difference). Examples (7) and (8) represent these two options, respectively.

(7) Tu vas où?
'Where are you going?'
(8) Où tu vas?
'Where are you going?'

Just as with the yes/no-questions, the traditional view is that Q SV, Q *est-ce que*, and Q VS follow an order of increasing formality (e.g. Ball 2000). Myers (2007) offers a detailed study of the various *wh*-interrogatives in French conversation. In line with other authors (Behnstedt 1973, Coveney 1996) she finds that Q

SV-interrogatives are by far the most used in conversation. *Est-ce que* questions are used in "long-winded" (2007: 176) questions, i.e. questions that are "very long and involved" (2007: 176). This is in line with other authors (Waltereit and Detges 2008: 16-18, Söll 1971: 497, Seelbach 1983: 277, Hansen 2001: 479) who find that they are quite rare in discourse, and are marked interrogative devices. Rhetorical questions with *est-ce que* are often illocutionary exclamatives (Waltereit and Detges 2008: 17)

(9) Qu'est-ce qu'elle a travaillé!
'She worked really hard!'

Regarding Q SV-interrogatives, Behnstedt 1973, Coveney 1996, and Myers 2007 converge in noting a difference in preference for in-situ vs. fronting according to the *wh*-word used. *Quand* 'when', *où* 'where' and *combien* 'how many' prefer in-situ over fronting, whereas *comment* 'how' and *pourquoi* 'why' prefer fronting over in-situ. As Myers (2007 125-126) explains, this contrast mirrors an intuitive difference between the two groups of wh-interrogatives. "When", "where", and "how many" questions can often be answered with a single word, whereas "how" and "why" questions often demand more complex answers. This leads Myers to develop the concept of *answerability*: '"A highly answerable question is one in which the speaker believes the listener is able to (easily) answer the question" (2007: 126). This may be because the speaker believes the listener knows the answer, or it may be because the speaker is asking for a straightforward piece of information (such as the location of an object, or a date of the week) as opposed to a more complex information.

"Answerable" questions are questions, more broadly first parts of adjacency pairs, for which the speaker predicts a straightforward second pair-part. "Answerability involves what the speaker predicts the second part of the adjacency pair will/can be" (Myers 2007: 125).

"What" interrogatives questions do not belong straightforwardly to one level of answerability; they can occupy various degrees on the answerability scale. In general, however, the more answerable a question is, the more likely it is to surface as an in situ construction rather than a fronted one (Myers 2007: 124).

Inversion *wh*-questions in French, according to Myers, are very rare. If used at all, they are used almost ironically, for example in order to indicate a register shift (to imply "teacherese").

3.2 Previous work on the history of the *est-ce que* question

The *est-ce que* question is an oft-cited case of reanalysis (Brunot/Bruneau 1969, Harris & Campbell 1995, Haspelmath 1998, Waltereit 1999, Waltereit & Detges 2008). Waltereit and Detges 2008 argue that the *est-ce que* interrogative arose out of "free", i.e. compositional, use of the same material.

They show that the free *est-ce que* question is the interrogative counterpart of the cleft-construction – this helps to understand the use of compositional *est-ce que* in discourse. More specifically, they argue (2008: 18) that compositional use of *est-ce que* carries three elements of meaning as a direct result of the construction: Firstly, the constituent represented by the *wh*-element is focused. Secondly, the content of the subordinate *que*-clause is treated as presupposed. Thirdly, presupposed and focused content are neatly separated. These characteristics conspire to make the utterance a strong speech act. Waltereit and Detges argue that the contemporary function of the *est-ce que* particle has conventionalized the erstwhile discourse effect of a "strong speech act".

