

**Modal Existential Wh Constructions are not Interrogatives:
arguments from French**

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This talk will explore the syntax and semantics of French Modal Existential Wh Constructions (MECs), and consider what their analysis might bring to the cross-linguistic debate on MECs.

Modal Existential Wh Constructions, also known as Irrealis Free Relatives, are attested in various languages, although the initial focus in the literature on these constructions was on Slavic languages (cf. Izvorski (2000), Grosu (2004)). MECs can be superficially described as non indicative clauses fronted with a wh-phrase, that are interpreted as existentially quantified DPs, and that only occur in existential environments. Moreover, the non indicative IP inside the MEC has modal properties.

- (1) Est [s kem pogovorit].
be-3SG with who talk-INF
'There is somebody with whom one could talk.'
Izvorski (2000); example from Russian

At least three types of analyses of these constructions have been offered. Izvorski (2000) analyzes them cross-linguistically as interrogative CPs, whereas Grosu and Landman (1998) analyze them as relative CPs, and Rappaport (1986) as indefinites modified by a CP.

French MECs are peculiar in that the wh-word that fronts them is necessarily introduced by a preposition. After showing that there is no reason to analyze French MECs as interrogative CPs, I concentrate on MECs built with the preposition *de*, which appear to be the most productive kind of French MECs. I argue that in these constructions, cf (2), *de* is best analyzed as an indefinite determiner, just as it is in (3):

- (2) Il y a de quoi écrire sur le bureau.
3SG there have-3SG of what eat-INF on the desk
'There is something with which one can write on the desk.'
- (3) De rares cas de réactions cutanées sévères ont été rapportés.
Of rare cases of reactions cutaneous severe have-3PL been reported.
'Rare cases of cutaneous reactions have been reported.'
(<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azithromycine>)

MECs built with other prepositions will be argued to be less productive than MECs with *de*.

Taking these facts into account, I sketch an analysis of French MECs that builds on and brings support to the analysis of Grosu (2004), according to whom

MECs are non core relative CPs with inherent existential features.

References

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