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## QUESTION SEQUENCES IN INTERACTION

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<b>Project</b>	Multimodal Interaction
<b>Task</b>	Relying on video recordings of spontaneous, naturally occurring interaction, isolate sequences involving information questions for analysis
<b>Goal of subproject</b>	To examine how different languages seek and provide information, the extent to which syntax vs prosodic resources are used (e.g., in questions), and the extent to which the design of information seeking actions and their responses display a structural preference to promote social solidarity.

### Background

When people request information, they have a variety of means for eliciting the information. In English two of the primary resources for eliciting information include asking questions, making statements about their interlocutor (thereby generating confirmation or revision). But within these types there are a variety of ways that these information elicitors can be designed. They can be structurally designed to most enable a “yes” answer (“Are you going?”; “You’re going, aren’t you?; You’re gonna go?”; “Aren’t you going?”) or to most enable a “no” answer (“You’re not going?” “You’re not going, are you?”). Other question types make relevant particular types of responses such as Who questions which may make relevant a “name” as the most “preferred” answer type.

It has been argued that social interaction may be fundamentally organised to promote social solidarity (Heritage, 1984). This has been supported thus far in English with the observations that people do a lot of interactional work to agree with one another (even when they go on to disagree) (Sacks, 1973, 1987) and to promote alignment across sequences (Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984). Since this earliest work, other sorts of organizations of preference have been shown to be organizing principles of interaction including a preference for answers over non-answer responses to inquiry (Clayman, 2002; Stivers & Robinson, 2002) a preference for selected next speakers (as opposed to other non-selected but co-present interlocutors) to respond to inquiries (Stivers, 2001; Stivers & Robinson, 2002), and a preference for conforming answers to yes/no interrogatives (Raymond, 2003). Preference is, quite possibly, a central structural manifestation of the way that interaction is designed to be, and operates optimally as a cooperative enterprise. Assuming that all cultures have ways of eliciting information and asking questions, the organization of preference surrounding responses stands to make a large contribution to our understanding of how interaction is organised cross-culturally – is the preference for agreement universal? Do/ how do speakers select particular next speakers to respond? (which helps us understand one component of turn taking) And is their response preferred? How do hierarchical structures play into this?

### **Research questions**

- 1) What are the range of ways a language has for asking questions or otherwise eliciting information?
- 2) What sorts of responses are made relevant by particular types of questions/information eliciting statements?
- 3) How do these practices relate or bear on a system of structural preference for agreement or social solidarity?
- 4) To what extent are the principles governing the organization of questions the same cross-linguistically/ cross-culturally?

### **Task**

- 1) Relying on video tapes of maximally informal speech events (See “Building a corpus of multimodal interaction in your field site”, Enfield, Levinson, de Ruiter & Stivers, this volume, p 32-36), researchers are asked to first survey their language for the range of practices or ways of eliciting information. Be particularly attentive to non-questions (whether declaratives that use intonation to elicit information or other types of marking such as dubitives that might elicit information recurrently). Then begin to isolate these questions/information-seeking behaviours and their responses in the form of a “collection” either marked in ELAN, pasted into a Word file, or otherwise marked. Pay special attention too to the effects of gesture and eye gaze on the elicitation of information. Ideally a collection will be reliant on at least 3-4 different interactions.
- 2) Transcribe these instances if not already transcribed (see Enfield, Levinson, de Ruiter & Stivers, this volume, p 32-36).

### **Analysis**

The data for this project will be the transcriptions and media associated with the collections of instances described above. These data will be used to investigate the organization of how speakers elicit and receive information in interaction.

Step 1: In preparing the collection, researchers should be aware that although any number of examples will be useful, we would prefer to have at least a hundred examples (ideally several hundred) of each behaviour (here total number for all types of questions).

Step 2: For each collection, categorizations must be made regarding the prevalence of one type of behaviour over others (e.g., the use of yes no questions over declarative questions using intonation rather than syntax to mark the question), the organization and ordering of behaviours (e.g., what do speakers try first and what do they try second (if a question isn't initially answered)?, etc. In making categorizations we should be sorting by:

- Type of question (e.g., Wh- type questions that use a lexical item to mark questioning vs declarative sentences that use intonation to communicate that they are seeking confirmation)
- Whether the question is responded to with an answer that conforms to the type of question it is? (e.g., Yes or No to a yes/no question vs a full-form confirmation/disconfirmation of the question)

- Whether the question is being agreed to/aligned with in terms of structural preference (e.g., Does a question that prefers a Yes such as “Have you got some beer?” gets a yes or a fully formed agreement vs a no or a fully formed disagreement)
- Other features/types of questioning that seem to group them together. . .

Step 3: Once collections have been categorised and generalizations can be made, a series of MI meeting slots will be reserved for presentation of these analyses to colleagues. The categories should be presented, with multiple examples of each (also as media files), and with full support of the analysis using appropriate evidence. As these meetings continue, members of the subproject may sharpen their analysis, and together some generalizations may emerge from comparison of doing questioning/responding across languages.

### Outcomes

1) Researchers will, at the conclusion of analysis, have an analysis of how question-answer sequences are organised in their language/culture. Thus, they should have at least one publishable article based on this analysis likely in the domain of the types of questions most frequently used, the differential reliance on syntax and intonation, the organization of structural preference in question and/or answer design, and the types of conformity that exist in answer types. An edited volume is planned for this sub-project where researchers would be asked to contribute a chapter on their language-specific results.

2) The Multimodal Interaction project is interested in collecting results for an article that compares the practices asking questions and responding to them cross-linguistically. These results would be co-authored by researchers who were actively involved in the comparative work. Others are invited to contribute data and analyses for this comparative project.

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