We also know that the *est-ce que* question has been attested much earlier with *wh*-interrogatives than with yes/no-questions (Foulet 1921: 264-265, Kaiser 1980: 112). Whereas it has been used in yes/no-questions from the 16th century only, it was used in *wh*-questions throughout the Old French period. Kaiser (1980: 113-125) discusses some of the diachronic evidence, in particular the question as to how the *est-ce que wh*-question may have been modelled on Latin templates. He also notes, with Schulze (1888) and Foulet (1921), that in Old French, the *est-ce que wh*-interrogative as it is known today was in competition with other interrogative formatives with a similar "doubling" structure, in particular *qui est qui*:

(10) Et qui est qui le porroit prendre?
'And who is it that could take it?' (*Roman de Renart* 12th century, example cited in Foulet 1921: 252)

Kaiser's discussion of the diachronic rise of the *est-ce que* question and the attendant literature review is, however, inconclusive. In particular, he notes a lack of agreement between previous authors on the order in which the various *wh*-interrogatives became available to the *est-ce que* construction. This is why, in the following, I will attempt to address this issue through an analysis of large electronic diachronic corpora.

3.3 Reanalysis in the French *est-ce que* question

The following is based on research using standard electronic corpora of French, namely FRANTEXT and BFM (Base de français médiéval). I have searched for occurrences of *est-ce que* and spelling variants (e.g. *esse que*). I should stress that I am not offering a quantitative study; rather, the work is based on what appeared the corpora to be early occurrences of the constructions in question. At any rate, the numbers involved are too small for a serious quantitative analysis.

The first occurrences of *est-ce que question* in the corpus share a number important properties. Firstly, they are all "what" interrogatives; secondly, they tend to refer deictically or anaphorically to a referent already in the Common Ground. In the following, I will offer some examples.

(11) Dex, fet il, que m'est avenu! Quiex mervoille est ce que je voi? N'est ce Cligés?
'God, said he, what has happened to me! What marvel is it that I see? Isn't it Cligés?' (Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligés*, 1176)

In (11), the speaker refers to a person (Cligés) he can see. In other words, the anaphoric pronoun is used deictically.

(12) Ke est ce ke tu paroles?
'What is that that you are saying?' (*Vie de St Benoit*, end of 12th c.)

In (12), the pronoun *ce* is referring to the other discourse participant's previous utterance. In other words, it is anaphoric.

(13) Suer, li tot poissanz deus espargnet a toi, **ke est ce ke tu as fait?**
'Sister, the almighty God has saved you, what is that that you have done?' (*Vie de St Benoit*, end of 12th c.)

In (13), too, the speaker is referring anaphorically.

Note that in all these examples, the *que* (*ke*) from the e*st-ce que* construction can only be interpreted as a relative pronoun, rather than as a complementizer as in the contemporary construction.
The following are earlier examples of *est-ce que*.

(14) Et li vaslez le tenoit pris au pan de l'hauberc, si le tire : « Or me dites, fet il, biau sire, **qu'est ce que vos avez vestu?** - Vaslez, fet il, don nel sez tu? - Je non. - Vaslez, c'est mes haubers, s'est ausi pesanz come fers. - De fer est il ? - Ce voiz tu bien.
'And the servant held him by the side of the neck-cover, and draws it to him: "Now tell me, sir, what is this that you are wearing?" "Servant, says he, don't you know this?" "No". "Servant, that is my neck-cover ; it is as heavy as a horseshoe". "Is it made of iron?" "You can see that."' (Chrétien de Troyes, *Conte du Graal*, end of 12th c)

In (14), there is a plain deictic use of the pronoun *ce*. The following is an example for anaphoric reference.

(15) Et quant il se senti agrevé, si manda le roi Phelipe son filleul, et li dist : « Biaux fillues, faites penre une corde, et si la me faites metre ou col, et me faites traïner par toutes les rues d'Acre car je l'ais bien deservi. » Quant li rois l'oï ainsi parler, si cuida qu'il ne fust mie en son sens, et li dist : « Biax parreins**, qu'est ce que vous dites** ? - En non Dieu, je sais bien que je di, sachiez de voir, biax filleus, que je ai vostre mort juree [...]. »
'And when he feels very ill, he asks to see his godson King Philip, and says to him: "Dear g o d s o n , hang a rope and tie it around my neck, and have me drawn through all the streets of Acre, for I have deserved such treatment." When the king heard him speak like this, he thought that that the count had gone mad, and he said to him: "Dear godfather, what are you saying?" "In the name of God, I know very well what I am saying; be sure you understand, dear godson, that I have sworn to kill you [...]".' (*Récit d'un ménestrel de Reims*, 1260)

Finally, an example from the late 15th century:

