

P2 2009: Questions in Research Interviews are Interesting

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Research Purpose: To examine question-answer pairs produced in research interviews.

Research Description: This project makes the qualitative research interview a topic of research. It does this by treating an interviewer's utterances as a topic of interest, and by treating an interviewee's answers as jointly produced by the interviewer and the interviewee.

Questions are a pervasive feature of interviews in psychology. Typically, interviewers ask questions and interviewees provide responses to them (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000). But is this how best to understand relations between interviewer and interviewee. That is, are relations governed by the interviewer just following the standardised techniques of good interviewing practice (cf., Baker, 1982, as cited in Silverman, 2001, p. 86)?

Several studies have examined question-answer pairs in qualitative research interviews (Barnes, 2007; Day, 2006; Richards, 2008). However these studies have used small extracts of talk from a single research interview and so it is difficult to generalise beyond these findings to account for the recurrent patterns and forms of organisation found in qualitative research interviews.

This project follows the recommendations of Barnes (2007), Day (2006), and Richards, (2008) to replicate this research with a new larger data set. This study examines the hypothesis that qualitative research interviews are unproblematic when interview questions are asked in the canonical form as displayed in the 'how to interview' textbooks.

Day (2006) found instances of declarative, yes-no interrogative, and wh-interrogative questions in the interview transcript of New Zealand 2 (van den Berg, Wetherell, & Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003). Respondents treated both orthodox and unorthodox questions in a similar manner.

Armstrong (2007) found the typical sequential order involved questions in the first-part-pair position and answers in the second-part-pair position of the question-answer adjacency pair. The grammatical form and prosodic features of a first-part-pair utterance can shape the social actions produced by a respondent by projecting a relevant or preferred response.

Richards (2008) examined a sequence of three orthodox but topic-distinct interrogative questions and found they produced different response trajectories. Only one question produced a type-conforming response. She found the interviewer and interviewee used local management systems of conversation to resolve dilemmas produced by the preference for action-, polarity-, and type-conforming answers to follow interrogative questions. She argued that interviewing relies on everyday conversational rules and practices more than is generally acknowledged in the 'how to interview' textbooks.

Together, these findings suggest that idealised conceptions of interview behaviour ignore how the socio-organisational contingencies of talk-in-interaction shape questioning and answering in qualitative research interviews. Thus adopting an evidence base practice approach that focuses on the contingencies of real-time talk in interaction, and the dynamic and

emergent practices of questioning may advance qualitative interviewing practice and training.

Participants: An archival data base will be used for this project so the student will not be required to recruit research participants.

Methodology: The archival data base used for this project is from the transcript of New Zealand Interview 2 (see van den Berg et al., 2003, pp. 232-261).

This interview was originally conducted for a large-scale research project on race and race relations in New Zealand by Margaret Wetherell in the mid-1980's. Wetherell and Potter (1992) display the methods and the findings of this earlier study.

The original audiotape of this interview was recently re-transcribed in fine detail for a new project displaying different discursive approaches for analysing talk produced in research interviews. So the student will not be required to transcribe the original interview audiotape for this project.

Data and Analysis: A qualitative analysis will be used in this project. It will examine the sequential organisation of talk produced by the interviewer and a respondent in New Zealand Interview 2 (van den Berg et al., 2003, pp. 232-261). This project will focus on a new sequence of conversation about New Zealand role models (pp. 238-242). This data set begins with the following question.

I: Yes (1.6) Mhmm (1.4) So uhm (1.2) I- If I asked you to think of (0.6)
I: particular New Zealanders that you admire or you'd like to (0.6) say have
I: your children use as models for their own behaviour wha- what people (0.6)
I: stick out in your mind as great New Zealanders (1.4)
R: Well of course there's always Sir Edmund Hillary I[:
I: [Yeah

The data will be analysed in three steps. Firstly, it will be screened for the serial, sequential, and adjacency organisation. Secondly, Greenbaum and Quirk's (1990) linguistic criteria will be used to identify and classify questions. Thirdly, question-answer adjacency pairs will be examined for recurrent patterns, distributions, and forms of organisation to show how the participants themselves orient to certain sequential expectations embedded the interview context.

The student will be expected to work closely with the supervisor and other Honours students working on related discursive analysis projects during the analysis phase of this project.

The student will gain the skills and confidence in conducting the analysis by completing the conversation analysis module from the D843 Discourse Analysis course which is offered by The Open University (UK) in the Master of Social Sciences Programme (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001a, 2001b). The supervisor will be responsible for providing this training in conversation analysis.

Student Friendliness: This project is suitable for external and on-campus students. However the student must be available to meet with the supervisor before, during, or after the scheduled Honours Workshop Program so that training in conversation analysis techniques can be conducted. Weekly supervision sessions will be required during the project. These supervision sessions can be conducted by telephone and email, and will vary in length and content to reflect the student's progress.

- Further reading:** Barnes, A. G. (2007). *Interviews: Research questions are interesting*. Unpublished honours thesis, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia.
- Day, A. (2006). *Interview questions are interesting*. Unpublished honours thesis, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia.
- Greenbaum, S., & Quirk, R. (1990). *A student's grammar of the English language*. Harlow, England: Longman.
- Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. (2000). *Interaction and the standardised survey interview: The living questionnaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. R. (2008). *Question/answer adjacency pairs in the research interview*. Unpublished honours thesis, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia.
- Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- van den Berg, H., Wetherell, M., & Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. (Eds.). (2003). *Analyzing race talk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the language of racism*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. J. (2001a). *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis*. London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. J. (2001b). *Discourse theory and practice: A reader*. London: Sage.

Research Outcomes The student is expected to: (a) submit his or her completed Honours Thesis to the USQ ePrints archive; (b) submit an abstract for a research poster to the 2010 APS Conference Scientific Committee; and (c) contribute to developing a Masters-level clinical psychology research proposal on questioning in clinical interaction.

Ethics: Ethical approval will be sought by supervisor; or
 Ethics approved – number: EP2009002

Resources: Project able to be funded within \$150 departmental limit
 Project not able to be funded within \$150 departmental limit – additional funds will come from: _____

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Creation Date: 11/20/2008 11:57:00 AM
Change Number: 7
Last Saved On: 2/6/2009 2:55:00 PM
Last Saved By: Division of Information, Communication & Technolog
Total Editing Time: 13 Minutes
Last Printed On: 2/6/2009 4:02:00 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 3
Number of Words: 1,282 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 7,310 (approx.)