This dissertation examines usage and diachronic change in the yes/no and wh-interrogative system in Modern Hexagonal French. Using the variationist methodology, I analyze a total of 3,988 yes/no interrogatives and 2,484 wh-interrogatives collected from a corpus of 60 French films spanning 1930 to 2009 and explore the social, linguistic, extralinguistic, and pragmatic variables that govern dependent variant selection throughout time. Results indicate that both yes/no interrogatives and wh-interrogatives experience significant change within the 80-year period under investigation, and change in both systems is shaped by the (progressive) loss of pronominal inversion.

Within the yes/no interrogative paradigm, the loss of pronominal inversion entails a significant change in the expression of diaphasic variation (i.e., variation according to style or register) and diastatic variation (i.e., variation according to social groups), resulting in: (a) statistically significant increases in the usage of rising intonation across all variables (though these increases occur within and across variables at different moments in time) and (b) a trend of increased usage of est-ce que in more formal settings by the 21st century. Within the wh-interrogative paradigm, the loss of pronominal inversion also spurs change in the distribution of different variants in connection to stylistic level and social structure; however, in contrast to yes/no interrogatives, the change attested is much more dramatic. Whereas working-class usage of nonstandard interrogative forms is shown to be stable throughout time, usage by middle- and upper-class speakers shows an increasing preference for nonstandard forms. Additionally, in the post-inversion system, interrogatives pattern differently such that certain wh-words prefer certain wh-constructions and usage of the nonstandard interrogatives increases at different rates. Specifically, there is a marked increase in the usage of fronting (post-1960), which is then followed by a robust increase in the usage of wh-in situ (post-1980).

Though the changes that occur are found in the speech of actors and actresses, not naturalistic speech, we interpret these findings as mirroring changes in the actual system. Thus, this dissertation not only makes significant contributions to our knowledge of 20th and 21st century interrogative usage in Hexagonal French but also helps to legitimize the use of nontraditional data, and media in particular, in studies of language change.