(16) Oyant le roy d'Espaigne ce que le roy de France luy avoit dit, luy respondit : « Monseigneur mon filz, puis qu'il vous a pleu de me faire cest honneur que d'avoir prins ma fille a femme, je vous supplie que ne la vueillez laisser, car sans vous elle ne pourroit durer, comme la raison bien le vouldroit. Si vous supplie que en ce royaulme vueillez commectre telz gouverneurs comme il vous plaira, car dès maintenant je vous livre le royaulme. »
« Monseigneur, dit le roy de France, **qu'est ce que vous avez dit** ? Je vous prie que jamais n'en soit parlé, car de ce royaulme et du mien tant comme vous vivrez pourrez faire et disposer a vostre voulenté, car soyez seur et certain que vostre royaulme ne voz biens ne m'ont point esmeu a avoir vostre fille que icy est, mais sa bonne renommee. »
'When the king of Spain heard what the king of France told him, he replied: "My son, since you've given me the honour of marrying my daughter, I implore you not to leave her, because she can't stay without you, as one would do. I implore you to put in place in this realm the governors of your choosing, since from now on I will leave it to you." "Mylord", said the king of France, "what have you said? I ask you not to speak about this ever, since you are free to use this and my kingdom as you please for the duration of your life. Please be reassured that it is not for your kingdom and your wealth that I wanted your daughter, but for her good reputation."' (Jean de Paris, 1494)

In all these cases, we can notice, in line with what has been noted in the literature (Greive 1974, Kaiser 1980: 111) that the *est-ce que* question is used at marked points in discourse. In the examples above, the questions do not seem to be sincere questions. By "sincere" I mean questions where the speaker does not know the answer to the question they are asking and are expecting the hearer to know it. Rather, the speaker does already know the answer, or it is plain to see anyway. One could argue that there is low answerability in the sense of Myers (2007), explained above.

There is often an element of disbelief here, or a pretence of disbelief. Although numbers are very small, it is hard not to be struck by the preponderance of the verb *dire* 'to say' (cf. also Ehmer & Rosemeyer to appear for similar results for Spanish). The speaker is asking in what appears to be disbelief "what are you saying?". In fact, in the above examples, what precedes the *est-ce que* question concerns a highly unusual request: In (15), the previous speaker asks the speaker of the *est-ce que* question to hang a rope and tie it around his neck, and have him drawn through all the streets of Acre – a request the addressee can't possibly take seriously. In (16), a father asks his son-in-law not to leave his wife (i.e. the speaker's son), likewise a very unusual request.

Also, in all cases, *est-ce que* is a "what" question. However, as noted in the literature review, a similar but not identical doubling technique of the *wh*-word can be used, in Old French, in questions about the subject:

(17) Maintenant qu'il fu relevez de pasmeisons, si l'apela : « Dex ! fet ele, que voi ge la? **Qui est qui se demante si ?** » Et cil li respont : « Et vos, qui ? - Je sui, fet ele, une cheitive, La plus dolante riens qui vive.
'Now that he woke up from unconsciousness, she said to him: "God, what do I see there? Who is it that is complaining here?" And he replies to her: "And you, who? "I am", she said, "very weak, the most suffering person alive."' (Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain*, ca. 1180)

In all the "what" *est-ce que* questions above, it is not really possible to tell whether they represent a holistic or a compositional reading of the *est-ce que* question. This is to some extent due to the fact that *que* can be read as either a relative pronoun or as a complementizer.
The ambiguity over whether the construction is conventionalized as an interrogative formative or whether it is compositional ends once other *wh*-words than "what" enter the picture. The first example with a *wh*-word other than "what" that I have found is the following from the late 12th century, with *comment* 'how':

(18) **Car coment est ce ke unkes** ne **parmaint** en un **estage?**
'Since how is it that it never remains in the same state? (*Li sermon Saint Bernart sor les Cantices*, late 12th C)

The eligibility of *wh*-words other than "what" changes the nature of the construction in a number of important ways. Firstly, *que* can only be read as a complementizer, rather than as a relative pronoun – there is no antecedent for a relative pronoun reading there.

Secondly, the pronoun *ce* does not refer to an antecedent, either deictically or anaphorically, in the Common Ground. There is no such antecedent for it any more. The only antecedent we could construe for *ce* is the following subordinate clause *ke unkes ne parmaint en un estage*. It then would be almost like an impersonal pronoun, reminding of *cela* or ça in these Modern French constructions (invented example):

(19) Cela me fait plaisir que vous ayez pensé à moi.
'I'm very pleased that you thought of me.'

It is interesting to note that example (18) is in fact a translation from Latin:

(20) Car quomodo est, quod nunquam in eodem statu permanet?
(Bernard de Clairvaux, 1090-1153)

it is not entirely certain to what extent Latin templates helped the propagation of this construction. Both Foulet 1921 and Kaiser 1980 agree that it must have played a role, but are not sure of it.
In the following I provide two more examples with an interrogative pronoun other than "what":

(21) Li rois dist qui voleit assegier Thabarie. Et Balyan li dist : « **Par cui consel est ce que vos volés** faire **ce?**
'The king said that he wanted to besiege Tiberias. Balyan told him: "On whose advice is it that you want to do that?"' (Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr, ca. 1200)
(22) **Où est ce que nous verrons Dieu?**
'Where is it that we shall see God?' (*Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, mid-15th c.)

The eligibility of *wh*-words other than "what" can be taken as evidence that reanalysis has taken place. Whereas the construction used with the "what" interrogative pronoun can, from today's vantage point, be read as either compositional (a complex sentence) or as holistic (an interrogative particle), the same construction with other *wh*-words is only amenable to the particle interpretation. The extension of the set of eligible *wh*-words falls under "actualization" (Timberlake 1977), i.e. the use of the reanalyzed construction

in new contexts unavailable to the preceding one. By the same token, the use of the construction with "what"-interrogatives can be seen, equally from today's vantage point, as a "bridging context", i.e. a context amenable to the old and the new reading of the reanalyzed construction (Heine 2000).

I would now like to look briefly at the sequence of *wh*-words eligible for the *est-ce que* question through the lens of the notion of answerability (Myers 2007). It would appear that after the "what" question, interrogative pronouns that are less easily answerable became eligible (*how*, *on whose advice*) before easily answerable ones (*where*). In her study of contemporary French conversation, Myers found that "what" questions show greater variety in answerability than other interrogatives, which seem to be more specialized in a given degree of answerability. Now, looking at the Old French "what" examples in *est-ce que* interrogatives above, it would appear that they are not easily "answerable". They are not straightforward requests for a piece of information; they tend to be rhetorical questions that ask for explanations of previous behaviour rather than requesting information that the speaker doesn't know. In that way, they resemble "why" questions. In other words, even though in the abstract, "what" questions occupy an intermediate point in the answerability scale, early Old French *est-ce que* what-interrogatives are actually low on that scale. So, with a lot of caution, it would appear that over time, the *est-ce que wh*-interrogatives move from less answerable to more answerable constructions. To be more certain of this possibly underlying direction of change, future research will need to take a closer look at the subsequent development of the "what" *est-ce que* question.

This suggestion would also help to put in context the later diachronic availability of yes/no-questions, as opposed to *wh*-questions. Clearly, yes/no questions are highly answerable – they frame the question in a way that only two options, each consisting of a single word, are possible as an answer. In that sense, they are more easily answerable than any *wh*-question, even the most answerable ones such as "where" and "when". In other words, the change by which yes/no-questions become eligible for the *est-ce que* interrogative construction after *wh*-questions might be less dramatic than it may otherwise appear; it could merely mean that the construction gradually moves up the answerability scale.

3.4 Summary

In this section, I have taken a new look at the French *est-ce que* question. After a review of the literature, I have focused on the rise of the *est-ce que* question in *wh*-contexts. It has emerged that the *est-ce que wh*-interrogative was first used with "what"-interrogatives. At that stage, it may not be possible to tell whether the construction is compositional or holistic, i.e. whether reanalysis has taken place. Examples from that stage show a manifestly rhetorical use of the construction. The pronoun *ce* is clearly discourse-old (anaphoric) or even deictic. The early contexts have a very strong rhetorical flavour. In particular, the questions asked are not presented as straightforward requests for answers. Once the compositional interrogative construction is reanalysed, the pronoun *ce* ceases to be anaphorical and would, under a "literal" reading, received a cataphoric interpretation. Moreover, the erstwhile relative pronoun *que* is reinterpreted as a complementizer.

The data are consistent with the view that the construction expands from less answerable to more answerable (in the sense used by Myers 2007) contexts. Under this view, the expansion from *wh*-interrogative to yes/no-interrogative may not be as major a change as it may appear, since yes/no-questions are naturally more highly answerable than even the most answerable *wh*-question. In other words, the expansion from *wh*- to *yes/no* interrogatives would only be a gradual, not an abrupt, change.

4 Discussion

In the empirical part of this paper, I have offered additional material on the rise of the *est-ce que* interogatives that helps to further understand the history of that construction in French. In this discussion section, I would like to link the history of the construction in French with the broader discussion of reanalysis from

section 2.

As others have noted (Kaiser 1980, Detges & Waltereit 2008), and as indeed generally in bridging context situations, in particular with the what-interrogatives, it may be difficult, especially with the what-interrogative to establish whether we are dealing with the compositional use of the construction or with its reanalysed, i.e. conventionalised, use (cf Ehmer & Rosemeyer to appear for Spanish). By saying that there is an ambiguity between the compositional and the conventionalized use, we are invoking a model of representation where the two options (compositional vs. conventionalized) correspond to two different representations in a speaker's grammar. To account for the change, then, it becomes necessary to assume that at some stage speakers inferred that the construction had become a conventionalized one. In this sense, reanalysis is both a type of language change among others, instigated by the hearer by inference, and a general mechanism that is implied by any language change in the structural-generative tradition of thinking about change.

It has also become apparent, as also noted by Whitman (2012), that analysing a change as reanalysis is, in part, a data problem. Whitman shows that what has been analysed as reanalysis in the literature may just have reflected insufficient data. The "steps" that are assumed to have occurred in diachrony, as a result of hearer inferences, may simply reflect whatever discontinuity there is in the data. This resonates very much with De Smet's point that, to some extent, "reanalysis" may to some extent just be an artefact of independent assumptions about whatever syntactic theory is being used to represent the structures in question.

Let me make one more somewhat speculative theoretical point. The notion that reanalysis reflects a recognition by speakers that something has changed in the language would seem to suggest that it is effected by adults, as opposed to during language acquisition. Only adult speakers can meaningfully distinguish between a "before" and "after" stage in a diachronic sense. This difference between children and adults links to an interesting distinction made by Labov (2007). Labov distinguishes two modes of passing on language diachronically (i.e., via spread): "transmission" and "diffusion". Transmission is located in child language acquisition, whereas diffusion is located in contact between adults. Importantly, Labov argues that these two modes of diachronic change are correlated with different levels of structural complexity. Diffusion is more limited in its potential for structural complexity. Ultimately this limitation is grounded in the higher capacity for learning and routinization that children enjoy over adults. Now, the notion that reanalysis is effected by adults would in turn suggest that reanalysis is in the realm of diffusion, not transmission. Because of the relative cognitive limitations of adults, "mistakes" will occur in diffusion: "Structural borrowing is rare: the adults who are the borrowing agents do not faithfully reproduce the structural patterns of the system they are borrowing from" (Labov 2007: 383).

Since reanalysis is "structural", not "substantial", a variationist perspective on language change as discussed in 2.1., emblematically associated with Labov, may hence suggest that reanalysis is crucially associated with language contact - in the broad sense of contact between adults. Furthermore, a Labovian perspective may suggest that reanalysis is not actually an "analysis"; it will presumably acquire its eventual structure only once the adult agents of borrowing pass it on to the next generation via transmission. In other words, the syntactic and/or morphological differences noted between stages of reanalysis could conceivably reflect the differential in structural granularity between transmission and diffusion. This would in turn mean that bridging contexts (Heine 2002) are not synchronically "real" bridging contexts (i.e., ambiguous for a contemporary hearer), but only so by retrospective construction. I cannot elaborate more on this point here and must leave this to further research.

Going back to the *est-ce que* question: As previous authors have surmised (Schulze 1888, Foulet 1921, Kaiser 1980), it is quite likely that the rise of the French *est-ce que* question is linked to language contact with Latin. Indeed, in our own example (18) this was immediately apparent, since it is a translation from Latin. Language contact between French and Latin might thus have created a "diffusion" scenario where what we retrospectively class as reanalysis could occur.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I have taken a first look, based on diachronic corpora, on the rise of the French *est-ce que* question in *wh*-contexts. We saw that the first occurrences are with low-answerability "what"-interrogatives, and that the construction then gradually seemed to extend to higher answerability contexts. As it opened up to higher answerability contexts, it is increasingly conventionalized.

Taking as a starting point Croft's distinction between structural and variationist approaches to language change, which are each other's converse where the respective importance of innovation and spread are concerned, I discussed the role of reanalysis in both of these approaches. In the structural-generative tradition, reanalysis is used both to refer to an assumed type of language change based on hearers' inferences, and to the recognition by inference that "something is different" inherent in all change. Echoing Whitman (2012) and De Smet (2009, 2013), reanalysis under this view is, to some extent, vulnerable to being merely an artefact of independent assumptions about syntactic and morphological structure, on the one hand, and of accidents of the available historical record, on the other hand. In the variationist approach, where language change is essentially spread, not innovation, it may be useful to take into account Labov's (2007) distinction between transmission and diffusion. Reanalysis would, under this view, squarely fall under diffusion and, by the same token, may not be a form of structural manipulation at all.

References

Armstrong, Nigel (2001). *Social and stylistic variation in spoken French. A comparative approach.* Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Ball, Rodney (2000). *Colloquial French grammar.* Malden: Blackwell.

Behnstedt, Peter (1973). *Viens-tu? Est-ce que tu viens? Tu viens? Formen und Strukturen des direkten Fragesatzes im Französischen*. Tübingen: Narr.

BFM = Base de français médiéval. Lyon : ENS de Lyon, Laboratoire IHRIM, 2016, <txm.bfm-corpus.org>.

Brunot, Ferdinand, & Bruneau, Charles (1969). *Précis de grammaire historique de la langue française.* Paris: Masson Et Cie.

Campbell, Lyle (1998). *Historical linguistics. An introduction.* Edinburgh: University Press.

Coseriu, Eugenio (1978[1957]). *Sincronía, diacronía e historia. El problema del cambio lingüistico.* Madrid: Gredos.

Coveney, Aidan (1996). *Variability in spoken French: a sociolinguistic study of interrogation and negation.* Exeter: Elm Bank.

Croft, William (2000). *Explaining language change. An evolutionary approach.* London: Pearson Education.

De Smet, Henrik (2009). Analysing reanalysis. In *Lingua: International review of general linguistics,* 119(11), 1728-1755.

De Smet, Henrik (2013). Does innovation need reanalysis?. In E. Coussé & F. von Mengden (Ed.), *Usage-based approaches to language change* (pp. 23-48). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Detges, Ulrich, & Waltereit, Richard (2002). Grammaticalization vs. reanalysis. A semantic – pragmatic account of functional change in grammar. In *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft, 21*(2). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/zfsw.2002.21.2.151

Detges, Ulrich, & Waltereit, Richard (2008). Syntactic change from within and from without syntax. In U. Detges & R. Waltereit (Ed.), *The Paradox of grammatical change. Perspectives from romance* (pp. 13-30). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Eckardt, Regine (2006). *Meaning change in grammaticalization. An enquiry into semantic reanalysis.* Oxford: University Press.

Ehmer, Oliver & Rosemeyer, Malte (to appear) : Contrast and inferences in but-prefaced partial interrogatives: a synchronic and diachronic analysis of Spanish

Foulet, Lucien (1921). Comment ont évolué les formes de l'interrogation. In *Romania, 47*, 243-348.

FRANTEXT = www.frantext.fr

Greive, Artur (1974). *Neufranzösische Formen der Satzfrage im Kontext.* Mainz/Wiesbaden: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur.

Hansen, Maj-Britt M. (2001). Syntax in interaction. Form and function of yes/no interrogatives in spoken standard French. *Studies in Language, 25*(3), 463-519. DOI: 10.1075/sl.25.3.04mos

Hansen, Maj-Britt M. (2008). *Particles at the semantics, pragmatics interface: synchronic and diachronic issues. A study with special reference to the French phrasal adverbs.* Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Harris, Alice C., & Campbell, Lyle (1995). *Historical syntax in cross-linguistic perspective.* Cambridge: University Press.

Haspelmath, Martin (1998). Does grammaticalization need reanalysis?. In *Studies in Language, 22*(2), 315-351. DOI: 10.1075/sl.22.2.03has

Heine, Bernd (2002). On the role of context in grammaticalization. In I. Wischer & G. Diewald (Ed.), *New reflections on grammaticalization* (pp. 83-101). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Hopper, Paul J., & Traugott, Elizabeth C. (2003). *Grammaticalization.* Cambridge: University Press.

Kaiser, Egbert (1980). *Strukturen der Frage im Französischen: Synchronische und diachronische Untersuchungen zur direkten Frage im Französischen des 15. Jahrhunderts (1450-1500).* Tübingen: Narr.

Koch, Peter (2004): Metonymy between pragmatics, reference and diachrony. In *metaphorik.de*, *07*, 6-54.
Labov, William (2007). Transmission and diffusion. In *Language, 83*, 344-387.
Langacker, Ronald W. (1977). Syntactic reanalysis. In C. N. Li (Ed.), *Mechanism of syntactic change* (pp. 57-139). Austin: University of Texas Press.
Lapesa, Rafael (2000). *Estudios de morfosintaxis histórica del español*. Madrid: Gredos
Myers, Lindsy L. (2007). *Wh-interrogatives in spoken French. A corpus based analysis of their form and function* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, Austin). Retrieved from https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/3235/myersl19237.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y
Nilsenová, Marie (2006). *Rises and falls. Studies in the semantics and pragmatics of intonation.* Amsterdam: ILLC.
Ohala, John J. (1981). The listener as a source of sound change. In C. S. Masek, R. A. Hendrick, & M. F. Miller (eds.), Papers from the Parasession on Language and Behavior (pp 178-203). Chicago: Chicago Ling. Soc.
Ohala, John J. (1989). Sound change is drawn from a pool of synchronic variation. In L.E. Breivik & E.H. Jahr (eds.), Language Change: Contributions to the study of its causes (pp. 173-198). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
Schulze, Alfred (1888). *Der altfranzösische direkte Fragesatz: Ein Beitrag zur Syntax des Französischen.* Leipzig: Hirzel.
Schwenter, Scott & Waltereit, Richard (2010). Presupposition accommodation and language change. In K. Davidse, H. Cuyckens, L. Vandelanotte (Eds.), *Subjectification, intersubjectification, and grammaticalization* (pp. 75-102). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
Seelbach, Dieter (1983). *Linguistik und französischer Grammatikunterricht: Eine Einführung für Lehrende und Studierende.* Tübingen: Narr.
Söll, Ludwig (1971). Der neufranzösische direkte Fragesatz in einem Corpus der Kindersprache. In E. Coseriu & W-D. Stempel (Ed.), *Sprache und Geschichte. Festschrift für Harri Meier zum 65. Geburtstag* (pp. 493-506). München: Fink.
Timberlake, Alan (1977). Reanalysis and actualization in syntactic change. In C. N. Li (Ed.), *Mechanism of syntactic change* (pp. 141-177). Austin: University of Texas Press.
Traugott, Elizabeth C., & Dasher, Richard B. (2002). *Regularity in semantic change*. Cambridge: CUP.
Waltereit, Richard (1999). Reanalyse als metonymischer Prozeß. In J. Lang & I. Neumann-Holzschuh (Ed.), *Reanalyse und Grammatikalisierung in den romanischen Sprachen* (pp. 19-29). Tübingen: Niemeyer.
Whitman, John (2012). Misparsing and syntactic reanalysis. In A. van Kemenade & N. de Haas (Ed.), Historical Linguistics 2009: Selected papers from the 19th International Conference on Historical Linguistics, Nijmegen, 10-14 August 2009 (pp. 69-88). Amsterdam: Benjamins. DOI: 10.1075/cilt.320.04whi